

COMMON ROOTS AND ENTANGLED LIMBS: EARTH FIRST! AND THE GROWTH OF POST-WILDERNESS ENVIRONMENTALISM ON CALIFORNIA'S NORTH COAST

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Radical: *adj.* 1. Arising from or reaching a root or source: basic.
... —*n.* 1. A supporter of basic changes esp. political revolution.
[L. *radix, icis*, a root]

—*Webster's New Riverside Edition*

A Place of Extremes

California, like much of the American West, is often characterized as a place of both natural and social extremes (Neel, 1996). Natural disasters in the form of droughts, floods, and earthquakes seem to set an appropriate stage for vanguard social movements and ideologies that push the edge of American tolerance and fascination (Davis, 1995; Walker, 1996). Just as California's physical landscape has been shaped by the geological fault lines at the collision of the Pacific and North American plates, so its social landscape arises through the fault lines of America's contradictory and shifting relationships among races, classes, and genders and between people and nature (Almaguer, 1994). This latter troubled relationship has engendered an environmental movement, labeled as "radical" by both its supporters and its critics, that has fought on-going battles framed as protecting a "pure" nature from the depredations of human civilization

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(Manes, 1990; Muir, 1991). Standing tall in this history of green struggle is the redwood tree (*Sequoia sempervirens*), which is found almost exclusively in northern California. For most of the twentieth century, the fight to save the redwoods has been cast as part of the epic struggle between nature and civilization (Harris, 1995; Schrepfer, 1983).

Susan Schrepfer (1983) periodizes “the fight to save the redwoods” as a shift from a Theodore Roosevelt–era conservationism, led by the patrician Save the Redwoods League, to the 1960s-era preservationism spearheaded by the Sierra Club. Schrepfer and others (Harris, 1995; Lee, 1995; Manes, 1990; Zakin, 1995) see contemporary redwood conflicts as following the trajectory of the radical wing of the larger American environmental movement in which “radical” refers to the sharpness of the boundary drawn and defended between human despoliation and pure nature: *wilderness*. Earth First!, an environmental organization characterized by their slogan “No compromise in the defense of Mother Earth!” is often depicted as simply the leading edge of this deepening rift between nature and culture (Luke, 1994; Manes, 1990; Zakin, 1995).

I argue, on the contrary, that the Earth First! branches on California’s North Coast should be understood as making bold, if incomplete, attempts to cast off the problematic nature–culture dichotomy and to envision a more “domestic” forest in which social justice and ecological health can be sought in struggles with a common root. This has included rhetorical and physical gestures of reaching out to an extended family tree that includes both timber workers and the redwoods themselves. In moving beyond wilderness, the North Coast Earth First! activists have initiated a break from earlier eras of the fight to save the redwoods, from the larger environmental movement, and even from the original leadership of their own organization. By attempting to avoid the problematic nature–culture dichotomy of the broader environmental movement that, like all oppositional discourses, merely serves to “promote superficial comparisons and to prevent real ones” (Williams, 1973:54), the North Coast Earth First! offers the promise of a truly radical movement, by which I mean one that truly confronts capital’s interlinked degradation of both natural and human communities. This article examines the efforts by the North Coast Earth First! to inscribe a new community of activists and timber workers joined in the struggle to contest corporate claims on the redwood forest. It will explore the ambiguous effects of activists’ “embodied” and “home-based” practices on this budding alliance, particularly the ways in which such practices also alienated workers by redefining the redwood forest as the exclusive property of the activists themselves.

Redwood Country as Contested Terrain

The ecological range of redwood trees is a narrow 450-mile coastal band (encompassing two million acres) extending from the Santa Lucia

Mountains in California's Monterey County to just over the Oregon border. All but 4% (80,000 acres) have been subjected to timber harvest or other recent anthropogenic transformations.¹ The majority of the vestigial non-harvested "old growth" forests are contained in state and federal parks, with approximately 6000 acres in private ownership (King, 1990). The temporal and physical scale of redwood forests has inspired many to perceive a spiritual significance in these groves.² At the same time, the redwood tree's qualities of water and decay resistance and its deep cinnamon color have made old-growth redwood a very highly valued commodity.³

The bulk of the redwood forests still open to timber harvest is found on California's North Coast and it is consequently in this region that the fiercest struggles to protect the redwood forest have occurred. California's North Coast stretches north from San Francisco toward the Oregon border and lies primarily within Mendocino and Humboldt Counties. Because the region was seen by early European and American explorers primarily as a source of furs (and later gold), the North Coast redwood forest itself was not the target of systematic exploitation until a combination of federal land policies and the rise of the California timber industry precipitated a land rush in the 1880s (Cornford, 1987). In the decades that followed, California's timber industry transformed the redwood forest into the foundations of San Francisco's architecture and capital accumulation (Carranco and Labbe, 1975). A series of industrial shakeouts beginning after World War II has produced a highly concentrated industry.⁴ Currently, four out-of-state firms own over 60% of all private timber lands in the North Coast redwood belt and process nearly all the redwood products.⁵

The dominance of the North Coast by the timber industry has led to three critical characteristics of the region. First, unlike most forest regions of California that are dominated by federal lands, public land comprises only 18% of the total forest lands on the North Coast, the rest being held privately. Consequently, the U.S. Forest Service and its national forests are not major players in the redwood economy, and, conversely, the issue of private property rights is central to forest management and contestation here. Furthermore, the near monopoly of large absentee corporate land ownership imbues the region with a colony-like land tenure pattern in which timber firms enjoy significant economic and political power.

Second, the corporate forests have been subjected to intensive (and some would say excessive) harvesting. As early as 1945, 35% of the private timber lands in the coastal redwood region had been cut over, burned, or both and left in unproductive conditions (Biggar, 1945:28). During the 1980s, industrial timber firms in Mendocino County cut an average of 225% of the annual growth on their lands (Burkhardt, 1993:19). While timber industry representatives argue that there are still "1,244,000 acres with a plurality of redwood trees and 496,000 acres with redwoods present" (California Redwoods Association, 1993), the vast majority of these lands are stocked with residual stands of second- and third-growth trees with

greatly reduced inventory (board feet per acre) and non-timber values (e.g., wildlife habitat, aesthetics) (McBride and Jacobs, 1977). Such forest management practices have created vestigial islands of primary-growth redwoods, such as the Headwaters Forest in Humboldt County owned by the Pacific Lumber Company, in a sea of secondary-growth stands. Some activists maintain that this version of the historical cut-and-run pattern is a purposeful strategy of industrial timber firms whose national (and, in some cases, international) holdings, coupled with their high debt loads and mandate to turn profits competitive with other industrial sectors, make redwood country just one expendable node in a global commodity circuit (Ball, 1995; Burkhardt, 1993; Seidenstein, 1990b).⁶

Third, the transformation of the redwood sector into a highly concentrated industry dependent primarily on second- and third-growth stands has had significant impacts on forest-based communities on the North Coast. While logging has traditionally been a "tramp industry" attracting a mobile labor force, a large number of timber towns did develop in the redwood region where generations of loggers and mill workers were raised with the expectation that they would follow their parents into the woods (see also Hibbard and Elias, 1993). With the decline of high-value old growth, the high-skilled logging operations are no longer needed, and as a result, most firms have replaced their internal logging crews with outsourced (and non-unionized) logging contractors (London and Kelso, 1995). This often results in a deskilling of the workforce as well as a drop in wages, benefits, and job security (see also Kusel et al., forthcoming). In the mills, the smaller-diameter logs, coupled with the demands of a fiercely competitive sector, have driven firms to maximize throughput efficiency by automating their operations, often displacing many workers (Stewart, 1993). The increasingly fast-paced and competitive work environment affects the remaining workers through degraded working conditions and frequent workplace injuries (Bari, 1994; J. Bari, personal communication). A long history of union-busting, pervasive patron-client relations, and timber workers' desire to remain within the industry has resulted in a general lack of organized worker opposition to these trends (Carroll, 1995; Cornford, 1987; Young and Newton, 1980). This destruction of human and natural capital can be seen as indicative of the extractive mode by which industrial timber firms relate to both human and natural communities on the North Coast.

Despite this pattern of oppression, the weak structural position of the workers has tended to displace their anger from their corporate bosses to a range of "outsiders" whom they blame for their economic woes. While to some extent, state and federal government agencies come in for criticism, much of the animosity is directed at the waves of ex-urbanites attracted to the timber county of the North Coast. These waves have included an influx of back-to-the-land hippies in the 1970s seeking cover for their counterculture ideology and marijuana gardens and, more recently, a stream of retirees and telecommuters buying up forest lots for

their dream homes. Conflicts have arisen over whether forests are to be viewed as sources of commodities and incomes or as aesthetic entities that provide pleasing vistas and wildlife habitats (Raphael, 1973, 1994). At the same time, some common ground has been found, with newcomers and old-timers joining in opposition to timber industry practices such as herbicide spraying and clear-cutting (see also Brown, 1995; Fortmann and Kusel, 1990).

The Struggle for Nature and the Nature of Struggle

Over most of the course of the twentieth century, the fight to save the redwoods has been played out on this shifting political, economic, and cultural terrain. Each era of this struggle has located the tree in a unique position within the dialectics of nature and culture.⁷

After World War I, social elites from the spheres of business and academia in California and elsewhere began to express alarm at the timber industry's destruction of the redwoods. As men and women of "good breeding," they felt compelled to rescue the noble redwood from what they saw as the rising tide of human degeneracy—and to that end founded the Save the Redwoods League in 1918 (Schrepfer, 1983). Since that time, members have donated \$75 million toward the purchase of tens of thousands of acres of redwood forests, most of which have been turned over to the state government as park lands (King, 1990). While today many visitors marvel at the redwood "wilderness" preserved through these efforts, this terminology obscures the League's ideology of nature, which did not conceive of the redwoods as wilderness, but rather the distinctly cultured landscape of redwood parks. Such redwood parks were not seen as places to escape civilization, but as a source of inspiration (accessible via scenic auto-tours) to raise or preserve one's level of class identity (see also Wilson, 1992).

As Schrepfer (1983) points out, ideologies of both racial and natural purity were intertwined in the roots of the League's "progressive" conservation (see also Brechin, 1996). To the patrician League members, redwoods represented "the finest examples of a species that has emerged over centuries of progressive change" (Schrepfer, 1983:128), and their destruction was likened to the "slacking down" of "priceless works of classic art" after the fall of the Roman Empire by "men who . . . are today rightly dubbed 'vandals and barbarians'" (Grant, 1919:12). Redwoods served as a trope through which elite League members could embody their *own* distress about the forces of social change (including mass immigration and a rising commercial class) that they saw as threatening to sever their class and race privilege. Redwoods were thus cast as symbolic doubles for the League members themselves: saving the redwoods meant protecting common roots from the ax of crude barbarians. Redwoods were not the antipode of civilization; they were its champion.

The social Darwinist ideologies of the Save the Redwoods League characterized the redwoods movement throughout the first half of the century. Challenges to this hegemony arose as part of the increasingly militant environmental movement in the 1960s, led especially by the Sierra Club. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century (the Sierra Club was founded in 1892), the Club and the League shared board members and organizational ideologies, but the Club's new militancy under the leadership of David Brower began to drive a wedge between them (Schrepfer, 1983). The Sierra Club adopted a much harder line against the timber industry and actively sought to prevent its destructive logging practices through law suits, lobbying, and public mobilization. Unlike the Save the Redwoods League, which saw redwoods as teleological evolutionary exemplars, the newly constituted Sierra Club and the new crop of environmental organizations founded since the 1960s viewed the redwoods as an integral part of a vast, but fragile and interdependent, web of nature (Schrepfer, 1983:128). These groups warned that human civilization, flushed with a false sense of its own importance, threatened to fray this web. This ecocentric view minimized humans' importance in the natural cosmos and emphasized the need to preserve non-human-influenced nature, that is, wilderness. No longer the champion of civilization, redwoods were now cast as its victim. The ecocentric ethic exemplified by the 1960s-era redwood struggle is the basis of much of the modern environmental movement that locates itself as nature's defender against human arrogance and destruction (Proctor, 1995).

In the late 1980s, a new partisan joined the fight to save the redwoods as Earth First!, founded earlier that decade in the deserts of the Southwest, grew a new branch on California's North Coast (Forman, 1991; Lee, 1995; Manes, 1990; Luke, 1994; Zakin, 1993). Over the last decade, the North Coast bands of Earth First! (calling themselves Ecotopia Earth First! or Redwood Nation Earth First!) have staged mass rallies in front of mills, locked themselves to trees, and erected makeshift barricades deep inside the timber lands of the region's major corporate timber firms. Many of these actions have been directed against the Pacific Lumber Company, owner of the largest private stands of old-growth redwoods. While commanding less media attention, an even greater proportion of protests targeted Louisiana-Pacific, a firm that has already liquidated its old growth and now focuses on its second- and third-growth stands. Earth First!'s media-savvy direct actions at the point of production and their professed "no compromise" stance on forest protection have led to their being labeled as "radical" by both the mainstream environmental organizations and those opposed to the environmental movement. I seek to enhance this definition of radical environmentalism and propose a standard measuring Earth First!'s ability to move beyond the traditional nature-culture dichotomy and confront capital's dual exploitation of natural and human communities.

Earth First! and Post-Wilderness Environmentalism

The North Coast Earth First! activists can be read as engaging in three new tactics of struggle that reach across the nature–culture divide: (1) linking concern for the bodies of workers with the fate of the forest, (2) inscribing the redwoods with a symbolic human body, and (3) a strategy of trans-species “touch.” The remainder of the article will examine the complementarities and contradictions among these three discursive and physical tactics. In particular, I will query the uneasy relationship between the first tactic of environmentalist–forest worker alliances as pioneered by Earth First! activist Judi Bari and the other two embodied practices that also arose on the North Coast.

A Bridge to Timber County

The North Coast Earth First!’s attempt to create a unified community of interest between environmentalists and timber workers was greeted with great admiration and great fear on the part of both the timber industry and their environmental colleagues. To appreciate the significance of this attempt, it is useful to reflect on Raymond Williams’ statement that “[a] working country is hardly ever a landscape. The very idea of landscape implies separation and observation” (1973:120). Williams goes further to note that the observer’s division of “practical” from “aesthetic” is significant not simply because the observer made it, but that “it is that he needed and was in the position to do it, and that this need and position are parts of a social history, in the separation of production and consumption” (Williams, 1973:121).⁸

Until Earth First!’s entry, the redwood forests were viewed by their primarily urban defenders either as “pleasing prospects” and landscapes of consumption or as pure ecological units, not as a “working country.” While the patricians and financial elites of the Save the Redwood League may have attempted to appease the lumber men by buying out their redwoods as opposed to taking them (via regulation or eminent domain), there was no spirit of common cause. Similarly, the American environmental movement—including the Sierra Club—has been repeatedly critiqued for its race and class biases and the way in which its lumping of resource industry workers with their bosses as the enemy actually reinforces the perceived “jobs versus the environment” dichotomy (Cronon, 1995). White’s (1995) analysis of the environmental movement’s framing of “work” as despoiler of nature instead of a legitimate and powerful way of knowing nature can be applied to the mainstream fight to save the redwoods. The boundary between the aesthetic landscape of the preserved redwoods and the practical country of the timber harvest zones was impermeable and there was no attempt on the part of the redwood defenders to “work” in the latter spaces.

During the late 1980s, overtures from the North Coast Earth First! to the timber workers to join them in an alliance against the timber companies involved a potential blurring of the boundaries between “landscape and working country” and the “practical and aesthetic.” Earth First! attempted to win over timber workers by demonstrating the common roots of the fate of the forest and the fate of the forest-dependent human communities. Judi Bari, a carpenter and long-time labor organizer who began organizing postal workers in Baltimore and moved to the North Coast to join the region’s hippie, back-to-the-land culture, played a leading role in these efforts.⁹ The basic message articulated by Bari and other North Coast activists in clandestine meetings with loggers and mill workers across the region was that the corporations cared neither about the long-term viability of the forest nor the well-being of the local communities and would deplete both as soon as they could (*New Settler*, 1990:20). This linkage between worker and forest exploitation is supported by the observation of second-generation Mendocino County logger (and environmentalist) Walter Smith, “When I talk to loggers, I get their concerns. They’re concerned about how the companies treat their employees. The companies treat their employees how they do Osprey Grove [a clear-cut, old-growth redwood grove]” (quoted in Seidenstein, 1990b).

North Coast Earth First!-ers pointed out that timber jobs were imperiled not because of logging protests or the restrictions to protect the endangered spotted owl but because of timber firms’ automation, depletion of the timber inventories, exporting of unprocessed logs, and repressive labor policies. In so doing, the activists hoped to replace the opposition between landscape and working country with a unity (community), joined in opposition to a corporate moonscape devoid of both jobs and redwoods. Bari noted that she hoped to appeal to an underlying affinity between loggers and hippies, both of them being “drug heads, close to the land, economically marginal, and basically outlaws” (J. Bari, personal communication). Tactics to spread this message included banners on feller-bunchers (automated logging machines that displace dozens of loggers) reading “This Thing Kills Jobs and Forests!” and “Sustainable Logging Saves Jobs and Forests” (Bari, 1994). Earth First!’s special focus on Louisiana-Pacific, a firm notorious for its heavy-handed labor practices and intensive forestry practices, attempted to illustrate the connection between the two. This focus on capital’s contradictions as manifest across the working landscape was a more appropriate target than the more sensational Headwaters Forest issue in which activists acted to simply prevent any logging of the old-growth groves. Earth First! activist Darryl Cherney put these sentiments to music in a number of songs:

*Where are we gonna work when the trees are gone?
Will the big boss have us wash his car or maybe mow his lawn?
I’m a man, I’m a man, I’m a lumberjack man
But I fear it ain’t for long.*

Where are we gonna work when the trees are gone? (cited in Harris, 1995:168)

An appeal to the masculine logger culture coupled with the joint tree-worker fate formula is heard in another of Cherney's songs directed at logging truck drivers. Here the loss of old-growth trees is coupled with the loss of the prized "big load" of the truckers:

*I used to haul one log on my semi
That tree was a thousand years old,
Now I'm a-hauling 30
And each one a pecker pole!* (cited in Bari, 1994:172)

Judi Bari took this symbolic linkage of forest and human welfare to the streets in her attempts to recreate a local of the International Workers of the World (IWW)—a radical labor union most active in the 1910s and 1920s—among the North Coast forest workers (see also Cornford, 1987). Bari's motivation in forming the IWW local was the recognition of the common interests of trees and workers:

The timber companies treat [the workers] the same way that they treat the forest—as objects to exploit for maximum profit. We can't form an alliance by saying, "Hey worker, come help save the trees." We have to recognize that their working conditions are not separate from or subordinate to the rape of the forest. They are part and parcel of the same thing. (Bari, 1994:15)

By helping a number of mill workers file unsafe working condition complaints and by offering an alternative to the "company unions" of the timber sector, the IWW Local No. 1 expanded Earth First!'s circle of care from the bodies of the redwoods to the bodies of the workers.

Despite these efforts (or perhaps because of them), the line between timber workers and environmentalists did not soften and can actually be seen to have hardened. The question of why a new "community" coalition failed to form warrants careful analysis. To what extent is such a failure a result of industry efforts to enforce an alliance with its workers against a "common foe" (and thus papering over the class division between labor and capital) and to what extent is it a reflection of a deeper cultural clash between environmentalists and workers?

The explosion of a pipe bomb in a car driven by Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney during the height of the 1990 Redwood Summer environmental actions certainly played some role in the derailment of this coalition building. While the media and law enforcement officials at first claimed that the bomb was made by Earth First! and intended for a terrorist attack on the timber industry, no substantive evidence was ever provided and all charges against Bari and Cherney were eventually dropped. Bari, a self-

described pacifist, maintained that the bomb was part of a campaign by both the North Coast timber firms and the FBI to derail Earth First!'s organizing efforts. The fact that no full investigation into the true identity of the bomber was made and that FBI activities seemed intended solely to label Earth First! as "eco-terrorists" prompted Bari and others to place the bombing in the legacy of COINTELPRO efforts to destroy other radical movements (J. Bari, personal communication).¹⁰ Bari and Cherney subsequently filed a lawsuit against the FBI and the Oakland police for civil rights violations. The case is still pending.

Bari had been the target of an earlier series of death threats and instances of physical intimidation. One death threat letter included an image of rifle crosshairs superimposed over a photograph of Bari taken at a Mendocino County Supervisor's meeting in which she and a group of loggers made a proposal for the county to use its power of eminent domain to seize Louisiana-Pacific's timber lands and mills. Bari recounts that it was at this meeting that she "crossed the line" and truly began to threaten the industry (J. Bari, personal communication). None of these threats was investigated by local law officials. One county sheriff reportedly promised Bari that they would investigate only if she turned up dead.

Bari did not let this intimidation stop her work, but the physical impacts of the bombing—including a severely fractured pelvis—limited the extent of her efforts. In the polarized timber country, the bombing also created lingering suspicions among timber workers about her complicity, a result, Bari argued, that was the real intent of the bomber. After the bombing, Bari and other movement observers noted that the détente between loggers and environmentalists suffered a great setback.¹¹

While physical and social impacts of the bombing and timber industry counterefforts undoubtedly had a chilling effect on the attempts to create an alliance between environmentalists and timber workers, significant tensions can also be seen as arising from the rhetoric and practices of Earth First! itself. At the same time that the North Coast Earth First! made important strides away from a wilderness vision of the redwood forest, many of these strides took them further away from a true solidarity with timber workers.

Embodying the Redwoods

Unlike the Sierra Club and similar modern environmental organizations, the North Coast Earth First! evoked the specific qualities of the redwood trees themselves, as opposed to a more general concern with the redwood ecosystem. While this strategy had also been followed by the Save the Redwoods League, in which the League used the redwoods to stand for their ideals of human hierarchy, Earth First! attempted to ignite broad-based support for the redwoods by inscribing them with a fictive human body. By describing the redwoods in human imagery, the North Coast

Earth First! also distanced itself from the original Earth First! leadership that generally sought to protect a wild nature that was completely Other (Luke, 1994; Zakin, 1993).

Such anthropomorphic imagery includes the depiction of Pacific Lumber's plans to "punch a road into the heart of the Headwaters Grove" (Redwood Nation Earth First!, 1996:4) and deforestation as the "stripping nude of the forest" (*New Settler*, 1990:20). The cutting of redwoods, now in possession of bodies, could be likened to all manner of human violations. Redwoods could thus be "murdered." One example of murder imagery was a response to the California Department of Transportation (CalTrans) cutting of four large redwood trees along Highway 20 in Mendocino County. Earth First!'s self-styled "EcoTrans" poured red paint on the four stumps and posted signs proclaiming, "Redwood Murder!" At the same time, an environmentally friendly county attorney filed a wrongful death lawsuit in the name of "Dead Redwood #1, Dead Redwood #2, Dead Redwood #3, Dead Redwood #4" (Bari, 1994:143). Naming these trees individually (if anonymously) as plaintiffs in this suit provides a striking application of Christopher Stone's (1972) question, "Should trees have standing?"

In addition to these explicit invocations of murder, environmentalists routinely use the terms "massacre," "assault," "slaughter," and "butchery" to describe redwood harvests, thus upgrading the redwood's status, if not from non-human to human, at least from *plantae* to *animale*. This rhetorical shift in categorical kingdoms can be seen as serving to liberate the redwoods from the agrarian realm, the conventional location of forestry, and toward a greater kinship with humanity.

Such embodied imagery can be seen as having an ambivalent effect on the prospects for an environmentalist-worker alliance. This can be seen specifically in the metaphoric reference of second- and third-growth redwoods as "baby trees." On the one hand, this is an ironic inversion given the typical environmental representation of the redwoods as "ancient," next to whom humans are the evolutionary new kid on the block and to whom humans must show respect befitting the trees' elder status. Here the relationship is reversed and the appeal to save the redwoods is based on respect, not of patriarchal elders, but of maternal horror at the killing of innocent and helpless babies.¹² The implication is that such an act locates the perpetrator outside the pale of civilization, thus requiring unified opposition. By equating their actions as opposing infanticide, Earth First! cast themselves as the defenders of civilization against the Huns of industry, thus turning the nature/culture dichotomy of the modern wilderness movement on its head. At the same time, such rhetoric links Earth First! with the patrician Save the Redwoods League, the class implications of which will be explored further below.

The symbolism of baby trees also critiques the industrial timber firms' post-old-growth practice of using small-diameter trees to create non-traditional products such as oriented strand board. This policy of "logging

to infinity" strips every sapling and stump and reduces the forest to bare soil.¹³ By focusing on "baby trees," the North Coast Earth First! expanded their sites of protest from the vestigial old-growth groves (such as the Headwaters Forest) to encompass the real battlegrounds of industrial forestry and thus from the wilderness to the civilizing edge of the forest. In addition to more accurately reflecting the ecological reality of the North Coast, this post-wilderness focus allowed for greater solidarity with timber workers who also tend to regret the loss of high-skill/high-wage logging and labor-intensive milling jobs associated with the passing of the old-growth forests. In contrast, an industry based on mopping up "baby trees" provides workers with little job satisfaction, labor demand, or financial compensation. By wiping out the new generation of trees, such forestry practices represent a running down of the area's natural capital, thus impoverishing the resource base for the next human generation. In this way, Earth First! attempted to frame firms such as Louisiana-Pacific as "anti-family" in a region that prides itself on its strong "family values."

In addition to symbolically charging the timber firms with infanticide, Earth First! also used the small trees to show how the loss of old growth is an insult to the male virility of the timber workers by pointedly referring to small-diameter trees, using the loggers' own lingo, as "pecker poles." Through the cutting of pecker poles, the loggers are framed as emasculating themselves or as being emasculated by the inventory-stripping policies of the timber firms. Both connotations are potentially subversive given the strong sense of machismo within the logging occupational culture (Carroll, 1995). Earth First!'s implicit message to the loggers is as go the big trees, so go your manhood.

While these rhetorical strategies may have been intended to split the timber workers from their corporate bosses, they more frequently simply angered the workers, who felt insulted and demeaned by the environmentalists. Confronting workers with the reality of their exploitation by the timber firms without providing a realistic alternative may have also led to their shame and anger being displaced onto the environmentalists themselves. For instance, one logger noted to Bari, "Let's say that you're a big macho logger and you know something is wrong. You could blame L-P [Louisiana-Pacific] but then you're powerless. Or you could blame Earth First! and then you can punch 'em" (quoted in Bari, 1994:116). The baby-tree image was also viewed with scorn by workers as just another version of environmentalist's sentimentalization of nature as a petting zoo of fuzzy seals and pandas, not as a working country.

Another prominent North Coast Earth First! strategy was to link human and natural justice through depictions of redwoods as imprisoned and oppressed by their corporate owners. The most basic expressions of this rhetoric were the countless banners demanding, "Free the Redwoods!" A more systematic manifestation was Earth First!'s campaign in the summer of 1990 called "Redwood Summer." Like the Freedom for Mississippi Summer of 1964, in which thousands of college students went

south to work for civil rights, Redwood Summer was intended to frame the fight to save the redwoods as a moral struggle. In this struggle, the rights of redwoods were to be protected by young freedom workers against the “speciesist” onslaught of the corporations (Seidenstein, 1990a). The crackdown on the Redwood Summer actions was also described using the civil rights vocabulary. For example, Bari describes the arrest of several Earth First! protesters as involving “brutal Mississippi-style law enforcement” (Bari, 1994:75). When an Earth First! rally was attacked by pro-timber counterdemonstrators, the Earth First!-ers responded by singing “We Shall Overcome” (Harris, 1995).

Coupled with Bari’s organizing under the resurrected IWW Local No. 1, these invocations of social justice did have promise in creating a broad-based alliance against the timber firms. However, like the “baby trees” imagery, this anthropomorphic call for redwood “justice,” by symbolically tarring timber workers as child killers and speciesists, was jarring in communities dependent on the harvest and milling of trees. Reactions to this approach included a death threat to Darryl Cherney with the drawing of a hangman’s noose entitled, “Humboldt and Mendocino Countie’s [*sic*] Welcome Dirt First to a Mississippi Summer” (Harris, 1995:301). The critical failure on the part of Earth First! was to clearly articulate the distinction between workers and corporations as targets of their critiques. In the context of the Jim Crow South, such a lapse would be akin to blaming the oppression of blacks solely on poor whites, without an analysis of the broader systems of capitalist agriculture and land tenure that forced both groups into conflict with each other. While Judi Bari certainly recognized this, her efforts were not adequate to bridge the divide resulting from shallow class analyses within her organization and the broader environmental movement.¹⁴

Limbs on the Line/ Bodies Out on a Limb

Donna Haraway frames the narrative of *Primate Visions* (1988) with the touch of a primate and human hand. She asks, “What is the history of this touch?” and then provides one of many answers:

Jane Goodall’s touch was redemptive: its power saved others who could not be allowed to repeat her original actions if the wilderness of the animals and the safety of the humans was to be preserved. Dr. Jane Goodall inhabits one half of the system of desire mediated by modern science and technology, the half dreaming of reclosing the broken cosmos, known in its natural-technical form as an ecosystem. (Haraway, 1988:135–136)

The “touch” between human and non-human as a “dream of reclosing the broken cosmos” can be seen as reflected in the direct actions of Earth First! in their fight to save the redwoods. Like the strategies to “embody”

the redwoods described above, Earth First!'s tactics of trans-species "touch" problematizes the conventional nature/culture dichotomy and represents a salutary move toward a post-wilderness environmental ethic. However, this tactic also represented a powerful means by which to stake property claims to the forest, a process that threatened to fracture the fragile culture of solidarity between activists and timber workers.

The most striking element of Earth First!'s actions is their forum: the forest itself. Unlike the Save the Redwoods League, which conducts its negotiations in the suites of commerce and watering holes of high society, and the Sierra Club, which pursues its aggressive agenda in the courts and the halls of Congress, Earth First! and its partisans have taken to the hills and placed their bodies in the line of fire. Earth First!'s use of forest-based civil disobedience locates them within Harrison's lineage of the archetypal "heroic outlaw fighting the forces of injustice from his lair in the forest" (1992:77).¹⁵ Earth First!'s direct actions were striking, not simply because they used human bodies to oppose the timber firms, but because they represented a bodily solidarity (a touch) with the objects of struggle, the redwood trees themselves.

This physical connection is seen clearly in the specific tactics used, including tree-sitting and tree-hugging. In addition to the tactical value of halting a timber harvest (if only temporarily), tree-sitting and tree-hugging draw upon the cultural capital of their historical precedents, arguably including India's Chipko movement and the desegregation sit-ins at Jim Crow lunch counters. In all cases, protesters put their bodies on the line to show their willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice for their cause. Tree-sitting became a rite of passage to gain entrance into, and status within, the tribe of forest defenders. Darryl Cherney recounted how, despite his great fear of heights, he "was prepared to go through with this torment because he felt that if he was going to have anything resembling appropriate standing within the national community of Earth First!, he had to have a tree-sit under his belt before the next [Earth First!] rendezvous" (Harris, 1995:260).

Physical contact with the trees also served as inspiration for many Earth First! activists. A refusal to accept anything but the protection of all the remaining old-growth redwood groves on Pacific Lumber land was explained with language that invokes almost a lover's bond: "[W]e know these groves. We've touched their trees, we've been lost for hours in the underbrush, and we've hopped the rocks in their streams" (Redwood Nation Earth First!, 1996:1). Physical bonding can even join activists and forest within a kind of hybrid body, as an emergency alert calls out, "You are the heartbeat of the Headwaters!" (Environmental Protection Information Center, 1996).

While such strategies evoked powerful motivating and legitimating discourses of forest protection, they also led to a deepening of conflicts between activists and workers. This was clearly evidenced in the second-ever tree-sit staged by the Redwood Action Team in which a male and

female pair of tree-sitters were hyped to the media as Tarzan and Jane coming to save their forest home. The next day, the *Los Angeles Times* picked up on this theme with a headline reading, "Environmentalists Taking a Leaf from Tarzan's Tree" and a story that began, "He's Tarzan and she's Jane and together the swinging pair have put themselves out on a limb over what they consider a pressing environmental issue" (cited in Harris, 1995:272).

Haraway (1988) is useful in leading us to note how the environmentalists are "coded" as primitive, wild, and heroic. And while left unsaid, it is interesting that like Tarzan and Jane, these activists are not truly natives, but newcomers who have adopted or been adopted by the redwood forest. Reading the tree-sit in the light of Tarzan and Jane's symbolic part in the colonial displacement of Africans as rightful owners of their "jungle" homelands, the activists can be seen as claiming the identity of legitimate occupants of the forest and contesting the legitimacy of the loggers and their corporate bosses. Following legal scholar Carol Rose (1994), these actions can be understood as attempting to communicate a "persuasive" property claim upon the forest. This strategy coincides with the view of property theorists (Berry, 1989; Goheen, 1992; Peluso, 1996; Shipton and Goheen, 1992) who suggest that access to natural resources is often achieved through the investment in particular social identities and networks. Within this narrative, the touch between the activists and tree codes them as more native and closer to nature than the original natives (the loggers) who would destroy the forest if not for the heroic actions of present-day Tarzan and Jane. Here the activists' mode of physicality is clearly privileged, while that of the timber workers is denigrated.

Taking the occupation of the forest to a new level, Earth First! activists would create arboreal "villages" with ropes, nets, and hammocks in trees selected to be cut. In addition to serving as a strategy to physically halt logging, such "homesteads" can be seen as a symbolic property claim on the forest intended to supersede those of the timber firms. Earth First! tree-sitters often faced angry loggers who used their own tree-scaling skills to cut the protesters out of their perches, lifting the terrain of struggle over legitimate residency from the timber towns into the canopy itself. The displacement of timber country "natives" by back-to-the-land hippies and ex-urbanites injects tension into the "community" of common interests that Bari and others tried to create on the North Coast. Or perhaps, more accurately, it was this tension in the North Coast community and within the broader environmental movement that Bari struggled to overcome with only partial success.¹⁶

While tree-sitting and tree-hugging enacted a physical forest politics, both were eclipsed in terms of social divisiveness by another mode of tree-based direct action, tree-spiking. In tree-spiking, a large nail is driven into a tree, creating a booby-trap for unsuspecting chain saws or mill saws. Often after a stand of trees has been spiked, the lumber company (or agency, if on public lands) is notified with the hopes that the cost of

removing the spikes and the danger of missing one will convince the firm to “spare those trees.” Occasionally, however, no warning is made, and as a result in 1987 a worker at a Louisiana–Pacific mill on the North Coast was maimed by a saw blade that hit a tree spike (Bari, 1994:264). Although it was not clear that the tree was spiked by Earth First!, the timber firms were quick to brand Earth First! as “eco-terrorists” for this tactic, and many timber workers came to resent both the physical danger in which these spikes placed them and the insult to their dignity as laborers that the destruction of their tools represented. The political import of tree-spiking can be understood through White’s (1995) analysis of the environmental movement’s casting of modern work as the enemy of nature: tree spikes physically and symbolically construct the forest as off-limits to work and inhospitable to workers. In this way they represent a powerful and exclusive property claim by activists on the forest.

The contrast between the response to this maiming by the North Coast Earth First! and by many in Earth First!’s original leadership highlights the ideological divergence between the two. After the 1987 maiming, Judi Bari and the North Coast Earth First! quickly renounced tree-spiking as ineffective and counterproductive in alienating timber workers who might otherwise be allies against the corporations. For this, Bari was roundly criticized in the pages of the *Earth First! Journal*. Most notable was Earth First! co-founder Dave Forman, who responded, “I think it’s unfortunate that somebody got hurt, but you know I quite honestly am more concerned about old-growth forests, spotted owls and wolverines and salmon—and nobody is forcing people to cut those trees” (cited in Bari, 1994:268). Bari’s renunciation of tree-spiking evidences her attempt to transcend the contradictions between jobs and the environment and, more broadly, to create a movement that cares for both the bodies of the workers and of the trees.

Such physical struggles in and for the trees are simply reflections of the broader contestations over political and cultural power on the North Coast. Bari and other North Coast activists recount that much of the initial success of the North Coast Earth First! occurred not as a result of their extreme tactics, but because unlike the “nomadic action teams” of other Earth First! activists, they were “home-based” and “defending the place they love” (Geniella, 1996). This shift within Earth First! can be seen as a manifestation of the broader western tensions between the rootless individualism of the frontier and what Stegner (1992) calls the attempt to “nest” or “stick” in place, between nature as the Great Outdoors and nature as home. Such place-based activism provided grounds for alliances with timber workers, as children of Earth First!-ers played with children of timber workers, and all families could express concern for the local health impacts of timber industry practices such as herbicide spraying. A local identity—contrasted with the absentee-owned timber firms—helped to enhance a sense of common material conditions between activists and timber workers (J. Bari, personal communication).

And yet this defense of place also locates Earth First! within the tradition of competing property claims that historian Patricia Limerick (1987) calls the West's "legacy of conquest." That is, Earth First! can be seen as simply another in successive waves of settlers seeking to answer "who was a legitimate Westerner, and who had a right to share in the benefits of the region?" (Limerick, 1987:348). Despite the efforts of Judi Bari to the contrary, it was the discourse of competitive property relations embodied in Earth First!'s tactics of "touch" that was communicated most forcefully to the timber workers.

Reflections from the Forest Edge

If, as Harrison (1993) observes, forests are the shadow of civilization, standing in perpetual tension as both its source and antithesis, then the fight to save the redwoods must embody this ambivalence as well. Narratives that pose the redwoods as wild nature's last stand against civilization tell only half of the story. Set against the shifting place of redwoods on the landscape of nature/culture dualisms, this analysis has attempted to show how the North Coast Earth First! embraced the tree, not as a sign for pure wilderness, but as a fulcrum around which a "community" including workers, environmentalists, and the forests could be constituted against the timber corporations. By reaching out to workers and exposing the common roots of human and ecological exploitation and by reaching out to the trees with defiant gestures of touch, Earth First! attempted to create a movement as radical as the reality of capital's radical transformations of natural and human communities on the North Coast. I have argued that while the North Coast Earth First! group did make significant strides toward a post-wilderness environmentalism in which nature is not Other but is part of an extended family tree, its efforts suffered from an inability to make common cause with timber workers against the timber firms. This failure, in large part, was due to an uneven recognition of the legitimacy of forest work and the privileging of activists' own claims to the forest above those of workers and their families.

Cronon (1995) argues that the wilderness ethic of the environmental movement, rooted in both a frontier myth of virgin land and a romantic notion of the sublime, should be replaced by a middle landscape of "home." "Home," he explains, "is the place where we finally make our living. It is the place for which we take responsibility" (1995:89).¹⁷ This sense of nature as a living space, as a site including both production and consumption, the "practical and the aesthetic," history and aspiration, provides the grounds for powerful new alliances for social transformation. However, as the case of the North Coast Earth First! demonstrates, the environmental movement has a while yet to journey toward a common forest home.

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Notes

1. That native peoples have historically modified the redwood ecosystem and *continue* to live in the region is an “inconvenient” fact in this environmentalist periodization. See Berkhofer (1978) on the notion of the vanishing Native American. White (1995) provides a useful critique of the environmentalist negation of indigenous transformation of nature in North America. See Huntsinger et al. (1994), McEvoy (1986), and Kroeber (1925) on the land use practices of Native Americans of the redwood belt of California’s North Coast.
2. Such experiences range from the native Yurok people, in whose cosmology the redwoods “held up the world” (Huntsinger et al., 1994), to the contemporary Trees Foundation’s (n. d.) brochure, in which the redwood groves are a “vast cathedral stand [that] serves as sanctuary for many plant and animal species.”
3. As an indication of this value, the California State Board of Equalization (1994) taxes old-growth redwood of the top size/quality class at \$900 per thousand board feet. In contrast, old-growth logs of other common species (i.e., Douglas fir, ponderosa pine) are valued at \$100–\$200 less per thousand board feet.
4. Between 1968 and 1992, as the total number of mills on the North Coast shrank from 63 to 18 (72%), the smaller mills tended to close, increasing the percentage of the largest mill size class from 25% to 83% (Barrette et al., 1970; Ward, 1995).
5. Georgia Pacific is based in Atlanta, Georgia; Louisiana-Pacific is based in Portland, Oregon; Pacific Lumber is owned by the Houston-based MAXXAM corporation; and Simpson Timber/Arcata Redwood is based in Seattle, Washington.
6. Soon after the old-growth redwood stands on its lands were exhausted in the late 1970s, Georgia Pacific shifted its main base of operations back to the Southeast, where its yellow pine plantations had since matured (Council on Economic Priorities, 1991b). See Marchak (1983, 1990) for an analysis of the impact of the global nature of the timber industry on workers and communities.
7. My analysis of the activities of the Save the Redwoods League and the Sierra Club is drawn primarily from Schrepfer (1983).
8. Wilson (1992) explains the rise of wilderness tourism in the United States as based in the nearly complete alienation of Americans from nature and their desire to reintroduce a symbolic and delimited version of it back into their lives.
9. Bari died of breast cancer in the spring of 1997. References to her activities will therefore be made in the past tense. Contributions to help support her two teenage daughters can be sent to: The Judi Bari Trust Fund, c/o The Mendocino Environmental Center, 106 W. Standley Street, Ukiah, CA 95482.

10. The FBI agent in charge of the bombing case was Richard Held, who led the bureau's operations against the Black Panthers and the American Indian Movement (Bari, 1994).
11. Former logger Walter Smith noted that Redwood Summer did not win "a lot of friends in the workers . . . 'cause Judi Bari wasn't part of it. . . . Had she spoken at Redwood Summer, the effect on the workers might have been completely different. She's the first environmentalist that I felt was not an elitist at the same time. She talked about environmental issues from a worker's perspective" (Seiderstein, 1990b).
12. Earth First! activist Judi Bari describes her motivation: "[J]ust as we mothers know we would kill to protect our children, I think I would do whatever I had to do to protect the earth" (*New Settler*, 1990:21).
13. The term "logging to infinity" is from Harry Merlo, former chief executive officer of Louisiana-Pacific Corporation, the largest industrial producer of redwood commodities in the world. In an oft-quoted newspaper interview, Merlo mused, "It always annoyed me to leave anything on the ground when I log our own lands. . . . We need everything that's out there. We don't log to a ten-inch top, or an eight-inch top, or a six-inch top. *We log to infinity*. Because we need it all. It's ours. It's out there, and we need it all. Now" (quoted in Geniella, 1989, emphasis added).
14. In *Timber Wars*, Bari (1994:14) asks, "Why have the companies been so successful at misdirecting the workers' anger? . . . [Because of t]he utter lack of class consciousness by virtually all of the environmental groups. I have even had an international Earth First! spokesman tell me that there is no difference between the loggers and the logging companies. . . . As long as people on our side hold these views, it will be easy pickings for the bosses to turn their employees against us."
15. Slotkin's (1992) analysis of the "outlaw as hero" myth of the American frontier is also useful for understanding Earth First!'s attempts to invert traditional moral judgments by casting their struggles as natural virtue versus corporate vice.
16. The complete invisibility of the *original* natives, the Native American tribes, from this struggle further problematizes the stance of the activists as legitimate residents of the forest. See Willems-Braun (1997) for a critique of how both timber firms and environmentalists involved in the struggles over the rain forests of British Columbia erase the land claims of the First Nations.
17. See Dowling and Pratt (1993) and Sibley (1995) for the ways in which the boundaries of "home" can contain, mask, and reproduce systems of gender, class, race, and sexual oppression.

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