

**Environmental Uncovering: Excavating Our Rhetoric in the Fracking Movement
and Beyond**

**By
Valan Anthos
Department of Environmental Science
Department of Philosophy
Allegheny College
Meadville, Pennsylvania**

April, 2016

Environmental Uncovering: Excavating Our Rhetoric in the Fracking Movement and
Beyond

By
Valan Anthos
Department of Environmental Science
Department of Philosophy
Allegheny College
Meadville, Pennsylvania

April, 2016

Submitted in fulfillment of the senior thesis requirements of the
Department of Environmental Science at Allegheny College
and approved by the senior thesis committee.

Dr. Comp Advisor

Date

Dr. 2nd Reader

Date

Pledge

Name: Valan Anthos

Date: Spring, 2016

Major: Environmental Studies, Philosophy

Thesis Committee: Dr. Ian Carbone, Dr. Eric Boynton

Title: Environmental Uncovering: Excavating our Rhetoric in the Fracking Movement and Beyond

There has been a false division between nature and society set up through the history of the Western world. This binary creates the context where many modern environmental issues arise, so combatting these problems without addressing this underlying issue is detrimental. Through a close analysis of the film *Gasland*, I examine how the rhetoric of pieces of environmental activism often remain trapped in this binary thinking and fail to truly challenge it. Although there is no “right” relation to nature that can be restored, there are certain avenues of language that can call attention to humanity’s separation from nature and deconstruct it in some way. One of the main avenues is focusing on people’s biological dependence on natural systems and how this has been covered over in modern society.

Introduction

Nature is always a contested term, its exact meaning always changing with different perspectives and times in history. It might typically conjure up some picturesque image of greenery and sparkling bodies of water, but the meaning of the word is much more complicated than it initially appears. Even though various people evoke this word constantly, they often do not fully realize all they are implying with the word. The modern concept of “nature” in Western thought has developed as a foil to society (Uggla 2010). The definition of nature ends up being hopelessly anthropocentric since it primarily defines nature as where humans are not present.

Humanity’s relation to nature in Western history has been always marked by either domination or protection. Uggla (2010) outlines this history in his essay “What is this thing called ‘natural’? The nature-culture divide in climate change and biodiversity policy.” He argues there is no true nature out there for us to find, but rather we should treat nature as a political category. He speaks about how the Judeo-Christian ethic has helped to instill either an orientation towards domination or one of stewardship towards the planet. A reading of these religions tends to produce either, but both of these positions stem from an understanding of humans as fundamentally distinct from the rest of nature and additionally “above” nature in some essential way. Both the relations of destruction and stewardship reinforce a fundamental division between nature and society. Both those who pollute and those who try to protect the environment are subscribing to the same ideology and living it out in different ways that ends in either destroying nature or “tying it up in a plastic bag to protect it from contamination” (Turner 1996).

Although advances in technology and modern thought greatly solidified this division in some ways, humanity’s separation from nature has been brewing for hundreds of years. This is not to suggest the story is a simple one that begins with humans in perfect harmony in nature and ends with an unfathomable rift of separation. Many older cultures, such as the Romans, greatly changed the local ecologies, although their area of influence was small in comparison to all that humans affect today (White 1996). Humans in the past were much more subject to the whims of nature that could at a moment’s notice destroy their crops or wipe out entire villages, so it makes sense that

advances in technology throughout the West's history often reflected an ever-increasing domination of nature. Even before the combination of science and technology in the 19th century that led to a sweeping domination of the natural world, there were advances such as a much more effective and aggressive plow in the seventh century that tore deep into the soil and molded it to humans' will (White 1996). This drive towards separation and domination has been simmering in the West's history for quite a while, but it exploded during the 19th century with both technological and ideological movements drastically shaping the world in unprecedented ways.

The Enlightenment has also significantly shaped the current relationship to nature. The rise of modernism and the industrial revolution during this time drastically changed humanity's relationship to nature. While humans might have already been somewhat separated from nature, this era of intellectualism and advanced technology allowed an unprecedented domination of the natural world. The natural world more firmly became raw "resources" that could fuel the projects of society. These natural inputs were quantified and extracted in large quantities from their place in nature so they could fuel economic growth and an ever-increasing race to create and consume more material goods (Uggla 2010).

The constructed meaning of nature delineates our separation from it and sets up an entrenched dualism between nature and society. Nature is defined as that which is untouched by humans, even though there is no longer anything that remains wholly unaffected by humans (McKibben 1989). Nature appears as the absence of society, so it is shaped around the idea of humans living in spaces deemed "society" that are somehow separate from the very natural systems that allow life to happen at all. Although nature and society clearly interact and are interlaced in many ways in physical space, these two areas have become conceptually separate. Uggla speaks of the irony of humans separating themselves from the very roots that make their bodily existence possible (2010). This conceptual separation from nature in many ways reflects Western mind-body dualism.

Philosophers have been struggling for ages to reconcile the supposed problem of how the mind relates to the body. Some recent philosophers, such as John Searle (2010), argue that there was never a problem in the first place and the mind has always

been obviously linked to the body through the brain that supports the mind. Even if science is still working out the details, it is clear that neurons firing in certain sections of the brain create the mental states that make up our experience of the mind (Searle 2010). Philosophers who speculated how the mind might be transcendent of the body and placed more value on the mind were ignoring the basic reality of how they have always been able to think and exist in the world. No matter how transcendent mental states might appear, they are dependent on the brain, which is made up of cells and depends on calories to continue to function (Fromm 1996).

Fromm (1996) describes how the ancient mind-body problem has taken on a new form in the past couple of decades with the artificial division between nature and society. Similar to the false mind-body problem, the artificial divide between nature and society is the product of humans denying how they are able to physically function in the world as beings that require food, air, and water. Although this contradiction is not the direct fault of modern technology, the industrial revolution greatly facilitated human's ability to deny on a daily basis their direct connection to the natural world. Early humans were constantly at the mercy of nature, whether it be lack of food, natural disasters or horrendous diseases. Although humans today are still to some degree at the mercy of these problems, the industrial revolution has brought about a domination of nature unprecedented in history that allows many to live in relative material comfort (Fromm 1996). Now many people's experience of obtaining the essentials of life is obscured from its origins, such as water coming out of the tap or meat being purchased already cut up and wrapped in plastic at the store. There might be a vague awareness that these products come from somewhere and that the waste from them must go somewhere, but these are not daily concerns and many are in the dark about how such products end up on the shelves.

Now in a cruel twist of irony, humanity's great triumph of technology is proving to be humanity's great downfall. All that has made people's lives easier and provided extensively for their every material comfort is contributing to a multitude of environmental problems where the very life systems humans have always been dependent on are being strained, all for the sake of a "better life." The link between human-produced greenhouse gases and climate change can be clearly seen through

the many reports showing unprecedented levels of greenhouse gases. The average temperatures since the Industrial Revolution have been getting increasingly warmer in a way that cannot simply be explained by climate variability (IPCC 2014). Even small temperature increases caused by climate change bring with them a long laundry list of ill effects, such as ocean acidification, melting icecaps, crop failure, species extinction or change of habitat, disturbing essential hydraulic systems, and many more seemingly minute changes that all contribute to scrambling the durable life support systems of the Earth (IPCC 2014). In a classic story of hubris, humankind tried to transcend the natural world through technology only to find that humans have always been deeply dependent on the natural environment. Meanwhile, technology has become an unexpected poison.

Despite mounting evidence of human destruction of the Earth's systems, many are still actively denying the importance of these very systems in comparison to the importance of modern conveniences. In his essay "From Transcendence to Obsolescence", Fromm depicts this irony through analyzing a letter he received from a woman asking how we are to reconcile environmental protection with the modern conveniences even environmentalists use, such as cars. She asks, "Do we destroy our economy: eliminate many necessities of life; go back to living in tents for the sake of clean air?" (Fromm 1996). This question reveals how deeply entrenched the nature/society divide is and how it conceals the very life support systems that this woman depends on. The question she tries to ask of how to balance the modern technological world we live in with environmental protection is an important one. However, the way she proposes this question reveals a profound disconnect between what she views as essential for life and what is truly essential for life.

When society is conceptualized as separate from nature and more important to life, environmental concerns are often trumped by economic concerns. When contemplating how clean air might not count as a necessity of life to the woman who wrote the letter, Fromm breaks down how she is conceptualizing "necessities." When this woman evokes the idea of necessities for life, she is not talking about the physical needs of her body, namely air, food, and water (1996). She is instead speaking of her mind's will and those things that support her mind's conceptions of itself and the world (Fromm 1996). Her body's biological existence is taken as a given, so that clean air

appears as a luxury in comparison to that which supports the mental landscape of society, such as economics. When this question is ultimately reframed, it becomes “Do we give up the necessities of life for the sake of remaining alive?” In this question, clean air is replaced with remaining alive since clean air is clearly essential for one’s continued biological existence (Fromm 1996). Although this phrasing makes the question seem contradictory and preposterous, it reveals the somewhat absurd disconnect people have developed about their own biological existence and what is truly needed to support that existence. This is not to suggest that all technology and aspects of modern society must be abandoned, but rather this is meant to illustrate the larger problem of humanity’s ignorance of their roots in the Earth.

This woman is by no means an abnormality, as we see this kind of rhetoric often and it is an outcropping of the general attitude regarding nature and society. Chamber of Commerce executive vice president Arch Booth echoed a similar sentiment when he stated, “Clear air, land and water are vital to all of us. But so are jobs, food, clothing and housing. We have to weigh the total impact on the environment along with the economic and social costs in order to clean up” (Waterhouse 2014). Similar to the woman, Booth clearly separates the realms of nature and society with air, land, and water being important but weighed against the more immediate societal concerns of jobs, food, clothing, and housing. It is as if things like clothing and food do not depend always already upon clean air, land, and water. Weighing the costs of these two lists of things really does not make sense when you realize how incredibly interconnected they are. Of course jobs and proper housing are important to people’s well-being and a well functioning society, but how could these be prioritized over the very air people breathe or the water we drink? All too often, current environmental debates get reduced to this game of tradeoffs where the basic health of the Earth’s natural systems that support all life is treated as of equal or less importance than societal needs such as a strong economy or jobs. It is not that these societal concerns should be dismissed, but rather a more holistic viewpoint allows one to see that the needs of society are utterly dependent upon and connected to nature in such a way that makes treating the two as completely separate absurd.

This division has real consequences for the environmental movement. If nature is viewed as inherently separate, then this game of weighing human interests above environmental interests will continue. This separateness prompts humans to not take their biological reliance or the diversity of natural systems seriously. It promotes a “shallow” ecology that typically only takes into account short-term perspectives that are directly related to human interests (Patrik 2015). A good historical example of this is the destruction of wetlands in the United States, where many of these areas were destroyed for development. The early settlers considered the wetlands to be unproductive land and hotbeds of disease, so by the 1920’s about 70 percent of wetlands had been modified or completely changed through drainage practices in order to change them into more productive farmland. It was only in the past couple of decades that there has been increasing awareness that wetlands are incredibly important and diverse ecosystems that provide invaluable services to humans, such as water filtration and flood mitigation (Dahl & Allord 1997). This systematic choice to drain and repurpose wetlands is a classic example of humans greatly modifying nature in order to suit their short-term needs, such as the need for good farmland.

If humans identify themselves primarily with society, than those concerns of a strong economy will trump the perceived “luxury” of clean water. This is especially concerning for combatting climate change, where the effects are spread out, hard to determine exactly, and happen slowly over time. It is in modern society’s best interest to continue its destructive path and have those less fortunate or a couple generations down the road pay the price of climate change. A capitalist society’s goal of endless economic growth is served through unsustainable resource exploitation. When the goals of society and nature are perceived as separate, only then can the goal of endless economic growth appear as much more important than inadvertently changing the climate to the detriment of all life and ecosystems. Unlike in the past, where humanity’s separation and subsequent abuse of nature led to local ecosystem destruction, the effects have been greatly amplified by modern technology and the population boom. A perspective that allows for humans to consider themselves in nature always already, such as deep ecology, could be useful in destabilizing the division between humans and

nature and put into question the belief that human needs are unconnected from all other needs (Patrik 2015).

Deep ecology is a movement that arose during the 1970s on the heels of the mainstream environmental movement picking up steam after Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (Timothy 2002). A Norwegian philosopher named Arne Naess spearheaded the movement and made the distinction between shallow ecology, which helps the environment only as much as it directly benefits humans, and deep ecology, which proposes that all of nature has intrinsic value and humans are simply a small part of the overall picture (Timothy 2002). Many critics complain that deep ecology cannot be relevant in the rational and anthropocentric worlds of policy and business. (Diehm 2007). This criticism may have some merit, but it misses the point of a perspective such as deep ecology. It may be true that at the current moment articulating the inherent value of other creatures and ecosystems in the legal system will not prompt more environmental legislation, but the problem lies in the set up of legislation itself. In a separated context, societal intuitions will only respond to that which appeals to immediate societal needs unconnected from environmental needs. Although it is a longer process, the premise that environmental concerns must adhere to the flawed rules of societal intuitions to get recognition is what must be changed.

The often-criticized perspective of anthropocentrism is a direct consequence of the divide. Only in a conceptual landscape where humans and nature are separate can there be perspective that is human-centric at the expense of nature. If humans and nature were more intimately connected, then a human-centric perspective would also focus on all of nature (Grey 1993). Anthropocentrism is not necessarily the problem, but rather how it arises in the context of separation is certainly a cause for concern for environmentalists. Deep ecology attempts to counter anthropocentrism through a more ecocentric view, but this only leads to delusion. To take an ecocentric viewpoint in a divided context would not solve the problem of separation, but rather hold nature up above humanity while ignoring our inescapable human perspective (Grey 1993).

Our attitudes towards nature and society consequently shape our built environment and our environment informs our ideas regarding nature. It's a feedback loop with no definite beginning, as humans have always in some ways been shaped by,

and have been constantly shaping, their environment (Preston 2003). People tried to separate themselves from the perils of nature and the environments built from that reflects that desire. They also reinforce those divisions in all who live in them. In our pastoral ideology, nature is landscape, nature is background, but nature is rarely us. We consume landscapes as readily as we consume oil and coal, and decide what really constitutes nature by how supposedly untouched by humanity it is and how much it matches our preconceived notions of what nature is supposed to look like (Turner 1996). In this feedback loop, simply telling someone about their problematic separation from the natural world cannot fix these deeply ingrained problems. If our ideologies are deeply embedded in both our consciousness and our world, the shift to something else will be slow and laborious.

One of the major ways to interfere with this powerful feedback loop could be language. Language is obviously central in communication, but it also reveals the values a culture holds or the underlying ideology of the person speaking (Ryan et al. 1997). As shown in the two examples of people speaking on the tensions between societal and environmental issues, how people speak reveals their underlying beliefs that they themselves might not be fully aware of. The woman who wrote the letter to Fromm would obviously not agree that she was essentially asking the question of whether we should give up the necessities of life in order to live, yet her statement reveals a very common conceptualization of nature as inherently separate from society. Not only does language reveal, but also it subtly reinforces and passes on those values (Ryan et al. 1997).

In addition to revealing how people are conceptualizing nature, language creates and reinforces certain meanings and understandings about the world. In the process of enacting environmental rhetoric, certain meanings are created, reinforced, or abandoned (Myerson & Rydin 1996). Language reflects a culture's relationship to nature that's been built into the words and phrases over hundreds of years (Ryan et al. 1997). When people engage in environmental rhetoric, they are drawing upon culturally pertinent ways of speaking about nature and environmental issues (Myerson & Rydin 1996). If many examples of rhetoric about environmental issues reflect and reinforce a fundamental separation from nature, then this becomes a normalized and accepted way

of talking about these issues. This is concerning since what is talked about and how has a large impact upon the laws that are created, the behavior and strength of various institutions, and the lives of people all over the world (Myerson & Rydin 1996).

In response to cold, scientific descriptions of nature or the dreaded business-like reductionism that translates natural systems into resources, many environmentalists have turned towards poetic language that paints nature more favorably. This kind of nature romanticism started with the Transcendentalists in the 19th century and continues today (Helms 2008). Some environmentalists believe this language is the key to people connecting and caring more about the environment, but even this dialogue is not free from the problematic conceptions of the people/nature dualism. Poetry does not ultimately connect people more to nature since it brings attention instead to the letters themselves that are always an abstraction of some sort no matter how concrete the language.

Helms (2008) claims that poetry cannot heal the rift between humans and nature but it can at the very least reveal the concealing of the world that language performs. The problem in speaking about nature might not be one specific type of language (scientific versus poetic), but rather the problem might be that language is always manifesting as the tension between humans and their environment (Helms 2008). There is no one type of “right” language, since “it is the nature of language always to be both a solution and a problem” (Helms 2008). Therefore, any attempts to “fix” language in a way that fully restores some primordial relation with the Earth will fall short. The act of performing language, whether externally or internally, is an abstraction of the experience of nature. Language always comes after the initial encounter with nature, so even though it tries to make sense of things, it also to some degree always separates the person from nature.

This does not mean the project of attending to language is a hopeless one. There is great value in understanding what exactly language is concealing about our distorted relationship to nature. Although there is no way of adapting language so it is free from these problems, there is language that calls attention to itself in a way that exposes the problems. Thorough analysis and criticism of popular environmental rhetoric is a type of language that can help expose those beliefs that were previously concealed. This brings

the problems to the forefront on consciousness, and opens other possibilities in environmental rhetoric. Language that either directly or indirectly addresses the divide aids in the process of deconstruction. The most productive kind of language becomes the kind that helps in this process of uncovering or deconstruction.

The fracking movement presents an interesting window into environmental rhetoric. A movement that only in the past couple years has gained traction, it differs from some more abstract environmental problems like climate change in that it invades people's homes and completely disrupts the lives of those directly affected. Fracking is short for hydraulic fracturing, a special kind of drilling process that involves injecting vast amounts of water underground to create small fissures in shale formations so that they release natural gas. This process has been around since the 1940s, but recent advances in technology that allow for horizontal drilling instead of just vertical drilling have made many more large formations containing natural gas economically viable, leading to a large natural gas boom in the past decade or two (Brantley & Meyendorff 2013). Fracking has caused a lot of backlash from environmentalists who cite the secretive list of chemicals that is put into the water and testimony of landowners who claim their well water has been contaminated by nearby fracking operations (Brantley & Meyendorff 2013). Since the accusations against fracking are that it contaminates the water, it provides an interesting avenue since it corrupts what is most essential for life. Despite water's importance in people's biological existence, it often exists in the background of people's lives and this importance is only highlighted through it being sullied. In this sense, the fracking movement has the potential to highlight humanity's dependence on nature. It also had concrete immediate consequences for ordinary citizens, so it provides a more tangible problem that people can relate to than some other environmental issues.

My project involves looking closely at the rhetoric in the fracking movement, focusing upon how the language used in fracking activism could be inadvertently reinforcing a division between nature and society. For my study into the fracking movement, I choose to focus on *Gasland*, produced by activist Josh Fox, which is a documentary revealing some of the environmental concerns associated with fracking. *Gasland* is fairly representative of the wider fracking movement, and was central to

shaping the movement and bringing it to national attention. In the wake of *Gasland*, there was increased research on fracking, coverage on mass media and social media, and screenings of the film greatly contributed to anti-fracking activism that lead to political and legal consequences (Vasi et al 2015). *Gasland* is clearly a success in terms of bringing national attention to an environmental problem. It features many interviews with people who were directly affected by fracking, and who may have to consider their biological dependence in ways they never have before. The language of this film and the implicit assumptions it strengthens have reached many ordinary people as well as environmentalists. The kind of rhetoric and approach of *Gasland* has shaped many people's experience of the fracking movement, and for this reason what exactly the rhetoric is doing is of great importance. If very successful pieces of media are perpetrating an ideology of separation, then this could explain some of the stagnation and hurdles in environmental progress.

In my project, I will examine the rhetoric used in the film *Gasland* by both the director/activist Josh Fox and the many ordinary citizens he interviews. Through this speech, I hope to gain an understanding of how fracking is being framed in terms of connections and divisions between nature and society. I suspect that even those who are advocating for environmental issues might be unknowingly trapped in these ways of thinking, and they could be inadvertently solidifying the very ideologies they need to tear down in order to advance environmental progress. The goal of my project is to discover what kind of language can help expose and deconstruct the division between nature and society. In this endeavor, I am utilizing *Gasland* and the fracking movement in order to examine how the rhetoric might be helping in this project but also how it might be detrimental. Through the process of analyzing *Gasland*, I hope to determine the usefulness of the project of uncovering meaning in rhetoric.

Methods

For my project, I chose the frameworks provided by Fromm and Uggla to engage with to explain the nuances of the nature/society divide. I chose Fromm since in his essay of ecocriticism, he tackled the absurdity of humanity's progression from fear of nature to domination and ultimately to technology that threatens the roots of existence. He lays out the current environmental crisis as an ontological problem rather than a technological one, which is a major argument I use when claiming the ontological problem of the divide is what is holding back the environmental movement. I chose Uggla since he laid out the history of the nature/society divide and spoke to the constructed and political aspects of nature. This feeds into my argument regarding the troubling current conception of nature and how some sort of reframing must occur. I rounded out my discussions of the ideas of these two authors with additional related research.

I've also examined through Helms how language in regards to nature is not simply a matter of "wrong" or "right" language, but rather a deeper problem embedded in the nature of language itself. I can point out instances of language that is laden with problems and clear signs of conceptual division, but I cannot prescribe how exactly to speak of nature in a way that completely avoids these issues and connects humans fully into their environments. This is because any language is somewhat of an abstraction of the environment, so there is no one way of speaking that completely avoids the problem of separating people from their environment. With this knowledge, my task becomes to analyze what studying language in this manner can reveal about both human's relation to nature and what role language plays in the relation. I can identify language that either explicitly or implicitly calls attention to society's separation from nature and that begins the process of deconstructing the underlying ideology. This process of critiquing language and revealing the ways it can cover up humanity's distorted relation to nature is my primary task in analyzing the rhetoric used in environmental media.

I choose to focus on the modern fracking movement and the language being employed there. I choose the fracking movement for its media publicity and for how it was an environmental problem that directly invaded people's homes with contaminated water. It stands apart as a problem that became intimately connected to people's daily

lives in their ability to use water. Clean water is used every day and is a background condition upon which people depend on for their daily functioning. One of the biggest controversies that arose with hydraulic fracturing is how some people experienced contaminated water that was now unsuitable for drinking or bathing and caused unusual and debilitating diseases (Brantley & Meyendorff 2013). Fracking presents an interesting opportunity to expose people's biological dependence on natural systems. Although clean water is the most important factor in people's continued health and biological existence, this connection has been covered over by the conceptual division between nature and society. The pollution of the water brings it to the forefront and allows water to show up as essential for life. In this sense, the fracking movement could be useful in calling attention to how societal endeavors depend on the natural systems that support all human's biological existence.

I analyzed the film *Gasland*, a defining piece of media in the fracking movement, and one of the biggest players in terms of bringing national awareness to the issues with fracking (Vasi 2015). I combed through the film, looking for instances that spoke to the problem of division, either by challenging it in some way or by inadvertently reinforcing it. I then tried to trace these instances of rhetoric throughout the film, seeing which ones showed up again in similar or different contexts along with which language seemed to disappear more easily. After identifying these patterns of rhetoric in the film, I gathered them into four major categories: Society is more real than nature, Nature's order and its disturbances, Justice for who?, and Absence. In each section I highlight examples and speak more broadly about how this theme shows up in the film and what it means for the larger project of critiquing a division between nature and society.

My focus is on the language of environmental activists and ordinary people who have been affected by this particular environmental crisis. I am particularly interested in the language of activists since they have a large part shaping the discourse around environmental issues. I want to examine some of the ways they might be unknowingly trapped within the framework of the nature/society binary, or if they have found ways of speaking that deliberately call out and challenge it. I am also interested in the rhetoric of ordinary people who have been directly affected by fracking to see if this experience has changed how they are conceptualizing their biological dependence, and more

broadly, the connections between nature and society. The language of the citizens in the film also reflects back on the filmmaker, Josh Fox, as it reveals his focus in conversations with people and also the way he is ultimately choosing to portray the issue of fracking through including some things people say and not including others.

Within these four sections, I perform a philosophical analysis that combines a study of ontology and a rich description of the first-person experience. Ontology is the study of what is, and can encompass conceptual structures and differing relations to reality (Hofweber 2014). I use a study of ontology in this project in order to identify the existence of underlying ideologies that are informing certain ways of speaking. I also examine how things are “showing up” for people in the film. Certain conceptual landscapes and ideologies shape a person’s reality, so certain things will appear in different ways depending on the person or context. I use this mode of philosophy to investigate how things appear to those citizens in the film before and after fracking caused their water to become polluted and also how things show up for Josh Fox as an activist. An example of this would be a businessman who looks at the forest, and this forest shows up as resources to fuel his business. Meanwhile, for someone with a nature-based spirituality, the forest would show up as a place of rich tranquility and spiritual truths.

From these analyses I hope to gain a nuanced understanding of the many trappings and breakthroughs in environmentalist rhetoric and point to productive pursuits in terms of language. If I try to produce any definitive, concrete suggestions for specific ways of talking about nature, I will be falling into the trap that many have of asserting that I have absolutely escaped the deep problem of the nature/culture divide that is embedded in every aspect of our lives and language. Much of my work will be uncovering the mostly hidden ways language traps us in problematic binary thinking, and how this kind of critique can help with the slow process of consciousness shifting.

Analysis

Society is More Real than Nature

Within a nature/society dualism, there is the interesting phenomenon of society appearing as more real than nature. In this dualism, people consider nature to be spaces that match their preconceived notions of what qualifies as nature. These will be spaces where there is minimal evidence of human interference or life, such as a forest where no one lives. Since people are constantly involved with society and less frequently directly involve themselves with what they consider to be nature, the concerns of society appear as the most pressing problems while natural systems are considered secondary. When those natural systems are considered, it is often because there has been a break in the illusion of societal independence that demands some action related to natural systems. This is how concerns about economic growth and securing oil and gas can easily trump concerns about clean air and water.

Gasland centers upon the necessity of clean water for people's lives, and in this regard challenges the idea that the spheres of society and nature are separate. By emphasizing the importance of clean water, *Gasland* at some level exposes society's dependence upon natural systems. However, it still falls into the trap of considering society as more real than nature with its focus mostly upon people, companies, and governmental organizations. The real heart of the film is a road trip stringing together narratives of people whose lives have been ruined, and this somewhat overshadows the massive damage done to nature that is not directly connected to the human suffering being portrayed (Fox et al. 2010).

In an interview with John Hanger, secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Fox questions him about how they can continue fracking when it is polluting so much water. When questioned, he replies, "Folks on this side of the camera have to make some real decisions in the real world....I have to make trade-offs" (Fox et al. 2010). It appears that the "real world" is not the physical reality of the world but is the societal world of economics and business where it makes sense to continue fracking and paying off all the people who have their water polluted. This is the

context in which fracking is being justified, since it makes sense in the “real world.” The fatal flaw in this thinking is not that some hard decisions and compromises have to be made, but rather it is pretending that societal concerns and the concerns of nature are separate. When you sacrifice the health of natural ecosystems, this undermines society, even if the effects are only felt by those less fortunate or those in future generations. When Fox pushes Hanger on the subject, speaking of all the people he has met with polluted water, Hanger responds that anyone who has problems with pollution has had their water replaced (Fox et al. 2010).

After that interview, Fox ponders, “How much water could you replace?” as the camera pans over rivers and lakes (Fox et al. 2010). Fox is deliberately calling out the practice of trucking in water from somewhere else when the groundwater has been polluted. This “solution” does solve the immediate problem of getting clean water to the family, but it is ignoring how the natural systems have been ruined and will likely remain contaminated indefinitely in the future. In this question, Fox is troubling the industry’s division of nature with society and calling attention to the interconnectedness of water. Clearly implied in this question is that Fox does not believe the fracking industry can ever truly “replace” the water they are corrupting. He is challenging the idea that societal concerns should trump those of nature. Contaminating groundwater and bodies of water does more than just create the immediate problem of clean tap water for those who live in that area. It ruins important sources of water that have value beyond just their immediate service to the people in the surrounding area.

This kind of troubling the divide shows up much earlier in the film as well, before Fox sets off on his road trip to discover the damage fracking does. He speaks about the stream near his house, saying “This is a place I know, it’s a place that runs through my mind, and it’s always there and it feels like it’s the source of all life. And it is. You need water for life” (Fox et al. 2010). Before he sets off on his road trip to find all the damage polluted water has done to people, he affirms the importance of water and its place as the source for life. This is an example of more holistic language that breaks down a strict barrier between nature and humanity by reminding people that their life is sustained by water.

After an explanation of some of the dangerous chemicals found in a water sample, the film overlays an anonymous resident on the phone saying, “A dollar bill cannot bring back what they have taken away” (Fox et al. 2010). This is referencing the practice of residents getting paid per acre of their land that they allow companies to drill on. There is usually a signing bonus that averages at least a couple thousand dollars (Fox et al. 2010). The resident is affirming that any economic benefit, either to society or to the families, cannot repair the damage that has been done to the water and the landscape. This citizen, who likely was enticed by the hefty signing bonus, has undergone a change in consciousness on what is important. It is likely that before, societal concerns such as economics appeared more real than nature to this citizen, but the traumatic experience of water pollution has exposed this ideology and shifted their values. The choice to include this sentiment also reflects Fox’s desire to point to the significance of the problems fracking causes and how they cannot be justified through economic means.

The reference to “what they have taken away” hints at a greater awareness of the importance and interconnectedness of natural systems, but it does not take this point much further. Additionally, this point of awareness is relatively short-lived in comparison to the vast amounts of time dedicated to societal problems. These moments in the film appear as breaches of the more typical rhetoric focused upon society alone, and then they recede into the background fairly quickly. The gas companies have essentially taken away the ability to function as a healthy person in society. The background in the citizens’ lives of clean water from the tap has been disrupted, and all that rests upon this begins to break down. Still, there is not much focus upon the wider implications of sully millions of gallons of water and injecting it underground, even those times when it does not get into someone’s drinking water. There is only the hint of these types of concerns, never a real engagement with them.

Even to those who have their biological needs threatened, there is still the sense that society is more real than nature. Accordingly, they turn first to society to solve the problems it has created through natural gas drilling. They want to hold the gas companies responsible and pressure them to repair the damage they have done, at least by replacing the water that has been ruined even if they can never fully undo the

damage. This is a reasonable and necessary step for residents who are struggling greatly. Of course gas companies should be held responsible for how they have affected people's lives, yet positioning the problem as mere legal retribution forecloses upon the possibility of grappling with the kind of ideologies that allow for the situation of polluted fracking water in the first place. Solving the problem through only through the vein of society by legal retribution does not address the issue of society appearing as more real than nature that allows fracking to continue uninhibited in the first place.

This perspective does not allow certain questions regarding the situation to arise, such as, "What are the implications of natural gas drilling for whole ecosystems decades down the road?" Or, "Why does society need natural gas in the first place?" This is not to imply that *Gasland* does not ask important questions about the safety of fracking and the economic and political conditions that allow for fracking. However, those types of questions cannot reach too far outside the realm of society. The economic and political questions cannot question society's position itself and its turbulent relationship with nature. The kinds of questions that destabilize the division between nature and society do not arise often. At one point Fox does question the premise of fracking itself, asking if we really need to be fracking at all (Fox et al. 2010). Although this question helps to disrupt the assumption that fracking must occur, Fox does not pursue the point further to examine exactly why fracking has the kind of power it does. He only questions the practice of fracking itself, but does not ask how fracking can appear of greater importance than clean water within the larger framework of broad social needs always trumping those of nature.

An unspoken idea emerges from complaints about fracking affecting humans: If society must drill for natural gas in order to keep itself going, then it should do so far away from humans. Already, natural gas drilling tends to almost entirely affect those in more rural communities. If drilling happened in a highly populated area, there would be a huge uproar right away. These types of things must remain somewhat hidden from the general population, or at least out of sight. The dirty conditions that allow society to continue on must occur more in that other space, nature, where there are very few, if any, people around. The disruption of society is deemed far more important than the disruption of nature. If nature is sullied and there are no humans to be harmed or to

mourn the loss, then can it even appear as a problem? The abuse of nature does not show up to most people until they see the direct affects of such actions on humans and can relate through the experience of human pain. Fox is likely not trying to imply that fracking should simply occur somewhere else where it does not affect people, but he unknowingly reinforces this idea. His journey to discover the truth about fracking was motivated by reports of people with polluted water they could light on fire, and the pattern continues throughout the movie where the focus remains upon how people's lives in society have been disrupted.

Nature's Order and its Disruptions

Throughout the film, Fox insinuates that fracking is disrupting some fundamental natural order. What exactly that natural order is remains vague and is never clearly stated. The shock and disgust at the polluted state of the water, the water being lit on fire, and the gas wells that loom over every landscape point to Fox's feelings that something has been corrupted. Although Fox pins this disruption explicitly on the gas companies, he is tapping into a common trope in environmentalist circles. This is the trope of humans being a fundamentally corrupting force in nature, and this kind of thinking is upheld by the binary that constructs nature as that which is completely untouched by humans (Turner 1996). Fracking appears as a disruption, but Fox's critique and resistance to this ends up reinforcing the notion that humans are a fundamentally corrupting force upon nature.

A startling image that is prominent throughout the film is that of the water on fire. When water is contaminated with enough natural gas, it can be lit on fire. That means when a house's water supply becomes contaminated, all the pipes in the house contain flammable material and hold the dangerous potential to be explosive. Fox spends a decent amount of time on this phenomenon in the film, chasing down these stories of people who can light their water on fire (Fox et al. 2010). When the film finally shows a man who lights the water coming right out of his sink on fire, the effect is drastic. Fox exclaims after the act, "It's really upsetting actually, it's not supposed to do that" (Fox et al. 2010). This is quite the interesting statement, considering it might be brushed off as

Fox stating the obvious. The reason why Fox makes this comment and then chooses to include it in the film is because the water on fire carries with it a deep sense of wrongness, a sort of reversal of the natural order. It stands as the climax of the water troubles, and becomes a symbol for how profoundly troubling this whole situation is.

The spectacle of the water on fire is significant because it relies upon this underlying assumption that there is a natural order and humans have disturbed this. Water should not be able to catch fire when people are used to water putting out fire. The water on fire appeals to a wider notion of natural order. Although not stated outright, implicit in this symbol is that nature has a certain order and humans, specifically the natural gas companies, have greatly disturbed this order. The United States' dependence on fossil fuels clearly comes at a great cost, the cost of turning what is most essential for life into a potential explosive.

The awe and obsession surrounding the water on fire points to society's corrupting influence upon what should be. The water that is essential for life, and consequently society, is being ruined by predetermined societal needs. Society's need for fuel caused the pollution of the water. These societal concerns are constantly undermining society by corrupting what is most essential for human existence above all else, water. This absurdity can only take place when the ideas of society and nature are deeply divided. Fox is calling out this disruption, directly stating that this is not how things should be. The implication is that things should be according to the natural order.

Another part of the film where fracking is displayed as disturbing nature's order is when Fox is driving through the largest gas field where the landscape has been drastically changed by seemingly endless gas wells. Fox describes this place as a "moonscape" and dreads driving through a place where the impact of fracking is so clear. There are many shots from the road and overhead where you see the dusty landscape strewn with drill wells, refinery machines, and trucks. The fracking operations have disturbed the landscape, and Fox implies it is not for the best. Vast open fields of public land have been torn up and scarred from intensive fracking practices.

In the midst of this scarred landscape, Fox brings up how some animals' habitats have been disrupted. He shows images of the Prong-Horned Antelope in a grassy field while explaining that the major gas fields are in a historic migration path of this

endangered species and that the species has suffered a decline since 2005 (Fox et al. 2010). He references how the gas fields have been built on a “thousand year old migration corridor,” clearly implying that fracking is interfering with nature’s order (Fox et al. 2010). The peaceful image of the antelopes in the field stands in stark opposition to the shots of the ugly, dusty landscape of gas wells. This is one of the few times in the film animals are part of the conversation, however briefly, and while it might call attention to the problem of the Prong-Horned Antelope for a second, the example is really just to show how large-scale fracking operations wreck the natural order.

In the face of this disruption of the landscape, Fox responds in a way that only reinforces a problematic division between nature and society. When he reflects on how he was able to travel around the gas field freely, Fox comments, “It was BLM land, it was mine. It belonged to every United States citizen” (Fox et al. 2010). BLM land means that it is public land controlled by the Bureau of Land Management, but certain deals were made so there could be fracking on this public land (Fox et al. 2010). With this statement, Fox is trying to reclaim this land back from the fracking companies who he perceives as having soiled it, but this has some unsavory implications.

Fox’s statement regarding the BLM land serves to think of land in terms of human ownership instead of something that is valuable in its own right. Although Fox’s intentions were likely to call attention to this abuse of public land and mobilize people to reclaim it, he inadvertently reinforces the notion that the land is some thing *for* humans rather than something that holds value and meaning in its own right and in relation to humans. In trying to rip the land out of the grasp of gas companies, he has it remain in total human control. All land is owned, quantified, existing for human’s benefit in some way, even if its just for the aesthetic pleasure. It prompts people to reconnect to the land, but in a way of ownership that maintains a strict division between nature and society. Land ownership distorts the relationship between humans and the land, making nature something that is caged by people. Additionally, the ownership narrative can only arise in a context where humans are separated in some fundamental sense from the land itself. Fox’s language was not of an affinity for the land, or a belonging to the land along with other species, but one of possession. If humans are divided from nature,

then one of the only ways to relate to the land is through ownership, since this maintains the division.

When Fox is explaining what BLM land is, he states “The BLM stated mission, is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity for the use and enjoyment for present and future generations” (Fox et al. 2010). He articulates this as he drives across the fields brimming with gas wells that he clearly feels violates the integrity of the BLM’s mission. He is implying that the BLM is not completing its stated mission in giving so much land up for natural gas drilling. In framing the issue in this way, he does not call out the kind of language the BLM is using in the first place, and later replicates it when he affirms that this land belongs to every United States citizen. The land remains always for humans, either in the present or in the future, and its maintenance is only for this purpose.

The language of the BLM is an outgrowth of attitudes of the government and larger society towards the purpose of land, and Fox fails to question the very premises the BLM rests upon. The idea of sustaining the “productivity” of the land is likely the kind of thinking that allows the BLM to sign off huge tracts of land to gas companies in the name of productivity for humans. It is not that humans should not use the land, but the idea of “productivity” is one born out of a modern capitalist ideology that only values things by their outputs and does not take a holistic viewpoint. Fox’s failure to question the language of productivity and the land being something for humans results in him replicating this very language in a way that reinforces division.

This ownership of the land shows up again in the very last lines of the film. As pictures of streams and running water show, Fox articulated “My backyard wasn’t my backyard anymore. It belonged to everybody else too...and it’s possible the gas land might stretch a little bit further than my backyard, into yours” (Fox et al. 2010). These are the final lines Fox leaves the viewer with, clearly trying to entice the viewer to realize that fracking is a widespread problem that could easily affect their town. This language makes sense for Fox’s purpose, which is to encourage people to campaign against unregulated fracking even when it has yet to directly affect them. In that sense, his closing lines are perfectly suited to shifting people’s thinking to conceive of fracking as a national problem that involves them.

Although the language of “my backyard” might encourage some to consider fracking as a potentially more personal problem, it still mirrors the problematic language of ownership displayed earlier in the film. The land that is worth protecting is directly related to human ownership. Fracking is a problem because it might “stretch into your backyard,” namely it could disrupt your property and consequently your daily life. The ultimate message is not one of the wider implications of fracking on the land, the ecosystems, the creatures, and the humans who are affected. Rather, the message is clear that this terrible disruption of daily life could happen to you, and that’s why you should care and go campaign against fracking when it comes to your town. The “disruption” that is focused upon in the end is still the disruption to society, which is valued over the disruption of nature.

Justice for Who?

One of the main focal points in *Gasland* is the great injustice being done to those people whose water has been polluted. The real heart of the movie is these interviews with people talking about their great suffering due to fracking polluting the well water they depend on for daily functioning. One after the other, residents tell a similar story of contaminated water and the effects it has produced on their health and their livelihood. One resident, Ron Carter, summarizes the common situation saying, “We’ve lived here 40 years and never had a problem with the water...after they drilled the water was bad” (Fox et al. 2010). Similar statements are made throughout the film, and the effect is a centering of human pain. While to some degree this human pain can be the starting point for realizing humanity’s biological dependence on natural systems, often the conversation stops at human pain. If the story that is told is only one of human pain that is remedied through legal action, then it does not contribute to the project of breaking down a division between humans and nature.

The people delivering these lines are downtrodden, stuck in homes with water that makes them sick. The first person Fox interviews, Pat Farnelli, paints a grim picture of her town, stating “Everybody was sick, including me, our stomachs were acting up and couldn’t handle eating anything for over a month” (Fox et al. 2010).

Understandably, the rhetoric of the residents interviewed is concentrated on the injustice of the situation for the people who have been directly affected. One farmer's wife interviewed later in the film highlights this, complaining that "They can drill wherever they like, it doesn't seem to matter that we're affected, that humans are being affected" (Fox et al. 2010).

That seems to be the primary message *Gasland* drives home, that "humans are being affected" (Fox et al. 2010). Only once fracking disrupts the daily workings of people in society is it able to attract mass concern. Before the reports came in of people who could not even drink their tap water, who could even light it on fire, not many people really knew or cared about fracking. It was just another piece of the fossil fuel puzzle that allowed society to continue on as usual. Only when it ends up disrupting societal workings, even if it's a minority of people, does it appear as injustice. It could not appear so earlier, when the concerns were more abstract and related only to water use and potential ecosystem damage that could not be calculated well. It is understandable that fracking truly became an issue when humans were being directly affected, but this does not address how fracking was causing problems that affected humans even before people had their well water contaminated.

The aspects of fracking that affect nature could not show up as injustice in the same way that people being unable to use their water shows up as injustice. These other aspects of fracking only become important in light of the human pain that immediately shows up as intolerable injustice. The danger with this kind of framing is that it ignores how humans are affected by nature and are always already connected to it. The focus of *Gasland* is how people have been affected only in the instance of their well water being contaminated and becoming undrinkable. The dangerous assumption is that only in this instance are humans being affected, and only in this instance must there be some kind of injustice.

The effects of fracking harm humans even if the well water never gets polluted. The natural gas that escapes during drilling and the CO₂ produced when the natural gas is used affect the very climate all people live in. The use and subsequent corruption of millions of gallons of water affects ecosystems and diverts large amounts of water from other uses such as agriculture or recreation. If the well water was not being

contaminated, it is not the case that fracking would be primarily harming “nature” rather than humans. *Gasland* focuses primarily on the phenomenon of those who have had their well water sullied, yet it does not consider how the other effects of fracking are also connected to humans, sometimes in more ambiguous ways.

The ecosystem people are a part of does not connect to their lives *until* the water is undrinkable and they are faced with their biological dependence upon clean water. The water before was nothing but background noise, it never truly stood out but was built into our daily lives in a way that hid its importance. Its vital importance comes to light only in its corruption. This is the situation that stands out in fracking, because it so directly forces humans to grapple with their biological dependence upon water. This is what shows up as injustice. This is an important starting point, but *Gasland* does not take advantage of this reveal to focus more deeply upon how the affects of fracking on nature are always affecting humans as well. Ultimately, justice for humans would mean justice for nature as well.

How fracking affects animals and ecosystems is brought up only in the context of fracking contaminating people’s water. There is a brief minute or two in the film when Fox brings up how one of the largest gas fields is in the migration path of the Prong Horned Antelope (Fox et al. 2010). This issue only comes to light in the overall narrative of human pain, and hence not much time is spent upon how gas wells damage the ecosystems where they exist. The issue of the antelopes appears as an issue separate from humans and a more minor one. The loss of species diversity caused by natural gas drilling should be taken seriously. It is an issue connected to humans, not wholly separate.

Another theme undercutting the rhetoric is the unsympathetic bureaucracy of the gas companies. With a mixture of frustration and defeat, residents recount encounters with the gas companies who dismiss or deny their concerns. Even those who have had their water replaced by the companies are still frustrated by the irreversible damage done to their property and health (Fox et al. 2010). This narrative of unfeeling gas companies and victimized people is a story about justice in the realm of society, with nature still existing as a mere backdrop to the tale.

The endless litany of unsavory encounters residents had with the oil and gas companies successfully establishes these companies as the villains. One resident who could light her water on fire, Rene McClur explains:

What blows my mind is that the oil and gas conservation commission, I thought they were there to work for the people. They are not there to work for the people, they are there to work and help the oil and gas companies, and I asked them, who's there for the people? And he said, 'nobody, call an attorney.' (Fox et al. 2010).

This is just one example of many stories of unsympathetic gas companies. These encounters paint those working for the gas companies anywhere from evasive and in denial to downright cruel. Although the conversation about corporate responsibility is clearly an important one, it can cover up the more basic problem. The true “villain” might in fact be the distorted relation to nature that allows for the necessity of fracking and its justification in the first place.

Fox speaks at length about all the loopholes that allow natural gas companies to get around environmental legislation (Fox et al. 2010). Its clear that with this documentary, Fox aims to make the natural gas companies more accountable and proactive in the course of fracking and also get many people to reconsider allowing the practice of fracking as it stands. What *Gasland* does not do is question the very context that produced the whole fracking situation in the first place. What shows up to Fox as an environmental activist is the immediate consequences of fracking on human health. His concerns might spread beyond that, but the film starts from human pain and struggles to connect this firmly to the wider context of nature. This human pain is caused by the pollution of nature, but justice narratives bring the focus back to the gas companies and ignore what true justice might look like for humans within the context of nature.

Absence

One of the most striking features of *Gasland* is perhaps not what is said, but a distinct absence that is much harder to detect. Anyone watching the film will likely be too caught up in the injustice of people getting sick and the legal chaos that allows

fracking to bypass many important environmental regulations to notice what is not included. A wider conception of nature beyond the immediate need of clean water in areas that have drilling wells seems to be elusive. The focus is almost entirely how people's lives and health has been disrupted without situating that in a larger context.

Not only is nature often not part of the conversation, but the links between nature and society still remain half hidden. Although Fox places great importance on clean water and often portrays images of streams and rivers, it tends to circle back to human interests. The multiple images of running water might seem to wrench attention away from human interests for a moment, but they become images of pristine nature that people consume. Either we are listening to people's stories about how their homes are ruined, or there are images of pristine nature scattered here and there. This kind of presentation only serves to support the idea that nature is where humans are not and further disconnect between humans and their environment. Even when nature is clearly present in the conversation, it is highlighted only through human interests that are always deemed more important.

This sense of absence is present throughout most of the film, and it appears like a shadow that can only be seen if you are looking for it. *Gasland* is so packed full of shocking content and stories of great pain, that its hard to notice what only creeps up in flashes throughout the film. Since it is not content itself, one can never quite get a hold of it. It begins in a feeling of something missing, a feeling that while this content is important, it is not enough. Its difficult to parcel out exactly what this absence is, since for Fox and for some of those interviewed in the film, there is clearly a connection to nature. What is missing is not a just a simple connection to nature, but some understanding of the wider implications of how biological necessity and connection to the land has been covered over by an extreme focus on society that traps people.

There's no doubt that Fox is an activist deeply committed to his cause, and that he cares greatly about his home in rural Pennsylvania, the people affected by fracking, and the damage being done to these natural spaces. It is not that Fox does not care about nature or consciously thinks that nature is meant to serve only human ends, but rather through his activism and crafting of the film he ends up focusing almost entirely on humans and societal issues. While he does question the legitimacy of fracking as he

sees the damage it has done, he cannot seem to reach further to question the context that produced the situation of fracking.

Results

There's no doubt that *Gasland* was an essential piece to making the movement against fracking mainstream, yet like many other prominent pieces of environmental advocacy, it struggles to break free from the trap of inadvertently promoting a division between nature and society. It is easy to understand why *Gasland* became so popular and effective at getting people to care about the issue of fracking. It appeals directly to people's empathy for their fellow humans, and makes it clear that the problem is quickly spreading and is likely coming to your town if it is not there already. It clearly portrays the political atmosphere surrounding fracking according to the filmmaker's interpretation and gives people a sense of the injustices that are occurring. These are all important points for the fracking movement, and yet there is still a sense that this is not enough.

In fracking, something essential has been revealed. The case of people whose very lives are threatened by the process of fracking is an example of that which has been hidden showing through the cracks. What has been covered over is people's biological dependence upon natural systems through the constructed Western myth of separation. The phenomenon of polluted water draws attention to what has been concealed, and provides an opportunity to expose people's biological dependence. Although the story of people's biological dependence does not provide some clear way for humans to drastically change their relationship with nature, it does provide an important avenue to expose and begin to deconstruct the divide.

Gasland focuses on this disruption, and so in some respects highlights humanity's biological dependence. It calls attention to the importance of water and the absurdity of corrupting it. The film will call attention to these issues, but then it often ends up obscuring them through falling back on language that reinforces separation. It also spends much of its time trying to paint the narrative and consequently solve the problems associated with fracking through only addressing societal concerns. It misses the opportunity to dive deeper into what has been exposed through the polluting of people's well water, and thus while it was widely successful in drawing attention to fracking, it still lacks the power to truly address fracking and the context of separation that allows for fracking and other environmental problems to arise.

Despite many small successes, both the fracking movement and the larger environmental movement struggle to achieve the widespread change they are aiming for. Natural gas usage is still growing despite an increased awareness about some of the problems with fracking. Some counties and even New York State have banned the practice of fracking, but since there is still growing demand for it, fracking continues elsewhere. This leads to a situation like in New York where fracking has been banned because of potential health risks, yet New York consumes significant portions of natural gas from elsewhere, amounting to about 5% of U.S gas that provides 1,300 trillion Btus of energy a year (Clemente 2015). By 2015, the natural gas sector had grown even more, ending up supplying more energy in the U.S. than coal (Cassar 2015). Just pointing out all the problematic aspects of fracking will do little to curb the United States' thirst for natural gas, and will lead to situations like in New York where people take a "not in my backyard" attitude to drilling but continue to rapidly consume fossil fuels.

Gasland is explicitly after changing the regulation surrounding fracking, either to put in more safety measures or in some cases to ban fracking all together (Fox et al. 2010). This is certainly an important task in the environmental movement. However, there is a danger in believing that the problem is fixed solely through some minor legislation. If legislation acts to close the rupture fracking has created, then it can provide the dangerous illusion that the work is over. Legislation as the solution forecloses upon the possibility of grappling with humanity's biological dependence that has been revealed through fracking. It is not that films like *Gasland* should stop pursuing environmental legislation, but if they want to prompt deeper change they must not let their activism stop there. There are moments of rhetoric in *Gasland* that destabilize the assumed separation of humans and nature, but these paths are opened up only to not be pursued further. Additionally, the overall effect of the majority of rhetoric in the film reinforces humans as somewhat separate from nature and positions legislation as the solution to all the problems presented.

Things take an interesting turn when it comes to larger, more abstract crises such as climate change. On a recent blog post on the *Gasland* movie site, Fox makes reference to the increase in natural gas use and brings up multiple times how this negatively affects the fight against climate change (Fox 2015). At one point he claims

that “Fracking is a climate disaster,” explaining that both the methane that escapes in drilling operations and the CO₂ that is produced through burning natural gas contribute to climate change (Fox 2015). This could be a good beginning to highlighting how fracking is affecting all humans, not just those who happen to have their well water polluted. If Fox can follow through on some of those claims about fracking affecting more than just a handful of people, he could be more proactive in the deconstruction of the kind of ideologies that allow fracking to continue unmitigated.

The focus on biological dependence may seem to be an anthropocentric solution to the problem of division. This brings up the issue of whether anthropocentrism is completely inescapable and if so, what can be done? This is a commonly discussed issue in environmental philosophy and deep ecology (Katz 2000). Of course there is a danger in only addressing immediate human needs, but can humans truly reach beyond themselves, and is that even productive? Some unwavering deep ecology positions have morally reprehensible consequences. A strong deep ecology position that maintains all life is equal and all life has an equal right to flourish would produce the dilemma that follows: If there is a small quantity of water left, and it could be used to save either a dying tree or a dying human, there is no reason to give it to the human over the tree. It is this type of thinking that leads some deep ecologists to advocate for a drastic reduction of the human population so that other life may flourish, even if it means resorting to morally reprehensible methods to accomplish this (Attfield 1993). Does human life need to be devalued in order that the natural world is valued higher?

Although deep ecology claims to be a response to anthropocentrism, some of its core principles are anthropocentric in nature. Identification with nature and self-realization through this identification with other creatures and ecosystems is quite human-centric (Katz 2000). This is not surprising, considering any kind of theory that comes from humans is going to be human-centric in some way. We can stand in no other place than our human viewpoint, with our context shaping our thoughts and perceptions (Attfield 1993). This seems to point to anthropocentrism being inescapable in some sense. The real problem with anthropocentrism is that it is often a shallow, misguided ideology that arises in a divided context where there is the myth that humans are in many ways separate from nature. If this is countered with the science of ecology and

biological dependence, then a human-centric view would recognize the importance of healthy ecosystems beyond just serving immediate human needs (Grey 1993). To pretend that humans can simply step outside of their viewpoint and value things independent of any connection to humans is dangerous, because it ignores how humans must attend to the way the world shows up for them as humans. There are many different human viewpoints, some much more conducive to environmentalism than others, but there is no inhuman perspective one can take on.

Although deep ecology can be useful in destabilizing shallow human-centric thinking, it is not truly attentive to the division and proposes holism without grappling with our current separated context. Deep ecology is a direct response to anthropocentrism, and it proposes that anthropocentrism is what causes all our environmental problems. However, shallow anthropocentrism is a direct consequence of the divide and can only arise in a divided context where human interests must be weighted against those of nature. Deep ecology proposes holism, a return to some harmonious state with nature where humans are simply a part of the larger picture. The problem with this is that the context of division that has been building for hundreds of years is not being taken seriously, and so this holism still pits humans against nature in some respects. Deep ecology is often considered an ecocentric point of view, but it struggles to grapple with how humans can fit into this context when our conceptual and physical separation from nature is so strong (Katz 2000). The framework falls apart when it is applied to difficult, real world situations, at least in the sense that no one can accept the moral consequences of such an ideology.

The task at hand is not to restore some primordial “right” relation with nature, as if there ever was some perfect relation with nature, but rather to expose again and again how the conceptual division between nature and society shows up in all our language. In this task, there are certain avenues to pursue that are particularly salient to the cause of exposure and deconstruction. An in-depth study of *Gasland* has revealed focusing upon biological dependence as a potentially fruitful path. It uncovers a fact of human existence that has been hidden, and provides a fairly concrete connection between the realms of nature and society. The act of simply pointing out how certain phrases and sentiments are reinforcing a distorted relationship between humans and nature is the

powerful first step towards developing a different kind of environmental consciousness in this country. The language must call attention to itself so that it does not fully hide its nature (Lawlor 2014). If we were to ever stop examining our rhetoric, then not only would we still be caught in the trap of division, but we would be fooled into thinking that we are no longer subject to it. Even as I have spent this whole project trying to examine and comprehend how this division sneaks into everything we say, I am still very much caught in the trap of thinking of nature as separate from society. Further projects in deconstructing the divide should be attentive to the ways in which they remain trapped. Examining humanity's biological dependence upon nature is a potentially productive way to begin this process of deconstructive, though there can certainly be other frameworks that aid in this process.

References

- Attfield, R. (1993). Sylvan, Fox and Deep Ecology: A View from the Continental Shelf. *Environmental Values*, 2(1), 21-32.
- Brantley, S. & Meyendorff, A. (2013, March 13). The Facts on Fracking. *The New York Times*, online.
- Clemente, J. (2015). Why New York's Fracking Ban For Natural Gas Is Unsustainable. *Forbes*.
- Dahl, T. & Allord, G. (1997). Technical Aspects of Wetlands. History of Wetlands in the Conterminous United States. *U.S. Geological Survey*.
- Diehm, C. (2007). Identification with Nature: What It Is and Why It Matters. *Ethics & the Environment*, 12(2), 1-22.
- Fox, J., & Roma, D. (Directors), & Adlesic, T., & Gandour, M. (Producers). (2010). *Gasland* [Motion picture]. United States: New Video.
- Fox, J. (2015, December 19). This graph shows why we haven't won against fracking, yet [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://blog.gaslandthemovie.com/?p=888>
- Fromm, H. (1996). "From Transcendence to Obsolescence: A Route Map" *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*.
- Grey, W. (1993). Anthropocentrism and Deep Ecology. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 71(4), 463-474.
- Hofweber, T. (Fall 2014 Edition). "Logic and Ontology," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edward N. Zalta (ed.)
- Helms, E. (2008). Language and Responsibility: The Possibilities and Problems of Poetic Thinking for Environmental Philosophy. *Environmental Philosophy* 5(1), 23-36.
- IPCC (2014). *Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Core Writing Team, R.K. Pachauri and L.A. Meyer (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 151 pp.

- Katz, E. (2000). Against the Inevitability of Anthropocentrism. In Katz, K, Light, A, & Rothenberg, D. (Eds.), *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology*. Cambridge: MIT Press
- Lawlor, L (2014). *Phenomenology: Response and Developments*. New York: Routledge.
- McKibben, B (1989). *The End of Nature*. New York: Random House Inc.
- Myerson, G. & Rydin, Y. (1996). *The Language of Environment*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Patrik, B. (2015). Managing Climate change: A View from Deep Ecology. *Ethics and the Environment* 20(1), 23-44.
- Preston, C. (2003). *Grounding Knowledge: Environmental Philosophy, Epistemology, and Place*. University of Georgia Press
- Ryan, T., Barati, N., & Ujam, R. (1997). Language and the organization of the built environment. *Environments*, 25(1).
- Timothy, L. (2002). Deep ecology: Living as if nature mattered. *Organization & Environment*, 15(2), 178-186.
- Turner, F. (1996). "Cultivating the American Garden." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*.
- Uggla, Y. (2010). What is this thing called 'natural'? The nature-culture divide in climate change and biodiversity policy. *Journal of Political Ecology* 17, 79-91.
- Vasi, I., Walker, E., Johnson, J., and Tan, H. (2015). "No Fracking Way!" Documentary Film, Discursive Opportunity, and Local Opposition against Hydraulic Fracturing in the United States , 2010 to 2013. *American Sociological Review*, 80(5), 934-959.
- Waterhouse, B. (2014). *Lobbying America: The Politics of Business from Nixon to NAFTA*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press
- White, L. (1996). "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my two amazing advisors, Ian Carbone and Eric Boynton, for supporting me throughout the process and helping me expand and develop all my outlandish ideas. I want to thank my awesome roommates who dealt with all my complaining constantly and still encouraged me and believed in me. Thanks to my family's constant support, even at a distance. A big thanks to all my close friends who helped me to work and laugh and take breaks and actually get back to work in this process.