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Finis Dunaway, *Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of American Environmental Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). ISBN: 9780226169903

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Introduction by Christopher F. Jones, Arizona State University

A picture, according to a popular proverb, is worth a thousand words. And in the case of the modern environmental movement, there is no doubt that certain images have spoken far louder than words. Oil-soaked birds, the Crying Indian, and menacing cooling towers at nuclear power plants have struck nerves with millions of Americans and raised environmental awareness (due to copyright restrictions, most of these images cannot be reproduced in this forum, so I encourage you to open a new browser and search for terms such as “Crying Indian ad”; “Pogo we have met the enemy”; “Exxon Valdez birds”; “Three Mile Island cooling towers”; and/or “polar bear climate change” to get a sense of some of the visualizations discussed in the book). But beyond their emotional potency, what do those proverbial thousand words convey? Not as much as we might hope, **Finis Dunaway** argues in *Seeing Green*. Analyzing iconic environmental images from the second half of the twentieth century, he demonstrates that widely circulated media representations have typically offered an overly simplistic explanation of environmental problems. In particular, they have privileged the role of individual actions as both cause and solution to issues such as pollution while understating long-term systemic factors such as consumer culture and corporate power.

At the same time that environmental images have often reduced complex environmental questions to individual decisions, Dunaway argues that many images encouraged the perception that we are all in this together. While true in an abstract sense, this sentiment ignores enormous variation in which groups cause environmental harm and which groups pay the price of exposure. As environmental justice scholars have amply demonstrated, wealthier and whiter communities that live resource-intensive lives are typically able to protect themselves from the worst effects of pollution while poorer communities of color usually bear the brunt of environmental burdens. The recurrent visual motif of universal responsibility and vulnerability, frequently depicted with white bodies, has masked the extent to which the realities of environmental challenges are shaped by race and class.

Handsomely illustrated, concise, and seeking to address several subfields including environmental history, visual studies, and public culture, *Seeing Green* tackles a big subject in a relatively small package. The result has been a host of awards, including the John G. Cawelti Award for the best scholarly book in popular culture and American culture from the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association and the AEJMC History Division Book Award for the best book in journalism and mass communication history from the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. The book also received an Honorable Mention designation for the PROSE Award in Media and Cultural Studies from the Association of American Publishers and was shortlisted for the Wallace K. Ferguson Prize of the Canadian Historical Association.

I asked **Keith Woodhouse** to participate in this roundtable because of his expertise in the history of the modern environmental movement. His comments emphasize the value of bringing images and emotions into environmental history while also raising questions about the rigidity of the divide between individual action and systematic change.

Lori Vermaas is a scholar of American visual culture with a particular interest in perceptions of the natural world. Her review explores the links between images and environmental action, discussing among other topics the proper balance of visual analysis versus historical context and the degree to which it is appropriate to judge the limitations of media representations.

Finn Arne Jørgensen brings a background in history of technology and science and science and technology studies to environmental history. His remarks emphasize the categories of agency and hope, asking, for example, about how much agency we can attribute to images themselves versus the conditions of their creation and distribution. He also raises critical questions about the role of hope versus pessimism in the writing of environmental history, and how we assess the merits and limitations of individual action.

Marguerite S. Shaffer completes our roundtable, lending her expertise in American studies, public culture, and popular environmentalism. Her response uses the recent “Nature is Speaking” campaign of Conservation International to highlight the relevance of Dunaway’s historical work as well as to explore the concept of slow violence and the limitations of enlightenment epistemology.

Before turning to the first set of comments, I would like to pause here and thank all the roundtable participants for taking part. In addition, I would like to remind readers that as an open-access forum, *H-Environment Roundtable Reviews* is available to scholars and non-scholars alike, around the world, free of charge. Please circulate.

Comments by Keith Woodhouse, Northwestern University

What does environmentalism look like? Finis Dunaway has been asking that question for years, first in *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform* and recently in *Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of American Environmental Images*. *Natural Visions* considers film (both photography and movies) in the early and mid-twentieth century conservation movement, while *Seeing Green* examines the visual culture of the late-twentieth century environmental movement across a variety of media. Both books show how the seemingly straightforward ways in which environmentalists depicted their concerns – on television and in comic strips, through photographs and symbols – were in fact freighted with complicated meanings. In an image’s careful design and eager consumption, environmental narratives were built.

In many ways, though, *Seeing Green* is more concerned with how images limited those narratives than with how they built them. Starting from the straightforward premise that graphic representations were a crucial means of calling attention to environmental issues, Dunaway pays much greater attention to how such representations bounded those issues and Americans’ understanding of them. Just as photographs leave more out of the frame than they include in it, environmental imagery presented a radically simplified view of scale, social inequality, and possible alternatives. This amounted to a specific definition of what Dunaway calls “environmental citizenship.” Visual culture helped to define what rights Americans had to be safe from environmental harm and what responsibilities Americans held towards each other and the planet. That definition of citizenship was always a narrow one, even as it made powerful new claims.

The immediacy and clarity of graphic representations, and the speed with which people perceived them, meant that they often operated at a high emotional register. That did not put images at odds with reasoned discussion and conventional politics, Dunaway makes clear. *Seeing Green* insists on the crucial role of emotions in public life and so the direct connection between powerful images and political discourse. Emotional content, in fact, became a political stance in itself after World War II, when “government officials and scientific experts sought to discredit fear and anxiety as illegitimate emotions, especially in relation to technology, the environment, and human health” (p. 12). In the familiar story of 1960s environmentalism, concerns about nuclear fallout and pesticides led to a more ecological understanding of the world, blurring the line between human communities and natural systems. To this story Dunaway adds the use of emotions in politics, often through images featuring children, like anti-nuclear advertisements warning of strontium-90 in children’s teeth; photographs of suburban youth playing in clouds of the pesticide DDT; and the Lyndon Johnson campaign’s infamous “Daisy Girl” ad juxtaposing a young girl and a nuclear detonation. As environmental images taught Americans about the interconnectedness of the world, they also made a case for the legitimacy of visceral responses to technical concerns. “A vibrant democratic

culture,” anti-nuclear activists believed, rested on “the infusion of emotions into politics” (p. 16).

By April 22, 1970, the first Earth Day, the nascent environmental movement brought together disparate issues like nuclear fallout, smog, polluted waterways, solid waste, and oil spills into a planetwide phenomenon known as “the environmental crisis.” That expansion of geographic scale far beyond local communities led to a universalizing of who the environmental crisis affected, as environmentalists casually referred to an undifferentiated “we” and “us.” Everyone, environmentalists implied, contributed to and suffered from environmental ills in equal measure. “We have met the enemy and he is us,” Walt Kelly’s comic-strip opossum Pogo famously declared on poster after poster circulated during Earth Day. But environmental images depicted supposedly universal victims of pollution in highly specific ways. The human bodies that produced DDT-tainted milk or that wore gas masks - a ubiquitous symbol of environmental threats during Earth Day - were always white. Photograph after photograph showed white Americans subjected to environmental harm, an unintentional reflection of how the environmental movement ignored the disproportionate effects suffered by communities of color. For decades after Earth Day environmental images overwhelmingly featured white people, and the rare appearance of non-white Americans was almost never accompanied by a discussion of environmental inequities. The visual culture of environmentalism reinforced the movement’s narrow frame of reference.

For Dunaway, Pogo’s declaration of universal responsibility not only flattened uneven social relationships but limited political understandings of pollution. By declaring that the cause of environmental harm was “us” - a collective humanity - Pogo equated an individual tossing away a plastic cup with a corporation dumping waste into a nearby river. That uncomplicated finger-pointing apportioned guilt equally and suggested that individuals should clean up their own acts before blaming larger institutions or systems. The business community took this idea and ran with it. If there is a villain in *Seeing Green* it is certainly the Ad Council, the largest producer of public service advertisements in the United States. Again and again, Dunaway argues, the Ad Council offered individual action as the best solution to collective problems, leaving out any discussion of corporate responsibility or systemic change. In 1971 the Ad Council released its “Crying Indian” ad, depicting an American Indian canoeing through a polluted landscape and shedding a tear at a piece of trash casually tossed from a car window. Here the emotional content was explicit but the nature of the problem obscured. The “Crying Indian” ad anchored a television and print campaign called Keep America Beautiful that admonished Americans to stop littering. Individuals were at fault, and individuals could provide the solution. Nowhere did Keep America Beautiful suggest change at the level of policy, like requiring beverage companies to sell their product in reusable containers or, for that matter, holding companies in any way responsible for the waste they generated. This was not simply a blinkered point of view, Dunaway argues, but a message by design; the beverage and beverage container companies

that funded Keep America Beautiful sought to “counter the claims of a political movement without [themselves] seeming political” (p. 88).

During the 1970s the limited views of who suffered environmental harm and how environmental problems might be solved came together in a singular understanding of environmental politics best represented by the M.C. Escher-inspired recycling logo. Recycling was the battle cry of individualistic environmentalism and yet it was buttressed by municipal recycling programs. Environmentalism in the 1970s, Dunaway says, was less a matter of shifting from liberal reform to individual solutions than of combining the two. Americans could mitigate pollution by recycling their empty bottles and by passing relevant legislation. “In both cases,” Dunaway writes, “environmentalism was portrayed as a movement devoted to a specific entity – ‘the environment’ – and not a broad-based effort to bring about social justice.” Built on images of universal harm that ignored the unequal distribution of that harm, and on images of individual action that ignored systemic criticisms of capitalism or even particular industries, the environmental movement used powerful emotional appeals to promote simple and technical fixes. Even when environmental images were not cartoons, they offered cartoonish views.

The visual culture of environmentalism heightened awareness and limited the terms of that awareness at the same time. The energy crises of the 1970s forced Americans to confront the nation’s reliance on fossil fuels and environmentalists tried to encourage this introspection with events like 1978’s “Sun Day.” The Sun Day logo featured people holding hands, just as the event itself tried to bring together environmentalists, organized labor, and municipal leaders to form a broad-based coalition for alternative energy. The Ad Council, on the other hand, responded to lines at gas stations with a “Don’t Be Fuelish” campaign encouraging individual Americans not to waste energy while carefully avoiding any discussion of federal policy, corporate responsibility, or alternative energy regimes.

By the 1980s and 1990s, the environmental movement had accommodated itself to what Dunaway calls “a neoliberal age.” In time for the twentieth anniversary of Earth Day, the Ad Council concocted yet another environmental campaign focusing on individual action, this one encouraging recycling. But where environmental groups had once criticized the Ad Council’s overly simplistic messages, now they signed on. Many environmentalists finally came to embrace market-based solutions to environmental issues, Dunaway explains, convinced that people could buy their way to sustainability by putting the right light bulbs and organic produce into their shopping baskets. Not only did this consumer-friendly approach limit the discussion of alternatives, it normalized what might otherwise have been criticized. Although the outcry over the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989 was well deserved, the most familiar images – of oil-slicked birds and coastline – focused exclusively on the immediate threat to Alaskan wilderness. Oil leaking from the ship to the shore was an obvious crisis; less obvious, as Bill McKibben pointed out at the time, was the slow-rolling crisis of unspilled oil that fueled cars and contributed to global warming. An environmental movement that called attention only to unmistakable

problems like oil spills and packed landfills was an environmental movement that lacked any systemic critique.

Seeing Green is about much more than the visual culture of environmentalism; it is about the trajectory of the environmental movement after Earth Day, a surprisingly under-narrated story. While Dunaway's most immediate contribution is to bring specific images into the story of an inherently visual movement, his greater contribution is to more fully contextualize environmental ideas. *Seeing Green* provides a sense of how environmentalism responded to the crises and limits of the 1970s, the market fixations of the 1980s, and the importance of climate change in the 1990s and 2000s. It's not always clear what exactly "environmentalism" is – Dunaway tends to jump from group to group and issue to issue without discussing the many differences between them – but what is clear is that communities of color and systemic critiques tended to remain in the background, while white, middle class Americans and individualistic solutions occupied the foreground. *Seeing Green* helps to explain how Denis Hayes could go from criticizing corporations and overconsumption during Earth Day, 1970 to starting a guide to green shopping soon after Earth Day, 1990.

Seeing Green also takes seriously the role of emotions in environmental politics, something that few books have done. Emotional appeals can be misleading or limiting, as Dunaway demonstrates, but they can also be effective and important. Too often environmentalists, so used to being labeled sentimentalists, downplay the emotional content of environmental politics despite its clear importance. Dunaway acknowledges both the power and the pitfalls of playing on emotions for political ends, and shows convincingly how understanding both is crucial to understanding environmentalism.

One of the book's most significant contributions is also a conceptual limit, however. Dunaway structures the narrative of *Seeing Green* around the rise of a politics of individualism in the 1970s and 1980s. Market-based understandings of social problems hid the roles of corporations and industries and frustrated systemic solutions. Environmental policies moved from the public sphere to the private, from regulation to consumer choice. This trend, which Dunaway narrates with great insight, is an especially vital topic at a time when "Promethean environmentalists" have turned to technological fixes and the power of the market to address climate change. Too little has been written on market-based environmentalism, and *Seeing Green* has much to teach scholars now taking up the subject. It offers a rich counterpoint to Thomas Jandt's recent *Greening The Red, White, And Blue: The Bomb, Big Business, and Consumer Resistance in Postwar America*, a much more celebratory take on green consumerism.

At times, though, the distinction between individual behavior and systemic solutions is overstated. Dunaway criticizes any efforts to police everyday actions as distractions from more meaningful reform, and draws a line from anti-litter campaigns to market-based green consumerism. Pogo's "focus on personal

responsibility preceded the individualist turn in American public culture and the subsequent triumph of neoliberal values and structures” (pp. 65-67). The “Crying Indian” presented environmentalism as little more than “a moralistic cleanup crusade” (p. 95). By the 1980s, “The private sphere became the main site of environmental action, the place where virtuous consumers could atone for their ecological sins through recycling and other individual acts” (p. 191). *Seeing Green* pits individualistic environmentalism against the possibility of more complicated and nuanced views, presenting the two sides as mutually exclusive.

Surely environmentalism should involve both. As easy as it may be for environmentalists to pat themselves on the back for buying hybrid cars, recycled napkins, and low-flow showerheads and to then naively consider their work done, individual behavior still matters. Recently Bill McKibben – who Dunaway celebrates as an advocate for systemic change – wrote in *The New Yorker* about visiting a Vermont couple that let their local utility switch their lightbulbs to L.E.D.s, place solar panels on their garage, and install several heat pumps in order to save money. “I’ve travelled the world writing about and organizing against climate change,” McKibben said, “but, standing in the Borkowskis’ kitchen and looking at their electric bill, I felt a fairly rare emotion: hope.”¹

A focus on individual behavior does not have to frustrate systemic understandings. One may even contribute to the other. California has been much criticized for regulating car washing and lawn watering to combat a years-long drought while the lion’s share of water goes to agriculture in the Central Valley. But as long as agricultural water use is reduced, isn’t it better that municipal water use is too? An Angeleno or a San Franciscan taking shorter showers and using grey water for plants is far more likely to think about the statewide water system every day. Dunaway suggests virtuous individual behavior can have greater emotional than political consequences. But it can also give Americans an emotional stake in matters that often seem out of their reach.

It’s hard to believe that consumers who are admonished to turn off lights in empty rooms, reuse plastic bags, and walk to work are too myopic to draw connections between those everyday activities and the systems they connect to. The Exxon boycott that followed the Valdez spill targeted a single company rather than an industry or a way of life. “In this framing of environmental politics,” Dunaway writes, “the structural dimensions of energy policy receded behind appeals to virtuous consumption” (p. 233). Maybe. But market-based strategies can be effective parts of much larger wholes. One of the turning points in the civil rights movement, after all, was a boycott. Any seismic shift in energy policy is going to be built from countless moments of specific and limited frustration and outrage, building to a point where wholesale change becomes the only option.

¹ McKibben, Bill, “Power To The People” *The New Yorker* (June 29, 2015), p. 30.

Where do individual actions and systemic change depart from each other? Are consumer choices and broad political reforms always distinct or can they operate in tandem? Which is more likely to influence the other? These are difficult and important questions that social movements from Populism to feminism have wrestled with. They are particularly complicated when it comes to environmentalism – a movement fundamentally tied up with matters of production and consumption.

Seeing Green raises these questions in a way that should influence much scholarship to come. Dunaway has framed the modern environmental movement in urgent and compelling ways. He tells a story that must be integrated into a broader narrative of environmentalism in the twentieth century. After reading his book it becomes difficult to utter the familiar slogan “Think globally, act locally” without a newfound introspection and thoughtfulness, or to gaze at environmental images without thinking harder about the complicated ideas and implications at work.

Comments by Lori Vermaas, Independent Scholar

I feel like a bit of an outlier as one of the reviewers of Finis Dunaway's *Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of American Environmental Images*, given that my training primarily focuses on pre-World War I American visual culture. As a result, the images of environmental concern I'm most familiar with are harbingers like Thomas Cole's "blasted tree" or works by other Hudson School artists who depicted landscapes dotted with tree stumps, like George Inness's *The Lackawanna Valley* (c. 1855) or Sanford Gifford's *Hunter Mountain, Twilight* (1866). Yet, the environmental commentary seemingly apparent to us in these works is highly dubious. Inness likely intended to celebrate technological or settlement progress rather than condemn the raping of the land. Indeed, in a later period some of Dorothea Lange's FSA photographs of northern Idaho homesteads (studded with denuded, branchless trees) dramatized impoverished farmers' challenges to establish their new holdings rather than made some large statement about questionable American land-use practices. In other words, images expressive of an environmental ethos in America tend to qualify as ecological statements retrospectively, informed by subsequent concerns, not really the artist's.

That isn't the case with Dunaway's *Seeing Green*. The images he studies were intended by their creators (many in the realms of advertising or the news media) to foreground environmental concerns and/or push an agenda. By tracing out a history of what he has identified as the most iconic environmental images, Dunaway not only establishes a list for scholars to quibble over (I vote for the Crying Indian, nuclear cooling towers, polar bears, and Al Gore on a mechanical cherry picker to spotlight rising carbon dioxide levels), but also raises intriguing questions about the role of images in the environmental movement and the limits of media representation.

Can images actually generate changes in environmental practices and policy? Can they improve how we perceive environmental problems? Given Dunaway's contention, with which I heartily agree, that the media or art world struggles with depicting the subject effectively, I'm not so sure they can. As he frequently notes, the issue of time is vexing for image makers—they habitually avoid depicting long-term consequences, opting instead to highlight the spectacular (oil spills spreading across the ocean, for example) or the poignant victims (oil-soaked otters) of a current disaster. Images like these, which focus on disasters and their victims, are compelling and harder-hitting—these pictures sell better, they attract us because they allow us to see actual environmental damage occurring in real time. But they pull up short of spotlighting the underlying causes of the damage: all the consumer-based systems that support environmentally hazardous practices (like industrial agriculture or fossil-fuel dependence).

Another of his critiques involves the images' strong tendency to promote a consumerist (or individualist) ethos as a viable solution—that each of us can help to

“solve” these problems by voting with our wallets. Some of the examples he notes include not purchasing products from companies or industries whose practices are environmentally destructive (like Exxon or apple sellers using Alar), purchasing recyclable containers, or buying carbon points (to mitigate one’s carbon footprint). I agree that these aren’t ultimately solutions to harmful environmental practices. But since the advertising industry created many of the images in which Dunaway locates this attitude, why does he find it so surprising that they tend to stress a consumerist ethos? Why wouldn’t a culture that is market-driven, a capitalist country, rely on consumerist rhetoric to propose a solution?

While I appreciated his critiques, I began to tire of them after a while. In fact, I started smiling to myself with each reading session, because I began thinking that it would be more accurate to alt-title the book as “Seeing Red.” I say this, not with deep criticism, but with just increasing annoyance, because as I kept working through the book, Dunaway’s approach seemed not only to trace the history of environmental images in America, but also how they came up short. And they ALWAYS came up short. He constantly judges the images, an approach not usually employed in scholarly analysis.

Some of the images Dunaway discusses also didn’t seem to merit an entire chapter themselves. In chapters 6 and 10 (about the recycling logo and the logo for Sun Day, a 1978 event celebrating solar energy, respectively) he devoted less time to interpreting the logos than to discussing the contextual issues surrounding them, like environmental policy history or the festival itself. The latter are relevant, but because the book’s focus is on interpreting images, it was jarring when he veered away so much from close readings of each of the chapter’s visual headliner.

In addition, Dunaway missed out on analyzing more potentially promising visual material when he took a big jump in time over the 1990s. The leap was quite glaring and surprising, given the comprehensiveness and vigilance of his analytical timeline throughout the rest of the book. One way of filling in that gap might have been to touch on the controversy concerning clear-cutting practices during that decade, and the activism it inspired, which ultimately led to heavy media coverage of Julia Butterfly Hill’s two-year redwood tree sit in the late 90s. I was eager to read of his take on this confrontation and its visual portrayal and was a bit disappointed when I realized he had skipped over this time period.

However, when Dunaway focuses on the cultural/semiotic interconnections of the images, his analysis shines. For example, his explication of the Three Mile Island towers as symbols, juxtaposing them with other notorious imagery, like the mushroom cloud—or noting the towers’ visual quotation in various media, like entertainment magazines and editorial cartoons—clearly indicates the nuclear behemoths as part of the American visual vernacular, thus exemplifying a more durable and satisfying interpretive approach.

My aforementioned impatience with Dunaway's writing style ultimately provoked me to go back and consider the challenge of capturing *processes* in imagery (which Dunaway quotes journalist Jack Newfield raising as a news media weakness way back in 1969). Indeed, why do we tend to ignore or avoid creating compelling environmental imagery that emphasizes systemic, long-term issues, the "accretive hazards" or "institutionalized injustices" [58] that inevitably lead to ecological problems? Furthermore, how do we learn to perceive the long view, and then embrace it? Why do we struggle so with depicting systems, or larger environmental concepts? Do other national cultures have this problem too? I wonder how much visual cultural historians, and also members of the media, are implicated in promoting this lack of vision. That is, how can we teach, using imagery, to encourage the development of this type of perception, an appreciation of ecological time?

I don't have answers for this; alas, I don't think images can "school" one to perceive environmental issues/solutions in a longer-view way, though they can provoke an awakening. The only way I've started or been able to even consider a longer view and resist status quo ideas is to do a lot of reading and listening to "experts" discuss these issues. In other words, long-term perception takes or requires a slow, long-term build up. That's really what I've taken away from Dunaway's project—that no matter how clever we think are about these issues, we still don't know how to promote the "proper" solution with images as our primary guide. As embarrassing as it is to admit, we seem to only pay close attention when we're in the midst of suffering the brutal consequences of environmentally destructive habits. I fear that our lack of "proactive" vision when it comes to maintaining healthy ecosystems will forever be our Achilles heel.

Comments by Finn Arne Jørgensen, Umeå University

When environmentalism gained momentum as a mainstream movement in the 1960s and 1970s, media images played a key role, but at a high cost. This is the central argument in Finis Dunaway's *Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of American Environmental Images*, a forceful, intriguing, and well-written study of how "media images do not simply illustrate environmental politics, but also shape the bounds of public debate by naturalizing particular meanings of environmentalism." (p. 1) Arguing that histories of environmentalism have largely ignored the role media images have played in framing and popularizing environmental issues, Dunaway seeks to write a history of modern environmentalism that treats media images as active rhetorical agents that have had real significance in the world. More specifically, the book examines the historical development of a post-1960s discourse where, over a very short period of time, environmental concerns were catapulted to the forefront of public discourse through advertising, comics, and images. Through this process, key actors promoted a discourse where environmental problems should be solved at the level of the individual consumer rather than seeking more systemic solutions.

In the three sections of the book, each consisting of five concise chapters, Dunaway examines a series of iconic events in the history of modern environmentalism from the 1960s onward. Most will be familiar for environmental historians, though others are less studied. For each of these events, he argues that images played a central part in the framing of environmental issues as well as in prescribing particular outcomes. Dunaway states that this book emphasizes three broad themes that are often missing from other histories of popular environmentalism: 1) emotions and public life, 2) the shifting meanings of environmental citizenship, and 3) the limits of media representation. By using environmental images to study these broader themes, Dunaway draws the conclusion that the iconic imagery of modern environmentalism mixes facts and feelings in ways that helped the environmental movement grow large at the cost of its capacity for creating systematic change. When environmental issues were popularized through visual media, they deflected attention from corporate and government responsibility, Dunaway argues, instead emphasizing "the idea that Americans are personally culpable for pollution and other environmental problems." These "mass-media spectacles of crisis" (p. 2) encouraged Americans to see themselves as part of a larger ecological fabric, but often masked systemic causes and structural inequalities. His worthwhile ambition with this study, which builds on and extends his first book, *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform*, is not only to bring images into histories of environmentalism, but to place media images at the center of analysis.² Images make problems visible, but they also hide and mask the causes of these problems, Dunaway argues. In other words, his real concern is what lies outside the frame of the iconic environmental images he studies.

² Finis Dunaway, *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

When sitting down to read the book, I was expecting to find a study that brought environmental history in dialogue with visual culture and media studies, well-established research fields that study respectively the relationship between images and their users, and the content, history, and effects of particular media forms. This is not quite what Dunaway has done in his book, though. He does not attempt to theorize media or relate to key scholarship on the production and reception of media, of which there is plenty.³ As a result, I don't think we get a satisfactory discussion of what it means *to see* and even more so, *to see green*, as the title of the book promises. I certainly believe there is a connection between ways of seeing and ways of knowing and engaging with nature and the environment. In a recent book, the journalist Jon Mooallem argues that we increasingly work out our relationship to the natural world through visual media, with the consequence that nature is as much a place of the imagination as it is something "out there."⁴ This is an observation that environmental historians should recognize from William Cronon's essay "The Trouble with Wilderness."⁵ I have recently argued that media images "not only articulate broader social trends but also shape them and give them direction," an argument that definitely aligns with what Dunaway aims to do in *Seeing Green*.⁶ Visual culture bypasses words and the need to spell out exact definitions. It works on an emotional level, as Dunaway acknowledges, but it also means that images aren't definitive. There is always room for interpretation, as we read meaning into images and, in doing so, to a certain extent project our own experiences, values, and preferences onto them.

And it is here I miss some more explicit and theoretically-informed discussion of what the media forms that Dunaway writes about are and how they function. He makes a point of focusing on mainstream mass media, looking at largely iconic images that found widespread circulation, and uses these to draw particular conclusions about media images as rhetorical agents. His conclusion is that visual media is a technology of environmental citizenship, but one that comes with severe limitations. While I can generally agree with that statement, it is not entirely clear to me exactly where these limitations come from. What kind of explanatory power can we attribute to such visual media? Are all forms of media equal and do they work in the same way? Do images shape the bounds of environmental discourse, or are they simply tools in the strategies of particular actors to promote their interests? In other

³ See for instance Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London: Verso, 1989), Marcus Banks & Jay Ruby, *Made to Be Seen: Perspectives on the History of Visual Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), and Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

⁴ Jon Mooallem, *Wild Ones: A Sometimes Dismaying, Weirdly Reassuring Story about Looking at People Looking at Animals in America* (New York: Penguin, 2013).

⁵ William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." In *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon, 69–90 (New York: Norton, 1995)

⁶ Finn Arne Jørgensen, "Why Look at Cabin Porn", *Public Culture* 3, 2015, p. 559).

words, are the limitations of visual media as technologies of environmental citizenship inherent qualities of images as media forms or are the limitations something that are actively constructed, enforced, and maintained by individuals, institutions, and organizations?

The tension between images as agents and images as just one of many tools in the strategies of what we might call more traditional historical actors can be found throughout the book. For instance, in part 2, Dunaway focuses on how media fragmented popular perceptions of the energy crisis and rendered incoherent the claims of oppositional movements. Here we see how in the media coverage of Sun Day, individual tinkerers could be treated with respect, but energy activists working towards systematic change were ridiculed. Dunaway interprets this as an example of how not all important environmental problems can be represented in visual media (with reference to Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence"). While mass media coverage has been important for legitimizing the concept of environmental crisis, and at times also placed narratives of individual disasters into larger temporal frameworks, Dunaway argues that the overall impression is one of short-term solutions and immediate disaster thinking. Long-term and systematic reform has little place in the mass-media discourse on environmental problems. Yet, I wonder: Do the causes of this problem reside in the images themselves, or in the way these images are deployed in mass media?

It seems to me that the real power in the story lies in mass media and actors that influence and govern media rather than in the images themselves. Dunaway demonstrates well how image-producing agents (organizations and individuals) produce spectacles of crisis to serve their own interests. Two such actors that appear frequently, and that I have some knowledge of from my own research, are Keep America Beautiful (KAB) and The Advertising Council, which partnered to produce the very influential public service campaign "The Crying Indian," released on Earth Day in 1971. KAB is a nonprofit, public education organization established in 1953 by a group of important glass, aluminum, paper, and steel container manufacturers, typically making consumer products in disposable packaging. Beverage companies like Coca-Cola and Pepsi were important here, but also Dow, Dupont, and Procter & Gamble. KAB is a tricky company to study, as they have been active for a long time and have had considerable influence on American environmental policy and civil life, yet they have not welcomed scholars and journalists into their archives. As Dunaway rightly notes, KAB "practiced a sly form of propaganda" (p. 88). Many scholars, myself included, have written about KAB using material from where KAB has come into contact with other actors that are accessibly archived, such as The Advertising Council, whose archives are deposited in the University of Illinois Archives in Urbana. In studying these and other sources we get a clear impression of an organization that works to instill a sense of environmental awareness in the American public, particularly centered on waste and littering, but in ways that deliberately shift responsibility away from the packaging manufacturers. Dunaway's conclusion that KAB frames environmental problems in moral and not structural terms in order to shift responsibility, attention,

and liability away from its founders, aligns perfectly with this growing body of scholarship. However, while images and visual media certainly were an important tool in the activities of these actors, they were certainly not the only one. If we are to recognize how images and visual media were deployed through mass media in particular ways that clearly reflected the interests of KAB's founders, we should not necessarily treat the successes and limitations of these images as inherent qualities of the media form. I'm not saying this to criticize Dunaway's treatment of KAB and the Ad Council, which I believe is both sophisticated and spot on, but by bringing this particular aspect of the story so sharply into focus, I wonder what nuances are lost.

I say that because while images are the subject of Dunaway's book, he simultaneously tells a history of the rise of green consumerism as a form of environmental citizenship. In dealing with this story, I have a distinct feeling that Dunaway reduces the story to binary political alternatives: our choices and ways of understanding the world are framed as either/or, good/bad, individual/corporate. It is quite obvious that Dunaway is not a fan of practices of individual environmental action, such as recycling, energy conservation, and green consumerism, calling the faith in personal action "lopsided" (p. 4). Dunaway makes a sharp argument that green consumerism as an attempt to harness market forces to save the planet is a wholly symbolical action: "More than ever before, green consumerism and other forms of personal action became the crucial levers of change, the site where hope resided, the realm in which individuals could simultaneously express their environmental values and gain a sense of therapeutic relief" (p. 203). Implied in this argument is an understanding that the image-centricity of mass-media environmentalism is the cause of the individualized environmental actions of green consumerism, which he categorizes as futile.

But what is the causal link here? Did the images cause the shift to individualized actions or are they symptomatic of the shift? The story of environmentalism going broader but shallower is one we can recognize, for instance, from the light-green France that Michael Bess writes about in *The Light-Green Society: Ecology and Technological Modernity in France*, but what happens when this story is applied to the US?⁷ Dunaway is more interested in connecting the light-green environmentalism of green consumers to the advance of neoliberalism rather than seeing it as a legitimate form of environmental action, however imperfect, in a complex and contradictory world. Yet, hybrid models of environmental action and governance, such as the ones that Bess argues for or that I write about in *Making a Green Machine*, are increasingly common.⁸ By presenting a fundamentally binary model where the only substantive and meaningful environmental action must take place at systemic levels, Dunaway risks falling into the same trap as the actors he

⁷ Michael Bess, *The Light-Green Society: Ecology and Technological Modernity in France, 1960-2000* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁸ Finn Arne Jørgensen, *Making a Green Machine: The Infrastructure of Beverage Container Recycling* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013)

looks at – by making particular problems visible (which he does well), alternatives are obscured.

As an experiment, could the story of the environmental images in this book be told and interpreted in another way? In such a story, could we say that by putting environmental concerns on the public agenda from the 1960s onwards, environmental images served to raise awareness (though admittedly an incomplete knowledge, as is the case with all knowledge) of environmental concerns and connections, most importantly in providing a framework for understanding concrete everyday actions in relation to an increasingly planetary view of environmental problems? This emerging articulation of relationships and responsibilities was gradual and distributed, taking place in a variety of media and promoted by actors with particular interests, many of them conflicting. In such a story, what is the relationship between seeing green and acting green?

In conclusion, I think that while the book is well-written and compelling, its larger framing fits in with a longer (and largely American) tradition of fundamentally declensionist environmental histories. I do not find it to be a particularly optimistic book, rather one that despairs at the possibility of environmental action in the United States. Significant action is not possible within the current system, Dunaway seems to say throughout the entire book. By reducing Americans to individual consumers, their ability to act collectively, as citizens, is taken away. Of course, one could ask whether instilling hope should be a goal with our scholarship, and opinions will differ here. I do believe, however, that we should be asking how we can act at scales beyond the everyday. *Seeing Green* succeeds in asking the right kind of questions and provides some provocative answers that should inspire reflection and consideration, especially on what the answers might look like beyond the American context. Are environmental problems moral, structural, or both? How can we break down planetary and deeply structural environmental/social/political/economic problems (for these are deeply intertwined) into components on which it is possible to take action? While the question of individual responsibility is a critically important one, I believe it is even more powerful when paired with a story about hope and of the possibility of meaningful change. While individual responsibility certainly isn't enough, the question remains: can you do without it?

Comments by Marguerite S. Shaffer, Miami University

“The Drama of Nature”

In 2014 Conservation International, a nonprofit environmental advocacy organization headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, launched its worldwide public awareness campaign entitled Nature is Speaking in an effort to reframe the public debate about climate change as a lead in to the 2015 Paris Climate Summit. Through both imagery and message, the campaign seeks to shift the discourse of environmentalism away from the traditional rhetoric of wilderness preservation toward ecosystem services, human dependence on natural systems, and, ultimately, survival of the human species. Currently, the campaign consists of ten short videos created by Lee Clow, the man behind the renowned Apple “1984” advertisement and director of media arts for the global advertising network TBWA Worldwide. Each video represents a critical component of the earth system, a specific natural cycle, or an iconic natural phenomenon. Harrison Ford narrates “Ocean”; Edward Norton is the voice of “Soil”; Penelope Cruz depicts “Water”; Liam Nelson portrays “Ice”; Kevin Spacey speaks for “The Rainforest”; Robert Redford is the voice of “The Redwood”; Ian Somerhalder narrates “Coral Reef”; Lupita Nyong’o performs “Flower”; Reese Witherspoon, “Home”; and Julia Roberts is the inimitable voice of “Mother Nature.”⁹ Combining the aesthetics of the sublime with the recognizable voices of blockbuster global celebrities, the spots dramatize nature’s agency and emotional appeal: each one culminates in the admonition, “Nature doesn’t need people. People need nature.”

CI’s Nature is Speaking campaign might best be understood as part of an established practice of environmental advocacy that has relied on the emotional punch and power of environmental imagery designed to educate the public about hard environmental facts. The short films draw attention to a number of critical issues deftly explored in Finis Dunaway’s new book *Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of American Environmental Images*. Like the diverse array of environmental images examined by Dunaway, the Nature is Speaking spots provocatively fuse facts and feelings in an effort to spark a new global environmental citizenship. As with the examples Dunaway cites, these public service advertisements point to the resilience of nature and the vulnerability of humans. Their goal is to dramatize the urgency of our current global environmental crisis and thus provoke a renewed sense of environmental responsibility; they serve as an environmental call to action. Their melding of mass media and environmentalism, Hollywood celebrity and spectacular nature, ecosystem services and ecological resilience provides a useful entrée to consider the larger significance of Dunaway’s work.

⁹ Greg Harmon, “‘Nature is Speaking,’ Will Consumers Listen?” The Guardian 6 October 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/vital-signs/2014/oct/06/-sp-julia-roberts-harrison-ford-penelope-cruz-spacey-norton-redford-nature-is-speaking-videos> accessed November 12, 2015. See also, the Conservation International website for Nature is speaking: <http://www.conservation.org/nature-is-speaking/Pages/default.aspx>

Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of American Environmental Images examines the emergence and development of environmentalism as a mass political movement from World War II to the present, focusing on the role of visual media in framing and defining public conceptions of and responses to environmental issues. Tracing a broad spectrum of mainstream media including advertisements, public service announcements, popular comics, Hollywood film, documentaries, news stories, press releases, and public relations campaigns, among other sources, Dunaway documents how media has shaped a visual, cultural, and political rhetoric of environmentalism, which blends emotion, science, and politics to foster a sense of ecological vulnerability and an ideal of environmental citizenship. His detailed analysis demonstrates that even as this emotionally charged political discourse expanded the public debate about environmental issues, it also constrained the possibilities for effective public action by framing environmental reform in neoliberal terms as an individual rather than a state or corporate responsibility. In probing the intersections between visual imagery, public discourse, mass media, popular politics, and environmentalism, Dunaway's work not only re-contextualizes the history of environmentalism, but it also offers a new understanding of political culture and public discourse in the postwar era. His analysis reveals the integral interconnections between consumer culture, systemic and structural environmental problems, and popular environmentalism.

The Nature is Speaking campaign is clearly an attempt to intervene in and correct what has been deemed a widespread failure to communicate not only the scientific facts substantiating pressing environmental issues, but also the political, economic, and social issues at stake for environmental policymakers, the environmental movement, and the broader public. In *Seeing Green*, Dunaway demonstrates that this failure has well-established, deep roots. Integrating media studies, visual studies, political culture studies, and consumer culture history, Dunaway raises a number of significant issues that lay bare the origins and the inadequacies of environmental communication and the implications for future public debates about environmental policy. What follows is a preliminary meditation on these issues inspired by my reading of Finis Dunaway's timely new book. Specifically, I want to focus on two interrelated themes: the inefficacy of environmental discourse and the limitations of enlightenment epistemology.

Despite the emotional power of environmental imagery, Dunaway argues that the visual rhetoric of environmentalism prevented rather than provoked systemic environmental reform. In tracing the development and impact of a range of media representations centered on environmental issues, from images of the 1969 Santa Barbara Oil Spill to the "Crying Indian" Keep America Beautiful PSA, from the popular impact of the OPEC Oil Embargo to Three Mile Island and *The China Syndrome*, from the campaign against Alar to *An Inconvenient Truth*, Dunaway documents and probes Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence."¹⁰ His close analysis

¹⁰ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

of these representations exposes the power and limitations of the discourse of popular environmentalism, demonstrating how these images successfully elicited feelings of environmental vulnerability and culpability while obscuring the systemic and structural causes undergirding a broad range of environmental crises. His analysis of the Crying Indian Keep America Beautiful PSA provides a compelling example. In celebrating an ideal of nature embodied by the vanishing Indian and conflating pollution with litter, this public service announcement simultaneously obfuscated the problem of toxic byproducts and pollution, while placing responsibility for action on consumer citizens rather than corporate manufacturers and government regulators. Similarly, the Nature is Speaking spots, cast humans broadly as the problem. In "Coral Reef," Ian Somerhalder calls out humans in general for destroying one fifth of the world's coral reefs systems: "you [humans] raise the temperature of the ocean so I can't live here anymore...you tear me apart with dynamite and poison me with cyanide."¹¹ In each of these examples the visual spectacle of nature evokes a broad emotional appeal rooted in a sense of universal human vulnerability, guilt, and responsibility, but the causes of this environmental "slow violence" are either individualized or generalized. Corporate, business, and state powers bare no responsibility, and the realities of environmental inequities are erased. To quote Walt Kelly, the creator of the Pogo comic strip, one of Dunaway's main examples: "We have met the enemy and he is us." In this logic of popular environmentalism, environmental problems are the public's problem. "Ultimately," writes Dunaway, "the iconic images of American environmentalism have impeded efforts to realize or even imagine sustainable visions of the future" (6). In this way, Dunaway details the broad implications of this failure, and in doing so raises the question of the responsibility of environmental historians among other scholars to address this failure of public discourse.

In *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, a pivotal critique of public discourse in a media saturated age, media scholar Neil Postman warned that the graphic revolution embodied by instantaneous news and visual spectacle "undermined traditional definitions of information, of news, and to a large extent of reality itself" and in the process undercut civic literacy, public discourse, and reason-based political action; or as he describes it: the "sophisticated ability to think conceptually, deductively and sequentially; a high valuation of reason and order; an abhorrence of contradiction; a large capacity for detachment and objectivity; and a tolerance for delayed response."¹² Postman provides broad context for recent works in environmental history, most notably Naomi Oreskes and Eric M. Conway's *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* and Joshua P. Howe's *Behind the Curve: Science and the Politics of Global Warming*, which examine the inefficacy of

¹¹ Conservation International, "Coral Reef," narrated by Ian Somerhalder <http://www.conservation.org/nature-is-speaking/Pages/Ian-Somerhalder-Is-Coral-Reef.aspx> accessed November 12, 2015.

¹² Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York City, NY: Penguin, 1985), 74 and 63.

environmental discourse and the failed political response to climate change.¹³ Oreskes and Conway chronicle the deliberate and systemic practices of misrepresentation and obfuscation embraced by corporations to discredit environmental science. Howe's history of global environmental policy, practice, and implementation further documents the failure of science-based political discourse to produce effective international environmental policy on climate change. Both of these works suggest that if rational, science-based, public discourse could prevail over corporate mass-mediated interests, there might be some hope for a democratic politics of environmentalism that could result in potent environmental policy.

Dunaway, however, complicates this faith in the possibilities of a rational, science-based, politics of environmentalism. In tracing the emergence of mass-mediated environmental spectacle rooted in emotional imagery and a populist politics of environmental vulnerability, guilt, and individual responsibility, he expands on critical issues raised by Neil Postman and Rob Nixon. His analysis of *An Inconvenient Truth* offers a case in point. As Dunaway notes, Al Gore's film offered the most comprehensive representation of the connections between global warming and our dependency on fossil fuels. Yet, like the many environmental icons that preceded it, as well as the current Nature is Speaking campaign, the film engages the drama of nature to convey its message of universal vulnerability and individual responsibility. As Dunaway explains, "His [Gore's] solutions merge the personal with the planetary, but obscure the geographies of risk and responsibility and enshrine faith in the market as the immediate savior, the short-term solution to the long-term accumulative crisis of climate change" (272). Gore was unwilling and unable to call into question the driving faith in unending growth and accumulation fueling global consumer culture; nor was he able to address the inequities and power dynamics that support a global economy and culture organized around consumer abundance. The power of Dunaway's book rests in his detailed documentation and analysis of the integral connections between consumer culture, systemic environmental problems, and popular environmentalism. Through this unraveling of the entanglement of representation and the material environment, emotion and science, consumer culture and environmentalism, Nature and Culture writ large, Dunaway speaks to the failure of enlightenment epistemology in a media saturated world governed by the forces of neoliberalism. He suggests that the inefficacy of popular environmentalism goes beyond attempting to confront global environmental "slow violence." Like Postman and Nixon, Dunaway argues that the spread of a hegemonic, consumer driven, mass mediated, corporate controlled, globalized culture centered on unlimited growth and accumulation is to blame. This raises the question: as environmental historians, academics, global citizens, inhabitants of the earth, what are our options?

¹³ Naomi Oreskes and Eric M. Conway *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*. (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010); Joshua P. Howe's *Behind the Curve: Science and the Politics of Global Warming*. (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2014).

Following the interpretive path of cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall, Dunaway concludes that the power of images to “render visible the seemingly invisible phenomenon of global warming” and other forms of environmental slow violence offers possibilities (273). He cites 350.org’s successful use of imagery and social media to galvanize a global climate movement that has had significant political impact. Thus, he ends on a note of hope for a democratic, mass-mediated, politics rooted in enlightenment epistemology, which promises that science, knowledge, and reason can result in rational action and informed policy. CI’s Nature is Speaking campaign grudgingly shares this same faith. As Julia Roberts as Mother Nature intones: “One way or the other your actions will determine your fate, not mine. I am Nature. I will go on. I am prepared to evolve. Are you?”

In the context of environmental history and the larger politics of environmentalism, this raises the well-established tension between capitalism and environmentalism—the market vs. democracy. What both the Nature is Speaking campaign and *Seeing Green* add to this debate is a more nuanced look at the complex interconnections between consumer culture and environmentalism. This perspective reflects the broader shift taking place in environmental policy and politics articulated by the concepts of ecosystem services and environmental resilience. In this emerging framework, nature is recast in the context of the “planetary boundaries” necessary to support a safe operating space for humanity to avoid “human-induced environmental change on a global scale.”¹⁴ What this emerging environmental logic suggests is that we need to turn more attention to what Donna Haraway calls “naturecultures,” which reject “typological thinking, binary dualisms, and both relativisms and universalism of many flavors” in favor of “relational categories” focused on “process, historicity, difference, specificity, co-habitation, co-constitution, and contingency.”¹⁵ In *Seeing Green*, Finis Dunaway offers an excellent model to follow.

¹⁴ Rockström, J., W. Steffen, K. Noone, Å. Persson, F. S. Chapin, III, E. Lambin, T. M. Lenton, M. Scheffer, C. Folke, H. Schellnhuber, B. Nykvist, C. A. De Wit, T. Hughes, S. van der Leeuw, H. Rodhe, S. Sörlin, P. K. Snyder, R. Costanza, U. Svedin, M. Falkenmark, L. Karlberg, R. W. Corell, V. J. Fabry, J. Hansen, B. Walker, D. Liverman, K. Richardson, P. Crutzen, and J. Foley. 2009. Planetary boundaries: exploring the safe operating space for humanity. *Ecology and Society* 14(2): 32. [online] URL: <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art32/>

¹⁵ Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 6, 8, 7. For a more detailed exploration of this approach in the context of environmental history see, Marguerite S. Shaffer and Phoebe S. K. Young, “The Nature-Culture Paradox,” *Rendering Nature: Animals, Bodies, Places, Politics*, eds. Marguerite S. Shaffer and Phoebe S. K. Young, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 1-20.

Response by Finis Dunaway, Trent University

I thank Christopher Jones for including *Seeing Green* in the *H-Environment Roundtable Reviews* and for organizing this lively discussion. I am also grateful to Keith Woodhouse, Marguerite Shaffer, Finn Arne Jørgensen, and Lori Vermaas for their thoughtful and critical engagement with my work. Together their reviews raise wide-ranging questions about the methodologies, interpretations, and broader implications of the book—questions that I am eager to consider in this response. I have structured my comments as a set of reflections on the following questions:

1. How does *Seeing Green's* approach to environmental images relate to other scholarship in media and visual culture studies?
2. What's more important: image or context?
3. Is *Seeing Green* too critical of popular environmental images, especially those that emphasize individual responsibility and green consumerism?
4. Is the book too pessimistic? Is there a place for hope in the writing of environmental history?
5. What topics does the book ignore, and how might future scholarship draw on (or depart from) its approach?

Before addressing these issues, let me begin with some brief comments about the origins and development of *Seeing Green*. Initially, I conceived of this project as a history of popular environmental images during the 1970s. At the time, other historians were working on path-breaking accounts of this pivotal decade, yet their books on politics, culture, labor, and other topics neglected the era's critical environmental debates. I began by exploring media images that circulated during the period surrounding the first Earth Day in 1970. From this research, I began to notice certain dominant motifs and recurring patterns across a variety of sources. In particular, I found that popular images emphasized two key concepts: the idea of universal vulnerability, which suggested that all Americans were equally susceptible to environmental danger; and the notion of universal responsibility, which suggested that all Americans were equally culpable for causing the environmental crisis. Although I continued to research environmental images in the 1970s (and large portions of *Seeing Green* focus on this decade), I soon found myself being drawn, simultaneously, backward and forward in time.

My interest in traversing the more recent period was in part sparked by the remarkable success of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*. I vividly remember seeing that documentary during the summer of 2006, while I was in the midst of my Earth Day research. I was impressed by Gore and director Davis Guggenheim's innovative use of images to convey scientific information about climate change. Yet I was also disappointed by the film's emphasis on universal vulnerability and disheartened by its predictable recitation of individual save-the-planet tips. The public response to *An Inconvenient Truth* encouraged me to carry my story into the twenty-first century and also to write this book with an eye on the present. I researched and

drafted *Seeing Green* as the devastating impacts of neoliberal policies became more apparent: increasing income stratification and declining opportunities for the middle and lower classes; escalating carbon emissions and other long-term ecological problems that received minimal response from the US government; and ongoing popular enthusiasm for the market and green consumerism as the most appropriate means for solving the environmental crisis. The edgy tone that I adopt in the book (and that some readers find too strong and provocative) was certainly shaped by my feelings of concern about the widespread failure to confront these deeply entrenched environmental and social predicaments.

At the same time, I also began to explore how and why particular images gained public visibility in the years before Earth Day. The project's chronological scope thus greatly expanded: Ranging from debates over nuclear fallout and pesticides during the 1960s through global warming today, *Seeing Green* traces the origins and durability of environmental images and ideas. In writing the book, I approached these sources with ambivalence. Even as I sought to explain the power of the media to shape popular attitudes and bring ecological values into the mainstream, I also wanted to understand the problems and limits of environmental icons.

1. How does *Seeing Green's* approach to environmental images relate to other scholarship in media and visual culture studies?

Both Woodhouse and Jørgensen note that *Seeing Green* builds on my first book, *Natural Visions*. Indeed, *Seeing Green* could be read as a chronological extension of *Natural Visions*, which covers the period from 1900 to 1970. Yet while *Natural Visions* looks at how artists and advocates used images to galvanize concern for threatened landscapes and policy decisions, *Seeing Green* emphasizes how mainstream media sources have framed and packaged environmental ideas for popular audiences. Although *Seeing Green* discusses certain images produced by environmental organizations, the book's focus is less on how environmentalists have used images as activist tools and more on how their ideas have been visualized and interpreted by the mainstream media. Like other scholarship on the media and American social movements, the book tries to explain how the media could both advance and hinder one of the most important political causes of our time.¹⁶

Shaffer's review astutely places *Seeing Green* in dialogue with other works on media coverage of science and environmental issues, such as Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway's *Merchants of Doubt*.¹⁷ Oreskes and Conway document the powerful role of

¹⁶ Important scholarship on the relationship between the mass media and other social movements includes: Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1994); and Martin A. Berger, *Seeing through Race: A Reinterpretation of Civil Rights Photography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

¹⁷ Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010).

corporations and right-wing foundations in fostering public doubt about environmental and health dangers. This effort to reject climate science and question the severity of environmental problems has undoubtedly limited the effectiveness of environmentalism. Rather than emphasize these issues, though, *Seeing Green* looks closely at media sources that seem, on the surface, to promote environmental values. Through a critical history of media images, I examine how mainstream images promote environmental anxiety but also constrict the political imagination. I argue that the limits of environmental reform were embedded within popular portrayals of the movement as an individualist response to systemic problems.

In this way, *Seeing Green* challenges a view commonly voiced by conservative critics of environmentalism: that the media have preyed on audience emotions to dupe the public into accepting the false claims of environmentalists. In the book's notes, I cite examples of representative authors who make this argument. Yet it is also worth noting that this perspective has been more fully articulated in the historian Patrick Allitt's *A Climate of Crisis*. (His book appeared just as I sent the final draft of *Seeing Green* to the publisher, so I was unable to engage with it.) *A Climate of Crisis* contends that the American public has been repeatedly manipulated by environmentalists and the media. Allitt presents audiences as gullible, easily swayed by emotion-saturated coverage and thus prone to accept environmental fear-mongering. He looks at pivotal events (including some analyzed in *Seeing Green*)—such as the Alar scare and the catastrophic *Exxon Valdez* oil spill—to buttress his claim that the spectacle-driven mass media mobilized popular feelings and lent legitimacy to the apocalyptic warnings of environmentalists.¹⁸

Allitt and conservative critics are surely correct that the popular media have promoted ecological anxiety through the emotive depiction of environmental danger. Yet this argument fails to consider how media coverage has frequently ignored the long-term causes and consequences of ecological risk. As Shaffer and Jørgensen note, *Seeing Green* draws on the literary critic Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence to critique media imagery. His book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* appeared after I had completed most of the initial draft, and I found that it provided a critical language to help me illuminate some of the problems of mainstream media images.¹⁹ While Allitt echoes conservative critics in chiding the emotionalism of environmental imagery, *Seeing Green* considers how media temporality—the focus on sudden spectacles of crisis—often obscures slow-motion tragedies and promotes short-term fixes to systemic problems.

Jørgensen asks important questions about the “inherent qualities of images as media forms,” the “causal link” between images and environmental politics, and the multiple uses of images by different historical actors. Many of his comments suggest

¹⁸ Patrick Allitt, *A Climate of Crisis: America in the Age of Environmentalism* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014).

¹⁹ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

that he was expecting something different from the book, such as a history of one particular media form in relation to the growth of environmentalism. This is a standard approach in many fields, and it has significant virtues: it allows for close attention to the visual qualities, forms of address, and modes of circulation offered by a specific type of media. In *Seeing Green*, though, I chose to emphasize the cross-fertilization of images. Rather than tracing the history of photography or film or TV news, I looked at how similar ideas and visual motifs cut across different genres of expression. This approach meant that I had to sacrifice the detailed scrutiny of a particular media form that Jørgensen recommends, but it also allowed me to consider a wider range of sources and to examine how certain ideas and representations became naturalized through repetition. Although I can understand why some might prefer a close study of a single media form, I hope that readers will find the trade-off—the greater breadth offered by this approach—to be worth it.

Jørgensen also wished for a more in-depth theoretical and methodological discussion. It's true that I ultimately decided to keep such commentary brief—in part because I wanted the book to engage the broadest possible audience. That being said, the notes indicate some of the theoretical scholarship that informs *Seeing Green*. Since this literature does not correspond to the sources he cites, I would like to explain the book's theoretical underpinnings. In particular, I found interdisciplinary scholarship on public culture to enrich my understanding of environmental images. Much of the recent work in this area seeks to revise Jürgen Habermas's influential theory of the public sphere. In *Publics and Counterpublics*, the literary critic Michael Warner challenges a key feature of the Habermasian public sphere: the notion of an idealized community based solely on the rational exchange of discourse, to the exclusion of aesthetic and affective modes of expression.²⁰ *Seeing Green* builds on the work of Warner and other scholars who have considered the emotionality of public culture, including visual culture theorists who have explained how the public is constituted through acts of common spectatorship. In *No Caption Needed*, the communication scholars Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites argue that visual images form publics by appealing to audience emotions and bringing strangers into a shared world of discourse. "By starting with a photo that evokes a strong association between visual imagery, emotion, and dissent," Hariman and Lucaites write, "we can ask how a vibrant democratic culture is an emotional culture, how particular images communicate or constrain particular emotions, . . . and how disruptive emotions can be crucial for democratic citizenship."²¹ Likewise, *Seeing Green* questions familiar binaries between reason and emotion to examine the fusion of fact and feeling in environmental icons.

As Shaffer notes, *Seeing Green* can be read in relation to other studies that have probed "the limitations of enlightenment epistemology." In emphasizing the emotional politics of environmentalism, the book reconsiders the role of spectacle in

²⁰ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

²¹ Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 161.

public life. According to cultural and media theorists, spectacle denotes forms of visual pleasure that have problematic political consequences: images that entice spectators, but denigrate public understanding. For example, during the Cold War, iconic imagery of the mushroom cloud aestheticized nuclear testing. Photographs of the Nevada Test Site elicited feelings of awe in spectators but erased the material realities of radioactive danger.²² In the book's first chapter, I explain how this atomic sublime was actively resisted through visual images that merged fact with feeling, reason with emotion. SANE (the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy) and other antinuclear organizations orchestrated media campaigns that combined scientific knowledge about the long-term dangers of fallout with photographs depicting children as innocent victims. These images challenged the spectacle of the mushroom cloud through the counter-spectacle of the vulnerable child. Rather than assuming that science and spectacle are mutually exclusive, *Seeing Green* explores their complex entanglements in public life and explains how emotion-infused imagery has been both productive and problematic for modern environmentalism.

2. What's more important: image or context?

Both Jørgensen and Vermaas suggest that there is a tension in *Seeing Green*: is the book primarily a history of environmental images or should it be read as a broader reinterpretation of American environmentalism? This tension, they imply, relates to larger methodological questions concerning images as historical evidence and the analytical weight given to text and context. Vermaas claims that certain chapters veer too much from visual analysis to provide extensive (and, in her view, "jarring") explorations of historical contexts. Meanwhile, Jørgensen thinks that the book needed to clarify whether the images themselves exerted significant power or whether the key story here was the uses of images by the media and other actors.

Seeing Green aims to move beyond the standard way historians use images in their scholarship. Rather than presenting pictures as mere illustrations and passive mirrors, I treat images as active rhetorical agents. In writing *Seeing Green*, I hoped to demonstrate why images matter to history, and how environmental images have shaped the bounds of public debate. Some of Jørgensen's questions suggest that this claim either needed to be qualified (to offer a more restricted account of image agency) or expanded (to emphasize the inherent problems and limits of images as representations of environmental knowledge). I would be reluctant to follow Jørgensen's second suggestion, as I think that it would be overly reductive to characterize all images as lacking the capacity to convey complex ecological ideas. Like many visual culture scholars, I explain how non-visual cues—including photographic captions, TV and film narration, magazine articles, and other textual and auditory sources—work to anchor the meaning of images and help shape viewer responses. As the visual theorist W. J. T. Mitchell comments: "[T]he

²² Scott Kirsch, "Watching the Bombs Go Off: Photography, Nuclear Landscapes, and Spectator Democracy," *Antipode* 29 (July 1997): 227-55.

interaction of pictures and texts is constitutive of representation as such: all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous; there are no 'purely' visual or verbal arts, though the impulse to purify media is one of the central utopian gestures of modernism."²³ Adopting this approach, *Seeing Green* eschews an overarching (and overly deterministic) interpretation of the inherent limits of visual representation to emphasize instead the cultural and political work of images.

Seeing Green seeks to combine the object-centered, close-looking approach practiced by many art historians and material culture scholars with contextual research into the larger social and political worlds in which environmental images were made meaningful. Although the book critiques historians for their inattention to the visual qualities of images, it also tries to avoid the pitfalls of textual analysis that remains hermetically sealed—cut off from larger social forces, bounded within the frames of an image. Indeed, factors external to images often play a crucial role in determining their cultural and political significance.²⁴ For instance, I found it quite surprising that the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill was widely interpreted by many Americans as a troubling sign of an all-encompassing environmental crisis. To view an oil spill—an event that could easily conform to dominant forms of media temporality that privilege the sudden and the spectacular—as evidence of a gradually-escalating calamity struck me as unexpected and in need of explanation. In this case, the visual evidence alone—the poignant photographs of oil-stained beaches and dying wildlife—did not determine what period viewers saw in these images. *Seeing Green* emphasizes the interplay between image and context to reconstruct the contingencies of reception and to reveal how particular images participated in broader environmental debates.

3. Is *Seeing Green* too critical of popular environmental images, especially those that emphasize individual responsibility and green consumerism?

Seeing Green's argument strikes some readers as overly strong. In their reviews, Jørgensen, Vermaas, and Woodhouse comment on what they find to be the book's extremely critical interpretation of environmental images. I have to confess that I find some of their criticisms to be unfair. Neither Jørgensen nor Vermaas, for example, mentions places where *Seeing Green* explains how images contributed to political change. The 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty, the numerous environmental policies adopted during the period surrounding Earth Day 1970, the rising opposition to nuclear power following the release of *The China Syndrome* and media coverage of the Three Mile Island accident, the increasing visibility and public understanding of climate change that accompanied the surprising success of *An Inconvenient Truth*: all of these are discussed in *Seeing Green* to demonstrate how

²³ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5.

²⁴ Martin A. Berger, "The Problem with Close Looking," in *A Companion to American Art*, ed. John Davis, Jennifer A. Greenhill, and Jason D. LaFountain (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 113-27.

images have worked to legitimate environmental concern and encourage policy change.

Still, the reviewers are correct that the book ultimately emphasizes the problems and limits of popular images. For all the changes listed in the above paragraph, I identify limits in how these issues were framed by the media and addressed by public policy. Jørgensen and Woodhouse claim that, in developing the book's argument, I adopt an overly dismissive tone toward individual action and green consumerism. They characterize the analysis as overly sharp—even binary—in its effort to question what I consider to be the popular media's exaggerated emphasis on individual action. While *Seeing Green* develops a strong argument, I think that reviewers are sometimes reading the book as being far more polemical than it really is.

Let me be clear: I do not think that appeals to individual responsibility are pointless, nor do I think they inevitably exclude structural responses. What I do think is that popular media framings of environmentalism repeatedly privilege the personal over the political, and routinely obscure the role of corporations and other powerful entities in producing large-scale environmental degradation. I think that Woodhouse is right that at times I may have missed opportunities to connect individual behavior and collective visions. Yet I think that the dominant framing of environmentalism propagated by the mainstream media has been to promote faith in the capitalist market and green consumerism as the main sites where environmental hope resides. Appeals to personal responsibility often rely on a therapeutic frame that soothes environmental anxieties but deflects attention from the political and economic systems that cause ecological devastation. Indeed, as I document in the book, popular images of environmental hope—from antilitter campaigns to the corporate appropriation of the recycling logo—have often been used to support unsustainable agendas.

The example that Woodhouse provides of McKibben feeling hopeful when he sees the solar panels at a Vermont couple's home is compelling and indicates that McKibben, like many environmentalists, is a complex figure who extols multiple forms of action. Yet it does not undermine the central point that I develop about McKibben and the founding of 350.org: this climate action group explicitly modeled itself as a response to *An Inconvenient Truth*, as an effort to move beyond green consumerist nostrums—change your light bulbs, buy a Prius, purchase carbon offsets—to nurture support for structural solutions to the climate crisis.

Seeing Green explains how mainstream media have often distorted the ideas of environmentalists through a relentless focus on personal responsibility.²⁵ Unlike

²⁵ Important critiques of the discourse of individual responsibility include: Ted Steinberg, "Can Capitalism Save the Planet? On the Origins of Green Liberalism," *Radical History Review* 107 (Spring 2010): 7-24; Michael F. Maniates, "Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?," *Global Environmental Politics* 1 (August 2001): 31-53; Timothy W. Luke, "Green Consumerism:

most other critiques of this discourse, I sought to provide a historical perspective that shows how popular depictions of individual action developed over time; a close engagement with visual culture that reveals the role of images in promoting these ideas; and a reception analysis that considers how media images were contested and argued over by different historical actors. Indeed, I was surprised to see how frequently the question of individual responsibility became central to cultural and political struggles over the meanings of environmentalism. Appeals to individual responsibility emerged in tandem with the rise of popular environmentalism during the period surrounding the first Earth Day. For environmental activists, the focus on individual action provided (and continues to provide) a powerful way to help Americans contemplate how their lives are enmeshed within complex ecological systems. Yet these same activists also became some of the most ardent critics of the media's overemphasis on individual responsibility. From Pogo's popular diagnosis of environmental crisis ("We Have Met the Enemy and He Is Us") to the Keep America Beautiful's antilitter campaign starring the Crying Indian ("People start pollution. People can stop it."), these activists challenged popular portrayals of the environmental crisis for obscuring the production decisions of corporations and governments. It is important to emphasize the reception analysis, because the book's argument does not simply impose my own interpretation onto past images. Vermaas criticizes *Seeing Green* for "constantly judg[ing]" the images, but she does not mention how I develop this argument through research into the history of audience reception. Even as I explain how images "came up short" (as she puts it), I also sought to understand how period actors responded to these images, including why many environmental activists repeatedly opposed popular media framings of their cause.

My critique of green consumerism connects to a broader emotional history of capitalism that I develop in the book. Green consumerism, recycling, and other forms of individual action seemed to fuse the personal with the political, alleviating anxiety by providing Americans with a sense of involvement in the environmental cause. Even as the mainstream media provided evidence of capitalism's destruction of the ecosphere, green consumerism offered a fantasy of empowerment and presented the market as the prime solution to the crisis. Like other forms of neoliberal citizenship, this vision of popular environmentalism made consumer choice appear synonymous with political power.

4. Is the book too pessimistic? Is there a place for hope in the writing of environmental history?

Jørgensen, in particular, raises some thoughtful questions about pessimism, hope, and the writing of environmental history. Again, I do not agree with some of his characterizations of the book: "as one that despairs at the possibility of

Ecology and the Ruse of Recycling," in *In the Nature of Things: Language, Politics, and the Environment*, ed. Jane Bennett and William Chaloupka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 154-72.

environmental action in the United States.” Indeed, as Shaffer notes, my concluding discussion of 350.org’s use of media imagery in contemporary climate activism “ends on a note of hope for a democratic, mass-mediated politics.” As I wrote the book, I was quite conscious of the concerns that Jørgensen mentions, and I tried to ensure that certain chapters considered alternative visions and models of environmental citizenship that did not conform to the dominant patterns that I critiqued.

I agree that environmental historians should look for examples of hope in the past and should not only produce declensionist narratives.²⁶ As the American Studies scholar Joel Pfister argues, cultural historians should strive to understand “how aesthetic culture can be used more affirmatively to better make and mobilize political agents invested not just in demystifying the present and naming guilty parties, but in imagining a future worth struggling and living for.” Otherwise cultural studies may lapse into what he provocatively calls “cynicism studies.”²⁷ Similarly, I think that cultural and environmental history involves more than, say, demystifying the social construction of wilderness or deconstructing the problems of media imagery. I also think we need to consider the productive and promising uses of culture, to explore how images not only distract and alienate viewers but also can encourage them to reimagine the human place in nature. My current research on the history of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge suggests that, rather than distracting viewers from more pressing environmental concerns, Arctic refuge imagery has often urged spectators to view this remote landscape within the broader contexts of fossil fuel dependency and American energy policy. This project will trace the grassroots circulation of non-iconic images to reveal how visual culture can inspire environmental action.

Yet, even as we look for alternative visions or, as some reviewers suggest, emphasize the salutary impact of green consumerism and individual action, I think that there is a danger in writing overly optimistic accounts of environmental history. Many calls for environmental optimism are premised upon a rosy view of technological fixes and market forces. They often define environmental problems as side effects of industrialization that are easily remedied by wealthy democratic nations. Such accounts neglect larger questions of power and injustice, both within the US and on a global scale. For these reasons, I think we need to be critical of popular visions of environmental hope that do not address unsustainable patterns of growth and do not confront the political and economic systems that produce long-term ecological problems.

²⁶ Finis Dunaway, “Seeing Global Warming: Contemporary Art and the Fate of the Planet,” *Environmental History* 14 (January 2009): 9-31; Finis Dunaway, “Writing History in the Anthropocene,” *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* 35 (Winter 2016): 30-53. For an important study of environmental hope, see Andrew G. Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007).

²⁷ Joel Pfister, *Critique for What? Cultural Studies, American Studies, Left Studies* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 19 and 178.

Rather than subscribing to optimism or pessimism, *Seeing Green* emphasizes the complex cultural and political implications of environmental images. Over the past five decades, these images have helped change public attitudes: strontium 90, DDT, and Alar became feared; recycling became a mainstream practice; the cooling tower became an icon of nuclear danger; and the notion of a global environmental crisis—marked by the disappearing ozone layer, the destruction of tropical rainforests, and the greenhouse effect—became a recurring media story. Media images are not marginal to this history; they have actively shaped public debates over pressing environmental problems. Yet these images have tended to frame all people as equally susceptible to environmental harm and thus deflected attention from the power relations that determine ecological inequalities. Moreover, the repeated emphasis on individual action and green consumerism has made environmental problems appear as easily solved by the benign workings of the capitalist market.

Despite the real achievements of modern environmentalism and the mainstream acceptance of environmental values, the gravity of current ecological problems—problems that, in many cases, have worsened over the past few decades—calls upon historians to offer critical insights into how and why modern societies created these crises. While ecological problems stem from a number of political and economic factors, *Seeing Green* emphasizes the role of culture: Popular framings of environmentalism as a market-oriented, green-consumerist strategy contributed to the neglect of accretive disasters in the making.

5. What topics does the book ignore, and how might future scholarship draw on (or depart from) its approach?

I hope that *Seeing Green* will encourage other scholars to consider images as active agents in history and to grapple with the visual politics of environmentalism. The reviewers offer some tantalizing suggestions for new research topics. For instance, Jørgensen wonders what my analysis “might look like beyond the American context.” I think that this is a fantastic suggestion for exploring the history of environmental images in non-US and transnational contexts. I also think that his implicit call for studies of particular media forms will encourage new approaches to different modes of environmental visual culture. Likewise, Vermaas asks about the visual representations of “clear-cutting practices” and the “heavy media coverage of Julia Butterfly Hill’s two-year redwood tree sit in the late 90s.” As she notes, the book does not deal with that portion of the decade. Nor does it focus on public lands, forests, and wilderness debates—all issues in which visual culture analysis could recast familiar interpretations. Woodhouse mentions the contemporary drought in California and the emphasis on individual behavior in popular responses to this ongoing crisis. He offers an intriguing suggestion: to consider how appeals to individual responsibility might also connect to more systemic views of environmental problems. His comment dovetails nicely with Shaffer’s brief mentioning of the cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall, whose generative work on

encoding and decoding opened new vistas for understanding audience reception.²⁸ Shaffer's own meditation on Conservation International's Nature is Speaking campaign offers provocative insights into contemporary environmental images and suggests how the issues I explore in *Seeing Green* continue to resonate in popular environmentalism. Her analysis of this campaign also indicates the significance of "global environmental citizenship" to recent framings of environmental issues. *Seeing Green* discusses some of the transnational and global meanings of popular environmental images, but I think that these topics beg for further research. Shaffer's recent publications on transnational wildlife conservation reveal promising approaches to these topics.²⁹

As noted above, I also think that historians and other scholars should investigate a wider range of visual sources—not only the mainstream, iconic images that I emphasize in *Seeing Green*—but also pictures that have circulated in other contexts and that can offer new insights into the multifaceted and contested histories of environmentalism in the US and elsewhere. These sources include visual images but also other material objects that could be defined, according to Mitchell's terminology, as "mixed media": pamphlets, flyers, buttons, magazine inserts, and other items that are often overlooked in accounts that privilege mainstream sources. In the book, I discuss some examples of images used by environmental justice activists—including pictures that challenged the concept of universal vulnerability and the neoliberal focus on market solutions—yet I think that grassroots and subaltern uses of images deserve much greater attention. I also think that historians could pursue more place-based studies that consider the materiality and agency of images. Such projects could illuminate how visual culture works in the world by shaping the material histories of landscapes and human communities. Finally, as both Shaffer and Woodhouse indicate, few environmental historians have integrated the emotions into their work. Human feelings, desires, and fears have material and political consequences, and these should figure more prominently in our studies of the environmental past.

Beyond its emphasis on images as primary sources for environmental history, *Seeing Green* advances broader arguments about environmentalism that other scholars may want to build upon or challenge. My critical interpretations of individual responsibility and green consumerism seem, according to some readers, to be the most provocative and debatable portions of the book. Although historians have been reluctant to engage with the concept of neoliberalism, I think that it can help us grapple with the triumph of market values and the shifting meanings of environmental citizenship. In contrast to my analysis, some reviewers have a more

²⁸ Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979*, ed. Stuart Hall et al. (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 128-38.

²⁹ Marguerite S. Shaffer, "A Transnational Wildlife Drama: Dian Fossey, Popular Environmentalism, and the Origins of Gorilla Tourism," *American Quarterly* 67 (June 2015): 317-52; Marguerite S. Shaffer, "Digit's Legacy: Reconsidering the Human-Nature Encounter in a Global World," in *Rendering Nature: Animals, Bodies, Places, Politics*, ed. Marguerite S. Shaffer and Phoebe S. K. Young (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 70-96.

sanguine view toward the capitalist market and its potential to create long-term conditions of ecological sustainability. As I write this response, there are some encouraging signs that renewable energy may adopt a more prominent position within future energy systems. Maybe future historians will interpret our current moment as one in which the market began to respond to consumer and citizen longings for a sustainable future. Maybe they will emphasize (as do I at the end of *Seeing Green*) the founding of 350.org and other climate activist groups as crucial agents of change trying to envision a world that transitions away from fossil fuels. We cannot predict the future, but we can look back at the recent past and ask critical questions about why the US and other nations adopted such short-sighted responses to escalating ecological crises. I hope that *Seeing Green* will contribute to these broader discussions and will encourage more critical reflection on the methods of environmental history, the links between visual culture and public life, and the ongoing struggle to create a just and sustainable future.

About the Contributors

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Lori Vermaas is the author of *Sequoia: The Heralded Tree in American Art and Culture* (Smithsonian Books, 2003), several historical essays, and historical book reviews. A fifteen-year publishing professional, as a writer she has explored various subjects, most avidly American visual culture and the nation's attitudes toward nature. Her latest book is much lighter fare, a pictorial history of the commercial development of Texas's Rio Grande Valley, *Cornerstone: Building the Rio Grande Valley* (www.rgvcornerstone.com).

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