UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RETREAT: A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

BY

© ANGELA SPECHT

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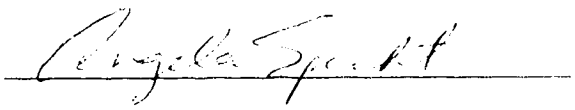

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **RETREAT: A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY** submitted by ANGELA SPECHT in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to examine the ideology of retreat as a means of creating social change and environmental reform. The foundation of retreat ideology was examined as a response to a perceived crisis of culture and its accompanying environmental impact. A model of Western perception was explored and key elements which fuel a retreat ideology were identified. The prescriptive nature of retreat was examined via the Utopian tradition. The retreatist desire to design and prescribe values and behaviors in order to create an ecologically based social system were questioned, and the noninnocence of the creation of social change was explored.

The notion of the creation of an ideal future and the nature of social change were examined in three ways. First, the ideal future was examined as a form of social change which advocated moving "back-to-the land." Second, the assimilation of retreat ideals by mainstream culture was explored. Finally, the subversion of dominant culture was examined as a form of creating social change. The subversion of dominant culture recognized the complicit nature of those involved a movement of social reform, such as retreat. Subversive reform was offered as a tentative means of influencing change through its ability to recognize and react to cultural complicity; and parody was examined as an example of subversive reform (creating social change from within the confines of dominant culture).

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Chapter 1

Retreat: A Philosophical Inquiry

> Nature is perceived to be in danger and it is up to us to devise the means to its salvation. (Evernden, 1992: 3).

I have always loved to go walking in the bush around my home. The thought of paddling a canoe or a kayak on the nearby lakes and rivers sets my heart on fire. I love my home and the opportunities that it has afforded me; however, I have become more and more disturbed by the kinds of human wrought changes that have happened, and continue to occur, to my home. I have walked for hours in the mixed wood bush around Wabamun. There is nothing quite like a walk through the bush on a crisp autumn afternoon. I have paddled on placid parkland lakes under the silver light of a midnight moon. But these memories are tempered by the increasing realization that the bush I walked through just last spring has been logged because of 'high' timber prices; and, the bush I played in as a child now sports 'nine holes and grass greens.' I can paddle on Wabamun Lake on any night because the lights from the surrounding generating stations illuminate the water with the intensity of two moons. I can even paddle during -40° Celsius weather in the middle of January. The generating station pumps enough hot water into the lake to make most of the east end of the lake ice-free during the winter months. Whitewood lake cannot be paddled at all. It has been drained so that the coal seams under it can be strip mined to provide the generating station with enough fuel to keep electricity flowing to my computer running for years.

It does not feel right to me that my home is being systematically dismantled and destroyed. The problem is compounded by the knowledge that environmental degradation is not only a local phenomena. The impact of environmental damage caused by humans is global in its nature, especially in places where Westernized industrial nations have been

involved. These experiences have led me to believe that we may be losing irreplaceable parts of our selves, our experiences, our homes and our world as we speed toward a future which is consumed by demands for the "good life" which the Western social, economic and technological order offers (Borgmann, 1987). The disturbing nature of these experiences makes me think that we, in the West, have to change, change very fast and change on a global level.

What shall be the means of environmental salvation? My initial reaction to things like the generating stations and logging is reactionary. My mind screams: "Run Away, Run Away!" Why can't we just 'run away' like Monty Python's Holy Grail questers did when confronted with a situation that was hostile and frightening, and which promised a future that appeared uncertain but in actuality alluded to the coming of the horrific (Monty Python, 1974).[1] My next response to my experience is: "we have to stop what we are doing, turn back the clocks, and live life as though we were living 150 years ago." It is the feeling that at some point along the space time continuum we took the wrong path, and that if we could only turn around and locate the turn to the correct path, we would be safe. But, can we simply retreat from our environmental crisis?

The idea of retreat is a popular response to dealing with conflict. The idea is that if one can put some distance between oneself and the hostile element, then one could create a "better" situation and be "safe" from the injurious intent of the hostile element. The notion

[1] Monty Python's movie **Monty Python and the Holy Grail** is a satirical representation of the Arthurian Legends of the Grail Quest. King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table are charged by God to search for the Holy Grail (the cup which Jesus drank out of at the last supper and which caught his blood at the crucifixion). In Monty Python's satirical representation, Arthur and his Knights encounter many farcical adventures. In one adventure, the questers encounter a fortified castle guarded by the French. The French will not accept Arthur's offer to become questers and they will not let him search their castle for the grail. Arthur decides to storm the French castle; however, he is at a great tactical disadvantage. The French catapult large farm animals onto Arthur and his Knights, forcing him to scream in terror "Run Away, Run Away!" (Lest they all be squished by the cows which are being hurdled through the air by the French). The call to "Run Away!" becomes a running theme throughout the movie. Whenever Arthur and his Knights are confronted by a hostile situation (which occurs frequently), Arthur issues the command "Run Away, Run Away!"

of "retreat" has had a popular following throughout human history. People have often resorted to "retreating" from social oppression (the hostile element) within their respective cultures. People have retreated from religious persecution, or religious liberalism in an attempt to return to the "ideal" of their beliefs, or toward a perception of traditional "orthodoxy." Some people have retreated from political oppression toward their own conception of political ideals; and yet other people have fled the onslaught of industrialization by moving "back-to-the-land." My own story reflects a desire to retreat from the (human created) global destruction of the earth's ecosystems. The hostile elements of the global destruction are the values, beliefs and practices of (predominantly) Western humans of which I (unfortunately) happen to belong. This notion of environmentally motivated retreat is fundamental to many philosophies of environmental reform. There is an underlying assumption that we can return to a time in which humans and nature had a more egalitarian relationship. All we need to do is to "go back," "find it" and "live it" (on the global level).

It is a this point, that I will clarify the notion between the philosophical ideology of retreat and the physical manifestation of retreat. Retreat, as a philosophical concept, is to be considered "an ideological withdrawal from elements / ideals within dominant culture that are perceived to be hostile." In the ideological concept then, an environmental retreat is a withdrawal from ideas / elements which are perceived to cause environmental degradation. Retreat, however, does not need to be confined to purely environmental concerns. One might wish to withdraw from other "hostile" ideas or elements which are perceived to originate in the dominant culture. In this sense, one might retreat from things like a perceived widespread violence in urban communities; or, from something like bigotry. The second element of retreat is the manner in which it might manifest itself. There is no "set" prescription to retreat. Retreat might manifest itself in any number of

different ways because of the differences in the resources or opportunities that individuals or groups will have available to them, and because of the different ideological objectives that may be involved in the motivation of their retreat. Retreat may manifest itself from inside or outside, spatially or temporally, collectively or individually. For example, environmentally based retreat might manifest itself in the form of a move back-to-the-land (by one who could afford the financial implications of purchasing land, buildings, and equipment); or, it might take the form of retreating to the natural setting of a river valley park for a few hours on a Saturday afternoon (by one who is confined to the urban setting). Retreat might take the form of an intentional community, like a bioregional commune for those dedicated to bioregional environmental principles. Or, it might manifest itself as a "gated community" (communities who fear urban violence and crime, so they erect security fences and limit neighborhood access by the installation of patrolled security gates). In all of these cases, the ideology of retreat is working. The individuals or groups are withdrawing from what are perceived to be hostile elements within the dominant culture; however, the manifestation that the retreat takes on occurs in a myriad of different ways.

Neil Evernden said "Nature is perceived to be in danger and it is up to us to devise a means to its salvation" (Evernden, 1992: 3). Is retreat the means to devising the salvation of the natural world from human involvement? What follows is a philosophical inquiry into the "concept of retreat" as method for creating ecologically-based social change. The inquiry into the concept of retreat is in no way an attempt to reveal "how to devise a retreatist movement based on ecologically-motivated social change;" instead, I seek to explore the implications of trying to "create" and "institute" a different mode of social organization which is based upon environmental retreat as the agent of reform.

In Chapter 2, retreat will be examined as a way of "perceiving" the environmental crisis; and, as a way of responding to the crisis based upon those "perceptions." A philosophy of retreat attempts to explore the development of the present environmental crisis by exploring the Western past. It attempts to identify the "points" along the time line at which we "turned" from the correct path. Those points in the past are believed to have a significant bearing on the current environmental reality. The identification process identifies "what is our environmental reality" and subsequently is thought to motivate the creation of a future, "better" environmental reality, or "what ought to be."

Chapter 3 critiques the concept of "creating a universal change" as a means to achieve the desired environmental reform. The premise of the desirability and the ability to institutionalize a "universal solution" of reform is problematized. Can we and do we want to institute a "universal change" as a means of creating environmental reform? What things must we consider when we "hope" to create and achieve global change; and, are these changes desirable? These are some of the complex questions that need to be addressed when considering the institution of global changes which are based upon a single premise.

Chapter 4 explores the "nature of change." The nature of creating and attempting to institute change is a complex and amorphous endeavor. There is a complex interaction between the realm of ideals and the practical realities of change. There are three aspects of change that are examined. First, the "retreat" of individuals "back-to-the-land" is examined as the institution of a "manageable change." Second, the assimilation of retreat ideals by mainstream culture is explored. And finally, change is examined as the product of the subversive nature of "ideals" and individual agency.

Chapter 2

The Foundations for a Retreat Ideology

An ideology of retreat is a way of perceiving our environmental crisis and a way of reacting to those perceptions. It has developed out of a certain understanding of our past (the history of Western Europe and North America) and, relies upon an oppositional interpretation of that past. Retreat ideology relies on a specific perception of 'environmental reality' and then uses that perception to seek an oppositional approach to environmental reform. It uses the perception of Western history to explore the tension between "what is" and "what ought to be" environmental reality. It also tries to create a vision of how the retreatist perception would inform human interaction with the natural world. In this section I elaborate upon a model of Western perception and identify key elements which fuel a retreat ideology. This is not a complete examination of Western history because of the complexity of variables and interactions: instead, the focus is on the elements which I perceive to have a significant influence on the concept of retreat.

2.1 The Crisis of Culture

Alexander Wilson considered our environmental crisis as being more than just a crisis of ecosystem degradation; instead, he thought the environmental crisis to be a "crisis of culture" (Wilson, 1991: 12). The crisis occurring in the natural world is a symptom of a crisis that is rooted in how we think, act and live in the natural world. It is who we are. It is disconcerting to know how deeply ingrained our environmental crisis is. I am not alone in my concern. Ferenc Maté in his book, **A Reasonable Life**, attempts to identify the 'cause' of (or more precisely -who to blame for) our environmental crisis. His work

reveals how difficult it is to identify any one cause for the environmental crisis. It is too deeply entrenched in many facets of our culture to do that:

> ... You sure can't blame big business; it's nothing but our slave. It finds out what we like, then drowns us in the stuff. "You like Barbie dolls? Good! Here's a billion of them. You like hamburgers in Styrofoam containers? Here's thirty billion more." And we helpless, smiling sheep follow right along. But we don't "Bah, Bah, Bah." We Buy, Buy, Buy.
>
> We want everything ever made and we want it now, want it cheap and in twenty different colours. And next year we want more, only a bit different. So big business almost kills itself every year to please us. If it means oil spills, poisoned water and chemical disasters... well... nobody's perfect.
>
> So you want to know who's guilty?... You!... You bought the bloody toy... And so did I.
>
> We bought radios, stereos, cassettes, CDs, then VCRs. We bought Instimatics, Veg-O-Matics, popcorn makers, muffin bakers, machines to mow the lawn, fry a prawn, shear the dog, saw a log, to blow snow, leaves, hair or air; we bought gear to barbecue a chicken, broil it, roast it, deep-fry it or toast it or put it in a Radar Range and blow it to the moon; bought chemicals to calm our fits, dry our pits, clean our mitts, expand our tits... Have we gone and lost our collective bloody minds?!! (Maté, 1993: 12-13).

I read this excerpt and I think that we are living anything but a reasonable life. It also gives me a fair understanding of why an individual, or group might seek to retreat from this version of reality. It appears as though the 'things' that we are striving toward are less than commendable; and, the price that we are paying (with the destruction of the natural world) is too high.

I read Maté's excerpt and find it is easy for my environmental sensitivity to be repulsed by the 'absurdity' of modern materialism and consumerism. Maté's excerpt cuts into the fabric of our dominant world view to expose the kind of 'blind following' that has created our global environmental crisis. But, what is behind this blind following? Why do those of us in euro-western culture strive toward something that on the surface seems so destructive; and, yet at the same time, causes us to be unwilling, or perhaps unable to change? It is this point about adherence to what Maté calls our "collective bloody minds" that requires elaboration for establishing retreat ideology. What drives us to follow these

patterns apparently destructive to self and nature? Environmental philosophers have been trying, for a very long, time to address these issues in an attempt to identify, and possibly change behaviour. Adherence to environmentally destructive practices can be traced through some of our Western perspectives of nature.

2.2 The Perception of Nature

In order to understand how ingrained our world view is, we have to look back several centuries. The blossoming of Western science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is considered by environmental philosophers to be the catalyst in the development of "a western perception of the natural world" that may eventually lead to our planet's wholesale destruction. The scientific revolution is generally considered the point of departure from a pre-modern wholistic, integrated understanding of the human-nature relationship (Merchant, 1990). The human pre-modern perception was considered to be one of reverence for the natural world, and a dependence upon the natural world's generosity for human sustenance. The power the natural world yielded over people made us live within the limits presented by it. The growth and development of the scientific method started a movement toward the fragmentation of knowledge and the intensification of a human-nature dualism (Griffin, 1989). The scientific method presented the world as an entity which was ultimately knowable: "the physical world is something we can know, enjoy, and control" (Wilson, 1991: 14); thus, creating a "disenchantment with nature" (King, 1989: 21).

Science helped to create a lense from which the non-human world could be filtered. One could look through that lense and know how nature's processes operated; and, to know nature meant that one could learn the laws of nature, and subsequently, manipulate these natural processes with scientific knowledge. Humans could now control the

processes of the natural world. Scientific knowledge was a 'power over' the unpredictable temperament of the non-human world (Jung, 1988). It meant people could control the influence which the natural world would have on them and were no longer constrained by a pre-modern vision of nature.

The Judeo-Christian tradition is credited with helping to install in the Western psyche the sanctioning of power and control over nature. Environmental philosophers, such as deep ecologists, ecofeminists and social ecologists, often point to the first chapter of Genesis as the justification of Western humanity to control the natural world:

> [T]hen God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every living thing that creeps upon the earth... Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Genesis, 1: 26 -28).

Science rendered nature knowable and controllable, while the Judeo-Christian tradition was used as sacred justification for human domination over natural processes. It was ours to subdue and use. Western science and religion began to mediate the Western experience with the natural world. The essence of the mediation is how we "perceive the value of the natural world," and the role that perception has in shaping our interaction with the world.

Nature became objectified as a resource. The establishment of nature as an object in the eyes of the dominant culture created a usurious relationship (Plant, 1989). The identification of this "subject-object" relationship reveals an issue of "power over." The subject, "the entrenched western perception," has a power over the object, "nature." In a practical sense, this power over relationship can be observed in the extent to which we exploit natural resources. I have only to go up to the highway by my house and I can see the smoke stacks of four generating stations, and the scars on the landscape caused by two strip mines. We have a power over nature when we use our ability to change the inherent

'energy' from lump of coal into electrical energy. Nature is subject to our will. This kind of manipulative power has mediated our understanding of nature for a very long time. The natural world is under the dominion of human prowess and our belief in our knowledge can help keep it submissive. This perception of nature is evident in how we interact with the non-human world.

I do not believe there is the collective conscious 'will to power' that the preceding inspection of the scientific method and religious tradition might imply; instead, scientific knowledge and religious sanction of dominion nature have evolved into simply becoming "how it is" and part of "what we do." Our control and manipulation of the non-human world simply has become our normal way of being in the world.

2.3 The Value of Nature

I was driving with my family from Wabamun to Slave Lake one winter. The drive takes about three and a half hours, with the last one and a half hours being through some very rugged and undeveloped country. The topic of conversation soon turned to how desolate the country was. Desolate meant "how under - peopled" the landscape was. I listened as the conversation began to turn toward how "no one in Alberta should have to be without their own home because there were so many trees in the bush and so much space up here to put them on." I must admit that I was looking out the windows and thinking the same thing. I was thinking about which logs (trees) would be good for a cord-wood home, and identifying which land would not be too musk-keggy (useless) to put that cord-wood home on. The way in which we were perceiving that 'desolate land' was through the prism of human utility, our ability to have control over the landscape, and our right to use the resources. We were valuing that land based on a perception of it as "resource: [an] object to be used and manipulated for our own benefit." We manipulate and control

our environment to create the type of "human environment" that what we want. That is just the way we think it should be. But for this alteration of the physical world to happen, there has to be a perception about that physical world based on the concept of nature as a resource that we have the right to use.

The way our culture values nature mediates our experience of the natural world. The way in which that mediation has manifested itself has become an essential element in the creation of our environmental crisis. Susan Griffin, along with many other environmental philosophers, suggests that the scientific-religious perspective of nature, has created the way we value nature, has alienated us from the non-human world and has hindered our capacity to experience nature (Griffin, 1989); and, perhaps it does. It gives us a very specific way of looking at the world —as a resource for us to manipulate and consume.

Alienation arises when one begins to regard nature as something other than a resource. It arises when one's perception of the value of the natural world begins to change. I felt like an environmental monster when I began to realize how I was perceiving the landscape as I rolled down the road to Slave Lake. I was looking out the window and seeing the land and everything on it as one big building block. This perception is not unlike the one that causes us to look at a coal seam and think "Look at the amount of electricity a seam like that could generate;" or, the perception that causes us to look at a bush full of aspen poplar trees and think "There's millions of cubic yards of pulp for fine paper products in there;" or, the perception that causes us to look into a seemingly desolate landscape and think "You think they could use all that land for something?" There are a thousand more examples that spring to mind of the perception of nature as resource; however, when I begin to string these examples together, one begins to realize more and more the accumulative effect that this kind of value order can have on the natural world.

The environmental movement also recognizes the accumulative effects of our value system on the natural world. The 1989 "Vancouver Declaration on Survival in the 21st Century" points to a multitude of problems that are a direct result of how the Western perception of the natural world, and subsequently the human power relations which support this vision, have led us to the brink of global collapse:

> An accelerating increase in population growth over the past 150 years from one billion to five billion with a current doubling time of 30 - 40 years;
> a comparable increase in the uses of fossil fuels leading to global pollution, climate and sea-level change
> an accelerating destruction of the habitat of life, initiating a massive and irreversible episode of mass extinction in the biosphere -the basis of Earth's ecosystems.
> an unimaginable expenditure of resources and human ingenuity on war and preparation for war.
> And all licensed by a belief in inexhaustible resources of the planet encouraged by political and economic systems that emphasize short term profit as benefit, and disregard for the real cost of production (Wilson, 1991: 73).

The environmental movement challenges us to create a different perception of nature; and a perception of environmental value that would guide humanity toward a harmonious relationship with the natural world.

The environmental movement has adopted the ecological principle of inter-relatedness of everything. Everything is related to everything else (King, 1989) is the foundation for an ecological ethic that posits nature with a value that is independent of human utility. For example, Ecofeminists use the web metaphor to convey the principle of the ethic: one cannot break one strand of the web without affecting the integrity of the whole web. This perspective of interconnectedness takes issue with Western devaluing of natural processes. The integrity of the web is dependent upon a perception of value which promotes harmonious interaction between and among the constituent strands of the web. Western perceptions, values and behaviors do not try to maintain the harmony of natural processes; instead, these dissonant values are thought to unravel the web of nature. According to Ecofeminists, if the Western value order was in harmony with the web of the natural

world, then its values and behaviors would be consistent with humans only constituting a few small strands in the integrity of the web. Western values and behaviors would act in harmony with the processes of the natural world rather than influence the web in a destructive manner.

2.4 The Pervasive Nature of Technology

The web metaphor calls into question the role of humans in the web of interconnectedness. Since we have a perspective of nature as resource, we have developed the means and processes to use nature on a massive scale. We perceive our role as being users and manipulators of the environment. The creation of a new environmental ethic based on interconnectedness would redefine our role to one of helping to maintain the integrity of the whole web. Therefore, the new value order takes issue with the "modern" understood as the wholesale "acceptance of [a] technological and material culture" (Hostetler, 1980: 356) which destroys the integrity of the whole web. There is however, a difficulty in creating a new way of taking up with nature. Our technological and material culture has become a "normal" way for us to be in the world. It is as normal as our perception of "nature as a resource to be used." For example, during the industrial revolution, people questioned the morality of how technology and industry were changing the fabric of their lives (Franklin, 1992); but now, we cruise down the information superhighway knowing and rejoicing in the fact that it will constantly be adding more new and exciting lanes.

Technology then is perhaps the most pervasive manifestation of the modern vision of nature and the human role in that nature. If one looks at technology as the art of forming tools to manipulate and control the natural world, then one would have to say that technology appears in every aspect of our interaction with the natural world. However,

until recently, the role of the technical infrastructure has only received a limited amount of scrutiny. Technology is still largely regarded in two ways, as something made and as something used (Winner, 1986). The making of tools is simply regarded as creating artificial aids for use in human endeavor; while using technology is a temporary straight forward interaction with a tool for a specific purpose (Winner, 1986). In this way, a chainsaw is made and I can use it to saw logs for my cord wood home; or, a truck is made and I can use it to haul my logs to the building site. The use of the technology is seemingly innocuous. I use the technology and once that use is over my interaction with it is thought to be complete. The role of the technology in my life is never questioned, and its use is considered morally neutral as long as I don't use it to do anything bad or wrong. If I were to use the chainsaw to participate in the Texas chainsaw massacre; or, to use the truck as a weapon to run down small children walking their pets, then my actions would be considered morally heinous, but the chainsaw and the truck would still be considered morally neutral.

This perception of technology as something that is made and used has a significant impact on retreatist ideology. Let me use an example of a trip I took. My friend and I were driving through the British Columbia interior. From the highway, we could see the landscape effects of massive clear cut logging, and we could see the pollution created by huge timber mills that processed the wood. We were disgruntled with the impact of the logging and mill. My friend said, "It's criminal that they can go in with those big machines and cut down trees just as fast and as thorough as a lawn mower cuts grass. They should have to use axes, saws and teams of horses to get that wood. We'll see how much they get then... Their mills should have to be a lot cleaner than that. You'd think there is something that they could develop that would deal with that... Maybe they should just have to go back and mill it like they did in the old days."

There are several notable things about our conversation. First, nature is still viewed as a resource. We were still very secure in the perspective that trees are a resource to be harvested and used. Second, what was questioned was how we used technology in resource extraction. In this case, we thought we were using it inappropriately. Third, there had to be some "good" use technology available, or at least the possibility of developing some "good" technology to solve the clear cut and pollution problems. Finally, there was never any question that some form of technology would mediate our (human) interaction with that forest. We were still looking at technology as something to be made and used, and something that would mediate and manipulate our interaction with the forest.

The retreatist philosophy relies on these popular notions of how technology is used in our lives; and how it mediates our experience. Technology is judged by how much impact a specific technology will have on the natural world and its ability to be used properly. Contemporary Western society's pervasive technical infrastructure, and the ecological damage that has accompanied its building, has reinforced the concept of good and bad technological innovation. Retreatist ideology reinforces the notion of good and bad technology through the advocacy of "appropriate technology." Technology is supported if its development and use are appropriate. In other words, the technology is good / appropriate if it fulfills its function without damaging the environment.

Retreat philosophy construes technology, especially technology of mass destruction as bad. The philosophy of retreat looks back through history for a golden age of technology in which technology fulfilled human needs without creating the wide scale natural destruction we have today. There were, however, a couple of things that my friend and I failed to recognize in our observations about technology. Interaction between technology and humans was much more thorough than what we were seeing (from our car

window as we drove down the highway) and in many ways, our technological infrastructure was controlling us (as we were channeled down the highway, following the rules and regulations of car travel).

How much does technology allow one to interact with the process? The more complex the technology, the more one's experience becomes mediated through the technology. Technology is so pervasive in modern culture that it can no longer be appraised as something that is made and used. It also has to be recognized for its ability to control and shape us and our lives. Logging can be used as an example of how pervasive technology is; and, as an example of how technology controls our experience. Each aspect of the task of modern logging is mediated via technology and a complex technological infrastructure. One can regard logging in terms of the interaction between a logger and a machine for the purpose of harvesting trees for lumber. For example, the primary logger operates a machine which can cut down trees of certain diameter, limb those trees, and then stack them into piles without ever leaving the cab of the machine. Then another person comes into the area with a vehicle and loads the log piles onto a truck. The logs are transported to the mill to undergo further mechanical processing. The logs are turned into lumber products and sold. On the surface, it appears to be a fairly straight forward interaction with the technology of logging. Yet, there is also a massive infrastructure which has been created to support and control the industry. Government and business create forest management agreements to regulate every aspect of the process. Public lobby groups, labour unions, companies and governments work to further regulate the process. In effect, these groups try to develop new laws to institute how the process will operate and to regulate who gets to take part in the process; and, how they get to take part. A massive physical infrastructure of roads, railways, shipping and buildings are created and maintained to support the logging operation as well; and, with the institution of these

physical infrastructures comes more regulations for use. Economic markets which support the industry rise and fall depending on how well these infrastructures can be supported and maintained. The technological connections are immense. It no longer simply involves interactions with things like saws and trucks. The technology also entails bureaucratic institutions, physical infrastructures and legislation. The massive technical infrastructure which has been created controls how we interact with our environment. Those infrastructures begin to control us as well. They control us in how we perceive the world and our role in it. In this sense, we perceive "technology as the characteristic way in which we take up with the world" (Borgmann, 1987: 35).

The way technology mediates our experience is also a problematic issue for retreat. What is problematic is that the technological paradigm is perceived to hinder the process of "self-realization" (Devall and Sessions, 1985: 69), "engagement" (Borgmann, 1987:41), enfranchisement (Franklin, 1992), or inter-connectedness. I use these terms because, although they come from different perspectives, they all point to a concept about alienating effects of living within modern technological society. Disengagement is identified as a key element of disillusionment with the dominant culture and plays probably the most fundamental role in retreat.

Jacob and Brinkerhoff, in a study of people who retreat to semi-rural, semi-subsistence lifestyles, found that these people chose "a simple lifestyle that is a rejection of the high - consumption / high - technology mainstream culture" (Jacob and Brinkerhoff, 1986: 43) because they found mainstream culture to be controlling and alienating. The mainstream culture is deemed a system which controls and exploits humans as much as it controls and exploits nature. The mainstream that has developed over the last several hundred years to liberate humans by controlling nature is perceived to be more constraining and exploiting toward people than at any time in history.

Ursula Franklin exposes the development and implementation of control related technology as being one of the factors for this perspective. Technology was developed to increase control in operations by breaking the processes of creating things down into specific parts (Franklin, 1992). For example, a traditional potter would be involved in the process of making a pot from the throwing stage directly to its final firing. When control related technology is introduced the process is broken down into stages. Each stage of the process is designed to be performed by a person or a machine. The process limits an individual's involvement in the process. It also means that progress can be monitored and controlled during any stage of the production. However, in order for a process like this one to operate, the individual elements within the process must be compliant. The prescriptive nature of control related technology eliminates decision making and judgment. The process has spread beyond the production of goods, to include all aspects of our technological and social infrastructures. It begins to shape all aspects of our lives. The feature of this pattern that is disenfranchising is that the system discourages people from challenging the control related issues:

> Today's real world of technology is characterized by the dominance of prescriptive technologies. Prescriptive technologies are not restricted to materials production. They are used in administrative and economic activities and in many aspects of governance, and on them rests the real world of technology in which we live. While we should not forget that these prescriptive technologies are often exceedingly effective and efficient, they come with an enormous social mortgage. The mortgage means that we live in a culture of compliance, that we are ever more conditioned to accept orthodoxy as normal, and to accept that there is only one way of doing "it" (Franklin, 1992: 24).

What is problematic is the fragmentation of experience that control related endeavors create; and, the marginalization of one's concerns that may arise out of these experiences. How do we challenge the precepts of institutionalized control which controls us?

Mainstream culture is perceived as even more alienating when one realizes how difficult it is to change. It is especially difficult to attempt and achieve change when the

infrastructure has been created to resist alteration: "...most activities in the real world of technology have been planned; the spread of technology has resulted in the growth and advancement of technology; the presence of these infrastructures and their 'forward planning' (often manifested as institutional inertia) severely hinder political or economic changes, even if such changes are viable and appropriate" (Franklin, 1992, p.79). I believe it is this frustration with our social infrastructure, the control it exerts over us and the ecological destruction accompanying it which inspire retreat.

Engagement in retreat entails being involved in, but not controlled by, our social and production processes. The development of the technological infrastructure is perceived as yielding a form of alienation from an engaging life. For example, two studies on people who retreated back to the land identified an ideology of engagement as "an important element in sustaining alternative rural lifestyles" (Jacob and Brinkerhoff, 1986: 43). Retreating to an alternative lifestyle was a liberating and empowering experience. The retreatists were freed form "the encumbrances of conventional urban existence" and escaped the oppressive "institutions and situations" of mainstream society (Coffin and Lipsey, 1981: 50) The matter of retreat captures the elements of past forms of engagement, while rejecting the current manifestations of technological progress. The retreatist is seeking the holistic practices and social order which offers an inclusive and engaging culture.

2.5 The Concept of Progress

The concept of progress is rooted in expectations of the power of science to explain our world and in the power of technology's ability to control the world. The development of Western science had a "greater explanatory power" (Borgmann, 1987: 25) over the world than previous ways of seeing. Previous ways of seeing were articulated in a belief

in a 'universal world view' which gave the physical world a perceived sense of 'natural order.' Western science improved the scope of Western perception about the 'natural order' and achieved an increasing consistency in the interpretation of the 'laws of nature' (Borgmann, 1987). The increasing ability to know natural processes through scientific laws increased our ability to control and manipulate the physical world. In this sense, scientific knowledge fragmented the previous universal world view. Knowledge, as a perception of continually increasing power and control over the physical world, opened up many different possibilities for, or new ways of seeing the world. As we gain more knowledge and control over our physical world, we perceive ourselves to be progressing.

The "modern," however, has helped to shape another perception of progress. Progress becomes a somewhat elusive ideology because it is normalized into being a part of how we see ourselves changing into a "more advanced civilization." The roots of progress are still in the history (past) of the western perspective; but, progress now directs us as a kind of 'attitude of being' in the world. Contemporary slogans like "bigger is better" (Franklin, 1992: 26) and "you can't stop progress" present key hints to how we perceive our place in the world, and how we believe that there is a "best way" to create our future. The concept of progress is a way of anticipating the future and it is very positivistic. It denotes a concept of scale which is supported in the scale/size of our contemporary economic and technological systems. The motivating force is that the larger and more sophisticated our systems become, the better off we will be.

Human achievement becomes synonymous with an idea of positive (value) change. This progress usually manifests itself in our ability to control and change our environment. Progress becomes essential to our understanding of how we become 'better people." You only get better if you progress. Progress becomes a psychological aspect of our Western

ontology and epistemology; and, because of the global nature of westernization, it becomes a driving force which is restructuring the planet.

Technology and the technological imperative are representative of the concept of progress. Technology is the tool by which the physical world can be restructured into that future world that we are wanting to create. This striving for progress through the technological medium, however, is problematic because technology becomes the medium which "ceaselessly transforms the world along abstract and artificial lines" (Borgmann, 1987: 29). This artifice becomes problematic for it fails to state what exactly we are progressing toward. One can examine our environmental problems and surmise that perhaps after several centuries of unbridled progress, our actions have still not yielded some utopic human civilization. As we have become more 'progressive' in our outlook, progress has become a normalized phenomena in our psyche.

The relationship between technology, science, economics and politics have all adopted the philosophy of progress. We are continually trying to create new and better technology, open new markets and make new discoveries. This infrastructure is the context of our way of being in the world (Hallen, 1988). Unfortunately, our drive toward progress has usually meant exploiting the non-human world; and, changing our own patterns of behavior to accommodate the 'progressive' changes.

I only need to look at my small village to see the mentality of progress at work. I live in a village that takes on a new "improvement project" every summer. The project usually means that the local environment will be manipulated to create a "better" environment. All the streets in town have been paved. The water treatment plant is upgraded about every five years. The unsightly drainage ditches have changed into an underground system; and, every summer there is a new addition to or renovation of the recreational complex. The village is constantly looking for ways to 'improve' our town site. One of the latest

improvement projects is the paving of all back alleys in the village. Now, why should this be a an illustration of progress and, consequently, environmental destruction? Well, It shows that we regard advancement, or betterment as our ability to control and alter our environment. Most of the village back alleys are either gravel roads, or are still part of the home's backyard. The village has functioned well for the past 25 years with back alleys like this. But now, the village is bursting with a sense of civic pride. Our little town is progressing. When I ask "the old timers" about the changes to the village, most of them will inevitably respond with a comment like: "It sure has progressed in the past 50 years," or "we didn't have all this stuff when we were kids, we had it hard."

My paving story, however, does not mean that everyone is bursting with the same civic pride. There are grumblings about these plans. No one really even thought about their quality of their back alleys, or the absence of a back alley behind their house. The grumblings express themselves in some of the following comments: "we have good enough back alleys," and "they're going to cut down the hedge and wreck the lawn." Amidst these grumblings is also a perception of the inevitable: "well, we can't stop progress," and "something like this was going to happen sooner or later."

I believe that this story illustrates a long since established perception that we are progressive entities with some reward waiting for us in the future. Langdon Winner gives a perfect example of this when he reminisces about his childhood experience of buying shoes. The shoe stores had fluoroscopes which would x-ray your feet under the premise that you would get a better fit. But there was never any questioning of a potential danger. It was progress:

> Of course, everything and everyone around me in those days tended to inspire a fast belief in the religion of progress. Modern was always thought to be superior to "old fashioned." The pattern, however, was certainly not one of tailoring technology to suit human needs. Instead, the practice was that of renovating human needs to match what modern science and engineering happened to make available. If there were problems encountered in following this path, they could be taken up later. But during this time the slogan was, in effect, "We don't know where we're going, but we're on our way" (Winner, 1986: 170).

This concept has established itself in how we interact with the natural world. Progress eventually means that we will manipulate our environment to some extent. It is inevitable. Unfortunately, the natural world is not quite fitting into our concept of progress, for the natural world is dying through our attempts to be progressive. The notion of retreat rejects this ideology of progress of "not knowing where we are going, but we're on our way" because of the environmental damage and social disengagement that we have created as we 'innocently' go on our way.

The accumulative effects of science, technology, economics and politics have been to create a new world of freedom, independence and control over our fate. The changes have been slow and seemingly innocuous. As time passed, the processes adopted controlled and shaped our lives more than we realized. These processes and the ideologies behind them have been accepted as progress, normal and therefore seldom questioned. Now however, those processes which were once heralded as progress are now being questioned by a growing number of people. The degradation to the natural world and some people's sense of disengagement does not fit into the promises of our past. The notion of retreat challenges us to recreate a past that might have been, if different decisions had been made and different paths have been followed.

2.6 Retreat

I have traced the formation of a "western perception" for predominantly two reasons. First, retreat, as a philosophy for environmental reform, is based on an interpretation of how elements in our past formed to construct our current environmental and social behavior. The concept is: "there are points on the space time continuum that if we acted or believed differently we wouldn't have the same kinds of ecological and social problems that we have now." In a clichéd version: "Hindsight has 20/20 vision." Second, this investigation of the past is perceived as necessary for creating a different social and environmental outcome. The assumption is that if we can identify some of the points where we took the wrong turn, we can turn back and get on the correct path.

The elements i have outlined are notable for an understanding of retreat because they are rejected and "opposing" or "contrary" positions or interpretations for the creation of reform are accepted. The literal definitions of retreat can illuminate this ideological move toward a contrary understanding to achieve reform. Retreat, in one definition, is a withdrawal from hostile elements. Retreatist ideology then is withdrawing from "what are" the environmentally and socially hostile elements of "Western perception" and practice. In a second definition, retreat means a place where one finds refuge form hostile elements. This would be the situation or place where one would be insulated from the hostile elements; or, a situation or place in which hostile elements no longer have any power or control. In this sense, retreat would mean establishing "what ought to be" the situation or place most conducive to environmental and social harmony. The final definition of retreat would be the "act " of withdrawing toward the place or situation of stability —an act of withdrawing from the mainstream beliefs and practices, which are perceived to have caused the problems, toward a life which would rectify the situation.

This excerpt form the Tao Te Ching illustrates the kind of ideal that is popularly envisioned as being congruent with "retreat ideology:"

Better to keep
Your country small
Your people few
Your devices simple-
And even those for
Infrequent use.

Let people measure life
By the meaning of death
And not go out of their way
To visit far off places.
With nowhere to travel

And little care for display
Great ships, fine carriages,
And shining weapons become
Mere relics of the past.

Let people recover
The simple life:
Reckoning by knotted cords,
Delighting in a basic meal,
Pleased with humble attire,
Happy in their homes,
Taking pleasure in their
Rustic ways.

So content are they
That nearby towns,
So close the sound
Of dogs and roosters
Forms one chorus,
Folks grown gray with age
May pass away never having
Strayed beyond the village.

Tao Te Ching (translated by Tom Early)

The poem reveals an idealized perception of a "good life." It is the kind of life which is opposite to the dominant Western understanding of the "good life." The poem reveals a value of human interaction with the physical world that is non-dominating. The citizens in

this small village live within the limits of their environment. They engage in the rhythm and flow of a simple life, a life not governed by the lure of high technology, or the power of progressive ambitions. They are a people content and fulfilled by a simpler mode of existence.

I believe this poem captures the psychological nuances of retreatist aspiration. The poem appeals to an "ecology of mind" (Maybury-Lewis, 1992: 35) in which one creates an understanding of the world which is based on a harmony of all the parts (human and natural). This search for harmony compels one to behave 'correctly' to fix the corruption of our past endeavors, to salvage from the past the harmony that we lost. Devall and Sessions, in their discussion of Deep Ecological principles, express the same method of environmental and social reform that the notion of retreat involves:

> Our vital needs are probably more simple than many realize. In technocratic-industrial societies there is overwhelming propaganda and advertising which encourages false needs and destructive desires designed to foster increased production and consumption of goods. Most of this actually diverts us from facing reality in an objective way and from beginning the "real work" of spiritual growth and maturity (Devall and Sessions, 1985. p. 68).

Devall and Sessions have envisioned the kind of lifestyle that is consistent with a retreat from the dominant paradigm in order to create a world in which humans are more connected to the whole.

Can retreat ideology truly create a kind of ecological utopia? I don't think so, or at least not in the sense of an ecological utopia. The infrastructures and perceptions are so pervasive that it would be difficult for us to overcome the last 300 years of institutional inertia that propels our culture. Retreat ideology does, however, offer a unique way of investigating the idea of reform. It offers a creative way in which to look at the influences of our social and ecological past; and, provides a method of experimenting with ideas for future reform. I believe that it is in this realm of tension between the "mistakes of the

past" and the "hopes for the future" that the concept of retreat can be of service in environmental reform.

In the next chapter, I examine this tension between these "mistakes of the past" and the "hopes for the future." How can these tensions between "what is" and "what ought to be" our environmental reality influence environmental reform? I examine how this tension can be used to explore the perception, creation and institution of "value." I also explore how these values motivate a desire for social change leading to environmental reform and social engagement. Finally, I explore the possibility of change that change in "value" might yield. Can it create a platform for the reform of an "ecology of the mind," or can it create the "world of bucolic rural splendor" to which the poem alluded?

Chapter 3

The Noninnocence of Retreat as a Utopia

3.1 Utopia: Designs for Social Change

> The times are comet-crossed. The list of crises grows, and human perfection edges forward only in political rhetoric. It is no surprise that utopia now seems more unattainable than ever. The ecologists, now in their ascendancy, foretell of grim alternatives: we must either radically change the way we live or suffer the effects of planetwide environmental catastrophe. A dark irony then, confronts us: science and its new prophets entreat us to do the impossible, to embrace the "unreal." The realities of a rapidly expanding population, industrial abuses, and a dying earth must give way to the fictions of the utopian life. If man is to ensure his future, we need a primer of instructive utopias.
>
> (Chianese, 1971: 1)

Can retreat bring about the kinds of changes that can save us from a planetwide environmental catastrophe? In this chapter, I examine the concept of reform via "utopian musings." I have chosen the utopian tradition because it is a conscious creation of a new society, which I believe is also the goal of philosophies of environmental reform. First, the utopian tradition urges us to examine our values, and second it urges us to change behaviors based on those values. The behaviors are the "prescriptive" elements of the social design. Although this exploration of utopia will not yield a prescriptive agenda for change implied by the notion of retreat, it can reveal possibilities for environmental reform by questioning the kinds of changes advocated by utopia and examining some of its own foibles.

The concept of Utopia brings to mind visions of a perfect society, a world of peace, harmony, joy, cooperation, of world unity and of ease (Ponsioen, 1969) which are difficult to conceptualize in a world besieged with war, dissonance, despair, competition, disparity and toil. So, what does utopia have to do with retreat and its implications for environmental reform? Dreams of utopia play essential roles in most of our attempts at

creating and changing how we pattern our collective social arrangements; how we develop economic and political systems; and, how we understand our relationships with science and technology. Utopian ideology is at the heart of how we perceive our place in the world. For this reason, utopian thought is fundamental to the construction of environmental reform. It is a potential key for unlocking the concept of retreat as a premise for environmental reform.

3.2 Utopian Tradition as a Tool for Examination

'Utopia' has been a much maligned literary device. Often utopian literature is discounted as an author's vain attempt to dream up the perfect world. The utopic story is discounted as nothing more than an entertaining work of fiction. There is, however, more to utopian musings than an endeavor to write something to keep a reader entertained for a while. The creation of a utopic novel, or the exploration of a utopic vision has its roots in the fertile soil of the author's contemporary social network/organization. It offers the author the opportunity to criticize contemporary society within the safety net of fiction. There is a disparity between how the author perceives the world "to really be" and how she or he perceives that the world "ought to be." The utopia of the **Bible's** garden of Eden was the eternal paradise for humanity, in contrast to the mundane world of suffering, toil and despair into which humans were cast. Plato's **Republic** was designed as the ideal social relationship, in contrast to Plato's own 'corrupt' social reality.

It wasn't until Thomas More wrote **Utopia** in 1516 that the term "utopia" was coined as synonymous to 'the perfect world.' He used it as a pun: 'utopia' as 'no place' and eutopia as 'good place' (Geoghegan, 1987: 1). More created an elaborate fictional world that was on the one hand a 'good place,' but, on the other hand, did not exist. It was a society that was at ease with itself, for it had eliminated what the author considered the

baser elements of his contemporary social environment. More's utopia was "not only the best country in the world, but the only one that has any right to call itself a republic... the Utopian way of life provides... the happiest basis for a civilized community... They've eliminated the root causes of ambition, political conflict and everything like that" (More, 1965: 128 - 131). Utopia was a criticism of the design flaws which More perceived were corrupting his society; he offered the reader a "better" society with which to compare. It is as a comparison that the construction of utopia can provoke individuals to examine their current social reality. Melvin Lasky, Jr. offers this insight into the significance of the utopian narrative:

> What single-minded critics of utopia appear to miss is the "double metaphor," the ambivalent and often dialectical character of the utopian inspiration. Utopias are written out of both hope and despair. They are models of stability concerned in the spirit of contradiction. They are actions -a kind of "action dreaming"- in the name of ideal values: neglected or betrayed in the present, once enjoyed in the past, or yet to be fulfilled in the future. They are interpretations of an existing order, and as often as not programs for change. (Lasky, Jr. 1976: 9)

3.3 Ecotopia: The Hope for Ecological Reform

Ecological philosophers desire environmental reform and have often adopted the utopian tradition as a means of exploring and developing different, and supposedly "better" ecologically based societies. For example, Ynestra King links ecofeminist philosophy with developing utopian ideals: "Ecofeminism supports utopian visions of harmonious, diverse, decentralized communities, using only those technologies based on ecological principles, as the only practical solution for the continuation of life on earth" (King, 1989: 25). Devall and Sessions in their book **Deep Ecology** devote an entire chapter to the exploration of utopia in "Ecotopia: The Vision Defined:"

> It would be a grave injustice to dismiss utopian thought as mere fantasy, visionary and impractical: to consider it restricted to literary forms that bear its label is to underestimate its wide prevalence, at many levels and in all cultures. However expressed, it is essentially a critique of defects and limitations of society and an expression for something better. (Sears, 1965)

The intentions of these ecological philosophers is clear. They wish to convey that there is a "crisis mentality" inherent in the modern perception of "the environment," and a need to construct the new improved society; contemporary society is destroying the ability of the earth's ecosystems to sustain life; and that we have to change, and change fast, if we are to create some "hope" for the future. The changes designed by environmental reform are founded in *opposition to* the crisis; and, are designed to create a social system which would support ecosystem integrity. Retreat is compatible with this conception of interpreting our contemporary social ills and their subsequent effects on the natural world. A "better" more "meaningful" ecologically-based social organization is to be created by retreating to another (utopic) way of life.

3.4 The Oppositional Stance

Retreat reacts to modernism and its associated environmental crisis. The retreatist utopic vision is characterized by traits that first, run contrary to modern Western society; and second, adopts the elements of the "pre-destructed past" which will create the ideal ecological human society. The first trait means that certain modern Western characteristics can be identified as the progenitors of environmental erosion. The adoption of the contrary position would, therefore, create the opposite relationship with the natural world. The adoption of the contrary position is a prevalent method of trying to evoke change in almost any situation. For example, if I am failing a course because I did not study, I could conclude that I would pass if I did the contrary behavior and studied. In retreat, if a "dominance over nature" is perceived to yield an environmental crisis, then an "egalitarian

perspective of nature" is thought to yield a harmonious relationship with nature. The act or belief in the contrary position for soliciting change is prevalent in environmental philosophy. The adoption of "contrary to dominant culture beliefs and practices" is often used to form the basis of ecologically sensitive lifestyles and communities.

Deep ecology and ecofeminists have created charts and developed discussions to reveal the characteristics of an oppositional stance. For example, the dominant world view as characterized by deep ecology has the following traits:

1. The belief in a dominance over Nature.

2. The Natural environment is a resource for human consumption.

3. Material and economic growth are encouraged to keep up with the growing human population; and, consumerism is an active ingredient in this material and economic growth.

4. Those in the dominant culture believe in an infinite resource base.

5. High technology and technological processes will assure future progress and solutions to any problems that may arise.

6. National/centralized communities are supported as a form of social organization (Devall and Sessions, 1985).

The oppositional strategy of deep ecology promotes the following contradictory stance which they believe will promote environmental reform:

1. The belief in the non-dominance of Nature.

2. Nature is inherently valuable. It has intrinsic worth or biospecies equality. It is a worthiness which is independent of human utility or human perception.

3. Humans have elegantly simple material needs which serve the larger goal of self-realization.

4. These needs can be realized by satisfying those basic needs and working within the limits of the Earth's finite supplies (resources).

5. Our use of technology should be appropriate and our process should be non-dominating. We cannot find all the solutions in technology and science.

6. The most appropriate form of social organization that would support these values and practices would be small, de-centralized bioregional communities (Devall and Sessions, 1985).

Ecofeminist theorists point to elements within the Western historical tradition as being root causes for the oppression of both women and nature. "This man's world is on the very edge of collapse... This is because there is no respect for the 'other' in patriarchal society" (Plant, 1989: 2). Griffin states that Western science and religion, which is the basis of patriarchal oppression, alienated humans from the natural world and justified the subordination and exploitation of women and nature (Griffin, 1989). Similarly, King asserts that hierarchical thinking emerged from within Western society and created the systematic denigration of women, minorities and nature (King, 1990). The denigration, subordination, exploitation, and oppression that has been created by Western patriarchal society emerges through the objectification of 'others'. This objectification creates a dualistic society, in which the subject (in this case, male) is placed in position of power over the object (in this case, female or nature). The dualism manifests itself into "binary opposites" revealing the hierarchy of the power structure:

male	female
culture	nature
self	other
subject	object
technological	natural
rich	poor
mind	body
rational	intuitive
physical	spiritual

(King, 1989; D'Sousa, 1989; Shiva, 1989; Spretnak, 1989)

According to ecofeminists, the reorganization of a society depends on the identification of the oppressive elements (left column) within it and, then an implementation of a change or changes (right column affiliated change) to eliminate these oppressive elements.

Ynestra King traces the domination of women and nature through the historical development of Western civilization. Western civilization developed into a patriarchal society which relegated women and nature to the role of "other". By objectifying women and nature, a social system which esteemed "male culture" could justify the subjugation of "others" which did not meet the cultural criteria of value (King, 1989). King attempts to 'follow up' the historical analysis of Western society with an attempt at reconstructing the society based on the significance of the "other" to eliminate ecological and social oppression.

Four ecological principles are representative of this oppositional relationship to the dominant culture. They are as follows:

> 1. The building of Western industrial civilization in opposition to nature interacts dialectically with and reinforces the subjugation of women, because women are believed to be closer to nature. *Therefore, ecofeminists take on the life-struggles of all or nature as our own* [emphasis added].
>
> 2. *Life on earth is an interconnected web, not a hierarchy.* There is no natural hierarchy; human hierarchy is projected onto nature and then used to justify social domination. Therefore, ecofeminist theory *seeks to show the connections between all forms of domination, including the domination of non human nature, and ecofeminist practice is necessarily anti-hierarchical.*
>
> 3. A healthy, balanced ecosystem, including human and non human inhabitants, must *maintain diversity.* Ecologically, environmental simplification is as significant a problem as environmental pollution. Biological simplification, i.e., the wiping out of whole species, corresponds to reducing human diversity into faceless workers, or to the homogenization of taste and culture through mass comer markets. Social life and natural life are literally simplified to the inorganic for the convenience of market society. *Therefore we need a decentralized global movement that is founded on common interests yet celebrates diversity and opposes all forms of domination and violence.*

> 4. The survival of the species necessitates a re-newed understanding of our relationship to nature, or our own bodily nature, and of non human nature around us; *it necessitates a challenging of the nature-culture dualism and a corresponding radical restructuring of human society according to feminist and ecological principles.* Adrienne Rich says, "When we speak of transformation we speak more accurately out of the vision of a process which will leave neither surface nor depths unchanged, which enters society at the most essential level of the subjugation of women and nature by men... (King,1989: 19-20).

The italicized sections in each of the four principles reflect the oppositional stance of the reform. They represent a differing perception in "value" toward the natural world. Adherents to the oppositional value are called to create a social structure with principles and practices found upon this value to create a "positive" (value) change.

Deep ecology and ecofeminism both establish a "contrary to the norm" position as a means of creating a socially and ecologically just society. I have chosen these two environmental philosophies as examples of the 'contrary position' because "retreat" has strong undercurrents within both philosophies. Both are rejections of dominant culture and both seek to retreat from the oppressive elements within it. Retreat then supports these oppositional standpoints to dominant culture. The notion of retreat entails a belief in the inherent value of the natural world, and a belief in the establishment of an engaging and meaningful human life. The means by which to create these relationships is to minimize our use of nature as a resource to be exploited. Nature appropriately provides us with essentials like a home and sustenance; however, we should not exploit Nature to get more than we need. Our scientific and technological infrastructures are to be either minimized (very little technology mediating our experience); or, appropriate (one that would accomplish a task, but not wreak massive destruction on the natural world, or our ability to engage with it). Our material, economic and consumer patterns would be based on small scale localized models that would work within the finity of resources and the ecological

limitations of a particular area. Government would be small and localized, limiting the bureaucracy and control of our modern large scale heavily bureaucratized governments.

In the chart below, I summarize the "oppositional elements" which I regard as fundamental to retreat philosophy.

Modern Western Perspective	**Retreat Perspective**
dominance over nature	cooperation with nature / work within natural limits
individual/social disengagement	individual/social engagement
high technological infrastructure	minimum or appropriate technology infrastructure
infrastructures of scale (economy, technology, politics)	small scale infrastructures (local economy: trade and barter: appropriate technology: shovel vs. dragline; politics: community vs. national / international Gov.)
predominantly urbanized (agri-business, highly structured urban centres, highly resource dependent, highly consumptive)	predominantly rural (subsistence agriculture, small independent homesteads, minimized resource use, sustainable consumption)
oppressive institutionalized power	liberating engaging self-reliance

The identification of oppositional philosophy serves to mark a key issue in attempts to construct "positive" social change. That issue is one of "value" or "perspective of value" It is this issue of value that is problematic to philosophies of environmental reform, or any attempt at creating change. What I am suggesting is that there is a significant assumption on the part of the ecological reformist about what is "wrong" with the situation, and what can make it "right." What if there is disagreement about what is wrong and how it can be made right, or perhaps there may be some question as to whether the problem really does exist at all, or the degree to which it exists?

The choice to retreat from mainstream culture means that a value judgment has been made against that culture. Retreatists perceive mainstream reality to be conflicting with an ethic of care toward the natural world. In this sense, I might choose to retreat from the mainstream society because I believe that the pervasive infrastructure conflicts with my sense of what is morally correct. The establishment of an cohesive 'environmental ethic' is at the root of trying to achieve environmental reform. Rosemary Radford Ruether comments on the establishment of an environmental ethic:

> An ecological ethic must always be an ethic of ecojustice that recognizes the interconnection of social domination and domination of nature.
>
> Nature is a product not only of natural evolution but of human historical development. It partakes of the evils and distortions of human development. There is virtually no place on the planet where one can go to find "nature untouched by human hands." Even if humans have not been there before, their influence has been carried by winds, water, and soil, birds, insects, and animals, who bear within their beings the poisoning effects of human rapine of the globe. Nature, in this sense, can be see as "fallen," not that it is evil itself but in that it has been marred and distorted by human misdevelopment. The remaking of our relation with nature and with each other, then is a historical project and struggle of re-creation (Ruether, 1989: 149).

3.5 The Nature - Culture Dualism

The language used in this citation is a significant clue to the perception of what is "environmentally valuable." In it, as in a wide array of environmental literature, nature takes on a status of purity and perfection, while anything that has been invaded by human contact is sullied or destroyed. Human interaction is understood to be the corrupting force, or when taken to extreme limits, declared as out right evil. Nature takes on a mystical allure. Its purity is darkened by human "exploitation," by our tools of mass "destruction," and our philosophies of "dominance." This language politicizes nature. It gives nature value that is a product of or reliant upon a sense of our role in the world as users and destroyers of the "pure" nature. The earliest progenitors of the North American environmental movement reflect this contempt for humanity and the infallible spirit of

nature: "The conservation movement in North America began in the late nineteenth century as a moral crusade to conserve 'wilderness" —places supposedly uncontaminated by the physical traces of humanity, meaning people of European origin" (Wilson, 1991: 39).

The notion of retreat is also complicated by delineating nature as 'good' and humans as 'bad.' The integrity of nature is only considered truly intact if it is independent of human influence. In retreat, this contempt for human involvement in the natural world is revealed by an effort to minimize "our being in the world." In this sense, there is a desire for a "stillness" of interaction. One retreats from the fast paced, high technology, urbanized "human" created world toward the refuge of nature. Nature becomes idealized for its absence of humanity, or human infrastructure. Ironically, however, this idealization of nature is very much the product of our modern industrialized culture. Nature is a place to which to retreat within our culture, yet nature is usually perceived as something or some place which has never felt the touch of human hands. Nature is idealized for its absence of humanity or human infrastructures. Nature has become a place to retreat from ourselves.

Sometimes, when I feel like I need a break form the "rat race" I will retreat to my sister's rustic acreage, or I go on a solo hike or paddle in the wilderness. I perceive these rural settings or wild lands as somehow being "better" than the constructs of my human communities. Nature is the way it should be. I like to just hike around, or hang out by a lake or a river; but, I always find aspects of my sojourns dissatisfying. I always get disappointed when I run into human things. I feel like nature is being intruded into by all the destructive elements of humanity. But what does this mean for creating a meaningful and lasting change?

How can we establish a "relationship with the natural world" when we don't see a place for ourselves in it? I can see the trend continuing in something like "low" or "non" impact camping. The attitude of this form of "green" camping is: "Take only pictures, and

leave only foot prints" during your excursions out to nature. Methods are devised to conceal the presence of humans in the "natural environment." If I were to build a fire, I would build it below the tide-line if I were sea kayaking, or hiking along the coast. The evidence of my fire would be erased by the action arrival and departure of the next tide. The method would be somewhat different if I were camping in the forests around Hinton. I might use only a stove for cooking. The stove is portable and leaves no visible scar. I might dig a trench fire pit, carefully digging and removing blocks of dirt and vegetation. I dig to the mineral soil. I would then have my fire. When I was finished, I would carefully replace the loose dirt into the trench. I would then replace the blocks of vegetation and dirt. The only immediate visible evidence of my fire would be a "mound-shaped" feature that looked like the rest of the forest floor. However, if I constructed the fire properly, after a few good rains the mound would settle and the vegetation would continue to grow. You would not be able to tell I had been there.

I believe in this method of camping, but two disconcerting ideas emerge. First, is this ritual revealing a "harmonious relationship with nature" or is it simply preserving an "aesthetic" of the "purity of nature" for the next camper? Second, is this act a re-enforcement of a nature-culture dualism that suggests that humans do not belong in the natural world? It would be like me saying, "If I can hide my fire well enough, I can deny that I was in here taking advantage of the forest." The hostility toward our perception of our usurious relationship with nature is almost like a collective neurosis of sub-conscious self-contempt. We must deny our relationship with the natural world, because we taint it (the natural world) if we admit to one.

I look at my reaction to "nature the pure" and "humanity the evil" and I begin to think that the nature-culture dualism is as strong as ever, and still is creeping in as a basic element of environmental reform philosophies. Nature is still upheld with reverence as

being "better" than human. Nature philosophies or strategies (i.e. conservation and preservation movements) which support a nature/culture dualism have not been successful, and supposedly "new" ideas for reform (retreat, ecofeminism, and deep ecology) that are emerging still maintain this perspective:

> [T]hese early nature philosophies -aside from the fact that they have been largely ineffective even on their own terms - is that they are reductionist. They invariably understand nature to be good and civilization -or, in the formulation of deep ecology, humans -bad. This is hardly the basis for a politics of social change (Wilson, 1991: 41).

This issue Wilson raises is important. How can we establish or determine what our role in the world is when being "environmentally sensitive" means feeling and acting on the collective "human guilt" of centuries of natural oppression and social injustice? How can we create truly egalitarian social organizations and environmental ethics when the underlying assumption about human involvement in nature is essentially alienating? This may sound like I think that all humans are self-loathing, nature wreckers who should receive "self-esteem" and "co-dependency" counseling. I do think that to a certain degree we are not even aware of how we re-enforce the nature/culture dualism. This occurs in any number of situations. It may emerge in the way we perceive the "scale" of our environmental destruction. In retreat it arises as an attempt to be as "small scale" or as "still" as you can be without actually "existing at all."

I would have a greater impact on the natural surroundings if I owned and operated an agri-business needing 10 gigantic tractors to harvest my 6000 acre genetically engineered wheat mono-culture. I would have less impact on the natural world if I owned a subsistence farm and I used a horse team and horse drawn implements to harvest my 6 acre mixed vegetable garden. In the first scenario, the human relationship to the natural world is like throwing a house-sized boulder into small lake. The impact of the boulder will cause huge waves to radiate out, potential upsetting anything that gets in the way. The

second scenario, is like throwing a grain of sand into the same lake. Its impact might create a few ripples, but its effects dissipates quickly. The environmentally reform precept would attempt to make that grain of sand as small as it possibly could, so that human impact on the "natural world" would be minimized. The relationship, however, still creates a dualism.

3.6 The "Collective Crisis" of Reform

Another issue, surrounding the perception of value and social change is that of "value perspective." The utopian creation of a "better" society based on a new system of values is based on an assumption that all the participants are like minded. The creation of an "ecologically sensitive" community is based on this assumption as well. Arne Naess suggested that

> [T]he backbone of the deep ecology movement is its "silent majority," who all over the world fight mindless destruction of free Nature, with a passion derived from deep philosophical or religious, mostly unarticulated, attitudes. Often isolated, such people are helped by knowing that there are thousands, if not millions, form Australia to Canada, from Japan to South America, who feel very much the same way --desperation, sorrow and anguish. There is a tiny minority who eagerly, but more or less imperfectly, try to systematically articulate what these people stand for. It is a significant job, and different articulations are needed. The prospect of reformation and revision is always to be greeted with gratefulness (Naess, 1988: 76).

The suggestion of the support of a "silent majority" needs to be examined. I would like to think that there is an overwhelming majority of the globe's human population which would support a new 'ecologically based' paradigm; however, I don't think that there is (at least not in the sense of the development of a new all encompassing "ecological" meta-narrative). Can we assume that people will or can value nature in the same way; and, then use that value to create particular ends?

Gophers (they are actually Richardson's ground squirrels, but everyone I knows calls them gophers) are a very symbolic representation of "Nature" for me. They play a major

role in how I regard the value of nature. I remember, as a child, getting excited when I saw the first gophers in spring. Every time I'd see one I'd say, "Look! Gopher!" I used to drive my parents crazy. The car ride between Wabamun to Edmonton was never so long for them, as it was during those first few weeks of gopher season. They were wonderful, beautiful little creatures who just hung out in the fields and on the side of the roads, doing their little gopher thing. I can't remember why, but one day when I was around 10 years old, I went with my brothers out to the field. They were going to shoot the gophers because our friends' cows were tripping in the gopher holes. I was mortified that they would "murder the poor innocents." My brothers, in the infinite wisdom of young boys, sought to break me of my "silly" notions about the gophers. They handed me the gun and said, "It's not that bad. They just pop their heads up and then ya blast 'em. It's fun. Then coyotes and stuff come and eat 'em." I took the gun and aimed to the side of several gophers. I shot and missed (I was secretly trying to save as many of their little rodent lives as I could by wasting bullets). My brothers caught on though and took the gun away, and then called me a "pansy." The "slaughter" was then free to continue. In all fairness to my brothers, they didn't see anything "wrong" with what they were doing. They were just "gophers" that did not mean that much in the grand scheme of their lives.

The gopher story is markedly different for a friend of mine. I have just about died in head-on-collisions in attempts to let gophers (and other creatures) "live long and prosper." I can't stand the thought of killing any creature, even if it is by accident. I went into a two week state of mourning after accidentally murdering a flock of pine siskins which looked remarkably "road like" as my van ran over them. A friend of mine, on the other hand, has just about killed us in head-on-collisions for quite the opposite feelings. She feels that gophers are the vermin. Every opportunity she gets to "extinguish the scourge of the

prairie provinces" is taken, even if it means catapulting her dear friend through the windshield of her car. Hers is the truest form of "loathing" that I have ever seen for a "creature" of "nature."

The gopher stories reflect the magnitude of diversity in perception that can arise on any one subject. None of us felt the exact same way, or valued those little creatures in the exact same way. We couldn't understand how or why our relationship with them was different. We didn't agree with how we should interact with them. I wanted some aesthetic relationship. My brothers were indifferent. My friend wanted them all dead. This might seem like a trivial story; but, how can environmental reforms like "retreat" harmonize all the complex variables and move "everyone" to "love" the natural world? How can people be encouraged to behave in an "ecologically sensitive" way? How can differences in these "perceptions" and "behaviors" be resolved?

3.7 Value Differences and Limitations to Reform

The issue of value is further complicated when I realize that these "value" orders can be perceived differently, even among those who profess to be "environmentally aware." I was having lunch one day with a friend of mine. We both consider ourselves to be "environmentally sensitive" and are "up" on all the latest "green methods" and "environmental philosophies." Anyway, I am whipping my "environmentally friendly" lunch out of my "environmentally friendly" reusable containers when my buddy says, "Um, Ange. Is that 'bleached white bread' I see you consuming?" Not to be outdone, I quickly responded "Um yes, yes it is. Might that be 'nylon' track pants that you are wearing? My aren't those wonderful fully synthetic light hikers (shoes) on your feet? I wonder if the third world women who made them actually earned enough wages to feed their starving children?"

The conversation deteriorated, however, three things about it struck me as important. First, here we were, two "environmentally aware" people and we could not agree on our values or our behaviors. How can we create a "meta-narrative" of environmental reform when people who supposedly have similar beliefs cannot resolve their differences? Second, the complexity of our interactions and values significantly diminish our capacity to establish any one "meta-narrative" (I will discuss this issue later in the chapter). Third, we were both being very "morally righteous."

3.8 Moral Righteousness

The lunch date had a profound effect on how I listened to conversations and interpreted literature about philosophical ideas for environmental reform. I began to listen to the tone of conversations, and how language was used to establish the "moral value" of environmental philosophies. I began to think that there is a certain amount of "moral superiority" in theories and practices of environmental reform. I think this "morally superior" attitude can potentially be a disabling factor in creating change. My lunch companion and I, created moats to protect ourselves; instead, of building bridges to investigate the significance of differences.

The "moral superiority" perspective is connected to the reductionist "good-evil" dualism. How can we address the potentially alienating reductionist perspective which emerges? Retreat fosters the support of this dualism. The retreatists in Coffin and Lipsey's, and in Jacob and Brinkerhoff's back-to-the-land studies "celebrated" the return to a simple agrarian lifestyle, while they denigrated the "rat race" existence of the urban world. Could the adherence to these "better" values alienate the people who were still in the "bad" value system from the people in the "good" system? Could it alienate the "other" of the urban world from changing or wanting to change?

3.9 Prescriptive Forms of Change

The utopian tradition is useful in examining the concept of differing values and the effects that it might have. The utopian ideology is like a doctor. It diagnosis the illness (the detrimental effects of the contemporary society) and then prescribes the appropriate treatment. Doctor Utopia, however, does not allow the patient to seek a second opinion. In this way, treatment is limited to a very strict regime. Retreat (and environmental reform in general) is similar, in the establishment of a particular set of "rules to live by" and "beliefs to have" which will govern the operation of the reformed society. The reformed system is intact as long as there are no challenges to its authority. In order for it to be successful, it would have to exist within a "vacuum." When one begins to question those set practices and beliefs, then the integrity of the structure is weakened. First, how could a retreatist philosophy create homogenous values and practices which would lead to an environmentally-based social paradigm, when there is such a disparity in values and beliefs? Second, is such a moral merger into a universal moral theory desirable (Harding, 1987)?

There is a difficulty in trying to universalize a "world view" because there are so many differences (gender, race, culture, religion, individuality, etc.) to contend with (Harding, 1987). In this way, "retreat" as a universal agent of reform would need to address the complexity of these differences. I think too often, this is where the "creation" of a "better" or "utopic" social order begins to fall apart. The reform is built within the vacuum of its own values and beliefs. The different philosophies of reform establish their own "principles," similar to the ones presented earlier (deep ecology, ecofeminist, and my own retreat chart). They call for a change toward these principles of reform. The principles are appealing because they give a prescriptive way of dealing with the environmental crisis. For example, if I were to believe that nature has the same status as humans; and I were to

practice subsistence agriculture; use appropriate technology; and, live in a non-dominating way, then I would be living the "ecologically-based" lifestyle. The difficulty is that I am influenced by and influence other people; and, I am influenced by and influence my physical environment. I am not living in an ecological vacuum. The question then is how can "retreat" cope with the many differences which may challenge it as the "universal method" for environmental reform?

3.10 The Noninnocence of a Universal Theory

The second question, "is such a moral merger into a universal moral theory desirable," (Harding, 1987) asks us to explore whether we should attempt such a grand plan of social re-construction. I support this line of questioning because of the "variety of differences" that are involved; and, because of the disturbing thought of replacing one method of living (the Western way) with another method of living (the Retreat way). What if it does not "in reality" create the world we "expect," but instead creates something else? For example, I have been searching for means of merging environmental philosophies (ecofeminism and deep ecology) with "practice." How do we move beyond the theory and into a practical application of those philosophies to our lifestyles and social systems? I find the initial "ideals" very appealing; however, I get "disillusioned" when I begin to think about how those changes would influence my life now. My example is the idea of being satisfied with living within the limits of my "bioregion." I am quite satisfied with my home and the immediate area around it, but I also value my freedom to travel outside that region. I love going to the West coast. I want to travel to England. Does the adoption of a bioregional community mean that we wouldn't be able to travel? How would we enforce that ideal: through legislation, oppression, education? The creation of a

"better" social construction might yield some changes that are unexpected and perhaps undesirable.

Jane Flax provides some insight into the dilemma of prescriptive change, and the potential danger of moving from one social meta-narrative (Western) to another meta-narrative (i.e. Retreat) as a means of creating a "desired" reform:

> The Enlightenment hope is that utilizing truthful knowledge in the service of legitimate power will assure both freedom and progress. This will occur only if knowledge is grounded in and warranted by a universal reason, not particular "interests." The accumulation of more knowledge (the getting of more truth) results simultaneously in an increase in objectivity (neutrality) and in progress. To the extent power / authority is grounded in this expanding knowledge is too progressive, that it becomes more rational and expands the freedom and self-actualization of its subjects who naturally conform their reason to its (and their) laws. Power can be innocently or purely emancipatory; "rational" power can be other than and not productive of new forms of domination. Such power can be neutral (it cannot hurt anyone) and transparent in its exercise and effects. Hence it is not really power at all, especially when it works by / through such neutral mediums as the law (Flax, 1992: 447-448).

Environmental philosophies, like retreat, thrive on the ideal that there is a "truthful knowledge" to be had. There is a "sense of rightness" accompanying the analysis of the dominant world view and the establishment of ecological principles on which to pattern social change. Retreat finds truth in the value of "past" ideals and "past" practices which were left behind as 'we' moved toward the modern. The "universal reason" of retreat is the ability to capture that lost past, in order to solve the environmental crisis of the present. In this way, retreat is an idealization of our past, an understanding of the past that may, in actuality, not have existed at all. We have created a perception of past practices (low impact technology, small communities, and agrarian lifestyles) and past beliefs (harmony with nature and between people). The appeal of "retreat" is the hope that it generates. It is the psychological hope of striving toward a utopic ideal (Flax, 1992). In this case, a retreat toward an idealized past.

But even if we were to place "retreat" within a "vacuum" and establish it as the dominant form of social / ecological organization, would it be the emancipatory creation that our ideal suggests? Flax cautions us to investigate this desire for a "universal" organization. The adoption of a different system may change things, but it will also develop its own patterns and beliefs. Citizens will adopt, enforce and be molded by the "reason" of their system, just as Western beliefs and patterns have "just" become as "normal" for us as "that is just the way that it is here" mentality. It is helpful to ponder Ursula Franklin's observations on the "house that technology built." The structure of the house decides who can come in and who must stay out (Franklin, 1992). I think that our idealization of the ideal past might blind us to its ability to determine who can participate in it. It will be the "house that retreat built" and it will determine who can come in and who must stay out.

Retreat, and most forms of philosophies for environmental change, embrace the notion that there is some form of innocent "environmental knowledge" that will form an emancipatory movement. As I mentioned earlier, I am inspired by the hope of their claims, but these reforms rarely explore the potential impact of an "all encompassing" reform. I believe this is an area that requires more examination within the field of environmental philosophy, especially, since the call is for "global" change. Some potential questions to ask are: How would 'we' encourage these reforms? How do 'we' deal with conflict? How do 'we' "control" our system? The utopic tradition illuminates the possibilities, some of which I do not find particularly appealing. The creation of a "Utopia" even though it does exist in a "vacuum" does rely on strict procedures to maintain order. The order can be maintained through methods such as coercion, legislation, morality, indoctrination, terror, education, inducement, psychological conditioning, or total conditioning (Goodwin, 1978). Since no knowledge or change can be perceived as

being "innocent" or without consequence, our agendas of environmental reform must explore the possible effects. I believe that concepts like "retreat" do not explore the potential consequence and rely too heavily on the idealized outcome of change.

In this chapter, I have explored the influence of values and differences in constructing social change. Social change based upon an homogenous utopic idea of what the future should be like is challenged by the complexity of our world. Perhaps, retreat is like More's "Utopia." It is a "good place" where people live in an idealized harmony with nature and each other; however, it is "no place" in that the complexities of "reality" make it unattainable, or perhaps an undesirable place. The complexity reveals that we should be cautious in our desires and construction of a "new order."

It may appear that I have poked a hole in the balloon of retreat or environmental reform. However, I believe that I have pointed out the difficulty in creating a comprehensive "social order." I do not mean to imply that there is no hope for change because I think there is. I do think, however, that the creation of a unified social organization is unattainable because of complexities of social existence, and undesirable because the new social organization may not be as liberating as was hoped. In the next chapter, I explore a more "manageable" form of retreat: retreat on the small scale or individual level.

Chapter 4

The Ideal of Retreat and the Nature of Change

4.1 The Creation of Change and Reform

The avowed goal of environmental philosophy is to examine the detrimental effects of Western culture on the natural world and on human relations; and then, to create a new paradigm that would be both ecologically sensitive and socially engaging. However, the creation of a "sweeping" ecological reform has been confined to the pages of environmental philosophy. The complexity of our infrastructures and relationships make creating "universal reform" difficult, as well as problematic. In this chapter, I explore the concept of change in forming an "ideal future." I examine movements for change which advocate retreating "back-to-the-land;" the "assimilation of retreat" by mainstream culture; and, the subversive nature of change.

4.2 Retreating to an Alternative Lifestyle

Retreat has been supported as a means of creating reform in many philosophies of change. However, as was discussed earlier, there are difficulties associated with the concept of creating a "widescale" prescriptive change based on "retreat." The infrastructures of the Western world are so pervasive that creating wide-spread, deep seeded social change is a difficult endeavor. But that does not mean that there are "no" possibilities available for change; or, that there are not any people who are willing to make changes based upon "retreatist" ideals. There are currents within Western culture that often call for a "retreat" from some particular element within the dominant culture. Environmentally based retreat is founded upon the perception of catastrophic environmental degradation caused by mainstream practices of social and ecological injustice. The concept of environmentally based retreat has tended to manifest itself in

"idealized" ways, like in the advocacy of a retreat 'back-to-the-land' or the advocacy of sweeping ecologically based reform.

4.2.1 The Idealization of Time

The "ideal" of retreat is an important element in understanding how we perceive change. There is a curious blend of past, present and future in the desire to create change. It is a construction of reality that exists relatively independent of the linear perspective of time; instead, it relies a great deal on the ability of our imaginations to manipulate and create different perceptions of our past, present, or future. The retreatist ideal creates the "reality" of the past as being a "golden era." In this sense, the past is presented as a time in human history in which people and nature co-existed in a harmonious relationship. One finds this idealization of the past throughout environmental literature; and through attempts to recapture the "idealized" past. It can be found in things like the advocacy for earth-based spirituality: gaia worship, goddess spirituality and neo-pagan spirituality (Metzger,1989; Hamilton, 1989; Reuther, 1989; LaChapelle, 1989; Eisler, 1990; Starhawk, 1990; Javors, 1990). There is also an idealization of the past of "other" traditions. The traditions of eastern religions like Taoism and Buddhism (Devall and Sessions, 1985); and, in the tribal wisdom of pre-Western globalization (Maybury-Lewis, 1992; Plant, 1989). The idealization of the past is also realized in the popularity of the "pastoral." The works of Emerson and Thoreau, and the popularity of the lifestyle and achievements of John Muir are popular references for the idealization of an ecologically-based past. There is a "hope-fored" return to the pastoral existence of a place like Thoreau's Walden Pond.

The creation of the "idealized past" perhaps meets its most significant entrenchment in the North American psyche via the field of recreation. We retreat from the fast-paced

urban, industrial lifestyles of our present to the pastoral charm of the countryside or to the perceived "pre-human" wilds of our national "parks." The longing to return to the idealized past can be seen in such endeavors as rural museums. The past is saved and presented in the artifacts of an era, and the nostalgic portrayal of the lives of those people from that past. The town of Stony Plain has "heritage murals," as a tourist attraction, painted on the sides of buildings within the town. The murals "capture" significant moments in local history and portray notable local citizens. They are beautiful paintings. Yet, they capture only aspects of the past . The paintings conceal the context of those historical people's everyday realities, and the difficulties which they had with living in their own "society." These images of the past are out of context with a "reality" which probably existed in that time. There is a creation of an "ideal" of past that is perceived to have existed at one time. It is possible to create a past that represents a "historical era" where humans and nature lived in harmony and use this perception of the past to develop a philosophy that can help us "re-create" that idealized past that we can retreat toward in the future.

The perception of "present reality" however, is dependent upon an ability to create a paradoxical interpretation of past events. In this interpretation, there are events and situations in the past where people in the Western world have "strayed" from the ideals and practices of the "golden era of harmony." The environmental degradation and social alienation that we currently are struggling with are then seen as the results of the "past gone wrong." Points along the historical time line are identified as moments when ideals and behaviors that formed the current destructive "Western perspective" were adopted. Events like "the scientific revolution" (Merchant, 1989), "the industrial revolution" and the birth of market economics are "isolated" as historical points creating detours from the true path of the "golden era." The "present" is the time in which we try to re-construct that

"ideal past" and project it into the future. The "future" projected by environmental reform is a future created by the institution of sweeping environmental reform. It requires a correction of all those points at which we "de-toured" from the "true" path, to create that utopic future of the "idealic past."

4.2.2 The Ideal Morality of Retreat

The perception of the past, present and future has a profound effect on "retreat" as the ideology for creating environmental reform. Ferenc Maté rejects the dominant culture based upon the "enslaving" effects which it has on us, and its ability to stop us from living a "reasonable life" (a reasonable life seemingly existed in some time past). The following is Maté's "quiz" for the question: "what constitutes a reasonable life." The quiz and Maté's answers reveals the tension between perceptions of past, present and future:

> It is not difficult to figure out what constitutes a reasonable life. You can, if you like pain, do it by elimination, by listing your daily activities and asking yourself "How does it feel?"
>
> 1. Being shocked awake from a deep sleep in mid-dream by a heartless gadget every morning. Answer: Torture.
>
> 2. Breaking Olympic records in the Career-Octathelon: rising, crawling, dumping, showering, shaving, clipping nose hairs, gray-suiting (or Nairing, spraying-hair-until-bullet-proof-helmet, clown-facing and dressing), chomping, slurping, cursing, and dashing to car. Answer: Humiliating.
>
> 3. Lurching, stopping, bumping, gridlocking while holding back caffeine rush so you don't tear off your car roof and serial-kill the first hundred people you find. Answer: Trying.
>
> 4. Being locked in office or factory with the boss hovering over you, smiling when you need to scream, nodding politely when you want to scream, nodding politely when you want to smash his nose flat with your forehead. Answer: Unbearable.
>
> 5. Lunching lumpy tepid mush with the combined fragrance of Pine-Scent and puppy chow. Answer: Don't remind me.
>
> 6. Repeating all of the above 10,000 times before you die. Answer: No way!

> Or you can simply ask yourself what you would like to do if you could retire today. Most people would say, "Get a little house with a garden in the country or in a small town and live happily ever after."
>
> So what are you waiting for? Why not sell the house, pack up the kids, kiss the boss goodbye and head for the hills?
>
> For economic security, emotional calm, diversity of work, and living in complete harmony with nature, nothing can surpass the classic, mostly self-sufficient, country family. As John Berger said, "it is the only class of people with a built-in resistance to consumerism." And it also has a built-in resistance to unemployment, recessions, inflation, deflation, traffic jams, and crime. In other words, it is the only class with a built-in ability to tell the hectic, frantic world to drop dead! How can anything feel better than that?! (Maté, 1993: 209-210)

I read Maté excerpt and I find an immediate "allure" to it. His is a call to "drop the evils of this (present, modern) world" and "pack up and head for the hills" (create the utopic future, by recreating the ideal past). This call is attractive because of the manipulation of the constructs of "time," yielding the charismatic feature of the concept of retreat. The charismatic appeal of retreat plays off the perceived "historical tradition" of the nature-culture dualism. I believe part of the appeal which the nature-culture dualism offers the individual is the "clarity of choice." If one can identify something as "bad" or an action as "wrong," then one can also identify something as being "good" or an action as being "correct." As identified earlier, the nature-culture dualism presents anything human, especially modern human as being "bad" —being "stuck in the rut of modernity" means subjecting one's self to its traps, while on the contrary, anything that is "natural" or "of the past" is "good, right and just." Therefore, the closer that we can get to that idealic perspective of "nature" and the "natural process," the "better" off we will be. It makes life much easier to live, and our choices much easier to make when we perceive that there are such clearly defined notions of what is "right " or what is "wrong."

I believe there is a sense of security in retreating to this idealic "system" which supports an individuals "perceptions of what ought to be." There is also the underlying "psychological security" of believing that this ideal place or time existed at some time in the

past. If it existed in the past, there must be some way of creating it for the future. For example, I am concerned about the present state of the natural world, and the role that humans have in it. I live in a modern society in which I have access to just about every amenity available. My situation allows me to live in a small village and commute by car to my job. I commute a total of about 95 minutes by car to my job in the city. I know that my car is one of the "demons" in our current environmental "nightmare." My car is made out of refined metals and alloys. Metals that were ripped from the side of some mountain, or from deep within the earth —the extraction of which caused some significant damage somewhere. The metal and the mixing of the alloys used massive amounts of energy (probably from fossil fuels or a hydro projects) in their refinement. The effluent from these processes are spewing all sorts of "junk" into the atmosphere and waterways, causing massive environmental degradation. Right now, some poor beluga whale's body is being treated as toxic waste because of the creation of my and other cars. The plastic, gas and rubber are all petroleum bi-products, which through their extraction, refinement and use are pushing the planet a little closer to the edge of oblivion. It does not end with the construction of my car. The roads I drive on, the traffic lights I stop at, and the traffic laws I follow are all infrastructures created for "my car" and millions of cars just like it. It is an infrastructure that, as I creep through rush hour traffic, begins to control me (to control us). Everyday that I step out my door and into my car, I drive another nail into the coffin of our planet's health, and the loss of my "ecological sensitivity." How do I deal with the choices that this modern world offers me, when I don't agree with what it is doing to the world, or to me? Retreat, in a very idealistic way, offers "the answers" to the conundrum. I could live an ecologically "better" and more "fulfilling" lifestyle if the decisions I had to make were founded upon the "retreat ideal." I wouldn't be stepping outside my door and into my car for a 95 minute commute, and carrying all the associated

"psychological and moral" baggage with me that such a choice would make. I could however "retreat" to the behaviors and practices of that idealic "past time" —the time when there was a symmetry between our behaviors and practices and the processes of the natural world. I would, instead, be stepping outside my door into my farm-yard. I would live a non-dominating lifestyle. Appropriate technologies would allow me to have a home and livelihood that are in harmony with the natural world around me. My farmlife would be in sync with my rural setting and I would be engaged in a non-dominating relationship with the natural world. The lifestyle of the "modern me" would be nothing more than a horrible memory, while the lifestyle of the "retreat me" would be one of harmonious pastoral splendor.

The ability to manipulate our understanding of the past, present and future helps to create a morality based on the perception of "how it was" in the ideal past and "how it ought to be" in our idealic future. This moral perception of the past allows one to identify "vice" or "virtue" occurring in the present. It also allows one to use that perception to create or motivate a change toward the future. There are, however, difficulties in creating the "sweeping changes" of a "culture-wide" retreat. The pervasive infrastructures of Western culture, and the many "differences" within Western culture and within the reform philosophies make that kind of a wide-scale change problematic and difficult to achieve. There is, however, the ability to use these "idealic constructions" of an environmental past, present and future on a personal level.

4.3 The Assimilation of Ideals by Dominant Culture

The ability of an individual to live according to an "idealic philosophy" is easier to achieve than widespread social change. Individuals and small groups often do attempt to retreat "back-to-the-land" of which Maté spoke. Retreat allows those individuals to live

according to their own personal moral constructions. The construction of these moral prescriptions about nature and an individual's ability to create an appropriate lifestyle based on those values is an essential element in retreat (Jacob and Brinkerhoff, 1986; and Coffin and Lipsey, 1981). One need only look to the many popular "country lifestyle" magazines and to the increasingly popular "environmental philosophies" to realize that "retreat ideology" and a morality based on an "idealized environmental past" has a fairly strong following. There are many publications which appeal to the "values" and living skills of the past as catalysts to creating the lifestyle which would be "better" for the environment and more fulfilling for the people who practiced it. *Mother Earth News* is marketed as "The Original Country Magazine." *Harrowsmith* is billed as "Canada's Magazine of Country Living," while *Backwoods Home* is "a practical journal of self-reliance!" These are popular magazines. They have (collectively) subscription rates that go into the millions. This body of environmentally-based lifestyle literature supports retreat philosophy, and targets individuals, families and small groups who have either moved back-to-the-land, live in a rural environment, or have aspirations to live such a lifestyle as their audience:

> A dynamic body of popular literature has arisen over the past two decades that has undoubtedly contributed to the back-to-the-land movement as much as reflected it. This literature includes "how-to" magazines like *Mother Earth News* (with over 1,000,000 subscribers and its own research institute), Countryside, *Farmstead*, and *Harrowsmith*, as well as broad philosophical justifications for simple rural living (e.g., Shumacher, 1973). An underlying thread running through both the technical and philosophical books and articles is a preoccupation with the fragility of the earth's ecosystems. Since we are now purportedly at a "turning point" (Capra, 1982) in our relationships with the earth -industrialization is inexorably destroying the planet (Meadows et al., 1972)- the sane alternative, virtually the only way to survival, is to return to simple, rural-based lifestyles. The return to simple living and the consequent loss of the urban/leisure culture is not viewed with regret; rather it is celebrated as the "good life" (Nearing and Nearing, 1970, 1979).
>
> Beyond the issues of survival of the planet and the general welfare of the human family, the back to the land literature reflects the particular concerns of the movements adherents. These particular concerns center on the personal freedom derived form the control of basic productive, if only subsistence,

> resources and are expressed through ideological elaboration of the ideal of self-reliance (Jacob and Brinkerhoff, 1986: 44).

Originally, I was interested in these magazines because they revealed that there was a significant current within mainstream culture that was trying to change the way it lived. These were people who were trying to fit in with their "ecologically sensitive" values by retreating from dominant culture. The exploration of "individual" attempts at creating a retreat lifestyle actually illustrates a great deal about trying to create environmental change. First, retreat can be achieved on an individual level in the manner in which Jacob and Brinkerhoff's description presents it. Second, the retreat ideal (as represented by individual retreat) is being subverted by the dominant culture. Third, the element of "subversion" begins to emerge as a method for creating change. The second and third elements are key to my perception of how "retreat" ideology may eventually influence change.

I use the magazines as an example of the current of retreat that occurs on the individual or small scale level because they fulfill my ideal of what the retreat lifestyle encompasses. I can flip through the pages of these magazines and see the manifestations of a "retreat ideal" that are making qualitative differences in the lifestyles of the people who live it. This lifestyle is achieved with the "concern" for the environment in mind. However, another element begins to emerge as I explore the retreat of individuals back to these idealic rural lifestyles. Throughout the exploration of the " retreat ideal," one begins to see how much the ideal is being subverted by the massive and pervasive infrastructures of the dominant culture. If one flips through the pages of these "country-lifestyle" magazines to see the "simple, ecologically-sensitive lifestyles" being portrayed, one begins to recognize that the "ideal" might not be achieving its "reality." The ideology of retreat is being subverted by the dominant culture. In fact, after examining many of these "popular magazines," I half expect to see a huge billboard on Highway 16 that says (under a huge

golden "M") "*Mother Earth News* Over 30 million sold." At $3.50 a copy there is a fair bit of cash being generated by a "back-to-basics" lifestyle. This does not include the money which is generated for the "advertising" of "green products and services" and "appropriate technologies." In other words, the "retreat" ideal has become subverted by the mainstream infrastructures of economics and consumerism.

The magazines are an example of the irony of a "call to reform to a basic rural lifestyle." On the one hand, the magazines are founded on the principle of a "care for nature," for the "responsibility of human action," and importance of living an "ecologically appropriate lifestyle." The articles within the magazines tell us "how-to" move back-to-the-land, build the old homestead, rear the animals, cultivate the crop and make a living, all within the limitations presented by the natural world. Anything the neophyte "retreatist" wants to learn can be found within these pages. However, when one puts down the $3.50 plus tax and begins to peruse page after page of advertising, one wonders if "retreating" back to a simpler life is really that much simpler, less expensive, more engaging, or as good for the environment as the "retreat ideal" promises. The retreat lifestyle has been usurped, and the dominant culture has a new "market niche."

The phenomena of the dominant culture's "co-option" of retreat is widespread. Maté's appeal for us to "head for the hills" (to retreat to a rural or a small town existence) does occur. Many people must have heard this call to rural or small town living; however, not exactly in the way Maté envisions. There is the "allure" which a retreat to the rural and small town offers. The ideal of returning to places with "better values" and a "better environment" motivates the retreat. I have observed the reconstruction of the "rural" space between Edmonton and Wabamun for the past 20 years. People have been returning to the "country" or to the "small towns" in droves, and for many of the "better" characteristics that one is supposed to achieve after a "retreat." Here are many of the popular reasons that

I have heard: "There is nothing like living in the country or a small town." "Everything is so much cleaner here." "It is a better environment for kids to grow up in." "Ah, the fresh country air." There is a nostalgic appeal to moving back to the country, or to a small town. People are retreating to the idealized past which the country of small town represents. Yet, the retreat from the urban to rural migration has caused a great deal of environmental degradation. When I was a child, Highway 16 (a two-lane highway) allowed us to drive through the sparsely populated countryside from our home in Wabamun (a hamlet) to town (Edmonton). The only things between Wabamun and Edmonton were farms and two very small towns (Stony Plain and Spruce Grove). The only thing that told a passer-by that Stony Plain existed was a sign, an intersection and a couple of grain elevators in the distance. Spruce Grove was noticeable because the highway actually bi-sected the town. There was a row of single story businesses on one side and three grain elevators on the other. Other than these two towns, the road to Edmonton was flanked by farms and bush. Edmonton was the "west end" for me. We rarely went past "Centennial Mall" on 170th Street. Now, the whole face of the landscape has changed. The distinction between the "rural" and the "urban" has collapsed and blurred. Edmonton has sprawled about 15 kilometres west from where "Centennial Mall" used to be. Spruce Grove and Stony Plain, which were once about 10 kilometres apart, are now on the verge of linking up through housing and business developments. The rest of the countryside has changed as well. Highway 16 is now a divided highway between Lloydminster in the east and Hinton in the west. There are still some farms along the highway, but many of them have been subdivided for trailer parks, housing lots and acreages. The whole character of the landscape has changed.

The interesting thing is that many of these developments are named after some pastoral setting, natural surrounding or historically significant elements that at one point in

time meant something or was characteristic of the area. Glory Hills Estates, Parkland Village and Brookside Estates were all named after local features that in just about all three cases no longer carry the characteristics of their namesake. The glory hills are subdivided into acreage packages and some of those hills have even been bulldozed to "improve" the landscape for the new urban refugees. Parkland Village is a very large, highly concentrated trailer court. It is practically devoid of any of the vegetation that would be considered part of the parkland ecosystem; and, most of the brook at Brookside estate runs through a culvert.

The other ironic aspect about this urban sprawl is that moving back to these locations is viewed with the "ideal of retreat" in mind. People are moving away from the "decay" of the urban environment in Edmonton; and, retreating toward the idealic "lifestyle" that the "country" or the "small town" offers. Even if the residents are not practicing "the ecological aspect" of retreat, many are motivated by a perception of "rural" and of "nature" which is "better" or "purer" than the urban or human environment of the city. It does not appear to matter that these new landscapes are becoming the "urban jungles" that were being fled in the first place. One thing that this usurpation of "retreat" ideology means is that the advocacy of a "mass retreat" (as the universal environmental reform) would probably cause environmental destruction not assumed by the ideal.

4.3.1 The Acceptable Nature of Minority Traditions

The subversion of the "retreat" ideal by elements within the dominant culture, ironically, causes another "difficulty" for retreat as a reform movement. Retreat's adoption by the mainstream means that retreat is an "acceptable" current within the larger stream of modern culture. Devall and Sessions address the Deep ecology movement from the

perspective of the establishment of an "ecological consciousness" founded in a "minority tradition:"

> "There is a minority, but persistent tradition in Western politics and social philosophy. It is also a tradition found in many other cultures and historical eras, including Native American cultures, and Eastern traditions including Taoism and some Buddhist communities. In the west, it is found in numerous revolts of people seeking local autonomy from centralized state authority (Devall and Sessions, 1985: 18).

There is a willingness within Western mainstream culture to let "minority traditions" exist as a "small" part of the "larger" culture. There is also a willingness to assimilate "minority traditions" from other cultures (especially if there is an opportunity to exploit the minority for some purpose). In this sense, the call to adopt or explore "minority traditions" is ironic in that it will most likely be welcomed into, or be rediscovered by the mainstream. For example, Native American culture is a very popular "cultural commodity" (Wilson, 1991). "Indian" theme campgrounds have opened up all over Europe; and, "Native American Ceremonies" are practiced as an "alternative belief system" by many non-Native peoples. The adoption of "minority traditions" occurs through the popularity of "indigenous clothing fashions." Clothing from Nepal, South America and Africa can be found at any of the local "farmer's markets." The "minority tradition" has become the latest fashion for our dominant culture to consume and subvert for our own purposes, in very much the same way "back-to-the-land" or "retreat" has become commoditized by things like magazines, environmental media coverage, and the "green" movement. The citizens of our modern culture are "buying" the ideals of retreat as they are marketed (subverted) by the dominant culture. So, where does this commodification of "retreat" by dominant culture leave the "ideal of retreat" as an agent of reform? Ironically, the "ideal of retreat" may itself be able to create change in an insidious method by subverting the mainstream which tries to assimilate it.

4.4 The Subversion of Dominant Culture as a Form of Change

If retreat can be subverted by dominant culture, then why can't "retreat" as an ideal "act upon" or "subvert" dominant culture? Subversion of dominant culture by currents within that culture can be clarified by returning to the definitions that I used for "retreat." Subversion is an aspect of those definitions. In those definitions, retreat was defined as a withdrawal from hostile elements; as a place or a situation in which one finds refuge from hostile elements; and, as the act of withdrawing. The subversive nature of retreat is primarily concerned with the "act of withdrawing" and the influence those acts have on creating the place of "psychological" refuge. The most "obvious" act of retreat would be the one where an individual or group "packs up and heads for the hills" in an act of rejection of the dominant urban, industrial society. The "retreat" of heading for the hills does have adherents who practice oppositional lifestyles. There can, however, be a second facet to the act of retreating that does not necessarily lead people "back-to-the-land." It is the act of "retreating" by recognizing one's own complicity within the dominant culture, and then acting upon that recognition to subvert the oppressive elements of the dominant culture. It can be a subtle act of subversion, and often it is not recognized as having much "power to change." However, it may have a much more broad base of support than is traditionally recognized. It is a "retreat" from "within" or a "manipulation of dominant culture from within its own structures."

4.4.1 Criticism of "Reform from Within"

The attempt to create reform from within dominant culture has been criticized by many environmental philosophers. It is met with skepticism because it is considered difficult to achieve any kind of "meaningful" reform from within the system that creates the oppression. The understanding is that if one tries to reform the system from within, the

system will inherently try to protect its own interests and its own structures. The Deep ecologists call attempts at reforming the dominant culture from within "the reformist response" (Devall and Sessions, 1985: 51). The reformist response "attempts to address some of the environmental problems in this society without seriously challenging the main contradictions and assumptions of the prevailing worldview" (Devall and Sessions, 1985: 52). Attempts at creating reform from "within" dominant culture is perceived as only trying to create things like "new public policy" or "legislation" which will, in turn, define different limits for people within our society with which to work. The reformist response is considered superficial. It does not ask the "deep questions" or go beyond the assumptions which are grounded in the Western worldview (Devall and Sessions, 1985).

The call for individuals to act "environmentally friendly" is an attempt at this kind of "reform from within." I can attempt to make a "positive impact" on environmental degradation by practicing the 4-Rs (recycling, reducing, reusing and refusing). I can sort all of my recyclable goods and put them in the "blue box" so that they can be "re-fined" into new products. I can reduce consumption of fossil fuels by walking or riding my bike, instead of using my car. I can re-use items that I would normally have tossed away after one use; or, I could purchase items that were designed for more than one use. I can refuse to buy materials that are not "environmentally friendly," or which do not contain enough recycled content. The superficiality of following the 4-Rs is that my consumption patterns and the infrastructures that support the manufacture and consumption of dangerous products are left unexamined. I consume and use differently, but I continue to consume and use. If anything, the practice might encourage me to consume more because I can justify my behavior by thinking, "it can be recycled." The reform from within does not ask us to change very much, and it does not question the foundations of the dilemma.

The problematic element which accompanies this form of retreat from 'within' is primarily one of suspicion. A suspicion which is founded in the pervasive nature of the 'power structures' which so often represent the manifestation of a reform from within. The 'deep questions' or the going beyond the dominant 'assumptions' which are grounded in the Western world view are skeptical of the kinds of changes which can be achieved by reform which is initiated by the power structures which grant meaning within Western culture. There is a general cultural awareness of the existence of power systems which do not necessarily reflect the culture so much as grant meaning, value and power within that culture (Hutcheon, 1989). For example, a forest logging company may be subjected to strict logging legislation in its own nation; however, it is able to move to another nation with limited or no legislation. There the company logs that nation's forests. Neither the logging company or its home government are doing anything 'wrong' in a legal sense. They are acting within the legislative guidelines as set up by both countries. The company has been granted power within the legislative system of both its own nation and the nation in which it logs. It has the ability to move and the ability to carry on with its business. It is acting within the structure of what is permissible. The home government is also granted power by its ability to rely on inadequate legislation or the economic desperation of the other nation. However, there is something troubling about this act of power. The logging company is compromising the forestry practices which would not be tolerated in its own country; and, its home government is supporting the environmental destruction of a nation —a destruction that it would not tolerate at 'home.' The problematic element of this kind of reform is its ability to cater to the already existent power structures. The reforms do not represent changes so much as they represent a manipulation of the system for those already in power.

4.4.2 Complicity and "Reform from Within"

The call from retreatists to change by placing oneself 'outside' of dominant culture must be problematized from another perspective, as well. The call to ask the 'deep questions' and to go beyond the 'assumptions' which are grounded in the Western world view must recognize the retreatist's own complicity within the culture which is in question. One cannot truly exclude one's self from the culture of which he / she is a part. One must recognize her / his own complicity within this culture. The previous examples and stories which I have used to illustrate my arguments reveal my own complicity within my culture; and, my complicity when I submit to when I 'compromise' my environmental values or behaviors. No matter what I do, or how hard I try to behave to the contrary, I will always be part of and influenced by my culture.

We are presented with a paradox in awareness. We cannot get out from under the weight of traditional ideals within culture, yet we lose faith in the inexhaustibility and power of those existing ideals to yield meaning (Hutcheon, 1989). In this sense, we are stuck under the weight of the traditional promises which Western culture has made to us (the 'goodness' of progress and the achievability of the 'good life'). Yet, we are confronted with the awareness that Western culture is unable to fulfill those promises to even a small percentage of its population; and, the achievement of those promises for the few comes at the expense of the many 'others' in the majority, and at the expense of the destruction of the natural world.

Retreat from within dominant culture must recognize its own complicity. My lunch story about moral superiority serves as an example of how, quite often, we do not recognize our own complicity. On the one hand, my friend could point the 'environmental-finger' at me and criticize me for eating 'bleached' white bread. On the other hand, he was unable to see his own submission to the environmental 'evils' (the

petroleum based bi-product of nylon track pants) of our culture. In this sense, retreat (and reform in general) must "acknowledge its own complicity with the very values upon which it seeks to comment" (Hutcheon, 1989: 10). Too often, notions of reform (especially environmentally-based reform) are rigidly bound to the concept of trying to stay "outside" of or disassociate itself from all aspects of the mainstream upon which it seeks to comment. It has a hand in creating the us 'vs.' them mentality of environmentalism.

Alienating one's self from the dominant culture can have a profound effect upon creating change. The effects of 'denying complicity' are most noticeable in the concepts of constructing the ideal society and, in the way in which we perceive change. The popular sense of Retreat is aimed at constructing the society of the "grand ideal." The grand ideal is to retreat toward a "golden age" of rural human-nature harmony. However, there are (as was previously discussed) difficulties in creating this world of a grand retreat which makes its institution impossible and perhaps undesirable. The grand ideal creates a nostalgic representation of the past (the return to the Golden Age), and not a critical representation of the past. In this way, critics of reform can dismiss philosophies like retreat by pointing out that these 'golden ages' which we nostalgically hearken back to never existed, so they cannot really be returned to.

The romanticization of the past represents the sanitization of our (human) involvement in the creation of our past. A critical interpretation of our past would acknowledge a couple of things. First, that the golden age probably did not exist. Second, we have the capacity, through being reflexive beings, to create images of the past. The second point is fundamental to the notion of implicating one's self in the creation of the social sphere. If one can recognize the dynamic uncertainty of past representations, then one can open up the possibilities for social scrutiny. One can critique current social organization without all

the hang ups of trying to create the perfect way of how it was in the ideal social model of the past.

The grand ideal of retreat is also problematic in the way in which it perceives change. Creation of desirable changeis perceived in two ways, as a "sweeping, all-encompassing" change and as a "static" change. In this way, once the all-encompassing society of retreat is installed, the citizens would live in a "forever land" of human-nature harmony. This perception of the future and change is frustrated by the dynamic nature of social change. The retreat society could exist only in a vacuum in which it would be isolated and have no forces acting upon it. Our "real" social world, however, has many variables and influences acting upon it: variables as abstract as philosophical ideals to variables as 'natural' and as physical as monsoons and earthquakes. All of these elements interact to create "change" that is beyond the scope of a "static society."

Retreat, if it is approached from the perspective of complicitous involvement, has a 'practical' power in creating change and can incorporate it differently. Change can be dynamic and occur on many different levels. The daunting element of this kind of change is, however, that it is unpredictable and may not yield the "ideal" which is sought in our construction of the "grand society" or "perfect ecological society." David Maybury-Lewis's interpretation of the ability of traditional cultures ability to "cope" with change reflects the divergent nature of these two perceptions of change. Modern society (Western society) is "characteristically, an optimistic system, hoping for and betting on the best. In contrast, traditional societies have settled for more cautious systems, designed to make life tolerable and to avoid the worst" (Maybury-Lewis, 1992: 69). Modern society wants to create or strive toward the "best" way of living. It is a change on the massive scale, and we get frustrated by our apparent inability to create this "golden state." In the modern

system, we are so much looking toward the ideal future that we forget change is happening all the time and all around us.

The desire to create whole scale change, or a new universal world order does not recognize the complicitous nature of social change. Carol Pearson suggests that it is a matter of how we perceive creating change and how we perceive reform. Pearson identifies a tension between a "critical mass theory" and "individuality" that has a direct implication for creating "change." She examines the divergent viewpoints of feminist political theory and points out that they converge on a "shared hypothesis: we must have a critical mass of people who agree with our hypothesis to redress the root cause of our cultural and individual oppression. When such consensus fails to emerge and when oppression continues, apparently unabated, we feel powerless and turn our anger on each other" (Pearson, 1984: 267).

Instead of relying upon 'whole scale' change which needs the support of a critical mass who have identified the root causes of oppression, social organizations can be criticized, and change can be called for in a different way. This change recognizes our complicity and is empowered by our being part of the culture. It is a subversive kind of change. The "change by subversion" is analogous to being a spy within the dominant culture. A spy who plants little "complicity bombs" within the structure of the larger culture. Retreat, in this sense, is a process of criticizing the hostile elements from within one's culture. It is in the role of 'critique' that the integrity of the main system may eventually be sabatoged. I believe this system of subversion and sabotage is happening in all aspects of our culture. This form of subversion is most commonly associated with the notion of parody.

4.4.3 Parody as Change from Within

Parody has the capacity to criticize a 'thing' from within. There maybe some attempt to place some distance between the critic and the 'victim' of the satire; however, the critique achieves its meaning (politicization) by acknowledging the relationship between the critic and the victim. In other words, you have to be "in on the joke." In this sense, meaning is derived from the inside. One recognizes the significance of the situation, the relationships of those who have power in the situation, and how those relationships affect the 'general' society.

Parody can slide around on a continuum from wit / ridicule to the playful / ludic to the seriously respectful (Hutcheon, 1989). Parody politicizes a 'thing' or 'issue' by value-problematizing , or de-naturalizing it. De-naturalizing something is a form of acknowledging its history, and through irony recognizing the politics of its representation (Hutcheon, 1989). Parody, as a political agent, is predominantly found in the field of the 'Arts.' Visual arts, the print media, the visual media, fiction and science fiction all have currents within them which criticize mainstream cultural characteristics via the use of parody. Cartoon editorials are good examples of parody as a way of criticizing contemporary issues from within. An example of the playful / ludic social criticism would be the political cartoon drawn by Mayes, and published in the **Edmonton Journal**. It is based on the criticism of Alberta's Klein government's drive to 'privatize' Crown corporations. In the cartoon, Ralph is knocking on the cave opening of a bear den. He is holding a bag of money and has his hand out. The headline reads: "News Item: New Fees Predicted for Privatized Provincial Parks." One bear inside the cave is shaking his sleeping bear friend, as he says "It's for you... Something about a user fee..." (Mayes, 1994). The cartoon medium politicizes the privatization issue by mocking the Klein

government's drive to privatize; however, the cartoon only makes sense if you are 'within' or have access to the Alberta political system.

4.5 The Nature of Social Change

The parodic examination helps us to problematize values and investigate how we create meaning in our culture. It does not necessarily create or initiate a 'sweeping' reform or change, but it does provide a process for investigating our values and behaviors. It may also have an effect if one considers the "nature of change in social organization." Carol Pearson's commentary on theories of social change in the creation of feminist science fiction plays a vital role in my understanding of this "subversiveness" and the ability it may have to empower "retreat" or "reform" on the personal level. Pearson suggests that in most discussions of feminist theories of social change, the focus is "on a cause-and-effect analysis" and in "this historically deterministic view, we are essentially all individually stuck with our oppression until we collectively redress its root cause" (Pearson, 1984: 267). I believe this analogy can be projected directly to philosophies of environmental reform which focus primarily on the causes of global environmental degradation and the creation of sweeping global changes as the direction for creating reform. Pearson's comments challenge us to remember the agency that we have as individuals. We can as individuals use that agency as a way to challenge the oppressive infrastructures of "environmental destruction" and "social alienation." There is a "personal political power" that is working when one works to subvert an oppressive element within the system:

> The concept of taking responsibility for one's life while relinquishing control over it is beyond the dualistic debate about individual freedom versus determinism. Paradoxically, we are both free and oppressed, and it is only in both truly recognizing the extent of our oppression and choosing to act fully on that freedom and power we do posses that we and our culture are transformed (Pearson, 1984: 266).

The concept of striving for the ideal future has a direct bearing upon movements of "reform." It suggests that we should question the concept of "reform" which is portrayed by the notion of the replacement of one universal world view (Western world view) with a different universal world view (the retreat world view). I think what is frustrating the "environmental movement" is the belief that there is a "new golden age" to be had. When we are unable to find that "new golden age" we are disappointed, or we think we need to try harder to achieve it. The nature of social change is such that fulfilling this ideal is very difficult. We can influence the direction our culture is going; and, we should try to change our "systems" when they oppress people or nature. However, we must recognize that change can be slow and unpredictable; and, that we are complicit in those changes. Cultures are slowly transformed by its own citizens as they "subvert" the oppressive cultural systems of their daily lives; and, as they join together to create larger reforms.

Finally, we must recognize that we are going to lose (irretrievably) some of those elements within our culture and within our natural world as we struggle toward "change." The "psychological denial" of "losing parts of our world" might be why the call for sweeping change is so popular, and presented to us in such an "urgent" manner. We do not want to lose the "rainforest," or "idly sit-back and watch" as more and more species become extinct. There is desire to create the "sweeping" changes that will "save the earth" and "save our selves," however, change does not really work in the "sweeping" or "all encompassing" way that we might desire. This does not mean that we should "simply accept these losses;" instead, it means that we should constantly remind ourselves and inspire ourselves to work for an end to oppressive systems and be flexible in how we interpret the changes that occur, and which are in the process of occurring. It is part of the interplay between agency and structure; both will end up influencing each other.

The nature of change is such that it can not be encapsulated into a rigidly defined structure. In the chapter, I explored the subtle, uncertain nature of change. Change can weave its way into all elements of human culture and perception, and can create "different ways of being in the world." The ideal of retreat and the desire to create reform based on ideals is not immune to the influence of change. We can attempt overt patterns of change by doing things like moving back-to-the-land and acting in opposition to mainstream practices; we can subvert dominant culture; and, in turn be subverted by that same culture. All attempts at changing oppressive elements within culture will create change, it might just be a different kind of change than what we desire or expect.

Chapter 5

The Inconclusive Nature of Social Change

> Nature is perceived to be in danger and it is up to us to devise a means of its salvation (Evernden, 1992: 3).

My initial interest in retreat was sparked by the desire to examine ideas that bridged the gap between environmentally based philosophical theory and the implementation of a social practice which would be based upon those theories. I wanted to "find the way" to creating an environmentally based social order. However, I found myself frustrated by the inability of philosophies to achieve the ideals which were prescribed as "cures" for the creation of reform. I believe that I was frustrated by the inability of these philosophies to manipulate all the "variables" thought to either cause environmental degradation, or install a new social order. The inquiry into retreat as a concept for creating environmental reform has offered some significant insights into this desire to search for and create environmentally-based social change.

Alexander Wilson stated that "[e]cological thinking cannot form the sole basis for social theory or political action. Restoring this land must also mean making a place for ourselves within it" (Wilson, 1992: 86). My inquiry into retreat addressed both of the issues in Wilson's statement. First, retreat cannot and perhaps should not form the sole basis for social theory or for political action. It can offer insights into aspects of social theory and political action, but it cannot act as the sole foundation for theory or action. The advocacy of a sole foundation for reform, such as Retreat, presents a paradox. On the one hand, the reform is deemed as the creation of the 'one' true form of liberated social being; but on the other hand, it does not take into consideration the complexity of social interaction. The ideal retreat social order would have to be a static entity which operated in exactly the same way all of the time. In order for it to operate, it would have to have its

systems very structured and rigid. A wide scale reform based on this notion of the retreatist ideal is unrealistic when one considers the complexity of social interaction. The nature of social interaction is dynamic. Many different variables from the individual level to the group level influences social change. The many variables that are inter-relating are constantly creating a new hybrid of modern culture. The concept of a sole foundation for creating change would not or could not embrace the complex variations within social organization.

This idea about having "one premise" as the sole foundation for reform is significant in the general sense as well. Many environmentally and socially based philosophies for change are based upon creating change from a particular perspective norm. Basing change upon one premise or one desired outcome, limits the ability of a philosophy to introduce change. It confines the philosophical ideals into the realm of the "ideal," for it cannot or will not entertain the complexities of human organization.

The second element of Wilson's statement addresses perhaps the most difficult aspect of the inquiry: the human-nature dualism. The human-nature dualism emerges as one of the dominant elements of discord. How can we create a place for ourselves in the natural world? The issue is problematic because on the one hand, humans are perceived to be but one small part of the "natural world," but on the other hand, humans can also perceive that they exist "outside of" or at least "apart from" nature. I do not presume to know how to create a "reunion" of human to nature, or how a new human-nature relationship might manifest itself. Retreat, however, has offered some insight into the constitution of the human-nature dualism. One issue that arises from the human-nature dualism is the concept of "manipulation." Another issue that arises is the ability for humans to be moral agents, in light of this ability to manipulate. For example, a beaver can manipulate and control natural processes when it builds a dam. Its interference with that local area destroys the

natural processes of a specific ecosystem (a stream valley or a marsh), however, it also creates another ecosystem (a pond or a small lake). The beaver is perceived, by humans, to be part of the natural cycle of destruction and creation. It is doing what a beaver does, and it is part of nature. Humans also have the capacity to manipulate and control natural processes. We can split an atom, releasing enough energy to irradiate many ecosystems and to cause micro affects that effect the global ecosystem. This destructive cycle is also followed by the creation of a new ecosystem (a radiation altered genetically mutated system). We are doing what humans do. We are controlling and manipulating elements of the natural world. Humans, however are perceived to be "a-part" from the natural cycle of destruction and creation in this example. Perhaps, the human-nature dualism lies in our perception and our abilities to pass judgment on these perception. Humans are able to manipulate and control natural processes on such a grand scale that perhaps the dualism exists as part of our ability to question the appropriateness of our behavior. We can, at least some of us can, be appalled by a the moral implications of a comment which equates a human created nuclear melt-down to being a natural transition of one ecosystem to another. Humans have the capacity to explore the reality of "what is" the product of human creation, and then pass judgment upon it. Humans then have the capacity to "idealize" and to "create" a new or different understanding of "what ought to be" our relationship with the natural world.

The moral aspect of a concept like retreat and the desire to create a different way of living is a significant aspect of this philosophical inquiry. It attempts to address the nature-human dualism by designing the withdrawal to an idealized time, a time in which humans purportedly had a more egalitarian relationship with the natural world. The moral aspect of many philosophies is central to calls for reform. The call to reform usually attempts to address some "perceived injustice." The difficulty is however, that by focusing on a sole

injustice, or a sole prescription for moral action, one is not addressing the injustices that occur in other aspects of human culture, and yet which may be tied to the first injustice. For example, injustices which are based on issues like race, gender, wealth, or power do have a direct bearing upon the creation of environmental reform; and yet, when ideals are being constructed these other issues might be abandoned for the purpose of serving an "ecological outcome." The issue of global population growth is a good example. Environmental philosophers point to the "problem of human population" as a significant element in environmental destruction. The earth's resources are not capable of carrying such a large, and exponentially expanding human population. Reform is based on the ability to control and reduce human population growth. The reform is based upon the environmental premise of the earth's human carrying capacity, however, it does not address issues related to how other forms of injustice might figure in the resolution of the equation (for example, poverty, wealth, race and gender). The potential actions from a "one-sided" call for reform based upon the premise of population growth could take on horrific overtones if it were to be construed in a certain way (for example, genocide as the solution to over-population of harshly affected ecosystems).

The call to end oppression must be motivated by a broader agenda for change —one that attempts to address the complexity of issues, offers a variety of solutions, and which solutions which have the capacity to malleable. The creation of social change presents us with a challenge. One the one hand, it challenges us to create "more egalitarian" relationships between nature and humans, and humans and humans. The challenge is to try to create a social organization which addresses oppression, and yet does not create more or different kinds of oppression (by instituting prescriptive changes to certain ideals) in the attempt to create a desired social change. This means that we must be aware of the kinds of oppression that are occurring: and, we must be aware of the "nature of change" as

we responds to these oppressions. The changes can be of the overt nature, like political lobbying and legislative changes; or, they can be subversive changes, like when an individual subverts a system (such as a university) to fulfill a personal or political agenda. The changes that occur from such a wide range of action is going to create a "different" social reality. It may not however be the social reality that was constructed as the "ideal."

There are problematic elements inherent in the construction and implementation of a "desired for" social organization. This does not mean that concepts such as "retreat" are invalid for developing ideas of social and environmental change. Instead, it suggests that propositions for change should be thoroughly examined in their intent and their possible effect. It also suggests that "systems" be malleable enough to change as we change.

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