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GROUNDING THE COUNTERCULTURE: POST-MODERNISM, THE BACK-TO-THE-
LAND MOVEMENT, AND AUTHENTIC ENVIROMENTS OF MEMORY

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of History
The University of Mississippi

by

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May 2013

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will explore the regional and cultural dimensions of the Back-to-the-Land movement during the 1970s in an effort to move scholarship away from applying theoretical constructs such as post-modernism to diverse social movements. By drawing on the three main Back-to-the-Land publications, namely the *Whole Earth Catalog*, *Mother Earth News*, and the *Foxfire* books, this paper will demonstrate the varying impulses and regional nuances of the movement as well as the continuity and discontinuity of the back-to-nature tradition in America. Particular emphasis will be placed on the ways in which the Southern homesteading experience has been masked within the scholarship and how a reexamination of the movement from a Southern perspective can move historiography and historical methodology forward. The analysis put forward in this paper will serve to critique the study of ethnohistory by demonstrating the permeability of Native identities and the ways in which labor in the natural environment constructs identity. Native American and rural Appalachian cultural symbolism was employed by back-to-the-landers who sought out native knowledge through oral histories, most notably obtained in the *Foxfire* books. The construction of identity through knowledge and work of the physical environment was in no way post-modern because it was grounded in the soil that back-to-the-landers turned for their vegetable gardens.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to a gnarled olive tree in Marseille, a rainy jungle in Seattle, a vegetable garden at Camp Hanover, a mountain holler in Charlottesville, and a pond in Oxford, Mississippi. All are sites of memory that connect me with the friends, family, and colleagues who have been an intrinsic part of creating this work of history. They know who they are, though it remains to be seen if the trees do.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Charles Regan Wilson in the Department of History at the University of Mississippi, whose advice and positive feedback have made this work possible. I would also like to thank Professors Elizabeth Payne, Deirdre Cooper-Owens, Mikaëla Adams, John Neff, and Lester Field, whose methodological feedback informed my graduate career at the University of Mississippi.

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INTRODUCTION

In fall of 1970 Eliot Wigginton guided a group of high school students, laden down with audio recording equipment and a camera, to a ramshackle log-house in the hills of Rabun County, Georgia. There they met with an affable eighty-four year old widow named Arie Carpenter. Aunt Arie, as she was known to her interviewers, was both a disarming presence and a disorienting relic of the past. It did not help that she met the students with a butcher knife in her hand. Eliot Wigginton later described the experience as inexplicably disconcerting. He confessed, “The image of the raw, severed hog’s head— coming as it did on the heels of my just completing *Lord of the Flies* with my students—in the clutches of a tiny, white-haired lady...this image was unforgettable. It was harmony and discord, resonance and dissonance, peace and chaos...it was almost unbelievable.”¹ The interview with Aunt Arie was not the first oral history to be recorded by Wigginton and his students, however it soon became one of the most famous.²

Three years prior to the interview with Aunt Arie, Wigginton had had an epiphany that led to the establishment of the *Foxfire* series, an experiment in experiential learning, which encouraged students to explore local Georgian history outside of the classroom. What started out in 1966 as a small regional school magazine blossomed into a full-fledged book in 1972, and a series of similar books soon followed. Eliot Wigginton understood the purpose of his project and

¹ Eliot Wigginton, *Aunt Arie: A Foxfire Portrait*, ed. Linda Garlan Page and Eliot Wigginton (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), xiii.

² Indeed Aunt Arie became one of Wigginton’s allies in his effort to promote experiential learning. Apart from the thirteen *Foxfire* books and one additional work on Appalachian arts and crafts, Aunt Arie was the only local Rabun Gap resident to receive an entire book devoted to her stories and recipes. *Ibid.*, Introduction.

attributed much of its success to interest in Appalachian cultural preservation and educational ingenuity.³

His interpretation, however, tells only part of the story. The vast majority of Wigginton's readers were not schoolteachers seeking to reinvigorate stale or pedantic lesson plans. Nor were they solely interested in the cultural preservation of rural Appalachia. *Foxfire* spoke to larger currents within the counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s. It spoke to emerging environmental sentiments by presenting interviews on Appalachian foodways and "less invasive" forms of agriculture.⁴ It spoke to latent spiritual interest in Native American cultural practices as a means of recapturing a mythical pre-modern past.⁵ Furthermore, it spoke to an emerging group of middle-class white youth who yearned to physically return to nature in the belief that a self-sufficient lifestyle would allow them to wash away the environmental sins of industrial capitalism. Aunt Arie's rustic butcher knife, the dripping hogs head in her sink, and her painstaking attempts to pluck out the hog's eyes with a dull pairing knife, were all culturally symbolic acts linked to these desires. In essence, Aunt Arie represented the last vestiges of America's pioneer heritage, a legacy slowly disappearing in the face of industrialization,

³ Wigginton's first memoir served more as a handbook for teachers interested in his new form of experiential learning which took students out of the classroom. In his first book, published by the Institutional Development and Economic Affairs Service (IDEAS), Wigginton's methodology is explained, by the president of IDEAS, as "a successful model project worthy of replication. The process underlying *Foxfire* is applicable and adaptable to a wide range of subject matter...English, journalism, local history, social studies, environmental studies....young people are afforded a reality learning experience which can help them discover themselves to be worthy, self-reliant...members of their own communities." Eliot Wigginton, *Moments: The Foxfire Experience* (Kennebunk: Star Press Inc., 1975), x.

⁴ For a discussion of the rise of environmental movements in the 1970s and 1980s see Samuel P. Hays, *A History of Environmental Politics since 1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 15-21,94-108; Carolyn Merchant, *The Columbia Guide to American Environmental History* (New York Columbia University Press, 2002), Chapter 10.

⁵ This process has been explored in depth in Philip Deloria's works on the perception of Indianness in American culture. See Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

electrification and environmental degradation in southern Appalachia.⁶ Wigginton's sense that these symbols were "harmony and discord, resonance and dissonance" hints at the transition America, especially Southern America, experienced in the 1970s

The interview with Aunt Arie occurred at a cusp in American history. The reigning declensionist narrative of the past half-century posits that the 1960s was a period of increased political participation, social experimentation, communal action, and hope. On the other hand, the 1970s is seen as a period of political disillusionment, social fragmentation, historical discontinuity, self-absorption, and pessimism.⁷ This pervasive narrative found its way into the titles of some of the most widely used college textbooks of the twentieth century, especially Tom Engelhardt's *The End of Victory Culture*, William O'Neil's *Coming Apart*, and William Chafe's *The Unfinished Journey*.⁸ Such titles hint at a downward slope that American society followed over the course of the twentieth century.

The most emblematic social movement within this narrative, whose adherents bought and used the *Foxfire* books, was the Back-to-the-Land movement that began in the early 1970s.⁹

⁶ For a discussion of the pioneer and frontier mythos in American history see Thomas Hallock, *From the Fallen Tree: Frontier Narratives, Environmental Politics, and the Roots of a National Pastoral, 1749-1826* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), xi-xv, 177-195. For a discussion of the changes in the southern landscape in the twentieth century see Jack Temple Kirby, *The Countercultural South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 47-56.

⁷ Peter Clecak, *America's Quest for the Ideal Self: Dissent and Fulfillment in the 60s and 70s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 4.

⁸ Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007); William L. O'Neill, *Coming Apart: An Informal History of America in the 1960's* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005); William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America since World War II*, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁹ The Back-to-the-Land movement has generally been associated with the communal movement. While the majority of communes were part of the Back-to-the-Land movement (excluding those established before the 1960s) the focus on the communal impulse obscures the much larger single-homesteading demographic. The focus on the collective impulse is due to the heightened media attention that communes received during the late 1960s and early 1970s. One often cited source on the communal movement was Robert Houriet's *Getting Back Together* published in 1971. Houriet, a reporter who traveled the country interviewing communards, observed that "they went back to the land; but this time, they went together. It was a spontaneous, simultaneous movement. Starting from the cities, from Cambridge to Berkeley, they headed for the wide-open country that held the blank promise of a fresh start." In this passage, of a urban-to-rural diaspora, we see the proto-typical narrative adopted by scholars who began to study the movement in the 1980s. This narrative framework easily fit around the communes that sprang up in the 1970s and

Generally defined as the conscious decision of urban and suburban counter-culturalists to move out of the cities and into the rural landscape, the Back-to-Land movement included a nationally diverse demographic composition.¹⁰ The largest demographic, it should be noted, was college educated white-middle-class youth.¹¹ Aging eco-pragmatists reading the *Whole Earth Catalog* (WEC) and building geodesic domes in the deserts of Arizona, born-again Christian communards in the hills of Arkansas being interviewed by *Mother Earth News* (MEN) and single-family homesteaders in West Virginia who owned the *Foxfire* series all fall under the umbrella of the Back-to-the-Land movement. Indeed, a sense of impending ecological disaster as well as disillusionment with industrial capitalism and American politics unified the movement. They also shared a belief that propinquity to nature would render them morally and spiritually pure.¹² This sense that the modern western world needed to be shirked and reimagined led numerous scholars to brand the Back-to-the-Land movement as inherently post-modern.¹³

began to interest sociologists who, by definition, sought to understand efforts at restructuring society and ignored single-family homesteading. See Robert Houriet, *Getting Back Together* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1971), xii-xiii.

¹⁰ It is important to note the relationship between the movement in the 1970s and movements in the nineteenth century. A large proportion of back-to-the-landers were homesteaders, meaning that they bought land and built houses in the countryside that were economically self-sufficient. It is clear that these homesteaders saw themselves as contemporary pioneers. Many of the Back-to-the-Land handbooks described how to build log cabins and “pioneer” dugout homes. The cultural heritage of the pioneering period in American history was a powerful cultural symbol for contemporary homesteaders. This contemporary homesteading movement, however, must be distinguished from the homesteads created after the Homestead Act of 1862. The promise of 160 acres after settlers had lived on the land for a set period was aimed at conquering the “West.” Late nineteenth century homesteaders understood their mission in terms of settling virgin land, despite the fact that it was owned by Indians. They did not go Back-to-the-Land instead they brought civilization to the land. In contrast contemporary homesteaders left civilization in an effort to live symbiotically with nature in a primitive state. Indeed, even the way knowledge was disseminated about these two movements was different. Nineteenth century homesteaders were attracted to the West by travel narratives that expounded on the promise of conquering nature by single families. College educated homesteaders in the 1960s read oral histories and how-to books in an effort to integrate historical knowledge of the land so that they could live peaceably with Mother Nature. For a discussion of these travel narratives see Hallock, *From the Fallen Tree: Frontier Narratives, Environmental Politics, and the Roots of a National Pastoral, 1749-1826*, xi-xii. For a disambiguation of the movements see Rebecca Kneale Gould, *At Home in Nature: Modern Homesteading and Spiritual Practice in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), Introduction.

¹¹ This fact has been explored by numerous sociological studies, and is especially well explained in Jeffery Jacob, *New Pioneers: The Back-to-the-Land Movement and the Search for a Sustainable Future* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 28-32.

¹² Scholars have exhaustively analyzed the ideological linkages between diverse sub-sections of the movement. One early sociological study conducted in the late 1970s by Bennet M. Berger entitled *The Survival of a Counterculture:*

Before proceeding further, it is important to make a number of definitional and historical distinctions between the terms commonly used to describe the Back-to-the-Land movement. Terms such as modernism and post-modernism are notoriously slippery and are best understood, not as rigidly defined ideologies but, as constellations of impulses, sensibilities, symbols, and mindsets. As such they must be put into historical context in order to understand the way in

Ideological Work and Everyday Life Among Rural Communitards approaches the communal movement from an intellectual perspective and employs microsociology of knowledge to tease out the ideas underlying the movement. He posits that “pastoralism; simple living in harmony with nature in the country; continuities with the “suburban” ideal; negative predispositions toward “technology”; pride in survival “on the Land”...;apocalypse: impending doom for cities” were all important aspects of the movement’s ideology which were then imposed and reinforced within the internal structure of the commune. In the work Berger hints at the long history of the pastoral myth in American culture and spends one-third of the study on mapping out pastoralist ideology within American history. This connection between the Back-to-the-Land movement and other rural traditions has been another key niche for scholarship of the counterculture. See Bennett M. Berger, *The Survival of a Counterculture: Ideological Work and Everyday Life among Rural Communitards* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 19.

Another sociological study published two years later by Gilbert Zicklin avoided the limitations of Berger’s study and instead took a much wider view of the communal movement. Zicklin studied twenty different communes as opposed to Berger’s single case study. In *Countercultural Communes: A Sociological Perspective* Zicklin argues that there were four main types of communes. First, there were naturalist communes which exhibited marked interest in diet and health with an emphasis on non-artificial ingredients. Zicklin notes that “often, one can distinguish the naturalist by his or her strong interest in health matters. Taking dietary matters first, the naturalist is an experimenter with eating habits, often believing that he has gained expertise in the area of nutrition and health.” He goes further to explain the diverse interpretations of what was “natural,” food from communitards who were vegetarian to others who ate meat from animals that they had personally slaughtered. Zicklin’s second type was the spiritual commune that he characterized by “the centrality of a belief in the existence of a higher reality which the members aspire to gain knowledge of and to contact.” Of the twenty communes that Zicklin studied he identified six which he felt fit within this definition. His third communal type was the expressive commune whose occupants sought to “unfetter the self from the confinement of conventional social restrictions and to achieve a wholeness felt to be unattainable within the bounds of the conventional culture.” Three such communes were within Zicklin’s study which all experimented with differing sexual and familial arrangements. His last category was the Movement-Oriented commune, which he admits was a rare form and were usually confined to urban areas where protests against the war in Vietnam were more practical.

Zicklin’s four categories are useful in breaking down the movement into its various ideological components. The qualitative data that he accumulated supports the assertion that nature, spirituality, emotions, and politics were all important reasons that drove young middleclass whites to join communes. See Gilbert Zicklin, *Countercultural Communes: A Sociological Perspective* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 3,36,42,48.

Though sociologists were the first academics to study the communal movement in the 1970s, historians soon grabbed the baton and tried to place it within historical perspective. David Shi’s *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* appeared the same year as Zicklin’s work but took a drastically different approach. Shi’s work is an attempt at historical synthesis which traces the ethos of simplicity within American thought. His chapters flow chronologically from chapter one, “The Puritan Way,” to “Republican Simplicity,” and finally to the last chapter on “Affluence and Anxiety.” Shi argues that the pursuit of “the simple life” has been a core American aesthetic. While acknowledging the difficulty in defining such an aesthetic, Shi argues that there has been “a shifting cluster of ideas, sentiments, and activities,” all of which revolve around a reverence for nature, suspicion of luxury, and a tendency towards self-reliance and nostalgia for the past. See David Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3, 258, 277-281.

¹³ See Deloria, *Playing Indian*; Philip Deloria, “Counterculture Indians and the New Age,” in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s & 1970s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (London: Routledge, 2002).

which they fit into a general narrative of the twentieth century and why they became attached to social movements in the 1970s.

An intellectual and cultural movement, American modernism developed at the turn of the twentieth century and continued into the 1960s. Modernism, as a mindset, was characterized by faith in the scientific method, belief that progress can be affected by the rigorous study of society, confidence in technology and industry, and devotion to the democratic process.¹⁴

American intellectuals such as William James, Charles Pierce, John Dewey, Reinhold Niebuhr, and W.W. Rostow shared this mindset despite their different fields and approaches.¹⁵ Important within intellectual historiography, William James took center stage as the example of the modernist spirit. Robert Richardson's *William James in the Maelstrom of American Modernism*, which won the 2008 Bancroft Prize, argues that "James indicates the road to modernism, and even to postmodernism, when he...proposes that the furthest we may be able to get is to say that 'the thought itself is the thinker.' James maintained that one's philosophy is fundamentally an expression of one's temperament."¹⁶ According to Richardson, this represents the heart of James's modernist methodology. His philosophy was pragmatic and therefore pluralistic.¹⁷ He

¹⁴ For a discussion of this movement and its effects on the development of twentieth century intellectual historiography see David Hollinger and Charles Capper, *The American Intellectual Tradition*, 6th ed., vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Martin Halliwell, *The Constant Dialogue: Reinhold Niebuhr and the American Intellectual Culture* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005); James Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); James Kloppenberg, "James's Pragmatism and American Culture, 1907-2007," in *100 Years of Pragmatism: William James's Revolutionary Philosophy*, ed. John Stuhr (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Robert D. Richardson, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007); John E. Toews, "Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn. The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience," *The American Historical Review* 92, no. 4 (1987).

¹⁵ This is evident in David Hollinger's and Charles Capper's work on the American intellectual tradition which contains the works of these preeminent modernists see Capper, *The American Intellectual Tradition*, 2, 16, 69, 161, 208, 379.

¹⁶ Robert D. Richardson, *William James in the Maelstrom of American Modernism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), xiv.

¹⁷ According to Richardson there are three main reasons that intellectual historians need to remember William James. First, as an empirically trained scientist, doctor, and the founder of modern American psychology. Second, as a philosopher who, though he did not coin the term, promoted pragmatism and the connection between ideology and society. Third, as the author of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which is the founding text for the modern

saw no fixed center in the universe, instead opting to see many centers or, in other words, many equally valid worldviews. James's pluralism demonstrates the difficulty of defining terms such as modernism and post-modernism because James exhibited characteristics of both sensibilities. Yet what differentiated James from later post-modern intellectuals was his faith and hope for the future of American society through progressive reforms.

In the 1960s, however, faith in modernism began to crumble in the face of political disillusionment, environmental degradation from dichloro diphenyl trichloroethane (DDT), foreign policy blunders in Vietnam, and the resulting counterculture movement. Post-modernism first arose in academic circles in America and France, especially among philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jean Baudrillard.¹⁸ These early theorists began to question the nature of meaning and identity. They saw language as a system of signs and symbols that could be manipulated and recreated by each individual.¹⁹ The idea that meaning was contingent on individual interpretations was picked up by social scientists and literary critics in the 1980s who began to formulate an intellectual framework based on deconstruction, cultural relativism, and the study of power discourses.

study of religion. In this text James argues that religious truth cannot be found in books such as the Bible, but instead in the actual religious experiences of individuals. This analysis puts William James back into the spotlight as an intellectual who had a profound affect on society, through John Dewey and Reinhold Niebuhr, as well as on the academic study of philosophy, psychology and history. See Richardson, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism*, xiv.

¹⁸ The most important leader of this movement for our discussion is William James whose modernism is reflected in Stewart Brand's works. See James' lecture on modern pragmatism in Capper, *The American Intellectual Tradition*, 2, 162.

¹⁹ Baudrillard famously states in *Simulacra and Simulation* that "we live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning... Either information produces meaning... but cannot make up for the brutal loss of signification in every domain... or information has nothing to do with signification... Or... there is a rigorous and necessary correlation between the two, to the extent that information is directly destructive of meaning and signification." This is much the same process that Deloria sees happening within countercultural America in which mass marketed Indianness has destroyed the actual social meaning of indigeneity. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994). For a discussion of the post-modern mindset and approach, with specific emphasis on the work of Baudrillard see. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Jean Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster, 1st ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

This intellectual movement grew in tandem with social and cultural movements, such as the Back-to-the-Land movement, that questioned the basis of identity, ethnicity, and history. Philip Deloria has explored the post-modern nature of these social movements and argues that they held three main sensibilities. He contends that in the 1970s there was “a crisis of meaning and a concomitant emphasis on the powers of interpretation, a sustained questioning of the idea of foundational truth, and an inclination to fragment symbols and statements and to reassemble them in creative, if sometimes random, pastiche.”²⁰ Deloria asserts that these sensibilities were endemic to many of the social movements that arose during the 1970s. The cultural symbolism of Indian headbands, peace power, tipis, love power, leather fringed jackets, red power, and black power, all mingled to create a collage of countercultural pastiche that began to have meaning only in relationship to other cultural symbols. He argues that these socio-cultural movements were “a postmodern phenomenon, a bricolage whirl of color, style, fashionable rebellion, and flyaway meaning” that allowed white Americans “to have their cake and eat it too.”²¹ Deloria asserts that this post-modern meaning making was a form of play that, while important as a “critical experience, it is also a powerful metaphor for that which is frivolous and without significant meaning.”²²

There are, however, a number of issues that arise from the use of this narrative and analytical structure, especially when studying the Back-to-the-Land movement in the early 1970s. While it would be impossible to contest the rise of post-modernism as an intellectual movement within academia during the 1980s and 1990s, recent attempts to label socio-cultural movements, such as the Back-to-the-Land movement, as post-modern in the 1970s should be challenged. Highly diverse and regionally nuanced, the Back-to-the-Land movement contained a

²⁰ Deloria, "Counterculture Indians and the New Age," 162.

²¹ See *ibid.*, 157, 182.

²² *Ibid.*, 180.

great deal of divergent impulses rooted in regional histories. In other words, it cannot be fitted neatly into either a modern or post-modern framework. Terms such as modernism and post-modernism mask more historical reality than they reveal and should be approached with extreme caution by historians. As a case in point, throughout the historiography, the South has received little to no attention despite concrete statistical data demonstrating that at least thirty-one percent of back-to-the-landers lived in the Southern United States during the 1980s.²³ Jack Temple Kirby's *Countercultural South* hints at some of the foundations for this myopia. Since the South, especially in the 1970s, was considered pre-industrial and pre-modern it does not fit within a modern or post-modern narrative.²⁴ Yet this is a methodological mistake that ignores nearly one-third of the movement and the cultural symbolism generated in the South. Southerners wrote numerous advertisements in Back-to-the-Land handbooks such as the *Whole Earth Catalog* and *Mother Earth News*. Indeed, throughout the 1970s *Mother Earth News*' correspondence section consistently held advertisements from Southerners looking for others to return to the rural landscape.²⁵

Further difficulty faces a systematic study of Back-to-the-Land experiences in the 1970s due to a dearth of contemporary oral histories and specific quantitative data. The sole academic study, conducted by sociologist Jeffery Jacob, was completed a decade-and-a-half later in the

²³ Jacob, *New Pioneers: The Back-to-the-Land Movement and the Search for a Sustainable Future*, 32.

²⁴ Kirby's *Countercultural South* followed a neo-Marxist interpretation of Southern history but merged it with a cultural historian's approach to dominant and subordinate cultures. He argued that white "red-neck" life style was in many ways a countercultural phenomenon that rebelled against the contemporary bourgeois. More importantly for our discussion is his assertion about the ways Southerners are portrayed in the latter half of the twentieth century. He states "The countercultural South is widely acknowledged and almost totally...misrepresented as superficial, curmudgeonly regional male style: southerners (read "white middle and upper classes") are archconservative politically, dangerously aggressive in pursuit of violent sport, and excessively familiar in social relations. Southerners (read "rednecks" and "hillbillies") are quaint premoderns, prone to taking the law into their own hands, but entertaining." Thus they have not been represented correctly in mass media or Southern historiography which confines them to non-countercultural lifestyles. See Kirby, *The Countercultural South*, 3.

²⁵ See John Shuttleworth, "More Contact Section," *Mother Earth News*, January 1970; John Shuttleworth, "More Contact Section," *Mother Earth News*, May 1971.

mid-1980s.²⁶ Jacob's survey findings points to a tentative demographic understanding of the national movement in the 1980s. The examination of historical movements through statistical analysis, however, is inherently flawed and does not get at the movement's countercultural core.²⁷

Instead of pursuing a sociological approach, a historical analysis of Back-to-the-Land publications provides a richer glimpse of the impulses driving the movement. Such an approach also establishes the ways in which a post-modern analytical framework fails historians of the 1970s. The symbolic tools that the Back-to-the-Land handbooks communicated to their readers were not historically disembodied. In other words, they were not, as Deloria asserts, random collage and pastiche. Homesteaders who built pioneer dug-out homes on their property, and wrote to *Mother Earth News* with questions about Native American spirituality may have been mixing disparate traditions, but this practice has had a long history within America.²⁸ Such an approach avoids both Deloria's and Jacob's methodologies. Instead of focusing on the statistical conclusions of mail-in surveys from readers of how-to magazines, an analysis on the cultural symbolism employed by do-it-yourself books allows for larger conclusions about the Back-to-the-Land experience.

²⁶ Jacob, *New Pioneers: The Back-to-the-Land Movement and the Search for a Sustainable Future*, 32.

²⁷ This point is made clear from statements made by Berger, who case study was explored in an earlier footnote. His study suffers from the limitations of sociology. Berger states that "my greatest hope is to impose on the commune data I gathered at The Ranch a theoretical framework whose relevance transcends the time and place in which the data were gathered. If that relevance is there, it must be discovered and imposed on the data by the ethnographer." Such a statement makes sense in a sociological setting where structuralism dominated academic discourse in the 1970s. Such assertions, however, are also ahistorical and bring into question all of Berger's conclusions. Contemporary metahistorical frameworks cannot be forced onto historical data. See Berger, *The Survival of a Counterculture: Ideological Work and Everyday Life among Rural Communards*, 11.

²⁸ It is important to note that Deloria does admit that mixing traditions has had a long history in America. He concludes, however, that "Indian play was hardly clear-cut, for if Indianness was critical to American identities, it necessarily went hand in hand with the dispossession and conquest of actual Indian people." This key admission, and Deloria emphasis on "actual Indian people" and their dispossession and conquest, will be explored further in this thesis. Deloria, "Counterculture Indians and the New Age," 182.

There were three main Back-to-the-Land publications in the 1970s. The first was Stewart Brand's *Whole Earth Catalog*, which began in 1968 and continued into the 1980s. Brand's catalog, published out of Menlo Park, California, gave back-to-the-landers access to a wide array of tools such as books on how to build geodesic domes, how to grow marijuana, and even how-to guides for the latest forms of birth control.

The WEC represents a problem for the reigning declensionist narrative of the twentieth century. Fundamentally modern, Brand's catalog put faith in the future of scientific knowledge to solve contemporary ecological concerns. Though the catalog carried advertisements for how-to books on log cabin and yurts, Brand outspokenly advocated for Buckminster Fuller's futuristic geodesic domes. The ultimate symbol of Brand's pragmatic modernism, the geodesic dome could be constructed from almost any building material, was based on geometric principles for saving space, and was thought to be the answer for cheap housing for poor people all over the world.

Deeply pragmatic, the WEC looked to scientifically based "whole systems," such as the geodesic dome, to fix the environment. This whole system mentality, by definition, also carried over into society and culture. The cover of the 1970 *Whole Earth Catalog* includes a picture of the Milky Way Galaxy with a poem that states "No one is/Ever separated from every other/For then the world would die."²⁹ This poem, and the inclusive nature of Brand's search for knowledge, point to a pragmatic cultural pluralism. Yet this pluralism did not extend to portions of the countercultural movement that Brand saw as faddish and superficial. In the pages of the *Last Whole Earth Catalog* Brand published Gurney Norman's *Divine Right's Trip*, which parodied contemporary counter-culturalists who changed identities on a whim and followed charismatic leaders. Thus Brand's form of modernism diametrically opposed the post-modern

²⁹ Stewart Brand, ed. *Whole Earth Catalog: Access to Tools* (Menlo Park: Portola Institute, 1970), Back Cover.

sensibilities that historians such as Deloria saw emerging in the 1970s. Brand's foundational truth was firmly rooted in scientific pragmatism and not post-modern play.

Brand's modern pragmatism inspired other Back-to-the-Land publications, most notably *Mother Earth News*. Of the three main publications, only MEN survived the 1970s and 1980s. The WEC directly inspired its main editors, John and Jane Shuttleworth, yet their decision to focus on journalistic exposés instead of tools provided much of the magazine's stability by allowing it to remain relevant to counter-culturalists over the past four decades.

Since MEN was the main forum in which back-to-the-landers communicated with each other, it has been the main source scholars have pointed to in order to demonstrate the post-modern nature of the movement. Philip Deloria specifically focuses on the material published in MEN during the 1980s.³⁰ Others, such as Rebecca Gould, use MEN to support her claim that modernists such as Helen and Scott Nearing, whose books were advertised in both the WEC and MEN, were widely read and therefore influential.³¹

A deeper reading of MEN in the 1970s, however, with an emphasis on the correspondence section, in which actual back-to-the-landers discussed their lives, can reveal that the movement did not, as a whole, exhibit post-modern play. The full-length articles on tipi construction in MEN distinctly connect contemporary white fascination with Native culture's long history of Indian play. Nevertheless those same articles were supplemented by correspondence between actual homesteaders and the Shuttleworths, which demonstrates that back-to-the-landers were interested in the socio-political and historical realities of Indianness.

Furthermore, a discussion of the Shuttleworths' biographies and articles can be used to explore Gould's contention that the modern homesteading movement primarily represented a

³⁰Deloria chooses to analyze the attempts of the Bear tribe to create an inter-ethnic tribe, as well as the spirituality of Mother Earth. See Deloria, "Counterculture Indians and the New Age," 174-182.

³¹ See Gould, *At Home in Nature: Modern Homesteading and Spiritual Practice in America*, 184, 193.

secular spiritual movement led by Helen and Scott Nearing. The magazine, like Brand's catalog, was inherently pluralistic and allowed for a diverse array of alternative lifestyles. While Helen and Scott Nearing's books were occasionally advertised, their intellectual impact on the movement was shared by many other intellectuals such as Wendell Berry, Henry David Thoreau and Gurney Norman.

Both the WEC and MEN have been analyzed by historians of the 1970s. Yet one other publication sat on back-to-the-landers' bookshelves. The *Foxfire* books were the creation of Eliot Wigginton and his high school students at the Rabun Gap–Nacoochee School in Georgia. Unlike the WEC and MEN, the *Foxfire* books were not explicitly created for the Back-to-the-Land movement. Instead, Eliot Wigginton started the school magazine in 1966 in order to encourage students to preserve the history of their region by conducting oral histories on Appalachian folkways. Articles in the early magazine ranged from exposés on moonshining to complex technical schematics for Appalachian log cabin building. It was this latter type of article that interested the Back-to-the-Land community. Increased demand for these articles in the early 1970s led Wigginton to partner with Doubleday to publish the oral histories as a book series.

The *Foxfire* books' emphasis on folkways instead of back-to-the-land tools and lifestyles may partially explain the reasons that the books have been ignored within 1970s historiography. Yet such oversight is a mistake. The *Foxfire* books represent sites of Southern memory that back-to-the-landers employed to successfully create homesteads and communes in the southern United States. Furthermore, the oral histories that Wigginton's students collected, and that back-to-the-landers used, do not represent post-modern play. The cultural symbolism contained in the *Foxfire* books demonstrates the complexity of Southern identity formation rooted in both ethnic conflict and positive cultural interchange.

Such symbolism is evident in the series' title. Foxfire is a bioluminescent fungus that grows on decaying logs across southern Appalachia. The student's decision to use it as the symbol is significant because it combines the student's pioneer and Native heritages. A number of the subjects whom the students interviewed asserted that the fungus was the faerie lights carried by "little people."³² Faerie lights referred to Scotch-Irish folk traditions that the pioneers took with them as they settled Appalachia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The reference to little people, however, is intricately related to Catawba Indian traditions that viewed faerie lights as dark spirits. Thus Foxfire, both the fungus and the books, represents a symbolic intertwining of Native and White identities, which was socially and environmentally embodied. Therefore, it does not fall within Deloria's three categories of post-modern play and pastiche.

Communards and homesteaders used all three publications at the same time, as these publications were mutually referential. Early editions of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, for instance, carried advertisements for *Foxfire* and *Mother Earth News* and provided highly favorable reviews for each.³³ *Mother Earth News* also carried advertisements for the *WEC*, and the founder claimed to have been inspired by Brand's catalog.³⁴ While the *Foxfire* books never explicitly mention either the *Whole Earth Catalog* or *Mother Earth News*, Eliot Wigginton's correspondence with his editors refers to the *WEC*, the Back-to-the-Land movement, and the market for Appalachian folk knowledge.³⁵

Taken together, these publications represent the way in which back-to-the-landers created an identity based on local history and work in the natural environment. This movement

³² See *Foxfire 9: General Stories, the Jud Nelson Wagon, a Praying Rock, a Catawban Indian Potter, Haint Tales, Quilting, Home Cures, the Log Cabin Revisited* ed. Eliot Wigginton and Margie Bennett, 1st ed. (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1986), 4.

³³ See Brand, *Whole Earth Catalog: Access to Tools*, 56.

³⁴ See John Shuttleworth, "The Plowboy Interview," *Mother Earth News*, March 1970, 6-8.

³⁵ Eliot Wigginton, *Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience* (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1985), 123.

was not post-modern since meaning was not solely contingent on the individual's experiences and interpretations. Instead foundational truth came from regional environments and their *lieux de memoire*, both of which existed outside of single individuals in the realm of collective memory and the natural environment. The study of *lieux de memoire* has been a methodological stepping-stone for Civil War and Holocaust historians who adopted Pierre Nora's approach to memory studies in the 1990s.³⁶ A *lieux de memoire* approach, however, can be used to study other movements, especially ones that sought oral histories of vanishing folkways.

Nora's understanding of historical memory is important to flesh out. In his famous 1989 article he writes that "Our interest in *lieux de memoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn."³⁷ In essence, sites of memory are places in which historical memory persists within a culture with ties to the past that have been violently torn. Nora goes on to state that these sites represent memory that has been "torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de memoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de memoire*, real environments of memory."³⁸ For the environmental movements of the 1970s, especially the Back-to-the-Land movement, this was a sentiment that rang true. Strip mining, monoculture, and electrification tore away the vestiges of the idealized rural American landscape. Their attempts to translate *lieux de memoire* into *milieux de memoire* were not, however, post-modern. *Lieux de memoire* are symbolic sites of memory in which a

³⁶ Nora has since been critiqued for reifying memory and conflating the divide between history and memory. Yet despite his focus on French national history the concept of a *lieux de memoire* still applies to the study of history. Indeed this concept has been taken up by Civil War historians and used to study commemoration in the post-war period. For a discussion, and an example, of current Civil War memory studies see John Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 1-15.

³⁷ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Memoire," *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

“sense of historical continuity persists.” They were thus rooted, at least in a small part, in collective memory, and therefore history.

Books, such as the *Foxfire* series, sat on back-to-the-landers’ bookshelves as regional *lieux de mémoire*, but they were used to create *milieux de mémoire* or authentic environments of memory. The knowledge about the natural environment encapsulated by their oral histories shaped the reader’s identities when the books were used to build traditional houses, cook regional dishes, or create authentic arts and crafts. The nature of this knowledge and the ways it reflects indigeneity and authenticity should make scholars reconsider a number of assumptions held about the existence of authenticity, the permeability of ethnicity, especially native ethnicity in the South, and the ontological implications of performance.

Back-to-the-landers, by definition, sought to become tied to the land in order to become Native. Authenticity, thus, depended on the handbook’s ability to create effective and sustainable *milieux de mémoire*. The process by which this occurred has been critiqued as “play” because it ignored the socio-historical realities of indigeneity. Deloria’s conclusions are based on his study of Plains Indian history and the transformation of Indian stereotypes in the twentieth century. The socio-historical realities of indigeneity, however, are far more complex and regionally nuanced. Ethnic identity, especially in the southern United States, included dispossession and conquest as well as positive cultural interchange.

Evidence from the *Foxfire* books exhibits the permeability of Native identities when rural Appalachians passed down knowledge garnered from their own experiences with Native Americans. Indeed, oral histories from Appalachians who were both White and Native shed light on the difficulties of accurately defining Indian play. This is not to say that dispossession and conquest were not key components in Indian and White history, but instead that positive cultural

interchange, as evident in the *Foxfire* books, figured as significant. Furthermore, readers of the *Foxfire* books, who built log cabins from the diagrams within its pages, were not performing Appalachian Southernness. They were rediscovering sites of Southern memory and translating them into real environments of memory. This does not mean that rural mountain folk such as Aunt Arie were seen as Indian. Instead, Native identity was shaped around local histories and *lieux de mémoire* that were intricately connected to the complex relationships between Indians and local whites.

In order to shed light on this complex relationship and the ways in which it is reflected in the Back-to-the-Land literature, it is important to explore the most widely read handbook of the early 1970s. Stewart Brand's *Whole Earth Catalog* represents a summation of Back-to-the-Land technical knowledge used to create real environments of memory in the rural countryside. It also represents the most evidently hopeful, futuristic, and modernist attempt to compile Back-to-the-Land knowledge: making it the perfect primary source to deconstruct the post-modern narrative.

CHAPTER 1

THE MODERNISM OF STEWART BRAND AND GURNEY NORMAN

Using post-modernism as a label for the Back-to-the-Land movement implies a discontinuity with the past not present in many of the handbooks used by homesteaders and communards. Indeed, if the Back-to-the-Land movement best represents the shift from modernism to post-modernism then evidence of lingering, or even new emergent, modern sensibilities should make scholars rethink the reigning narrative paradigm. In fact, evidence for continuing modern sensibilities abounds within the Back-to-the-Land literature. As the brainchild of Stewart Brand, *The Whole Earth Catalog* gave access to knowledge and tools to the Back-to-the Land movement and other like-minded organizations.³⁹ *The Whole Earth Catalog* can be used to dismantle the declensionist narrative because it demonstrates ecological hope for the future rooted in science as well as a strong vein of modern pragmatism throughout its pages.

Stewart Brand still publishes works on the Whole Earth Discipline that are pragmatically critical of the contemporary environmental movement. His *Whole Earth Discipline: Why Dense Cities, Nuclear Power, Transgenic Crops, Restored Wildlands, and Geoengineering are Necessary*, created an uproar within the environmental community in 2009 for its advocacy of

³⁹ For a synopsis of Brand's publishing history see Andrew Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), Introduction; Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 41-69.

nuclear power and genetically modified crops.⁴⁰ He was no less controversial in the *Whole Earth Catalog* during the 1970s. He helped to publish *Divine Right's Trip: A Novel of the Counterculture* in the pages of the *Last Whole Earth Catalog*, in 1972, which was deeply critical of new age hippies who shunned modern technologies such as birth control and powered hand tools. Thus, far from representing discontinuity, the *Whole Earth Catalog* builds on many modern themes such as faith in the future of science to solve environmental problems, but it also critiques modern government, capitalism, and formal education. These critiques, however, were not post-modern. While the *Whole Earth Catalog* focuses on the individual's personal power to affect environmental and cultural change, they fall within a progressive sensibility that if enough information and technology are compiled then any issue within society or the environment can be solved.

These assertions are supported within the historiography on Brand's environmental pragmatism. There have been two major works on the *Whole Earth Catalog* by academic historians. The first work was Fred Turner's *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* published in 2006. Turner's work focuses on the *Whole Earth Catalog* as the primary way in which Brand created a network of like-minded environmentalists in the 1970s. He argues that the *Whole Earth Catalog* was the vehicle by which the communal counterculture transitioned into a mainstream cyberculture that relied on computing technology to create a "networked mode of living, working, and deploying social and cultural power."⁴¹ In essence, the egalitarian socio-cultural experiments occurring in the desert of the Southwest in the 1970s transmitted into the

⁴⁰ See Stewart Brand, *Whole Earth Discipline: Why Dense Cities, Nuclear Power, Transgenic Crops, Restored Wildlands and Geoengineering Are Necessary* (New York: Penguin, 2010).

⁴¹ Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*, 9.

cyberculture created in the 1990s.⁴² More importantly for this discussion is Turner's statement that "to those who think of the 1960s primarily as a break with the decades that went before, the coming together [in the 1980s and 1990s] of former counter-culturalists, corporate executives, and right-wing politicians and pundits may appear impossibly contradictory."⁴³ This coming together of contradictory interests represents the pragmatic modernism of Brand's environmental thinking, which had a long tradition within America that did not falter after 1968. Thus, the *Whole Earth Catalog* represents an anomaly in the declensionist paradigm because it does not present pessimism and discontinuity in the 1970s.⁴⁴ Evidence for this abounds within the pages of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, which contained advertisements for Wendell Berry's writings and Thoreau's *Walden*.

This connection to larger currents within American intellectual and environmental history led Andrew Kirk to write the second main history on the *Whole Earth Catalog* in 2007 entitled *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism*. Kirk's history focuses less on Brand's impact on the information revolution and instead explores the regional history that created the *Whole Earth Catalog*. Kirk states in his preface that "I have tried

⁴² Turner focuses on the intended communal audience of the WEC and argues that they were the main supporters of Brand's modernism. This argument fits within the general narrative of the Back-to-the-Land movement, especially that it was communal in nature and centered on the coasts of the United States. Such a narrative posits that all meaningful countercultural changes flowed from pockets of communal dissent in and around large coastal cities. The narrative holds true for a number of communes created by West Coast communards such as The Farm in Tennessee in and Twin Oaks in Virginia. As noted earlier however, much of the scholarship of the Back-to-the-Land movement has incorrectly focused too much attention on the communes sprouting up on the East and West coasts of the United States in the 1970s. This ignores sociological studies demonstrating that the communal movement was a much smaller demographic within the Back-to-the-Land movement as well as evidence that the movement was occurring nationally.

⁴³ Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*, 8.

⁴⁴ This assertion is supported in Kirk's work on Brand's eco-pragmatism, which he argues was explicitly hopeful. Kirk states that "Brand's creation capitalized on a critical cultural moment by offering a tantalizing burst of optimism in one of the bleakest periods of American history. In a year marred by the assassinations of Martin Luther King jr. and Robert Kennedy, the debacle at the Democratic National Convention, and the alarming Tet Offensive in South Vietnam, Whole Earth was a breath of fresh air for a generation suffocating on relentless bad news." Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism*, 3.

to place *Whole Earth* within a western regional context and explore the ways that the publication tapped into deep regional traditions (libertarian-leaning individualism and distrust of centralization, for instance) and refashioned them for a new generation.”⁴⁵ The *Whole Earth Catalog* was published out of California and Brand was linked to a number of communes in Arizona, such as Drop City, which were experimenting with Buckminster Fuller’s architectural designs.⁴⁶ This western environmental climate led Kirk to argue that “it was its enlightened pragmatic individualism that explains the catalog’s wide appeal” and allowed it to sell millions of copies and win the National Book Award in 1972.⁴⁷ Kirk unpacks Brand’s “enlightened pragmatic individualism” within the context of the communal movement on the West Coast and his narrative reflects a West-East Coast cultural movement. Yet Kirk argues against Turner’s assertion that the key to understanding the *Whole Earth Catalog*’s historical significance lies in utopian communitarianism. Instead Kirk argues that Brand was part of a larger modern American intellectual tradition that was decidedly more individualistic than communal.

Kirk contends that Stewart Brand inherited John Dewey’s hopeful pragmatic instrumentalism, which posited that ideas were merely tools whose worth should be based on their usefulness in the real world. Kirk asserts “that optimism made a household name out of John Dewey precisely because Dewey and the movement for which he was the most visible...representative offered a hopeful vision of the future during a period of astounding change.”⁴⁸ Brand followed a similarly positive ecological message in the tumultuous period after 1968 and provided readers with “a hip new spin on this pragmatic tradition” that emphasized

⁴⁵Ibid. xi

⁴⁶ For a discussion of this see Kirk’s work on Brand’s early career. Ibid., Chapter Two.

⁴⁷ Ibid.xi

⁴⁸ Dewey’s writings spanned the period between 1896 and 1949, which was period of dramatic cultural change. It is important to note that he was a student of William James, whose influence on Brand’s thinking will be explored later in the chapter. See *ibid.*, 10-11.

“individualistic ecological living” that “tapped deep into conservative impulses like thrift, ingenuity, technical know-how, tinkering, and individual responsibility and agency.”⁴⁹ In essence Kirk argues that Brand’s optimistic modern pragmatism explains the success of the *Whole Earth Catalog*. For Kirk, however, this modern pragmatism arose out of the “libertarian-leaning” West Coast communes. The problem with this assertion is that the *Whole Earth Catalog* won the National Book Award in 1972 because it was purchased nationally. This implies that there were other like-minded counter-culturalists throughout the United States in the 1970s and that the success of the *Whole Earth Catalog* lay in its ability to connect eco-pragmatists across the country and provide them with region-specific tools.

Evidence for this assertion even appears in the pages of the Spring 1970 *Whole Earth Catalog*. In the first advertisement for the *Foxfire* Books Gurney Norman, whose novel *Divine Right’s Trip* will be thoroughly analyzed further in this chapter, wrote in his review that:

The thing I like most about it is the way these kids are looking immediately around them for their inspiration, instead of taking cues from New York and California. In their own way, these people are as hip and sophisticated as any young people putting out a magazine on either coast. More so, even. They’re cooler, more adult. Next to FOXFIRE, most “underground” papers seem written by children shrieking at Daddy (or cops, or Nixon) because he won’t let them smoke grass or smash store windows.⁵⁰

Norman’s thinly veiled critique of counter-culturalists demonstrates a key dimension of the *Whole Earth Catalog*’s success. Brand’s enlightened pragmatic individualism did not, as Kirk asserts, solely tap into deep western regional traditions. Instead the *Whole Earth Catalog* sold millions of copies and won the 1972 National Book award because Brand’s catalog employed modern cultural symbolism that both transgressed and included regional nuance. This is apparent in Norman’s review of the *Foxfire* series. The students conducting oral histories in

⁴⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁰ Brand, *Whole Earth Catalog: Access to Tools*, 45.

the Rabun-Gap were more “hip,” “adult,” and “sophisticated” than their counterparts in New York and San Francisco because they turned to their own regional histories for inspiration. In other words they were more adult because they were not being influenced by the traditional coastal cultural centers. Therefore, Brand’s decision to recommend the *Foxfire* series gave the *Whole Earth Catalog* regional credibility in the South. Indeed, the *Whole Earth Catalog* was purchased by homesteaders in Maine, Christian communards in Arkansas, and eco-pragmatists in the deserts of Arizona because it provided access to region-specific tools like the *Foxfire* series while, at the same time, presenting those tools within a common modern instrumentalist framework.

This type of instrumentalism more closely resembles the modernism of William James than John Dewey. James’s pragmatism included a vein of radical empiricism, pluralism, and relativism not present in Dewey’s instrumentalism.⁵¹ In James’s famous lecture on the meaning of pragmatism in 1906 he stated that a pragmatist “turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins... It means the open air and possibilities of nature, as against dogma, artificiality, and the pretense of finality in truth.”⁵² It follows that James’s pragmatism was open and pluralistic because it allowed for the varieties of lived experience. The “open air and possibilities of nature” is in direct contrast with the scientific empiricism of Dewey

⁵¹ This assertion is supported within the historiography of pragmatism in both Kloppenberg’s and Hollinger’s works. Kloppenberg, in *The Virtues of Liberalism* argues that William James “broke down the dualisms that had under girded empiricist as well as rationalist philosophies, dualisms that had thereby contributed indirectly to the abstract and dogmatic theorizing characteristic of laissez-faire liberalism...Hermeneutical understanding, historically sophisticated and self-consciously aware of its provisionality, replaced certainty as James’s standard for human knowledge.” This was in contrast to the pragmatic instrumentalism of John Dewey. See Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism*, 129. Richardson discusses the positive but distant relationship these two pragmatists had in his biography of James. According to Richardson James intended on dedicating his famous essay on pragmatism to young pragmatists such as Dewey, but decided at the last minute to dedicate it to John Stewart Mill. See Richardson, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism*, 486.

⁵² Capper, *The American Intellectual Tradition*, 2, 164.

who focused on education reform as opposed to James's psychology of religious experience. Within this framework Brand's "whole systems" and dizzying array of contradictory advertisements begins to make sense as successors to William James's and not John Dewey's pragmatism.

While pluralism and relativism are intrinsic parts of Brand's modernism, it does not follow that the symbolism contained within contradictory advertisements was post-modern. The *Whole Earth Catalog* does not, as Deloria asserts, represent disembodied collage and pastiche. Advertisements for geodesic domes and tipis, vegetarian cookbooks and deer hunting manuals, "Scientific American" and tarot cards represent varieties of Back-to-the-Land knowledge and experience rooted in American history. An exploration of these seemingly contradictory advertisements will establish the validity of this assertion. For brevity's sake, however, discussion will be centered on the regional community section of the catalog.

The community section of the *Whole Earth Catalog* is the most diverse, pluralistic and regionally nuanced. Throughout the span of publication, from 1968 to 1972, the community section consistently expanded its section on food and food processing. The advertisements represent a fundamental way in which Back-to-the-Landers interaction with the physical environment because food is a primary way in which humans interact with, and construct, nature.⁵³ Thus the cultural symbolism of Back-to-the-Land food advertisements can be used to study the modernism of Stewart Brand and his regional pragmatism. It can also be used to

⁵³ For a discussion on the philosophic and methodological implications of this statement see Massimo Montanari, *Food Is Culture*, trans. Albert Sonnenfeld (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), ix, xii, 6, 7, 9-12, ix, xii, 6, 7, 9-12; Massimo Montanari, in his book *Food is Culture*, argues that the very act of picking food constitutes a cultural act and should, therefore, be studied by historians. The former book is a theoretical treatise on food in history while the latter provides a much more in-depth historical analysis of European foodways from antiquity to the present. It should be noted that Montanari, in the preface to *Food is Culture*, declines to use the term medieval, modern, or even ancient as chronological markers. Instead, in his words, the book is about "people, things, and ideas."

contradict post-modern critics of the Back-to-the-Land movement because the organic foods lauded in the pages of the *Whole Earth Catalog* were physically grounded in the soil.

The advertisements for food in the community section of the *Whole Earth Catalog* visibly displayed the regional diversity of its readers and help to explain the wide appeal of Brand's catalog. In the community section of the Spring 1970 edition of the *Whole Earth Catalog* the "Foods by Mail" sub-section states that these advertisers provide "sources for foods that are not treated with DDT, fumigants, ect. Most of these outfits are family affairs, and dedicated to supplying customers with real foods."⁵⁴ The reference to DDT and fumigants is significant because it represents the environmental concerns of the *Whole Earth Catalog* readers. They wanted to purchase real foods that had not been contaminated by the infamous DDT. Furthermore, the "et cetera" implies that the organic foods had reached a point in 1970 in which the author did need to elaborate on its definition. This marks a point in which organics had become a mainstream national movement. This assertion is supported by the references to "family affairs" and "real foods," both of which were symbolic catchphrases for the organic food movement.

The advertisements within this subsection further reveal the regional diversity of the *Whole Earth Catalog* readership. The 1970 mail-in section contains an announcement by Arrowhead Mills, Inc.. a Texas based food supplier. It states "Deaf Smith county, Texas is a mineral-rich area that produces wheat with high amounts of protein - - the best wheat available."⁵⁵ Next to this advertisement for Texas wheat is an advertisement from San Francisco stating "New Age Natural Foods: Headed by Fred Rohe, this is now San Francisco's largest

⁵⁴ Brand, *Whole Earth Catalog: Access to Tools*, 82.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

natural food store.”⁵⁶ The advertisements are followed by contact information including names and addresses. The diversity of the mail-in section reflects Brand’s whole system approach. He attempted to link different portions of the country such as Texas, New Hampshire, and San Francisco in order to create inter-connected systems of organic food producers who could affect environmental change.

Brand even catered to such diverse populations as vegetarians and omnivores. While this appears to be a contradiction, it makes sense within Brand’s relativistic countercultural pragmatism. Both vegetarian and omnivorous readers of the *Whole Earth Catalog* chose their lifestyle in an effort to live closer to nature. The *Whole Earth Catalog* gave both demographics sustainable tools to follow these efforts. This is apparent in the reviews of a number of cookbooks and how-to manuals in the *Whole Earth Catalog*.

Both the 1970 and 1972 WEC contained advertisements for the 1963 *Soybean Cookbook* that was accompanied by a tongue-and-cheek review from Stewart Brand stating that:

This cookbook is listed because too many vegetarians I know are looking too unhealthy. It’s particularly poignant when said vegetarian is pregnant and brain-starving the child. Soybeans are extra rich in protein; they’re cheap, and not hard to grow. Now would some professional nutritionist let us know if they flat-out replace animal protein?⁵⁷

This statement is inherently modern and pragmatic. By asking for expert nutritional advice Brand exhibited modern scientific sensibilities. He sidesteps any moral questions arising from vegetarianism in favor of a solution to protein deficiencies. Yet there is also an implied critique of those vegetarian counter-culturalists who have adopted a lifestyle out of touch with nutritional realities. This type of wording allows Brand to retain readers who were avid

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 83; Stewart Brand, ed. *The Last Whole Earth Catalog: Access to Tools* (Menlo Park: Portola Institute, 1972), 195.

carnivores, while at the same time provides a useful tool, in the form of a cookbook, to vegetarians.

A similar approach is taken with handbooks for butchering animals. The 1970 *Whole Earth Catalog* contains an advertisement for the 1957 *Venison Book*. Steward Brand's review states that "in my experience, getting the deer is the easiest part, if most written about. The rest of the action - - butchering, storing, cooking - - is the subject of this economical little book."⁵⁸ The rest of the article contains portions of the book ranging from excerpts on how to correctly drain a deer's blood, to the suitable way to make deer jerky. This is further supported by a review in the 1972 *Last Whole Earth Catalog* on the 1955 *Butchering, Processing and Preservation of Meat – A Manual for the Farm and Home*. Brand writes in his review that:

Vegetarians may turn their heads. (Some visited Kesey while he was slaughtering a cow. "They like to watch the blood gush just like everybody else.") One advantage of doing your own butchering, you get to thank the animal personally, and see him personally all the way through what you're doing together. There's nothing abstract about it. This book has the whole story....How to eat your friends and waste nothing.⁵⁹

This is a similarly critical review. In the context of the 1970s it was inherently countercultural because it advocated an organic relationship to food that took it out of the hands of USDA inspectors and the industrial meat supply.

The desire to get away from the industrial food system is mirrored in another review for the same butchering manual written by Arthur Kein of Colfax, Washington in the 1972 *Last Whole Earth Catalog*. Kein states that "if you are going to go Native or at least semi-fringy, you had better figure out a way of beating Safeway to the price of a pork chop. In other words, if you are going to beat the system, Ashbrook's book will show you how. (At least in the meat

⁵⁸Brand, *Whole Earth Catalog: Access to Tools*, 84.

⁵⁹Brand, *The Last Whole Earth Catalog: Access to Tools*, 198.

department).”⁶⁰ It is significant to note the regional nature of this review. Safeway is a local supermarket in the Pacific Northwest. Thus the review immediately applies to those living in Washington State who would have identified with the prices at Safeway stores. Equally substantial is Kein’s reference to beating the system and going native, both of which connect food symbolism with the Back-to-the-Land movement. Indeed, all four of the above food reviews in the *Whole Earth Catalog* represent Stewart Brand’s modernism.

Both vegetarians and omnivorous back-to-the-landers valued thrift, ingenuity, technical know-how, and individual responsibility as modern personal traits.⁶¹ Brand’s review for the *Soybean Cookbook* emphasized individual responsibility for pregnant vegetarians through nutritional knowledge. His advocacy of the *Venison Book* highlighted the importance of ingenuity and technical know-how in food matters. The exposé on the Butcher’s handbook reflected all of these traits, especially the individual responsibility of butchering an animal. Thus all of these advertisements demonstrate the modern sensibilities of Stewart Brand and his intended Back-to-the-Land audience. His decision to incorporate contradictory lifestyles such as vegetarianism links Brand’s pragmatism to that of the relativism of William James.

Yet this cultural relativism was not a blank check to “do your own thing” as some historians have stated. Philip Deloria states that “do your own thing,” conflated social order...with authority and rejected both. The communalists used Indianness hoping to establish a particular kind of organic community....What many of them found instead was a individualism....that became supercharged by the very experience of living collectively.”⁶² Brand’s modernism was not a blank check for counter-culturalists to “do their own thing” instead it was a plea to “do your own thing” if it works in the physical environment. Deloria’s critique of

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Kirk, *Counterculture Green : The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism*, 11.

⁶² Deloria, "Counterculture Indians and the New Age," 163.

the communalists for avoiding meaningful interaction with actual Indians because they would have found it “ideologically distasteful” may hold true for the small number of communes Deloria studies in *Playing Indian*.⁶³ Brand’s relativism and his interest in Native American folklore, however, were not boundless or prone to flights of whimsy. It was rooted in the physical practicalities of regional environments and their history of white and Indian cultural mixing.

This is eminently clear in the counterculture novel Brand helped publish in the pages of the 1972 *Last Whole Earth Catalog* entitled *Divine Right’s Trip: A Novel of the Counterculture*. The novel was written by Gurney Norman, a native born Appalachian who traveled to California in the 1960s to work with Stewart Brand. The book was published on sequential pages in the 1972 catalog and was deeply critical of new age hippies who were out of touch with pragmatic environmental realities. The novel was initially written from the perspective of the protagonists’ VW bus, named Urge, and chronicles their adventures meeting a series of comical counterculturists on the road from California to Kentucky. Before delving into the book itself, however, it is important to explore Norman’s biography in order to understand the novel’s historical significance.

Reared across the Southern United States, Gurney Norman was born in Grundy, Virginia, in 1937.⁶⁴ Due to his father’s enlistment in World War Two and his mother’s mental illness, Norman traveled between his maternal and paternal grandparents’ homes in Lee County, Virginia, and in eastern Kentucky respectively. He graduated from Stuart Robinson High

⁶³ It is important to note that Deloria’s work does not draw on primary source documents from the communal Back-to-the-Land movement. Instead, his work begins with his recollections of staying in a leaking tipi in a Pacific Northwest communes during his childhood. See *ibid.*, 159-163.

⁶⁴ For a more in-depth biography see George Brosi, "Gurney Norman," *Appalachian Heritage: A Literary Quarterly of Appalachian South*, Summer (2005).

School in 1955 and obtained his B.A. in journalism from the University of Kentucky in 1959.⁶⁵ While at the University of Kentucky, he became friends with Wendell Berry, who, it is important to note, published a poem alongside *Divine Right's Trip* in the 1972 *Last Whole Earth Catalog*.⁶⁶ After winning a scholarship to Stanford, he studied creative writing. Following graduation he joined the army for a short time, but after his contract had expired he returned to Hazard, Kentucky as a journalist for the *Hazard Herald*. From 1963-1965 he wrote articles about the environmental degradation of eastern Kentucky and specifically targeted strip mining in the Appalachian Mountains. In 1967, however, he returned to California where he met Stewart Brand.⁶⁷ His relationship with Brand led to the only novel to be published in the *Whole Earth Catalog*.

The significance of Norman's biography lies in the way it impacts his novel *Divine Right's Trip*. As a Back-to-the-Land narrative, the novel traces Divine Right's path from California to a rabbit farm in the mountains of Kentucky.⁶⁸ When D.R. and Estelle reach their rabbit farm, they use its manure to reclaim land that had been destroyed by strip mining. Norman explains that Divine Right's scheme was "to reclaim the soil of the home place that had been killed by the mining on the slopes above the farm. Until Emmitt started rebuilding the garden soil with rabbit shit behind the barn, the only living spot of the home place was the little triangle of green in front of the house."⁶⁹ It is not a coincidence that Norman's life followed a similar trajectory. In 1979 he left California to take a position at the University of Kentucky's English department and has remained active in Appalachian folklore preservation. Yet Norman's novel

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Wendell's poem is entitled "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" and was published next to Gurney's novel. See Brand, *The Last Whole Earth Catalog: Access to Tools*, 25.

⁶⁷ Brosi, "Gurney Norman".

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Gurney Norman, "Divine Right's Trip: A Novel of the Counterculture," in *Last Whole Earth Catalog* (Menlo Park: Portola Institute, 1972), 421.

speaks to a larger transition occurring in America during the 1970s. The novel has been likened to Jack Kerouac's famous *On the Road* and its search for American identity in a zig-zag travel narrative.⁷⁰ Norman's novel, however, specifically follows a West-East trajectory that seeks to wipe away the sins of western expansion and homesteading in the nineteenth century.

Divine Right's trip is a reverse narrative that critiques both nineteenth century modern homesteaders and contemporary hippies who partake in faux environmentalism because it is faddish. In this way both Brand's and Norman's pragmatic relativistic modernism shines through the pages of the *Last Whole Earth Catalog*. The nature of this pragmatism is evident in the transformation of Divine Right and the various misadventures that befall him on his move eastward.

In the beginning of the novel Divine Right purchases a 1963 Volkswagen microbus described as "a good clean red and white seven passenger job with five new re-capped tires and near perfect upholstery" that had been owned by a military family.⁷¹ The bus is the initial narrator in the story who tells the reader that his previous owners "brought me to the states when the sergeant went to Vietnam, and after he got blown up by a land mine, his wife Marie traded me in on a Falcon."⁷² After this unfortunate incident D.R. showed up on the car lot and purchased the automobile. Urge states that "I hadn't gone five hundred miles with that son of a bitch before I'd of given my fuel pump to be back on that parking lot. That bastard drove me from Boston to Chicago to St. Louis to Cincinnati without once checking my oil. I found out later he didn't even know where my damn oilstick was."⁷³ It was only after D.R. met Estelle, a hippie who understood proper maintenance of technology, that the car's spirits pick up. It is

⁷⁰ The novel was reviewed by John Updike, from the *New Yorker*, who commented on its cultural symbolism in 1972. Brosi compares it with *On the Road* in his biography. See Brosi, "Gurney Norman."

⁷¹ Norman, "Divine Right's Trip: A Novel of the Counterculture," 9.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

evident from this initial set of scenes that Norman is establishing a parody of the counterculture movement that fits closely with the modernism of Stewart Brand. The car's final assertion that "I never did understand what she [Estelle] saw in D.R. but...my job was to carry them around from place to place while they acted out their story....It was painful but I do have to say that it was interesting, and instructive. On some level I'm sure I'm a better bus for it" sets the stage for Norman's instructional West-East travel narrative.⁷⁴

The reverse narrative is made explicitly clear in the following chapter entitled "St. George and the Dragon." In the chapter D.R. picks a strange hitchhiker off of the side of the road while listening to a radio broadcast. D.R.'s internal narration states "I sure don't want to pick that guy up...[because] He was into a radio talk show out of Los Angeles. This strange woman had called in to comment on dress styles and wound up on the Turner thesis and the American westward movement."⁷⁵ In spite of his reticence, D.R. picks up the teenage hitchhiker who turns out to be uncommunicative, forcing D.R. to turn up the radio. The woman on the radio states "...all I mean is that genocide against the Indians was the official policy of every American President after Andrew Jackson." The announcer was aghast. "Are you saying that our government had a policy..." [the woman cuts in] "Absolutely. It's well known, I mean you are in radio, it's common knowledge among informed people."⁷⁶ This exchange on the radio leads D.R. to confront the hitchhiker about his opinions on the matter of Indian genocide and westward expansion. The stranger remains silent which infuriates D.R., leading him to kick the stranger out of the VW bus. As the stranger collects his baggage D.R. takes a closer look at him and states "Far out...did you know you had red, white, and blue eyes?" The strange hitchhiker "looked up at D.R. and said, "Did you ever read about St. George and the Dragon?" D.R. said he hadn't.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

“It’s far out shit,” said the kid.”⁷⁷ The references to westward expansion, the Turner thesis, genocide, and the dragon are significant for understanding Norman’s message in *Divine Right’s Trip*. The boy’s red, white, and blue eyes link him to America and the countryside-destroying dragon. It is D.R.’s destiny in the novel to slay the dragon by driving from Los Angeles to Kentucky in order to revive a Southern landscape that had been destroyed by strip mining. It is no coincidence that Norman decides to link the dragon’s fiery destructive power to the desolation that coal mining creates. It is equally important to note the way in which the woman on the radio is critiquing countercultural Indian fashion and the ways in which it masks the conquest and dispossession of native peoples. This establishes that, at least for Gurney Norman, Indian play was something to be avoided by pragmatic counter-culturalists. All of these themes and symbols are connected in *Divine Right’s* journey and would have resonated with the Back-to-the-Land audience of the *Whole Earth Catalog*. Thus, along this West to East journey D.R. must shed many of the faddish aspects of counterculture movement.

During a drug trip D.R. meets a charismatic man known simply as the Greek who tries to convince D.R. that he needs to change his diet. The narrator states that “if it had been a silent fellow mysteriously behind the wheel, acid-paranoia would have overwhelmed and terrified D.R. But this was a talker, a speaker, and D.R. trusted him implicitly.”⁷⁸ The man represents charismatic spiritualists who preyed on weak-minded individuals. Norman thoroughly satirizes the Greek’s belief system when he has him state

Now I know a lot of people are on a dairy-protein trip....And it is true that protein is essential. But what’s got to happen is that people must quit accepting mucus as the price of protein in their bodies. As anyone who has studied the sex and dietary habits of ancient Sumerians can tell you, there’s lots of protein available in non-mucus-making foods.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 69.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

The Greek is able to convince D.R. to switch over to a strictly walnut and water diet in order to avoid the “American mucus conspiracy.”⁸⁰ The nutritional impossibility of this diet leads Estelle to break apart D.R. and the Greek. Norman’s satire of whole food nuts is strikingly similar to Brand’s review of the *Soybean Cookbook*. In essence, Norman and Brand’s lesson is that the Greek’s nutritional ideology is pragmatically invalid because it does not provide nutritional sustenance.

In the end Philip Deloria’s critique of portions of the communal movement may ring true. Though it has been demonstrated that Indian play does not apply to Gurney Norman or Stewart Brand, *Divine Right’s Trip* would have lacked satirical power if portions of the communal movement had not been playing with socially and environmentally disembodied Indian symbols. The woman on D.R.’s radio spoke for Gurney Norman and his quest to instruct back-to-the-landers in cultural pragmatism in order to avoid meaningless play. The extent of this play and some of its ontological implications will be explored in the next chapter. Before moving on, however, it is important to note one aspect of Native-White relations that crops up within the *Whole Earth Catalog* that can serve as a way to nuance understandings of Indian play as well as the way Stewart Brand’s modernism undermines the postmodern declensionist narrative.

An entire section of the 1972 *Last Whole Earth Catalog* was devoted to books on Native American folklore and political issues. The section begins with an excerpt from Allen Ginsberg’s famous poem “Howl,” specifically the portion referring to visionary countercultural Indian angels.⁸¹ The poem is followed by a short introduction by Stewart Brand. He states that “the booklist that follows comes from two intense informal years (and five-slack ones)...hanging

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ginsberg’s *Howl* contains a stanza that intones “Who loned it through the streets of Idaho seeking visionary Indian angels who were visionary Indian angels.” This is specifically cited in Brand’s Section on Native American folkways. See Brand, *The Last Whole Earth Catalog: Access to Tools*, 382.

around Indians, reservations, anthropologists and libraries....They gave me more reliable information, and human warmth, than dope and college put together.”⁸² Note that Brand’s understanding of Native American folkways is rooted in seven years of experience with Pueblo Indians in the Southwest and that he promotes face-to-face interactions with Indians as well as anthropologists and libraries. This is an inherently modern mindset for he is gaining folk knowledge through interaction with trained academics and books.⁸³ Yet he is not bound to this western notion of learning. The proceeding portion of his introduction states “I’m sure that the books all by themselves cannot deliver The Native American Experience. For that you need time immersed in the land and neighborly acquaintance at least with some in fact Indians.”⁸⁴ Though he does admit that the book list contains “an amazing amount” of knowledge.

The section contains reviews for such diverse titles as *Book of the Hopi*, *The Lost Universe*, *Black Elk Speaks*, *Tales of the North American Indians*, *The Eagle*, and *The Jaguar, and the Serpent*.⁸⁵ More importantly for this discussion is the review for Vine Deloria Jr.’s 1969 *Custer Died For Your Sins*. Brand writes that:

Vine is the perfect dude to write of current Indian politics. Son of a missionary, enough Sioux to be a Sioux, long experience getting Indian kids into good schools, revved up by the National Indian Youth Council stand-up-and-fight meetings of the late fifties and sixties...and after all that he’s still thirty-five and still funny....His recommended route for Indian survival is strong land-based tribal identity.⁸⁶

Brand’s 1972 review is hopeful and enthusiastic. He puts Vine Deloria Jr. forward as a model for white-Indian activism because he has become enmeshed in Sioux culture and managed to stay positive in the face of government intransigence.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 382-383.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 383.

Custer Died For Your Sins was written for young Indians, but Brand asserts that white middleclass youth can also gain important knowledge from the book. He writes “young white Indian-savers: you can’t help anybody by saving them; that’s a self-defeat program. Relax and appreciate. Custer died for your sins. And your virtues. A long-hair artist famous former-dope-fiend commune white person I know is busy learning from his Indian friends at the Taos Pueblo: manners.”⁸⁷ In essence Brand’s message is pluralistic and pragmatic. Social change cannot be affected through western “salvation.” Instead meaningful change occurs through authentic cultural interchange through study and friendship. This is the same type of cultural transformation Gurney Norman calls for in *Divine Right’s* reverse narrative that seeks to heal historical wounds between Whites and Indians so that Americans could fully move back to the land.

In many ways William James, John Dewey, Stewart Brand, Gurney Norman, Vine Deloria Jr., and his son Philip Deloria are part of a long tradition of modern pragmatic thought in the United States. As we have seen James’s pluralism and relativistic pragmatism infused Brand’s *Whole Earth Catalog* with the ability to reach diverse portions of the United States by appealing to local sensibilities and, at the same time, create “whole systems.” Evidence abounds for this in the *Whole Earth Catalog’s* community foods sections. Likewise, Gurney Norman’s countercultural novel *Divine Right’s Trip* exhibits James’ pragmatic pluralism by seeking to heal the wounds of western industrial expansion that had led to environmental degradation. An integral component of these attempts by Back-to-the-Landers to affect environmental change lay in their ability to understand the complexity of Native American experiences. Brand’s Native American book section, as well as the woman on the radio in D.R.’s VW bus, demonstrates the difficulties white countercultural communards encountered as they sought to deconstruct Native

⁸⁷ Ibid.

stereotypes. While Brand and Norman rarely employed the term play to describe inept attempts of back-to-the-landers to ape Indianness, the pages of the *Whole Earth Catalog* contain carefully worded remonstrations to readers who wrote the authors seeking Native knowledge.⁸⁸ The nature of this disconnected, decentered search for identity has been described as post-modern play by Philip Deloria. We have seen the ways in which the post-modern declensionist narrative does not apply to the *Whole Earth Catalog*, yet it still remains to be seen if the larger Back-to-the-Land movement and its adherents were undergoing a post-modern crisis of meaning. In order to understand this it will be important to turn to the voices of back-to-the-landers that appear in the pages of *Mother Earth News*.

⁸⁸ For an example of these remonstrations see Brand's remarks to Eileen O-Leary of Vancouver, B.C., who asked for knowledge about his experiences with Southwest Tribes, demonstrate this point. He replied to her "Anarchistic Indians, right? So I still thought until I attended a Navaho Peyote meeting...I've been to glorious meetings, with big feeling and big learning. And to loser meetings, boring, depressing. The glorious were flexible, tight. The losers, loose, "democratic", wishful, weak. That's what I saw. The difference wasn't Indian, White; it was responsibility, or not." Ibid., 382.

CHAPTER 2

MOTHERN EARTH NEWS AND POST-MODERN PLAY

The counter-culturalists that Brand and Norman critique have been the main source of evidence that scholars have pointed to in order to label the Back-to-the-Land movement post-modern. Their arguments are most aptly encapsulated in Philip Deloria's book *Playing Indian* and his article "Counterculture Indians and the New Age" in which the author critiques the communal Back-to-the-Land movement for "playing" Indian and "unraveling...the connections between meanings and social realities."⁸⁹ He sees white communards wearing Indian headbands and living in leaking tipis as post-modern play that is out of touch with the social and political realities of being Native American. These whites were part of a sixties rebellion that "rested, in part, on a politics of symbols, pastiche, and performance...that signified a hopeful, naïve rebellion that often had as much to do with individual expression and fashion as it did with social change."⁹⁰ There is irony in Deloria's narrative. The same white counter-culturalists who lobbied for meaningful social change during the Civil Rights movement were now commodifying and devaluing Indianness and returning to Native Americans "a 'power' that was more linguistic than actual."⁹¹ This politics of symbols and performance occurred because white America's cultural world had become decentered. Cultural meaning had become contingent to the players, not on

⁸⁹ Deloria, "Counterculture Indians and the New Age," 162.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 170.

the real world or actual history. Deloria sees this as the emergence of the three post-modern sensibilities touched on in the introduction.

Deloria's critique rests on play and performance theories. These theories are intricately related to post-modernism and have recently crept into historical discourse.⁹² Play theory was first put forward in Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* in 1944. Huizinga, an anthropologist by training, argued that play was an integral part of identity creation and the civilization process. Deloria specifically cites from Huizinga's first two characteristics of play. The first main characteristic of play is that "it is free, is in fact freedom."⁹³ In essence, it is not bound by the rules of society or culture. The second, related, characteristic is "that play is not "ordinary" or "real" life. It is rather a stepping out of "real" life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own."⁹⁴ Taken together these two characteristics resonate within the sensibilities that Deloria states are part of the post-modern mindset. Back-to-the-land communards were stepping out of real life into a mythical natural playground that allowed them to play with drugs, alternative sexual arrangements and identities without social repercussions.

Yet positing that the Back-to-the-Land movement was caught up in a crisis of meaning and identity leads to an ontological and methodological conundrum for historians. Huizinga's third characteristic of play states that it "is distinct from "ordinary" life both as to locality and duration....It is "played out" within certain limits of time and place."⁹⁵ In other words, play requires a "play"ground and an established time limit. Historians of the 1970s know that many of

⁹² Judith Butler makes this specific connection in the introduction to her work *Gender Trouble*, and mentions the ways Derrida's post-modernism affected her methodology. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), xiv.

⁹³ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, 1st ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944), 8.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

the back-to-the-landers failed in their mission to connect with nature through “playing” Indian.⁹⁶ There have been numerous sociological studies exploring this phenomenon.⁹⁷ Yet back-to-the-landers did not expect to fail in their mythical playgrounds. From their perspective the new life they were carving out was permanent, and was thus not play. This is apparent in all of the Back-to-the-Land literature, especially in *Mother Earth News* which contains conversations between homesteaders and communards looking to move back to the land.

If, however, some back-to-the-landers succeeded in their quest historians are left with an ontological conundrum; at what point did they stop playing, at what point did their identities become fixed on their playgrounds, at what point did they become “Native” to the land that they tilled? Historians fall into the trap of historical hindsight and fail to meet back-to-the-landers on their own terms by imposing play as an analytical construct. While it would be acceptable for contemporary socio-cultural critics such as Stewart Brand, Gurney Norman, or Vine Deloria Jr. to use the term; play, as an analytical theory, becomes morally perilous for historians studying historical subjects.

⁹⁶ Shi’s last chapter deals explicitly with the communal movements in the 1960s. He remarks that “many of the intentional communities did produce more babies than bread. Pursuing an organic simplicity and allowing everyone to “do his thing” frequently meant nothing got done. Impulse is a poor substitute for self-discipline when it comes to providing daily necessities.” Despite the failure of many communes Shi does note a number, such as The Farm, which did prosper by emphasizing work and self-discipline. Yet he observed that “The Farm’s success, however, was more exceptional than representative... The counter culture, like the earlier Arts and Crafts and back-to-nature movements, had developed both faddish and fashionable overtones, and much of the rebellion’s original ideals was preempted by commercialization.” This acknowledgment, however, of the ultimate failure of the movement should not be taken as dismissive. Shi argues that “the superficiality and naïveté of many of the hippie communalists make them ready subjects for caricature. It is always easy to poke fun at utopians. But focusing only on the youthful follies does not do justice to the complexity or the momentousness of the issues with which they were wrestling.” This is a very important methodological approach to keep in mind when studying failed utopian movements. What is more important, from a historical perspective, is not their success or failure, but instead what drove young men and women to flee urban areas in an existential search for meaning. Not all historians have been so empathetic as Shi, often critiquing communards superficial adoption of Native American culture. See Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture*, 258.

⁹⁷ Jeffery Jacobs in particular focuses on how back-to-the-landers rated the success of their ventures in terms of partial and full sustainability of their communes and homesteads. See Jacob, *New Pioneers: The Back-to-the-Land Movement and the Search for a Sustainable Future*, 28-32.

Performance theory, as expounded by the gender historian Judith Butler, has been put forward as a way of solving this problem.⁹⁸ Butler argues that gender is an “expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates.”⁹⁹ In other words, the interior expectations of gender create the outward reality of performed gender. Performance is based on a set of internalized learned rules that the actor enacts. In this sense there is no difference between gender and preformed gender. Deloria uses performance theory to explore the ways in which white communards acted out Indianness based upon culturally learned stereotypes.¹⁰⁰ Performance theory bypasses the time-limit conundrum because Butler’s second aspect of performance is that “performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration.”¹⁰¹ From Deloria’s perspective, individual whites were ritually performing a set of culturally learned rules and stereotypes that associated Indianness with cultural protest.

Post-modernism’s emphasis on individual meaning making through performativity cannot adequately analyze environmental movements. If theories posit that all interpretive agency flows from inside the individual, then they miss the ways in which external environmental histories affects and informs identity over time. Deloria critiques the communal movement because identity was no longer contingent on socio-historical realities of Indianness. Some of the correspondence in the *Last Whole Earth Catalog* demonstrates that this is a valid point. It does not follow, however, that the majority of back-to-the-landers lived in a decentered

⁹⁸ Butler’s performance theory is directly descended from post-structural theorists such as Jacques Derrida who posited that “the anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which authority is attributed and installed.” Butler created performance theory that asserted that “performativity of gender revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself.” See Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, xiv-xv.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, xiv.

¹⁰⁰ Indeed, he specifically sites from Butler’s works. See Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 199n17.

¹⁰¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, xv.

world or that all Native symbolism had become detached from socio-historical realities. Instead back-to-the-landers, especially those in the South, grounded their identities on physical spaces through oral histories and created identities based on environments and localities whose past contained positive and negative cultural mixing between whites and Indians.

In order to explore this process, and develop a critical understanding of post-modern play theory, it will be important to turn away from the *Whole Earth Catalog*. For all of its dizzying array of advertisements the catalog lacks few real voices from the Back-to-the-Land movement. In other words, it cannot adequately shed light on the lived experiences of actual homesteaders and communards. For this we must explore the correspondence section of the *Mother Earth News*.

Mother Earth News(MEN) was created in 1970 by John and Jane Shuttleworth. Unlike the *Whole Earth Catalog* and the *Foxfire* series, MEN's publishing location moved across the country throughout the 1970s as the magazine's readership expanded. It initially started in Ohio but moved to Hendersonville, North Carolina and eventually settled in Topeka, Kansas where it still publishes as of 2013.¹⁰² Also, unlike other Back-to-the-Land publications *Mother Earth News* was the only magazine to survive the 1970s and 1980s. The *Whole Earth Catalog* sporadically published after 1972 and discontinued publishing in 1985. The Foxfire project became the Foxfire Fund in 1992 after Eliot Wigginton plead guilty to one count of non-aggravated child molestation. The success of *Mother Earth News* lay in its ability to present an array of alternative life-styles and connect actual back-to-the-landers in its correspondence section.

¹⁰² For a discussion of early history of MEN see the interview in the second issues of MEN. Shuttleworth, "The Plowboy Interview," 6.

The stated goal of *Mother Earth News* “was to be a bi-monthly publication edited by, and expressly for, today’s influential “hip” young adults: the creative people; the doers; the ones who make it all happen. Heavy emphasis is placed on alternative life styles, ecology, working with nature and doing more with less.”¹⁰³ The heavy emphasis on alternative life styles took the form of special reports and issues by the *Mother Earth News* staff. Articles ranged from reports on how to go back to the land to exposés on Christian communes in Arkansas and even a full-length article on how to canoe down the Mississippi River.¹⁰⁴ The first editions of *Mother Earth News* were published by the Underground Press syndicate making it one of many underground magazines and newspapers devoted to alternative lifestyles in the 1970s.

The diversity and antagonist nature of many of the segments of the *Mother Earth News* readership made itself clear by the third issue in 1970. After publishing an advertisement for a catalog that contained an “all-purpose” spray containing DDT the Shuttleworths were inundated with complaints. In response to these complaints they issued an apology but retorted in a statement of policy that:

As for the Ultimate Truth—or lack of it—in everything from eating meat (three vegetarians have taken exception) to the Robinson’s “unnatural rectangular pastures” (that worried one couple) we can only say: There are many paths to the Clear Light and we are all pilgrims. MOTHER exists only to present the HOW of alternative life styles not normally considered in our modern society. That’s “life styles,” not “style”¹⁰⁵

This retort mirrors the pragmatic pluralism of Stewart Brand. *Mother Earth News* was created to present multiple ways to go back to the land that had not been considered by modern society. The Shuttleworths’ magazine, however, differentiates itself from Brand’s catalog by

¹⁰³ See John Shuttleworth, "The Mother Earth News...It Tells You How," *Mother Earth News*, January 1970, 5.

¹⁰⁴ See John Shuttleworth, "How to Make It Your Way," *Mother Earth News*, January 1970, 6-7; Cindy Cooper, "Mississippi Canoe Trip," *Mother Earth News*, July 1970, 24-27; Thomas Bevier, "The Group: One Member's Debts Are the Debts of All and Everyone Works for the Common Bread in This Arkansas Commune," *Mother Earth News*, July 1971, 40-43.

¹⁰⁵ John Shuttleworth, "A Statement of Policy," *Mother Earth News*, May 1970, 9.

being overtly spiritualist and by also advocating anti-modern lifestyles. Their retort contains capitalized terms such as Ultimate Truth and Clear Light as well as the assertion that all back-to-the-landers are pilgrims. These references hint at the plethora of religious traditions influencing the Shuttleworths' back-to-nature ideology. Multiple paths to the clear light of enlightenment mixes Buddhist middle way philosophy with Judeo-Christian terms such as pilgrim and ultimate truth.

The religious nature of MEN has interested a number of scholars most notably Rebecca Kneale Gould who has written the sole historical work on the modern homesteading movement.¹⁰⁶ Her work *At Home in Nature: Modern Homesteading and Spiritual Practice in America*, published in 2005, argues that the Back-to-the-Land movement exhibited many of the aspects of a religious movement.¹⁰⁷ Gould's micro history focuses on her ethnographic work with homesteaders in Maine. She noted that the majority of homesteaders described their movement back to the land as a spiritual journey that included a conversion experience and, in many cases, a pilgrimage to the homestead of Helen and Scott Nearing.¹⁰⁸ Gould asserts that Helen and Scott Nearing were the spiritual leaders of the Back-to-the-Land movement whose works, such as *Living the Good Life*, influenced the entire movement's ideology.

According to Gould, the nature of this spiritual movement rested in the lived secular religion of the Nearings who emphasized conscious labor in the natural environment, a self-sufficient lifestyle, and a rigorous work ethic.¹⁰⁹ Gould briefly analyzes MEN and the importance

¹⁰⁶ The only other work within the historiography on the modern homesteading movement is more of a summary of the movement and its transition into mainstream culture in the 1980s and 1990s. See Ryan H. Edgington, "Be Receptive to the Good Earth': Health, Nature, and Labor in Countercultural Back-to-the-Land Settlements," *The Journal of Agricultural History* (2008): 279-303.

¹⁰⁷ Gould, *At Home in Nature: Modern Homesteading and Spiritual Practice in America*, 3-10.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁹ Gould's work appeared in first work on lived religion. See David D. Hall, ed. *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 217. The article that she published in this edited volume was one of the chapters in *At Home in Nature* where she elaborates on the Nearings' live religion and work

that its advertisements had for disseminating the Nearings' works.¹¹⁰ Gould's analysis is correct in asserting that the Nearings were two of the important intellectual leaders of the movement. In the January 1971 edition Roberta Hammer writes into the MEN news staff that "We've just read the Nearings' LIVING THE GOOD LIFE and we learned a lot – mainly about the importance of some order and organization –from that book. Right now we're waiting semi-patiently for DOMEBOOK ONE to arrive and we're anticipating the construction of a dome with high fervor."¹¹¹ The reader's letter indicates that they connect the Nearings with other modern pragmatists such as Buckminster Fuller who wrote *Domebook One*.¹¹² They assert that they learned organization and discipline through the Nearings' most influential work. The reader muses "I wonder if other "artists-turned-homesteader " types find that their creative impulses are now turned to food and shelter for family and livestock...that paintings are somehow not very practical or real in this basic way of living."¹¹³ According to Gould, the reader's incorporation of Buckminster Fuller's architecture and the Nearing's homesteading ideology are partially at odds. The Nearings were strong advocates of building traditional houses out of local materials, in their case river rocks, that could be found in the surrounding physical environment. Thus these homesteaders, who were building a geodesic dome out of synthetic materials, do not fall within Gould's strict characterization of modern homesteading.

She explicitly excludes numerous homesteaders because they do not fit within her definition of modern homesteading. This methodological mistake stems from the constraints she puts on her definition of the Nearings's modernism. She states in a footnote that "while there are

ethic. For an example of the way she describes the Nearings see Gould, *At Home in Nature: Modern Homesteading and Spiritual Practice in America*, xiii-xiv.

¹¹⁰ See *At Home in Nature: Modern Homesteading and Spiritual Practice in America*, 193.

¹¹¹ Not that the Nearings do appear alongside other of the movements intellectuals such as Buckminster Fuller in the Plowboy Interview section. See Roberta Hammer, "Report from Them That's Doin': Coon Run Farm," *Mother Earth News*, January 1971, 69.

¹¹² John Shuttleworth, "The Plowboy Interview: Helen and Scott Nearing," *Mother Earth News*, September, 6-13.

¹¹³ See Roberta Hammer, "Report from Them That's Doin': Coon Run Farm," *Mother Earth News*, January, 69.

rural experiments (e.g., libertarian survivalists and rural fundamentalist Christians) who share some “family resemblances” to homesteaders, they are not part of this study.”¹¹⁴ This is a problematic approach to take for a historian of religion, which leads to questions about Gould’s impartiality. She lived for a number of years on the Nearing’s homestead in Maine, which clouds her analysis.¹¹⁵ A deeper look at the correspondence section of MEN in the early 1970s, however, reveals that Gould overestimates the importance of the Nearings which led her to ignore portions of the country that contain homesteaders who were formally religious. *Mother Earth News* purposefully included religious homesteaders in their correspondence section and published articles on Christian communes in the South.

Throughout the early editions of MEN numerous religious homesteaders across the country appear asking to be connected to other like-minded counter-culturalists. In the July 1970 edition Jim and Lois B. from Seattle, Washington asked “Is there anyone out there interested in establishing a rural commune founded on the life of Jesus Christ and modeled after the primitive Christian Church as described in the first four chapters of the Book of Acts?”¹¹⁶ Their reference to the primitive Church and the Book of Acts ties these Christian back-to-the-landers to larger counter-cultural currents that sought to live a simpler life closer to nature and a mythical past. This sentiment is mirrored in another advertisement in the May 1971 edition of the contact section from Joe. T in Florida. He writes “A group of us with liberal Catholic and ecumenical Christian backgrounds have formed a small 'underground church' community. We would like to contact others in Florida interested in ecology, communal living, movement religious philosophy

¹¹⁴ Gould, *At Home in Nature: Modern Homesteading and Spiritual Practice in America*, 250 n17.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, xiv-xv.

¹¹⁶ Jim and Lois B, "Contact," *Mother Earth News*, July 1970, 70.

and working with blacks and minority groups.”¹¹⁷ Thus, from Washington State to Florida, homesteaders and communards exhibited a diverse range of religious beliefs.

Gould’s work specifically focuses on homesteaders and not communards, therefore the above advertisements do not necessarily fit within the purview of her study.¹¹⁸ Yet there were other articles in MEN that did specifically deal with Christian homesteaders who shared more than a “family resemblance” to homesteaders. In the March 1971 edition of MEN Hal Smith wrote an exposé on the Christian Homesteading movement. He began his article with the statement "If you think the back-to-the-land movement is attracting only young freaks, misfits, the alienated and disenchanted revolutionaries...the Christian Homesteading Movement will set you straight. Membership is for god-fearing people only. Though the rest of us are welcome to learn and participate at CHM's homesteading "school."¹¹⁹ It is apparent in this excerpt that Hal Smith and other journalists from MEN defined the Back-to-the-Land movement in larger terms than Gould. It did not just include alienated youth who had become disenchanted with 1970s political culture nor did it solely include revolutionaries such as the Nearings. It also included other traditions that have had a long history within America such as the fundamentalist Christian homesteaders and libertarian survivalists.

Many of these movements, including the Nearings’ lived religion, were inherently anti-modern. Hal Smith goes on to state that this Christian homesteading school established a number of rules such as “no cameras, no "gadgets" of any kind (flashlights, radios, ect.) no hard liquor or drugs, no cars or machinery and no "profanity" or vulgarity.”¹²⁰ The admonition against cars, flashlights, radios, and other gadgets reflects the Christian homesteading movement’s desire to

¹¹⁷ Joe T, "More Contact Section," *ibid.*, May 1971, 107.

¹¹⁸ For the limitations she places on her study see Gould, *At Home in Nature: Modern Homesteading and Spiritual Practice in America*, 252n20.

¹¹⁹ Hal Smith, "The Christian Homesteading Movement," *Mother Earth News*, March 1971, 44.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

return to the fundamentals of the primitive church. Yet these same sensibilities are similar to the Nearing's pursuit of the simple life through self-sufficient homesteading.

Gould labels back-to-the-land homesteaders as modern in an effort to distance it from the nineteenth century homesteading movement.¹²¹ This makes modernity a synonym for contemporary and glosses over important aspects of the Back-to-the-Land movement in the process. More specifically it ignores evidence that the contemporary homesteading movement combined pre-modern, anti-modern, and modern sensibilities. The existence of these competing ideals should make scholars reconsider the application of terms such as modernism, anti-modernism, and post-modernism. The *Mother Earth News* team's pluralistic approach, as evidenced in their early editorial interactions with readers, led them to embrace both Brand's modern pragmatism and a relativism that included Christian homesteaders and New Age communards who experimented with Native American traditions. In fact, the pre-modern and anti-modern sentiments held by portions of the Back-to-the-Land movement led many of them to turn to Native folkways in an effort to learn how to live in a pre-modern world. Gould's emphasis on modern homesteading precludes her from exploring this important facet of the Back-to-the-Land movement, a facet that Deloria explores in *Playing Indian* and *Indians in Unexpected Places*.¹²²

The Shuttleworths' biographical backgrounds are important to note because they are similar to the experiences of Stewart Brand, Eliot Wigginton, and other counter-culturalists. Each author sought out native knowledge of the natural environment in their region. Brand spent time with the Indian tribes in the Southwest, while he lived in San Francisco. Eliot Wigginton's experience homesteading in the Rabun-Gap led him to include native Appalachian and Native

¹²¹ Gould, *At Home in Nature: Modern Homesteading and Spiritual Practice in America*, 2.

¹²² See Deloria, *Playing Indian*; Deloria, "Counterculture Indians and the New Age."; Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*.

American folk knowledge that he garnered through the oral histories his students collected. The Shuttleworths' background exhibited similar interest in Native knowledge and symbolism.

John Shuttleworth was born and raised in rural Indiana. He graduated valedictorian and was given a scholarship to Ball State Teacher's College in Indiana. He decided on Ball State because "It was close to the family farm and I could live at home and help with the chores. After two years I dropped out...in 1958."¹²³ When asked by an interviewer why he decided to drop out, Shuttleworth answered "For the same reasons that people are dropping out now: The establishment education system trains great replacement parts for the military industrial complex and it turns out wonderful consumers but it doesn't teach much about living a satisfying life or developing human potential."¹²⁴ John Shuttleworth's decision to drop out in 1958 makes him part of an older counter-culturalist generation that came of age in the middle of the 1950s. Shuttleworth noted that "In the dead Eisenhower years. The Organization man years. And it was a lonely thing to drop out at that time. I spent the next ten years rambling through 30 or 40 changes of address...Finally, two years ago—when I was living in North Carolina—I met and married ...Jane."¹²⁵ John Shuttleworth's story mirrors countless other countercultural conversion narratives including those of Eliot Wigginton and Stewart Brand. After becoming dissatisfied by the "dead" 1950s John Shuttleworth "dropped" out and wandered the country, much like Divine Right in Gurney Norman's novel, until he found grounding in North Carolina and a Southern bride. Shuttleworth's reference to "developing human potential" and avoiding becoming "replacement parts" for the military industrial complex is directly related to the modernism of Stewart Brand.

¹²³ Shuttleworth, "The Plowboy Interview," 6.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Indeed, *Mother Earth News* was directly inspired by Stewart Brand's *Whole Earth Catalog*. In the same 1970 interview John Shuttleworth was asked how *Mother Earth News* was created. After being asked how his previous work mutated into *Mother Earth News* John Shuttleworth answered "Stewart Brand is responsible. I was inspired by THE WHOLE EARTH CATALOG."¹²⁶ After the interviewer agrees that the *Whole Earth Catalog* was a "fantastic" source of information, Shuttleworth states that it is "Mind boggling and *tremendously* useful. It just goes to show what the right man with an idea...can do....I'm saying we need fewer politicians and more Stewart Brands."¹²⁷ He stated that he wanted to create a "publication that paralleled and supported the work of Brand's WEC."¹²⁸ The interviewer then asks if that is why *Mother Earth News* contained the word "earth" in it. John Shuttleworth replied "No. I wanted to call the thing THE GREAT CHIEF JOSEPH NEWSLETTER. I still think Chief Joseph, of the Nez Perce Indians, is one of the few authentic heroes of the North American Continent. But Jane held out...As usual, she was right."¹²⁹ This insight demonstrates a key aspect of Shuttleworth's Back-to-the-Land countercultural mindset. By seeking to name the magazine after Chief Joseph, Shuttleworth was trying to link his anti-establishment political beliefs with the "authentic" symbolism of Joseph's defiance. The search for authenticity is a reoccurring theme throughout the Shuttleworths' biographies and in the pages of MEN in the 1970s. Older, Native, and pre-modern ways of living were seen as more authentic and less synthetic. In other words, Plains Indian tipis and pioneer dugout homes existed in a category of reality that back-to-the-landers considered the epitome of authentic American experience. Therefore they included articles

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 7.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

based on books and oral histories on how to build Indian Tipis and pioneer homes so that readers could recreate authentic environments of memory.

John Shuttleworth was prohibited from naming the magazine by his wife who felt that the name *Mother Earth News* was “more universal and less political.”¹³⁰ Jane’s reason for a more universal title is significant for understanding the context of MEN in the early 1970s because it sought to bridge Native and white political agendas, while at the same time create a forum for a diverse movement. The interview with Shuttleworth, as well as his editorial debates with his wife, occurred in conjunction with the rise of the Red Power movement and the occupation of Alcatraz Island.¹³¹ Indeed, *Mother Earth News* carried a number of articles calling for aid for those Indians on Alcatraz in its 1970 and 1971 magazines.¹³² Interest, however, in Native Americans extended beyond politics and was an integral component of the Back-to-the-Land mindset. Thus Deloria’s assertion that back-to-the-landers and communards were employing Native symbolism holds true in the primary source material.

An article in the first special edition of the *Mother Earth News* explicitly lauds Indian tipis as the original Back-to-the-Land building. It states that many back-to-the-landers “are into the aborigine things these days and live in plains Indian tepees. It makes sense because, unlike white man’s tents, a properly constructed tepee is warm in winter, cool in summer, and able to withstand windstorms that will flatten a frame house.”¹³³ This excerpt exhibits a number of

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ For the historiography of this movement see Troy Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Indian Self-Determination and the Rise of Indian Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 1, 2, 13, 17.

¹³² There was even a full length interview in the march 1971 edition of the Plowboy Interview with Buffy Ste. Marie, a native American activist. She had spent time on Alcatraz in 1970 and elaborated on many of the plights that the pan-Indian movement was facing in its protests, from the censorship of news to the disconnection of power on the island. She concluded with a plea that “I think Americans, hip and otherwise, are missing the last chance they are ever going to get to sooth their consciences. The guilt I see in white peoples’ eyes is a sad thing. It is up to the individual white person to pay the debt.” See John Carpenter, “The Plowboy Interview: Buffy Ste. Marie,” *Mother Earth News*, March 1971, 8.

¹³³ John Shuttleworth, “How to Make It Your Way,” *Mother Earth News*, January 1970, 6.

themes touched on earlier in the *Whole Earth Catalog*. In the “Indian books” section of the catalog, as well as in Divine Right’s Trip, it is evident that many counter-culturalists were getting “into the aborigine thing” and connecting it with their own search for a sustainable lifestyle. Yet, as we have seen, Brand and Norman were critical of new age hippies who did not heed the pragmatic socio-historical realities of Native American experiences.

The Shuttleworths were less critical of these currents and published exposés on Indian living in many of their early magazines. One example in particular comes from their “Build It and Move In” series entitled “Plains Indian Tipis” that includes five quotations, from white observers, noting the merits of living in a tipi. The first excerpt comes from the Spanish government’s 1599 Great Plains expedition. The last quotation comes from an interview with a back-to-the-lander in 1969 who states:

It’s a whole new trip man. Its, like, living inside and outside both at once. During the day even on dark days—a tipi has a mellow, even illumination that’s never been equaled in a house... I once heard Buckminster Fuller tell how he wanted to build a double-walled geodesic dome house... and Fuller’s basic idea was that living in the place would be a natural inside-outside thing. But its already been done man. Like the Indians were ‘WAY ahead. —a back-to-the-land tipi dweller, 1969¹³⁴

It is significant that no Indian voices can be heard in these quotations. Instead an unbroken line of white history connects Don Juan de Oñate’s praise of the Plains Indian’s dwellings to this new age tipi dweller. Furthermore this counterculture Indian exhibits many of the characteristics that Philip Deloria critiques in *Playing Indian*. The unnamed tipi dweller exists in a liminal haze of illuminated mellowness somewhere between “outside” and “inside.” Coupling this with the inherent contradiction of his statement that living in a tipi was both “a whole new trip” that has “already been done” leaves readers puzzled. Yet the tipi dweller was not exhibiting post-modern play. Instead he exhibited anti-modern sentiments explored earlier,

¹³⁴ John Shuttleworth, "Build It and Move In: The Plains Indian Tipi," *Mother Earth News*, January 1970, 29.

which linked Native folkways with pre-modern authenticity. The specific refutation of Buckminster Fuller's geodesic architecture, and its inherent pragmatic modernism, proves this point.

Furthermore, a deeper reading of the articles surrounding this exposé in the first issue establishes that the majority of the Back-to-the-Land movement understood that tipis were not sustainable long-term dwellings for homesteaders. Instead they existed in an intermediate category between "white men's tents" and modern housing. In the same issue, immediately following the recommendation for Plains Tipis is a paragraph stating "If you prefer something more substantial, you can construct a thoroughly modern ranch house dirt cheap by using just that—dirt."¹³⁵ Thus there is an understanding, at least from the *Mother Earth News* team that tipis were not meant to be long-term "substantial" dwellings for homesteaders.¹³⁶ There were, however, other pre-modern building structures that were substantial. In the September 1970 MEN Victor A. Croley wrote an article on the frontier dug-out home that his grandfather lived in. He writes that "the first – and most desirable – homes were simply small rooms dug into the lee side of a low rolling hill. The walls were built up with sod blocks to a height of seven or eight feet."¹³⁷ Croley concludes that the advantages of the dug-out "are still available to today's pioneers, homesteaders and freedom folk who want to get away from big city congestion and find a quiet, simple life close to the land."¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Shuttleworth, "How to Make It Your Way," 7.

¹³⁶ Other articles made this eminently clear. In the May 1971 MEN an article on nomadism told the story of three young counter-culturalists who bought a tipi from the *Whole Earth Catalog*. According to the article "six months of continuous living in that tent later, those three folks were – to put it mildly – more than somewhat discouraged. . . . the whole miserable structure was proving less than optimum for rains, snows, and zero degree weather of Oregon's costal winter." These young counter-culturalists decided to reevaluate their living situation, and in the vein of Stewart Brand, began tinkering with tipi designs. See Nomadics, "Nomadics: The Best Dang Tipi in the World!," *ibid.*, May 1971, 44-45..

¹³⁷ Victor Croley, "The Frontier Dugout," *Mother Earth News*, September 1970, 38.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

The assertion that tipis were not substantial dwellings, along with advocacy of pioneer dugout homes in a special issue is significant for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that much of the Back-to-the-Land movement was not exhibiting post-modern play. They were not stepping out into a mythical playground with the expectation that it was a short-term experiment. Instead they sought out regionally relevant articles in MEN that taught readers how to build geodesic domes, how to correctly insulate homes, and how to choose land for homesteading. They were therefore seeking permanence and not play. Secondly, the admission that tipis were not long-term dwellings reveals an understanding of Plains Indian culture and the nomadic nature of tipi use. Yet it also shows the way in which back-to-the-landers were constructing an identity that incorporated Native American folkways and white pioneer heritage. This seemingly contradictory identity was rooted in the regional histories that back-to-the-landers incorporated when they began homesteading.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the number of advertisements for settling in the South. It is important to note, however, that even the white pioneering tradition in the South was susceptible to the historical misunderstandings Philip Deloria sees occurring with Native Americans. In the seventh issue of MEN Mrs. Robert Baumann from Rochester, Michigan wrote in the correspondence section "Did you know the Arkansas Ozarks are "backward", "disadvantaged" and "poor"? Just the wonderful kind of country the original settlers found: Clean air; forests; clear, pure springs (hot and cold); streams; fish and game."¹³⁹ The sarcasm found in this excerpt hints at the pre-modern sensibilities of the MEN readership. In essence Mrs. Baumann questioned the way in which modern society defines backward, disadvantaged, and poor. Her claim is that the Ozarks are rich in environmental opportunities for homesteaders. Her assertion that the Arkansas landscape is as pristine as when the original settlers found it,

¹³⁹ Mrs. Robert Bauman, "Dear Mother,," *Mother Earth News*, January 1971, 3.

disregards both Native American and native Southern history. It also reflects the positive and negative ways in which the South was stereotyped in the 1970s. From her perspective the Ozarks represented the last vestiges of pre-modern authenticity.

Mrs. Baumann's claims, however, were contested by a vocal minority of Southerners who lived in Appalachia and wrote in the MEN's correspondence section. In the sixth issue a group of students from Huntington, West Virginia wrote to MEN stating "We are a group of native Appalachian young people....We are content printers and plan a series of pamphlets on Appalachian culture, history, economic exploitation, political colonization and the plight of the people."¹⁴⁰ References to economic exploitation, political colonization, and the plight of the people by a group of "native" Appalachians hint at the complexity of Appalachian identity in the 1970s especially since it corresponded to the rise of the Red Power movement. These students felt the necessity of preserving and distributing pamphlets on their native culture in order to combat economic and political exploitation. Their claim to indigeneity and the plight of the people hint at the ways in which native Southerners were tied to the land. This is the process that Jack Temple Kirby explores in the *Countercultural South*.¹⁴¹ These students were writing to the preeminent countercultural magazine in an effort to alleviate the dominant culture's political hegemony.

The interest in Appalachian studies expressed itself in a number of different ways. Student organizations such as the ones above distributed pamphlets on Appalachian culture and history. Other organizations such as Antioch University began programs to study Appalachian socio-economic problems. In an advertisement in the July 1971 edition of MEN Robert Snyder, directory of Appalachia affairs for Antioch College wrote "Every truth has its instrument.

¹⁴⁰ Appalachian Mountain Press, "More Contact," *Mother Earth News*, November 1970, 104.

¹⁴¹ See Kirby, *The Countercultural South*.

Appalachian studies are now underway in schools both inside and outside the mountains to serve...the truth of Appalachia. Our endeavor is unique in that the program will be built from Appalachian staff and students for the purpose of coming to grips with Appalachian problems.”¹⁴² In essence the truth of the Appalachian experience can serve as an instrument for solving larger issues. These problems included economic exploitation but also environmental and cultural degradation. The assertion that truth is based on pragmatic instrumentalism is important to note as it is a reoccurring theme both in the *Whole Earth Catalog* as well as *Mother Earth News*. Snyder elaborates when he states “We also feel that by studying Appalachia, we can use it as a prism to see many of the problems of America and the World...The Center and its backers have the opportunity to change the history of an Appalachian people struggling against a society that has branded them as "yesterday's people.”¹⁴³ Yet it was their label as “yesterday’s people” that interested the readers of MEN because it made their lifestyle more authentic in a back-to-the-land context. Thus being tied to the land was both a blessing and a curse. It allowed native Appalachians a semblance of cultural power within the Back-to-the-Land movement, while at the same time limiting their choices.

Mother Earth News displays the diversity of experience within the Back-to-the-Land movement. Christian homesteaders, eco-pragmatists, and Appalachian students all interacted in the magazine’s correspondence section and critique Gould’s purists vision of modern homesteading as the legacy of Helen and Scott Nearing. Furthermore, the sense that a move back to the land was a permanent decision that incorporated disembodied native symbolism undermines Deloria’s use of post-modern analysis. So far discussion of the Back-to-the-Land movement has remained national in scope. In order to understand a specific region’s experience,

¹⁴² Robert Snyder, "More Contact," *Mother Earth News*, July 1971, 109.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

as well as the ways back-to-the-landers constructed regional identities, one must turn to regionally specific handbooks. An exploration of the *Foxfire* books allows for more specific insights into the nature of white and Native interaction in southern Appalachia as well as the way in which oral histories served back-to-the-lander's goals of creating authentic environments of memory.

CHAPTER 3

FOXFIRE AND SOUTHERN MILIEUX DE MÉMOIRE

Contemporary scholarship on 1960s and 1970s counterculture, specifically on the back-to-the-land movement, has focused on the *Whole Earth Catalog* and *Mother Earth News* and has altogether ignored the *Foxfire* series. Scholars have mistakenly placed too much emphasis on the communal aspects of the back-to-the-land movement advocated in the WEC and MEN, and have ignored those couples and lonely countercultural pioneers who struck out alone to homestead and commune with nature all across the United States.¹⁴⁴ It was these couples who sought out regionally specific handbooks, such as the *Foxfire* series, in their effort to create an environmentally self-sufficient lifestyle. Yet as one leading article has stated “using popular rural representations and innate Arcadian ideals, the movement reinvented the idealistic self-sufficient Jeffersonian yeoman farmer and ‘pioneer’ figure as a collective endeavor.”¹⁴⁵ Such an assertion falls apart in light of evidence of non-collective attempts to recreate the Jeffersonian ideal.¹⁴⁶ Thus the back-to-the-land movement was not a reinvention; it was a nostalgic recreation fueled by books such as the *Foxfire* series whose oral histories connected contemporary homesteaders

¹⁴⁴ The majority of early scholarship, between the 1980s and 2000, on the Back-to-the-Land movement was almost entirely focused on the utopian communal movement and sought to trace its origins in American history. These early works will be explored further in this chapter.

¹⁴⁵ Edgington, "'Be Receptive to the Good Earth': Health, Nature, and Labor in Countercultural Back-to-the-Land Settlements," 287.

¹⁴⁶ Jeffery Jacob, a Canadian sociologist, conducted a series of mail-in surveys across the United States and Canada in the early 1990s which has demonstrated that the movement was much more widespread across the country and was not concentrated on the West and East coast of the United States. His study will be explored later in this chapter.

with a vanishing pioneering culture in rural Appalachia. Studies have been similarly myopic to the regional subtleties within the movement. While East and West Coast communes have been explored in depth, there has been little to no research done on Southern Back-to-the-Land movements despite the wealth of sociological evidence that points to a Southern movement.¹⁴⁷

Sociologist Jeffery Jacob conducted a series of mail-in surveys in 1983 and 1992 through a number of Back-to-the-Land newsletters. His findings demonstrate the extent of the Southern movement. A 58% response rate created an initial sample size of 698, which was reduced to 565 that Jacobs defined as, at the very least, small-holding homesteaders. It was a national survey broken down by state and percentage: California, 17 percent; Texas, 15 percent; Missouri, 13 percent; Minnesota, 17 percent; Maine, 22 percent; and Georgia with 16 percent.¹⁴⁸ These surveys provide powerful evidence for an analysis of the Southern homesteading experience since 31 percent of respondents lived in the South. Jacobs' operational definition of "back-to-the-landers" is important to note, as it has been a site of contention in the historiography. Jacob decided to ground his "definition in intent or interest."¹⁴⁹ Thus "the new pioneers, then, are individuals and families interested in self-reliant living on their own land. More specifically, this interest in self-reliance means trying, in the best yeoman tradition, to produce on one's own property what one consumes, even if the intent falls short of the ideal."¹⁵⁰ What is important here

¹⁴⁷ There is one exception that in some ways proves the rule that the South was not on academic radars in the 1990s. In his discussion of "Sixties-Era Communes" Timothy Miller states "The South probably had fewer communes than any other part of the country, but it was the home of the Farm, the largest 1960s-era commune and perhaps the most influential of them all...Strict vegans, they were pioneers in the natural foods movement...They were forthcoming about the psychedelic dimension of their spirituality...That philosophy did not carry much weight with the local authorities, and...Stephan and three others were arrested for growing marijuana." Miller spends little time on "the most influential" commune in the south and places it in juxtaposition to southern culture. The Farm was founded by Stephen Gaskin who moved out of the San Francisco Bay area to found his community, a narrative of West-to-South cultural migration that leads Miller away from studying endemic South back-to-the-land movements. Timothy Miller, "The Sixties-Era Communes," in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s & 1970s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (London: Routledge, 2002), 336-337.

¹⁴⁸ Jacob, *New Pioneers: The Back-to-the-Land Movement and the Search for a Sustainable Future*, 32.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 28.

is that this is not a constrictive definition. Since the movement was inherently idealistic fewer families achieved perfect self-reliance. Jacob reigns in the definition by using a question on the survey to weed out those who do not own property on which it is possible to raise some small animals.¹⁵¹ What must be taken away from Jacob's study is the extent of the movement in the South, and the resulting market for Southern environmental knowledge that can explain the success of the *Foxfire* books.

The *Foxfire* series was a site of Southern memory, or *lieux de mémoire*, that pointed the way to a distinctive Southern homesteading movement that was less collective, though influenced by the same countercultural impulses as the WEC and MEN. The counterculture of the 1960s informed Elliot Wigginton's college experiences and his loose ideology permeates the *Foxfire* books. Yet the books do not simply reflect his political or environmental ideology. Americans, from the North and South, bought the *Foxfire* books as an act of Southern cultural preservation and commemoration in an effort to preserve authentic environments of memory, or *millieux de mémoire* thought to be disappearing in the 1970s. Oral histories, by their very nature, were the vehicles that substantiated authentic Southern experience. Furthermore Southern back-to-the-landers used these oral histories to establish real environments of memory that were rooted in the native knowledge of Appalachia. Yet the oral histories on the vanishing practices express the complexity of native Southern identity and history. Interviews on Appalachian foodways and folkways sheds light on a fusion of native Appalachian and Indian cultures. The interview with Aunt Arie contains an in-depth discussion of corn pone, a dish that has Native American and White origins. Likewise, interviews with Catawba Indian potters such as Nola Campbell, who considered herself White, Catawba, and Mormon, shows the difficulties in detaching Indianness from whiteness in Southern Appalachia. Indeed, the name Foxfire itself is

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 32.

derived from the faerie lights of the Catawba's "little people." It is thus significant that the Foxfire students chose it as their title because it connected their search for authentic local memories with the combination of Scotch-Irish and Catawba folk stories.

Contemporary historiography has been mute on this topic and instead focuses on the post-modern play of back-to-the-land communards in Plains Indian tipis. Deloria's critiques rest on his own work with the Plains Indian tribes, whose history of cultural defiance was adopted by counter-culturalists such as the Shuttleworths. Yet the Southern Catawba oral histories, and the resulting cultural mixing evident in the *Foxfire* books tells a different story; a story that is in no way post-modern because it was linked to the collective memory of southern Appalachia as well as its environmental history. In order to understand the development of the *Foxfire* books as Southern *lieux de mémoire*, however, it will first be important to delve into Elliott Wigginton's biography because it holds to the key to understanding the series' historical context in the late 1960s.

The *Foxfire* magazine and books were the brainchild of Elliot Wigginton. Born in 1942 in West Virginia, Wigginton lived for a number of years in Georgia before going to college at Cornell. He graduated with a degree in English in 1966 and decided to teach high school at the Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School in north Georgia. In his 1985 autobiography *Sometimes a Shining Moment* Wigginton described his reasoning, stating "I went to Rabun Gap to teach because I wanted to live in Rabun Gap. That's all...I wanted to live in that part of the country and teaching was a legitimate way to get there and support myself."¹⁵² His deeper motives for wanting to live in the Gap are somewhat vague as his autobiography was meant to help teachers understand his later experiments in experiential learning. His political, cultural and religious beliefs are similarly embedded in the text. It is, however, an introspective work filled with primary source

¹⁵² Wigginton, *Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience*, 9.

letters and journal entries transcribed verbatim which allow a glimpse into the mind of a liberal, environmentally conscious, man who was deeply distressed by the war in Vietnam and the politics of the late 1960s. It is these core characteristics that would guide the *Foxfire* series and explain much of its success.

While still attending Cornell, Wigginton's academic advisor told him, in March of 1966, that he should enlist in the military since he would probably be drafted in the next six weeks. Wigginton wrote in his journal, "Vietnam hangs over everyone's head like an ax. It's changing people's lives to an unbelievable extent. People are planning (or not planning) whole careers—whole futures—around it. I rebel at the idea of enlisting."¹⁵³ Viewed in this light his decision to move to the Gap can be seen as a calculated move to avoid the draft. He wrote another entry in May of 1966, where he stated, "At this point in time, I am relatively safe from the draft with a 1-Y and have mixed feelings about the whole thing, but am much more glad than not. Last night, Rabun Gap called and definitely offered me a job....My father doesn't want me to—it's less money, less prestige, less chance for real success and advancement; but I'm still young. I can afford to take a flyer."¹⁵⁴ As a school teacher and a college student Wigginton was eligible for draft only in the case of national emergency under the 1-Y classification. In his autobiography this letter is followed with the frank statement that he moved to the mountains simply for the geography and that teaching was a "legitimate" way to get there. This pragmatic approach stems from his disaffection towards writing. He had initially joined the Cornell English department hoping to become a writer. With the war in Vietnam, however, and his lack of publishing success he felt it prudent to move to the mountains. This pragmatism did not dampen Wigginton's

¹⁵³Ibid., 5.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., 5-6.

political and racial views, which he carried with him to the Rabun-Gap school, a semi-private Presbyterian school.

Wigginton's liberalism would later get him into trouble at the school. During his first semester he chaired a panel discussion on current events where he challenged students' beliefs. In a December 11th, 1966 letter he wrote, "I want them to think, to examine themselves and their beliefs and their attitudes and change those they cannot defend. I have told them that I think there should be a Negro President in 1968, that this school should be half Negro, that it is impossible for teenagers to be Christians, that parents should teach their kids how to drink."¹⁵⁵ He goes on to argue that he did not necessarily believe these statements, but that evidently one of the students did not listen. It became known in the community that Wigginton was something of a radical. Undeniably his views were radical for the area and the assertion that teenagers could not be Christians was a bold statement coming from teacher in a Christian school.¹⁵⁶ His retention at the school can only be explained by the success of the *Foxfire* series that brought in governmental and academic funding.¹⁵⁷

At times Wigginton's exact political ideology was hard to pin down. In his autobiography the letters he presents show a man deeply unsettled by current events and profoundly confused in 1968. In an effort to get away from his job and responsibilities Wigginton applied to, and was accepted at, the Johns Hopkins graduate program in English. In his 1985 autobiography Wigginton states, "At that point in my life, I knew I needed nothing so much as some distance—distance between myself and my students and Rabun County; distance that perhaps would give

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 57.

¹⁵⁶ The Rabun Gap school rigorously enforced morality with its dormitory students. In his autobiography Wigginton provides a copy of a week's worth of write ups which include such entries as being "untruthful" "blouse outside of window" "indecent dress on campus" "too amorous" and "complete inattention during vespers" along with "reading magazine during sermon" see *ibid.*, 22-23.

¹⁵⁷ The *Foxfire* project received 1,500 dollars in funding early on from NEH, which allowed Wigginton to continue publishing in spite of running a deficit. It is also possible, though Wigginton does not state this, that the Presbyterian tradition of dialectic and debate helped to shield him from the brunt of such attacks

me some perspective on all that was happening; distance that would allow me to sample some other career possibilities.”¹⁵⁸ Note the similarities with Gurney Norman’s biography. Both he and Wigginton set out from, and returned to, the South for similar reasons. Wigginton was weary of the program, tired of teaching and felt that he was going to get caught in the South and the Foxfire project. This was a man who felt deeply for the children he was teaching and was exasperated by a culture that seemed to be disintegrating. In a letter in the spring of 1968 Wigginton noted “strange days are upon us all....Johnson has just eliminated draft deferments for graduate students and all teachers. More men leave for Vietnam this week....Hundreds and hundreds of civilians die by our hand. It is impossible to believe what anyone says anymore. Johnson is completely discredited.”¹⁵⁹ The tone of this letter is exasperation, depression, confusion, and exhaustion. Wigginton had left Cornell to teach in order to avoid the war. The end of draft deferments terrified him.

He was also terrified of cultural disintegration. In the same letter he ends with:

Hell. It’s all too confusing to figure out now....I just rebel when I see...twelve-year-old microboppers...who smoke, drink, and tell their parents where to hop off. I rebel when I see nineteen-year-old kids leveling a society in Vietnam. I rebel when I see thousands of teachers walk away from their jobs in Florida. And I rebel when I see people all around me giving up, and yet I want to do the same, not knowing anymore the difference between what is good and what is bad...what is clean and what is foul. Strange days, indeed. At least for me.¹⁶⁰

This glimpse into Wigginton’s thoughts in 1968 shows a man who is both averse towards war, but also critical of the liberal counterculture movement. In this way he was culturally conservative. Yet there is also an interesting disconnect between his thoughts and his actions. In this letter he critiques teachers who walk away from their jobs in Florida. This is, however, exactly what he was contemplating when he decided to leave the Rabun-Gap school and pursue

¹⁵⁸ Wigginton, *Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience*, 102.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

his writing career at Johns Hopkins. Wigginton's actions must be contextualized in the turbulent period surround 1968, a year of profound political and cultural disruption.

Wigginton's environmental sensibilities are equally complex. During the summer of 1964 Wigginton drove through the Gap and penned the following entry in July that clearly sets out the historic beauty of the area: "I spent the afternoon with Richard Norton looking for arrowheads. We found two or three good ones...and I again got the old desire for a huge museum devoted to Georgia and North Carolina Indian culture...Idle dreams probably never destined to bear fruit."¹⁶¹ This emphasis on Native American memory and heritage is significant as it can be seen throughout the *Foxfire* books. The arrowheads that Wigginton and Norton find are physical sites of Southern memory that have been lost in the Southern landscape. Indeed, his experiences with Norton reveal the permeability of native identities in the Rabun-gap in the late 1960s. In fact, while still in its infancy as a small school magazine, the series did a full feature on the Cherokees. In an introductory letter for the magazine, published in 1967, Wigginton wrote:

It all started with a story about some Indians from one of the families we interviewed...I suddenly realized that this section of the country was once the center of one of the finest Indian tribes in America...A census report of 1835 shows that more than half of all Cherokees lived in Georgia at that time...Rabun County—A county itself created from lands acquired from the Cherokees in the treaty of 1812. Many inhabitants here lay claim to Cherokee blood in their ancestry. It's all a story that needs to be told.¹⁶²

These types of stories, and the oral histories preserved in the *Foxfire* books, became the how-to books for Southern back-to-the-landers who craved knowledge of indigenous practices tailored to the Georgian ecology. Though Philip Deloria has argued that such parroting and second-hand information is part of a post-modern search for meaning, Wigginton's diaries express sincere desire to preserve Appalachian culture that included both White and Indian

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁶² Ibid., 92.

heritages. Indeed, Deloria's strict distinction between Whites "playing" Indian and authentic Indians is misleading. The Rabun-Gap residents who lived in the mountains had Native American blood, drew from Native American culture, and created a new synthetic culture; synthetic not with the negative connotations of the word, but from its pure meaning as an amalgamation of two cultures.

Wigginton sought to preserve these remnants, both for pragmatic and idealistic reasons. Wigginton's later recollections of Richard Norton explain the environmental degradation of the Gap caused by governmental ignorance. According to Wigginton's memory, Norton loosely stated:

When the Government bought up land in here, they wouldn't listen to the old folks. Had to see for themselves....They ringed all the hickory trees to kill 'em, then made this place a game reserve. But a lot of the game ate hickory nuts and stuff, don't you see? And then those dead trees got the worms started—'bout killed these woods. And the old folks used to burn the woods over. Now we've got mosquitoes, worms, and kinds a' insects; half of 'em I never seen before. Never used to have them.¹⁶³

The environment, both natural and cultural, that surrounded Wigginton plays an integral role in the development of the *Foxfire* series. His choice of letters shows both an ecological and historical conservatism that motivated him to begin leading his students outside of the classroom and into the countryside to document Appalachian folkways.

Indeed, this was one of the explicitly stated goals of *Foxfire*. In October of 1966 Wigginton and his students drew up a list of categories for the magazine. Goal four was to "feature articles from the surrounding community [The genesis of this idea came out of discussions in class that always began, "Yeah, but who's going to *buy* it? My folks aren't going to shell out money for a *poetry* magazine. Neither are my friends]." ¹⁶⁴ Goal five was to document

¹⁶³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 47-48.

these articles with photographs. This early pragmatism, however, was soon bolstered by an idealistic sense of purpose. Writing in 1985, recalling his second year on Foxfire, Wigginton writes:

But it made sense for a number of other reasons....Most of my community students were almost as ignorant about the past customs of the region as my dormitory students were. I wasn't in much better shape...but at least I knew that at one time their grandparents had survived the incredible task of nearly total self-sufficiency and had thus exhibited a strength, ingenuity, and tenacity of will that we could only be well served understanding in this dawning age of almost complete dependence on...supermarkets and bowling alleys and fast-food.¹⁶⁵

Here we see the heart of Wigginton's beliefs. In many ways he mirrored contemporary Back-to-the-Land ideology and his reference to self-sufficiency and the evils of fast-food dependency would fit well in an article in *Mother Earth News*.

Wigginton even spent the summer of 1967 building his own home in the hills near the school. His move out of the teacher's dormitories and into the countryside was partly the result of his exasperation at the duties of the dormitory police. He wanted more time to write and plan out lessons. Yet there were other reasons behind this move. He made a deal with Mrs. Hambridge that if he built his own cabin he could live in it rent-free. In his autobiography he writes fondly of this self-sufficient move and states "I threw myself into physical work with the relief of a wanderer at an oasis. I traded in the Volkswagen van for a jeep and spent hours loading it with rocks from a nearby creek...for the rock walls I built. I....sawed away into the nights on cupboards, cabinets, closets and crude furniture....I was the happiest I had been in months."¹⁶⁶ What is important to note here is that this narrative mirrors modern homesteading stories. Finding oneself hassled by the busy modern world, one retreats to an "oasis," has a

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 74.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 80-81.

conversion experience, and cobbles together a makeshift home with local materials. This model follows both Jeffery Jacob's and Rebecca Gould's analysis. For all intents and purposes Elliot Wigginton was a "weekending" modern homesteader who sought self-sufficiency. He passed this sense of communion with nature on to his students and the *Foxfire* books.

The books that resulted from the *Foxfire* magazine recorded Appalachian folk and foodways. They were meant not only to generate revenue and provide experiential learning for students, but also to act as both preservers and transmitters of an endangered culture. For the readers who purchased the books they represented a site of memory in an age when real environments of memory were disappearing. The knowledge in, and even the title of, the *Foxfire* books were sites in which "a sense of historical continuity persists," to use Pierre Nora's phrasing. By purchasing, reading, and preserving the stories bound in those volumes Southern homesteaders could connect with, and resurrect, an idyllic past that was being destroyed by modern industry and corrupt politicians. Elliot Wigginton's autobiography and the works of sociologists have already established the type of thinking behind this movement. An exploration of the *Foxfire* books, however, will demonstrate the uniquely Southern character of this memory and how it spoke to Southern homesteaders.

Elliot Wigginton returned to the Gap in 1969 from his brief graduate program at Hopkins to find the *Foxfire* magazine still running with a solid and growing subscription base. Wigginton had kept in touch with his students who were editing the magazines. Now, in 1969, the magazine was about to reach a watershed moment. Indeed, there was so much interest in the magazine that Wigginton and his students started to think about publishing small handbooks devoted to log-cabin building and Appalachian foodways.¹⁶⁷ Wigginton had sent out a letter to Mike Kinney at Anchor Books proposing the idea and the response letter is preserved in Wigginton's

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 122.

autobiography. On December 19, 1969, Mike wrote, “You mentioned that you are in the process of publishing a handbook on survival and that another is in the works....I’d sure like a crack at it for Anchor books. From what you had to say about the book, and knowing the kind of material that Foxfire has been producing...I’m convinced...that this could be one helluva big-selling book.”¹⁶⁸ What Wigginton had not been able to publish on his own, he was now able to publish as a teacher.

Mike’s letters also discussed the logistical and ideological aspects of publishing the books. In the December 19th letter Mike wrote, “Seems like more than half of my friends are already split for the woods and as Nixon tightens his grip, more and more are leaving everyday. The growing popularity of the Whole Earth Catalog, the whole environmentalist thing, is very encouraging.... We might even be able to make a pile of money for you.”¹⁶⁹ From the very beginning, then, the *Foxfire* books were created as handbooks for the back-to-the-landers. Mike freely admits that many of his friends are splitting “for the woods” and that the popularity of publications such as the *Whole Earth Catalog* could prove lucrative. Mike’s January 5, 1970 letter tempers this purely monetary impulse and asks Wigginton “In putting together a book on survival in the woods, do you intend to gather articles like this one on the log cabin...or will you have other sources as well? It strikes me that, given the flavor of Foxfire from the beginning, you could make a richer book if you...gave it some of the same folklorish and literary flavor that the magazine itself has.”¹⁷⁰ Mike sought to expand the potential readership of *Foxfire* to include those who would be interested not only in the logistics of building a log cabin from scratch, but who also wanted to read and relive the experience of “authentic” Appalachians. This proved to be the correct avenue to pursue and the *Foxfire* books did make a “pile of money.”

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 123.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

It is important to note that even the term “Foxfire” itself was caught up in a sense of historical memory. The students had decided early in 1966 to use the name of a glowing fungus common to that area of Appalachia. Yet the name itself carried with it a sense of mnemonic continuity. In other words, it symbolically connected the past and the present as a site of memory. In *Foxfire 9* Clyde Hollified, a local Rabun County resident, gave his take on the meaning of the glowing fungus. In an interesting synthesis of Native American and Scotch-Irish myth he said:

I know some Indian people that talk about the little people. This one Indian fellow I know talks about four different kinds [of little people]. [All of them] were white. Some little people lived on top of the mountains....Fairy fire or foxfire may be [the little people’s] fire....Their fire is cold and blue; ours is hot and red....I think the literal translation of the Cherokees’ term was something like cold fire....To me, it has that elfin quality, that cool, blue-green lunar sort of elfin color....Foxfire is a real curious thing, which to me hints to the elfin world, but if foxfire is an elfin thing and if you mess with it, you’re very apt to come to the attention of the little people.¹⁷¹

Thus even foxfire was a cultural and spiritual amalgamation that had mnemonic meaning for local residents. It is a physical fungus that is imbued not only with color but also complex historical memory. It sat in a liminal area between Native American spiritual customs and Appalachian folk traditions. It is this type of connection that homesteaders sought to capture, emulate, and experience. They felt that they could recreate society by moving out of urban areas and go back to the land. Foxfire was their literal and metaphorical beacon, which could show the way back to an idealized agrarian past.

Elliot Wigginton understood this process and was an active advocate of the Back-to-the-Land movement. He employed his students in an effort to preserve this culture and dedicated the first *Foxfire* book “to the people of these mountains in the hope that, through it, some portion of

¹⁷¹ *Foxfire 9: General Stories, the Jud Nelson Wagon, a Praying Rock, a Catawban Indian Potter, Haint Tales, Quilting, Home Cures, the Log Cabin Revisited*, 7.

their wisdom, ingenuity, and individuality will remain long after them to touch us all.”¹⁷²

Wisdom, ingenuity, and individuality were all traits lacking in modern society, according to Wigginton. This is a statement that would have resonated with countercultural Back-to-the-Land readers both in the South and across the country. In the introduction to the first book Wigginton emphatically states his purpose and his methodology. He writes “if this information is to be saved at all, for whatever reason, it must be saved now; and the logical researchers are the grandchildren, not university researchers from the outside.”¹⁷³ He argues that this process is important for both the culture being preserved and the students researching their families. In Wigginton’s eyes it was a way to bridge the gap between the past and the present that could lead to socio-political and environmental political change. In writing about the students, he says, “Suddenly they discover their families—previously people to be ignored in the face of the seventies—as pre-television, pre-automobile, pre-flight individuals who endured and survived the incredible task of total self-sufficiency....They have something to tell us about self-reliance, human interdependence, and the human spirit that we would do well to listen to.”¹⁷⁴ Self-sufficient pre-industrial folkways, according to Wigginton, point the way towards solving the issues of modern culture. In the process of creating the *Foxfire* books Wigginton and his students succeeded in their task and created a *lieux de mémoire* that could fit comfortably on the bookshelves of aspiring homesteaders, who in turn used them to create *milieux de mémoire*.

The sheer number and variety of interviews conducted by *Foxfire* make a complete discussion of its scope unwieldy. Articles on log cabins, chimneys, moonshine stills, and wagon building all present very technical discussions that certainly point to the material culture of rural

¹⁷² *The Foxfire Book: Hog Dressing, Log Cabin Building, Mountain Crafts and Foods, Planting by the Signs, Snake Lore, Hunting Tales, Faith Healing, Moonshining, and Other Affairs of Plain Living* ed. Eliot Wigginton (New York: Doubleday, 1972), Dedication.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Appalachia. Such articles, however, do not elaborate on the thoughts and sentiments of interviewees towards nature, a subject that struck chords with readers. Two particular types of oral histories, however, get at the heart of the *Foxfire* series. It has been demonstrated in the *Whole Earth Catalog* that advertisements and stories on foodways preserve one of the most fundamental ways in which humans interact with the natural world, and there is a plethora of food related stories in the *Foxfire* books. The other type of oral history relates to the unique ethnic composition of the Rabun Gap that blended Native identities and connected them to the Georgian environment.

Appalachian foodways took center stage in one of the most famous interviews in the series. Aunt Arie met Wiggonton's students with a butcher's knife in her hand and a full three-quarters of the interview was spent helping her pull the eyes from a whole hog's head. For many of the students this was a disconcerting experience which shook their modern sensibilities towards food. After successfully taking the eyes out with a dull knife Aunt Aire sat down with her interviewers to discuss her self-reliant lifestyle. Much of her discussion revolves around food and food preparation. The interview was painstakingly transcribed in dialect in order to give it an aura of authenticity. After a discussion on the making of baskets and mats from local materials, Arie says:

Used t'raise corn pones too. You ever eat corn pones were raised? It's made out'a corn meal...I love it better'n a cat loves sweet milk, I shore do....I had a big oven a'purpose 'tbak'em in. Have t'cook'em on th'fireplace. An' Lester Mann, he found I could do that, an'they's' good; why he a-a-a-always, when started t-th' mountains, he always come an' I raised him a corn pone....I'll tell'y', be a neighbor and you'll have neighbors....You children remember that. Th'more you do for people, th' more they'll do for you.¹⁷⁵

This excerpt is important for a number of reasons. Corn Pone is a dish originating in the South and is the product of the confluence of European and Native American foodways that has

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 29-30.

a rich history dating back to at least the early colonial period. The fact that Aunt Arie cooked this dish on a wood burning stove is another important aspect. The introduction to the interview states that she very rarely used electricity and preferred a pre-industrial, non-electric wood stove. Many back-to-the-landers sought to live “off-the-grid” both metaphorically and physically. The connection between wood burning stoves, foodways, and the pursuit of “plain living” would have all resonated with readers.

Another aspect of the first Aunt Arie interview spoke to Southern homesteaders. When asked why she did not move into town after her husband died, Arie states, “We made a good life here, we put in lots’a’ time. Many an’ many a night I’ve been workin’ when two o’clock come in th’ mornin’—cardin’ n’ spinnin’ n’ sewin’. They want me t’ sell an’ move away from here, but I won’t do it. It’s just home—‘at’s all. I spent my happiest days here.”¹⁷⁶ To modern homesteaders, the flight back to the land would have been a continuation of the Appalachian tradition and a recreation of authentic environments of memory. Indeed, the *Foxfire* series would later capitalize on the Aunt Arie interviews by publishing a book of her interviews coupled with her recipes.

An entire section of the Aunt Arie book is entitled “I’d a heap rather cook as t’ eat”, which is filled with her reminiscences on woodstove cooking. According to the book, a typical Sunday menu at Arie’s would include “souse and sausage; chicken and dumplings; leather crèches; hominy; Cabbage cooked in a frying pan in broth from making souse; potatoes cooked in a Dutch oven; chow chow; bread; egg custards; [and] peach cobbler” served right after church.¹⁷⁷ The only thing missing from such a prodigious feast was smoked pork. Arie confesses in her interview that “I’m silly about hog meat. Whenever they killed th’ hogs, they fixed’em up

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 30.

¹⁷⁷ Wigginton, *Aunt Arie: A Foxfire Portrait*, 110.

and cut'em up, and salted'em th' first day... In th' spring, ill just tell th' truth, we never did smoke meat much, I don't want no ol' smoked meat."¹⁷⁸ It is plain from this confession that she thought it was odd that she did not like smoked pork. Despite her reticence for smoked meat, *Foxfire* gave specific technical instructions on not only how to smoke meat, but also hunt wild game, and butcher pigs. Indeed, hunting was another corollary to foodways and was a fundamental way of interacting with the natural world. These were key pieces of information for Southern homesteaders who wished to live like the natives of Rabun County and helps to explain the popularity of the books.

One last type of oral history was used by back-to-the-landers and can serve to critique Deloria's analysis of Indian play. A number of the oral histories contained in the *Foxfire* books shed light on the nature of indigeneity in the South. It has been shown that the title "foxfire" was connected to Catawba and Scotch-Irish folk traditions. Yet there were also interviews with actual Indians whose experiences further establish the complexity of countercultural Indian play.

Nola Campbell was interviewed in the mid-1980s and her oral history appears in *Foxfire* 9. She was the grandmother of two *Foxfire* students who came from Rock Hill, South Carolina near the Catawba Indian reservation. Nola Campbell was born in 1918 on the reservation to an Indian father and a White mother. This was a common occurrence for the Catawba, whose tribal viability rested in their ability to retain tribal identity while marrying outside of the tribe. The Catawba's ability to merge with Whites while retaining their tribal identity has been a long standing theme in their history that has been explored in James Hart Merrell's *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal*.¹⁷⁹ While Merrell's micro-history does not extend past the 1840s, his account lays the groundwork

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ See James Hart Merrell, *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

for understanding Nola Campbell's world. More specifically, he documents the ways Catawba functioned within colonial society by becoming landholders who rented out their tribal lands and traded with Whites. These inter-ethnic interactions created complex ethnic identities that Nola exhibits. Indeed, much of personal Nola's narrative, before she explains about her pottery, begins after the era of Indian removal.

In describing her mother she states "She was full white. I took after my mothers side of the people. I'd rather be darker than what I am."¹⁸⁰ Here we begin to see the complex way Nola constructs her identity. While there was no racial blood quantum for the tribe Nola still wished that she was darker because it would link her to the tribe. Furthermore she identified more with her father's people than her mother's. Therefore, she joined the Church of Latter-Day Saints when she was eight, because it was her father's church. She grew up on the reservation and contributed to the family's welfare through helping her father in the cotton fields. In her late teens she married a man named Raymond who was a Catawba farmer in the area. In the later 1940s and early 1950s he served as the chief of the tribe but had to step down when he became ill.

Nola Campbell was fiercely proud of her Indian heritage. Later in the interview she states "I personally don't hold nothin' against the white people 'cause my mother was white. I love the white people, and I love the Indians. I'll fight for the Indians quicker that I'll fight for the white people though. If somebody stands up there and cusses the ol' black Indians, then they're gonna have me to whip if I can fight 'em."¹⁸¹ Nola Campbell struggled with the racial duality of her identity. She wished that she was darker, but loved her mother's people. She was Mormon, yet would stand up to anyone who cusses the ol' black Indians.

¹⁸⁰ *Foxfire 9: General Stories, the Jud Nelson Wagon, a Praying Rock, a Catawban Indian Potter, Haint Tales, Quilting, Home Cures, the Log Cabin Revisited*, 241.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 250-251.

She even had to deal with non-Indian expectations. While working as a blanket inspector for a nearby company she was asked by her coworkers to do a rain dance. She stated “They knew that the Indians believed in rain dances, but I couldn’t help but laugh. Well, I got into some kind of little dance, and behold, it rained that day! I don’t know if what I done had anything to do with it....It was the Lord’s work.”¹⁸² Her willingness to play into white expectations allowed her to use her Indianness to her own advantage. Yet she kept the rain dance within her own Mormon perspective that disdained superstitions. After this story she went on to explore Catawba superstitions about the little people, which she did not believe in. She picked and choose from her own traditions. Mormonism did not allow her to believe in the folk superstitions, yet she was happy to retell them to the *Foxfire* interviewers because it linked her to her ethnic roots.

She was further connected to her Catawba identity and the Southern landscape through the pottery she made. In the interview she wished that she had started earlier in life. She explains that “I thought [as a child that the Catawba language] was silly....Looked like every word sounded the same to me....Same way it’s gonna be about this pottery making stuff....It’s gonna be gone, done away with after a while. They ain’t gonna be nothing the [modern] Indians ever learned to do [to preserve their heritage].”¹⁸³ For Campbell Catawba pottery and language were equally important for preserving her heritage. She bemoaned the fact that young Indians were not learning pottery the way she did not learn her native language. Yet the majority of her education came from the Mormon Church, since “it ain’t been too long ago that [Indian students] have been accepted in the high school up here.”¹⁸⁴

For the readers of the *Foxfire* books her pottery, and the authentic knowledge she was able to transmit, allowed them to connect with the physical landscape as well as its collective

¹⁸² Ibid., 248.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 252.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 251.

memory. Thus the interview ends with a technical discussion of how to find the correct clay and materials for Catawba pottery. Campbell states that “Getting good clay is the main thing...we get the clay in the [Catawba] River bottoms. We’ve been getting it in the same place for years and years. Two kinds of clay, blue clay and pipe clay, are mixed together. You’ve got to dig real deep to get the pipe clay and it comes from a different place.”¹⁸⁵ In essence, Campbell’s pottery literally rooted her heritage to the Catawba River bottoms. The process by which the clay was extracted was, she admits, not possible alone, and was therefore a community effort. This communal endeavor brought money to the tribe but also reinforced tribal bonds through work in the physical landscape. *Foxfire* readers would have been interested in both the communal process and the technical process of pottery making because it connected inhabitants of the Southern landscape with the land’s inter-connected ethnic history. Since the Catawba’s history reflects the merging of White and Indian ethnicities the reproduction of Catawba pottery would have been an affirmation of positive cultural interaction. Yet this positive cultural interaction was tempered by Nola Campbell’s oral history, which explains many of the injustices that the Catawba had faced.

Taken together oral histories on foodways and Native folkways mirrored the interest of back-to-the-landers in pre-modern self-sufficiency. Aunt Arie was the paragon of the frontier spirit, who preferred her wood burning stove to the convenience of modern electrical appliances. Native oral histories, such as Campbell’s, offered back-to-the-landers a glimpse into a pre-colonial world that they idealized because it was seen as inherently pre-modern. In essence, back-to-the-landers sought to create an identity that merged Aunt Arie’s pioneer heritage with Campbell’s Native experiences. The viability of this effort lay in the South’s unique ethnic atmosphere that was both contentious and intermingled. It also rested in the nature of the *Foxfire* experience, which used oral histories to preserve Appalachian memory and transmit it to a

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 255.

counterculture that sought to create authentic environments of Southern memory on their homesteads. The way this process occurred should not be overlooked by historians. Indeed, the existence and widespread readership of the *Foxfire* series should make scholars question the modern and the post-modern narrative paradigm. By couching the history of the 1970s within these terms historians have ignored the Southern experience. The oral histories in the *Foxfire* books represent the complexity of Southern ethnic and environmental experiences that do not represent disembodied play or collage and pastiche because they were rooted in Southern voices and the Southern landscape.

EPILOGUE

The history of the Back-to-the-Land movement is an account of contradictions. The three main handbooks for the movement contained a pluralistic array of information. Brand's *Whole Earth Catalog* spoke to eco-pragmatists about future of science, while at the same time advertising yurts and tipis. The Shuttleworths' *Mother Earth News* advertised for the *Whole Earth Catalog*, but also catered to techno-phobic communal movements such as the Christian Homesteading movement. The *Foxfire* series included articles on planting by the signs, as well as oral histories with devout Mormon Catawbas who spurned superstitions. Thus back-to-the-landers were given a plethora of pragmatic, but contradictory, choices in their efforts to move back to nature.

How to approach natural and unnatural lifestyles was a fundamental question that contemporary back-to-the-landers faced. They felt the urge to move back to a state of nature, but had difficulty defining what was a natural lifestyle. While books such as *Foxfire* acted as sites of Southern memory that contained authentic oral histories; they did not help back-to-the-landers answer these metaphysical questions. Indeed, the dissonance that the opening vignette of this work presents presages the difficulties young idealistic white homesteaders faced when they arrived in the country. They expected spiritual communion but instead found unbelievable chaos and discord. William Cronon has observed that nature "is a profoundly human construction...the way we describe and understand...[the] world is so entangled with our own values and assumptions that the two can never be fully separated. What we mean when we use the word

“nature” says as much about ourselves as about the things we label with that word.”¹⁸⁶ The back to nature movement foundered for a number of different reasons. How-to handbooks described methods of archaic construction requiring prodigious technical skill and physical prowess that many young white counter-culturalists did not possess. The realities of living a self-sufficient lifestyle and the sacrifices involved forced many homesteaders to return to cities in the 1980s and 1990s. There they formed community co-ops and helped lead the environmental and organic movements. Indeed, the Urban Homesteading movement occurring in cities all across the country today, shares much of the same rhetoric as early homesteaders.

¹⁸⁶William Cronon, ed. *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 25.

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