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ESSAY

From 'zombies' to 'coyotes': environmentalism where we are

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Environmentalism is in trouble. Some denounce it for being 'depressing and dowdy'; others have announced its 'death'. Environmentalism faces three problems: the *disconnection* of 'the environment' as an intellectual concept from popular understandings, the broader *development* culture in which environmentalism is preached and the *denial* discourse it is popularly seen to spread. As a result, environmentalism is not dead but has become a 'zombie' category. Environmentalism can be reframed to enable more effective engagement with green practices by drawing constructive alignment between discourses of environmentalism and notions of fragmented and malleable identities. Doing so works towards a vocabulary of theory and practice that is sensitive to hybridity and contradiction, whilst retaining the utopian stimulus of conventional environmentalism. Drawing on the terminology of Haraway, 'coyote' environmentalism is one move towards a more productive framing of environmental practice.

Keywords: environmentalism; identity; practice; coyote; zombie

Introduction

As many scholars, politicians and campaigners have outlined, the need for environmentalism to move from the margins to the mainstream is crucial for the maintenance of quality of life, if not life itself, for humans and other species. The importance of defining environmentalism as an empowering political position is the central concern of this article. However, as White and Wilbert (2006, p. 96) proclaim, 'environmentalism is in trouble'. Commentators such as Jonathan Porritt (2005) have denounced environmentalism for being 'depressing and dowdy', whilst others, such as Shellenberger and Nordhaus (2005) have gone further and announced its 'death'. Even social

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theorists such as Bruno Latour have argued that 'the politics of nature' is increasingly marked by a degree of stagnation (Latour 2004, p. 1, White and Wilbert 2006, p. 96), citing that environmentalism 'has lost much of its confidence, coherence and vigour' (Latour 2004, cited in White and Wilbert 2006). Thus, as White and Wilbert (2006, p. 96) state, there is a 'real need to open up the environmental debate in new ways'. Here I respond to that need, first by identifying 'the trouble with environmentalism', and second by proposing one way of opening up the environmental debate to tackle it.

There are three problems facing environmentalism if it seeks to become more mainstream. First, the 'environment' as an intellectual concept has become disconnected from popular understandings and experiences, conceived as somewhere 'out there', rather than 'around here'; the environment and our effects on it have become abstracted from our everyday, materialised and emotional lives. Second, environmentalism is in trouble as it is swimming against the tide of a pro-consumption, development-oriented culture of late-modern society that is the most conspicuous in the advanced economies, but increasingly prevalent in the advancing economies of the world. And third, environmentalism is popularly associated with a discourse and practice of 'denial' and this discourse, alongside prognostications of 'doom' for people and the planet, serves to limit its popular appeal. Shellenberger and Nordhaus (2005) and Nordhaus and Shellenberger (2007) argue that the combination of these problems has produced the '*death*' of environmentalism (see also Cohen 2006). However, to be more accurate, I would argue that these problems have meant that environmentalism has been marginalised from mainstream society, thus effectively removing the middle ground between essentialist positions of 'green' and 'mainstream'. As a result, environmentalism is not dead, but endures the status of the living dead – environmentalism has, to use the terminology of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), become a 'zombie' category in the late-modern world.

Having identified the problem, I respond to the need to 'open up the environmental debate in new ways' by offering one way to reframe our engagement with green practices. To do so, I draw constructive alignment between discourses of environmentalism on one hand, and notions of postmodern identity change on the other. Drawing on the terminology of Haraway (1988), I offer 'coyote environmentalism' as a more productive framing of environmental practice. A 'coyote environmentalism' is crucial as it remains sensitive to the hybridity and contradiction that is not simply inherent in the human condition, but is especially pronounced when trying to adopt a 'green' identity in industrialised society. A coyote environmentalism reclaims the betwixt and between positions that many of us inhabit – the middle ground between poles of 'green' and 'not-green' – and liberates us from the tightly bounded notions of environmentalist identity that hinder progress towards a more ecologically sound society (following Hayes-Conroy and Vanderbeck 2005). Regaining this sensitivity and reclaiming this ground shakes up the 'stagnant' position of conventional environmentalism

and raises new opportunities to experiment with green practices for the mainstream.

The trouble with environmentalism

As Vincent (1993) and Young (1992) have noted, there are many dimensions to environmentalism. Environmentalists can differ in philosophical approach as well as preferred political action. Environmentalism includes reformism (Orsato and Clegg 2005), radicalism (Manes 1990, Foreman 1991) and environmental justice (Bryant 1995, Faber 1998); it can be ecologically 'shallow', 'social' or 'deep' (see Bookchin 1980, Devall and Sessions 1985, Naess 1989, respectively). Environmentalism can also be shaded by its geographical origins in the 'North' or 'South' (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997), and by its evolution through feminism (Merchant 1982), development (Shiva 1989) and ecologically modern ideas (Hajer 1995). As Vincent concludes, the diversity of environmentalism is often difficult to capture:

> Contrary to many contemporary readings of ecological thought, the internal structure of both the political beliefs and philosophy is immensely complex and tangled. Existing typologies neither pay sufficient attention to this complexity, nor to the problematic and tense relationship of the philosophical ideas and political aspirations. (Vincent 1993, p. 248)

Thus environmentalism, as Wilbert and White (2006, p. 97) acknowledge, is far from being a monolithic and static set of practices; rather it is a 'shifting and complex set of coalitions'. Despite this diversity, it is worthwhile acknowledging some of the principal tenets of environmentalism that its protagonists would to some extent identify, if not wholly agree, with. Environmentalism can be broadly understood as a worldview that seeks to respect the (socio-) natural world and live harmoniously within it, notably valuing non-human species and processes alongside humans' basic needs (Button 1988, Dobson 1990, 1991). The interdependence of species and processes within the context of ecosystems and the broader biosphere underlines its philosophy, and this tenet often confers a democratic dimension to its worldview (see Doherty and de Geus 1996). This combination of harmonious living between humans and non-humans, self-reliance, democracy and autonomy creates a utopian way of living for many people, as O'Riordan (1981, p. VII) outlines,

> the ideal [environmental] community [i]s composed of self-reliant individuals, freely acting from inner drives, never conscious of class or caste, striving to improve their communal well-being … this [is the] utopian image … (1981, p. VII)

However, despite or perhaps because of the broad definition of environmentalism, this green raft of ideas has suffered from definitional and operational problems in popular, academic and policy contexts. I identify three

main problems with environmentalism: disconnection, development and denial.[1]

Disconnection

Interdependence among humans, non-humans and the broader ecosystem that we inhabit is fundamental to the environmentalist ideal. However, as Carter (2001, p. 164) identifies, from the outset,

> The interdependence inherent within environmentalism seems to have gotten lost in mainstream interpretations of the term.

Thus the first key problem with conventional environmentalism is that the environment itself has come to be considered as somehow 'out there', as an entity distinct and independent from the realm of human affairs. As Shellenberger and Nordhaus (2005) put it,

> assumptions about what we mean by 'the environment' ... reinforces the notions that a) the environment is a separate 'thing' [and] b) human beings are separate from and superior to the 'natural world'.

This configuration of the environment as something that is alien and abstract from the everyday spaces of human life is perhaps an unforeseen by-product of such popular phrases such as 'think global, act local', with the environment being assumed to equate with places of international significance such as rainforests and exotic ecosystems, rather than biodiversity and a range of habitats and processes in more mundane, proximate locations (Burningham and Thrush 2001). Disconnection also occurs through philosophical approaches to the environment and humans' relationship with it. Orthodox views of anthropocentrism, for example, view the environment as outside human consideration unless it offers benefits or resources to our species. As Kortenkamp and Moore (2001, p. 262) identify, 'the term "anthropocentric" was first coined in the 1860s, amidst the controversy over Darwin's theory of evolution, to represent the idea that humans are the centre of the universe'. Anthropocentrism thus considers humans to be the most important amongst all life forms. Non-human species and processes are only deemed vital to the extent that they are beneficial to or effect humans in some way (see Satterfield 2002, p. 153). Anthropocentrism in this sense is a form of human chauvinism (after Seed 1988, p. 35), as, in the words of Carter (2001, p. 15), 'only humans are [seen as] having intrinsic value; and furthermore, only humans have interests'. Somewhat ironically, however, the disconnection of 'the environment' from the 'environment-around-us' is further encouraged by more ecocentric or biocentric world views (see Devall and Sessions 1985, Naess 1989, Foreman 1991, Fox 1995). Deep ecologists and radical groups such as Earth First! posit the environment (as wilderness) as an entity to be preserved from

humans, framing us as both pollutant and polluter in these places. So although diametrically opposed on their approach to humans and the environment, both anthropocentrism and ecocentrism have the same effect: they disconnect the environment from our everyday lives. As Castree (2001) points out, both views:

> posit ... a foundational distinction between the social and the natural and assumes that the latter is, at some level, fixed and/or universal. ... Thus, where [ecocentrics] urge us to 'save', 'live in harmony with', or even 'get back to' nature, [anthropocentrics] propose to 'manage', 'control', or 'dominate' nature as if [it] were a domain different to, and separate from, society. (2001, p. 4 and 5)

In practice therefore, the environment is framed as outside, detached and distinct from our everyday material and emotional lives. Framing the environment as *somewhere else* has the effect of abstracting us and our activities from the environmental consequences they may have. This intellectual process of abstraction is compounded by the second key problem facing conventional environmentalism, namely the industrial culture of (over) consumption and development in which western society is saturated.

Development

As Jackson (2005) identifies, motivating and maintaining more environmental and sustainable behaviours is far from easy due to the profligate consumption choices offered by industrial society:

> Individual behaviours are deeply embedded in social and institutional contexts. We are guided as much by what others around us say and do, and by the 'rules of the game' as we are by personal choice. We often find ourselves 'locked in' to unsustainable behaviours in spite of our own best intentions. (2005, p. III)

As noted elsewhere (Anderson 2007), it is clear that our industrial context does not force unsustainable behaviours upon us. As actors with free-will, our own choices, habits and customs can align themselves with or reject the norms of development-oriented society. However, in line with Giddens' (1990, 1995) structuration theory, free agents are, to an extent, encumbered by the hegemonic orthodoxies and lifestyles prioritised by the societies they inhabit. This situation means that the intellectual framing of anthropocentrism coupled to encouragements to (over)consume means our lifestyle decisions are not made on an even playing field. As Jackson (2005) states:

> far from being able to exercise deliberative choice about what to consume and what not to consume, for much of the time people find themselves 'locked in' to unsustainable consumption patterns. Consumer 'lock-in' occurs in part through the architecture of incentive structures, institutional barriers, inequalities in access, and restricted choice. But it also flows from habits, routines, social norms and expectations, and dominant cultural values. (2005, p. V)

Thus, mainstream practices are influenced to a large extent by the dominant cultural forces operating within society (see Scerri 2009). The ability of corporate actors, for example, to use advertising, endorsements and incentives to induce particular consumption desires, wants and needs has the effect of marginalising calls for more environmental behaviours. (In this situation, Porritt (2005, p. 268) argues that we become reduced from citizens to consumers, and 'disempowered, manipulated and deceived' consumers at that). The saturation of modern culture with environmentally destructive practices means that some explicitly taken decisions (e.g. job selection or residence choice) effectively 'lock' individuals into unsustainable activities in other aspects of life (e.g. transport alternatives or shopping options). Thus, the widespread dominance of neo-liberal capitalism as the economic and societal context in which we live further compounds the difficulties for conventional environmentalism, as Jordan and Wheedon (1994 put it:

> The degree to which individuals can 'choose' forms of identity is circumscribed by social power relations [and contexts]. (1994, p. 17)

The second key problem facing conventional environmentalism, therefore, is the hegemonic orthodoxies of corporate capitalism and industrial society that make autonomous practices of an environmentalist nature difficult to action and sustain. This problem synergistically combines with the third problem facing conventional environmentalism – that of *denial* – and further militates against the likelihood of a sea-change in green activity.

Denial

> We're all doomed! (Lomborg 2005)

Popular interpretations of environmentalism often reflect the sentiment conveyed by Bjorn Lomborg: environmentalism is about doom, gloom and denial. Environmentalism is commonly seen to outline a negative, doom-laden scenario for the planet and its species (e.g. Malthus 1890, Meadows *et al*., 1972, 1992), and attempts to use this scenario as a motivating tool for action. As, it is argued, the current industrial trajectory leads the planet and its inhabitants towards an eco-Armageddon (see Bate and Morris 1994, Lee 1995), it makes sense to withdraw consent from profligate and unsustainable consumption practices and opt for less wasteful and environmentally destructive choices. In the context of capitalism and societal contentment promised through faster, newer, sexier gadgets, to opt for less rather than more has always been an act of transgression, perhaps even resistance, to the hegemony of Western civilisation. As Bedford *et al*. (2004) put it:

> One of the primary motivators for individuals who live in a society which values the acquisition of commodities is to increase consumption in order to achieve the

> highest possible quality of life. Hence, as environmentalism has become entwined with images of denial such as not driving a car and using less water, it is out of line with what society considers to be normal. (2004, p. i)

Environmentalism is thus attempting to win friends and influence people by asking us to sign up as members to a gang that is marginal and will, in the short term, entail denial of the privileges of western civilisation, however unsustainable these opportunities may be in the long term.[2] Not only this, but membership will also invite ridicule, even contempt, from non-members who remain in the mainstream, as Bedford *et al.* (2004) identify:

> those who do willingly undertake environmental actions are perceived as 'pious, hair-shirted, sandal-wearing hippies' (DETR 2000b, Bedford 1999). These negative connotations ensure that people continue to distance themselves from 'abnormal' environmental stereotypes. (2004, p. 22)

Thus, the perspective that the practices and commodities of industrial civilisation are 'benefits' is entrenched, so much so that the decision to deny oneself these 'goods' is deemed irrational and deviant. Most importantly perhaps, this situation is unlikely to change simply through the doom-laden messages offered by conventional environmentalism. As Shellenberger and Nordhaus (2005) outline, such a negative message is far from the empowering and enthusing inspiration needed to motivate much behavioural change. They explain their point in comparison to the tactics adopted by civil rights leader Martin Luther King:

> Martin Luther King's 'I have dream' speech is famous because it put forward an inspiring, positive vision that carried a critique of the current moment within it. Imagine how history would have turned out had King given an 'I have a nightmare' speech instead … Environmental leaders are effectively giving the 'I have a nightmare' speech. (2005)

It is suggested here, therefore, that driving behavioural change through a message that sells apocalyptic negativity may be, however accurate, not as easy and empowering as selling a positive, practicable alternative. The consequence of the environment configured as an abstracted 'out there', the cultural context of over-consumption, and the message of denial and doom – produces a situation where the environmentalist message is seen as marginal, abnormal and disconnected from the mainstream.

Sustainable solutions?

There have been a number of attempts to create a space in which environmentalist ideas can engage more positively with mainstream cultural preferences. This is not the place for an in-depth assessment of these moves; however, notions such as 'shallow ecology' (Naess 1989, Jacob 1994, Zimmerman 1994, Drengson and Inoue 1995) and ecological modernisation

(Mol and Sonnenfeld 2000, Young 2000) can perhaps be seen in this vein. The most popular of these moves is, however, the notion of sustainability. Sustainability explicitly seeks to negotiate a middle ground between the often competing claims of the economy, the environment and society (not to mention future generations) (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). Nevertheless, even as the most well-known attempt to offer an alternative to the environmentalist message, the language of sustainability and sustainable development (SD) has still failed to engage the wider population (see Seghezzo 2009). As Macnaughten and Jacobs (1997) state in relation to discussions with the public on the subject,

> It is tempting to ask whether any single definition the public could provide when challenged to explain 'SD' would be considered correct ... When introduced into the discussion by the moderator, the term was generally seen as a piece of abstract jargon; even 'gobbledygook'. (1997, p. 15)

Darnton (2004, p. 8) concurs, finding, 'the concept of "SD" ... too unwieldy to make it readily applicable to exploring people's daily lives'. In general, therefore, it could be argued that the 'soft-topic' of environmentalism (McCormick 1991) has been usurped by the 'non-topic' of sustainability – people just are not that interested:

> Qualitative researchers whose work is included in this report state that members of the public go blank when asked to discuss 'SD'; such sources reveal it to be a conversation stopper. (Darnton, 2004, p. 6, citing Shove 1999)

The environmental debate 'in a nutshell'

The trouble with environmentalism is due to three key problems it faces in the industrial context. The abstraction of 'the environment' to somewhere 'out there', coupled to the saturation of popular culture with the drive to (over) consume, has the effect of drowning out the environmentalist message. Small but statemanlike warnings of eco-Armageddon (see Gore 2006), alongside calls to sustainability, are seen as inconvenient and poorly understood persuasions to the masses to change their lifestyles. In this situation, environmentalism is deemed abnormal, even deviant behaviour. Environmentalism thus faces three key problems, which marginalise it from mainstream society. This marginalisation is such that it leaves no middle ground to effectively engage and experiment with green practices; as the journalist Zoe Williams (2006) somewhat comically outlines,

> [this is the] the environmental debate [in a nutshell]: you can't criticise an extravagant holidaymaker unless you never fly at all. If you never fly at all, you can't have a go at those who do unless you spend your holidays building dry-stone walls for voles to live in. The end point of all of this is that if you do anything at all that is environmentally dodgy, you have no right to criticise

> anyone else; and if you do nothing at all that is environmentally dodgy, you are a crank and nobody will listen to you. In other words, there is no way to have this debate in engagement with one another – you cannot prescribe eco-friendly behaviour, since only by living in a dingly survivalist dell would you ever be in a position to.

As Williams caricatures, the trouble with environmentalism has produced a situation where green ideas and practices are so marginal within mainstream society that is has become problematic to engage in the environmentalist debate without a fair degree of cynicism. Environmentalist ideas and practices are so alien and 'other' from conventional orthodoxy that anyone experimenting with them is treated with suspicion and ridicule: those who make a small change in their lives (e.g. green consumerism) may be pilloried for not doing more, or criticised for their inconsistencies and hypocrisies (see Horton 2003). However, those who go further become just *too* different from what is considered normal by and relevant to the majority – and thus become ridiculed as 'cranks' or 'hippies'.

Environmentalism absolutely

The distance between imagined positions of 'green' and 'mainstream' in contemporary society is so great that the three problems outlined above combine to create an ontological binary of purified subject positions: of 'environmentalist' (or 'green') and 'normal' (or 'mainstream'). This ontological binary resonates with what Chatterton (2006) has identified in relation to more 'radical' identity positions such as 'Activist-not Activist', and Barnes (2005) in terms of other binary subject positions, e.g. 'White–not White', 'man–not man', etc. In this case, each subject position has become simplified and differentiated to such an extent that an 'us' and 'them' polarisation occurs between both poles of the binary, in this case between 'environmentalists' and 'normal people'. This differentiation has the effect of removing the common ground between the groups concerned, with the 'them' and 'us' distanciation often becoming the source of 'pernicious conflict' between the groups involved (Watts 2005, p. 150). As we have seen from Bedford *et al.* (above), the trangressively deviant framing of environmentalists as pious and self-satisfied individuals by many in the mainstream is one form of this unhelpful stereotyping (see, for example, 'Homer to the Max' episode AABF09, Season 10, *The Simpsons*, http://www.snpp.com/episodes/AABF09 (SNPP 1999), or see Chatterton 2006).

Thus, the essentialist framing of environmentalism and environmentalists creates a situation where it is easy to further marginalise and ignore debates over ecological behaviours (see Blühdorn and Welsh 2007). In this situation, environmentalism is proving a hard sell. Despite many being motivated by the theory of an alternative to our carbon-belching society, the practical context in which we operate pacifies and disempowers many more. In short, conventional

environmentalism's potential to motivate the masses is lost, as Porritt (2005) laments:

> Conventional environmentalism is demonstrably incapable of rising to th[e] challenge: its appeal is too narrow, too technical, too anti-business, too depressing, often too dowdy, and too 'heard it all before'. (2005, p. 38)

Environmentalism is not dead! But environmentalism is a 'zombie' category

Commentators such as Shellenberger and Nordhaus (2005) and Nordhaus and Shellenberger (2007) argue that the problems facing conventional environmentalism are fatal. However, I would argue that environmentalism is not yet dead; it remains alive, but without the vigour to deal with the current situation. In short, environmentalism has become a 'zombie category' in the industrial context. The zombie category is a term coined by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) as part of a broader individualisation and reflexive modernisation thesis (see Beck *et al.* 1994, Beck 1995, 2001) that posits that the contours of industrial society have begun to dissolve under the dynamism of its rapid success. As this occurs, individuals begin to dis-embed themselves from conventional identity positions of class, employment and family, and 'produce, stage and cobble together' new identities through the course of 'turbulent and risky practices' (Beck *et al.* 1994, p. 13).

As a consequence, conventional identity categories (such as family, class, religion) become less relevant to the positions taken by individuals and groups to define themselves and their behaviour. For Beck, these categories have thus become 'zombies': they are living but dead; although their vocabulary is still in popular use, they no longer have any meaningful connection with the post-/late-modern society in which we are living. In other words, these zombie categories obfuscate reality; we no longer know what they stand for, what lies behind them. In short, they hide more than they illuminate (2002, p. 207). In Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's words:

> *zombie* or living-dead categories ... blind [us] to the realities and contradictions of globalizing and individualizing modernities. (2002, p. XXIV)

I suggest, therefore, that environmentalism has become (and perhaps always has been) a zombie category. Conventional environmentalism is a living dead category, it exists on paper but in practice its seclusion into one pole of a 'green-not green' binary means it does not engage effectively with the contradictions, tensions and obstacles facing individuals who live in 'globalising modernity'. For individuals 'locked into' the realities of this industrialised modernity, an essentialised environmentalism represents an unattainable and perhaps even undesirable objective. In this situation, there is a need to escape from the distinct binary framing of 'green-not green' to reflect the more problematic and in-between positions that may facilitate the uptake of

environmental behaviours. Environmentalism therefore needs to be reframed to fit into the contemporary context, in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) words:

> If you are interested in what is going on in people's minds and the ways of life they are leading, you have to get away from the old categories. (2002, p. 207)

Environmentalism where we are

Recognition that old categories of thinking are outdated both intellectually and practically has led many to explore new ways of categorising the world (e.g. Giddens 1990, 1995, Bhabha 1994, Soja 1996, Thrift 2000). The postmodern turn in identity theory is one alternative that can inform us here. Drawing on the work of Jameson (1991), Featherstone (1995, p. 44) has noted how the concept of identity has been reconsidered, with the sense of a coherent, essentialised identity giving way to the notion of fragmented and malleable and, if not schizo- then often multi-phrenic identities. Such postmodern understandings of identity lead us to conceive of the self not as a singular article but rather as a situated and positional entity/process (following Harvey 1996, p. 49). As Mitchell comically suggests, it is common to consider of the self not as singular, pure and coherent, but rather as multiple, conflicting and often contradictory:

> The Morning After Me was not overly impressed with the Night Before Me. I pass through many Mes in the course of the day, each one selfish with his time. The Lying in Bed Me, and the Enjoying the Hot Shower Me are particularly selfish. The Late Me loathes the pair of them. (Mitchell 2000, p. 270)

Identity is now understood, therefore, not to be a straightforward boundable entity, rather a 'contact zone', an arena in which 'disparate [entities/processes] meet, clash, and grapple with each other' (after Pratt, in Warren 1997, p. 4). Beck's theory of reflexive modernisation echoes these turns in postmodern identity theory. As individuals dis- and re-embed themselves in new subject positions in a world of 'globalising and individualising modernities', there is no longer a 'chain syllogism' (Beck and Beck-Gersheim 2002, p. XXIV) between identity label and particular attitudes and behaviours. In other words, instead of essentialised identity positions, all we can have are emergent, partial, unstable and variable distinctions between selves. There has therefore been recognition, at the intellectual level at least, that as individuals we cannot occupy pure identity positions; we occupy multiple positions, which are often contradictory. In short, to cite poet Ciaran Carson (1996, p. 127), we are oxymorons.

In order to engage effectively with the mainstream, any environmentalism needs to be sensitive to the multiplicities and tensions inherent within the 'realities and contradictions of globalising and individualizing modernities' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, p. XXIV). Recognition needs to be made that environmental aspirations and behaviours are simply one identity position

existing in the 'contact zone' of multiple selves at the individual level. At present, environmentalism has not responded effectively to this tension-filled situation. Environmentalism needs to 'get away' from absolute positioning – what Tuan (1970) identifies as the 'cultural pull of consistency', the idea that 'what is integral and whole is good and should stay that way' (Tuan 2004, p. 35), and begin to acknowledge that, 'contradictions may be inherent within the human condition' (Tuan 1970, p. 249). The potential and possibilities offered by embracing contradiction can be captured by the notion of 'coyote environmentalism'.

From zombies to coyotes: a 'coyote' environmentalism

As a prefix for any subject position the 'coyote' was introduced to academia by Haraway (1988). It refers to any identity encultured with tricky, subversive and problematic capacities. Haraway borrows this metaphor from Native American culture where it symbolises someone who is,

> quick, sly, [and] lecherous, [but] also a carrier of valuable knowledge, a rebel, a survivor. (Snyder 2007, p. 45)

The 'trickster' image of the coyote is useful for summarising the contradictions and multiplicities inherent within modern processes of individualisation. The coyote is a position that embodies conflicts, problems, solutions and possibilities. The metaphor goes beyond oppositional binaries and thoroughly bundles together the once separate and distinct into a co-mixture. As Snyder (2007) suggests with reference to intelligence and morality, the position of the coyote,

> breaks down any dichotomous black-and-white sense of good and evil and reminds us that wisdom and foolishness are often mingled hopelessly together like ghee stirred into milk. (2007, p. 45)

Haraway (1988) employs the metaphor of the coyote to offer scientists the opportunity to dally and flirt with the possibilities of feminism and situated thought. In her words, the coyote's

> split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history. (1988, p. 586)

A 'coyote' environmentalism can do the same. From the position of a coyote, environmentalist practices and selves should no longer be secluded at one pole of a binary positioning, but regain their connection to the range of practices and identities we action and inhabit in the course of our everyday lives. From this perspective, existing 'green-not green' subject positions are no

longer strictly oppositional in nature, they are only parts of a broader whole, (con)fusing together in practice to form our lives. Actioning environmentalism is therefore never to practise absolute consistency or purity; practising environmentalism becomes a performance of the problematic, joining our 'green' aspirations to our industrial behaviours in conversations and imaginings that may change history.

Coyote environmentalism thus deals with the three main 'troubles' of conventional environmentalism. Through its connections to Native American culture, its animal image and the inherent fallibility of its capacities, it takes us away from a strong anthropocentrism (or ecocentrism) and hints at a weaker or indeed shallower position where we have the opportunity to re-connect ourselves to the environment-around-and-in-us. By aligning ourselves within the environment that we share with other species it offers the potential to reinstall the recognition of interdependence that may engender more environmentally positive behaviour. A coyote subject position therefore reminds us that environmentalism cannot and should not exist independently of the ecological context in which it needs to be practised, but neither should it exist independently from its cultural context either. Coyote environmentalism does not seek to deny our positioning within the hegemonic orthodoxy of corporate capitalism. Due to its capacity to involve disparate and apparently oppositional elements within one whole, it brings together the context of industrial society alongside aspirations of environmental behaviour to allow, in Benton's words,

> the possibility of new coalitions and alliances, ... requir[ing] all of us to rethink our politics, [this] might mean ... a more open intellectual framework that lives with tensions, and doesn't seek a premature resolution. (in Soper 1998, p. 29)

This alternative framing of the relations between environmentalism and non-environmentalism therefore discards the alienating and disempowering dualism that limits debates around greening practices in the current cultural context (see Williams, above). Coyote environmentalism is thus continually problematic, emphasising the praxis of reflection and iterated action over the search for consistency, as to borrow Haraway's (1988, p. 593) words, coyote environmentalists: 'keep searching for fidelity, knowing all the while that we will be hoodwinked'.

From this knowledge, coyote environmentalism is no longer about *denial* and *doom*, but rather about *direction*. It opens up the possibility of moving towards, in Connelly's (1999, p. 144) words, 'a generous ethos of engagement' with the 'dissonant conjunction' embodied in modern beings between industrial and environmental cultures. In this way, coyote environmentalism maintains (or regains) the empowering aspects of environmentalist ideas, without the alienating division of conventional discourses. It allows us at the individual level to focus on the fragments that go together to form our identities and how they interact with our overall self and the context in which we live. It allows us

to direct our energies towards battles we can win, to aspects of our identity we can green, and then reflexively engage with issues of complexity and inconsistency in an open way.

This framing therefore creates 'a cognitive space' where 'assumptions can be challenged' and 'new ideas surface' (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 2005), it does not bring about the 'death' of environmentalism but rather the opportunity to reinvigorate a zombie, living but dead category, working with and through the structures, institutions, ecologies and cultures that we exist in (after Barry 2007).

Conclusions

> in real life boundaries are ... blurred. There is every reason to believe that each one of us favours certain elements of both ['green' and 'not green'] modes, depending upon the institutional setting, the issue at hand, and our changing socioeconomic status. ... Co-existence does not necessarily produce compromise, though in thoughtful people it should lead to better understanding. (O'Riordan 1981, p. 2)
>
> purity [i]s the end of possibility. (Dodge 2000, p. XX)

As many scholars, politicians and campaigners have outlined, it is crucial for the maintenance of quality of life, if not life itself, that environmentalism should move from the margins to the mainstream. The importance of defining environmentalism as a motivating, political position is my central concern here. However, as I have outlined, there are numerous problems with environmentalism as conventionally defined. There is a need to reframe environmentalism not only to restore the empowering and motivating aspects of the green message but also to engage a broader audience that at present is not turned on to environmentalist ideas (see also Braun and Castree 1998, Luke 1999, Soper 2007). To this end, I have sought to draw a constructive alignment between discourses of environmentalism on one hand, and notions of fragmented and malleable identities on the other. 'Coyote environmentalism' is one way towards a more productive framing of sustainable practice.

Coyote environmentalism does not offer a false choice between the conventional poles of 'green' and 'mainstream', it reinstalls a middle ground where the majority of us live out the contradictions of industrial modernity. In this space it becomes possible for us to flirt and experiment with new practices and positions; coyote environmentalism offers a space in which we, to paraphrase Haraway (1988), can be oxymorons rather than gods. Thus coyote environmentalism is an undertaking that embraces the contradiction of undertaking green practices in an industrial context, it allows for inconsistencies and 'time outs' from absolute environmentalism (e.g. from 'burn out', for emergencies) and has the potential to remove the cynicism, ridicule and finger-pointing that forestalls conventional environmental debates.

However, a coyote environmentalism does not fully elude the problems of other calls to 'be green'. Removing the simplified call for consistency and integrity ushers in the complexity of how collective structures affect individual agency, and how some actions may be negotiable to some but apparent necessities for others. It also offers the potential to reconsider actions that could be constituted as green but are often seen as outside the ambit of conventional environmentalist practice. This could potentially be negative through processes such as 'greenwash' (Greer and Bruno 1996, Rowell 1996, Pearce 2008), but also positive through redefining environmentalist practice to include individuals such as gardeners, thus bringing 'home' the concept of the environment from the exotic and global to the proximate and everyday.

Do I (you, we?) want to begin with greening practices that are most visible? Most easy? Those with the best 'return' (e.g. in terms of carbon reduction)? or the most 'efficient'? and how should these criteria be measured? Through reflexivity we can also openly consider how the range of practices we engage in relate to one another. If open contradiction is something we wish to minimise then this approach to environmentalism empowers us to do more, albeit knowing that absolute integrity is an unattainable goal. The explicit acknowledgment of these tensions makes the process of coyote environmentalism an ongoing one, as O'Riordan (1981) identifies,

> There is a constant tension between what we believe we should do and what reality appears to compel us to do. Many people feel that this tension is inevitable and desirable, for it constantly jolts us back to the principal messages of [in this case, coyote] environmentalism. (1981, p. VII)

Thus, coyote environmentalism does not ensure or guarantee environmental practices, but it does offer a space for individuals to engage with green ideas and actions without having to be absolute or 'hair-shirted'. From this space, it becomes possible to engage with and usefully critique the troubles facing a green future and move towards realising the Best Practicable Environmental Option (BPEO) for each individual within our current industrial and capitalist context.

Notes

1. It is acknowledged that these problems may be more *directly* apposite to preservationist and conservationist streams of environmentalism identifiable in organisations in the developed world (see White and Wilbert 2006, p. 97).
2. That is not to say, of course, that the draw of denial is not powerful to some downsizers, or those who see the benefits of a less consumer-oriented culture (see, for example, Soper's 2007 alternative hedonists, or Anderson 2007).

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