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Introduction: A Cultural Dialogue about Old-Growth Forests

Few environmental controversies have been more dramatic than the one over the destiny of Oregon's temperate rain forests – a controversy that, in the last decade, has centred on the practice of old-growth logging and the survival of the endangered northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*). The battle has raged throughout British Columbia, Washington, and northern California as well as Oregon and has been aptly referred to as a "slow motion riot" (Robertson 1996, 1A). It has fuelled or coalesced two primary social movements (the Ancient Forest Movement and the Forest Community Movement), and it has resulted in such acts as the burning down of ranger stations, the spiking of trees, logging truck blockades, and countless demonstrations.

Economists, forest scientists, and historians have all worked to explain the social and ecological ramifications of reduced logging on public lands. Little has been said, however, by cultural anthropologists. Even less has been said, at least ethnographically, about the controversy's primary activist-protagonists: loggers and environmentalists. *Anatomy of a Conflict,* which is a cultural analysis of the old-growth dispute, means to remedy both these omissions. It is rooted in primary (ethnographic) and archival research conducted throughout the 1990s. Most of the ethnographic work took place between 1992 and 1996, the controversy's peak years. The years that followed have been equally rich due to the continuously emerging literature on environmental disputes.

Rather than thinking of the conflict as a contest of political, economic, and scientific forces (which it certainly is), I choose as my primary objective to draw attention to how these forces are expressed culturally in the impassioned wrangling of locally situated and politically committed loggers and environmentalists. The intent is twofold. First, I mean to demonstrate the creative means through which opposing activists, each caught in the larger web of the aforementioned forces, achieve their ends. Second, I mean to

demonstrate that the forest dispute has everything to do with imagined ideal worlds, with the creative manipulation of political discourse, the assertion of moral priorities and identities, and with how activists on both sides appropriate linguistic and symbolic tools in order to promote a cultural world that reflects their quests for change.

An anecdote is a suitable place to begin. This one tells of an event that took place part way through my research period. An Oregon acquaintance invited me to speak to his middle school students about the forest controversy, which, due in part to federal policy aimed at protecting the spotted owl, had reached a feverish pitch. The stakes involved for parties on both sides were extremely high. A continuation of logging at recent levels promised ecological disaster, while a temporary suspension and subsequent decline in the annual allowable cut portended mill closures and job losses. The dispute had become, in the words of Oregon Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-OR), a "religious war." Those who "deviate from the true faith – whichever true faith – are condemned as sinners, heretics, or worse" (Porter 1999, 3).

Paring the fray down to a few succinct nuggets for middle school classroom discussion was simple enough. A more difficult task was answering the students' inquiries as to my own allegiances: Whose side, they wanted to know, was I on? It was a reasonable question: after all, I was working in the field of the spotted owl conflict, and the students' tranquil, once timber-dependent city was contentiously divided on the subject of logging. Standing mid-room I offered a neutral, though honest, reply: "I have always been drawn to these forests and think of them in protective terms, though my conversations with displaced loggers have deeply affected me. I suppose that leaves me torn between two worlds."[1] It was not the desired response, as it failed to appease the growing tension in the classroom. The usual classroom cacophony of competing voices, the clamour of books, papers, and backpacks came to an uneasy halt. It appeared they hoped I would resolve a rift that had commenced well before my arrival.

When the students and I viewed the pro-environmental video *In These Ancient Trees,* the tense atmosphere in the classroom increased. Then, upon viewing the Caterpillar-released[2] pro-logging video *Our Continuing Forest,* five students stood on their chairs and applauded. When asked about this behaviour, Eric, a member of the cheering section, offered only the somewhat pleading: "loggers are people, too."

At the beginning of the class period (before any discussion or video viewing), each of the students had been given a sheet of paper with "loggers" typed at the top left-hand side and "environmentalists" typed at the top right-hand side. All those present were asked to write down the first words or phrases that came to their minds when they read each term. The results were startling; four sets of responses are presented here.

	Loggers	**Environmentalists**
Kristin: (age 13)	dumb, worthless, uncaring	cool, caring, trees, water
Michael: (age 13)	bad, low paying, high-school dropout, bums	smart, mostly girls, wimps, Harvard grads
Paul: (age 12)	hate spotted owls, want to keep their jobs, cut down trees, hate environmentalists	like spotted owls, like environment, save trees, hate loggers
Katrina: (age 13)	people, cutting trees down, giving people wood for their house	people against loggers, put loggers out of work, letting trees fall on their own without supervision so they have a better chance of killing someone, "tree lovers"

"Dumb," "worthless," "cool," "caring," "hate environmentalists," "hate loggers." The students' piercing yet unaffected replies return me now to the dispute's peak years as quickly as could any memory-soaked smell or sound. Here was an age group likely to echo the opinions of their adult attendants, though not yet in the discursively diplomatic manner typical of this White, working- and middle-class enclave. Here was the raw material, so to speak, of the forest dispute.

Several legal decisions led to this classroom moment, and they did so by paralyzing the Pacific Northwest's economically dominant timber industry. In a set of landmark cases from 1989 through 1993, the federal courts found that the National Forest Management Act and the Endangered Species Act, both of which had provisions to protect species, had been clearly and consistently violated by the timber industry. The courts ruled that public forests were not being logged in a sustainable fashion and that no suitable policy had been developed to protect the endangered northern spotted owl. The sale of any new timber on Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands west of the Cascade Mountains in the Pacific Northwest was to cease until a legally credible and scientifically sound plan could be enacted.

To those directly employed by the wood products industry the decisions were harsh and abrupt – the result of an overzealous, ill-informed tide of sympathy for the natural world. To environmentalists, they were the culmination of decades of pressure on government and industry, who were perceived as having a destructive and all-powerful hold on the fate of Pacific

Northwest forests (Dietrich 1992). Throughout this period loggers organized a series of protests, one of which resulted in logging trucks blocking traffic on Oregon's main interstate for much of an afternoon (Durbin 1996). Environmentalists countered with equally vociferous gatherings, concerts, and so forth. Bumper stickers appeared everywhere, ranging from: "I Love Spotted Owls ... Fried" to "Stumps Don't Lie." Environmentalists saw the need to ensure the survival of the spotted owl as a way of saving the last stands of old growth remaining on public lands, whereas loggers saw it as a way of disrupting a culture and livelihood whose existence depended upon logging. Each side accused the other of destroying a way of life, of being intrinsically evil, of being insensitive to the needs of the human population (present or future), and of having no appreciation for the natural world.[3]

In short, the Pacific Northwest erupted into a fierce territorial and cultural conflict. Each side was bent on controlling not just common public forestlands, but also the political as well as the intellectual and cultural authority that enabled them to determine just how we ought to care for the region's remaining old-growth temperate rain forests.

Culture and Power

Since the 1960s, anthropologists have defined culture as consisting of shared "webs of meanings," "moral outlooks," and/or "worldviews" that are internalized by and reflected in the behaviour of its members (Geertz 1973; see also Ortner 1984). More recently, this definition has been challenged as unnecessarily essentialist (Clifford 1988, 1997) and/or as ignorant of specific situational contexts as well as caste- or gender-based positional variation (Bourdieu 1993; Holland et al. 1998; Ortner 1999; Strauss and Quinn 1997). Culture, these contemporary theorists have argued, is not a giant symbolic or structural mechanism that imprints itself on the individual and so directs behaviour; rather, it is an overarching, multi-origined, and multifaceted resource. Individuals draw upon this resource while manipulating it to fit both their own ends as well as the context and social positions from which they act.

Furthermore, this contextually fluctuating use of cultural resources (meanings, symbols, and the restraints imposed by such structural features as race, class, gender, legal and political institutions, etc.) manifests itself in everyday group identities (e.g., as Earth Firsters, anti-choice activists, pro-choice activists, Wall Street brokers, recovering alcoholics, etc.). These identities do not arrive on the socio-political landscape fully formed; rather, "[they] are improvised – in the flow of activity within specific social situations – from the cultural resources at hand" (Holland et al. 1998, 4). Culture is constraining in that it puts boundaries around the range of possible actions; yet it is also flexible in that those boundaries are permeable. Small, seemingly insignificant behaviours, as well as large ideological struggles,

will find the weaknesses in any social form as people – agents of cultural change – craft various strategic ways of being, some of which become the basis for new, or at least radically altered, cultural systems.

The relationship between culture and the emergence of identity can be illustrated via two contradictory observations pertinent to the forest dispute: The first is that loggers and environmentalists seemed to talk past one another; each would talk about politics, science, and the forest as though the other didn't exist. For instance, a logger would tell me that no timber had been sold in the Forest Service district in which he (and it was nearly always "he") worked since the court-generated logging injunctions. He would say that it was very difficult to find work in the woods, that preservationists had shut down the forests. An environmentalist would later point to the same district and tell me that several million board feet had been cut from that particular forest. Referring to the years preceding the legal injunctions, he or she would say that these forests had been overcut and that even a complete halt to logging would be insufficient. Paradoxically, both would be right, and both had managed to ignore (talk past) the other's charge. At the same time each party sounded oddly similar, as though each were notably aware of the other's positions.[4] Thus, both timber advocates and environmentalists talked about the joy of being close to nature, about the practice of forest science, about being the *real* victims of larger economic and political forces, about the implication of past cultures for future land use, and about being emotional activists.

Comprehending this discordant "talked-past-yet-sounded-similar" impression requires that one attend simultaneously to (1) dominant cultural discourses about nature, which influenced much of what both loggers and environmentalists had to say; (2) the interplay of competing activist discourses (i.e., the interplay of subordinate discourses and the disparate meaning systems reflected therein); and (3) the fact that both of these discursive layers are ongoing and intertwined at all times. Aggregating these three points, there existed in the Oregon context a dominant though multifaceted discourse that situated both how nature (especially the local forests) should be defined and who would be allowed, politically speaking, to voice that definition. By dominant discourse (an oft-used tag of late) I refer to what Scott (1990) terms "official transcripts" and part of what anthropologists call cultural systems. These are systems of thought that include entrenched conventions for behaviour as well as official definitions of "reality" asserted by the powerful. In this case, the powerful includes but is not limited to scientific, congressional, economic, or corporate bodies whose force "derives in part from their ability to impose [their] construction[s] of reality as the natural order of things" (Philibert 1990, 266). Thus, the scientific community had aptly convinced the federal court that owl habitat was imperiled and that science was central to arguments about future forest management.

Political and regulatory officials had determined, coterminously, that forest management plans would respect the perspectives of local grassroots stakeholders even as officials decried the political "problem" of increasingly "irrational" activist groups. Industry officials meanwhile asserted that life in Oregon as it was known would perish and the economy collapse if logging ceased.

Identities – in this case the competing self-definitions of activist groups (i.e., loggers and environmentalists) – emerged from within this larger cultural frame as each group manipulated its references so as to reflect features of the dominant system in such a way that they shaped its particular vision of a new and better world. Their acts are what Scott (1990, xii) refers to as the "fugitive political conduct of subordinate groups" and what identity and new social movement theorists refer to as the creative means through which human agents both consume and reconfigure cultural systems (Holland et al. 1998; Holland and Kempton 1999). It is for this reason, for example, that environmentalists and loggers reflected the importance of the dominant discourse of science and scientific opinion on owl habitat and forest ecology by speaking frequently of science. Yet – and herein lies the identity-constructing "fugitive" quality – each group managed to put forth very different conceptions of science (i.e., to talk past or to ignore each other on the subject of science). Environmentalists referred to science in its abstract mode, while loggers referred to it in its applied mode. Abstract science worked for environmentalists because it was a means of endorsing identities based on a protective relationship to the forest, and of reinforcing their intersensory bond with nature. Timber advocates endorsed an applied agricultural model of forests because such conceptions countered scientific definitions of the forest as fragile, irrecoverable systems and, instead, promoted the forests as "working" rather than as wild or recreational places.

Identity Dialogues

Identities can thus be seen as dually expressive phenomena, as indicative of (and/or marked by) larger cultural forms (e.g., enduring discourses about the importance of science) and as flexible vehicles through which to challenge those forms. Understanding cultural production requires, further, that analytic attention be paid to the innovative and imaginative actions through which this challenge is achieved. Dialogue is basic to these challenges, particularly dialogues of identity. As an interloper progressing through months of fieldwork, I was often viewed as an instrument of exchange. I told those I met that I was working both sides of the dispute, so it was only natural that I was perceived as a harbinger of opinion from the other side. When timber advocates spoke to me, they were implicitly speaking to the environmentalists with whom I also worked, and vice versa. For this reason, I first thought of this dialogue as an artificial consequence of my research activities.

Eventually, however, it became apparent that numerous scholars have confirmed the ubiquity of contentious dialogue and its connection to identity formation (Bahktin 1981; Holland et al. 1998; Holland and Lave 2001; Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield 1994; Mead 1934; Taylor 1992). This book draws on their work, focusing especially on identities as negotiated and situationally constructed through dialogues of difference – dialogues aimed ultimately at rewriting the cultural landscape. It paints a fluctuating portrait of competing activists' oppositional dialogue, as well as the changing definitions of culture and nature advanced by disputants. It also demonstrates that, for two reasons, oppositional dialogues are basic to identity formation. First, activists are, by definition, concerned with altering the status quo by stating grievances (Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield 1994) and imagining new and better worlds. "By modelling possibilities, imaginary worlds can inspire new actions," some of which become new cultural worlds (Holland et al. 1998, 49-51). One way of invoking identity is by making repeated public statements about who one is and how different one is from one's opponent. Indeed, new social movements often come into being because a group's identity is regarded as threatened (Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield 1994, 23). The second reason for the centrality of oppositional dialogues is that mobilization is, in large part, determined by the staking-out of identity-centred territory. Identity has become an essential ideological tool through which people become collective actors. Invocations of identity are used to call forth "a powerful sense of common cause against those striving to impose a [different standard of] ... personhood and vision of collective life" (Rouse 1995, 23). It is a means of taking action against those who stand in the way of an imagined, better world.

Identity construction is also tied to people's ability to be innovative and agentive. It furthers their ability to respond to situations and overarching cultural contexts by "opportunistically using whatever is at hand to affect their position" (Holland et al. 1998, 279). Impromptu actions are used at those moments where existing cultural resources do not fully meet the requirements of collective actors, thus compelling one to improvise by using the symbolic and linguistic tools at hand in order to craft new possibilities (17-18). So, as is shown in Chapter 4, timber advocates realize that the status of environmentalists as grassroots activists is relatively secure, while theirs is not. Loggers consequently employ the myth of Paul Bunyan, the language of stigmatization, and the symbol of "black-hat" cowboys to shore up their tenuous status as activists and to present themselves as a discrete social group worthy of public sympathy.

All battles about the physical environment also come down to battles about place (whether real or imagined) and the ties between place and identity (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). The places that inform this book are the last stands of old-growth forests in the western Cascade Mountains –

stands that once stretched uninterrupted for hundreds of kilometres from British Columbia to northern California. Durkheim (1965) once noted that moral communities, like churches, function to provide a sense of identity and psychic rootedness. More recently, Basso (1996, 143) draws on Heidegger when speaking about wisdom, place, and physical rootedness. He reminds us that "sensing place is a form of cultural activity." Through this sensing of place "men and women become sharply aware of the complex attachments that link them to features of the physical world ... Places possess a marked capacity for ... inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musing on who one might become" (106-7).

In this sense, both environmental activists and timber activists can be said to make up communities attached to places. The mobility of populations and mass communication have meant that very few communities (or, to borrow Lave and Wegner's term, "communities of practice") are actually integrated, geographically bounded wholes; rather, they are made up of people in separate places (e.g., whether environmentalists in Oregon's cities, or loggers in its rural settings) effectively becoming a single community through the continuous circulation of people, money, goods, and information (Lave and Wegner 1991; Rouse 1991). Matthew Carroll (1995) defines the logging community as a set of identity-based networks rather than as residents of territorially specific locales. Geography is a constant only in that the activists discussed in this book all live in western Oregon and all share an affinity for inspirational places that has informed their respective biographies.

Outline of Chapters

One need not read this book in a linear order (although I'm assuming that it will be so read); one need only accept its basic questions, which are: (1) In what sense can we be talking about a cultural battle when the terms of the debate appear to be driven solely by different legal, scientific, and land-management disputes? and (2) How do competing activists (loggers and environmentalists) operate as cultural producers who reflect and contest these formal terms of the debate?

If you are unaware of the social, historical, and scientific definitions of Oregon's forests, then a close reading of Chapters 2 and 3 will help. If you are concerned primarily with activists' competitive engaged dialogues, then you need only peruse those that most interest you, be they dialogues about emotional meanings (Chapter 7), cultural authenticity (Chapter 6), science (Chapter 5), or grassroots legitimacy (Chapter 4).

That said, the specific sequential logic of the chapters is as follows: Chapters 2 and 3 provide the basis for an informed ethnographic and cultural analysis of the old-growth debate in the Pacific Northwest. Chapter 2 compares current definitions of old growth with those that were popular in earlier times. It includes a brief natural, social, and intellectual history of

these forests. This is followed by a look at the parallel ethical legacies that emerged during the formation of public lands policy. What we now call a conservation ethic was embodied by Theodore Roosevelt's colleague, Gifford Pinchot. Pinchot understood that forests (and, therefore, timber supply) were finite and, thus, in need of protection (Hirt 1994; Robbins 1997). He also believed that forests were crops that could be harvested and replanted indefinitely. The land ethic was endorsed by John Muir and Aldo Leopold, and it emphasized the environment's spiritual, aesthetic, and systemic qualities (Shabecoff 1993). Broadly conceived, both ethics express a concern for nature. This explains why both loggers and ancient-forest activists think of themselves as invested in and protective of the forest.

Chapter 3 offers a portrait of the emergence of two grassroots movements in the American west basic to the forest dispute: the Ancient Forest Movement (i.e., environmentalists) and the Forest Community Movement (i.e., loggers). It also offers an ethnographic look at the actions in the recent past of the everyday worlds of cutters, loggers, and front-line environmentalists. Two starkly different expressions of work in the woods are revealed. One finds that both loggers and environmentalists insist upon their concern for nature. For loggers, this is manifested in their pleasure with forest regrowth, their delight with the experience of being able to spend their working day in the woods, and their humility before the force embodied by a falling tree. For environmentalists, this is manifested in their deep preoccupation with the spiritual, aesthetic, and material complexity of old growth as well as their willingness to commit their minds and bodies to protecting it. Also included in this chapter are some of my ruminations concerning the tense circumstances under which I conducted my research: the uneasy shuffle between opponents that was made all the more dissonant by my unvoiced reflections.

Chapter 4 addresses the competition between activists for grassroots status. Who has the best activist credentials, timber advocates or environmentalists? For timber advocates, the construction of identity-centred social groups is connected to their perceived stigmatization. Stigma and identity coalesce as part of a dynamic struggle to achieve political legitimacy and public sympathy. Timber community advocates summon their experiences of stigmatization in order to create politically effective group alliances. They invoke their experiences as victims in order to form a logging culture worthy of protection. Environmentalists' status as political activists was comparatively intact; consequently, they tended to focus on counteracting constructions of loggers as culturally unique by referring to them as ineffectual pawns of the forest industry and by referring to timber communities as pathological. This reinforced the image of environmentalists as the premier grassroots activists and, in so doing, dismissed the groundswell of a logging community movement in the American west (Brick 1995). In the end, the

implicit debate over who is pawn and who is victim is a persistent tug-of-war, an ongoing negotiation about legitimacy between two parties struggling to promote their respective goals.

Chapter 4 also introduces the implications of identity-driven social actors competing with one another for public support. Of particular concern is how studies of identity, agency, and culture seem to be preoccupied with single marginalized groups or social movements. This preoccupation ignores the basic fact of environmental conflicts in much of North America. Most battles involve competition between natural resource workers (loggers, ranchers, fishers, miners, etc.) and what Bron Taylor (1995) refers to as ecological resistance movements. Each side is as concerned with the other as it is with the state, cultural forces, or legal-political constraints. This, in turn, means that, if either social movement is to be successful (i.e., to reap some benefit from invoking its identity), then it must come across both as subordinate and as superordinate to its opponent (i.e., as both truly grassroots and as wiser, better, and more powerful). And it must do this at one and the same time.

Chapter 5, as noted above, discusses differing conceptions of science – a subject that, at first glance, may seem unrelated to questions of cultural identity. It begins by noting then president Clinton's official endorsement of a science-based solution to the forest dispute and thereafter examines the troubled implications of this endorsement. It demonstrates that two very different notions of science are at the centre of the forest dispute. Loggers prefer an applied science based upon common-sense empiricism of the "seeing-is-believing" variety, while environmentalists prefer abstract science and the beauty associated with complexity and holistic systems.

Chapters 6 and 7 depart from their predecessors to the extent that they take up more fully the roles of agency and imagination as they apply to the reconfiguration of cultural forms. Chapter 6 finds that both loggers and environmentalists recognize the significance of cultural history and authority to the dispute. This recognition is manifested, primarily, in activists' deference to the symbolic power of Aboriginal land-use traditions. This (symbolic) power is rooted in mainstream American notions that "Indians represent the possibility that there are individuals who are 'naturally' born into a way of life that effortlessly embodies principles of Western conservation" (Conklin 1997, 722). Both environmental and timber activists recognize that their authority regarding past and future land use depends on the ease with which they can play into publicly salient ideas about past peoples as ecologically instructive due to their relationship with physical territories. Practically speaking, this means that activists affiliated with the more "Aboriginal," or "authentic," tradition wield a distinct political advantage over those who do not. However, the question of cultural legitimacy presents a problem for both activist parties because both groups have markedly equivocal claims

to authentic status. Environmentalists can easily be dismissed as very few live outside urban areas, and few extract a living through physical labour in the natural world. One way to gain advantage under these circumstances is to ally one's group with those who already possess authenticity and, in so doing, acquire, albeit vicariously, the cultural capital that authenticity provides. Discussions about past peoples, like discussions about grassroots legitimacy, are used to bolster one's own fledgling cultural legitimacy by sheer force of association.

Loggers, conversely, appear uneasy with the strategic advantage embodied in the ability of environmentalists to capitalize on mainstream American notions of Aboriginal ecological nobility. When addressing the behaviour of their opponents, loggers seek to redefine popular images of an Aboriginal past while simultaneously recasting their own group as analogous to Aboriginal peoples and, thus, as deserving of authentic status and its concomitant rights. Loggers, too, have their own vision of future land use, which they regard as rooted in a recent past – one that improved upon Aboriginal practices. They regard any attempts to mimic Aboriginal traditions as introducing (not alleviating) ecological danger, and they equate Aboriginal-inspired ideas with a naive and non-natural disruption of the practices and communities of labourers that carry out those practices.

Chapter 7 examines how timber advocates and environmentalists explain the emotional character of the forest dispute. Both groups must contend with accusations of excessive emotionality, with criticisms from the centre (i.e., the status quo) about the appropriateness of their behaviour. Of course, to be an activist (whether on the right or on the left) is to be on the margins of the social whole. Feminist scholars have argued that one method of criticizing or delegitimizing those on the margins – be they labourers, women, people of colour, or the poor – has been to accuse them of excessive emotionality. This labels the disenfranchised as out of control, as being over the imagined line of reasonableness, and thus serves to silence and disempower them (see Lutz 1988). Loggers address this criticism by disassociating themselves from expressions of emotion. They appear forever conscious about being seen as irrational players in the dispute and work hard to counter these impressions in the public mind. Most environmentalists, on the other hand, do not betray any need to control their emotions and, instead, invoke emotionality to extend their definition of community as being comprised of both human and biotic subjects. Thereafter, the communicative power of emotional language is explored by demonstrating how emotion and ethical practice relate to agency, gender, and social class. Close scrutiny of activist invocations of fear demonstrates that both activist groups present fear in moral terms. Loggers equate fear with undergoing the danger of performing physically hazardous work to produce goods for an unappreciative public; environmentalists equate fear with the failure to commit to social change,

and with the failure to fully embody an intersubjective bond that they regard as central to the human-nature interface.

Chapter 8, the conclusion, pulls together the strings of evidence for the changing shape of culture both within the academy and across activist groups. It explores the benefits of studying environmental activism as a triangular process that incorporates both the influence of entrenched cultural forms and discourses and the oppositional dialogue between identity groups that work to promote change. I then draw some implications from this study for policy purposes, emphasizing those that concern the move towards public participation in local decisions about land management and the corresponding investigative methods used by policy analysts to ascertain how the public values nature.