Environment, ritual and research ethics are separate strands; their occasional convergence is our topic here. This review essay's starting point is Linda Silka's working paper, "Rituals and Research Ethics" (2001). In a way, Silka's primary title does not encapsulate the central theme of her paper, more clearly expressed after the colon: "Using One Community's Experience to Reconsider the Ways that Communities and Researchers Build Sustainable Partnerships." Thus I see her focus to be on the dynamic, negotiated success of a series of related community projects in Lowell, Massachusetts. These projects have incorporated, among other things, some elements of ritual; they have also involved a kind of ethical reflexivity from their inception. Moreover, as Silka portrays the process, these two crucial elements are mutually constitutive: ethical reflexivity has allowed Lowell's Southeast Asian Environmental Justice Partnership to sustain its successful educational and environmentalist endeavors, for which the Southeast Asian Water Festival offers a showcase, with tangible, shared economic benefits as well.

As their endeavors have branched out in several directions, the participants in the Lowell projects strive to remain aware of, and sensitive to, multiple issues conditioning the interplay of knowledge, authority, and participation among the various groups and individuals involved. The conjunction of research ethics and recreated, innovative ritual in Lowell may be happenstance, albeit important and encouraging happenstance. I found it difficult to locate similar conjunctions for a variety of reasons that will emerge in the discussion that follows.

In the first section, I highlight some of the productive themes in Silka's paper, and then attempt to look at some theoretically oriented approaches to partial intertwinnings of environment, ritual and research ethics -- drawing largely on observations from anthropology and religious studies. A second segment explores some impressive cases of created eco-rituals, or rituals produced in a context of activist ecological spiritualities. Two solid
examples of how activists use rituals effectively to motivate environmental consciousness, protection, and restoration are: the "ecology monks" of Thailand with their famous strategy of tree-ordination; and the "earthkeeping churches" of Zimbabwe in Southern Africa with their extraordinary success in ritualizing multiple environmental initiatives. I also note some more diffuse but widespread phenomena in India, where various green environmentalist movements draw on various mythological motifs and motivations to protect and restore local landscapes.

Thus, I shall consider, as does Silka, the adaptation or recreation of old rituals in new contexts designed explicitly to enhance environmental consciousness and alter behaviors that have been environmentally destructive. However, I also observe that, in all of the examples I have found, practitioner-activists have played extraordinary, transformative roles as charismatic -- or at least passionately dedicated --leaders. This seems to distinguish these examples in some fundamental fashion from the Lowell case where academics who helped to initiate the project appear to have kept a low profile, and personalities are submerged in collective authority.

I. Environment / ritual / research ethics: Three moving targets that rarely line up

Linda Silka offers an excellent and inspiring example of creative and collaborative community activism in notably multicultural Lowell, Massachusetts. Without being self-congratulatory, and with plenty of attention to problems and doubts, she is able to demonstrate some of the ways that traditions, religious values and ritual practices may be effectively and benignly employed to help solve new problems in new contexts. Most of Silka's focus is on the organization of educational projects, and mobilization of community rather than on the relevant ritual itself -- the Southeast Asian Water Festival. Here research ethics emerge in practice, in an "on-the-ground" fashion that seems particularly useful, although it does not provide a model easily followed except in the broadest sense. Its lessons may be something like: learn from the people you are working with, as you go along; and never be afraid to rethink strategies, renegotiate practices, and redistribute authority.

Although Silka's example, as presented in her written summary description, is not ethnographically dense with detail, it readily evokes our admiration for an ongoing community project that was not only well conceived but has remained permeable to multiple
perspectives, and mutable along with changing needs, circumstances and populations. Best of all, the multifaceted project has evidently succeeded in being genuinely productive of heightened consciousness of environmental problems. Silka's case study also demonstrates how collective well-being may be promoted through tapping youthful energy, in conjunction with serious attention to, and respect for, elders' knowledge and authority. Vital knowledge is thereby disseminated across generations in both directions.

Anthropological research and writing on environmental issues is notably on the rise, as are publications and teaching in the field of religion and ecology.¹ One very interesting aspect of this, relevant to what follows, is that the detached scholar has almost vanished in both fields. Silka is, without self-consciousness, an active participant in the processes she describes. It appears to be hard if not impossible to talk about environment without taking a stand and expressing a desire to help solve this universally experienced crisis of our times. This true meltdown of the ivory tower deserves more signal attention than I am able to give it here.

IA. Debating the uses of tradition

Leslie Sponsel represents an extreme voice in anthropology, as he cheerfully endorses a resort to religion in the context of our pressing need to save the earth. In his essay titled "Do Anthropologists Need Religion, and Vice Versa? Adventures and Dangers in Spiritual Ecology," Sponsel declares without reservations, that "religion has the potential to provide a worldview, values, attitudes, practices, rituals [my emphasis], institutions, and sacred places for the effective development of a vibrant and adaptive spiritual ecology" (2001: 185).

Among anthropologists, Sponsel sounds either very naive or, more likely, deliberately provocative. But his un-nuanced promotion of "spiritual ecology" is matched by E. N. Anderson's equally naive and provocative rejection of the same. Anderson is just as worried about the earth's future as is Sponsel, but he searches for footholds in current psychology rather than ancient spirituality. Although he examines ways traditional societies may have

¹ These are vast areas; library shelves groan and journals proliferate. For anthropological thought and practice, Milton's work is helpful (1993, 1996), as is Crumley 2001 and Brosius 1999 -- discussed in IA. For religious studies, a good entry point is Tucker and Grim 2001; see also Monserud 2002.
sustained ecological balance in particular localities, he argues that, once the world is
"disenchanted," there is no going back.\(^2\)

Attempts to adapt shamanism, Goddess-worship and the like to the modern world
have found little credibility and are often based on sad misunderstanding not only of
the religions in question but of their role in society. Like it or not, we are separated
by vast Weberian disenchantment from a world in which such cults can persuade"

Sponsel and Anderson may speak at cross-purposes, but they share a particularly sweeping
scope in their discussions of whether or not religions and their rituals possess possible virtues
in the quest for ecological healing.

Some other anthropologists who have questioned the potential for usefully recycling
rooted religious practices and knowledges in these times of global peril speak from narrower
perspectives. At issue from some writers' viewpoints is whether a culture's world view is
whole or broken; if broken, Piers Vitebsky argues, it is a humpty-dumpty situation --
unmendable. Vitebsky projects a bleak view in discussing a South Asian tribal people, the
Sora, and the rupture of their holistic world. He portrays a totalizing disjunction in this
world resulting from one fact: the commodification of grain:

So long as the soul-force of the Sora people is underground, it remains firmly in the
realm which the Sora share with the life-forms of the jungle. But how does the soul-
force in crops circulate when it is above ground, in the harvested grain itself? Much
of it, in an ever-increasing amount, leaves the area through the market, under steadily
growing economic and political pressure . . . . It is here that a problem arises. These
grains are the very crops which contain the soul-force of the Ancestors of the people
who grow them – and then sell them to be eaten by strangers. . . . .

. . . . this way of relating to one's environment becomes more and more
inappropriate the more that its ancestral soul-force, at the most nourishing peak of its
cycle, is sold off through the market place. If the produce of the land can be sold
fully to outsiders, then it belongs to anybody and nobody. . . . . A vital link between

\(^2\) Anderson explicitly follows nineteenth-century sociologist Max Weber's use of the term
disenchantment. For disenchantment as a motif in the religion and ecology literature, see Kinsley
Vitebsky contrasts the Sora's situation with that of the Sakha in eastern Siberia, although he finds little good outcome in either case. The Sakha's local knowledge has been valorized by urban intellectuals, and in the process has fatally shifted from localized knowledge to abstractions. Vitebsky concludes that "The New Age may be cosmopolitan; but at the same time, it moves away from cosmology by dissolving the realm of the religious" (192).

Other anthropologists offer a less dim, and happily more complex, view of the possibilities for local knowledge to remain meaningful under twenty-first century conditions. Arturo Escobar, for example, illuminates at least the possibilities for local knowledges to interpenetrate the impinging worlds of commerce and technology, perhaps transforming them. Escobar sketches three "regimes of articulation of the historical and the biological" which he names: organic nature, capitalist nature, and techno-nature. A defining feature under the regime of organic nature, as Escobar describes it, is the "fact that nature and society are not separated ontologically." Moreover, there are links between the "biophysical, human and supernatural." Although he is careful to point out that such continuities may be experienced as problematic or uncertain, Escobar also states that they are "culturally established through rituals [my emphasis] and practices and embedded in social relations different from capitalist or modern ones. Thus living, nonliving, and often supernatural beings do not constitute distinct and separate domains . . . ." (1999: 7-8).

If we forgive Escobar his somewhat stilted and obfuscating language, we may find his conclusions more helpful than Sponsel's, Anderson's or Vitebsky's. Rather than assuming the possibility of unproblematic replication as does Sponsel; or declaring the doom of organic nature regimes as do both Anderson and Vitebsky, Escobar suggests that when such regimes encounter commodification and/or technology, new emergent hybrid forms are not only possible but likely. Moreover, "hybrid natures might constitute . . . an attempt to incorporate multiple constructions of nature in order to negotiate with translocal forces while maintaining a modicum of autonomy and cultural cohesion" (p. 13). Thus, Escobar holds

1995: 125-140.
that understandings bred under organic nature regimes may even inform and energize struggle in the global arena.  

IB. Two ethical dilemmas

Two significant ethical issues are raised by ethnographers (both anthropological and religio-historical) who study environmental movements, including those that deploy religious rituals. These issues have to do with two very different possibilities of damage. One is the damage that may be perpetrated when a critical eye -- so often the dominant gaze in ethnographic observations -- informs a neutral academic's analytic voice. The other is the damage that some attribute to any decontextualized use by one group of another's religious values and practices -- especially if the borrowing group comes from a dominant mainstream culture and the group to whom the traditions originally belonged is a beleaguered minority. In the extreme view, all such apparently benign "borrowing" may be labeled "cultural genocide." These issues are treated, respectively, in two helpful and comprehensive review articles: Brosius (1999) on "anthropological engagement" and Taylor (1997) on "Earthen Spirituality or Cultural Genocide?" Following these sources, I shall expand briefly on both issues.

IB1. Ethnographic writing's inherent ambiguities

Peter Brosius' article on "anthropological engagements with environmentalism" covers considerable ground, and not all of it is specifically relevant to our concerns here. The article was published in Current Anthropology -- a journal whose practice is to solicit responses to a substantial article from about a dozen scholars with shared interests and potentially divergent views. One of the problems Brosius raises emerged as particularly controversial in the responses to his piece, and is explicitly a research ethics issue. Moreover, it relates directly to my earlier observation that environment appears to be a theme around which scholarly detachment is difficult, if not amoral, to sustain.

This issue is a painful and delicate one for students of social movements. If anthropologists see through the "invention of tradition" and point to the ways indigenous peoples' forms of self-representation may be deliberately and purposefully constructed, are they breaching not only disciplinary research ethics but their own ideals and moralities? In

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3 In this regard, see also the important work of Pramod Parajuli on ecological ethnicities (for example Parajuli 2001).
other words, if in the course of mobilization against environmental destruction, a group
reconstructs their own identities within nature as a political strategy, and the anthropologist
on the scene perceives this strategic ploy, should that researcher publish their deconstructive
insights, or not?

Brosius is clearly troubled. He writes, "at the very moment that subaltern voices are
at last being heard, anthropologists have taken to subjecting those voices to ethnographic
scrutiny. . . . ." And he adds that, "it is no longer very clear what is emancipatory and what is
potentially reactionary, either in the movements we wish to study or in our own
commentaries on these movements" (1999: 288).

Several of the commentaries on Brosius' article take strong exception to the idea that
scholars should tread softly (or engage in self-censorship) under any conditions.
Ramachandra Guha, for example, protests, "some comments in the present article that may
currently qualify as good politics . . . I reckon to be bad science. Such, for instance, is the
implication that while scholars need to scrutinize romantic essentialisms, strategic
essentialisms are somehow exempt from analysis or criticism. Scholars should not be subject
to such exceptions, which stem from an exaggerated respect for activists" (Guha in Brosius
1999: 293).

Other responses to Brosius, such as Michael Dove's, emphatically approve Brosius's
sensibility, his idea that scrutiny is not always in keeping with sympathy. Dove writes:
. . . social movements are in essence dedicated to challenging traditional
configurations of power, and what we disclose about them in reporting our findings ..
. provides a map for these who seek to suppress them. In short, we undercut
resistance when we show how it works" (Dove in Brosius 1999: 301).

Although our focus here is particularly on research ethics in the context of
environmental struggles, as is Brosius' focus, it is worth noting that Brosius and his
interlocutors have hit on an ethical issue of far wider ramifications for ethnography. Charles
Bosk, a medical sociologist, raises this question vividly in his very sobering essay on "Irony,
Ethnography, and Informed Consent." There Bosk argues, from his own painful experience:
Experienced ethnographers know that nothing is so prized in the social science
literature as the counterintuitive finding, that no voice is so cultivated as the ironic,
and that no spirit characterizes work so much as a debunking one. Yet we certainly
do not warn our subjects of this (2001: 213).

Bosk's disturbing insights into the way such practices are virtually unavoidable, unchecked
by internal review boards or informed consent procedures, should be heeded. I would not
venture to suggest how heeding them might transform our research and writing practices.
But, as a bottom line, researchers surely ought to remain alert to the perils. When studying
environmental movements and writing about them, we should be cognizant that our analytic
writings could ultimately be at odds with those movements' goals -- even if our sympathies
are with them. The scholarly enterprise of analysis and deconstruction is at odds with the
activist enterprise of persuasion.

IB2. When activists get religion, whose religion is it anyway?

Bron Taylor addresses lucidly a topic that is most acute, or at least most debated, in
the context of environmentalism in the USA: how the yearning for an environmentally
friendly spirituality has led to the borrowing, adapting, or (in its negative light) appropriation
of Native American rituals by persons of Euro-American descent. Taylor offers a helpful
and largely even-handed discussion of this topic which is often perplexing to non Native
Americans. He gives ample space to explicating the objections by some vocal and well
published Native American scholars and activists who consider any outsider use of their
rituals to be just another manifestation among centuries of theft, destruction, and cultural
genocide.

As Taylor describes it, in this native activist view:

"the non-Indian appropriation of elements from native cultures . . . functions in a
genocidal way, eroding cultural foundations and thereby fostering cultural
disintegration and eventually, cultural annihilation. Such borrowing is thus,
according to this perspective, a camouflaged form of mass killing.

Taylor comments, and cautions, that "This claim poses a crucial empirical question, but
should not be accepted without compelling evidence" (1997: 200).

4 For a broader treatment of appropriation see Ziff and Rao 1997 on "Borrowed Power."
5 Taylor's essay provides an excellent bibliography. One more recent piece is Donaldson 2001 on
"white shame-ans". Donaldson describes classroom encounters with white students who just don't get
her objection, as a Native American, to "imitation" as a form of "flattery." Eventually she is able to
transmit her radically different perspective.
Taylor draws on his own extensive research on Earth First! to describe various possible interactions between Euro-Americans and Native Americans in what he sees as ultimately a shared struggle to protect the environment. He observes that, "the hope of most Earth First! activists to preserve the natural world comes intertwined in a complicated way with their respect for Native American spirituality and their feelings of kinship with the natural world, . . . " (1997: 187 ).

It is fairly clear that Taylor's sympathies in the article are with a more moderate position. His arguments work to persuade us that the genocide view of borrowed rituals is an extreme one. He appreciates its validity from some viewpoints, and its salubrious clarity when applied to some frankly exploitative or highly commercialized practices. But he also offers plenty of counter-examples. These are examples not just of Euro-Americans meaning well (although we hear about them), but of Native Americans who embrace a less exclusive view, and some who even feel committed to sharing rituals as part of their commitment to work for ecological well being.

We may conclude from these discussions that both the study of ritual in environmental activism, and the use of de-contextualized ritual in environmental activism, and ethically dicey for more reasons than one. Both Anderson and Vitebsky might contend that this dicey-ness results from hopelessly incommensurable world views. Religion is literally out of place in global contexts. Brosius points to dicey-ness that might arise from ethnographers analyzing activist uses of ritual too closely, as they have been trained to do in academia: if researchers identify the ways rituals may be tailored or massaged in the face of new problems, and thereby diminish their presumed authenticity, scholarship could inadvertently damage a crucial element in a political fight for cultural survival. Taylor shows the dicey-ness inherent when one person's borrowed symbols are another's stolen goods – resulting in a case of identity vandalism. All these genuine problems could explain why, returning to the research ethics literature, we find that although Shanley and Laird suggest multiple specific ways that researchers may "give back" to communities including "theatre and travelling shows" and various forms of storytelling, they make no mention of rituals (2002: 111).
II. Insider innovations

Because of ethical dilemmas inherent in the use of "other people's rituals," it is not surprising to find that the most hopeful instances of innovative ritual practices deployed in environmental causes emerge within traditions. These are often developed by persons already possessing deep inner convictions and outer moral status. Thailand's ecology monks and Zimbabwe's earthkeeping churches present two examples where traditionally rooted but innovative rituals have successfully motivated popular environmentalist practice. In India, local ecological movements have been initiated by religious leaders and devotees, and draw on preexisting myth and ritual in a variety of transformative ways.

II.A. Ordaining trees in Thailand: innovations in Buddhism

Anthropologist Susan Darlington chronicles an initiative led by Buddhist monks in Thailand – a situation where, as she puts it, "rituals, particularly ordaining trees, promote the ecology movement, lending it economic, political, social, and moral force" (1998: 2). Sponsel has also written about the ecology monks (Sponsel and Natadecha-Sponsel 1993) -- and indeed it may be their success story that inspires his pollyannaish recommendation of religious remedies for all earthly environmental ills as discussed in IA. Following Darlington's more detailed account, we learn that Thai monks who were already involved in various social projects became increasingly concerned with the consequences of environmental degradation, and their impact on rural people. The deforestation rate in Thailand, according to Darlington, was higher than that of any Asian country except Nepal, and possibly also Borneo. Monks had been preaching for many years about conservation, but they saw the destruction continue unabated.

Then in June 1990, one monk, Phrakhru Pitak, "moved beyond preaching an ecological message and sponsored a tree ordination in the community forest of his home village . . and in July 1991 he performed a second to sanctify the forest surrounding ten neighboring villages." Darlington describes these and related activities as ritual innovations operating within a frame of tradition. Although in the past, certain "bodhi trees," sacred to the Buddha, were wrapped in special cloth, this had been done to honor the specific tree. But such was not the case in the ecology monk's new ritual. As Darlington puts it, "The innovation here was that the tree ordained was not already treated as sacred but was made so through the ritual. The orange robes symbolized its new status." Moreover, "The robes
stood as a reminder that to harm or cut the tree—or any of the forest—was an act of demerit" (1998: 6-10).

Sponsel and Natadecha-Sponsel help us to understand the power of the robes, commenting that, "For a devout Buddhist in Thailand, it is unpardonable to kill an ordained monk. The symbolism of the sacred robe wrapped around a tree is to deter people from cutting it and thereby helping to preserve it and the surrounding forest" (1993: 89).

The case of Thailand's ecology monks is quite different from the case of Earth First! activists adopting Native American rituals. The ecology monks are adapting and transforming rituals from a tradition to which they already belong. However, the monks have not been free of criticism from those who think that monks should stick to meditation and not meddle at all in earthly affairs. Darlington comments that, "The ecology monks are walking a fine line between their traditional responsibilities as spiritual leaders and their new practice as social activists" (1998: 11). Thus far, they appear to have managed this feat with remarkable success.7

II.B. Planting trees in Zimbabwe: Christianity in concert with African traditions

Marthinus Daneel's book, African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission offers the richest case study I have found describing multiple uses of elaborate ritual in the interests of environmental well being.8 Moreover, it is explicitly syncretistic ritual, uniting Christianity with indigenous South African traditions. Daneel, a white Christian bishop of Afrikaner descent describes himself as "adopted by the Zimbabweans," and uses a Shona name 'Muchakata' (the wild cork tree). Daneel acknowledges that he is too close to the earthkeeping movement to "make any pretence of academic objectivity." He speaks of himself unabashedly as "founder and architect of the movement—a role emanating from and affirmed within African society, not imposed on it by me" (2001: 2).

The history of the earthkeeping movement begins, in Daneel's account, in 1988 – although its roots as he describes them are clearly much deeper in both indigenous and colonial cultures, and their interactions. Daneel relates the movement's inception:

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6 Guha compares Thailand's ecology monks to Catholic priests in Mexico who have used processions with patron saints to mobilize protests against dam construction (2000: 107).
7 See also Bhikku 2000 for another innovative, monk-initiated environmental ritual in Thailand.
8 The U.S. edition of this is an abridgement of a two volume version published in Africa.
It was in 1988 that our shared convictions hardened into resolve, and our resolve into action. We decided to become earthkeepers, tree planters, healers of the wounded land. so we declared another chimurenga! This time it would be the war of the trees – later to be extended to the protection of wildlife and water resources. The old chimurenga of the lost lands, which had been won militarily and politically, was now to become the liberation struggle of the ecologically still lost, still enslaved land" (2001: 14).

Thus Daneel evokes the struggle against colonialism, and sees the ecological struggle as directly continuous with it.

As Daneel's tale unfolds, a severe draught strikes Zimbabwe in 1992. At this time, Daneel writes "the spirit mediums of AZTREC [Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists] . . . , having received ancestral dream directives to visit the oracular shrines of Mwari in the Mtopo hills, come into town with a delegation of chiefs. Together we set off for the distant shrines. . . . " The oracle speaks to them, instructing them that rains will be sparse, but that they must persevere with the planting of trees; if they do so they will be protected (2001: 15).

Daneel believes that traditional ecology "has all along formed an integral part of the religiocultural heritage and identity of Zimbabwe's African people," and that it has therefore "remained a force in peasant society" (2001: 91). A succinct statement of AZTREC's accomplishment offered by Daneel points to "the ability of the traditional custodians of the land to appropriate and revitalize Africa's age-old religio-ecological values in a modern programme of environmental reform" (2001: 104). Moreover, he argues persuasively that morality itself has been redefined in environmentalist terms: "traditional perceptions of evil are imaginatively applied to environmental destruction in the development of an indigenous ethos aimed at ecological repair" (2001: 105).

The "war of the trees" and the "earthkeeping" churches have reshaped many rituals. Daneel's account of how the independent African churches seamlessly integrated their own religious approaches to environmentalist activism with those of the traditional African ecologists makes the process sound almost too good to be true. But it is nonetheless a pleasure and a wonder to read about it. The fascinating liturgical texts and motions are too
complex and extensive to summarize here. Daneel provides fine examples, including a tree-planting Eucharist (2001: 167-174).

II.C. Storied landscapes in India

Examples from India all have to do with what we might call, following Nagarajan (1998), "embedded ecologies." That is, all involve localized practices, and draw on the ways a landscape is suffused in mythological meanings, and the ways these meanings can motivate devotees – both in extraordinary efforts and in their everyday lives. Two well known cases will suffice to exemplify these processes briefly. Both, significantly, are cases involving places of pilgrimage. That is, the environments at risk are sacred places to which Hindu pilgrims have for centuries traveled, suffering hardship and incurring great expense, in order to experience divinity on earth.

Several scholars and activists have described aspects of the ongoing efforts for ecological recovery in Vrindavan, the fabled pastoral country of the popular god Krishna's childhood and youth (Haberman 2000; Prime 1992; Sullivan 1998). What stands out in many of their accounts are the ways individuals involved in these movements give priority to their religious emotions when accounting for their activism. Haberman's research offers one potent example. He writes:

For example, one Vaisnava baba I met, named Madhavadas Baba, accomplished remarkable feats of environmental protection motivated by his conviction that the landscape of Braj [Krishna's country] was divine. He restored ponds, saved tracts of trees, and forced the government to pass legislation to protect several sacred hills in Braj . . .

Just before he died I asked him what the most important accomplishment of his life had been. He replied: "I planted trees at the foot of Mount Govardhana" [that is, the mountain that Krishna once lifted on his hand to protect the cowherd community from a terrible storm] (2000: 351).

Sullivan has also portrayed the "response to the ecocide in Vrindavan" as one that is taken totally to heart by Krishna's devotees, writing, "The general approach could be described by the following slogan, used to generate support: 'one who cares for Krsna cares for His land' . . . ." (1998: 254).
Prime's account of a Krishna devotee's transformation from absorbed worship to extroverted activism is also personal, emotional, and fervent. This devotee says to himself, on the day he sees a tree cut down, "What is the use of your chanting and what is the use of your worship in the temples and what is the use of your taking a bath daily in the Yamuna and what is the use of your daily parikrama round the sacred forest if you can't protect these trees and animals which are part of your devotion . . . ." (Prime 1992: 16).

All of these voices from insiders reflect an ancient premise of Krishna devotion: that the true devotee shares perpetually in the bliss of Krishna's youthful play (his "lila") in the eternally beautiful landscape of Vrindavan. In all these cases a terrible disjunction between mythic vision and degraded environmental reality is the wake-up call that leads to committed activism. In the instance given by Prime, this activism is opposed to meaningless ritual, but it also becomes a new form of engaged worship.

Another well known case of myth clashing with reality in the context of environmental concerns in India is that of the Ganges river. This river known as the "mother of purity" has become severely polluted at least in some regions. Anthropologist Kelly Alley has explored various aspects of this paradox (1994; 2000). She gives one eloquent description of conversion to activism that has a strikingly similar ring to the Vrindavan cases. This emerges during her recorded interview with Veer Bhadra Mishra, internationally known as an hereditary priest and a professor of engineering who has tirelessly led campaigns and researched technologies to restore cleanliness to the sacred river of his birthplace. As Mishra tells it to Alley, the pollution interfered with his own daily ritual baths in the Ganges, his "holy dips," causing wrenching cognitive dissonance:

"You can at least imagine that this causes a very deep internal stir and pain in my heart, that what to do? What should we do? And actually it is this feeling and this internal struggle and pain and conflict that has given, I would say, birth to the Sankat Mochan Foundation and Swatchha Ganga [Sankat Mochan is the temple where Mishra is priest, and Swatchha Ganga is his "Clean Ganges" campaign]" (quoted in Alley 1994: 135).

In the cases of Krishna's deforested landscape and of Mother Ganges' polluted waters, devotees describe awakenings to action. But these awakenings to environmental consciousness, rather than leaving behind religious values, are powerfully motivated by
them. Rather than explicitly creating new rituals, such as ordaining trees, or a tree-planting Eucharist, these Hindu activists seem to have redefined activism as religious practice.\(^9\)

In a recent discussion of Hinduism and environmentalism, Tomalin (2002) attempts to contrast Hindu activist modes with an approach she considers western and labels "religious environmentalist." The latter approach would call for some kind of totalizing transformation in attitudes toward nature -- of the sort that Sponsel might promote and others more skeptical might consider beyond the realm of possibility. Tomalin observes no such transformation in India, but rather finds a strategic use of religious teachings in localized movements – such as those just discussed here. While the distinction is valid, I find the resulting opposition not nearly so neat as she implies. For the passion that underlies and energizes these local strategies comes, it seems to me, from a world view that connects – if we follow Escobar – to organic nature regimes. In Hinduism this is an internalized mythological knowledge of sacred landscapes, and it endures even in the present when organic nature regimes are thoroughly hybridized with regimes of commerce and technology. Certainly the Lowell water festival equally displays such hybridization; but it flourishes and inspires and helps create a meaningful landscape for those whose pasts are geographically elsewhere. Its success as a project affecting both human / nature relations and community relations may have more in common with other innovative environmentalist rituals discussed here than might appear at first glance.

\(^9\) See, however, Narayanan for an example from South India where a wealthy temple has developed an innovative version of the common Hindu ritual where pilgrims and worshipers receive blessed food to take home with them. The Tirumala-Tirupati temple, instead of food, distributes tree saplings to be planted (1997:301).
References


