

uncomplex examples of Indian environmentalism when in fact multiple larger determining political and resource issues were also at play.

Chapter seven again urges us to consider broader context, this time in terms of how the Indian presence on American land has been and is currently recorded and debated. It explores how Indians have vanished and reappeared across time, within debates over numbers at contact and via changes connected to U.S. census enumeration. The chapter concludes with discussion of future problems associated with blood quantum as a means of registering Indian identity and, rather grimly, of some of the main reasons how and why today's native peoples die. This book's final chapter asks us to think about the future. It considers why we are so resistant to making the major changes needed to address the implications of climate change and explores the remarkable persistence of outdated ideas about wilderness. It does this by analyzing the 2007 film of the life of the young outdoorsman Chris McCandless called *Into the Wild*, exploring the conflagration of thinking that created a superficially counter-cultural but in environmental terms, flawed film. This book ends with an evaluation of how a variety of contemporary voices are thinking about land and nature and its relationship to mankind. It closes with the hope that the diversity of indigenous thinking on land and spirit and the history of its reception in the past will begin to inform the debates that inevitably will dictate all our futures on what the Iroquois call Turtle Island.

As the above makes clear, this book is intent on crossing boundaries. It makes a deliberate attempt to bring Indian concerns and Indian thinking out of comparative intellectual isolation and into direct relationship with some of the things that matter most to everyone today—how to maintain life on earth, how to manage nuclear energy and toxic risk, and how to grow as a species through understanding ourselves and our history.

CHAPTER 1



Approaches to Spirituality, Tradition, Land, Wilderness, Nature, Landscape, and Place

The idea of nature contains, though often unnoticed, an extraordinary amount of human history.

—Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," 1980.¹

Unless we understand the history which produced us, we are determined by that history; we may be determined in any event, but the understanding gives us a chance.

—Yvor Winters, *Forms of Discovery: Critical and Historical Essays on the Forms of the Short Poem in English*, 1967.²

At the start of an intellectual journey it is appropriate to begin at the beginning, in this case with the very terms used to describe land and spirit in America. Therefore this book begins with an initial consideration of what spirituality means, how the term differs from religion as it is commonly understood and how it might be defined. We consider what a spiritual tradition is and reasons why the term tradition is significant in the Native American context and important to retain. This chapter then addresses in outline some of the fundamental questions within human experience—what is land, what is wilderness, and what is place?

Having established some of the above and found a way through the larger points of contention, this chapter considers whether and how these foundational ideas relate to varieties of Indian thinking. It explores whether we can isolate ways in which Indian approaches differ from non-Indian ones. This leads inevitably to

a discussion of what is unique about Indian environmentalism and to recognition of the irritating double bind that confronts Indian intellectuals and spokespeople when they speak and write their views on this globally important topic. Too often they find themselves confronting conflicting necessities, on the one hand the need to subvert the stereotypes tying all things Indian to "nature" in a simplistic, ahistorical, and racist fashion and on the other, the need to articulate the abiding centrality of land and spirit within Indian life. Navigating this historical and rhetorical catch twenty-two is essential work, not least lest future generations find themselves condemned to slowly learning things to do with land and spirit that many Indian communities have always known and which now more than ever need greater exposure. This is not to suggest that Indian thinking about any of the above is homogenous. To the contrary, Indian approaches to land, to nature, however defined, and to place are as varied as Indian societies always have been and remain.

Perhaps inevitably, as this chapter closes we will be forced to acknowledge that much about how approaches to land, landscape, and nature have been understood over time has primarily reflected the changing thinking of the dominant Euro-American society. One of its greatest shifts has been from seeing nature as transcendent and sublime in the nineteenth century, to viewing it as recreational and consumable in the twentieth. As ecological problems dangerously accelerate in the twenty-first century, we are witnessing yet another mainstream shift whose ultimate features are as yet undecided. The hope is that our twenty-first century understanding of nature, of wilderness, and of land will be informed by indigenous thinking and that we all will have the courage to reassess ideas and approaches that were previously taken for granted.

ON SPIRITUALITY AND TRADITION

This book uses the larger term spirituality rather than religion. It does so even though the term "spirituality" has suffered considerable intellectual attack. A number of theorists have derided it as being "fuzzy" and "a word that encompasses obscurity with a passion."³ Yet spirituality is useful and rightly defended by many other thinkers because of its fluidity and the fact that it allows for discussion of a wide range of experiences that are rejected by many conservative religious traditions. In contrast to the word "religion," spirituality is a broader, more inclusive term to use when discussing Native American belief systems since it is more to do with a person's beliefs, values, and behavior than to do with a person's involvement in a religious tradition and institution. On top of all of this, in popular usage the term religion has suffered in relation to the larger term spirituality in the last 15 years or so. More of us, it would seem, are comfortable with the term spirituality and less happy to use a bounded term like religion.⁴

Certainly, when it comes to discussing Native American spirituality using the term religion has its inherent problems. The Western word "religion" sits uneasily

with indigenous spiritual practices and traditions that number in the hundreds and have their own associated ritual systems and applications to everyday life. A number of indigenous communities actively discourage use of the term in conjunction with their beliefs because their spirituality constitutes a seamless part of their being in a way the term "religion" simply cannot encompass. The word comes from the Latin *religio*, which translates as "obligation" or "bond." The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as "the human recognition of super-human controlling power, and especially of a personal God or gods entitled to obedience or worship." Such a definition is more appropriate to theistic religions like Christianity, Judaism, and Islam than to indigenous American forms of spirituality which may include Shamanism (however defined) and often a fundamental orientation toward the natural world as well as respect for a pervasive, cosmic force or principle.⁵ Even if we reduce the definition of religion to perhaps its most basic, the idea that it involves simply belief in a nonmaterial dimension, we still run into difficulties. This is because "religion" is unable to embrace the fundamental significance of place and of cultural community within indigenous spiritual traditions and, however carefully defined, it still suggests things indigenous spiritual traditions tend not to have, such as central didactic texts, prescribed theology and rituals as well as the urge to proselytize. Furthermore, there is a strong argument that only native language can express any form of native transcendent experience and that in any case, such experiences can only be understood via embeddedness and personal commitment to a specific native community.

Admittedly, some of these problematics are reflected in the dissatisfaction some of the foremost religious studies thinkers have expressed with the whole concept of religion. They argue that the term has limited value because it is indefinable and at heart, Western. For example, Nielsen et al. argue that "The notion that something called *religion* can be isolated, analysed or defined is primarily a Western conceit."⁶ This is because dominant Western beliefs have tended to split off what is deemed sacred from everyday life. God to a greater or lesser extent is thought about as being separate from what he created, nature conceived as a realm that operates in its own sphere and one over which man fundamentally has been given dominion. Following the Enlightenment, this was heavily bolstered by Western science. Science sets itself the task of fully understanding nature and does so in part in the modern era, through fully separating itself from issues of belief, transcendence, or religion. It is worth recognizing, however, that this separation was less stark in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when what was known in the West as natural philosophy had important interrelationships with Christian religion and theology.⁷

In comparison, the trajectory of much Native American thinking and development has been wholly different. Its various traditions tend to include the seen and unseen and build upon rather than segregate the sacred. As one of the foremost Indian thinkers of recent times Vine Deloria Jr. put it: "Indians developed as comprehensive analysis of the nature of the world as has Western science, but the

goals have been very different. Western science is based on Roger Bacon's command to pry nature's secrets from her, by torture, if nothing else. The medicine men sought additional alliances with other entities and, according to some tribes, accumulated both spiritual powers and cumulative knowledge over several lifetimes.⁸

Using the term spirituality gets us free of some of these departures and issues if we use a definition of it at its most basic—as mental or material energy and if we see it as a word that allows us to get us beyond ideas we may have inherited from Western traditions about mind being separate from body and nature being separate from the sacred. That said, like the word religion, spirit is also a non-Indian word with a Latin stem, coming as it does from the Latin word for breath (thus God is said to have *in-spired* Adam, breathing the spirit of life into him). It is perhaps best to think of that breath, of spirituality as it will be used in the succeeding chapters, as a force or energy that is not bound by dimension. In the Native American Indian context it is also useful to bear in mind the themes anthropologists have deemed to be common to a great number of indigenous spiritualities. These include certain cosmological approaches, the idea of pervasive supernatural force, respect for dreams and visions, for song and dance, varying understandings of the afterlife, respect for ancestors, a sense of kinship with all things including the animate and inanimate and specific reverence for certain symbols and materials such as tobacco and medicine bundles.

Another term this book uses is “tradition.” It is used even though, like the term spirituality, it too has been justifiably contested as being too broad to be meaningful. Readers will recognize that Native American Indian communities are at least as diverse as Euro-American ones and that any all-encompassing term or generalized set of perceived characteristics will inevitably be inadequate, but it is still important to speak of tradition in the sense that Raymond Williams wrote of it, as an active process within communities where ideas and beliefs (which may only require two generations to become “traditional”) are nonetheless valuable, dynamic, enabling, and historically significant.⁹ It is important to at least try to get beyond the Western intellectual “tradition” of thinking about tradition (here I exclude a number of anthropologists) as something stultifying and liable to enforce cultural homogeneity, and as analogous if juxtaposed to progress, to other nineteenth-century dichotomies like nature/nurture, primitive/civilized, mind/body. This negative Western intellectual “tradition” includes Durkheim, Weber, Tönnies, and Marx, the last of whom went so far as to write of the tradition of all the dead generations weighing “like a nightmare on the brain of the living.” This is an intellectual perspective on tradition that remains pervasive and persistent. Even more recent scholars such as Jürgen Habermas, who recognize that traditions are not static, see the continuity of tradition as coercive and deem change to be solely the outcome of rationality and reflectivity.¹⁰ In contrast, a more productive way to think about tradition when it comes to a number of Native American Indian practices is to recognize what Arnold Krupat has dubbed

a *both/and* modality of thought at work. Thus Indian communities and individuals are seen to be able to encompass what might appear at first to be mutually contradictory, able, for example, to combine elements of both Christianity and non-Christian indigenous tribal spirituality; able to respect what are thought of as nonrational, ancient traditions, and certain scientific approaches within the contemporary world. This indigenous, complementary way of thinking, of comprehending difference in terms of balance as opposed to in the Aristotelian, analytic, *either/or* mode of thought more familiar in the West is what makes “Indian tradition” so flexible, inclusive, and arguably, ultimately indestructible.¹¹ It will be this awareness, rather than the homogenizing, synoptic gloss that generally surrounds use of the term “tradition,” that will be invoked in the chapters that follow.

LAND, LANDSCAPE, PLACE, WILDERNESS, NATURE

It is worth considering at the outset some very basic differences. Intellectually, Indian approaches to land or place tend to see it as space invested with meaning through lived experience and as something defined by its construction rather than its borders. In comparison, European and later Euro-American approaches to land have tended to view it through the lens of Christianity. Thus for early settler societies, American land beyond their settlements represented spiritual danger. The wilderness was a place of potential peril, a place where the Christian could become profoundly both physically and spiritually lost. After all, it was in the wilderness that Jesus found himself “bewildered” and tempted by Satan.¹²

Interestingly, as Vine Deloria pointed out in his 1972 book *God Is Red*, the Christian idea of God is more or less humanlike (often meddlesome and vengeful), whereas in many native religions supreme authority is placed in a Great Spirit or Great Mystery who is not necessarily human-like; instead it symbolizes the life forces of nature. We might say that most Indian traditions map onto an egalitarian/kinship model in the ecological historian Donald Worster's terms, rather than an imperial tradition where knowledge of nature is used to exert power over it.¹³ In comparison, Western anthropocentrism goes back as least as far as the Greek Stoics, but the anthropocentrism at the heart of Christian spirituality can be traced directly back to the Old Testament idea that God gave man dominion over the earth and its creatures.¹⁴ The Old Testament puts man forward as the only creature made in God's image, making man superior to and separate from all others. God's instruction was: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”¹⁵ This makes the earth and its creatures significant primarily in terms of their usefulness or otherwise to man. The statement appears to be indifferent to those creatures or landscapes without such an inherent usefulness. This point was made very powerfully in 1968 by Lynn White in an influential essay called

"The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" that triggered much new thinking in the then-nascent ecological movement. The Bible, of course, is open to interpretation and as Christian ecologists have been at pains to point out in response to White's criticisms, there is a long history of Christian husbandry or stewardship of the earth and its creatures, an ethic that maintains that mankind has a divinely ordained moral responsibility to care for God's earth. Another recent thread of thinking within ecumenical discourse concerned with environmental matters centers on emphasizing the idea of the whole household (*oikos*) of God. As a root metaphor this allows Christian thinkers to think and speak of the earth as God's home and to formulate an ethics of eco-justice, a term popularized by theological scholar Dieter Hessel.¹⁶ Neither are Christian thinkers the only people who have taken issue with Lynn White's arguments. White argued that a direct link existed across centuries between Judaeo-Christianity and post-Baconian science and technology, a direct connection that for several notable scholars, is simply too much of a stretch.¹⁷

Deloria's point about the essential anthropocentrism of the Old Testament instruction remains valid nonetheless. It is also the case that Christian man's relationship to the earth is clearly utilitarian. A comparable utilitarianism can also be seen in early American political philosophy. In John Locke's thinking, in for example his 1690 *Second Treatise on Government*, we find a theory of property underpinning the legitimacy of democratic government. This was a set of ideas wildly popular throughout the eighteenth century and it included the idea that by using nature, a free man through his labor could legitimately transform what was worthless into property. The West, all that land beyond the confines of existing colonial settlement and with it all of its indigenous inhabitants, was therefore "worthless" until converted into property by questing Euro-Americans. Even Locke, however, placed some limitations on the uses to which nature might be put. An individual was not to take more than they could use and no man should appropriate more land than they could work. Even so, Locke established a bulwark of thinking in the United States that solidified connections between ideas of national freedom (as opposed to life under monarchy) and the use of nature primarily for man's benefit. A similar sort of anthropocentric utilitarian approach to nature would later be powerfully put forward by the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service Gifford Pinchot. Pinchot was a great friend of President Theodore Roosevelt who valued his advocacy of "conservation," which was as Pinchot put it, the sustainable use of resources so as to ensure "the greatest good for the greatest number." The idea was thought of as a middle way during the nineteenth century, a means of assuaging the demands on the one hand of the "timber barons" of the time intent upon maximizing profit and on the other, the demands of "preservationists" who saw in American land a vital spiritual and psychological resource that needed to be protected from exploitation and preserved as national treasure.

Gradually such preservationist thinking gained sway and settler thinking within the United States began to shift. By the early nineteenth century, wilderness had become less about danger and more about the opportunity to commune with God. A legacy of this way of thinking is that it is perhaps how most of us, whether religious or not, have been conditioned to think about wilderness today—that it is sacred and potentially transcendent space. Parts of the American landscape had by the early nineteenth century been deemed holy and were seen as potential portals to the ecstatic and the sublime. This was what "nature" meant, for example, to the philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1802–1882) and to John Muir (1838–1914), the individual who used this rhetoric to spearhead the creation of the first American national parks. Muir had come to America from Scotland at age 11 and founded the Sierra Club in 1892. It was largely through Muir and the Sierra Club's efforts that Yosemite National Park gained its current boundaries. Like a number of visionary individuals whose efforts ultimately changed the world, much about Muir was more than a little strange. He was obsessive, thirsty even, for the beauty he perceived in the wild and intoxicated on a romantic, mystical level by the wonder of places like Yosemite. His identification with nature was startlingly passionate, as complete we might say, as Catherine's was for Heathcliff in the novel *Wuthering Heights* published just 20 years before Muir had what might be called his "wilderness conversion."¹⁸ He wrote to a friend in 1870:

I'm in the woods, woods woods, & they are in me-ee-ee. The King tree & me have sworn eternal love- sworn it without swearing & I've taken the sacrament with Douglass Squirrel drank Sequoia blood, & with its rosy purple drops I am writing this woody gospel letter. I never before knew the virtue of Sequoia juice. Seen with sunbeams in it, its color is the most royal of all royal purples. No wonder the Indians instinctively drink it for they know not what. I wish I was so drunk & Sequoia that I could preach the green brown woods to all the juiceless world, descending from this divine wilderness like a John the Baptist eating Douglas Squirrels & wild honey or wild anything, crying, Repent for the Kingdom of Sequoia is at hand.¹⁹

It is perhaps unfair to judge someone as they describe one of the most profound realizations of their life in a private letter to a friend, but a number of points with reference to this quotation by Muir call out for comment. Here, a son of a Methodist minister uses all the language of revealed religion to extol the ecstasy and sacramental wonder of his encounter with nature. It is as though he has found his faith in the woods; his King is now King Sequoia as opposed to Christ. He will not go on to found a church but his highly individual and solitary experience will spawn a movement nonetheless, one dedicated to the preservation of "wilderness."

The individual and personal nature of Muir's relationship to the woods stands in stark contrast to a number of Indian traditions and their relationship to the non-human world. Notably, Muir's experience is outside of community rather than within it and while the language is as passionate as that within a Gothic novel, he relates his experience just as a Christian prophet might, descending from the wild to spread the word of a new gospel. For Muir in the quotation above, Indian peoples are very far from his own consciousness. Like animals, they are "instinctive" rather than intelligent and, it seems, drink liquids without having a cogent reason to do so. His views about Indian people would later develop, but the larger point is that the wilderness movement has tended to section off the Indian activities so that they are perceived as somehow not constitutive of what goes on in the "wild" still stands.²⁰

INTO THE WILD: THE ORIGINS OF AN IDEA

We will return to Muir, but at this stage it is worth going back in time so as to better understand the shift he represents. Muir did not invent "wilderness," but his approach articulated a new American understanding of it. In the centuries previous, wilderness had been thought of as places of almost unnatural barrenness, places of desert, loneliness, and danger—wastelands where a man without his community might find himself subject to every sort of terror and where inevitably he would fall prey to abject despair. Moses wandered with his people in the wilderness for 40 years and they felt so bereft they almost set about worshipping a graven image. Christ was driven into the wilderness so that Satan might tempt him, and Adam and Eve were driven out of God's garden Eden into wilderness that only hard labor could transform.²¹ According to Carolyn Merchant, it was this expulsion that spawned since the seventeenth century a "recovery project . . . to turn the earth itself into a vast cultivated garden." The United States in particular took to its heart the task of "reinventing Eden."²² It was a reinvention that at points was acutely brutal and as the quotation from Vine Deloria earlier suggests, it demonstrated thinking with its roots in seventeenth-century Europe, thinking such as that of Francis Bacon (1561–1626), a lawyer and official in the closing years of Queen Elizabeth's reign. Bacon could justify severely "vexing" the earth to rectify the loss of innocence and agency caused by the Fall. He advocated dissecting nature just as scientists of the time were dissecting bodies, exploring her bowels and "recovering that right over nature which belongs to [the human race] by divine bequest" so as "to establish and extend the power and dominion of the human race itself over the entire universe." His dream was to witness the dawn of the dominance of a new way of thinking, a "new organon" that might prize apart "the secrets still locked in nature's bosom." Top-dressing his plea with overtly sexual language, he explicitly called for the utter subjugation and exploitation of the earth.²³

In one sense, Bacon has been unjustly maligned by writers such as Merchant, since in truth, rather than adopt a mechanistic view of nature like René

Descartes's, he believed in a constant ebb and flow of "vital sparks." Furthermore, the larger context to his ideas on nature and experiment are, in intention at least, steward-like and centered around the common good. In fact, advancing the betterment of all was why he advocated the scientific method of systematic study through experiment. Furthermore, environmental degradation did not begin with the scientific revolution, something Merchant at points comes close to recognizing. Yet Merchant's key argument still stands; Bacon, Descartes, and a number of the primary thinkers associated with the scientific revolution in the West produced work that was used to advance a project of fundamental and profound "vexation" of the earth and it invoked the larger biblical project of recovering through man's agency the paradise of a lost Eden. Without question, their language was riddled with the misogyny that characterized much about their time.

European thinking therefore had at its roots notions of the wild as Other. Wilderness was held to be the home not of man primarily but of wild beasts (one source suggests it stems from the Old English *wildðoren*, another, less convincingly, that it stems from wild deer, that is, wild-deer-ness). Correspondingly the men who were said to live there were deemed hardly to be men at all. According to medieval legend and art, the "wild man" (in German *wilder mann*) was halfway between beast and man, governed only by instinct, hairy, naked, and fundamentally ignorant of God and his teachings. According to Richard Bernheimer's *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology*:

Wildness meant more in the Middle Ages than the shrunken significance of the term would indicate today. The word implied everything that eluded Christian norms and the established framework of Christian society, referring to what was uncanny, unruly, raw, unpredictable, foreign, uncultured, and uncultivated. It included the unfamiliar as well as the unintelligible. Just as the wildness is the background against which medieval society is delineated, so wildness in the widest sense is the background of God's lucid order of creation. Man in his unreconstructed state, faraway nations, and savage creatures at home thus came to share the same essential quality.²⁴

The European notion of the wild owed most to the European imagination, and it was conjured especially ardently at times when Europeans felt the strongest need to exercise their imaginations. This was pithily explained in perhaps the best essay ever written on wildness, its meanings, and history published in 1972 by the theorist and historian Hayden White. White saw wildness as a fiction, a sign that mankind's imagination imbues with certain characteristics. The idea of wildness he said had moved across time from myth to fiction and back again to myth, but it had retained its essential characteristic as first and foremost a projection of our repressed desires and anxieties.²⁵ Like Bernheimer, he linked a European

emphasis on wildness since the fourteenth century, whether in the form of primitivism or in the idea of the Noble Savage, with periods of oppression and cruelty. Attention paid to the wild, he suggested, was a recurring symptom of the need for greater liberty in a Europe dealing with the realities of population density, inequality, and scarcity. Always wildness represented what had been sacrificed for society to function and grow. As White put it:

It was the oppressed, exploited, alienated, or repressed part of humanity that kept on reappearing in the imagination of Western man—as the Wild Man, as the monster, and as the devil—to haunt or entice him thereafter. Sometimes this oppressed or repressed humanity appeared as a threat and a nightmare, at other times as a goal and a dream; sometimes as an abyss into which mankind might fall, and again as a summit to be scaled; but always as a criticism of whatever security and peace of mind one group of men in society had purchased at the cost of the suffering of another.²⁶

Or, one might say, an obsession with the wild in whatever form is and always has been, a sign of our moral, spiritual, and cultural desire to reconcile our almost limitless wish for comfort with our conflicting inherent wish to share.

THE CREATION OF AMERICAN WILDERNESS

As America industrialized, wilderness in the dominant, non-Indian culture became bound up with nostalgia for a mythic and supposedly regenerative frontier past. Instead of seeming untameably wild, deserted, and frightening, the wild now appeared inexpressibly beautiful; indeed it became prized as a precious sanctuary for Americans increasingly brow-beaten by the woes of burgeoning city life. Once seen as the no-man's land where Satan had free play, the same places were now recontextualized as the opposite, as holy sites, places offering special access to the transcendent and the divine. Wild places came to be seen as the sanctuary of the American individual, as feminized spaces, but at the same time as crucibles capable of forging the quintessence of manly virtue. They were the appropriate backdrop both for Owen Wister's novels and for the rugged exploits of the nation's darling, President Theodore Roosevelt. Equally significant, landscape and nature came to be seen as recreational, as something to be bought and consumed by the weary as a salve to the by now rapidly increasing physical and psychological pressures of city life. Especially among elites, landscape was seen as something that might be consumed, as part of the new idea of "recreation." However, it is important to keep in mind that this thinking had most salience for the intellectual and social elite. It is perhaps still this way today. The idea of land as pristine heritage had little currency for many of the workers on America's various frontiers or for many Indian peoples on reservations. Too

often, their lives were limited by the broader context of bitterly hard work and racial exploitation. This in itself conceals an acute irony. After all, part of what had always informed Euro-American attitudes to their "new" territory was collective memory of how previous Europeans generations had themselves lost vital access to land. In medieval times royal control over forests was one of the most hated aspects of monarchy across Western Europe. The right to hunt was strictly monitored with infraction resulting in rigorous punishment. It was only with significant colonial expansion into North America in the seventeenth century that via emigration a proportion of Europe's poor were again able to access the fauna and flora necessary to subsistence. In turn the creation of American "wilderness" areas was sold to the American people in part as a democratization of access to land, but in another sense it was a recapitulation of an old European idea that the best of nature was rightfully appreciated by an elite. When Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903) set about "designing" Niagara Falls and Yosemite he justified their being set aside by arguing that failure to do so would be undemocratic. Without such government intervention, American sites of beauty would, he argued, end up just as parks were in Great Britain—the exclusive preserve of the rich. Americans needed its set-aside parks, its Yosemite and Niagaras, so that its scenery might improve the morals of its working classes and imbue them with possibilities for happiness. The demand for Niagara's water had reduced its flow to a trickle in the 1860s; but subsequently, Olmsted was able to garden and design both sites so that they could handle high visitor numbers and retain the image of wilderness that would ensure their preservation.

Idolization by the dominant society of aspects of the environment was in fact, as Kenneth R. Olwig has pointed out, nothing less than a form of narcissistic triumphalism given that the process of creating and enshrining "wilderness" happened at the same time as the removal and destruction of Native American communities.²⁷ To put America's "natural" cathedrals on tourist maps, Indian peoples had to be aggressively dispossessed and their treated rights ignored. In an era characterized by immense Indian suffering, the Park Service carried on the process of removal and Indian cultural erosion that had been begun in the previous decades by the American army. After 1850, the most conventionally beautiful and sacred parts of what had been known as "Indian country," including Yosemite, Yellowstone, Mt. Rainier, Crater Lake, Mesa Verde, Olympic, Grand Canyon, Glacier, and Rocky Mountain, had all been designated "wilderness" and their Indian peoples removed.²⁸ The pages of print devoted to the idolizing of certain American environments all served the purpose of drawing attention away from actual processes of cultural displacement and resource extraction. To paraphrase Renato Rosaldo, in this process the active and morally responsible colonial agent got transformed into an innocent bystander. It was by no means a coincidence, as Rosaldo points out, that "[the] attitude of reverence toward the natural developed at the same time that North Americans intensified the destruction of their human and natural environment."²⁹ In sum, an idealized

wilderness was a necessary accompaniment for the lone, white hero of frontier myth as he carried out the tricky work of making the sustained attempt to culturally and physically erase Indians appear somehow morally tolerable.

Niagara Falls was the first American site to be deemed a sublime portal to the heavens in this way; it was followed by Yosemite, deeded to California in 1864, and then Yellowstone was designated the first true national park in 1872. The veneration of landscape these designations represent was bolstered by elite thinking about the sublime in work by a host of writers including, Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, and William Gilpin.³⁰ It was a predominantly white, male elite—the group who had benefited most from the exploitation of the American wild—who in general could be said to have been at the forefront of the movement to preserve wilderness. The class that contained the modernizers and industrializers were the very people most powerfully articulating an antimodern nostalgia for a supposedly pristine past. It is another example of the stream and counterstream within modernism so ably described by T. J. Jackson Lears in his seminal text, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880–1920* (1981). It was a symptom of psychological and spiritual yearning, of a desire to recover the self. As Lears notes, “Antimodern dissent more often contained a vein of deep religious longing, an unfulfilled yearning to restore infinite meaning to an increasingly finite world.”³¹ The wilderness preservation movement contained within it a desire for atonement as part of the idea that areas could be cordoned off where man would be powerless and the long story of his impact on earth rubbed away.

The history above paints in comparatively broad brushstrokes, and it is important to remember that for Americans of all sorts, nature had its own contours specific to context. As it was across the world, nature was understood variously by different peoples in differing places; but nonetheless, the general pattern described above holds true for the United States. Ironically, it was the very husbandry of wild spaces by indigenous peoples that had made those spaces appear especially park-like and attractive to Euro-Americans. Settler communities could not or would not recognize the efforts indigenous communities had made to keep landscapes looking so primally inviting to humans with their wide expanses suitable for game. In truth, the land settlers encountered and found so pleasingly like an optimal European proto-park was most often very carefully managed. Rather than “virgin land,” to use George Bancroft’s infamous term, it was indeed a park, a wildlife park belonging to someone else—America’s indigenous inhabitants.³² Euro-Americans found it difficult to perceive this because they clung to the idea that Indians simply did not use land. As William Cronon pointed out in *Changes in the Land* in 1983, the issue was the difference between individual ownership of land and collective sovereignty. Indian peoples generally did own things individually (the implements of their work, clothing, items used daily) but land was held collectively. Therefore when Euro-Americans encountered large tracts of it under intensive management for hunting and agriculture, it

appeared to them to be not used at all. Since it was not fenced and it was not being used to farm domestic animals, it was only too easy for settler communities to believe the very thing that was most convenient for them to believe—that here was “empty” land, gifted to them by God, a veritable Eden rediscovered in a “New World.” This conviction is and was remarkable for its persistence. As Francis Jennings has explained at length, early Puritan records in particular teem with formulas explaining away Indian use of their own lands. Lawyers like John Winthrop argued that Indians had neither national territory nor private property because they did not always live on land the whole year round. Legally he deemed most Indian land to be *vacuum domicilium* because Indians had not “subdued” it as the English might. Carefully managed Indian hunting lands were therefore “waste without inhabitant” or “traversed but not occupied” or “ranged rather than inhabited.” Since Indian peoples could not produce written evidence of the sale or transfer of designated lands between themselves in a form the Euro-Americans understood, their possession of land was categorized as only a natural rather than civil right and, as such, was considered easy to usurp.³³

An excellent example of Euro-American blindness to Indian use of land is how the landscape architect and conservationist Frederick Law Olmsted perceived Yosemite Valley when he first encountered it in 1864. He deemed it a “wild park” and because he felt it had been created just how man might like it *without* man’s intervention. In fact glacial action and the work of indigenous peoples had created Yosemite’s almost level floor, gentle pools, broad meadows deep with grass, wildflowers, azalea, great oak groves, pines, meandering riverbank lined with willows and colorful rocky outcrops. Yosemite teemed with bird life, grizzly, and all kinds of wildlife only because it had been kept so carefully kept for generations. Settlers named it Yosemite from a corruption of the Sierra Miwok word *Yoham’-i-te*, describing a band called *Ah-wah’-nee-ches* who had a large village south side of the Merced River. They were known as excellent hunters of grizzly bear, known as *Oo-hoo’-ma-te/O-ham’-i-te*, thus their name. Upon “discovery” Yosemite supported a large population—there were at least 36 sites in 1870. Some villages were lived in all year; some just from May to October; and some were geared exclusively for hunting and fishing. It is perhaps unsurprising that such a beautiful and abundant environment would have been home to a large population of humans over time. After all, Yosemite’s isolation made it easy to defend and it teemed with edible, fish, reptiles, insects, game, water, and edible plants—especially acorn, which, when shelled and dried, was something of a staple. Subsistence living always means regular effort but at Yosemite indigenous living was not hard. There was plenty of time for a rich ceremonial life carried out in two large, semi-subterranean assembly houses of about 40 feet in diameter in the valley. Yosemite native peoples carried out extensive political and cultural activities including dances and musical instrument playing. They had a vast hinterland of stories as well as stories tied specifically to places in Yosemite. They played a game like lacrosse, gambled, and held a great annual mourning

ceremony each September or October to connect with the dead. Each fall, they set fire to Yosemite's dry grass so as to keep its meadows open.³⁴

"IT ALREADY HAS A NAME": YOSEMITE

A key voice from this generation of *Ah-wah'-nee-ches* at what is now known as Yosemite is that of Tenaya. He was a renowned leader in the largest and most important village in the valley and had a large ceremonial house beside a gigantic oak just below Yosemite Falls.³⁵ He is repeatedly on record reminding early settlers that the remarkable landscapes and geological features they were "discovering" at Yosemite did not need to be named by them since they already had names—names with deeply embedded and powerful cultural and spiritual significance. Yosemite Valley already had a name, *Ahwahne*, meaning it is thought, large open mouth (*awo*).³⁶ When, in the process of his people's displacement, it was suggested to Tenaya that a deep blue lake be named after him he said "It already has a name. We call it *Py-we'-ack*."³⁷

This propensity of settlers to see and perceive what they wanted to see, and to not perceive indigenous presence and their sacred practice fundamentally oriented around specific homelands, can be traced from the very earliest records of contact. Columbus felt such a sense of cultural and religious superiority that he wholly dismissed the linguistic abilities of the indigenous peoples he first encountered. Because they did not speak his language, he deemed them to have no conceptual language at all. He told the Spanish monarchs who were his employers that he would bring six Arawak natives to them "in order that they might learn to speak." In the same way, he dismissed the ability of native peoples to relate meaningfully to place and went around renaming and recontextualizing the islands and phenomenon he encountered so as to mark non-Indian possession of them. He even renamed all the indigenous people of the Americas with one single collective descriptor, Indian.³⁸ That great homogenizing term, dismissive as it was of so many diverse sovereign tribal peoples, would continue to irk native peoples for generations until it was deemed to have been reinscribed and made indigenous through use. The Pequot William Apess, who wrote one of the earliest native autobiographies, *A Son of the Forest* (1829), was one of the first to articulate in print the negative impact of settler nonperception of native diversity and of native names. He wrote, "I know of nothing so trying to a child as to be repeatedly called by an improper name." Given that the word Indian was not in the Bible, he concluded that it must have been "imported for the special purpose of degrading us."³⁹ The whole process, or we might say, settler compulsion, was satirized very successfully by the indigenous/Greek author Thomas King in his 1993 novel *Green Grass*. Here Green encourages us to laugh at the desire to hierarchize through naming by juxtaposing Christian and Native origin myths. His character Ahdamn, first son of the Christian God, lives with First Woman in a garden created by Thought Woman and, preposterously, he starts renaming

everything he encounters after preconceived images from American consumerism. He tells Elk he is in fact a microwave oven and Old Coyote he is a cheeseburger.⁴⁰

The inability to perceive indigenous presence and the desire to rename what is new to the settler experience in one sense has never gone away. It is a "rechristening" process, a symptom of linguistic imperialism, that too many of us do not realize has happened. Despite park managers in Yosemite's cultural outreach efforts, for example, how many of us know the native names for the key geographical features of the nation's foremost nature park? For that matter, how many Americans know the Indian translation for any one of the host of Indian names they have retained and still routinely use—words, for example, such as *Chicago*, probably translatable as "wild onion place" and *Tucson*, "black mountain base"?⁴¹ We forget that a name is rarely just a name; it signifies how a community perceives reality. In forgetting this process of rechristening and translation, we lose sight also of previous Indian understandings of place. Two of the best books to help us reconnect in this sense involve the anthropologist Keith Basso, who wrote *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* in 1996 and produced with Steven Feld the edited collection, *Senses of Place* the same year.⁴² Basso tells of how he began what seemed like a straightforward mapping project to mark the locations of physical features around Cibecue territory in Arizona and note the Western Apache place names. He discovered among the Apache a fundamental belief that place names were the direct quotes of the ancestors who first named the places and settled the land. Tied to the places are stories about specific events with specific cultural meanings such that place names are capable of having moral import for the person about whom the place-name comments. Place names are thus connected with "correct" behavior, language, metaphor, and history, and they are culturally dynamic and subject to responsive change. Basso made a plea that we see beyond three-dimensional ideas about place and instead sense place and be aware of how different peoples are alive to the world around them. Following Martin Heidegger, he focused on the concept of *dwelling*, where importance is assigned to the forms of consciousness with which individuals perceive and apprehend geographical space.⁴³

While no single statement necessarily holds true for all indigenous peoples, here one is also reminded of Vine Deloria Jr.'s general statement in *God is Red* that "American Indians hold their lands—place—as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind." In his experience with the Apache Basso learned to perceive landscape as storied, as akin to theater, as a locale that calls up "thoughts of fabled deeds and the singular cast of actors who there has played them out." This awareness of places is crucial to gaining wisdom—"igo==+ in Apache thinking, which Basso defines in Apache terms as "a heightened mental capacity that facilitates the avoidance of harmful events by detecting threatening circumstances when none are apparent." Thus place is revealed as key to wisdom, which is in itself a key to survival and

based on three mental conditions, smoothness, resilience, and steadiness of mind. Basso asserts that, for many Native peoples, places, and place names are one means by which not only identity but also "portions of the past" are "brought into being." In this sense, Basso argues that place names quite literally embody an "eyewitness voice."⁴⁴ Thus place names and naming in general are seen to be heavy with the cultural and spiritual understanding necessary to indigenous survival. Names matter. To answer Shakespeare's Juliet's question, a rose by any other name does not smell as sweet. Renaming risks destroying the webs of meaning that support a community. Equally importantly, indigenous naming often allows for dynamism and ambiguity that is irksome in terms of non-Indian military and economic imperatives that call for static names and a one-to-one correspondence between the name and what is named (as in the name "High Peak").

In comparison, the record of settler "discovery" in the United States is most often one of ethnocentric tunnel vision. Admittedly, those who first set foot on indigenous lands had a sense of history but it was of a history calibrated almost exclusively in terms of Western nation-states and of individual and later racial narratives. For example, when in the fall of 1833 58 fur trappers and hunters "discovered" Yosemite, they were being watched by Ahwahneeche who had been secretly trailing them. Despite subsequently discovering this and despite all later evidence to the contrary, they persisted in perceiving Yosemite as pristine and devoid of human imprint.⁴⁵ Yet this sort of specific blindness and wondrously self-serving understanding of place was not unique to Euro-Americans. It was, as Mary Louise Pratt has shown, part of the overall history of what she calls "imperial meaning-making." Europeans "discovering" key natural wonders across the world were most often directed or in some cases physically carried by indigenous guides but still kept up the myth of theirs as "first sight." The story of "discovery" always discounted the long history of indigenous knowledge and possession of land. The myth of "discovery" and associated ideas about indigenous land being "empty," "pristine," or "virgin" were all part of what Pratt dubs "anti-conquest," the delicate sleight-of-hand that sought to accentuate the heroism, endurance, and providential good fortune of the venturing settler and to downplay his actual purpose—to secure and control land and resources. Renaming was and is, in the Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's terms, a cultural bomb whose effect is devastating. He writes:

The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capabilities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves, for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own.⁴⁶

Regrettably a historically underanalyzed understanding of this imperialist process also characterizes some of the best-known writing on place even today. Yi-Fu Tuan has done sterling work constructing a paradigm for the concept of "place" and created the term "topophilia" to suggest the link between persons and place or the physical environment. Yet he finds the reinscription of place through renaming symptomatic simply of the role of gesture in defining place, when in truth it signifies a great deal more. He writes: "Explorers conjure places out of the wilderness by simply naming peaks and rivers . . . Gestures, either alone or in association with speech and the making of things, create place. For example, when an explorer names a mountain he may at the same time put a cross on it: the ritual words for place-making are reinforced by ritual gesture." Tuan is right about place being intimately connected to symbols, language, propaganda, gesture, and culture in a general sense but there is a real danger in divorcing place, as he tends to, from the often bloody history of colonialism and from the specific relationships within discrete communities. This in turn is linked to other analytical choices in his approach such as his commitment to seeing nature and culture as being separate (albeit in tension) and to conceiving of culture as being unique to human.⁴⁷

The stories about Yosemite's "discovery," and perhaps John Muir's own stories about his uncovering of Yosemite's beauty, should be seen in Pratt's words, as "strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony."⁴⁸ Muir's writing about his discovery of Yosemite's beauty, to the extent that it served to bring about the consolidation of Yosemite and its resources for non-Indian use and classified and categorized what was beautiful about it, was writing about land perceived through "imperial eyes." It is perhaps only now that landscapes such as Yosemite are slowly coming to be perceived in ways other than how Muir and others suggested. In time, as Yosemite's indigenous heritage becomes better known and better understood, Muir's aestheticizing may no longer remain the dominant gaze. We may begin to tear away the veil of names, classifications, and standardizations imposed on landscapes to fit bureaucratic imperatives linked ultimately to various stages of capitalism. Today, parks like Yosemite shock the public by embarking on a 10-year program of tree destruction to preserve iconic "wilderness" vistas, but such activity is simply a reminder that "wilderness" has always been a constructed notion, constructed in relation to the gaze of the nonindigenous tourist. Yosemite's current "Scenic Vista Management Plan" will see the cutting down of thousands of evergreen trees, some one hundred feet tall and thirty inches wide, so as to preserve a balance between oaks, grassy meadows, and conifer trees that was once maintained by Indian peoples and naturally occurring fire. The reason? To preserve a camera-ready version of "wilderness" that will keep tourists visiting the park. As a historical landscape architect at Yosemite recently explained, "Enjoyment means allowing people to connect with nature. But you have to be able to see it."⁴⁹

It is because of this history that a number of our most eminent thinkers today advocate that we abandon wilderness thinking in favor of some form of "middle way" where the dualism at the heart of the idea of wilderness (thought of as pristine, historyless, and innocent) is opposed to non-wilderness (dismissed as contaminated, sullied, impure) is dispensed with. They argue that the very idea that there can or should be landscapes that remain unworked, or ever were unworked, is a fantasy specific to those who have not and do not expect to have to work the land to make a living. Wilderness in such an analysis is an urban idea, the corollary to a city-based life divorced from the seasons and from soil-based production. Wilderness suggests that man is outside of nature, outside of the natural. In this sense it is a profound rejection of the human self and a profoundly egotistical overestimation of man's potential relationship to the non-human world. For writers such as William Cronon in his ground-breaking 1996 book, *Uncommon Ground*, this is acutely dangerous because "The wilderness dualism tends to cast any use as *ab-use*, and thereby denies us a middle ground in which responsible use and non-use might attain some kind of balanced, sustainable relationship."⁵⁰ For Cronon and others "wilderness thinking" is in fact a key part of the contemporary period's ecological problem. The binary thinking involved in setting aside and preserving areas so that they might (impossibly) remain untouched by mankind allows us to ignore the great bulk of the world where awkward choices must be made to accommodate man's impact and the differing imperatives of capital, politics, race, and class. Thus Cronon quotes Wendell Berry and his contradictory-seeming statement that "The only thing we have to preserve nature with is culture; the only thing we have to preserve wildness with is domesticity."⁵¹ It is hard not to see the heavy hand of a certain Puritan form of sexual ethics at play in the binary thinking Cronon describes. Just as a "fallen" woman who has given herself up to be debauched was once thought of beyond redemption, "fallen" or non-pristine land is too often deemed to be not worth preserving. It is something of a zero-sum game. As Michael Pollan wrote in an essay discussing the ethics of equating nature with wilderness, "Thanks to exactly this kind of either/or thinking, Americans have done an admirable job of drawing lines around certain sacred areas (we did invent the wilderness area) and a terrible job of managing the rest of our land . . . Once a landscape is no longer 'virgin' it is typically written off as fallen, lost to nature, irredeemable. We hand it over to the jurisdiction of that other sacrosanct American ethic: *laissez-faire* economics." This means around 8 percent or less of American land today is preserved as wilderness and the rest is subject in some form or other to market forces.⁵² As Thom Kuehls has pointed out, an added problem with the wilderness idea today is that wilderness areas tend to be thought of as bounded, finite, and regionally discrete, whereas environmental despoliation and with it associated issues to do with politics and economics are porous and global in nature. The wilderness idea in this sense can act as a barrier to the transnational strategies that are often required to tackle environmental stress.⁵³

This urge to separate man from nature is something a number of Indian intellectuals wish to see abandoned and for similar reasons they wish for words like "landscape" to be dispensed with or at least for a broader recognition of the historical cultural baggage they carry as terms. In an essay entitled "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination," the Laguna writer Leslie Marmon Silko claims that the very definition of the term "landscape" embodies the kind of non-native separatist worldview described above. She writes:

So long as the human consciousness remains *within* the hills, canyons, cliffs, and the plants, clouds, and sky, the term *landscape*, as it has entered the English language, is misleading. "A portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view" does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings. This assumes the viewer is somehow *outside* or *separate* from the territory he or she surveys.⁵⁴

Silko bluntly asserts the inability of this linguistic definition to address Pueblo connections between "human consciousness" and spatial location. The term "landscape" thus represents the failure to "correctly describe" the relationship between humans and their physical surroundings. More explicitly, Silko has sought to wholly deconstruct the idea of sacred lands. "It is dangerous to designate some places sacred when we are all sacred," she explains. "Such compromises imply that there is a hierarchy of value, with some places and some living beings not as important as others. No part of the earth is expendable, the earth is a whole that cannot be fragmented."⁵⁵

Given that such binaries are decried by key native and non-native figures alike, is the answer conceptually, to focus on some sort of "middle way"? It is to this idea and its limitations that we now turn.