

Casey O'Donnell
03/04/2001

“The Creation and Preservation of Nature”

The presence and use of the word “nature” and “natural” has grown significantly, and our perceived connection to those words. What is the definition of nature, and where are we forming these definitions? Furthermore, what do we mean when we try to “preserve” that nature? Perchance, just like the words “normal,” “deviant,” “right,” “wrong,” or even “life,” we are faced with yet another term that has been defined by society to help reinforce the rules that we are supposed to follow in order to fit into the cogs of the system. When we “preserve” this nature, aren't we then supporting the status quo and the rules formed for us?

As a society we have been pushing the proverbial envelope in our experiments with technology. At the same time we are being constantly reminded of our connection to the animal or “natural” world. We are expected to lust for the “good ole days of yore,” of our organic “natural” past. The creation of that “natural” past has been a grab bag of science, religion and storytelling. A word just as ambiguous as “normal,” nature is not well defined, yet we assume ourselves to be connected to it, yet distinctly apart from it.

Human “advancement” and more specifically the advancement of “man” has been placed in opposition with nature. Culture and society are told to have “emerged” from the chaotic nature.

Nature is mystery and resource, a critical union in the history of civilization. (Haraway, Teddy Bear, Page 28)

In this excerpt from the inscriptions inside the American Museum of Natural History by Teddy Roosevelt, nature is not defined. Nature is merely implied to be separate from society, but something that we “emerged” from, creating the image of a hierarchy with nature at the bottom and us somewhere above. We have a creation of culture as oppositional to nature. At the same time though, we have nature being offered up as a resource of civilization, a tool to be utilized. I would also argue that this characterization of nature leads to a feminization of nature, hence the often used idea of a “mother” earth/nature. This of course encourages the male ego based idea that a man should be the dominant and logical force within the cultural unit, and that maleness means the domination and use of the feminized nature.

Many (Men) sought a “pure” nature, unspoiled by contact with people; and so they sought untouched species, analogous to the “natives” once sought by colonial anthropologists. (Haraway, Persistence, Page 7)

Here Haraway presents the premise believed by many that nature is “corrupted” by white male intrusion. So our definition of nature is something that is not civilization and culture. Humans can apparently be a part of nature if they are “primitive natives” because they have not moved away from nature. In modern society we see the use of the word natural in discussions of human sexuality. Perhaps this is in reference to the “primitive” nature of human sexuality, which is deeply rooted in our animal past, and particularly when non-heterosexual individuals transgress this “natural” boundary they are stepping outside of acceptable norms. Perhaps since the “natural” way to reproduce involves heterosexual intercourse, by transgressing these boundaries and viewing intercourse as something disconnected from the natural world we are subverting sexual power structures. I also see this as a cause for fear when discussing “test tube babies”

because you are again transgressing the line of what natural human reproduction is. If white men were not the dominant controllers of this technology, I suspect that it would cause even greater fear, because if women did not find men a “necessary” part of reproduction what would happen to their power?

It appears that nature is a societal construct, then what is the purpose of encouraging natural action in people and encouraging individuals to lust for that “better” and “purer” past?

In the heart of New York City stands Central Park – the urban garden designed by Fredrick Law Olmsted to heal the overwrought or decadent city dweller with a prophylactic dose of nature.”
(Haraway, Teddy Bear, Page 26)

Prophylactic – Acting to defend against or prevent something, especially disease. (Dictionary.com)

It isn't a coincidence that Haraway makes use of the wording that she does. The word “garden” has so many “organic” connotations associated with it. The Garden of Eden as presented in the bible is our organic past, our natural past that we have stepped away from and into the “modern” world. The ability for nature to “heal” those that have stepped away from “her” acts as a way of making our desire to be a part of nature as normal as our bodies ability to heal wounds. Of course, the use of the word “prophylactic” is very telling. What exactly is nature protecting the city dweller from or what is it protecting from them?

If nature is protecting the overwrought city dwellers, wouldn't it be protecting them from the world that they live and work in? They are being protected from the world created by the

hegemony. They are being protected from those that would work them to death if it was possible. If nature were protecting something from them, wouldn't it be protecting those that make use of the city dwellers? Either way, it appears as if the nature is being used to protect those with and in power. If that is the case, then what are we doing when we, "preserve" nature?

The preservation of nature is the preservation not of some mystical nature, but a nature that has been created by society. Then the preservation of this particular nature (what other natures exist?) I believe is another construct by society to keep people within "normal operating parameters." When people transgress these cultural boundaries, they are "going against nature" and that is wrong, because they are going against their "roots." It is preserving a nature that has been presented to us by those in and with power. We have been instructed to lust for something that we cannot attain by the very nature of the ways in which we are forced to live. If we really wanted to "go back to nature" (the nature given to us) we could. However, those individuals then become the Ted Kazinskis of the world. This of course is not acceptable either, so we are to lust for our organic past, but not attempt to achieve it. It seems that we have been presented with a nature that is there to keep us content and in our cubbyholes defined by society.

This is why I believe that Haraway is so fascinated by the Cyborg Body. The Cyborg Body offers a new method of revolution and questioning.

These cyborgs are the people who refuse to disappear on cue, no matter how many times a 'Western' commentator remarks on the sad passing of another primitive, another organic group done in by 'Western' technology, by writing. (Haraway, *Cyborg Manifesto*, Page 177)

The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the oedipal project. They cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust. ... Cyborgs are not reverent; they do not re-member the cosmos. (Haraway, Cyborg Manifesto, Page 151)

The Cyborg, which seems to be the ultimate “corruption” of nature is seen as a threat, not only to the natural world, but to society as a whole. The Cyborg offers too many methods of subverting the power structure that has been imposed upon us. The cyborg subverts all “natural” boundaries from physical to sexual. The cyborg cuts the ties to the natural world, freeing it from any past that it should lust for. It is free to move forward unhindered and question the world around it. It is immune to apocalyptic visions, as it will never return to dust.

We are the constructors of the “natural” world. We need not be in opposition to it. We could define nature as all-inclusive, because we all seem to be a part of the system on earth, and so should our creations. If we are then connected intimately with the world around us, we are not in opposition to it. However, given our current definitions, to question the authority of our system apparently simple ideas like the “natural” and “normal” need to be questioned and examined because they provide us with the rules and boundaries for society. If we wish to question the powers above us, we must question the rules enforced and the methods by which they are imposed.