



This wind has dialects : rethinking the textual landscape of nature
by Christopher Stratton Schaberg

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English
Montana State University

© Copyright by Christopher Stratton Schaberg (2003)

Abstract:

This thesis explores the condition of postmodernism—as a contemporary cultural field based on images and constantly new presentations—and the tenacious presence of Nature as an assumed point of authenticity or authority beyond representations. To understand the complex relationship between postmodernism and Nature, I focus on the phenomenon of Sport Utility Vehicles—or rather, I look at how SUV advertisements deploy ‘natural’ landscapes in order to authorize specific human desires and certain philosophical presuppositions. I then turn to Gary Snyder, whose work is symptomatic of American Nature Writing in that it depends on pre-constructed ways of seeing and knowing the so-called natural world. Finally, I use a close reading of an essay by Terry Tempest Williams as a way of fleshing out the general structure of ‘textuality’ that always already functions as we interpret the world. My overall argument is that since Nature cannot ever be detached from this general structure of textuality (i.e., how we make meaning), we are better off cultivating an attention to detail and an ethical sense of responsibility that is not limited to ‘natural’ realms but operates similarly in a wide spectrum of settings, from airports to cities to suburbs to the woods.

THIS WIND HAS DIALECTS: RETHINKING THE
TEXTUAL LANDSCAPE OF NATURE

by

Christopher Stratton Schaberg

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree

of

Master of Arts

in

English

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

April 2003

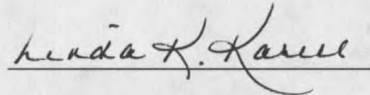
APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Christopher Stratton Schaberg

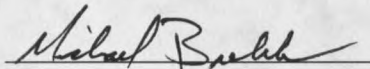
This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

Dr. Linda K. Karell, Chair of Committee

4/17/03
Date

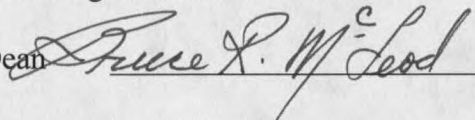
Approved for the Department of English

Dr. Michael Beehler, Department Head

4-18-03
Date

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

Dr. Bruce R. McLeod, Graduate Dean

4-21-03
Date

STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's degree at Montana State University, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

If I have indicated my intention to copyright this thesis by including a copyright notice page, copying is allowable only for scholarly purposes, consistent with "fair use" as prescribed in the U.S. Copyright Law. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this thesis in whole or in parts may be granted only by the copyright holder.

Signature CL Sol

Date 18 April 2003

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION: POSTMODERNISM AND NATURE.....	1
2. EPISTEMOLOGY OF CLASS: THE LEATHER EXTERIOR OF NATURE.....	11
3. THE LOOKOUT CONSTRUCT: SEEING DE-TEXTUALIZED NATURE.....	42
4. DEFERRING THE DESERT: NATURE AND THE PLAY OF DIFFÉRANCE.....	55
5. CONCLUSION: TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF NEW NATURE WRITING.....	86
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	89

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. "Personality Crisis".....	7
2. "Seems Fair".....	21
3. "Stirred by Nature".....	27
4. "Imitation".....	31
5. "Rule the World".....	33
6. "Running Loose".....	35
7. "Passionate Pursuit".....	39

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the condition of postmodernism—as a contemporary cultural field based on images and constantly new presentations—and the tenacious presence of Nature as an assumed point of authenticity or authority beyond representations. To understand the complex relationship between postmodernism and Nature, I focus on the phenomenon of Sport Utility Vehicles—or rather, I look at how SUV advertisements deploy ‘natural’ landscapes in order to authorize specific human desires and certain philosophical presuppositions. I then turn to Gary Snyder, whose work is symptomatic of American Nature Writing in that it depends on pre-constructed ways of seeing and knowing the so-called natural world. Finally, I use a close reading of an essay by Terry Tempest Williams as a way of fleshing out the general structure of ‘textuality’ that always already functions as we interpret the world. My overall argument is that since Nature cannot ever be detached from this general structure of textuality (i.e., how we make meaning), we are better off cultivating an attention to detail and an ethical sense of responsibility that is not limited to ‘natural’ realms but operates similarly in a wide spectrum of settings, from airports to cities to suburbs to the woods.

EPIGRAPHS

If anything is endangered in America it is our experience of wild nature—gross contact.

-- Jack Turner, *The Abstract Wild*

"According to nature" you want to *live*? O you noble Stoics, what deceptive words these are! Imagine a being like nature, wasteful beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure, without purposes and consideration, without mercy and justice, fertile and desolate and uncertain at the same time; imagine indifference itself as power—how *could* you live according to this indifference? Living—is that not precisely wanting to be other than this nature? Is not living—estimating, preferring, being unjust, being limited, wanting to be different? And supposing your imperative "live according to nature" meant at bottom as much as "live according to life"—how could you *not* do that? Why make a principle of what you yourselves are and must be?

--Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

When Nature, as self-proximity, comes to be forbidden or interrupted, when speech fails to protect presence, writing becomes necessary.

-- Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

Green in nature is one thing, green in literature another. Nature and letters seem to have a natural antipathy; bring them together and they tear each other to pieces.

-- Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*

Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true. Irony is about humour and serious play.

-- Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*

Rugged adventure, unprecedented safety, peace of mind—all in one beautiful package.

-- Subaru Forester ad

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: POSTMODERNISM AND NATURE

Always naturalize! This tendency—a slippery and we may even say “imagined” imperative within postmodern cultural contexts—will surprisingly turn out to be the target of this project as well. And, as the breakdown of the traditional dialectic teaches us, the naturalizing operation inevitably splinters determinate definitions: appropriating ‘nature’ always already requires a host of fabricated desires that are neither associatively coherent nor even individually secure in their naturalized state. In a culture made up of conglomerate desires for mobility, authenticity, and personal agency, various versions of nature are constantly deployed as devices by which these desires are authorized: when we call on nature (as in a ‘natural law’), we invoke a permanent source of control; when we seek out nature as refuge or illumination, we claim privileged spaces for ourselves (as individuals) apart from masses who misunderstand. Nature—as force and as space—has most recently, ‘naturally’, been adopted and modified to fit into postmodern scenarios. Stereotypes of nature have become so incredibly naturalized that we are constantly called upon to imagine and identify an essential Mother Nature who exists beyond and/or before human contact. The irony, of course, is that our denotations of nature always presuppose a human context of interpretation; we only comprehend (however vaguely) this ‘separate nature’ through an epistemological lens.

I invoke postmodernism in order to suggest the contemporary cultural whirlpool in which authentic identities are at once socially stable and yet entirely

variable. On the one hand, cultural norms are invented, disseminated, modified, and perpetuated seemingly without question—one need only to think of mobile phones as an example of this: the small communications devices have been introduced and assimilated into all segments of society, appropriated to accommodate an endless stream of already stable identities. On the other hand, phenomena such as mobile phones indicate the absolute instability of such identities: one is always necessarily ready for change, for a sudden shift in identity—whether be it ever so subtle, entirely intentional, or utterly spontaneous. This simultaneity of stability and instability is suggestive of the thoroughly accepted mixture of the absurd and the ordinary that is postmodernism—and everyday life is never simply paralyzed by the seeming impossibility of decisive forward movement. In all corners and mainstreams of American culture, individuals lead day to day lives coherently patchworked from a smorgasbord of possibilities, thus blurring oppositional distinctions (really a vast network of *options*) that would otherwise seem to render contemporary individuals forever hesitant.

Options: Verizon Wireless or Cellular One? Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator? PC or Mac? Ford or Chevy? DVD or VHS? Priceline or Hotwire? United or Delta? Organic or non-organic? Big & Tasty or Whopper? It is in this onslaught of personal options and incessant choices that postmodernism takes place—or rather, it is to (be able to) answer “*both*” to each of these questions that marks the arrival of postmodernism. In his essay “What is Postmodernism?” Jean-François Lyotard has argued:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. (CPR 436)

This notion of the unrepresentable in presentation itself is precisely what takes place in the bevy of consumer alternatives available at any given moment; individuals cannot possibly have everything at once, but forms of media such as television and the internet present the unrepresentable as such. We daily give up the solace of “good forms” in exchange for an active “nostalgia for the unattainable”—our culture depends upon constant novelty and change as a bizarrely effective way to stabilize the otherwise frantic velocity of daily life. This is postmodernism in action, and it affects even the most ‘simple’ American lifestyle: the unattainable (which is embodied in everything from the “perfect kitchen” to the “safest car on the road”) constantly shifts so that it never can be attained and yet is always visible on a horizon within continually incoming (re)presentations.

The ‘naturalize’ part of this thesis has to do with the tenacious presence of authority imbedded in notions of wilderness, nature, and the wild. Throughout this particular project, I will be somewhat conflating the terms wilderness, nature, and wildness, using these ideas interchangeably in order to streamline the designation process of this paper as well as to move toward a broader point concerning the implications of such categorization—and the implications of naturalization in general. While several celebrated nature writers (from Thoreau to Edward Abbey to Gary Snyder) have gone into great detail defining the shades

of difference between these terms—both culturally and etymologically—for our purposes here it is really only necessary to have a general understanding of the rather vague ways that the ideas of nature, wildness, and wilderness get employed in certain recognizable American cultural contexts.¹ What is natural, wild, or of the wilderness is always an Other, always located in (or originating from) a vague ‘out there’, and usually these terms are invoked by association with dependably powerful sources of authority and autonomy. For Thoreau, the woods around Concord serve to legitimize a social critique based on discovered ‘principles’ of Nature. Edward Abbey’s writings are inspired by the ‘emptiness’ and wildness of the southwest deserts—for Abbey, these perceptions of wilderness authorize a theory of social anarchy. For another popular example of this sloppy yet effective vernacular, we might recall how Tony Soprano refers to the family of ducks inhabiting his swimming pool as “a little bit of nature”—I would argue that he could have loosely used the word “wilderness” or the phrase “the wild” to the same end. In all of these examples—and many more—the wild, wilderness, and nature are invoked as exterior subjects that warrant a sort of authentic authority. We might be tempted to say that *Nature* is the umbrella term, underneath which are *wilderness* (as theoretical places ‘outside’ the ‘civilized’ reaches of human society) and *wildness* (as the aspects or segments of wilderness that flood beyond the strict parameters of the defined place)—and yet, here we are already confronted with the irony of human categorization and denotation. For the purpose of this thesis, then, I will be using these terms somewhat interchangeably,

¹ For an example of a brief discussion that explores the shades of difference in these terms—from a Deep Ecologist’s perspective—see Gary Snyder’s essay “The Etiquette of Freedom,” pgs. 3 - 24, in *The Practice of the Wild*, North Point Press, 1990.

both as an attempt to hold the irony of final distinction at bay while also submitting to a popularized conflation of these terms to simply suggest something Other, 'out there', that is authentic in its pure autonomy, always already detached from whatever is human. And this spectral presence is something I hope to eventually dispel throughout the course of this project.

Jennifer Price, in her book *Flight Maps*, succinctly fleshes out this generalized—and yet sufficient—subject of nature (including wilderness and the wild) as such: “I embraced Nature as the Last Best Places. I defined my experiences in Nature as more Real and Essential. I set Nature in stark contrast to everything modern and urban, and used Nature to articulate the social confusions and ecological destructions of modern urban American life” (xvii). This is the simplistic and yet problematic understanding of Nature that I want to explore through a close analysis of specific texts that rely on and complicate the Euro American consciousness of this mysterious Nature, this source of authority with a capital N. By veering between Deep Culture (consumer culture vortices such as SUVs, airports, or McDonalds) and Deep Ecology (the literary attempts at recording ecological purity and balanced, practical human interaction with this alleged pure presence) I hope to challenge rigid interpretations of what is considered ‘natural’, and in doing so work toward an interpretive attitude that no longer functions in respect to a strict nature/culture dichotomy, but can be implemented more widely and broadly across our world of interactions—be they in the woods or in your local Target store.

Postmodernism has not yet overwhelmed the tendency to naturalize; objects are still granted authority and/or authenticity (however fleeting) by a process that defers their existence to some sort of natural or wild origin—or destination. This move is always made as a sort of admitted deception; the wild or natural origins/destinations are never simply, essentially *real*, but are invoked in order to maintain a connection—however illusory—with a world—again, however illusory—that precedes and therefore legitimizes certain human activities. On the other hand, these imagined natural sources are always based on actual places; thus the desire for natural or wild origin/destination is always double, as fantasy dependent on a (however distant) reality. (For example, Tony Soprano's ducks that are "a little bit of nature" depend on a totally imagined place where ducks are wild and free and connected with a vast ecological system—yet on the other hand, denoting the ducks as natural suggests a participatory interaction with actual ducks in his pool, a scene no less 'natural'.)

A completely common example of this naturalization in/of a postmodern context arrived in my email "Inbox" just the other day (see Figure 1). The email—from Patagonia, a high-end outdoor gear retailer—states its subject as "Personality Crisis." Upon opening this email, I am faced with four pictures below a title that reads "Multiple Personalities." Each picture depicts an eerily androgynous individual exerting her or himself in a rigorous outdoor activity/setting. The first picture captures a climber scaling a sheer rock face; the second image shows a skier making turns down an expansive snowy slope; third, a hiker nears what seems to be the top of an alpine ridgeline; finally, a mountain

biker whizzes through a blurry background of fall-color deciduous foliage. The caption below the pictures reads: “A thirty-five foot clean traverse onto untracked slopes up a loose talus ridge to blazing fast single track. Quite interesting.” Then, in smaller print: “So many sports, so little time. Seek counseling at Patagonia.com to find the latest for multisport all-mountain athletes.”



Figure 1 “Multiple Personalities”

Clearly, in each of these images, there is the presence of nature or the wild—thus the emphasis on the “all-mountain” (—yet what is this? *Every* mountain? *Any* mountain? *All over* a singular mountain?). In each image there is a solitary figure in motion, moving through an otherwise static landscape—the *athlete*. The landscapes depicted in these images represent playgrounds, or some sort of arenas in which human athletes can compete (against whom?). But there is

more going on here. The subject of the email, after all, mentions a crisis—a personality crisis. What sense of crisis lurks in these images? The desire to be everywhere at once? To be each of these athletes simultaneously? Or perhaps this ad presumes to know all too much about its intended audience—could the ad function as an ironic wink at the fact that the “all-mountain athlete” might be, in actuality, an oxford cloth shirt-clad worker bee in an urban or suburban setting stationed in an office five days a week but who can nevertheless afford to buy the gear that suggests a surface association with such wildness, such athletic power, such expansive wilderness, and such natural authority? We must not forget, after all, that we are reading this text online, via email, possibly on a high-tech translucent aqua blue I-Mac—this is not exactly the site of ‘wilderness’ invoked in the digital pictures flashing across the screen; and yet, it is strangely necessary for the ‘crisis’ at hand.

I am counseled to seek counseling at Patagonia.com. We do not have to work extremely hard to conjure up the subliminal message of retail therapy. I am being encouraged to shop, to purchase two hundred dollar petroleum-product Gore-tex jackets (*online*—this is even *virtual* shopping: a simulacrum of the simulation of *being there*). Or, perhaps I am being urged to get ‘out’ into nature—for which I need the gear, first. Could both of these possibilities be taking place at once? In this expression of simultaneity, there is a presumed/compelled desire for multiplicity, for several choices of color scheme, fabric, and personality ‘types’ at once—a variety of activities and places that one can pursue while ‘out there’ in the wild. This is a thoroughly postmodern

situation, in which what is real, unreal, and hyper-real cannot be separated or easily distinguished. While reading my email, I am presented with the unattainable, with a plurality of possibilities all at once: I can visualize four scenes—four *perspectives*—simultaneously, and in doing so I am affirming a certain impossibility of attainment. And yet, my experience of the ad—in Hemingway's language, my 'stomach tightening' at the thought of new Patagonia gear—is visceral, too. The plastic keys under my finger tips are as real (and as entirely constructed) as the feel of the handlebars on the mountain bike that careens down the single track through the lush forest. "Quite interesting" is right—there is so much going on in this email, all of which takes place somewhere between the pure landscapes invoked and the highly fabricated setting of the computer user accessing email—it is in this liminal space that 'Deep Culture' has been strangely *naturalized*, tu(r)ned into an abstract place beyond and yet within at once.

The solution is not in a singular coherent personality, but rather lies in accepting and embracing "multiple personalities"—multiple solutions that occur at once. One can actually (and yet *never* at the same time) be all of these agents toiling in/against barren landscapes. The hope is for an activated multiple agency, and this floods back over into the initial setting: the email being read suggests yet another personality—that of the computer user—an 'online athlete' of sorts in a virtual wilderness. As if to authorize the multiple personalities (because in another setting we might call this pathological and even potentially psychologically dangerous), we must invoke a legitimizing, authentic

background: *Nature*. As long as these multiple personalities remain solitary in the wilderness (a confused notion already if we consider the strange god-like role of the Photographer), one is encouraged to indulge in a sort of sanctioned schizophrenia.

In this email, we can interpret a cluttered assortment of desires: solitude and plurality, deep nature and deep culture, empowerment and abandonment, dominance and anarchy, wildness and security—each of these double desires is commodified and compressed to the point of indisputable coherence. This email—most likely sent to hundreds of thousands of eager Patagonia consumers—will not cause a widespread rupture of the self, nor will it provoke a mass exodus into the wilderness. Rather, it functions merely (and entirely significantly) as a moment of naturalization in the midst of postmodernism. Most readers will not think twice about the intricate messages and assumed meanings contained in this strange virtual text that calls for the wild. It is this complex textual movement—always at least a double movement—that I hope to trace across several examples of contemporary nature writing. The goal of this thesis, then, is to expose the necessary play of ambiguity and simultaneity that takes place in contemporary discourses involving Nature. By moving through a variety of texts that deploy Nature as a setting of Authentic Presence, I will argue that whatever is invoked as ‘Nature’ (as natural, as wild, or designated as Wilderness) is always already supplemented by a structure of textuality that problematizes any essentialist categorization of Nature as an Other—liminally observable, exclusively knowable, or mystically ineffable—‘out there’.

CHAPTER TWO

EPISTEMOLOGY OF CLASS: THE LEATHER EXTERIOR OF NATURE

A ready-made subject for this project can be found at once on the periphery and at the core of contemporary culture: Nature has been implicated in the consumer craze of the Sport Utility Vehicle. In this icon of excess we are presented with a fragment of automobile culture that rapidly became both a norm and a class-distinguishing mark among many Americans. SUVs have been painted into a spectrum of American landscapes ranging from mountainous deserts to elementary school parking lots, from staged rocky slopes in shopping malls to actual remote woodsy 'interiors'. The characteristic hybrid shape—hovering somewhere between a minivan on steroids and a pickup truck outfitted for the apocalypse—has been crafted into a cultural symbol that rumbles along suggesting prestige, power, and an ironic twist of widespread self-reliant individualism. And yet the very crafting of this idea, this image, has taken place alongside the continually disclosed ulterior motive of offering consumers a commodified way of contacting the 'natural' world—thus the naturalization of a constructed schema via a postmodern cultural trend.

What makes the SUV a distinctly "postmodern" phenomenon? For one, the SUV was not a freak spin-off of the automobile industry; it was not a sudden idea that spontaneously combusted in public interest and delight. Rather, the SUV is a hybrid, fashioned as a carefully planned pastiche of certain functional appeals within the intricate expression of a shifty collage of contradictory aesthetic desires (independence and status, control and abandon, silence and

noise) embodied in the accelerated collective consciousness of a consumer-based public. The SUV's mechanistic and aesthetic hybridity, along with its ability to morph with ever-shifting social trends account for its status as *postmodern*. One might argue that all vehicles in the 21st-century count as postmodern, and while I do not disagree with this claim, I would suggest that the SUV—as a rather dynamic public spectacle—has demonstrated a unique ability to sustain a certain amount of social tension. The SUV is as uniquely controversial as it is overwhelmingly popular: it is as functionally utilitarian as it is a bourgeois symbol of an elite, privileged, wasteful class. For its ability to accommodate manic social hysteria, maintain functional flexibility across precise (yet unpredictable) social and geographic divides, and absorb oppositional desires (e.g., as rugged and luxurious at once), the SUV has become representative of the decenteredness, indeterminability, and schizophrenia that drive postmodernism.

For the purpose of this particular project, I am primarily interested in how landscape settings have been naturalized around the marketing of SUVs. The icon of the SUV has been imagined—even encrypted—into a highly constructed cultural perception of wilderness landscapes. If wilderness landscapes (depicted in ads from the piney forests and jagged anonymous peaks behind a Subaru Forester to the endless white tundra surrounding a glossy yellow Hummer H2) are meant to signify the most natural parts of the planet, the assimilation of SUVs into these landscapes constitutes a naturalizing process that sneaks into their overwhelming sub/urban reception and appeal.

One explanation for the suburban/urban fervor around SUVs calls on a resurgence of Michel Foucault's notion of "crisis heterotopias." Heterotopia is Foucault's theory that specific places are created in societies to act as counter-sites in which alternative ideas can be practiced and executed without an underlying critique or confirmation of day-to-day situations; unlike utopias, which are ultimately analogies based on fictions of ideal situations, heterotopias *happen*, they actually take place in distinct societal spaces that can be differentiated from other parts of society that they reflect or to which they respond—they are "enacted utopias" (*Diacritics* 24). Crisis heterotopias accommodate individuals who occupy "privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society...in a state of crisis" (*Diacritics* 22). This "state of crisis" has been the target of many critics of SUV-mania. In a recently released book called *High and Mighty*, in which the author traces the shady history of SUVs to their present popularity, the author discovers that SUV buyers are

...insecure and vain. They are frequently nervous about their marriages and uncomfortable about parenthood. They often lack self-confidence in their driving skills. Above all, they are apt to be self-centered and self-absorbed, with little interest in their neighbors and communities. ...[they] are more restless, more sybaritic, and less social than most Americans are. They tend to like fine restaurants a lot more than off-road driving, seldom go to church and have limited interest in doing volunteer work to help others. (Bradsher 101, 106)

This sentiment stems from a reading of SUVs as the mobile site of a crisis heterotopia; individuals who are discontent with their societal roles or who seek a deviant course against the mainstream ("most Americans") can choose to place themselves in a privileged position while simultaneously existing in (and off of)

the thick of a human swamp. The socially “insecure” SUV driver can thus be in the maw of dense highway traffic or urban gridlock, but because of the status of the vehicle—not to mention tinted windows and elevated perspective—the driver is able to retreat into and make local this state of crisis, this voluntary distancing from all Others. But does such a generalization do justice to the cultural flexibility of SUVs? Rather than cast SUV drivers together in a eerily conspiratorial anti-American guerilla movement, I would argue that the case of SUVs is hardly ever this clear; the defining characteristics of such a crisis heterotopia are bound to be transgressed and redrawn by each act of appropriation and deployment.

This concept of SUVs as mobile sites of crisis heterotopias appeals to a general cliché; this image at least superficially reflects the general indifference and detachment associated with the familiar stereotype of the self-absorbed hyperparent who zooms around urban or suburban landscapes in a new decked-out SUV, depositing caffeinated children into awaiting bright green soccer fields. But if the SUV represents a special, specific place (privileged, possibly even *sacred*) in which a commentary of societal complexity is played out, can we simply dismiss SUV drivers pejoratively as self-centeredly deviating from the interests of “most Americans”? If the SUV does signify a type of heterotopia, there is more going on than simply what Jürgen Habermas has called a “legitimation crisis” (46), an identity confusion resulting from the threat of inauthenticity while still within a distinct economic class position—here represented in the privileged, exclusive (and yet always necessarily alterable) popularity of SUVs. One cannot

ignore the way that SUVs are marketed as points of entry through which (privileged) drivers can access wilderness, nature, a lost garden—and suddenly the focus shifts from dense urban concentration to sparse landscapes. SUVs then become emblematic of a solipsistic, self-reliant urge to escape urban centers and flee to the most remote areas, areas denoted for their ‘naturally’ sublime beauty and/or emptiness. This suture of different scenes—the ultra urban with(in) stark wilderness—marks the point of departure from a simplistic social explanation of the escalating SUV hype.

There is more happening within and around SUVs than simply an ever-expanding site of personality crises. To limit SUVs to being a mobile manifestation of crisis heterotopias—the site for distressed individuals estranged from the “rest” of society—is to avoid fully exploring Foucault’s third principle of heterotopias: “The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (*Diacritics* 25). SUVs sustain a certain amount of irony in incompatibilities; SUVs invoke both the ultra-wild (just look for the mountains in almost any SUV ad) and the ultra-urban (leather interiors, hi-fi CD stereo systems, seat warmers, DVD players, etc.); SUVs balance brilliantly the desire for solipsism alongside the craving for trend-based community. SUVs thus become a prime example of postmodern heterotopias: they mesh seemingly contradictory oppositional systems as a way of achieving a necessary amount of slippage within the most culturally common scenarios.

While I was living in Tempe, Arizona—a rather vogue college town adjacent to Phoenix—I recall an evening news story of a family who had wanted to experience as much of the wild desert as possible while still living comfortably suburban lives within driving distance to school, work, and urban conveniences. (Phoenix is in the constant process of spanning out into the more distant reaches of the vast desert valley it lies in, with upper-middle class families building sprawling adobe-style homes that are required to adhere to specific environmental ordinances concerning native vegetation, minimal light pollution, and the desert-shade colors of exterior paint.)

You can imagine the scene: It is late evening—a low, muted, lavish home stretches out under the stars at night, silhouettes of saguaro cacti and ocotillo surrounding the structure. There is a curvaceous pool in the cleverly indistinguishable “backyard”—dim mood lighting illumines the shimmering water and a small child crawls around the border of the pool. In the distance, if we were to listen carefully, we might hear packs of coyotes howling from some invisible (but ‘out there’) rise in the landscape. But in fact, the faint yapping could just as easily be coming from a “Sounds of Nature” CD in the 100 Disc-Changer Pioneer stereo in the living room, which plays from the supplemental outdoor speakers strategically sprinkled around the pool. The wilderness, from the vantage point of this overwhelmingly comfortable patio, is tame, idyllic, and sculpted to a precisely desired aesthetic expectation.

Unfortunately, the wilderness in question seemed to care very little about aesthetics, for, just at that moment, several mangy coyotes rushed into the

environmentally-articulated 'yard' and promptly plucked the unaware child from the "slickrock" colored concrete.

This story was anxiously reported from the (naturally) dark scene of the 'crime'; the obscure forms of the sobbing parents exuded a mixture of frantic disbelief and erratic frustration. What had gone wrong with this so carefully planned domestic scene? A similar incident took place that same season; the next time the perpetrator was a mountain lion, the victim a four year old playing outside—again—around dusk. The obvious ironies of this story indicate a poignant example of the all too common disconnect between the fundamentally constructed roles of nature and culture and how the fabricated blurring of these seemingly distinct categories can result in eerie outcomes. Let us work to better understand how the complex dynamic between the supposedly clear roles of nature and culture played out in this grim narrative.

A much shorter story will serve to bridge the subjects of the misplaced desire for nature and the complex role of the SUV. On December 14 2002, *The Tricolor*—a Norwegian freighter carrying nearly 3000 high-end European luxury automobiles—collided with another ship and sank in the English Channel; about 400 vehicles in this shipment were brand new Volvo XC90s, the latest high-end SUV on the market. Nine thousand Americans (those who could afford to buy a \$40,000 SUV) had rapidly formed a long waiting list to procure the chic XC90s. Needless to say, many Americans mourned the loss of such a fleet of sparkling new SUVs.

The human desire for nature—for ‘raw wildness,’ more specifically—allowed to fully express itself, might embrace these types of extreme instances; from a certain perspective, the Phoenix children were, in a sense, granted a visceral return to nature, as were the Volvos that now house bottom-dwelling sea creatures and schools of innumerable fishes. But clearly, this is neither a compassionate nor an ethical way to treat such incidents; however, this conceptual move to an interpretive extreme reveals uncomfortable contradictions embedded in nature/culture oppositional theories.

The children crawling through meticulously crafted liminal zones between yard and wilderness echo a sentiment shared by Edward Abbey in *Desert Solitaire*; Abbey argues that in order to experience a sublime encounter with the desert, “...you can’t see *anything* from a car; you’ve got to get out of the goddamned contraption and walk, better yet crawl, on hands and knees, over the sandstone and through the thornbush and cactus. When traces of blood begin to mark your trail you’ll see something, maybe. Probably not” (xii). Certainly the children in question were on their hands and knees in just this sort of environment; and their trails were, eventually, marked by blood. Were these unfortunate souls actually fortunate to be granted a (however brief) mystical vision that at once obliterated their domestic situations and propelled them into a Thoreauvian wilderness sublime? To again quote Abbey, “probably not.” It might sound very creepy to contextualize premature deaths in such a way; but considering these situations with the utmost seriousness, does a specifically vague

notion of Nature as external Other significantly figure into these scenarios that we can understand as postmodern?

Such suburban sites located at the edge of vast 'empty' spaces would seem to epitomize the postmodern era. The upper-middle class families inhabiting these zones appear to understand nature as something 'out there' to be reckoned with, perceived, and experienced in precisely manipulated ways—and this notion conflicts with desires to infiltrate the Other, even if this infiltration takes place liminally or what we might call 'superficially.' The fact that children were sacrificed to such an exterior Other seems, if anything, to reinforce such a concept of nature as 'out there'—as a force to be watched over and occasionally deliberately accessed, but which remains ultimately Other: knowable and also beyond knowledge.

As for the shipping mishap that left 400 Volvo SUVs at the bottom of the English Channel, one can almost imagine a clever ad depicting a happy, white, nuclear family sitting in a sort of panoramic aquarium, safe in their brand new leather interior Volvo XC90 at the bottom of the sea. The GPS unit would be blinking hopefully and the father would be negotiating reefs and shipwrecks, driving patiently out of the depths as the children in the back seat marvel at the wonders of the sea and the mother points out spectacular deep sea species of fish. "The New Volvo XC90: Celebrate a Full Immersion into the Wild."

Of course, our society is not quite ironic enough to appreciate the extent of naturalization that we assume in our vast consumer culture. But in another sense,

we are absorbed in the irony and we embrace it as a cultural necessity. We see this in practically every SUV ad: on television, in magazines, and online.

One current Subaru ad claims “Nature has mountains, canyons, rain and snow. We have all-wheel drive. SEEMS FAIR.” (see Figure 2). The ad depicts four brand new silver Subaru vehicles poised—vigilantly, perhaps even competitively—on what appears to be a sort of frozen arctic lake; dark mountain ranges line the horizon and dramatic clouds float above. Nature is textualized as a subject that functions as a sort of ever-present background to human activity—but always a *background*, always something at a distance from the foregrounded SUV. The ad functions on multiple levels, simultaneously presenting nature as an anthropomorphic force opposed to humans (it “has” certain things, like “we have all-wheel drive”), and also as a serene backdrop into which the most technologically advanced automobiles blend (at least superficially), picking up the hues and shades of ‘nature’ in their windows, grills, hubcaps, and gleaming paintjobs. Nature is commodified as a mutual competitor to be respected, appreciated, and challenged via the Subaru experience. The assertion of ‘fairness’ again deploys the fantasy of Nature as knowable Other—or at least as a conscious Other who understands (and ‘plays by’) concepts like justice. The small print of the ad fleshes out this unflinching anthropotextualization of nature:

If you get that nature's biggest charms are sometimes its biggest challenges, you'll get an All-Wheel Drive Subaru. We put All-Wheel Drive standard on every Subaru we make. For incredible traction and control no matter what the driving conditions. So tell nature to bring it on. In a Subaru, you can handle it. The beauty of Subaru All-Wheel Drive. When you get it, you get it.

SUBARU subaru.com



**NATURE HAS MOUNTAINS, CANYONS, RAIN AND SNOW.
WE HAVE ALL-WHEEL DRIVE. SEEMS FAIR.**

If you get that nature's biggest charms are sometimes its biggest challenges, you'll get an All-Wheel Drive Subaru. We put All-Wheel Drive standard on every Subaru we make. For incredible traction and control no matter what the driving conditions. So tell nature to bring it on. In a Subaru, you can handle it. The beauty of Subaru All-Wheel Drive. When you get it, you get it!

SUBARU 
The Beauty of All-Wheel Drive.

The ABC's of Safety: Air bags. Buckle up. Children in backseat. Optional equipment shown.

Figure 2 "Seems Fair"

In this rather standard marketing effort, aesthetics and function have been mystified and bizarrely intertwined; the 'beautiful' All-Wheel Drive apparently allows the driver to effectively enter a competitive arena that somehow translates to the anonymous tundra (of the ad) as easily as it might take place at the

intersection of 46th and 9th in the heart Hell's Kitchen—after all, we are viewing this ad on the back cover of *The New Yorker*. The potential Subaru driver views nature as something both 'charming' and challenging, a sort of Blakean mythical sublime seen through tinted windows at 70 miles per hour. Does the ad perform at face value, merely reifying a myth of difference between humans and the natural world? Or is this ad endorsing a metaphysical intellectual move that seeks to eliminate the oppositional gap between nature and culture? Perhaps the ad functions in (at least) two ways at once, positing both sameness and difference, each attribute deployed discreetly to evoke a calculated response to a confused yet entirely effective "call of the wild."

We are urged to "tell nature to bring it on"—not only is Nature a competitor in this scenario, but a textually-capable, linguistically-enabled competitor who can be provoked into being some sort of an aggressor. Strictly opposed to human ingenuity, the arena that is the landscape becomes a competitor—both *place* and *being* at once. This would explain the earlier sentence that—in seemingly pragmatic terms—talks up the "incredible traction and control no matter what the driving conditions." What if the "driving conditions" consist of a detour through south-side Chicago, past low-income housing projects? Not to worry—this is where that "*control*" is really comforting. In a Subaru, you can handle it. *It*. What is this nameless subject? The other economic tiers of life, that bitter fray going on below amidst the lower classes of society. It is always 'beautiful' in the leather interior of the Subaru, passing

through the liminal edge of wilderness, be it mountains and rivers without end or utter urban despair.

“When you get it, you get it.”—This quirky little claim is enigmatic in its simplistic gruffness. What exactly does one ‘get’ here? The Subaru itself? As a matter of philosophical discourse, the little SUV cannot be a metaphysical Platonic form; it exists materially, out in the driveway or bouncing along a rugged two-track. So what is it, really, that one ‘gets’ with the Subaru? Class position? After all, that would certainly warrant a possible reason for invoking the above issue of *control*. Or perhaps one gets beauty—as in, finally one understands what ‘beauty’ *really is*—in this sense, the Subaru acts as a sort of phenomenological vessel through which one experiences aesthetic truths—and this leads back to the incommensurate realm of Platonic forms. (As one drives along through a fresh foot of snow in Detroit or Bozeman: “Oh, now I *get* what beauty is!”—and it is the driving, *not* the snow.) This notion of ‘getting’ it raises questions of epistemology: is there really something ‘out there’ we need to ‘get’? If so, this privileged (because, clearly, not everyone ‘gets it’) knowledge would seem to be contained in quantifiable commodities such as new Subarus.

The Subaru is an interesting vehicle to focus on: it is a smaller SUV, a sort of progressive alternative to the full size SUVs (*e.g.*, the Yukon, Tahoe, Suburban, Tundra, Sequoia, Land Cruiser, Pathfinder, Trail Blazer, Explorer, Excursion, Range Rover, Highlander—just to name a few), and more in tune with mileage issues. But it is still an SUV marketed to a diverse demographic, from rugged Westerners to sophisticated New Yorkers—always with an impregnated

subliminal, forbidden anticipation of escape, of fleeing into what nature writer Jack Turner dreaded: an “abstract wild” (32). But is this “abstract wild” that terrifying? In a sense, yes—it becomes the very sort of insubstantial ‘place’ that people only care about as a figment of a collective imagination; as long as the picture in the SUV ad still says there is wilderness, well then that is all that we need. From an ecological standpoint, this attitude poses a grim threat to actual places: to National Parks, Forests, and Wilderness areas that involve intricate and tenuous biological systems easily disturbed by the bungling human clutter that can result from this kind of “abstract” human reverence/ignorance dynamic. In another sense, this sort of ignorance is precisely what nature writers seem to advocate—take Jack Turner’s own words for example:

We need big wilderness, big natural habitat, not more technological information about big wilderness. Why not work to set aside vast areas where we limit all forms of human influence: no conservation strategies, no designer wilderness, no roads, no trails, no satellite surveillance, no over-flights with helicopters, no radio collars, no measuring devices, no photographs, no GPS data.... ...Let wilderness again become blank on our maps. (120)

Through the widespread dissemination and prevalence of SUV ads that portray “abstract wilds” as backgrounds, we might suppose that Turner’s cry for “big wilderness” has been heeded and taken up by corporate America. The car companies readily use wilderness as a background and interior space ‘out there’—but that is always the extent of its existence: it is precisely unmapped, anonymous, and looming. A commonly deployed trope asserts that an extremely infinitesimal number of SUV owners actually ever get anywhere near such ‘wilderness’—and if they do, it is on the outskirts, on the outside, or on paved

roads snaking tentatively through crafted corridors. The wilderness facades of SUV ads become a type of unspoken understanding between car companies and consumers: "We know that you are never actually going to *go* to these places, and you know that too, but we all know that there is an appeal here, an abstract wild worth denoting—so just buy the Ford Excursion, *please*, so we can all wink and move on to the next bigger model, next year, with a bigger wilderness in the background." SUVs thus perform as a sort of mobile liminal space in which capitalist consumption and being 'wild' are blurred strategically.

In another Subaru ad, from another issue of *The New Yorker*, a glistening green Outback poses against a background of steely, steep mountains striped with snow chutes and sharp, dark ridgelines (see Figure 3). The Outback rests on a flat, desert-like surface, with sagebrush neatly dotting the periphery of the sandy 'parking spot'—some dim red cliffs are behind the Outback, before the abrupt uplift of the mountains. (*Pay attention here—I am 'nature writing' my experience of an ad.*) The caption of this ad reads: "For those who like to be stirred by nature, not shaken." This invitation works on several levels. First and perhaps most obviously, it functions as an intertextual nod to a popular culture nuance; this references the calling card of Agent 007, where James Bond invariably, across decades and obliterating the aging process, pauses his clandestine duties as secret agent to ask that his martinis be shaken, not stirred. Within the Subaru ad, the shift in preference from shaken to stirred suggests cultural (and entirely class-entrenched) difference—we want to be pragmatic Americans driving practical Subaru Outbacks, not snobby Brits driving totally

nonfunctional Jaguars. This reference also indirectly suggests a masculine appeal to the vehicle; somehow the driver of the Outback will be following in the tradition of a macho American (and yet actually *British*) hero. The ad gathers in what is appealing about James Bond—his manliness, unquestioned heterosexuality, adventuresome spirit, and ethnic purity—while also jettisoning any residue of difference. Yet at a certain ambiguous point, the projected desire is to depart from the ‘tradition’ of Bond and become new, distinct—*American*. Here we might as well at least allude to another layer of ethnic confusion, recalling the blond Australian mate whose Aussie drawl and tough yet suave looks have come to signify most Subaru ads on television...what is it that we are really after in these mini-SUVs? In a word: *Authenticity*. And if we cannot simply get it from ‘out there’ in Nature, then there seems to be a move to get it from empowered white masculine icons.

Behind the pop culture reference and yet at the same time, we have the cryptic entrance of the subject of nature. The mountains in the background presumably represent the *shaking* aspects of nature—after all, a family could get fucked up out there in the dark recesses of such an “abstract wild.” But out here in the foreground, inside a Subaru, sliding around across the silky leather interior, a family could actually be *stirred* by the sheer, impenetrable beauty of the vast mountain-view—or at least the comfort of the seats. Nature is presented as the source of an emotional mystic encounter; the Subaru Outback becomes a mode of experiencing alterity from the margin—and this marginal encounter lends itself eerily to Turner’s passionate provocation for unmapped space. The point is not to

climb the mountain with the Outback, but to sit (comfortably) at the edge of nature and be moved by an aesthetic secret that is at once open to view and yet still concealed in the precisely calculated secrecy of distance. Leave the mountains unmapped—watch a DVD of *Vertical Limit* in the backseat of the Outback instead.

OUTBACK subaru.com

**FOR THOSE WHO LIKE TO BE
STIRRED BY NATURE, NOT SHAKEN.**

If you get that a sport-utility should be rugged, not brutish, then you'll get the new 2003 Subaru Outback®. Equipped with the rugged traction and control of Subaru All-Wheel Drive, the Outback can get you over rough terrain and deep into nature. But thanks to its new smoother-riding suspension system, the going never gets rough. So you can go out and experience nature's beauty, without the trip getting ugly. The beauty of Subaru All-Wheel Drive. When you get it, you get it.™

SUBARU 
The Beauty of All-Wheel Drive.

The ABC's of safety: Air bags. Buckle up. Children in back.

Figure 3 “Stirred by Nature”

The small print of this ad, below the contra-Bond aphorism, reads as such:

If you get that a sport-utility should be rugged, not brutish, then you'll get the new 2003 Subaru Outback®. Equipped with the rugged traction and control of Subaru All-Wheel Drive, the Outback can get you over rough terrain and deep into nature. But thanks to its new smoother-riding suspension system, the going never gets rough. So you can experience nature's beauty, without the trip getting ugly. The beauty of Subaru All-Wheel Drive. When you get it, you get it.

To begin unpacking this incredibly dense piece of text, we are first referred back to the Bond jab—Bond is apparently “brutish,” while the American (SUV driver) is more “rugged.” Why this distinction? It might be contrasting the outward heroism and daring machismo of Bond with the more subtle, repressed, behind-tinted-windows road rage of American drivers. Or is this distinction rather working to implant the idea of more contemplative, in-control ruggedness (suburban parents really know how to get through the everydayness of life: the errands, picking up the kids, Burger King drive-thrus...all this calls for a real *ruggedness* of spirit) as opposed to the constant hysterics of a British super-spy? Is “rugged” a less gendered term? “Brutish” seems to invoke careless masculine power; perhaps “rugged” is an attempt to de-masculinize the SUV—a *little bit*. It is a slight move in separation that does not guarantee difference, but is a sort of innuendo, a mere suggestion that something *is* different, but it is an uncertain difference—and only a slight one at that. We are still in the privileged sector of white, upper-middle class—perhaps masculinist—America.

Apparently, this ruggedness comes with “control”—and these two characteristics can get us “deep in nature.” This is interesting because the entire point of the image in this ad seems to depend on a liminal experience of

nature—we want to be *stirred*, remember? This goal of getting “deep” in nature is used as a reference to a common fantasy (that one must know is merely a fantasy), because it can only be hinted at by showing the Outback at the *edge* of a “deep” nature; the real interior, the *depth*, would not be able to be captured visually or conceptually—this nature is so authentic that it necessarily subverts textual representation. In this sense, getting deep in nature is not only possible, it is also all the more mysteriously authentic of an activity for being beyond imagistic expression—like a god’s activities beyond the realm of mere mortals. It is, then, possible that the liminal position of the pictured Outback functions in emphasizing—by provocation and enticement—the deep interior of the ‘outthereness’ of nature.

And yet, we are promised that things will never get “rough” thanks to the latest suspension system. Deep but not rough; control and smooth-riding suspension—it sounds as if we are suddenly unintentionally discussing a new interpretation of the Kama Sutra based on SUVs. Indeed, we have been invited to experience nature’s beauty; this call to a sort of intimacy only adds to the sexual mystique of the ad. (And this would follow quite in line with the Bond connection...always the lingering aura of sensuality within every encounter between the protagonist and every ally or enemy....) We are familiar with the last line of the print: “When you get it, you get it.” Yes, we *get* it; but we must not really get it at the same time—something must remain a mystery, utterly ineffable: and this is Nature’s role. It is always more complex than *getting* something—either as knowledge or as commodity. It is always about ‘getting’

more than just Nature or a new SUV. Postmodernism and Nature both require such a suspension of ultimate closure: we seem to need new SUVs in a future to come, and we need Nature to remain mysteriously, indefinitely Other.

The latest Lincoln Aviator ad depicts two vehicles parked side by side in a blindingly white desert-like setting (see Figure 4). Rolling sandy hills are vaguely present on the horizon. Beside the two vehicles is a large mirror that appears to be reflecting the SUVs. The bigger vehicle is the Navigator; the smaller one is the all-new Aviator. We might begin our reading of this ad with the very name of the SUV: *Aviator*. With enough class distinction (and/or money) one could be literally *flying* above the mire that is society. Get in the Aviator, seal yourself in, feel the leather and listen to the silence—the engine is so quiet, so powerful, and—what pleasure!—you cannot hear the clamor of the lower classes outside, *below*. There is an epistemology of class embedded in the seemingly ‘natural’ trend of SUVs.

The inscription, hovering in the sky above the two silver SUVs, reads: “Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Especially when it’s yourself you’re imitating.” The focus of this ad had been reallocated significantly from where it was in the Subaru ads; while the wilderness still serves as an ambiguous backdrop, what our attention is drawn to here is a sort of self-referential desire for sameness and alliance. Solitude in the wilderness (as captured in either the lone Subaru in the desert or Jack Turner the solitary Buddhist mountain climber) has been replaced by a craving for company—but this desire for company is not exactly a tolerant anticipation for just anyone.

302-hp best-in-class V8. 3rd-row seating. And climate-controlled front seats.* The new Lincoln Aviator. Like Navigator, just smaller. Proof that magnificence comes in all sizes. Call 800 688-8898 or visit Lincoln.com. There are those who travel. And those who travel well.

LINCOLN
AVIATOR

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.
Especially when it's yourself you're imitating.

*Medium Premium Utility Segment. **Optional equipment.

Figure 4 “Imitation”

The oddly placed mirror on the desert floor seems to directly subvert the significance of the mirage-like landscape—at least superficially. What matters in this ad is *semblance*, a repetition of class and power (and whiteness *everywhere*); and nature, at least the way we have been seeing it used, usually suggests

difference and otherness—what is ‘out there’. The ‘natural’ landscape is still present in this ad even while the message seems to call for an invasion of a higher order into this barren, Iraq-esque landscape. What is this tenacious need for wilderness, even when it is—for all practical purposes—effaced by a foreground of class-based human interest? Its milky whiteness could suggest a not so subtle Aryan ulterior motive at work. Another Aviator ad—invoking the older Navigator again—states: “Together we will rule the world. Well, the garage anyway.” (see Figure 5). Considering current global circumstances and oil-demand economics, this eerily buoyant reference to an imperial empire resonates gravely. And in this ad, there is no token nature scene present at all.

But getting back to the first Aviator ad, nature is only barely visible as a background feature. Even the ground underneath the wheels is a sort of crushed pulpy white rock, a place in which nothing green seems to grow. Here is an interestingly deviant move away from the comforting idyllic green scenery we have seen in other ads and what is typically associated with nature. The color green traditionally has been used to symbolize tranquility, lushness, purity—*Nature*. Green has also come to represent a political ideology, a progressive stance toward environmental causes and concerns—and this is certainly an association that Lincoln does not want to make.

If the class and political positions of Lincoln SUV drivers are informing the strategic use of nature here, then this might account for the annihilative mentality toward greenness in the ad. The hills roll in the background like streamlined, ergonomic furniture—or as if resembling expensive, abstract office

art. The small print *above* the image (an intriguing twist) ends with dual assertions: “There are those who travel. And those who travel well.” Clearly, Lincoln is not shying away from declaring an essential class-signifier imbedded within the vehicles. Does the symbolic need for nature (as Other, as ‘out there’) shift dramatically when SUVs occupy strictly upper-class domains?

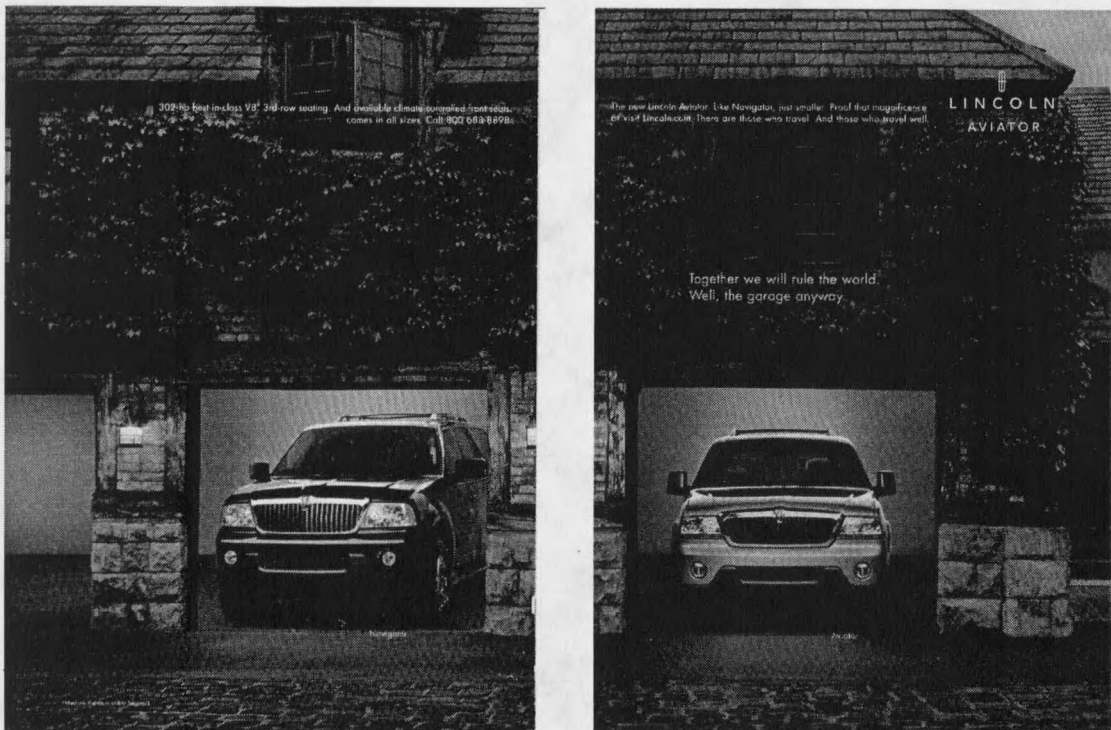


Figure 5 “Rule the World”

To bring us back around to the story of the suburban desert children being carried off by wild animals, one more ad lends itself as both segue and conclusion (see Figure 6). The page is a soft, foresty-green color—an instant tip off that we are in for some good postmodern nature deployments. A silvery Chevy Tahoe races up a steep incline, dust and rubble flying out from behind its spinning wheels. A sharp, forested ridgeline rises up in the background, and high cirrus clouds break up the dazzling blue sky. Some rocks are in the foreground, and a

big ponderosa pine stands on the other side of the road. The caption above this scene reads: "YOU'VE HEARD OF MOUNTAIN LIONS RUNNING LOOSE THROUGH SUBDIVISIONS. THIS IS THE OPPOSITE." In this legend-like inscription we might hear a sort of call for vengeance: that family that lost their four year old to the mountain lion can, as the ad later suggests, buy a new Tahoe and 'drop in on' its neighborhood—in order to terrorize and perhaps even kill this wild other (and of course this part is the *unsaid*). There is a sense of competition gone beyond fun and games; there is an ominous 'us versus them' tone to this ad that we definitely picked up in the first Subaru ad (although more with an "abstract wild"), but in this ad it gets personal, so to speak. It appears as if the SUV is actually frantically chasing the mountain lion (just off the page) with hopes of running it down—why else would the Tahoe appear to be moving so fast through such a landscape?

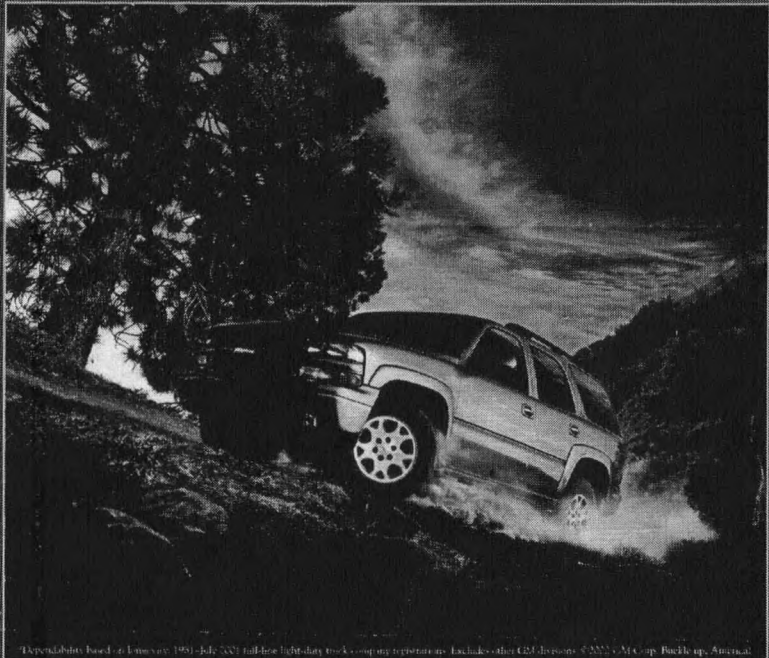
The small print below the image reads:

What's keeping you from dropping in on their neighborhood for once? Nothing, if you have an all-terrain Tahoe® Z71®. Show 'em what gas-charged shocks and 17" off-road tires are all about. Soon, you'll be the subject of puma-lore—if there is such a thing. From the family of Chevy™ Trucks. The most dependable, longest-lasting trucks on the road.

First, we are offered an invitation to go get some revenge, to go put some hurt on the mountain lions who, for so long, have been an intimidating factor at the periphery of human settlements. Then, as if to abolish any human fear or anxiety, we are assured that "nothing" can keep us from expanding beyond our civilized borders—at least, not as long as we have an all-terrain Tahoe® Z71®. Here we begin to see the suspicious naturalization process at work: by suddenly being

claimed as “all-terrain,” the ad has invoked the authority of nature—the SUV takes a double place, in a cultural setting as well as in the green utopia, an impossible place entirely isolated from human activity.

YOU'VE HEARD OF MOUNTAIN LIONS
RUNNING LOOSE THROUGH SUBDIVISIONS.
THIS IS THE OPPOSITE.



*Dependability based on Lincoln's 1991-July 1992 full-line light-duty truck company registrations. Excludes other GM divisions. ©1992 GM Corp. Buckle up, America!

What's keeping you from dropping in on their neighborhood for once? Nothing, if you have an all-terrain Tahoe[®] Z71.*

Show 'em what gas-charged shocks and 17" off-road tires are all about. Soon you'll be the subject of puma lore — if there is such a thing. From the family of Chevy[™] Trucks. The most dependable, longest-lasting trucks on the road.

Call 800-950-2438 or visit chevy.com

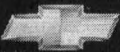
TAHOE Z71  **LIKE A ROCK**

Figure 6 “Running Loose”

The triple irony of this ad lies in the Tahoe's advertised presence (center, foreground) within this ‘natural’ setting—which is itself a hyper-real, staged simulacrum of ‘the wild’. Is the mountain lion's neighborhood ‘pure’ anymore

the instant the SUV is introduced? Presumably not—and yet maybe that is the point. And yet again, there is the need for such ‘pure’ places to exist in theory so that the subdivision-dwellers will feel the need to purchase the all-terrain Tahoe® Z71®. There is always more going on than a simple effacement of nature—it is a strange dialectic that annihilates and reifies at once. It is a naturalization process that almost functions backwardly to accommodate the postmodern conditions of image (re)presentation.

Further along in the text, we are charged to “show ‘em” the mechanical details of the SUV; this presumes that the mountain lions will be impressed, frightened, intimidated—all of these more or less anthropomorphic qualities placed on a vague yet vivid persona of nature. What comes next, after we naturalize the occupation of the SUV? We *mythologize*. The narrative structure of this ad thus unfolds: Mountain lions in nature, people in subdivisions. Mountain lions run ‘loose’ through subdivisions, possibly grabbing a little ‘Happy Meal’ on the way through. Mountain lions thus become the subject of a mythology articulated in liminal experiences between nature and culture. Armies of Chevy Tahoes take humans into the wild, to an inverted sort of liminal contact zone, in which the mountain lions get scared of “gas-charged shocks” among other features. Finally, humans—or really, Chevy Tahoes—become a subject in the “puma lore”; and this becomes a sort of reverse mythology that places humans as the wild intruders of the pure, sacred, safe space. Does the mobile heterotopia work both ways, as critique of interior and exterior alike? Do SUVs—as sites of a flexible counter-culture/counter-nature exchange—always already require a

surplus of mythologized subjects that lurk just beyond the perimeter? Why is it that SUV ads so readily deploy the movement of transgression, from outside (nature) to inside (nature), from inside (culture) to outside (culture), a double sort of movement that is never clear and that relies on fundamental contradictions within competing mythologies?

Finally, we have the assertion of dependability and longest-lastingness. Here we might really be getting close to the appeal of deferring to wilderness settings. If a goal of marketing is to advertise a product based on its dependability on longest-lastingness, then Nature might seem to accommodate such intentions. Nature, after all—as we have been seeing it used—has obviously been around ‘forever’, and you can always count on it being ‘out there’. Yet even here we cannot ignore the ironies: hiding right beside the claim for longest-lastingness is the need for ever-new SUVs—and therefore ever-new SUV buyers. The point really is not to have an SUV for a long time, but to know—for as long as one owns a singular Chevy Tahoe—that it is the longest-lasting SUV on the market. Again, we come back to a desire for authenticity: one could assert that her or his Chevy Tahoe is the most authentic SUV because in 45 years (given an impossibly general inertia of global tensions) it will still be around while all other types of SUVs will be broken down or bogged down in the mud somewhere. This authenticity apparently—somehow—is able to flow into the owner’s psyche, reassure one of *one’s own* authenticity. Furthermore, as any environmentally-minded individual should well attest, the SUV by its very design works against the longest-lastingness and dependability of nature—so why appropriate nature as

the mark of these attributes when these are precisely what SUVs seem to threaten? Herein is yet another incongruous area within the cultural deployment of Nature as a authenticating marketing tool.

One final ad begs entry into the program; the excess of this “one more ad” in fact fits in quite nicely with the assailment of ever-new models of SUVs to which we have grown so accustomed (see Figure 7). This ad—for the new Lexus GX—shows the luminescent SUV (again silver—why this repetition of the anti-color, the reflective mirror surface?) poised gallantly in a dense jungle or rainforest setting. This ad perhaps most cleverly intertwines the mixed messages of nature blended into postmodernism.

The sport utility vehicle subtly reflects in the swampy muck underneath its wheels. If we divert our gaze from the central image, we might notice that the border of the picture appears to be tattered, yellow paper—indeed, it is a single page in an old book. (Ah, yes: mythologies are often stored in old books.) We are, therefore, not supposed to be viewing the scene of the SUV in nature, but rather a catalogued entry (then reproduced in a magazine) that itself portrays the scene of the SUV in nature—a thrice removed projection of the experience. The print below the ad in some ways interprets, in other ways distorts, what is going on within the image:

Okay, if you really want to put your life on the line, the new V8-powered GX is more than capable of taking you to the kinds of places where danger lurks at every corner. But we expect most of you will appreciate the GX for what is really is: a luxury vehicle with all the amenities, for a new kind of adventure. One that leads to that unique little getaway where the only risk you’re likely to face is going off your diet.

LEXUS

The Passionate Pursuit of Perfection

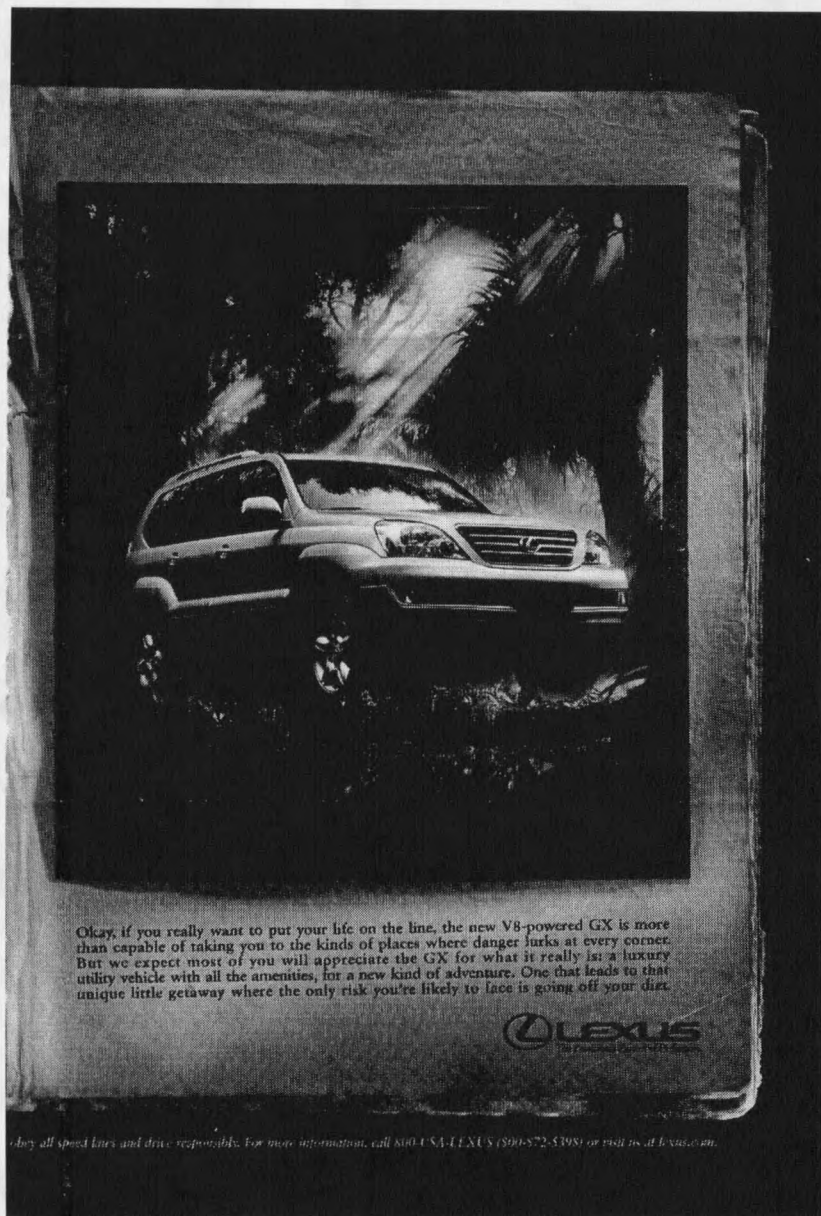


Figure 7 “Passionate Pursuit”

This ad is rich in double meanings, always undoing what it does, effacing what it ‘means’. We can begin with the aesthetic format of the ad itself: On top of the black border we have the worn pages of an old book—at least little odd when juxtaposed with the “new” Lexus GX. Antiquity here might be deployed as yet another claim for authenticity; while the SUV is new, it has the security of

something old, tried, and true. The SUV is then authorized in three ways at once: as based in an old text (suggested by the yellowed pages), as placed in natural context (marked by the lush green environment surrounding the GX), and as “new” (utilizing cutting-edge technology).

Getting into the text, we are relieved by a knowing sort of ironic tone: one *could* put their life on the line with this SUV (go “to where danger lurks at every corner”—wait, are there ‘corners’ in the wilderness?), but everyone knows that this is not how we really plan to use such a vehicle. Rather, what is stressed are the luxury aspects of the SUV—and this becomes a “new kind of adventure.” Does this new kind of adventure still require a traditional sense of nature? What sort of journey would one make that might threaten one’s diet? The “new kind of adventure” leads to...McDonalds? Or to the quaint cabin in the Maine woods in which greasy strips of fatty bacon might be cooked for breakfast? One cannot be completely sure from the brief text. Marketing the Lexus GX still relies on the residue of a pure Nature ‘out there’, and yet the ad plainly admits the more likely urban potential of such a vehicle. It is very difficult to determine the implications embedded in this schema: Is the ad an attempt to mythologize the high-end luxury SUV as (still) a wilderness machine? Is the ad suggesting that the wilderness appeal of the SUV is passe? Or does the ad re-mystify the reliance on an essential presence of a wilderness locale in order to maintain the SUV’s multiplex social significance?

In any case, this ad seems at once most aware of its own irony while also naively reinvigorating the very spirit (precisely as a mythological specter) of

nature employed in the other ads we have encountered. By setting the silvery SUV so starkly against the dark wild background, the ad seems to project its own caricature; the sides of the SUV are not even festooned with mud and green ooze—an all too common ploy of SUV marketing. Rather, in this ad we are presented with the sparkling clean Lexus GX in the middle of the jungle, with heavenly rays of sunlight beaming down through the foliage. To top off the sarcasm (how can we possibly read it any other way?), the picture of the “new” SUV has been placed (or found?) in the worn pages of an ancient book. We might follow the heavenly beams of light here and hypothesize the Biblical status of the Lexus GX; or, we could stay with irony and try to maneuver through the conflation of old and new, of authenticity and seemingly irreverent innovation, of simply ‘natural’ and complexly crafted.

What is at stake in how we read (or choose not to read) nature’s (awkwardly languid) place in these SUV ads? Might we get closer to understanding these abstract sites of wilderness invoked in the SUV ads if we were to trace accounts of such nature away from ‘Deep Culture’ and into the deepest reaches of human contact with and observation of this Other? Is there such a thing as Nature outside of the text?

CHAPTER THREE

THE LOOKOUT CONSTRUCT: SEEING DE-TEXTUALIZED NATURE

Terry Tempest Williams, in her most recent book *Red*, writes “Wilderness is not a belief. It is a place.” (61) This claim points toward an underlying tension between experience and language: That one could get in a Nissan Pathfinder and drive into the wilderness is easy enough to comprehend (the ad says: “Not that you would...*but you could!*”); but how does my (or Williams’s) *writing* about wilderness change the subject? Or for that matter, how does constructing an ad through language and pictures—a generated simulacrum of an actual experience, an actual *place*—shift the significance of the seemingly pure nature “out there”? If the driver in the ad is portrayed as having immediate experiences with(in) a wild landscape, is something *different* occurring when SUV manufacturers write about—try to *capture*—such experiences from a removed perspective?

This is the problematic position into which Terry Tempest Williams gets herself: through her very passionate nature writing, she simultaneously wants us to *believe* in a place called wilderness while also urging us to treat such a place as if it has some sort of inherent value or presence—with no need of our belief. The problematic is that this place called “wilderness” is mediated by language; our experience of wilderness here is based on shared linguistic and culturally constructed *beliefs* rather than merely an intuitive understanding that indicates any particular *place*. SUV ads are already lodged in a dynamic web of textuality; their message is so intricately assembled that we cannot simply have a detached sense of a beautifully barren “place” (wilderness), nor is it accurate to assume that

readers all share a universal “belief”—the ads depend on the slippage *between* these two functions. The writing and pictures perform by communicating an authentic presence of wilderness (as a singular place)—but the writing (as shared belief) competes with this authentic presence for what is ultimately to be prioritized. If there is any ultimate priority, it is that the undecidability of what is important around and within SUVs: wilderness is somewhere between belief and place as long as it is textualized—and it is always a textualized subject, even when (especially when) we are driving ‘in’ it. This aporia haunts the genre of nature writing, a class of writing that would like to claim a sort of invisibility, as well as a cultural (and aesthetic) distance from SUV ads.

Here, a brief discussion of nature writing is in order. Across the spectrum of American nature writers—from Henry David Thoreau to Doug Peacock—a common theme emerges: that of the privileging of sight, of seeing and looking out at (and often *into*) nature. A specific case study epitomizes such oculocentrism: the nature writers (there are several of them; it is its own subgenre) who write from the site of wildfire lookout towers across the Western United States. At this point, let us focus for a bit on Gary Snyder’s *Lookout’s Journal* in order to further explore some aspects of the awkward tension that occurs in most of what is called nature writing. By highlighting several fragments from the *Journal*, I want to ask three overlapping questions: 1) Can writing capture the authentic presence of nature? 2) Is there any ‘authentic presence’ of nature to write about? 3) Finally, how can ‘nature’ function as a fundamentally unstable subject of writing (and, more broadly, as a subject of cultural texts)?

To get at the first question, let's discuss the actual scenario a little: In the early 1950s, Gary Snyder took up seasonal positions in National Forests as a wildfire lookout. He spent months at a time alone in the far reaches of the Northern Cascade Range, watching for fires and jotting down his impressions and observations of the surrounding landscape. At first glance, we might view the isolated, remote lookout tower as an excellent example of a human perspective set within the middle of nature's most authentic presence. Snyder was positioned—alone—for weeks at a time at the top of a mountain ridge, completely surrounded by the wilderness. This combination of solitude and a rugged backdrop provide—at least superficially—a sturdy argument for an experiencing authentic presence.

Roland Barthes, in an essay on the Eiffel Tower, notes:

To visit the Tower is to get oneself up onto the balcony in order to perceive, comprehend, and savor a certain sense of Paris.
 ...Habitually, belvederes are outlooks upon Nature, whose elements—waters, valleys, forests—they assemble beneath them, so that the tourism of the "fine view" infallibly implies a naturist mythology. (241)

Substituting the National Forest for Paris, we might be lead to draw a parallel sketch of Snyder's position in the lookout tower: the privileging of sight (Snyder's vigilant desire "to perceive, comprehend") is always directed out at a landscape worthy of being seen—this introduces Nature into a sort of mythology that the human stands apart from and can watch unfold. (And here, we might just as easily subrogate a Chevy Tahoe for the tower—but, as a bonus, the SUV represents a site of *mobile* sight.)

But what is a lookout tower in the first place? A *tower*—an anthropocentric structure raised *above* the landscape, in order that a *lookout* might spot (and help *stop*) natural wild fires. This already complicates the writing perspective: Snyder is placed precisely in a highly constructed, mediated role even while in the ‘middle’ of the wilderness. This conjures up Foucault’s interpretation of the panopticon, the centralized surveillance space created for its effectiveness in exercising power and control over whatever is imprisoned around (and below) the central position: “The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately” (Foucault 200). So Snyder experiences the natural world from the fixed vantage point of a human structure; and yet, his writing often conveys a tone of immediate presence—as if he were not writing, but *being* there; not being a *lookout*, but being ‘*natural*’. Take a single line from the *Journal*:

zazen non-life. An Art: mountain-watching.

(Snyder 10)

Taking this sparse passage a phrase at a time, we can begin to dispel the chimera of Nature’s authentic presence. First, we have “*zazen*”: here is a meditative (albeit tautological) assertion that existence is what is here, now—or rather that the writer was in *that* moment, *therein* nature. The problem here is that this written assertion refers back to past moment, and yet the language declares presence, a *now*-ness that is grounded in the moment. But to which moment does this refer? Snyder’s past relation to his surroundings? Snyder writing “*zazen*”? The moment that his readers read this word? (Now, as *you* read this?) Like the

fire tower's supplemental overlay on the natural landscape, Snyder's written "zazen" complexifies his desire for an authentic, present relationship between human perception and the natural object(ive)—Nature. The text can be interpreted as pointing back at an authentic moment: but it is a moment of Snyder *writing*, not actually of Snyder simply *being there* with nature—that moment seems to be at least twice removed. Similarly, the lookout tower does not point right to nature as much as to a human organization *outside* of the designated wilderness area. Where is the authentic presence, and how does one capture this presence in writing? (Is it 'captured' in an SUV ad, in a paused moment of tranquility as an appropriately muddy red Suburban explodes through a lumpy brown puddle in a dip on a forsaken dirt road with mountains looming in the background?—It is just as much here as in Snyder's "zazen.")

The "non-life" phrase is equally intriguing; it is as if Snyder is magically removing himself from the scene—trying to effectively vaporize himself as-being in order to more truly experience the 'real nature' (the non-linguistic, the 'outside of the text,' nature) around him. But then we must ask: how does the *writing* function? The very words "non-life" in fact imply *life*. Again, it is the irony of the lookout tower that comes through Snyder's writing: any experience of authenticity is mediated in two ways at once: through the panoptic perspective of the lookout, and through the ironic language that the writer uses to transmit authenticity to his readers.

Finally, the "art" of "Mountain-watching."—this phrase perhaps best expresses the double-bind that Snyder is in: Through this expression of relation,

Snyder ceases to simply *be* a “mountain-watcher”—he also becomes a *writer*. The priority slides covertly between Snyder watching the actual mountain (the alleged authentic presence) and the textual expression of the relationship between Snyder and the mountain (the lookout construct)—the experience of the authentic presence is thus confused with its very absence in the textual representation. The lookout tower, then, becomes a metaphor for the linguistic trap into which writers necessarily get themselves when they try to express an authentic presence of nature. Or, again in Foucault’s words: “Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to introduce in the inmate [i.e., *Nature*] a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic function of power” (201). Does nature writing perform by controlling (perception of) the very—supposedly—autonomous authentic nature that the writers want to argue exists beyond human activity? Where is the authority in this dynamic? Who can *authorize* a nature outside of a framework of textuality?

Can we get to any authentic presence (*unauthorized* nature) through language? (Or: Can we get to the authentic presence of nature in a Subaru Forester?) Snyder attempts to accomplish this in his writing; his uses of few words and simple descriptions serve to make language appear transparent, so that the reader can feel as though something other than just reading is going on. It is as if there is nothing getting in between nature and Snyder—like the lookout tower—or between Snyder’s experience of the authentic presence and the reader’s vicarious experience of *Snyder’s* experience. But, like the lookout tower, that

erect interpretive vantage point, Snyder's language tends to obscure such transparency. Here are a few more lines from the Lookout Journals:

What happens all winter; the wind driving snow; clouds—wind, and
mountains—repeating

this is what always happens here,

and the photograph of a young female torso hung in the lookout
window,
in the foreground. Natural against natural, beauty.

(Snyder 10)

The first three lines emit a sort of transcendent, impersonal observation of the authentic presence—no adjectives, just the facts of nature: wind, snow, clouds, mountains. And then this quiescent view turns abruptly to “the photograph of a young female torso”—and what started as a seemingly unfiltered description of authentic presence suddenly exposes itself as a bizarre sort of double voyeurism. Snyder's account of the “natural against natural” beauty becomes blatantly phallogocentric: The lookout tower symbolizes masculine dominance of a *known* natural beauty—whether it is in the form of Nature's authentic presence or the projected image of femininity. And yet Snyder's role as lookout, in relation to the ‘authentic presence’ of nature (and to the *photograph* of the female torso), is exposed as prearranged and always at least a layer away from any sort of direct contact. And as readers, then, we are *three* times removed from the alleged ‘authentic presence.’ Are we always in a ‘lookout relation’—that is, in a position of prearranged dominance and mediation—to an ultimately *fictionalized* authentic presence of nature? Now we might turn this back on our initial Terry Tempest Williams claim; the question of whether wilderness is a *place* or a *belief* gets

more and more complicated. In a world still very much dominated by masculine vision and decision, one might prefer subversive SUV drivers—whose gender one cannot necessarily tell through the tinted windows and the speed with which they roar through the wilderness—to the manly lookouts writing (not simply *about*) nature.

How are we to go on writing about a subject that is decentered by the lookout tower construct built into language? When we write about nature, the act of writing always functions to assure us of the *absence* of nature's unmediated presence. A lot of Snyder's writing reads as if he is consciously plodding right through this messy turf, fully aware of the inherent irony of writing from his lookout perspective. Here is an example:

—If one were to write poetry of nature, where an audience?
Must come from the very conflict of an attempt to articulate the vision
poetry & nature in our time.

(Snyder 7)

Snyder articulates the problem by placing it out in the open, but simultaneously conceals the very essence of the conflict by bracketing the subject of 'nature' as if it is something separate and 'out there' to which he stands in a pure relation. And what should an audience matter? This gets back to the problem of Terry Tempest Williams' claim, that her writing "in defense of wilderness" needs an audience who can be active defenders of (and thus *believers in*) the authentic presence of wilderness. And this suggests a major theoretical problem: the significance of nature writing, in the end, depends upon communicable ideas, *beliefs* that get sent through words; the authentic *place* is always arbitrary and secondary—or maybe

not there at all. Snyder's phrase "in our time" hints at the political implications for nature writing—that the ideas involved matter on a level that applies beyond romantic literary expression of authentic presence; indeed, Snyder's descriptions of interconnectedness serve to persuade an audience to acquire a similarly reverent perspective toward nature. And this is where the lookout relation gets even more complicated—if the end goal is for more integration of the human into the natural, a beckoning for humans to experience authentic presence, then the mystical subject of nature gets deferred yet again, as a 'subject' that must always remain Other. Even while working to blur the divide between humans and nature, the lookout relation forever postpones immediacy with an authentic presence—nature is always a 'subject' in the sense of being acted upon or looked upon from a pre-scribed perspective.

What can we take away from the lessons of the Lookout Construct?

Nature writing can no longer function as a stable category of textual expression; the lookout relation prearranged in language complicates our attempts to let words blur harmoniously into landscapes. Here, we might think of the protagonists of Abbey's *Monkey Wrench Gang* burning down billboards along highways that meander through the desert—the words apparently did not fit into the scenery very well. And yet, the irony is always lurking near by: imagine a backpacker pulling out a tattered copy of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* after setting up camp; now, beyond mere scale, how is this innocent book in the wilderness any different from the aforementioned billboards in the wilderness? (And if it *is* different, it is a *textual* difference that ultimately interests us.) It might feel as though I have

done little more than get us into frustrating maze of contradictions—but I argue that this is a position we are constantly in when we deal with the subject of nature writing. What matters, then, is really how we naturalize textual experiences—and how we become critically aware of and responsive in regard to such naturalized texts.

Snyder himself was quite suspicious of how European poststructural philosophy could get in the way of his “deep-ecology” ethics; in an essay on nature writing, he dismisses continental theorists by simply stating “[...]they are just talk” (259). Snyder expresses what seems to be a widespread fear that language will somehow get in the way of our encounters with nature, when really, language provides the very medium through which we experience the so-called natural world. Poststructural theory does not imply that it is impossible to experience nature, but rather that it is always through textuality that these experiences occur. The role of language is emphasized, which requires that we *read closely and write carefully*—and this in fact enhances the responsibilities of writers and readers alike. If we are always responsible for what nature ‘means’ and how this ‘meaning’ gets distributed to and appropriated by human agencies, this would seem to trigger a critical consciousness that would never simply be satisfied with self-evident or self-contained definitions of nature. We should be suspicious of such closed deployments of nature, then—but we also must make sure that our decisions and actions (which are always political and social) are never based simply on naturalized essential or authentic definitions of this endlessly slippery construct.

My goal has not been to entirely dismantle nature writing and prove it useless, but rather to raise awareness as to what built-in implications come with otherwise unsophisticated sounding language. Snyder, later on the same essay, remarks that: "In disclosing, discovering, the wild world with our kind of writing, we may find ourselves breaking into unfamiliar territories that do not seem like what was called 'nature writing' in the past" (260). We can immediately sense the anxiety in these lines; there is a two-way pulling taking place, one way toward the human-centered lookout, the masculine "discover[er]," "breaking into" virgin-like "unfamiliar territories"—but also the other way pulling toward a *new* nature writing, a new use of language that gets into indeterminate descriptive places and will not (be able to) assert itself in such authoritative, mediated ways. It is this tension that is important, for it urges writers and readers toward textual modifications that, philosophically speaking, sound paradoxical. We can interpret Snyder as pushing the margins of this realm of paradox: as he awkwardly tries to penetrate the wild with his manly writing, Snyder also works to achieve some totally inarticulate distance from the very language that inevitably mediates his contact with nature. And this is where we can employ Jacques Derrida's take on writing in order to disentangle this obscure territory of textualized Nature: "The labor of writing is no longer a transparent ether. It catches our attention and forces us, since we are unable to go beyond it with a simple gesture in the direction of what it 'means,' to stop short and in front of it or to work with it" (Derrida, *Acts* 114). This indictment does not simply expose an unstable foundation of nature writing, but contributes vital insight to the genre: if we really

treasure such unutterable places (places we have been in), and likewise if we really want to share certain *beliefs*, we cannot afford to treat these subjects as pre-existing, distinct places accessible through a transparent entryway of language. Language is inevitably privileged in such cases—similar to how we determine the value of an image of an SUV foregrounded against a wilderness backdrop. We should stop short in front of language—in front of the text of Nature—and work with what nature writers are *writing*, with what SUVs say about the desire for nature; it is the general structure of textuality itself that shows how language functions in further complicating a subject that always eludes unmediated presence.

I have not isolated Gary Snyder as an especially unique or problematic nature writer; one might conduct similar analyses and conjure up similar “constructs” within any example of nature writing—from corporate SUV ads to the Deepest Ecology texts. However, the icon of the lookout tower does seem to lend itself quite easily to questions of desire, phallogocentrism, masculinity, authority, dominance, and oculocentrism that often get concealed in the positivistic tendencies of most nature writing. The Lookout Construct represents a double layering of desire: The nature writer always interacts with or observes a human construct—there is no essential nature ‘out there’ simply waiting to be ‘experienced’. The position that the nature writer assumes—as detached (Emerson’s “transparent eyeball” [811]) or absorbed (Thoreau’s “...in Nature, a part of herself” [122])—is always another construct, a function of the writer’s desire to experience nature objectively or purely. We see a similar movement in

the SUV ads: always a desire to get closer to or be consumed by the Authentic Nature 'out there'—but also the desire to maintain one's own authenticity and agency as human being. While these two desires are not necessarily incommensurate, they are often obscured in favor of positivistic preferences for Nature as definable, tangible, essential—and most of all, as the authentic Other that remains 'out there'.

Such a close reading of Snyder's *Lookout's Journal* should encourage a heightened sense of textual awareness concerning constructs of perspective and authority. While nature writers might be inclined to claim a sort of mystically granted, privileged state of consciousness, the 'Other' that remains 'out there' is hardly pure and is always already mapped onto a general field of textuality; the 'unknown' thus requires at least a liminally flirtatious relationship with the 'known'. Donna Haraway, describing the state of nature within a postmodern consciousness, claims that "Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other" (Haraway 151). Snyder's early writings tend to fail to meet this condition; his lines continually reaffirm a binary dialectic that inevitably collapses upon itself—the strict categories of 'nature' and 'culture' spontaneously deconstruct one another precisely by taking place in a textual network of interpretation. Snyder's isolated, elevated perspective can thus be read as symptomatic of the irony of his textualized attempt at self-removal: nature, as *interactive interpretive landscape*, might be nearer to an SUV driver's 4WD button than to the words of the nature writer who seeks to bracket, essentialize, and mystify whatever is 'out there'.

CHAPTER FOUR

DESIRING THE DESERT: NATURE AND THE PLAY OF DIFFÉRANCE

So far we have focused on SUV ads and on Gary Snyder's *Lookout's Journal* as textually problematic deployments of Nature. Now I want to take us into another nature writer's work, into lines perhaps more lucid and intelligible, and yet at the same time more fully entrenched in the complex network we have declared 'postmodern'. Jennifer Price, in her essay "Looking for Nature at the Mall" suggests "Nature itself still seems to many of us to be nothing if not rooted in place. Along with 'natural' and 'authentic,' 'place' is among the most powerful in the pool of meanings we've attached to nature" (193). In these lines we might detect tremors of Terry Tempest Williams's claim that wilderness is a *place*. Throughout her book *Red*, Williams seems to be fighting off an apparition of nihilism that she associates with postmodern urban trends. Her stories often juxtapose the urban and the wild as distinctly different realms; she finds solace when she leaves cities and retreats to the deepest interior regions of the desert. (And here the formula sounds eerily like an ad for a Subaru Outback.) Through a close reading of one particular short essay in *Red* called "Ode to Slowness," I want to flesh out the textual play of différance as it occurs through Williams's attempts at writing a lopsided dialectic between city and desert. By analyzing the ways in which Williams's Nature is never quite finally decidable, I want to argue that one condition of postmodern treatments of nature is for the supposed subject-object relationship to be replaced by the field of textuality, within which what

matters is not the essential identity of a thing 'out there', but rather how we construct and assign meaning to specific situations and particular spaces.

Jacques Derrida's essay "*Différance*" posits that textuality is always caught in the double function of differing and deferring: "On the one hand, it indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a spacing and temporalizing that puts off until 'later' what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible" (441). Williams's invocation of the desert takes place in this undecidable drift between presence and absence, and it is this problematic movement that should compel us to work toward a postmodern sense of how nature is inescapably bound to textuality.

Williams' essay opens by drawing a lineage to painters of light: "Is it possible to make a living by simply watching light? Monet did. Vermeer did. I believe Vincent did too. They painted light in order to witness the dance between revelation and concealment, exposure and darkness" (141). Starting with these lines, we are called back to a thread of oculoctrism reminiscent of Snyder's Lookout Construct; embedded in Williams's appeal to these painters is a general privileging of sight, of a sort of overseeing that takes place between subject and object, between aesthete and spectacle. Williams couches her own desire for 'witnessing' within a genealogy of European masculine painters. The terms she selects to connect paintings to her experience of the desert suggest the first layer of unintentional indeterminability; the "dance between revelation and concealment, exposure and darkness" is precisely the move of *différance*: while

Williams seems to be referring to landscape effects and the light-play on rock features, her writing takes place exactly *between* revelation and concealment—the desert is not here, and yet the lines work to reveal it a little, albeit as a (primarily) textual spectacle. Similarly, Williams’s prose functions as a liminal trace of what it between exposure and darkness, requiring that the forms of the desert remain obscure and peripheral as the reader is exposed (*in writing*) to these nuances.

The essay continues:

Perhaps this is what I desire most, to sit and watch the shifting shadows cross the cliff face of sandstone or simply to walk parallel with a path of liquid light called the Colorado River. In the canyon country of southern Utah, these acts of attention are not merely the pastimes of artists, but daily work, work that matters to the soul of the community. (141)

Williams acknowledges her desire-function in the schema, but then accounts for desire as “work”—interestingly, the focus on the painters also shifted from “to make a living” to being “pastimes.” What is Williams trying to say here? That she wants her interaction with the landscape to be pragmatic and occupational, or that it primarily be one of mystical awareness and pleasure? The priority floats somewhere between these two forms of life; we cannot be sure what it is that Williams actually sees in the landscape. All we can tell so far is that the desert wilderness seems to serve as a lens through which Williams refracts her (rather unclear and even contradictory) desires. The end of this passage veers suddenly into the subject of community—and even more mysteriously, to the “soul” of the community. Is this “community” strictly human, or is Williams expanding the concept of community to include rocks, scorpions, and sunlight? Williams does not explain why this labor “matters” to the soul of the community (or who makes

up this community), but instead leaves the assertion to be justified at a later moment in the text. Furthermore, suspending her direct entitlement to wilderness, does this “work” matter to places other than “the canyon country of southern Utah”? Does my close attention to the details of a Cinnabon kiosk in the Detroit Metro World Gateway airport matter to the soul of that community? The Northwest Airlines color scheme privileges the color red too, after all. Does Williams’s deferral of definitions unintentionally—or necessarily—open her text up to landscapes outside of “red” ones? Williams’s desire for the desert hinges on an undecidable sway between human perception and essential, authentic place: while Williams seems to want to assign unique qualities some ontological status of the desert, we see again and again that it is often her shift in perception of and participation with the landscape—which could be *any* landscape—that persuades the reader to believe in the desert’s inherent difference.

The next paragraph functions by thoroughly muddling the desires that Williams links to the desert landscape: “This living would include becoming a caretaker of silence, a connoisseur of stillness, a listener of wind where each dialect is not only heard but understood. Can we imagine such a livelihood?” (141). It now appears that we are definitely discussing an actual occupation, a way of making a living—and yet, does such a spiritually focused livelihood always already require a privileged position, one that affords time to carry out this ‘work’? And the actual work outlined is equally ambiguous: In a sense, I suppose we could call librarians “caretakers of silence”—and yet Williams would seem to be urging us away from densely concentrated human gathering places. The

position of “caretaker” is subtle; is “silence” ‘something’ that needs to be looked after, taken care of? Is this possible? What would it look like to actually take care of silence? Should we ‘rip’ it onto our Mac I-pods in order to share it with future generations who might not have the privilege of standing in the desert and hearing it themselves? Clearly, Williams would hope this not to be the case; the desert should always be there to provide the authentic experience—the I-pod silence would just be the simulacrum of silence. But then, who is the “silence” for? Humans, or for the desert itself? Does the desert have self interest? Have we anthropomorphized without realizing it? What about Williams’ writing—does the text about silence silence the silence? Imagining a “connoisseur of stillness” is a little easier. We can envision someone simply relishing the illusion of quiescence. And it is always an illusion, a matter of *scale*; the earth never stops rotating on its axis or revolving around the sun. But ignoring that material circumstance for the moment, we can get the gist of what Williams is getting at: certainly we’ve all experienced moments in which nothing seems to happen: whether pausing on a cross country ski across a wide empty valley, or stuck overnight in the Detroit airport at three in the morning—there is nothing happening, no visible movement. Stillness. And yet, I am again troubled by the placement of “stillness” within the text. I am experiencing stillness right now, in a sense, and yet I am very aware of the plastic noises my laptop keys are making as they are pushed down and bounce up rapidly. So—even if Williams were writing this sentence long hand, with a pencil or pen, there would be motion, movement: stillness—but *not quite*. Furthermore, what about the “dance” that

Williams just a few sentences earlier wanted to “witness”? Stillness and dancing seem a bit incompatible. And yet, it is not ever as simple as merely discounting what Williams is saying; her writing takes place once again in that space between “stillness” and the “dance”—textuality becomes the trace of both of these instances, which rely on each other as differences in time and space. Again from “Différance,” Derrida writes “The trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. The trace has, properly speaking, no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace” (461). Likewise, Williams’ textual indicators of the desert, as well as what she/we *should be doing* in the desert, function by trying to point beyond the text to something that exists ‘out there’. In Williams’ schema, the text is important for conveying a wilderness-inspired message, but at the same time the text is meant to self-destruct, to efface itself in favor of an experience ‘out there’ with an authentic presence that can never appear as long as the *text itself* is privileged. Listening to the wind would seem to replace the desire for silence and stillness; surely, particles of the desert get pushed around by the wind. And this wind has dialects; is this a scantily clad craving for actual human others, or merely an accidental lapse in humanizing the other wild Other? In either case, the Otherness of the wind is made Same: the listener not only hears, but *understands*. The Other’s Otherness is obliterated in the logocentric desire for understanding—which makes the Other the Same. Can we imagine this complicated livelihood? Perhaps only inasmuch as it seems inevitably estranged from its products of labor.

In the above passage another significant problem emerges: While Williams began the essay focusing on light and vision, she has shifted the subject craftily into one of sound and auditory experience. This confusion of what is heard and what is seen is suspicious; does the move from what is seen to what is heard (or rather, what is *not* heard) suggest a distinct tuning out of unpleasant noises that come from class disparity? Or are Williams's aesthetic tastes simply so blended that sensory experiences can move seamlessly from one sense to another without distinction?

In the next paragraph, Williams shifts from abstract pondering to personal accounts. She writes:

I now live in a village in the desert. Although we have left the city, it has taken my body months to slow down, to recover a rhythm in my heart that moves my body first and my mind second. I am learning that there is no such thing as wasting time, as whole days pass inside the simple tasks of making a home, meeting new neighbors, watching the ways of deer. My ears have just now stopped ringing as they adjust, accommodate this quiet, this calm in this landscape of time. (142)

Within Williams's writing, so much depends on scale. Surely, we might be able to discover a microcosm of the city's problems, nuances, and ugly details in the "village"—but the qualifier of it being "in the desert" serves to somehow purify the human settlement. (Perhaps the village is another instance of a Derridean trace: it refers back to the city while simultaneously effacing it as a necessary reference point.) Williams weaves a sort of reverse Eden myth; leaving the city and going into the garden (the desert) supplies a renewed sense of slowness. There is also a sentiment of transition from heart to mind—the city represents the activity of the mind whereas the desert coincides with the heart. Again, how does

this translate to Williams's act of writing—or our reading? To privilege the heart-function (as nonrational, more sensuous) is to once again neglect the ways that writing functions; can we really conclude that Williams's act of writing comes from a rhythm in her heart prior to any movement of the mind? This prioritization of the heart resists a simultaneity in the act of writing that is similar to how a symbiosis between city and desert becomes necessary to Williams's schema: writing requires both an interest (we might metaphorically refer to the 'heart') as well as the reassembling process of organized textual expression—a labor of the 'mind'. And the body is unavoidably present in *all* of this. For Williams, the desire to sequentialize these activities fits into the formula she is developing throughout *Red*: the desert (nature, wilderness) is primary whereas the city (human, built world) is secondary. But as we have seen, her desires for community, textuality, and a human point of entry distort this seemingly logical, pure sequence.

Williams then goes on to discuss the apparent illusion of 'wasted' time—and here again the focus drifts from desert to community. It is not entirely clear what it is that Williams is advocating; surely, we can find similar "simple tasks" in the most dense urban center—and watching rats in a subway can easily replace watching deer in an aspen grove. But still: why this *desire* for the non-human other? Williams seems to expect the significance of the desert to materialize out of this passage; yet if anything is clear it is that her illuminations are not limited to a specific environment but rather depend on her focus—or more precisely, on how she *textually crafts* this focus. The end of this last paragraph

comes back to Williams's preoccupation with quietness. In an intriguing move, quietness gets condensed into a product of space and time: "...this calm in this landscape of time." It is unclear what Williams is referring to here; is the calm her state of mind? Or this the way that Williams describes the feeling of the actual desert landscape, as calm, as full of time? The move from feeling rushed to slowing down is clear enough, but whether or not this follows directly from the move to the desert remains to be confirmed. It is in Williams's spatialization of time (the desert seeming to lend itself to time passing differently) and her temporalization of space (perceiving the desert as a function of slowed-time) that the desert ceases to depend on authenticity and becomes a textual function of Williams's desires. The "simple tasks" that Williams alludes to are suspended as long as writing and reading take place (and they never stop)—and this hints at the necessary complexity of the structure of textuality: Our understanding of the desert in relation to the city (and this theme runs throughout discourses involving nature) relies on a vast network of constructed meanings that is never simply 'turned off' in favor of a more 'pure' experience of an authentic presence. We saw this within the SUV ads, and it turned up again in Gary Snyder's *Lookout's Journal*. Williams is determined to textualize the desert in its lucid difference and alterity; yet the desert is, at best, a deferred subject that always eludes presence.

A paragraph later, Williams gets down to the details of what she calls her "urban routine":

The speed of my life in Salt Lake City was its own form of pathology; drive here, meet there, talk, eat, listen, look at my watch, run to work, teach, more meetings, talk, listen, run to the health club, run some errands, shop, buy, load the car, drive the

car, car in traffic, too much traffic, speed, brake, speed, brake, red light, green light, hurry home, almost home, pick up mail, pick up phone, call, talk, call, talk, time for dinner, go out for dinner, drive to dinner, eat, talk, drive, return home, bathe, read, sleep, wake, eat, dress, drive, drive to work, work, work—and the next day moved right on schedule. (142-143)

The writing style adopted for this passage cannot be ignored. While the content is nearly suffocating, the presentation of the run-on sentence and onslaught of verbs manipulate the reader; is this “speed” inherent to the city (presented as another Other ‘out there’)? Or has this list been formed in such a way to enhance and animate yet another specter—that of the Essential Fast City? Why can’t Williams simply *slow down here* as she writes? As a reader, I am suspicious of such an intense textual compression of activities and situations—is this intended by Williams in order to make me then suspicious of the Essential Fast City? What keeps me from reading this hyper-list not as an intrinsic ingredient of City, but rather as a pathological behavior of the writer? Theoretically, one could imagine such a textual tactic applied to a different setting: Walk here, look there, gasp, sigh, listen, look at the clouds, run up the hill, think, more looking, gasp, sigh, listen, run into the woods, run through a creek, touch, feel, etc.—does the shift in landscape change the feel of the text? How does slowing down the textual *framework* function in changing seemingly ‘essential’ identities? If Williams were to slow down her perceptions of city activities, could her urban experiences seem as euphoric as her time spent in the desert? Moreover, how does slowness here become a commodity, one that is afforded when one is in a privileged position that allows one to choose to leave the city? Is the shift in landscape available to everyone, or does it necessarily exclude a marginal group of people

who must never be able to afford such a move? (I.e., does Williams's desert require that certain people *remain* in the Essential City of Speed in order that she and a select group of others can experience the slowness of the 'empty' nature?) How is Williams's decision to subvert her city schedule preceded by a distinct class position, one that can already afford to make that decision?

The following paragraph adds yet another layer of textual complexity: "If you had asked, I would have told you I was happy. My husband and I were comfortable in our urban routine, but one night over dinner, he said, 'What if we are only living half-lives? What if there is something more?' (143) My first response to this confessional account is to wonder why we should believe Williams *now*; does the act of writing somehow authorize 'truth'? (This would be a justification for Nature Writing.) If Williams is telling us now—through her writing—that she is happy in the desert, how does this become suspect when Williams warns us that she would have lied to us in a past moment? What authorizes honesty at this point of the text? Again, here we encounter nature invoked as a source of legitimation, as a point of irrefutable authority: the desert doesn't lie—Nature is honest and revealing, whereas the City is deceptive and concealing. What justifies this unspoken authority is not the essential qualities of the desert versus the city, but rather the desires and meanings that Williams covertly siphons out of these signifiers. It is only a further irony that it is Williams's *husband* that initiates the move to the desert. Here is yet a further reconstruction of the Eden myth: rather than Feminine Curiosity causing the couple to be banished from the garden, here we have Masculine Wisdom resulting

in the couple's exodus from the City of Speed and Confusion and into the Garden of Slowness and Purity. Does nature writing—which seems to depend on a tenacious subject-object corollary—always require a masculinist epistemology? Williams frequently refers to desert forms as 'womb-like'—is there a significant difference when nature is feminized by a woman writer, or is this gender association blatantly reminiscent of the phallogocentric entanglements of Snyder's writing? And yet, Williams's husband only poses questions that are opaque at best. Half of what? What would 'whole' lives look like? What 'more' are they after? Of course, we can infer what Williams is alluding to here: 'more' feelings of connection with 'simple' rhythms of daily life: sun, wind, light, heat, water currents—the kind of things Thoreau was able to tune into (and write about) around Walden Pond. But Williams is not specific here: the ambiguity of these questions is necessary in order to allow the untenable entrance of the desert as treatment and cure to postmodern crisis.

The lines that follow begin as perhaps the clearest instances of textual expression in *Red*, but then recede into a blur of logocentrism:

We wanted more.

We wanted less.

We wanted more time, fewer distractions. We wanted more time together, time to write, to breathe, to be more conscious with our lives. We wanted to be closer to wild places where we could walk and witness the seasonal changes, even the changing constellations. And so we banked the idea of a simpler life away from the city near the slickrock country we love. What we would lose in income, we would gain in sanity. (143)

The first two lines of this section capture and even embrace the movement of différance; it is in this confusion of desire—a desire for two oppositional ends at

once—that Williams grapples with the difficulty of her position as nature writer. The desire for a nature as an Other ‘out there’ always works in these two ways at once, as *more* and as *less*, each one seeming to work against the other, and yet Williams can only describe this nature as such: resulting in/from a contradictory desire that displaces precisely what it seeks to absorb. Is Williams working within this ‘less’ as she writes, forcing quietness, slowness, and general less-ness on her readers? (Because arguably, I am quieted, slowed down, and less than ‘all of me’ as I read.) Or does her writing always function as the excess of her experience, the ‘more’ that by necessity exceeds the time and space of the desert? Either one of these options begs the other, and this is where *différance* takes place: always as an undecidable simultaneity (city and desert, less and more, writing and reading) that hinges on the tension of deferred difference. Each time that Williams focuses on her experience of the desert, she invokes the city as counterpoint; it is a textual paradox to decide on ‘nature’, as this decision always requires the absent presence of what is considered ‘unnatural’.

Williams’s writing complicates itself by pretending to be so clear: it is not “fewer distractions” that she and her husband want, but *different* distractions. And this interactive difference—this sense of what is ‘out there’—is always deferred when Williams writes; whether she wants deer instead of cars, or stars instead of streetlights, all of these external details are peripheralized when Williams *writes*. Textuality takes priority in exactly some of the ways that the above paragraph suggests: as more consciousness, more writing. On the other hand, the writing performs by distancing Williams from the activities of walking,

witnessing seasonal changes, and stargazing—these are suspended when the act of writing takes place. (And here again we ‘see’ the panoptic privilege of pure sight once again yield to the functions of writing and reading.) Is ‘nature’ really the focus of Williams’s move from the city? Or does the desert function as an ulterior motive that is foregrounded only through a sort of metatextual effort, as a mobile construct that always moves out of its defined context in order to authorize Williams’s writing/desire?

The choice to move from the city to the desert is made by desire; this desire is given a certain authority and legitimacy by the particular object of desire—the desert, a category under the umbrella of wilderness (which is part of Nature). The city and the desert are not clear and distinct places outside of the text; rather, Williams’s writing depends on a liminal space that delays any final distinction of actual places. Thus, the “simpler life away from the city” is always a conjecture, a desire that *must remain unfulfilled* in order to preserve the mystical value of the correspondent hope for a futurity in which Williams and her husband will be “near the slickrock country we love.”

The last line of the paragraph once again raises the initial issue of making a living, but here, Williams suggests an exchange of commodities: income for sanity. Does this theoretical assertion remove the desert from the materialistic arena of a consumer culture? Or is Williams’s way of approaching the desert here reminiscent of Tony Soprano’s attitude toward his turbulent visits with therapist Dr. Melphi: what he loses in income he hopes to gain in sanity. Has the desert simply been substituted as the latest therapeutic commodity? The desert cannot

simply be plugged in as a decisive cure-all to the 'insanity' that allegedly comes from the city; however, Williams's liminal treatment of the desert—deploying the desert as an extremely mobile and mystical source of authority—allows for a persuasive textual argument that works precisely by attempting to de-textualize the subject of nature. And now we are on curious ground.

Williams's narrative continues with a description of how different things became when they relocated to the desert:

We moved. Slowly, we are adjusting. We saunter more and drive less. We rarely eat out. We go to bed earlier and rise with first light. The closest town is twenty-five miles away. Friends call this a sacrifice, a lark, a momentary stay of madness. We call it home, finally.

What are we missing? (143)

Slow adjustment seems to be the theme of this essay; but can this adjustment ever be final? The title of the essay invokes the idea of "slowness"—and slowness always implies movement, however slow. Whether sauntering or driving, movement is a constant that hides behind these shades of difference. Textuality follows this movement, always providing mobility around the subject of the desert; in writing down how her life has changed in the movement from city to desert, Williams depends on the space that avoids the purity of absolute distinction. These lines depend on complexly related specters of urban proximity, natural authority, and most of all, clear textual expression: Williams's desert-home requires measurable distance from a peripheral existence of towns and places to eat out; the appeal to natural "first light" functions in legitimizing that this distance is far enough; and the documentation of others' skepticism within the lengthy context of a defense of a lifestyle attached to nature assumes authenticity

as well as insecurity—the presence of the text is necessary to express the simplicity of Williams's experience (to skeptical others), and the text also complicates the alleged "simpler" experience. *Finally*, Williams calls the desert home? This "finally" would seem to be precisely what the text forbids; as long as I read *Red*, as long as Williams writes, the 'pure' experience of the desert is put off. And I would argue that we can never have this 'pure' experience of authentic presence—textuality always already mediates how this experience takes place and is interpreted. Perhaps the best one can do is appropriate nature knowingly—"call" it home. What is Williams missing? Only that which she can never really have in the first place: a de-textualized desert.

The following paragraph draws out Williams's substitution of the desert for the city:

The distractions and excitement of urban life are replaced by the intensity of living in an episodic landscape where thunderstorms, flash floods, and wind break any threat of monotony. Just the other day, a dust devil carried a favorite black shawl of mine up into the air, unraveled its weave, and sent it flying toward the mesa where it was met by ravens. And at night, I am learning to see the sky as a map, the stars as thoughts, places of possibilities, kept from me by city lights. (144)

Williams does not attempt to disguise the transaction made here; she distinctly outlines a replacement of 'urban' excitements 'natural' intensities. But is this exchange so clear? It would seem once again that Williams has simply realigned her perception: she has decided to tune into weather more. But one could just as easily do this in a city—indeed, we *do* do this in cities: thus Chicago is known as "The Windy City." As for being "episodic," it now sounds as if we are dealing with a *staged* landscape—as if the weather performs to satisfy the desires and

entertainment needs of Williams—tune in next week for the Big Hailstorm in the Desert. And yet this still has not been proven as an exclusive feature of wilderness; one need only conjure up various episodes of the *Sopranos* in order to realize that such ‘natural intensities’ happen in urban landscapes in similarly spectacular or influential ways. The weather always functions as a background factor—at times more ‘intense’ than others—in the urban exploits of the Soprano characters.

And what happens in each installment of the *Sopranos* can hardly be considered monotonous merely because it happens within what Williams calls “urban life.” Monotony is not simply a factor of the city, and yet, such a feeling (the “urban routine”) might be afforded by *class*. Williams again exposes her privileged position while living in the city, a position that she seems to want to argue is destabilized by the wildness of the desert; but the rogue wind that carried her “favorite black shawl” up into the air to be “met by ravens” might just as easily come careening through a canyon of skyscrapers, only to be met by ordinary flapping pigeons. Williams’s ravens are deployed here as a mythologizing device—not unlike a Chevy Tahoe Z71 ad utilizes rumored wild mountain lions—by which she might again insist upon the inherent authenticity of the natural desert as a place ‘out there’ that, because of its clear difference from what has been garbled by human interference, changes human participation. Williams, though, continually defers this desired difference by translating the alleged mystique of the desert through “Ode to Slowness.” Her writing takes place in the space of *différance*: it is “a strategy without finality” (Derrida,

“Différance” 445) precisely because Williams can never get to any decidably ‘authentic’ desert—it is the very structure of textuality that authorizes any understanding at all of what the desert ‘means’ at different moments, whether it is assimilated seamlessly into an SUV ad or treated as ineffable Other embodied in the inscrutable desert.

The last sentence of the above passage settles comfortably into the irony of anthropocentric nature writing. Williams admits to realizing that the city has been conspiring against her all this time, and finally she is able to read the night sky as a map. Yet the metaphor of a map implies a sense of human knowledge and direction. Indeed, this would be Jack Turner’s worst nightmare: the entire universe is a BIG map—we do not even have an “abstract wild” anymore—it is all mapped out (somewhere) in a brilliant shade relief three-dimensional image of the entire finite, boundless universe. Then, Williams describes stars as thoughts—does this mean that the universe only exists as long as humans think it? Certainly, to classify stars as thoughts reinforces the theme of this project, that is, that we really cannot ever simply perceive or experience phenomena outside of the structure of textuality. In a sense, then, Williams is extremely precise in this observation: stars are thoughts. But so are Lincoln Aviators, Big Macs, coyotes, and cliffs. These all represent ‘thoughts’ that cannot be purely isolated (or experienced) apart from the intricate and flexible web that provides context and meaning in singular moments. What would be interesting here would be for Williams to trace the periphery zone of values and priorities that provoke her to write—and this is the wilderness, the liminal space that might really demand close

attention in the way that Williams would like her readers to believe happens 'naturally' in dramatic weather and underneath visible night skies. But instead, Williams remains within her invisibly panoptic vantage point of the Privileged Human experiencing the authentic presence of Nature. Finally, as if to further drive home the idea of a vast Human Empire in the sky, Williams suggests the stars as places of possibilities; in an increasingly global economy, one in which poetic inspiration is not exactly traded as a commodity on Wall Street, it does not seem a far stretch to read Williams as intimating further "possibilities" of Western colonization. And here, as if to make a subtle break from Western industrialism, the City takes on a conspiratorial, anthropomorphic form, 'keeping' her from realizing the capitalistic possibilities throughout the universe. We have seen this trend before, in both Thoreau and Emerson; and once again, it is a prearranged, privileged position that grants permission to exist in *and write about* such a space 'out there' in Nature.

It seems more and more that Nature has been appropriated not merely as home, but as its own unstable crisis heterotopia. Williams retreats to Nature as a place from which to critique the City—but this critique is embodied in a beautifully bound, mass printed text. It is precisely made for proliferation throughout cities and small towns (at the edge of Nature, of course) alike.

Foucault outlines the fifth principle of heterotopias as such:

Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and

purifications. To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures. (26)

Bringing heterotopias back into the discussion, we pick up on many of the symptomatic conditions of Williams's privileged desert. If we run Foucault's fifth principle of heterotopias alongside Williams's next two paragraphs, we might be able to more fully understand how *différance* filters through nature writing, outlining a textualized heterotopic place:

In the vastness of the desert, I want to create my days as a ceremony around *s l o w n e s s*, an homage to tortoises and snakes, reptilian monks who understand what it means to move thoughtfully, deliberately, who allow the heat of sand to create currents in their blood, which massages their bones and leather skins.

Slowly, so slowly these creatures crawl and wind and slither across the desert measured in shadows of geologic time. This is not to say they know nothing of the wisdom of speed or hissing and hiding. They do, but in times of danger. (144)

The desert is all about initiation and ritual; Williams outlines personal rites around her practice of the desert while simultaneously following a more general code of Nature Worship performed by Thoreau, Snyder, Turner, and others. In closing her language around particular features of a specific landscape, Williams also opens herself to more broad discourses already in effect; her intimacy with the desert is declared and suspended at once. The desert is 'vast' and yet what Williams focuses on are the minutiae that speckle the ground. And yet again, this feature is not exclusive of so-called 'natural' landscapes; airports can be 'vast' landscapes, too, and one can easily imagine corporate ceremonies organized around noticing each small blue lantern that lines the runway, or observing the various nuanced ways that people saunter down moving walkways to their

departure gates. Or the inflections in an anonymous voice announcing the final boarding call for flight 741 to Minneapolis. But this would not quite seem to suffice for Williams, as the airport example could theoretically be translated to a comparable urban-heterotopia. There is something different in the desert for Williams, but just what that difference *is* is what is delayed every time she writes, even in her most lucid expressions of natural simplicity or slowness.

So we have only the vague outline of yet another contradictory space—and in these lines we see this space as distinctly heterotopic. The individual—Williams, in this case—has apparently had to submit to certain “purifications,” precisely the process of *s l o w i n g d o w n* in order to realize one’s surroundings and the uniqueness of the space known (by the initiated) as the desert. And as much as Williams would like to celebrate ‘public’ open spaces—what Gary Snyder calls “the commons” (183)—the desert is clearly not for everyone. Only a select few actually can afford the time to *s l o w d o w n*; when Williams invokes “geologic time” as another point of authorization for her experience and perceptions, this highly privileged sense of slow time is rather incommensurate with the time known in Taco Bell, Wal-Mart, or the baggage compartment of a Boeing 757 in Boston scheduled to depart for Los Angeles in nine minutes. (Airports used to be public, subversions of the heterotopic formula, wilderness ‘commons’ zones that virtually anyone could wander through. But in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 we witnessed the tragic FAA closure of these commons, these distinct ‘bioregions’—and the construction of new-old heterotopias.) Williams gets permission to enter by making gestures toward the

vague monolith of time, by invoking a privileged perspective that can take the time to know time as an essential feature of the heterotopia at hand, as a transcendental mark of the desert. And we might admit, yes, time is significant in the desert for erosion, plant life cycles, subtle weather patterns, etc.; and yet, the point is that this sense of time is not open to a 'public'—it involves secret code words and covert signals of proof that one has had the time to become a member of a select group.

The play of *différance* throws this heterotopic system out of balance, though: as long as Williams writes and her words are proliferated out to a more or less public (i.e., *indeterminate*) audience, she gives away the secret that never really exists as a secret—it is always already textualized, whether in Williams's solitary experiences or in the written format of her reflective writing. Similarly, Williams's insistence on the epistemology of the desert creatures relies on a shared (albeit abstract) notion of human interaction with the desert—that is, her lines presuppose a network of shared constructed meanings necessary to make the metaphorical and anthropomorphic transition to thinking about the reptiles as 'monks' or as 'knowers of wisdom' in the first place. Knowing the language and imagery of the desert displaces the already-there-ness that Williams seems to want to insist about Nature. Thus, Williams's writing might be argued to be a sign of a 'time of danger' to which the creatures respond with hissing, speed, and hiding. And suddenly, the desert is not cast as essentially slow and overt—but surely Williams does not see *herself* as the danger: *she* has been granted access to the desert. It is important, therefore, that one must have permission—one must be

exclusively authorized—to enter the desert so as to maintain the essential slowness.

Williams goes on to further flesh out the oppositional system of speed and slowness:

Speed is a response to both danger and desire.
In our human world, we worship speed and desire. We desire money. We assign money to time. What is time worth? Your time. My time. Our time. Talk fast. Work fast. Drive fast. Walk fast. Run. Who ever told us to wear jogging shoes to work? Don't saunter. Don't look. Speed walk. Speed dial. Federal Express will fly our thoughts around the world. (144)

Here we read another one of Williams's hyper-lists, her tactic of textual compression to slyly indicate an 'obvious' disparity—a tactic that, by now, we ought to be extremely suspicious of for what is at stake in such assertive dichotomization. Compare this passage with the prior passage detailing the slow creatures of the desert—there is more than inherent difference at work. Williams begins by claiming a causal relation between speed, danger, and desire. Desire we can imagine: Williams, overcome with desire for the sexy slickrock curves and canyons, sits with her glistening, silvery Mac I-book at night and writes speedily, *furiously*, to get a book done that records her "passion and patience in the desert" (the book's self-induced ironic subtitle). As for danger, we might again consider the writing as a display of danger: the textualized desert, whether loved or hated, can never exist as Turner's "unmapped" wilderness. (But, if Turner really desires that unmapped space, are we then, according to Williams, back in the danger zone of speed?)

As for “our human world,” we should immediately detect the slippery ground Williams is on; at what point does a human leave the ‘human world’? A ‘world’ is precisely the general structure of textuality that wraps around and is tangled up in everything we name, ‘know’, and/or experience. But of course, we can infer what Williams is referring to: the ‘world’ of SUVs thundering down suburban streets, ‘real’ jobs in cubicles sitting in front of computers from nine to five, Burger King Whoppers and Mr. Pibb, *Joe Millionaire*, *Survivor*, etc.—a nearly interminable list with as many gradations as the desert, but not nearly as important, because they are *human*—or at least associated with what is *urban*. Worshiping speed and desire, however, cannot only be found within the bounds of this ‘human world’ (to let her designation slide for now)—that wind that whipped off Williams’s shawl must have had some speed, and she seems to have worshipped that breeze at least upon reflection. Similarly, her ‘desire’ for the desert is precisely what the text documents in such poetic tautologies.

The final sentence of the above passage is perhaps my favorite line in the entire book, for its seeming randomness as well as for its prophetic precision: “Federal Express will fly our thoughts around the world.” Is this referring to Williams’s book being shipped to nature lovers worldwide? Or is this a terse critique of a consumer culture that prefers speed and efficiency to authentic presence? Because we cannot finally decide which is the case, Federal Express becomes an excellent metaphor for the “speed and desire” that Williams seems to at once loathe and live for.

Another pastiche of Williams's machinegun style compression writing might hint at the not-so-clear (or all too clear) separation between her 'human world' and whatever is supposed to be Other:

In the nonhuman world, we worship slowness and nonattachment. Okay, we are kind of attached to authenticity. We assign authenticity to time. How old are those rocks? Geologic time. Whoa—snake's time. Think fast! Act slow. Walk slow...RUN! Who ever told us not to wear jogging shoes out here? Don't saunter. Don't look. Speed walk. Speed dial. The Park Service will hear my thoughts and destroy that goddamn snake!

In nature, one seems to desire separation, panoptic situatedness, liminality, and intimacy all at once, or each of these at certain moments; the desert becomes an arena of Nietzschean "human relations" (47) that compete, conflict, or cohere depending on textual prioritization and structuring. For someone freaked out by snakes and scorpions, the desert will not necessarily provoke the "passion and patience" that Williams sees as essential features of the landscape. Is the 'Otherness' of the desert more evident in instinctive fear and trembling than in privileged proximity and understanding? And yet this reveals another layer of irony: one would think that what is 'instinctive' in human behavior would actually spring from an already intimate association between human and the Other. This theoretical territory is its own infinitely thorny wilderness.

Williams then goes on to make another mysteriously collective claim: "We do not trust slowness, silence, or stillness" (145). Who is this 'we'? It cannot be Williams and her husband, unless this is a minor rupture of the schizophrenic other personality of Williams's postmodern self coming through the text. But more likely, this is Williams arguing that *we*—those of us still in the

city who might be able to afford to move away—do not trust these things, and that is why we will not give up our urban lives for the three S's of the wilderness: slowness, silence, and stillness. But I take issue with Williams here; we completely trust these ordinary forces, or else we would have daily apocalyptic chaos. *Slowness* is what happens in every check-in line at ticket counters in airports all around the world, indeed, in the urban-most parts of the world. The people do not revolt, they do not stop buying tickets merely because they are made to wait torturously long minutes while bleary-eyed airline employees grant seat assignments to fussy families in the front of the line. And throngs of people trust the slowness of escalators moving them down or up to various levels of the airport—escalators do not pose risky, speedy avalanche slides. *Silence* takes place on airplanes once the children have fallen into drooling slumbers and the corporate-level “bourgeois bohemians” of America have turned on their Toshiba notebooks or Palm Pilots and are busy working away while flight attendants scurry quietly back and forth from the front to the rear of jets whose contrails crisscross the sky at 35,000 feet. (And if one were to argue that being in an airplane does not really count ‘silence’ because of all that roaring jet engine racket, I would be willing to bet that Williams’s thunderstorms are just as loud—the point might be that either of these things invoke silence in the humans nearby.) As for *stillness*, the red lights at traffic intersections—those simple signals that “...seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people” (Nietzsche 47)—keep stillness culturally embraced. Even in the most concentrated urban centers, stillness is kept alive and well thanks to a simple, fully-functioning

metaphor of color, even after nearly a century of urban appropriation and wear. Drivers, for their own safety at the very least, embrace stillness as a necessary component of the Tao of the road. While slowness, silence, and stillness might indeed seem more complicated outside of 'natural' contexts, it should be clear that we cannot simply oppose landscapes, declaring one as hostile and the other as accommodating to these conceptualized forces.

Further along in the essay, we encounter Williams's familiar habit of substitution: "I am not so easily seduced by speed as I once was. I find I have lost the desire to move that quickly in the world" (145). Speed is replaced by slowness, or more precisely, Williams's desire for speed gets transformed into a desire for slowness. Either way, we are still focusing on *desire*—and it is this tenacious human will that always constructs what nature 'means'. Williams attempts to efface this will in favor of a nature that supposedly precedes and outlasts the textuality of desire. And the will—Williams's desire—remains in this *attempt*. Time and time again, we see the desert function as an authority that legitimates human desire: Williams's desire for slowness is apparently justified by the rhythms of the desert. "I want my life to be a celebration of s l o w n e s s" (146). Are we really celebrating the slowness of the desert here, or are we celebrating *celebration*? I would argue that one can never purely celebrate something else as Other—the will to celebrate slips in simultaneously. Williams's text and the desert function as supplements to one another: they rely on each other even when the writing seems to claim the desert as autonomous Other 'out there'. So, when Williams writes: "On top of the ridge, I can see for

miles" (146), we read not only the essential characteristics of desert topography, but also a version of the Lookout Construct: Williams privileges a oculocentric and logocentric position—what she sees she knows, and this experience gets linked to a sense of authorization. But this arrangement is hardly unique to desert vistas; I can sit in the drive thru of McDonalds and see the picture of the Chicken McNuggets Value Meal as I order, and this view authorizes a certain knowledge of the food I am about to consume. Both scenarios involve highly constructed contexts of meaning and preassigned value; sight does not really sanction lucid understanding, but simply figures in to an already complex system of selection and desire.

At the end of "Ode to Slowness," Williams returns to her entangled theory of time and space as coalescing entities that shape and define the desert:

Time and space. In the desert there is space. Space is the twin sister of time. If we have open space then we have open time to breathe, to dream, to dare, to play, to pray to move freely, so freely, in a world our minds have forgotten, but our bodies remember. Time and space. This partnership is holy. In these redrock canyons, time creates space—an arch, an eye, this blue eye of sky. We remember why we love the desert; it is our tactile response to light, to silence, and to stillness.

Hand on stone—patience.

Hand on water—music.

Hand raised to the wind— Is this the birthplace of inspiration?

(146 -147)

This final passage climaxes in the confusion of logic and poetic overflow of passion that Williams has become recognized for by readers of nature writing and Deep Ecology. Her writing depends on a sort of exploitation of Derridean *différance*: in trying so thoroughly to define the difference of the desert, Williams maintains its liminal status as Strange Other 'out there'. What she might call 'real

interaction' with "open space" is perpetually delayed as long as Williams mixes metaphors and descriptors in order to elicit intuitive responses to her ambiguous textual assertions. Space and time are sisters, first—again reifying the all too commonly deployed feminization of nature. Space is argued to give time to do all sorts of human activities: dreaming, daring, playing, praying, moving freely. Does space then precede and to an extent determine time? This would seem to problematize the 'sisterhood'. Interestingly, Williams reverses her argument mere sentences later: in the desert, "time creates *space*." Time is the parent of space, then, and 'her' sister. This mythology is becoming increasingly complex. Never mind; Williams would prefer that we have 'tactile' rather than theoretical encounters with things—or would she? What exactly takes place as we read about the desert—or as we exist 'in' the desert? Always more than *just* a tactile experience.

Textuality is the subterranean interpretive insect that comes along with everything we do:

Hand on Chicken McNuggets—hungry.
 Hand on Coke—thirsty.
 Hand raised to get your change back— Could this be the
 birthplace of inspiration?

Is Williams really after naked, devout human bodies crawling across the hot desert ground amidst Abbey's "thornbush and cactus"? Or would Williams prefer an attentive, solemn reader sitting in a cushy chair, sipping green tea, only occasionally glancing out an enormous panoramic window into an abstract (but still *present*) desert, but feeling tremendous desire well up inside as Williams's narrative unfolds? What about someone who takes this seriousness and

attentiveness *everywhere*, regardless of the landscape? This seems to me like a much more ethical and applicable move—at least in the long run and across social and class divides. What would it be like to really experience day to day interactions as singular encounters with alterity?

My argument in regards to Williams is not that the desert does not exist, nor that Williams does not really experience certain feelings and hopes while inside (or outside) specific landscapes, but just that these impressions and emotions depend on structures of meaning and significance that Williams always already brings with her, and which are constantly being modified and influenced by a wider range of experiences. Over and over in Williams's writing, oppositional ideas converge and rely upon one another for structural support: noise and silence, city and desert, complexity and simplicity, community and solitude—these binaries continually intersect throughout the progression of the text. Thus nature, as stable subject, slips through attempts to grasp what exactly it is, what it means, and how we should relate to 'it'. It is not that the desert means nothing, but rather that—as textual invention—it is so saturated with meanings and contexts that we cannot finally construct a metatext that would decode the desert once and for all. We are never simply inside or outside of the desert; the very structure of textuality requires that our experiences always take place in a liminal zone that resists essential, final identities. We must explore a practice of nature writing that suspends and critiques the logocentric drive we see in SUV ads, Gary Snyder's *Zen*, or Terry Tempest Williams's textuality of desire.

How might we go on writing about 'nature' from within a postmodern consciousness? What sorts of new tactics and strategies would we employ, and how would we avoid or defuse the minefields of contradiction that lace the subject of nature? For one, we must be aware of drifts toward naturalization—as the introduction to this thesis indicated. If we must naturalize anything, it is a meta-sense of interpretive awareness: we should learn to be more aware of the process of naturalization, of how constructs such as 'Nature' are deployed to promote or purchase authority, agency, and autonomy. With such a critical consciousness of the inescapability of textuality, we can look at nature not as a final frontier or infallible point of justification, but rather simultaneously as inevitable circumstance and complex cultural construct. And this postmodern acknowledgment does not annihilate nature as a sacred subject, but instead opens the genre to a wider participatory audience and a more inclusive sense of authorship: if bombing Baghdad counts as nature writing, then we are responsible for reading this 'text' closely and critically for a perhaps more urgent sense of ethical awareness than that which Williams restricts to the desert.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF NEW NATURE WRITING

What does our future look like from here? This might seem like a bleak ending: how can we take the vastness and trickiness of textuality seriously, and yet still talk about mystical encounters, simple observations (like seeing mountains with snow on them), and landscape preferences? My answer—at least a temporary answer—is that we must be careful and aware of what we say and be ready to articulate further the ambiguous spaces of explanation. And this is also a call to responsibility and to an awareness of particulars that requires us to listen closely to what others are saying—to how we talk about ‘ordinary’ places and situations. We cannot simply defer to naturalized notions of Nature as the Other who remains ‘out there.’ A postmodern philosophy of nature (writing) would demand an attention to detail beyond strict boundaries—beyond ‘wild’ places of exclusive membership and privileged perspective. We would take situations and places seriously—as seriously as Williams takes the desert. But, by accepting postmodernism, we would also be open to a sense of irony and humor that we rarely see in what has been called Nature Writing. Thoreau is rather sarcastic throughout much of *Walden*, but his rather somber prose lacks the jubilant Nietzschean affirmation of postmodern irony. Snyder’s writing has become more ironic, and humor is key to his *Practice of the Wild*—but there is still the sad struggle to reclaim an authentic presence. Postmodern nature writing would prevent us from taking ourselves too seriously, as every attempt at a *too* serious, prolonged focus on any one detail would threaten to ignore the interpretive

structure of textuality at work. Paying attention to the intricately flexible presence of textuality rather than essential objects 'out there' requires a sense of irony that is not easily frustrated by complexity. As Donna Haraway notes in her *Cyborg Manifesto*, "Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true. Irony is about humour and serious play" (147). So irony is also about doing justice to the play of textuality, to the necessary movement in how we construct meaning and shape our lives—and this movement requires ambiguous and indeterminate space. And ultimately, irony involves a perspectival, ethical project that is never complete—new perspectives constantly arrive, and each new perspective requires thoughtful consideration.

In regards to nature, discussing textuality might be ironic and at times frustratingly ambiguous, but we cannot risk preferring a wilderness that is unspeakable. The film *The Good Girl* ends with Jennifer Aniston's character telling a story that ends this way: "In the end, the girl and the boy run away together into the wilderness, never to be heard from again." This final line of the film suggests an apt ending for this thesis: to really have the essential wilderness of presence, we would never hear about it, because it would be precisely beyond textuality—unspeakable. And those who go 'out' into such places—Gary Snyder, Jack Turner, Terry Tempest Williams—would, in a similar way, "never be heard from again." As it is, though, we have heard from these writers, we have constructed meanings that are never restricted to essential places or authentic

moments. Actually discovering unspeakable places or de-textualized moments cannot ever happen in any interpretive or translatable way; it is how we interpret, how we translate, and how our interactions take place that is never final and that should concern us if we really want to make changes in how these ideas are treated in real political and social situations. And that is something to talk about—after all, we do not want never to be heard from again.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire*. New York: Ballantine, 1971.
- Barthes, Roland. *A Barthes Reader*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.
- Bennett, Jane and William Chaloupka, Eds. *In The Nature of Things – Language, Politics, and the Environment*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Bradsher, Keith. *High and Mighty: The World's Most Dangerous Vehicles and How They Got That Way*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2002
- Davis, Mike. *Dead Cities*. New York: New Press, 2002.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Acts of Literature*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- _____. "Différance." *The Continental Philosophy Reader*. Ed. Richard Kearney and Mara Rainwater. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Nature." *Anthology of American Literature Vol. 1*. 6th ed. Ed. George McMichael. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1997.
- Foster, Hal. *The Anti Aesthetic – Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage, 1979.
- _____. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16.22 (1986): 22 - 27.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *Legitimation Crisis*. Trans. Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.
- Haraway, Donna J. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women – The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" *The Continental Philosophy Reader*. Ed. Richard Kearney and Mara Rainwater. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Portable Nietzsche*. Ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking Penguin, 1976.
- "Passionate Pursuit." *National Geographic* January 2003.
- "Personality Crisis." Email to the author from Patagonia, Inc.

Price, Jennifer. *Flight Maps*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

_____. "Looking for Nature at the Mall." *Uncommon Ground*. Cronon, William, Ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996.

Roorda, Randall. *Dramas of Solitude – Narratives of Retreat in American Nature Writing*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.

"Rule the World." *The New Yorker* Jan. 20, 2003.

"Running Loose." *The New Yorker* Jan 20, 2003.

"Seems Fair." *The New Yorker* Jan. 13, 2003.

Snyder, Gary. *The Gary Snyder Reader*. Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1999.

"Stirred by Nature." *The New Yorker* Jan. 6, 2003.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1997.

Turner, Jack. *The Abstract Wild*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1997.

Williams, Terry Tempest. *Red*. New York: Pantheon, 2001.

"Imitation." *The New Yorker* Jan. 6, 2003

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY - BOZEMAN



3 1762 10382379 3