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Andrew Biro's edited collection "Critical Ecologies" is a timely, creative, urgent, yet ultimately an incredibly frustrating reapplication of Critical Theory to the contemporary environmental crisis. By applying the work of Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer and to a lesser degree Walter Benjamin and Jürgen Habermas, the essays in the volume seek to "redeem the hopes" of environmentalism through the application of Critical Theory. Whether this goal is accomplished is doubtful, for the text leaves the modern environmentalist hopeless and upset, but also with a grudging sense of respect for a vigorous engagement with an impossible problem. Indeed, one could argue that Critical Theory, with its much maligned "cul-de-sac ending", is in fact the most appropriate approach for this problem. It allows the text to wrestle with an environmental situation paradoxically characterized by both increasingly devastating stakes, and a simultaneous lack of collective political, economic or societal engagement. Through this theoretical lens, the essays reconsider the environmental crisis, the problem of domination and the question of nature from an angle that creatively challenges the status quo.

To their credit, the essays are not afraid to challenge, update, apply and modify critical theory, seeing their engagement as one with "a living tradition" that "can be enriched by an engagement with contemporary science, environmentalism and theory" (p.17). For example, Steven Vogel's essay revisits Marx in order to remedy the shortcomings he identifies in Adorno. This bold approach makes the compilation contemporarily relevant, and marks the fresh "beginning of a conversation rather than the last word on the question" (p.9). Their reinterpretation of Critical Theory, argues Vogel, holds out "the hope of lighting a path out of the paradoxes in which contemporary

environmental politics" and, many would argue, Critical Theory, often finds itself. It thereby opens the door to continued fruitful and deeply self-critical scholarship in this timely area.

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The text is structured into four sections, with essays by fourteen contributors, all of whom address the three "paradoxes" of the environmental crisis: the power of humans over nature and their consequent vulnerability, the nature of humans as a species in unequal social and political situations, and the actions of environmental social movements. The exploration of these paradoxes emphasizes the two main themes of the book. The first is domination, which was so important to Adorno, and the second is the nature of nature and our relationship to it. Delving into the relation between the subject and the object, this collection conceptualizes nature as a whole of which we are a part, rather than an externality from which we are alienated. While the four sections of the text address these themes, and the first three sections loosely address the three paradoxes, "neither the paradoxes above nor the themes...map simply onto particular sections or chapters of the book" (p. 9). Indeed, the structure of the text seems somewhat divorced from its initially stated framework, and a clearer correlation might have streamlined the overall argument.

For reasons of space I cannot engage in a summary of each essay, but will instead point to a highlight from each section. In part I, Christoph Görg's "Social Relationships with Nature: A Dialectical Approach" explores the transition from a post-Fordist to a "reflexive mastery of nature" (p. 45). He points to the "disconnect between the contemporary human capacity to transform our environment and our lack of control over those processes" (p. 11) and critically addresses the "selective treatment of environmental problems that developed from the play of socioeconomic interests and power relations" (p. 60). In part II, Bruce Martin's excellent and thought provoking piece "Sacred Identity and the Sacrificial Spirit: Mimesis and Radical Ecology" critiques Deep Ecology and other radical environmental movements. He insightfully points out their confused logic of self-sacrifice that fails to consider that humans are a part of the natural environment that activists are so

environmental movements applies Adorno in a striking and relevant way, and explores the relation between sacrifice and nature. Steven Vogel's piece "On Nature and Alienation" in section III is stylistically the apogee of the text, especially for a novice to the field. While all of the essays summarize making the text accessible for newcomers, Vogel's clear and comprehensive writing style is an absolute pleasure with which to engage. He amends Adorno by returning to Marx, in order to present a fascinating contemporary critique of the concept of alienation. Like Martin, he argues that humans are a part of their natural environment, and thus, like sacrifice, alienation cannot necessarily be explored in an anthropocentric way. He distinguishes between the built and the natural

environment while questioning the "nature" of both, and allows readers to easily identify the circular reasoning in the contemporary discourses of both alienation and environmentalism. Finally, Jonathan Short's "Natural History, Sovereign Power and Global Warming" combines Georgio Agamben and Adorno in a frustratingly accurate and gloomy description of sovereign power and how it undermines the conditions for man's existence. This sets the tone of much of section IV, which leaves the reader feeling an urgent sense of crisis without necessarily knowing how

determined to save, at any cost. This innovative criticism of

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to remedy it. Indeed, despite its excellent qualities, the major flaw of the collection is that it identifies problems without necessarily positing any paradigm shifting solutions. For example, the text offers a scathing indictment of green capitalism, and explains that sustainable development or "environmental managerialism ecological and modernization, far from solving the arisen problems, have helped deepen the crisis."(p. 44) To be fair, by using the insights of Critical Theory, the text does amply demonstrates that a "green capitalism" that fails to address the paradoxes of production is indeed the ironic dream of a neoliberalism bent on maintaining the status quo through the enforced acquiescence of happy consumers. It is clearly argued that the complacency engendered by "green" products creates a society of individuals who feel as though they have already fulfilled their required duty to cheaply, conveniently, and easily solve the worldwide environmental crisis. Furthermore, it argues that these individual actions, such as recycling or purchasing "green" cleaning products, actually prevent any deeper and wider engagement with the crisis. Thus, our current methods of environmentalism preclude the difficult but vital conceptualization of the problem, and forestall the wide-spread action that is urgently required.

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Görg, for instance, explains that we are trapped between two poles, for either "capitalism is the main enemy of nature" or "a green capitalism will be able to solve the principal threats connected with the global environmental crisis" (p. 58). However, such tension remains unsatisfactorily resolved. Görg argues that "instead of changing our attitudes", we instead turn to biofuels which should "reduce energy consumption" in a convenient capitalist solution that prevents any uncomfortable change of policy or lifestyle. However, such simplistic actions have the predictable effects of "distort[ing] food process...exacerbating food insecurity... threatening forests," and increasing global disparity (p. 60). Revealing these consequences is a fundamental aspect of the text's thorough critique of "green capitalism".

Similarly, criticisms of the "limited success" of environmental social movements are pointed and insightful, but ultimately frustrating to readers (p. 8). Martin's critique of self-sacrifice makes an excellent argument that social movements must return humanity to its place as a part of nature. However, in doing so he effectively discourages the only collective environmental action to date. Granted, it is effectively argued that green cleaners and environmental activism are now (and always were) unable to escape the fundamental paradox of the subject-object relation. And yet, what is now to stop readers from slipping back into the hopeless quietism that those very (albeit miniscule) gestures were designed to ease. Suggestions for alternative venues of action would have greatly strengthened the text, rather than leaving readers feeling left uncertain how to engage in any remedy whatsoever.

To this end, one promising venue that could have been explored was Adorno's extensive correspondence with Hellmut Becker and their

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involvement in the German educational reforms of the 1960s. After reading Biro's text, a reader is left lamenting that only something as drastic as a nationwide education in Critical Theory could help lift the public out of the production-based paradigm within which their green capitalism remains mired. Consequently, Adorno's engagement in this very process could provide an excellent model for bringing Biro's text into practice. While Michael Lipscomb's essay briefly glosses Adorno's seminal piece "Education After Auschwitz", it is surprising that these historical precedents are not otherwise addressed in any real depth, especially given Critical Theory's emphasis on practice.

To a much lesser degree, the surprising characterization of the "deranged visions" of religious movements, and the at-times overly eschatological rhetoric detracts from the otherwise professional tone of the book (p.34). While the crisis described is indeed a matter of high global relevance, and some texts in the tradition of Critical Theory might mirror this degree of hyperbole, such rhetoric in a contemporary academic analysis is jarring. Despite these minor flaws, however, the text generally does not regress into simplistic denunciations of capitalism, and instead maintains a thoughtful and articulate deconstruction of the mystifications of much contemporary environmentalism.

Overall, despite perpetuating the frustrations and hopelessness that accompany any serious consideration of the global environmental crisis, the text otherwise offers an excellent, insightful and lively conversation between contributors. It allows interested scholars and fresh students of environmentalism alike to approach and engage with critical theory in a relevant and contemporary application. It is also an urgent analysis of many of the paradoxes both of the environmental crisis, and of our failed solutions. While it might leave the reader frustrated, somewhat hopeless and tending to a quietism born of despair, such responses indicate that the text is in fact wrestling with those timely,

¹ See Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, (Columbia University Press: New York, 1998), especially "Education After Auschwitz". See also Theodor Adorno, *Erziehung zur Mundigkeit*, (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1971), and Theodor W. Adorno and Hellmut Becker, "Education for maturity and responsibility", Robert French, Jem Thomas and Dorothee Weymann, trans., *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1999, pp. 21-34.

uncomfortable and unfortunately very difficult questions that characterize one of the most significant problems of our century.