CHAPTER TWO

ECOTOPIA, ECODYSTOPIA, AND THE VISIONS OF DEEP ECOLOGY

The utopian societies imagined in Ernest Callenbach’s Ecotopia (1975) and Marge Piercy’s Woman on the Edge of Time (1976) resonate with the transformative environmentalist perspective called deep ecology, which identifies anthropocentric instrumental rationality as the driver of dominant, anti-ecological socioeconomic and cultural ways of thinking and being. Summarizing the philosophy of Arne Naess, the environmental philosopher who coined the term *deep ecology* in the early 1970s, David E. Cooper writes, “Among the policies advocated by Naess are radical reduction of the world’s population, abandonment of the goal of economic growth in the developed world, conservation of biotic diversity, living in small, simple, and self-reliant communities, and—less specifically—a commitment ‘to touch the Earth lightly’” (213). Callenbach’s and Piercy’s utopias display almost programmatic commitments to such ideals, advocating in the mid-1970s a way of conceiving and being in the world that is still widely influential among environmentalist scholars and activists. These novels think deep ecology with their mutually supportive ideas on population reduction, alternative modes of economic production, biodiversity (as a material and spiritual-psychological imperative), communal life ways, and reducing human impact on Earth.
It would be anachronistic to claim that Ecotopia and Woman on the Edge of Time grew out of their respective authors’ direct engagements with the deep ecology movement, because in 1975 and 1976 deep ecology was not yet a codified philosophical perspective. But finding a direction in the relationship between deep ecology and the utopian fictions discussed here is of lesser value, in my view, than recognizing the set of interests and concerns that gave rise both to deep ecology and these books at proximate moments in Western history. As deep ecologist Bill Devall notes, the 1960s and 1970s saw the development of environmentalism in response to “the effects of the explosive growth of human population; the effects of toxic wastes and pollution on air, water, and soil as well as on human health and well-being; and deforestation and human-caused extinction of other species” (“Deep Ecology” 51). But by the mid-1970s this environmentalism became an institution, with many of its already existing and new membership organizations (e.g., the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council) bureaucratically advocating for policy changes but not leading a charge for fundamental transformations in “our society’s basic culture” (Devall, “Deep Ecology” 52). The deep in deep ecology thus countered what many grassroots environmentalists deemed to be an ultimately shallow reformist environmental movement. Growing ecological degradation coupled with an ineffectual effort to address this degradation’s core ideological inputs motivated deep ecology to take a different route to meaningful environmental activism. Callenbach’s and Piercy’s books are literary utopian embraces of this deep environmentalist commitment. They question and repudiate socioeconomic institutions and cultural attitudes that continue to dominate modern life today, disagreeing with the ideologies that inform modern being and positing substitute social and cultural arrangements.

By virtue of the precision with which Ecotopia’s and Woman on the Edge of Time’s utopian communities align with deep ecology’s ideals, the books can serve a pedagogical function for the movement as well as a critical function for uncovering the movement’s limitations. Reflecting the neo-Malthusian worries that constituted 1960s and 1970s environmentalism, Ecotopia and Woman on the Edge of Time, like deep ecology, posit a declining human population as essential for ecological and social vitality. While the books, again like deep ecology, are also critical of economic growth as a major influence on ecological and social degradation, they do little to presage the virtual disappearance of reactionary, apocalyptic overpopulation myths against recent criticisms of capitalist production and other origins of this degradation. Both books also raise the specter of
violence as a necessary liberatory strategy, something not endemic to deep ecology but indeed a lurking possibility given especially the combination of deep ecology’s antithetical orientation and the Western political establishment’s efforts to reject the kinds of alternative socioeconomic and cultural possibilities that deep ecology sponsors.

This chapter thus ends with a look at John Brunner’s dystopian novels *Stand on Zanzibar* (1968) and *The Sheep Look Up* (1972), which can be interpreted to theorize prefiguratively a reconstruction of deep ecology by thinking more explicitly than the ecotopias do about demographic challenges and problems of radical environmentalist praxis. In addition to motivating deep ecology with their harrowing, dystopian images of ecological and social breakdown, Brunner’s books make it clear that (1) within our contemporary moment human overpopulation demands less of our attention than does the dominating mode of globalized economic production and (2) violent engagement in the interest of ecological or social liberation might appear as activists embrace a deep ecological ideological orientation, and thus the fundamentally nonviolent movement must contend with such a possibility. Again, it would be anachronistic to suppose that Brunner’s dystopias, which predate deep ecology and the utopias discussed here, responded directly either to deep ecology’s shortcomings or to Callenbach and Piercy. But reading *Ecotopia*, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, *Stand on Zanzibar*, and *The Sheep Look Up* as manifesting and/or challenging the visions of deep ecology is more an exercise in highlighting the value of mingling these works in a dialogical interplay ultimately to synthesize an ecological, activist perspective that each book alone—and deep ecology alone—cannot provide.

As Devall and Sessions note in their deep ecology manifesto, *Deep Ecology*, the movement finds its philosophical influences in many places: the Pythagorean, Platonic, Spinozan, and Huxlian “metaphysics of interrelatedness,” which places “humans in the wider scheme of things” (80); the literature of the British and American Romantic periods, as well as more recent literature that reflects comparable suspicions about modern, industrial life; ecological science and newer models of physics that reject the notion of scientific objectivity; Franciscan Christianity and Eastern spiritual traditions; feminism; and the knowledges and experiences of indigenous peoples (83–108). Deep ecology “recognizes the fundamental interdependence of all phenomena and the fact that, as individuals and societies, we are
all embedded in (and ultimately dependent on) the cyclical processes of nature” (Capra 6). To its understanding of human being deep ecology adds a spirituality not confined to top-down, institutional religiosity, but expanded to practice “the mode of consciousness in which the individual feels a sense of belonging, of connectedness, to the cosmos as a whole” (Capra 7). As a transformative environmental movement, deep ecology encourages significant ethical, epistemological, and ontological reorientations in a modern world where scientific quantification and manipulation, economic expansion, and human domination persist as central creeds.

Telling influences on deep ecology exist not only in canonical Romantic or spiritual writing, Huxlian philosophy, or indigenous epistemology, but also in utopian science fiction literature that attends to the illusory divide between humans and other-than-human nature. The societies imagined in these ecotopias avow both the intrinsic value of nonhuman nature—its value apart from its utility for humans—and the importance for humans to act within, not outside of, natural dictates. The value of ecotopian vision has not gone unnoticed by Devall and Sessions; they discuss the importance of ecotopian narrative in their book: “Creating ecotopian futures has practical value. It helps us articulate our goals and presents an ideal which may never be completely realized but which keeps us focused on the ideal. We can also compare our personal actions and collective public decisions on specific issues with this goal” (162). Though not scholars of utopia, Devall and Sessions echo academics who assert the importance of the utopian imagination in modern culture. They do for ecotopian fiction what utopian literary scholars do for utopian fiction—that is, declare the significance of what one such scholar, Lyman Tower Sargent, calls “social dreaming” for the realization of an alternative, more just or ethical, society (1). As Tom Moylan writes, by producing images “that radically break with prevailing social systems . . . utopian discourse articulates the possibility of other ways of living in the world” (Demand 26). And extending Moylan’s analysis, Phillip E. Wegner demonstrates the ways in which the imaginary communities of Thomas More’s Utopia (1516), Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward (1888), Ursula K. Le Guin’s The Dispossessed (1974), and other texts have transcended imaginary possibility and have figured into modern nation-building:

in the narrative utopia, the presentation of an “ideal world” operates as a kind of lure, a play on deep desires, both immediately historical and otherwise, to draw its readers in and thereby enable the form’s educa-
tional machinery to go to work—a machinery that enables its readers to perceive the world they occupy in a new way, providing them with some of the skills and dispositions necessary to inhabit an emerging social, political, and cultural environment. (2)

Utopian fiction is fiction of possibility; it envisions optional cultural paths, “catalyzes desire” for these paths, and instructs cultural and political progress with its “visionary glimpses of how our real world could be changed” (Mohr 278).

Deep ecology’s endorsement of ecotopian fiction stems from the ideal worlds that ecotopias imagine. A movement grounded in a critique of what it sees as the outmoded, unsustainable Western worldview and in a combination of scientific and spiritual notions of embeddedness, deep ecology finds in ecotopian texts the narration of its appraisals and desires. Unlike the space of the modern developed world, ecotopian space intrudes little on other species and their habitats. Its human inhabitants participate in communal governments and promote economic systems that are not growth-centered and resource-intensive. Ecotopian fiction portrays worlds far different from the originary world that it contests, articulating ecologically conscientious life ways hitherto contained or eradicated by modern social, political, economic, educational, and religious life. Ecotopian fiction is an instructive “educational machinery,” a cognitively estranging lens through which readers can compare their world with that proposed in fiction and as a result better perceive the inadequacies of current worldviews and practices. Devall and Sessions’s confidence in ecotopian fiction stems from their understanding of the genre’s possibilities for narrowing “the distance between what ought to be and what is now reality in our technocratic-industrial society” (162).

While ecotopian fiction occupies an important place in deep ecology, ecodystopian fiction holds similar and potentially greater value as an instructional literature of deep ecology. According to Sargent, dystopian narrative describes in detail nonexistent societies “that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived” (9). Despite its dreadful extrapolations, dystopian narrative maintains the utopian impulse: as Moylan notes, “a dystopian text can be seen as utopian in tendency if in its portrayal of the ‘bad place’ it suggests (even if indirectly) or at least stimulates the potential for an effective challenge and possibly change by virtue of human efforts” (Scraps 156). And as Dunja M. Mohr observes,
Where utopia uplifts the reader, dystopia holds up a hellish mirror and describes the worst of all possible futures. Although both utopian and dystopian imaginings of the future refer readers to the present and seek to implant a desire for societal transformation, they evoke different effects: the utopian defamiliarization takes the avenue of arousing readers’ desire for utopia, whilst the defamiliarized dystopian society appalls readers.

Where utopia compares social vision and reality by creating difference, dystopia presupposes and thrives on the correlation and similarity of the present social order and the near-future scenario. Using opposed strategies, both utopia and dystopia, however, share the same objective: sociopolitical change by means of the aesthetic representation of a paradigm shift. (27–28)

Dystopia fuels opposition to unethical systems of domination and oppression by portraying worlds where readers might live if steps are not taken to change these systems, and, I will add, by imaginatively rendering current global situations that demand immediate attention.

Ecodystopia, as a version of dystopia functioning under the same definitional rubric, offers something ecotopia cannot, because of the latter’s generic constraints: extended reflections on the issues that give rise to deep ecological sentiments, including overpopulation, species extinction, and air and water pollution. Ecodystopian science fiction stages dystopian presents and futures, frightening worlds not disengaged from the now but instead very much extrapolated out of some current and real, anti-ecological trend—whether that trend is social, scientific, economic, religious, or a combination of these and others rehearsed daily in the contemporary order of things. Significant, too, is that ecodystopia’s generic imperative to represent consequences also initiates important reflections on the viability and ethics of solutions that deep ecological philosophy can be interpreted to support, such as population controls or acts of violent ecotage against inflexible social and cultural institutions. This characteristic aligns ecodystopia with what Sargent, Moylan, and others have deemed the “critical” trend in dystopian narrative, though not in the same sense of being like more recent dystopias that are “self-reflexively ‘critical’” of traditional dystopian tendencies (Moylan, Scraps 188). The works by John Brunner examined below indeed move ecodystopian science fiction in such a direction, but critical ecodystopia reflects more so on ecotopian (im)possibility given the sociopolitical realities of the spaces upon which ecotopian
thinkers want to layer their dreams. Thus, much like *Dune*, this type of fiction is a powerful tool for stimulating new, more ecologically and socially conscious ways of thinking and being in the world.

*Ecotopia* chronicles the visit of the *New York Times-Post* reporter William Weston to Ecotopia, geographically the area once comprising Washington, Oregon, and northern California. Ecotopia seceded from the United States twenty years prior to William’s visit, and William’s purpose there is to write a series of articles documenting the unusual practices of the nation’s people. These practices include, among other things, maintaining an antigrowth economy and fulfilling a national goal to reduce population. Early in the book, William’s newspaper articles—which along with an italicized private notebook make up the book—are openly critical of Ecotopian ways: their lack of traffic and billboards is drab and isolating; their recycling requires too much personal effort; and their elimination of processed foods and putting certain foods on “‘Bad Practice lists’” is “a loophole that might house a large and rather totalitarian rat” (19). Despite the reporter’s early judgments, later he admits a change in attitude toward the nation: “*the more closely I look at the fabric of Ecotopian life, the more I am forced to admit its strength and its beauty*” (95). Though William’s visit to Ecotopia is supposed to last just six weeks, in the end he stays there. In a farewell letter to his editor he writes, “*I’ve decided not to come back, Max. You’ll understand why from the notebook. But thank you for sending me on this assignment, when neither you nor I knew where it might lead. It led me home*” (167).

A similar reevaluation of ecotopian life occurs in Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* as the book’s main character, Connie Ramos, admits she wishes her young daughter could grow up in Mattapoisett, the novel’s near-future ecotopia to which she travels:

She will be strange, but she will be glad and strong and she will not be afraid. She will have enough. She will have pride. She will love her own brown skin and be loved for her strength and her good work. She will walk in strength like a man and never sell her body and she will nurse her babies like a woman and live in love like a garden, like that children’s house of many colors. People of the rainbow with its end fixed in earth, I give her to you! (133)
Connie has reasons to want such a future for her daughter, because Connie has grown up in fast-paced New York City, has lived on the streets, has been abused physically and mentally by men, has had the one man she ever loved taken away from her by the prison system and killed in a medical experiment, and during the course of the novel is forced into a medical experiment while living in a mental health facility. Despite the aversion Connie should have toward existing institutions, similar to William in Callenbach’s book, she is reluctant to accept the promises of ecotopia. Her friend from Mattapoisett in the year 2137, Luciente, informs her of the fundamental social changes that have occurred in the alternative future; living under modernity’s ideological supremacy, Connie can only doubt the viability of these changes. She questions the city’s lack of social hierarchy, of patriarchy, and of centralized government. But the revolutionary thinkers living in the ecotopian future ultimately assist Connie on a journey to free herself from the forces that have dominated her life for so long. In the end, while she does not get to live in the future ecotopia, she thinks of Mattapoisett as she revolts against her oppressors at the hospital.

One of the concerns shared by these ecotopias and deep ecology is human demographics. Following a host of writers who in the 1960s and 1970s attended to the potential consequences of human overpopulation, both Naess and the deep ecologist, poet, and essayist Gary Snyder agree that taking steps to reduce world population is necessary for the realization not only of deep ecology’s ecocentric ideals but also of general ecosystemic health. In his 1973 essay “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements,” Naess sketches his deep ecological concept of biospherical egalitarianism, which to him is fundamental to environmental movements wanting to do more than institute shallow legislative efforts to cut pollution and resource depletion, efforts really aimed at preserving natural resources for the people of affluent nations. Biospherical egalitarianism requires “a deep-seated respect, or even veneration, for ways and forms of life” (151–52). It eschews anthropocentric hierarchies of being, instead observing the equal right to flourish for all species. Importantly, biospherical egalitarianism “implies the reinterpretation of the future-research variable, ‘level of crowding,’ so that general mammalian crowding and loss of life-equality is taken seriously” (152). Life-equality necessitates the protection of appropriate life-space requirements (physical space and resource availability) for all organisms. And since life space for any one species is reduced as another species overcrowds and infiltrates, human overpopulation violates such egalitarian principles.
Because human crowding threatens the abilities of other species to flourish, Snyder, in his essay “Four Changes,” suggests cutting world population—about 3.6 billion at the time of the essay’s publication in 1969—in half. His reasoning is similar to Naess’s:

Position: Man is but a part of the fabric of life—dependent on the whole fabric for his very existence. As the most highly developed tool-using animal, he must recognize that the unknown evolutionary destinies of other life forms are to be respected, and act as gentle stewards of the earth’s community of being.

Situation: There are now too many human beings, and the problem is growing rapidly worse. It is potentially disastrous not only for the human race but for most other life forms. (141–42)

The population problem can be addressed on the social and political levels worldwide, Snyder believes, by convincing governments that human overpopulation is a serious problem, by legalizing abortion and promoting sterilization, by questioning and correcting cultural ways of thinking that press women to have children, and by refusing to see a nation’s growing population as a sign of a good economy. Advocating changes in community structure, Snyder endorses alternative marriage arrangements, sharing “the pleasures of raising children widely, so that all need not directly reproduce to enter into this basic human experience,” limiting family size, adopting children, and as Naess also encourages, developing kinship with nonhuman species (142).

In Callenbach’s book, after seceding from the United States, Ecotopia engages in a national effort to reduce its population. Ecotopians want to decrease population to minimize pressure on resources and on other species, and to improve the quality of life for their nation’s people. They begin their efforts by legalizing and lowering the cost of abortion, as well as universalizing female contraceptives. Both prove effective, as deaths begin to outnumber births. The Ecotopian population declines during one measured period by seventeen thousand, while in that same period American society gains three million. The national goal to reduce population is coupled with a move away from centralized, metropolitan social organization and toward more deliberate living in dispersed small communities. As a result, and to give only one example from the book, “instead of massive hospitals in the city centers, besieged by huge lines of waiting patients, there were small hospitals and clinics everywhere” (62). Finally, Ecoto-
pians rethink the concept of family, disintegrating the nuclear ideal that obligates as a moral, if even economic, responsibility the replacement of oneself with single, or more often multiple, consuming progeny. Instead, Ecotopians value family as “a group of between five and 20 people, some of them actually related and some not, who live together” (64).

The efforts to reduce population in Woman on the Edge of Time, and to value family structures not dependent on one’s own reproduction, also mirror the ideas of deep ecology. Though Mattapoisett’s use of “brooders,” tanks in which human fetuses are grown, is more formulaically science fictional than Ecotopia’s political and social mechanisms, it nevertheless stages deep ecology’s position on population reduction and control. The brooder becomes not a real option, but instead an estranging *novum* that provokes environmentalist, and feminist, reflection on the possibilities of reproductive technology. For feminism, the brooders free women and men from biological enchainment, indicating Piercy’s “faith in the liberatory potential of reproductive technologies” (Sandilands 9)—women, liberated from “the power to give birth,” and men, from never being “humanized to be loving and tender” (Piercy 98). For deep ecology, such technology also liberates nonhuman nature from human overpopulation, a liberation that is central to the movement’s platform. Further, similar to the communal groups of Ecotopia, and to the community childrearing Snyder proposes, Mattapoisett’s children are assigned three “mothers,” or nurturers, who can be male or female. This restructuring of family life to extend and value nurturance beyond genetic relations, coupled with the deliberate move to shrink population, grows out of a conscious social effort to minimize the effects of material culture on Mattapoisett’s material base, its ecology.

For deep ecology, maniacal economic growth and consumerist trends have likewise distressed the world’s ecosystems, this time by encouraging an excessive mining of natural material. As Sessions notes in his preface to *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*,

Government leaders and economic elites in Industrial Growth Societies continue to push for endless economic growth and development. . . . Third World countries are now entering global markets and trying to become First World countries by destroying their ecosystems and wild species as they emulate the industrial and consumer patterns of the ecologically destructive unsustainable First World. (xx)

Earth Policy Institute president Lester R. Brown speaks also to this point: “Over the last half-century, the sevenfold expansion of the global econ-
omy has pushed the demand on local ecosystems beyond the sustainable yield in country after country” (79). Brown’s specific concern is with the growth economy’s more recent injurious effects on oceanic fisheries, forests, and rangelands. But even the deep ecologists of the 1970s recognized economic growth as responsible for overtaxing vital ecosystemic processes and damaging the systems necessary for human and nonhuman life. They advocated, then as now, for fundamental changes in the ways developing and industrial societies view such growth. Rather than valuing economic expansion and consumerism, deep ecologists and the ecotopian writers discussed here look toward more ecologically and socially conscientious economic paradigms.

Naess, for example, outlines several requisite lifestyle changes for transforming modernity’s growth-centered economy into an ecologically viable system: “Anticonsumerism and minimization of personal property”; “Endeavor to maintain and increase sensitivity and appreciation of goods of which there is enough for all to enjoy”; “Absence or low degree of ‘novophilia’—the love of what is new merely because it is new. Cherishing old and well-worn things”; “the attempt to avoid a material standard of living too much different from and higher than the needy”; and “Appreciation of lifestyles which are universalizable, which are not blatantly impossible to sustain without injustice toward fellow humans or other species” (“Deep Ecology” 260). Also writing against the grain of production-driven consumerist ideology, Snyder offers a Thoreauvian maxim: “True affluence is not needing anything” (146). With an assertion about the cancerous nature of economic growth, Snyder suggests that rather than promoting such growth without considering its deleterious effects on ecosystems, the economy should handle production, distribution, and consumption “with the same elegance and spareness one sees in nature” (146). For Snyder, hoarding personal possessions must be surrendered to communal sharing, and the modern fascination with new technologies must be surrendered to a high esteem for old ways: “handicrafts, gardening, home skills, midwifery, herbs—all the things that can make us independent, beautiful and whole” (146).

In his first newspaper article on the subject of Ecotopian society William displays his growth-centered culture’s fear of the utopian nation’s antigrowth economy: “Ecotopia still poses a nagging challenge to the underlying national philosophy of America: ever-continuing progress, the fruits of industrialization for all, a rising Gross National Product” (4). William perceives Ecotopia’s stable-state system in this way because “it means giving up any notions of progress. You just want to get to that stable point and stay there, like a lump” (31). With his censuring of economic systems
that see industrialization and a rising GNP as unnecessary and unhealthy, William exhibits his U.S. culture’s marriage to the growth model. What William cannot see in Ecotopia’s economy—rather, what his upbringing prevents him from seeing—is its agents’ primary motivation to preserve ecological integrity and to fulfill an ecological ethic of species equality. He can at least communicate the Ecotopian point of view, a fact that foreshadows his ultimate acceptance of it: “humans were meant to take their modest place in a seamless, stable-state web of living organisms, disturbing that web as little as possible” and “People were to be happy not to the extent they dominated their fellow creatures on the earth, but to the extent they lived in balance with them” (43–44). But William’s defense of “the underlying national philosophy of America” reflects more the attitudes of the system from which he comes. He analyzes Ecotopia’s stable-state economy using capitalist language, inevitably condemning any contrary economic possibilities. If William’s American readers believe that Ecotopia cannot maintain a decent standard of living with its twenty-hour work week, that Ecotopia’s system cannot attract capital, and that the nation will suffer financial collapse, then they are too deeply fixed in the language and rationalizations of capital to see or admit the triumph of Ecotopia’s divergent economy, which does not subscribe to capital’s exact notions of standard of living, investment, and financial success (48). Interpreted with the language of capital, the stable-state system will always fail; but interpreted with its own ecocentric logic, the Ecotopian economy realizes Snyder’s “true affluence.”

In Piercy’s book, Connie’s expectations when she first arrives in Mattapoissett demonstrate her faith in a booming economic future: “Rocket ships, skyscrapers into the stratosphere, an underground mole world miles deep, glass domes over everything” (62). But opening her eyes she sees instead the village of a bucolic past, prompting her to ask Luciente, “You sure we went in the right direction? Into the future?” (62). Luciente assents and Connie replies questioningly, “‘Forward, into the past? Okay, it’s better to live in a green meadow than on 111th Street. But all this striving and struggling to end up in the same old bind’” (64). This sentiment repeats William’s initial attitude about Ecotopia’s seemingly backward system. Both protagonists reflect the capitalist tendency to view as economically and socially regressive any alternative mode of economic production that does not depend on, and thus relentlessly provide, a constant flow of commodities through markets and a constant reinvestment of capital into new, marketable stuff and exploitable places and cultures.

In addition to its concerns about overpopulation and growth-centered economics, deep ecology advocates a “relational, total-field image,” a per-
ception of “Organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations” that at once reflects the materialist, part-of-nature thinking reviewed in chapter 1 and a related ecospirituality that is central to deep ecology and, as chapter 3 will demonstrate, cultural ecofeminism (Naess, “The Shallow” 151). Snyder, who derives his ecophilosophy from Buddhist concepts of organic unity and Animist ideas about the spiritual matrix that connects all life and material (Taylor, “Snyder”), writes, “Man is but a part of the fabric of life—dependent on the whole fabric for his very existence” (141). While this is true scientifically, for deep ecology the properly ecocentric attitude is also one that makes spiritual the ecological connections among nature’s varied, and often instrumentally valueless, elemental parts. As Bron Taylor and Michael Zimmerman write,

Naess and most deep ecologists . . . trace their perspective to personal experiences of connection to and wholeness in wild nature, experiences which are the ground of their intuitive, affective perception of the sacredness and interconnection of all life. Those who have experienced such a transformation of consciousness (experiencing what is sometimes called one’s “ecological self” in these movements) view the self not as separate from and superior to all else, but rather as a small part of the entire cosmos. (456)

Deep ecologists apprehend the human self by identifying the ecological and cosmological totality within which this self exists.

In Callenbach’s book, Ecotopians educate their children in a manner consistent with deep ecology’s scientific total-field image, and they worship in a way consistent with the movement’s ecospirituality. About Ecotopian schoolchildren, William writes, their experiences

are closely tied in with studies of plants, animals and landscape. I have been impressed with the knowledge that even young children have of such matters—a six-year-old can tell you all about the “ecological niches” of the creatures and plants he encounters in his daily life. He will also know what roots and berries are edible, how to use soap plant, how to carve a pot holder from a branch. (35–36)

An Ecotopian ten-year-old knows “how hundreds of species of plants and animals live, both around their schools and in the areas they explore on backpacking expeditions” (120). Such knowledge, even in young children, would be taken for granted in an ecologically literate society. But traditional education instead practices conservative pedagogical
models, which according to environmental educator C. A. Bowers emphasize not ecological literacy but rather human achievements of the past, social engagement, and job training (37–38). Just as ignorant of ecology are liberal models of education, which focus on social development, individualism, and rational, linear thinking (Bowers 74–76). Whatever their merits, these pedagogical trends become harmful in their neglect of ecology and of understanding human achievement, social engagement, the individual, and so forth within the context of ecological relationships. Perhaps William writes “‘ecological niches’” within quotation marks because of his *Times-Post* readers’ unfamiliarity with the term. Their education presumably has not accounted for ecology in the same way the Ecotopians’ has. Ecotopian adults can be heard saying, “‘Knowing yourself as an animal creature on the earth, as we do. It can feel more comfortable than [William’s] kind of life’” (80–81) and “‘We don’t think in terms of ‘things,’ there’s no such thing as a thing—there are only systems’” (81).

Rooted also in a cosmology that, as critic Jim Dwyer notes, “inspires people to consider themselves intrinsic parts of nature and act accordingly,” Ecotopian spiritual life reflects the ecocentric tenets of its educational system (565). This correspondence makes sense from the perspective of deep ecology, which connects pedagogy with spiritual growth: “Education should have as its goal encouraging the spiritual development and personhood development of the members of a community” (Devall, “The Deep” 134). Never in *Ecotopia* does William submit to his *Times-Post* editor an extended reflection on Ecotopian religion; he mentions spirituality peripherally in his discussions of economy, population, and health care. And when he does touch on the issue, either in an article or in his personal journal, he does so with an Abrahamic discomfort with nature-based spirituality. Ecotopians hold pagan charms, eschew the clear-cutting of forests for their apparent worship of trees, build shrines to various spirits, and embrace death as a part of the cycle of life. Similarly, in Piercy’s book, the people of Mattapoisett live their cosmology “as partners with water, air, birds, fish, trees,” professing nothing of an institutional religion but instead deeply integrating themselves in ceremonies “to heal the world we live in with so many others” (118, 269). Aligned in *Ecotopia* and *Woman on the Edge of Time* with an overall superior quality of social and ecological life, such ecospirituality—and indeed its educational complement—is contrasted with those religious and pedagogical systems of modern life that deny human embeddedness in other-than-human nature.

Deep ecologists hope to engender a new notion of community. For them, community goes beyond human social interaction. A community
is instead a total ecological field, a life system, and even a form of life. And because “The vulnerability of a form of life is roughly proportional to the weight of influences from afar, from outside the local region in which that form has obtained an ecological equilibrium,” our current tendency to import commodities and consumer ways of life into established human–nonhuman ecological fields disturbs the evolutionary self-sufficiency of these fields (Naess, “The Shallow” 153). The result is a social degradation that is both a symptom and a source of ecological degradation. To solve this problem Naess advocates strengthening local self-government and community self-sufficiency. Snyder supports similar moves: “Division by natural and cultural boundaries rather than arbitrary political boundaries” and “land-use being sensitive to the properties of each region” (147). Such bioregional thought pervades contemporary environmentalist discussions, which often advocate using locally available resources, rebuilding local economies, and establishing participatory democratic communities.

Callenbach reflects on the strengths of community and bioregional autonomy in three ways in his book. First, all Ecotopian food, energy, and building materials are locally harvested, and the nature of this practice is such that local systems remain healthy and distant systems remain untouched—at least by Ecotopians. Second, attesting to the importance of self-in-community, William eventually becomes aware of his and his culture’s unfulfilling disconnectedness from what could be called Stegnerian place. He writes, “I’m beginning to see that to an Ecotopian, who always has a strong collective base to return to, a place and the people of that place, my existence must seem pathetically insecure” (127). When William admits “I have never cried about it. But maybe I should,” Callenbach issues a compelling request for readers to evaluate their own disconnectedness and to envision life in community, with a strong sense of belonging (127). Finally, Ecotopia decentralizes the operations of local regions, getting rid of national spending and putting control of “basic life systems” into the hands of local communities (62). As a result of these changes, communities arrange their lives more deliberately, population density drops, medical services improve, and previously threatened ecosystems flourish.

Mattapoisett is also community- and bioregionally-oriented. As Jack-rabbit, one of the town’s dwellers, says, “A sense of land, of village and base and family. We’re strongly rooted” (116); and the village is “Own-fed,” “Self-sufficient as possible in proteins” (64). In their recognition of themselves as part of community, as part of (deep ecological) nature, Mattapoisett’s people fulfill a central goal of deep ecology: self-realization.
in other-than-human nature. As Sessions notes, “human individuals attain personal self-realization and psychological-emotional maturity when they progress from an identification with narrow ego, through identification with other humans, to a more all-encompassing identification of their ‘self’ with nonhuman individuals, species, ecosystems, and with the ecosphere itself” (“Deep Ecology” 211). Connie’s desire for her daughter to grow up in Mattapoissett and William’s choice to stay in Ecotopia are largely functions of the psychological completeness each experiences in their respective new communities. This completeness results from the conscious social, political, economic, educational, and spiritual policies and practices of ecotopia, all of which lead to the most general but materially significant consequence of ecotopian deep ecology: the small human footprint.

With its appraisals of overpopulation and growth and consumer tendencies, as well as its ecological-ecospiritual practices and redefinition of community, deep ecology hopes ultimately to lessen human influence on the nature within which a particular kind of (utopian or whole) human, and even nonhuman, identity emerges. With ecological integrity comes social and individual integrity; any utopian hope for the latter necessarily entails the former as the result of a practiced ecocentric ethic, which, following Aldo Leopold’s land ethic, argues for the protection of “the long-term flourishing of all ecosystems and each of their constituent parts” (Taylor and Zimmerman 456). What matters most to Ecotopians, according to William, “is the aspiration to live in balance with nature, ‘walk lightly on the land,’ treat the earth as a mother” (29). And summing up the critical stance of ecotopian deep ecology in general, Bolivar, a key spokesperson for social opinion in Mattapoissett, states, “I guess I see the original division of labor, that first dichotomy, as enabling later divvies into haves and have-nots, powerful and powerless, enjoyers and workers, rapists and victims. The patriarchal mind/body split turned the body to machine and the rest of the universe into booty on which the will could run rampant, using, discarding, destroying” (203).11 The collective story written by Ecotopia and Woman on the Edge of Time narrates deep ecology’s stance on these dominant conceptual dualisms. It is a story that always reveals the disparity between a “balanced” ecotopian society and a disembedded, displaced modern society. With William contrasting his lived experiences in Ecotopia against his lived experiences in the United States, and Connie living two experiences as she bounces back and forth between polarized worlds, these ecotopias transport us back and forth between our known world and the world of possibility. Indeed and as such, ecotopia offers another dualism, but it is one that strategically privileges subordi-
nated sociopolitical and ecologically conscious options. Callenbach’s and Piercy’s books demonstrate the value of ecotopian fiction for communicating and exploring the changes advocated by a transformative environmental philosophy that will have nothing less than comprehensive change to dominant socioeconomic and cultural practices.

Following the previous discussion of ecotopian fiction, this section of chapter 2 highlights what is precisely deep ecological in ecdystopian fiction, the question being, “How does such fiction also motivate deep ecological dreaming?” Dystopia always contains an implicit utopian drive, as Moylan and Mohr argue, but while this feature of John Brunner’s *Stand on Zanzibar* and *The Sheep Look Up* leads them to go together with ecotopia and deep ecology, the books cannot be read in complete alignment with deep ecology’s espoused principles. Even if we read utopia as a compass rather than a blueprint, as political scientist Marius de Geus argues we must, we still need to be critical about the direction in which the compass points us. Brunner’s ecdystopias enable this corrective. Extrapolating atrocious global futures from some very present and real situations, they not only concentrate our attention on the most critical matters but also question the viability of the ways we choose to act going forward.

As demonstrated earlier, population reduction is a key interest in *Ecotopia*, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, and deep ecology, emerging as they do out of a cultural moment that also produced Paul Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb* (1968) and other demographic studies, fictional and nonfictional. Ecotopians make it a national goal to decrease population; Mattapoisett controls population scientifically, growing its future generations in brooders; and deep ecology holds as one of its eight basic principles that “The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantially smaller human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires a smaller human population” (Naess, “The Deep” 68). *Stand on Zanzibar’s* insights into overpopulation soften deep ecology’s and ecotopia’s strong, if not dogmatic, attention to population controls by highlighting the growth economy and modern consumption habits as much more detrimental than overpopulation to ecological health and by drawing attention to the ethical problems inherent in controlling population. The book challenges the emphasis on population reduction that characterized many early works of environmental fiction and nonfiction, encouraging critical readers not to deemphasize the global harm of overpopulation—to be sure, the book’s
title is a direct reference to overpopulation—but to recognize modern eco-
nomic doctrine as demanding greater attention. Human overcrowding
jeopardizes appropriate life space requirements for other species, but it is
certainly feasible and in fact historically accurate to find that more damag-
ing consequences arise from the encroachment of economic systems that
liquidate human and nonhuman life space in the name of economic policy,
even using demographic trends to justify increased production.

In the novel, the multinational corporation General Technics (GT)
wants to transform a small, peaceful, and economically disadvantaged
African nation named Beninia into a processing center for an offshore min-
ing project. GT and its enterprise represent the economic trend that deep
ecology does indeed target: elite nations pushing third world countries to
participate in their market interests and fantasies of a global consumer
society while erasing any chance of developing alternative economic forms
that are more ecologically sustainable and socially just. As critic Neal
Bukeavich notes, “the Beninian enterprise enacts a kind of economic impe-
railism that renders it unlikely to initiate any revolutionary shift in global
environmental politics” (59). With the initiation of GT’s scheme, Beninia
will be swept into an economic system that not only gobbles up existing
social relations—and in Beninia’s case, peaceful social relations—but also
exhausts material nature. Nowhere in GT’s plan is there a discussion about
developing an economy that will lift Beninia out of poverty without sac-
rificing its already limited resource base. But it is predominantly such an
exhausting economic system and the culture it creates and then feeds that
wreaks the ecological havoc, and this insight is the specific contribution of
Stand on Zanzibar to deep ecology’s population concerns.

Throughout Stand on Zanzibar Brunner gives readers fragments of the
consumer culture that economic projects such as General Technics’s Beninia
plan support. It is a culture deep ecology would find harrowing in contrast
to its ecotopian images of strong communities and ecologically sustain-
able ways of living. Certainly it is the kind of culture against which Ecoto-
pia and Mattapoisett define themselves, but as a dystopia Brunner’s work
fully explores this culture, rendering many of its terrifyingly feasible pos-
sibilities. Communities as dynamic collections of participating individuals
with senses of ecologically inspired self do not exist in the mass culture of
Stand on Zanzibar. Instead, the dominant culture is an actualized capital-
ist fantasy of a world unified in its consumption habits. Images of Mr. and
Mrs. Everywhere, “construct identities, the new century’s equivalent of the
Joneses,” fill television screens sold by the media giant Engrelay Satelserv,
allowing viewers to see themselves in a variety of more desirable places
And a “Colliderscope” “turns your drab daily environment into a marvelous mystery” (172). These simulation technologies demonstrate a point made in the novel by Chad Mulligan, one of the characters who is critical of the society: “the whole of modern so-called civilized existence is an attempt to deny reality insofar as it exists” (251). The apparatuses of this “so-called civilized existence” allow two obfuscations: material reality, as in humanity’s necessary embeddedness in nature, is forgotten; and social reality, as in the lived consequences of this amnesia, is masked.

The latter obfuscation occurs with a technology that ubiquitously promotes cultural and individual homogeneity. Song lyrics in Brunner’s novel show this:

Like the good Lord God in the Valley of Bones
Engrelay Satelserv made some people called Jones.
They were not alive and they were not dead—
They were ee-magi-nary but always ahead.
What was remarkably and uniquely new—
A gadget on the set made them look like you!
Watching their sets in a kind of a trance
Were people in Mexico, people in France.
They don’t chase Jones but the dreams are the same—
Mr. and Mrs. Everywhere, that’s the right name!
Herr und Frau Uberall or les Partout,
A gadget on the set makes them look like you. (309)

Mr. and Mrs. Everywhere provide the society of Stand on Zanzibar with capitalist utopian experiences, Disneyesque escapes to the Moon, Mount Everest, or Martinique, all conveniently liberated from despoiled material reality. For Tom Moylan, in the mid-twentieth-century, utopian visions—which originally opposed “the affirmative culture maintained by dominant ideology”—dissolved into the corporate-driven utopias of shopping malls and the Disney empire (Demand 1). Co-opted by capital, utopia was diluted with images of “pleasurable weekends, Christmas dreams, and goods purchased weekly in the pleasure-dome shopping malls of suburbia,” all visions compatible with growth-centered, capitalist ideology and, incidentally, as Brunner shows, redirecting social attention away from the degradation required for this ideology’s upkeep (8).

As simulated culture in Brunner’s dystopia has replaced genuine social relations and effectively canceled political critique among the now tuned-out masses, simulated nature (third nature?) has replaced nonhu-
man nature. Synthetic grass carpets General Technics’ headquarters, and a clinic in London has a floor “covered by tiles with a design of dead leaves embedded under a clear plastic surface” (158). Interestingly, this “only touch in the place which suggested nature” is trampled, “a failure,” the leaves disappearing “behind a mist of scratches and scrapes, the legacy of uncountable feet that had crossed the room” (159). Given that this clinic is one that pregnant women must visit to be eugenically tested, the results dictating whether they must terminate their pregnancies, it and its trampled floor of faux fallen leaves symbolize all at once human population pressure (there are a lot of scratches and scrapes), the ecological harm such pressure induces (nature is now only a tiled image), and most importantly the ethical quandary of population control (a central authority is deciding who can and cannot have children).

Stand on Zanzibar considers the growth economy and modern consumer culture to be the most detrimental pressures on global ecological and social health, and it makes this claim stronger by emphasizing population control as a directive far more unethical to institute than deep ecology and ecotopia appear to recognize. Deep ecology seems to treat overpopulation and excessive production and consumption as equally worthy of sustained critical attention, but Brunner’s work argues otherwise. Alongside the consumerist ideology broadcasted globally in Brunner’s ecodystopia is a praise of eugenic legislation. A “Greater New York Times editorial slot” hails Puerto Rico for cracking down on population growth and “for joining the majority of us who have seen the danger [of overpopulation] coming and resolved to put up with the minor inconveniences it entails when we decide to control the human elements of the big scene we inhabit” (15–16). Such “minor inconveniences” include a cultural stigma on fertility, mandatory abortion, and other top-down methods of enforcing obedience to government-mandated controls. Perhaps, then, Stand on Zanzibar issues a needed reality check for readers impressed with deep ecological utopia.

Stand on Zanzibar does not discount the importance of a declining population for social and ecological health, but it does imagine the danger of treating overpopulation and modern economic doctrine as equally accountable for environmental despoliation. The book stages the dystopian upshot of such an evenly distributed critique: governments end up working to cut population growth while allowing economic growth to continue unimpeded. Given the hegemony of an economic system that fundamentally cannot be shifted away from the imperative to exploit people and material nature, popular attention to drastic and global social and
ecological degradation—an attention driven by this economy’s media com-
plex—will turn toward overpopulation as the primary threat, thus absolv-
ing the capitalist economy from its hazardous global expansion. Brunner’s
implicit take on the implications of what has since become deep ecology’s
neo-Malthusianism anticipates that of deep ecology’s staunchest critic,
Murray Bookchin, who asks,

would the grow-or-die economy called capitalism really cease to plun-
der the planet even if the world’s population were reduced to a tenth
of its present numbers? Would lumber companies, mining concerns, oil
cartels, and agribusiness render redwood and Douglas fir forests safer
for grizzly bears if—given capitalism’s need to accumulate and produce
for their own sake—California’s population were reduced to one million
people? (“The Population” par. 38)

His answer: no. Whales are extinct in Stand on Zanzibar, and Manhattan is
under a dome. One character reflects on “when he last saw the stars” and
“got wet in the rain,” and with this we are left to contemplate the death
of human experiences of nonhuman wonder, and thus of the ethical possi-
bilities of such wonder, as a consequence of industrial pollutants (262). A
cosmetics manufacturer brags, “we have taken control of our entire envi-
ronment, and what we choose by way of fashion and cosmetics matches
that achievement” (60). The world of the novel represents Bill McKibben’s
“end of nature,” in which the modern way of life “now blows its smoke
over every inch of the globe” (The End 60). McKibben, like Brunner, sees
modern economic doctrine as the biggest threat to global social and eco-
logical integrity. “There is no place on the planet now,” he writes, “that
does not fall under the enchantment of our images of the good life” (The
End xxii). The “good life” is a life of production-driven consumption, and
ultimately the life that makes overpopulation the serious threat that it is.

If Stand on Zanzibar is Brunner’s indictment of the growth economy
and production-driven consumer culture as sources of extreme social and
ecological despoliation, then The Sheep Look Up is his most thorough
exploration of the extent and effects of this despoliation. As in Stand on
Zanzibar, The Sheep Look Up imagines a world in which modern ideolo-
gical commitments to economic growth, its requisite mass consumption,
and human/nature disconnect play out fully, despite (or, because of) dev-
astating environmental and social injustices. But while Stand on Zanzibar
can be read as an effort to upset the myth that human overpopulation is
more responsible for ecological and social breakdown than modern eco-
conomic doctrine, *The Sheep Look Up* is less focused on overpopulation and instead surveys what is harmful in contemporary socioeconomic and cultural paradigms. It expresses anxieties about loss of community, the effects of unchecked economic growth, and the lack of ecological knowledge in modern society, as it also explores contrasting strategies for environmentalist action. While these concerns demonstrate the novel’s alignment with deep ecology’s concerns, and thus ecodystopia’s pedagogical function for the movement, it is the latter exploration of environmentalist action that allows Brunner’s book to operate also as a corrective or warning for deep ecology.

*The Sheep Look Up* details the effects of a U.S. military hallucinogen leakage. Countries whose citizens consume a synthetic food produced in the area of the leak have mass rioting. The military’s cover up of the chemical spill is one of several attempts by the U.S. government and the corporations it supports to deny their roles in bringing on ecological and social disasters. Insecticide-resistant worms devastate crops worldwide, and nearly all Americans suffer from ailments caused by environmental contaminants. Fighting to expose the misdeeds of corporations and the complicit government is the environmentalist and cult figure Austin Train, who also condemns emerging environmentalist violence. For the former activities Austin is labeled a subversive by the right-wing U.S. president, Prexy. Falsely accused of kidnapping the son of Roland Bamberley—a businessman whose company manufactures water filters and whose brother, Jacob, manufactured the contaminated food—Austin is put on trial publicly and uses the opportunity to address his television audience with a plea: “at all costs, to me, to anyone, at all costs if the human race is to survive, the forcible exportation of the way of life invented by these stupid men must . . . be . . . stopped” (353). Shortly after this declaration Prexy orders the broadcast to be cut off and the courthouse crumbles from a bomb built by one of the real kidnappers. The novel’s ending begins in a fury of American civil disorder, chaos one character claims fulfills his computer-generated forecast of “the best thing we can do to ensure a long, happy, healthy future for mankind” (363). “We can just about restore the balance of the ecology, the biosphere, and so on—in other words, we can live within our means instead of on an unrepayable overdraft, as we’ve been doing for the past half century,” says Dr. Thomas Grey in the novel, “if we exterminate the two hundred million most extravagant and wasteful of our species” (363).

Implicitly through its dystopian strategy and explicitly through Austin Train, *The Sheep Look Up* offers sympathetic deep ecological critiques
of a range of modern ideologies and practices. One of its key critiques is of the type of thinking that, against the ecological imperative to maintain biodiversity, declares the expendability of certain nonhuman animal species. The novel opens with a poem that announces,

The day shall dawn when never child but may
Go forth upon the sward secure to play.
No cruel wolves shall trespass in their nooks,
Their lore of lions shall come from picture-books. (2)

The domestication of wilderness celebrated here is an ideal central to Western modernization. As Jessica Wilkinson, Sara Vickerman, and Jeff Lerner write,

Taming wilderness to suit human needs was part of the value system European settlers brought to [North America]. The new nation’s vast natural resources were valued, but early settlers were concerned primarily with exercising control over the landscape, its indigenous human inhabitants, and its natural resources. . . . Wild animals and plants were more often seen as threats or competitors than as objects worthy of protection. (285)

This taming has been called one of the “hallmarks of modernization,” and we can see it confronted in Callenbach’s and Piercy’s ecotopias, which like deep ecology imagine economic, demographic, and spiritual models that encourage knowledge of and respect for biodiversity regardless of the instrumental value of species (Baker 2). In The Sheep Look Up, Austin calls himself a “commensalist,” building his environmentalist philosophy on the idea that “you and your dog, and the flea on the dog’s back, and the cow and the horse and the jackrabbit and the gopher and the nematode and the paramecium and the spirohete all sit down to the same table in the end” (18–19).

After the celebratory poem that begins Brunner’s novel is a scene critical of the antiwilderness vision to which the poem rejoices. In a dislocating incident that would initially reinforce the fear of carnivorous nature in any reader of the novel’s opening poem, a man finds himself hunted by wild animals “In broad daylight on the Santa Monica freeway” (3). Petrified and with “monstrous menacing beasts edging closer,” the man hides from cougars, jaguars, cobras, falcons, and barracudas—the beasts that the writer of the opening poem wants to relegate to children’s fairy tales
(3). Trying to run, the man is killed by a stingray. Is this a scene of some science-fictional, fantastical California now taken over by the savage creatures that the poem demonizes? No. The beasts are cars: Mercury’s Cougar, the Jaguar, AC’s Cobra, and so forth. The predation often associated with wild nature is given a different look, an ecocritical reevaluation demonstrating that automotive, industrial society, not wilderness, is the threat to life.

_The Sheep Look Up_ links global ecological degradation to modern habits that have grown out of an ideology of man as conqueror, to borrow Aldo Leopold’s concept, instead of man as biotic citizen. This lack of ecological intelligence enables economic progress in Brunner’s imagined future, but as Brunner shows, it also leads to a disabling of ecological systems and creates an atmosphere conducive only to perpetual corporate profiteering. Lead, chemical byproducts of various industries, and DDT have brought about the poisoned world imagined by Rachel Carson in _Silent Spring_. As a result clean air, water, and filtermasks are commodities in _The Sheep Look Up_, purchased from vending machines. And a food producer, Puritan Foods, uses the public’s growing fear of pollution to market falsely its brand of “uncontaminated” food. These examples reveal a central capitalist phenomenon: the omnipresent (il)logic of capitalism permits big industry to profit from its own poor environmental record, but in no way are the resulting cleanup industries altering their profit motive or developing an ecologically and socially conscious economy, despite the obvious necessity to do so. As one character states, “they shit in the water until it’s dangerous to drink, then make a fucking fortune out of selling us gadgets to purify it again” (187).

Similar to _Stand on Zanzibar_, corporate offices in _The Sheep Look Up_ boast of modernity’s containment of nonhuman nature: “cosmoramic projections,” simulated views of the outside world “Superior to the natural article,” “prevent the intrusion of untasteful exterior reality” (133). Again, this exterior reality is McKibben’s postnatural world at its dystopian extreme, in its third nature. Deep ecology finds intimate, spiritual connections between all forms of life, connections that allow for human self-realization. Callenbach’s Ecotopia and Piercy’s Mattapoisett nurture these connections. Fields and natural gardens serve as places for reflection and identity-building. In Brunner’s world, however, exterior space is poisoned, lifeless but for “rodent” species whose extreme populations are due to the loss of biodiversity. A child in Brunner’s novel cuts her foot while playing in an old garbage dump; a woman dies from exposure to pollutants at the beach. In such an atmosphere, fostering a recognized human–nature con-
nection and an ecocentric consciousness of nonhuman wonder becomes improbable, if not impossible.

Influenced by Austin, the “Trainites” of The Sheep Look Up mount a genuine ecotopian response to the custodians of the disastrous economic and political policies. A loosely organized group manifesting itself shortly after the Vietnam War, Trainites live out a number of environmentally sustainable practices in small collectives called wats. As if taking a cue from Naess and Snyder, Decimus—the man killed in the opening scene—was a Trainite who promoted, as Naess would say, a “global solidarity of lifestyle” (“Deep Ecology” 260): “His principle, at the Colorado wat, was third-world oriented; his community grew its own food, or tried to—crops had a nasty habit of failing because of wind-borne defoliants or industrial contaminants in the rain—and likewise wove its own cloth, while its chief source of income lay in handicrafts” (Sheep 34). The presence of Trainite wats gives Brunner’s novel a utopian quality. Wats are Brunner’s Ecotopias or Mattapoisetts, spaces apparently insulated from what is “Out There,” from “death and destruction” and “poison in the rain,” as one character thinks (171). But what makes The Sheep Look Up different from Ecotopia and Woman on the Edge of Time—what makes the wats spaces of ecodystopian worry rather than of ecotopian hope—is that at the moment of optimism, the Out There breaks through the insulation and intrudes upon utopian space. Despite the Trainites’ ecological consciousness and foresight, the wats cannot keep acid rain at bay, nor can they prevent the intrusion of a crop-threatening worm imported into the United States by a careless company.

Brunner uses the wats to insist on the potential for ecotopian enclaves and ecotopian ideas to stimulate cultural work in the world. His exploration into this potential is not simplistic and unidirectional, though. Instead, The Sheep Look Up speculates about contrasting forms that environmentalist opposition, influenced by ecotopian social dreaming, might take. The first of these narrative explorations shows the journalist Peg Mankiewicz becoming discouraged with the polluted and corrupt state of modern life. Her extended investigation of Decimus’s death draws the ire of her editor, Mel Torrence, who is hostile to the Trainites. Mel views public resistance, the most violent of which he carelessly and wrongly associates with Austin’s supporters, as a nuisance. As he declares, “‘They block traffic, they foul up business, they commit sabotage, they’ve even gone as far as murder’” (92). Seeing the merit in the Trainites’ actual methods of nonviolent dissent, the falsity of Mel’s allegations of murder, and the fact that the real killers “‘are the people who are ruining the world to line their pockets,’”
Peg quits the newspaper and heads to the Colorado wat (93). Encouraged by the undemanding and ecocentric way of life at the wat, but ultimately dissatisfied with its people’s lack of civic engagement with the world Out There, Peg leaves to carry on the fight started by Austin and Decimus. The Colorado wat is indeed an ecotopian space, but for Peg such a space is not enough for a world in need of sweeping change. In the end she channels her energies into critical journalism, researching and revealing the effects of rich nations on poor nations. With the public educative possibilities of such exposures she hopes to address the ecodystopian nightmare.

Peg’s story is one in which an individual draws inspiration from an ecotopian ideal and moves into the world to instigate change through journalistic endeavor. Like Peg, Hugh Pettingill becomes disgruntled with the conditions of society. Speaking out against his adoptive father, the food producer Jacob Bamberley, Hugh voices the anger of many in the novel: “Because of you and people like you we sit here in the richest country in the world surrounded by sick kids—. . . . You and your ancestors treated the world like a fucking great toilet bowl. You shit in it and boasted about the mess you’d made. And now it’s full and overflowing, and you’re fat and happy and black kids are going crazy to keep you rich. Goodbye!” (112). Hugh also flees to the Colorado wat, but instead of seeing the aggressive activism he falsely associates with the Trainites, he witnesses a community “rehearsing for tomorrow, devising a viable lifestyle by trial and error” (148). But Hugh wants direct action now; he wants an oppositional movement whose actions, we can say in retrospect, go beyond the sabotage that Edward Abbey later dramatized in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) and that has since been associated with groups such as the deep-ecology-inspired Earth First! and Earth Liberation Front. He leaves the wat and joins a small group of activists who employ the violent resistance he desires, including kidnapping Roland Bamberley’s son Hector and demanding for ransom that Roland freely distribute twenty thousand water filters to citizens.

Peg and Hugh act upon an understanding that broader social transformation entails crossing utopia’s spatial or intellectual boundaries and working in the world Out There to effect change. Tellingly, the ecodystopian elements of acid rain and an imported invasive insect have already crossed into the utopian wat, essentially dissolving ecotopian space and making such direct engagement with the Out There the only viable option for such transformation. But this direct engagement takes on two appearances in *The Sheep Look Up*. Peg’s tactic is journalistic disclosure, hoping for change by educating people. Hugh’s tactic is direct action in the
extreme, physically confronting those responsible for environmental and social degradation. With its staging of both activist possibilities, The Sheep Look Up inserts an important question into environmentalist discourse: what liberatory strategies might activists engage in the interests of eco-systemic and social liberation? Interestingly, all of the fictions discussed in this chapter raise this question in some way, but only The Sheep Look Up highlights its centrality. Ecotopia could not maintain its independence from the United States if not for the fear among citizens and leaders of the latter country that Ecotopians have mined major U.S. cities with atomic weapons. Callenbach’s book closes, though, with William vowing to shift his writing toward educating readers about Ecotopia, about “things [in] Ecotopia that the rest of the world needs badly to know” (166). The threat of violence maintains Ecotopian liberty, but William wants to educate the non-Ecotopian public about Ecotopian ways and, presumably, in so doing nonviolently enable the country’s existence and perhaps even its influence on the world. In Woman on the Edge of Time Connie engages a sort of personal revenge liberation by poisoning her doctors with an insecticide that she stole from her brother, thinking of Luciente and Mattapoisett as she does so. Billie Maciunas rightly sees Connie’s violent strategy as a poor course for implementing change, but the implicit reflection in the conclusion of Piercy’s book is on the difficulty of realizing utopia-inspired change against hegemonic dominance and oppression (256). Brunner’s ecodystopias also display this systemic, obdurate dominance and oppression, with The Sheep Look, of all the books, most clearly positing divergent activist directions to which the utopian compass might point.

Perhaps the full question raised in these narratives is about more than what environmentalist activism might look like when its motivating attitude reflects deep ecology’s disdain for the dominant Western worldview. Deep ecology provides an ideological orientation for activism against the agents of ecological destruction and a likewise socially destructive instrumental rationality. Whatever its specific critiques (e.g., demographics, economics, disembeddedness), its core aim, as Naess writes, is “a substantial reorientation of our whole civilization” (Ecology 45). The Sheep Look Up makes it clear that such an orientation might take on physically aggressive shapes when confronted with the intractable pervasiveness of ecological and social domination and oppression in modern political and economic forms. Brunner’s ecodystopian strategy brings him to imagine dissent in its worst state of uncontrolled violence acted out by those who “wanted to wreck and burn and kill” (Sheep 123). As such, Brunner offers critical dystopian reflection on the possibility of violent rebellion arising from those
who, much like Connie in Piercy’s novel, ultimately discover the obstinacy of those in power toward utopian possibility or any sociopolitical alternatives. The novel does not condemn all forms of active opposition. Austin supports demonstrators, whereas he denounces violence. But the manifestations of extremist pandemonium in Brunner’s work illustrate social disorder that is a symptom of both the failure of those in power to open a dialogue with activist groups whose concerns are about legitimate ecological and social issues and of an activist perspective that, given this failure, has the potential to instigate misanthropic aggression.

As Wegner suggests, imaginary communities “are real . . . in that they have material, pedagogical, and ultimately political effects, shaping the ways people understand and, as a consequence, act in their worlds” (xvi). Eco-topian fiction is a place where deep ecology can find a motivational imaginary space for similarly shaping its theory and practice. In ecotopia human society does its best to exist unobtrusively as one part of a complex and necessary ecology. Doing this requires new patterns of being that reduce the human footprint and allow for the flourishing of all species. New rituals and new pedagogical models emerge in ecotopia. More sustainable economic practices prevail over the modern push for economic growth and consumption. Political decisions are localized and all people are encouraged to participate in democratic process. But as David Pepper writes, “To be truly transgressive, rather than lapsing into reactionary fantasy, ecotopias . . . must be rooted in existing social and economic relations rather than being merely a form of abstraction unrelated to the processes and situations operating in today’s ‘real’ world” (“Utopianism” 18). This is where ecodystopia can help.

While indeed “Deep ecological and bioregional literature . . . can seem regressively removed from today’s world” (Pepper, “Utopianism” 18), if read in dialogue with ecodystopia’s constructive insights, deep ecological utopia can become refined enough to transcend its remove—and even its suspected “eco-brutalism”—and then to play a role in prompting change Out There (Bookchin, “Social Ecology” par. 15). In “Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology,” Bookchin writes,

Deep ecologists see . . . humanity essentially as an ugly “anthropocentric” thing—presumably a malignant product of natural evolution—that is “overpopulating” the planet, “devouring” its resources, and destroy-
ing its wildlife and the biosphere—as though some vague domain of “nature” stands opposed to a constellation of nonnatural human beings, with their technology, minds, society, etc. (par. 14)

Such charges against deep ecology stem especially from the tendencies in the movement to posit an all-encompassing “humanity” and to overlook global challenges in favor of local, bioregional reform. The former tendency blurs the complexities of human cultural difference and the various political structures and social hierarchies that sustain relations of socio-economic power; some humans are more responsible for severe social and ecological degradation than others. The latter tendency can lead to a bioregional isolationism and a disregard for the plight of distant cultures. Brunner’s novels shape our understanding of the dynamics of worlds opposite those of Callenbach’s and Piercy’s, and they even teach us that such worlds are out there and need to be attended to. But an extreme faith in the growth economy, an enforced cultural homogenization, and an authoritative government and corporate leadership inhibit the possibility of new patterns of being. Without ecotopian dreaming—or, in the case of The Sheep Look Up, with ecotopian dreaming present but dismissed and criminalized—damaging systems are allowed to flourish at the expense of sustainable ecological and social possibilities. Balanced against each other, ecotopia and ecodystopia provide deep ecology with a more complete sense of its visions and of the challenges it faces and must thoroughly consider while pursuing these visions.