

# IDENTIFICATION THROUGH ORANGUTANS

## *DESTABILIZING THE NATURE/CULTURE DUALISM*

STACEY K. SOWARDS

### ABSTRACT

The nature/culture dualism has long been criticized for constructing social beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that fail to respect and value the natural world. One possible way to bridge the divide between the human and non-human worlds is the process of identification. Orangutans, an endangered species found in Indonesia and Malaysia, enable individuals to bridge, connect, and identify with a seemingly separate natural world. Through identification with orangutans, humans come to reevaluate their own perspectives and dichotomous ways of thinking about their relationships with nature.

Many environmentalists and ecologists seek to bridge the discursively constructed divide that separates humans and nature to reveal a relationship of domination and control that often defines human understandings of nature (e.g., Plumwood 1993). Instead of fearing, dominating, economizing, or romanticizing nature through a process of "Otherization," humans must come to recognize nature as a complex and important sys-

---

ETHICS & THE ENVIRONMENT, 11(2) 2006 ISSN: 1085-6633

©Indiana University Press All rights of reproduction in any form reserved.

Direct all correspondence to: Journals Manager, Indiana University Press, 601 N. Morton St.,  
Bloomington, IN 47404 USA iuporder@indiana.edu

tem that sustains human, animal, and plant life. G. Kaplan and L. Rogers contend that “by recognizing that nature has its own laws and rules for survival, it is possible to live with nature and use it, but also put something back and allow it to be maintained” (1995, 6). In this essay, I explore how environmental organizations and primatologists construct a rhetoric of identification to create a common ground between humans, orangutans, and their rain forest habitat. Identification in this manner attempts to deconstruct the nature/culture divide and dualistic thinking that has persisted for centuries. Ultimately, orangutans are an effective rhetorical metaphor for bridging nature/culture dualisms by representing the natural world from which we have become rhetorically separated. Orangutans open up space for identification through both their similarities and differences with humans, which in turn, helps humans to expand identification to other elements of the non-human world.

Understanding how humans come to identify with orangutans is of importance for establishing measures to protect orangutans in their natural habitats. Orangutans, found only in Indonesia and Malaysia, are an endangered species primarily because of habitat destruction caused by legal and illegal logging, forest fires, forest conversion (especially for palm plantations), and forest fragmentation, and secondarily, because of hunting and the illegal pet trade of infant orangutans (Brown & Jacobson 2005; van Schaik 2004; Whyte, Desilets, & Warwick 2005). In what follows, I first outline a theory of identification that is used to describe the rhetorical practices of environmental organizations and primatologists. I then examine various aspects of how orangutans are used to bridge nature/culture dichotomous ways of thinking. Ultimately, animalcentric anthropomorphism (de Waal 2001) can provide the sort of profound interspecies event (Rose 1995) that creates positive identification and effective environmental advocacy by emphasizing the continuities and discontinuities humans share with both orangutans and their habitats.

#### A THEORY OF IDENTIFICATION

Numerous scholars have addressed the dualistic thinking about nature that has led to the human separation and “Otherization” of nature (e.g., see Mills 1991; Plumwood 1993; Sessions 1995). Fritjof Capra (1995) explains that humans separate and “Otherize” nature as a way to control the nonhuman world, or as Haila suggests, “specific subject-

object relationships are generalized to a totalizing distinction between ‘us’ and ‘the environment’ ” (2000, 156). In this essay, I take the position that humans have constructed artificial barriers that separate us from nature, rather than as seeing ourselves existing in the processes of the natural world. Val Plumwood explains that centuries of western thought from Plato to Descartes and beyond, have defined nature in opposition to reason: “Nature, as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilised, the non-human world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness” (1993, 19–20). According to Plumwood (1993), this system of thought has created a process in which humans use denial, hyperseparation, definition through use of negative, instrumentalization or objectification, and homogenization as methods to deal with difference, especially related to nature, gender, race, and class. Both Plumwood (1993) and Michael E. Zimmerman (1995) contend that humans trained in the western tradition and thought need a fundamental change in our values and worldviews to respect our natural environments.

One way to understand how humans perceive the nature/culture dualism and might bridge this conceptual dichotomy is through Kenneth Burke’s concept of identification. Burke describes a theory of identification in which individuals are composed of their social relationships with others. For instance, Burke notes in *Attitudes Toward History*, that “The so-called ‘I’ is merely a unique combination of partially conflicting ‘corporate we’s.’ . . . Sometimes these various corporate identities work fairly well together. At other times they conflict, with disturbing moral consequences” (1984, 264). The nature/culture dualism represents one example of these conflicting identities, with serious ethical implications in the seemingly imminent destruction of our ecosystems.

For Burke, consubstantiality, or shared substance, plays an important role in how individuals identify with the Other/others:

A is not identical with his[/her] colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or [s]he may *identify* [her]himself with B even when their interests are not joined, if [s]he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so. . . In being identified with B, A is “substantially one” with a person other than [her]himself. Yet at the same time [s]he remains unique, an individual locus of motives.

Thus [s]he is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another. (Burke 1969, 20–21)

Burke also contends that identification is primarily a rhetorical or symbolic act. Thus, Burke sees identification as sharing substance with another individual, reflecting one's self in a group, and establishing common interests through the power of rhetoric.

In addition to understanding identification as a process between two people or entities, it can also be recognized as way to appreciate identities of self and the other. Dennis Ciesielski (1999) explains, "in this process of identification, we gain new perspectives that will allow a dynamic tertiary truth that emerges ever anew with each subsequent transaction" (243–4). Ciesielski implies that engaging with new and different perspectives allows individuals to build solidarity with others and develop an identity of the self. Similarly, Judith Butler (1993) contends that identification challenges a sense of self because identifications:

belong to the imaginary; they are phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitations; they unsettle the "I"; they are the sedimentation of the "we" in the constitution of any "I," the structuring presence of alterity in the very formulation of the "I." Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability. They are that which is constantly marshaled, consolidated, retrenched, contested, and, on occasion, compelled to give way. (Butler 1993, 105)

Butler argues that the fluid nature of identification emerges through connection with the Other/others. Orangutans offer the possibility to move in this direction of identification, because orangutans disrupt dichotomous categories within the nature/culture dualism by challenging our sense of what it means to be human and nonhuman.

### ORANGUTANS: A RHETORIC OF IDENTIFICATION

Orangutans and other great apes (gorillas, chimpanzees, and bonobos) share many similarities with humans, as Ronnie Hawkins (2002) and Nancy Howell (2003) observe. Primatologists examine the close connection between human and nonhuman primates; their studies are often used by environmental organizations to explain why humans should be inter-

ested in protecting nonhuman primates and their habitats. My own experience illustrates how orangutans function as a connective device between the artificial divide of nature and culture. In the summer of 1995, I backpacked around Southeast Asia. I ended up in Balikpapan, Kalimantan, the Indonesian side of Borneo, also home to orangutans. I did not go to Kalimantan to see orangutans, but fortuitously, I was able to visit the Wanariset Reintroduction Center, designed to reintroduce orphaned orangutan infants and adolescents into rain forest habitats after a period of medical evaluation, quarantine, and extensive forest-living training. After reading a book (Smits 1992) that contained information about the Wanariset Reintroduction Center, and stories detailing the lives of orphaned orangutans, I became very interested in the environmental cause to protect orangutans. The infants were often sold as pets, especially in Taiwan, where a television program had popularized orangutans as pets. Each orphaned orangutan suffered from separation anxiety, human disease, and injuries from falling out of trees or by accidentally being shot.

I have been fortunate enough to visit the Wanariset Reintroduction Center, and a number of other facilities and programs in Kalimantan on numerous trips to Indonesia. Many of the orangutans' stories are unforgettable, such as the infant orangutan brought to Wanariset with life-threatening injuries and a missing hand that was cut off in an effort to kill his mother. Another orangutan at Wanariset, a large, fully grown adult male, has spent his entire life in captivity. His owners had kept him tied up in their backyard, but finally decided that they could not control him any longer. Seeing such a magnificent animal in a cage at the reintroduction center left an indelible impression about how humans treat animals, not as part of an ecosystem we share, but rather as substandard creatures for human entertainment. A. L. Rose (1995) identifies these kinds of experiences as profound interspecies events, in which humans develop connections with other species that change their thinking or understanding of that species and other aspects of the natural world. Since my first visit to Kalimantan, I have spent close to two cumulative years in Indonesia and learned the Indonesian language to facilitate my understanding of the environment, people, history, politics, economics, and other aspects of this fascinating country. For me, orangutans are an interesting example of how environmental organizations and primatologists employ a rhetoric of identification that diminishes the dichotomous

categories of nature and culture through Burke's concepts of consubstantiality and perspective by incongruity.

### Identification and Consubstantiality

Consubstantiality, the shared substance between two or more individuals, is the sort of identification that environmentalists often call for—a greater connection with what humans call nature. Consubstantiality is illustrated in a number of ways in rhetoric about orangutans, including four major categories: (1) origin stories about orangutans, (2) origin stories about humans, (3) the genetic/biological relationship with humans, and (4) the intellectual/psychological connection with humans. For instance, stories about the origin of orangutans demonstrate the mythological shared substance between humans and orangutans. The very name orangutan, means “person of the forest” in the Indonesian language. Indigenous people in Indonesia historically have thought of orangutans as descendents of humans. In these accounts, orangutans are still humans, yet have chosen to live in the forest to avoid the trappings of human societies (Russon 2000).

Furthermore, orangutans provide insight into our own human worlds. They exhibit many human behaviors, so by studying them we can find the story of our own origin and existence. If we can learn about humans from orangutans, our sense of shared substance is potentially very strong. Biruté Galdikas, Nancy Briggs, and Karl Ammann (1999) describe the role that orangutans play in Darwin's theory of evolution and as the missing link. Louis Leakey, the mentor for primatologists Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, and Biruté Galdikas, first sent Goodall to study chimpanzees to further his own paleoanthropological studies on the origin of humans. Similarly, Galdikas, one of the most famous orangutan primatologists, first studied orangutans under the same premises. Linda Spalding writes:

I thought, [Galdikas] might lead me to an understanding of how we *Homo sapiens* got ourselves thrown out of the garden and how we must look, in our exile, to the many eyes watching from the trees. Of course there was something else. A quest is as much about the seeker as the sought. We look in the mirror of another face to find ourselves. This is a signature act of all primates. (Spalding 1999, xiv)

Spalding demonstrates how anthropologists and others have sought ori-

gin stories of humans through anthropology, archeology, and primatology. As Donna Haraway observes, “People like to look at animals, even to learn from them about human beings and human society. . . We polish an animal mirror to look for ourselves” (1991, 21). Having the first-hand experience of being in the rain forest and seeing wild orangutans in Gunung Palung National Park in West Kalimantan, I am reminded of how similar, and yet how different, orangutans are to humans. For example, one female orangutan had just given birth a few days before and was handling her infant much like a human mother would. Yet, this orangutan and her infant were at the top of the rain forest canopy, living in a completely different environment, one in which many humans might struggle to survive. We may see ourselves in this “animal mirror,” but orangutans allow us to try to understand the complexities of our differences as well.

Primatologists and environmental organizations also rhetorically create consubstantiality by pointing to evidence that our shared substance is literal, in that 97 percent of human and orangutan genetic makeup is the same. This genetic makeup means that orangutans are a close relative to humans in the primate order, a fact on which environmental organizations and primatologists capitalize to bridge orangutan and human worlds. Environmental advocacy literature refers to orangutans as “our beautiful red-haired brothers and sisters,” “among our cousins,” and “one of our closest living relatives” (Balikpapan Orangutan Society–USA 1999–2000; Borneo Orangutan Foundation International 1999–2000; Galdikas, Briggs, & Ammann 1999; Russon 2000).

Rhetoric regarding orangutan intelligence is yet another way primatologists and organizations emphasize the connection between humans and orangutans. Although Western researchers initially viewed orangutans as lazy, stupid, or slow moving creatures, orangutans now are characterized among the most intelligent animals on earth (Russon 2000; van Schaik 2004). Anne Russon, a psychologist who studies orangutan intelligence, observes, “If any other species can reason, great apes are among the most likely candidates” (2000, 16), and “They are also the species most likely to bridge human-nonhuman boundaries” (2000, 17). Russon argues that orangutans use imitation to learn, create extensive forest maps, develop excellent long-term memory skills, demonstrate insightful thinking and self-awareness, sometimes rely on tools, exhibit the ability to plan activities and to learn signs to communicate with humans, and use deception to obtain food or escape other orangutans.

For example, I visited the Samboja Lestari reforestation project, where several islands were built to prevent orphaned orangutans from infecting each other with human illnesses such as hepatitis or tuberculosis. The orangutan caretakers use boats to paddle across the small river. Since orangutans cannot swim, the river is effective in preventing them from getting off the island. However, one day, I saw an orangutan get in the boat, pick up a paddle, and attempt to row away from the island. Fortunately, for the orangutan caretaker, the orangutan failed to push the boat fully into the water. As this story demonstrates, the ability of orangutans to learn and imitate is extraordinary. In studying these characteristics of high order animals, we may better understand human intelligence by looking in the mirror of species most like us.

Rhetoric regarding orangutan intelligence and the study of orangutan and human origins demonstrates literal and figurative consubstantiality between humans and orangutans. These features imply that humans can expand identification to the nonhuman world, because orangutans and other nonhuman primates have come to embody characteristics that are included in our understandings of personhood. Yet orangutans remain not quite human, and still shrouded in mystery, as there is still much to discover about orangutans (Carel van Schaik, in Rogers 2005). Haraway clarifies that in these simian narratives, using Frans de Waal's work on chimpanzees as an example, " 'We' are given no choice but identification, unless 'we' choose to be contentious readers from the start, losing all the pleasure of complicity with the author and identification with the engaging chimpanzee political actors we are about to meet" (1989, 147). Through discourse, orangutans become a rhetorical device to create consubstantiality that fosters our sense of identification between artificially constructed human and nonhuman worlds.

#### **Identification through Perspective by Incongruity**

Environmental organizations and primatologists who wish to protect orangutans seek fundamental changes in human behaviors. In order to create these transformations, our sense of self must be challenged to become more deeply connected with orangutans and nature. Butler (1993) and Ciesielski (1999) argue that identification contests, and risks changing, our human identities. In fact, identification with animals can be profound and shape our sense of humanness (Rose 1995). In many ways,

the study and protection of orangutans fosters identification through Burke's (1984) concept of perspective by incongruity, the suspension of old ideas to allow for the consideration of seemingly oppositional or incongruous ideas. Environmental organizational literature challenges the audience member's sense of humanness and nonhumanness, self and other. Rhetorical strategies used by environmental organizations and primatologists to encourage perspective by incongruity include naming, story telling, and personifying orangutans. For example, naming is pervasive throughout primatological studies and rehabilitation and reintroduction centers. Jane Goodall was one of the first to violate the scientific taboo of naming her subjects (see *A Reason for Hope*, 1999). According to Galdikas (1995), who also names the orangutans she studies, Goodall felt that numbering primates stole their individuality and perpetuated female, male, and juvenile archetypes. Primatologists also refer to their subjects as "he" or "she" rather than it and use "who" instead of "which" or "that." Galdikas dedicates her 1995 book to Cindy, Carl, and Cara, three orangutans who died while she was studying them. This process of naming gives orangutans individuality and emphasizes their human characteristics.

In addition to naming orangutans, environmental organizations often relate orangutan stories in their newsletters and websites as a way to help their audiences see orangutans through incongruous perspectives, that is, as almost human. For example, Piyona arrived at the Wanariset Reintroduction Center in 1999. She reportedly "is developing into a wonderful orangutan baby. She can now climb little by little, carefully grasping things. She is on the way to learning how to be a free and wild orangutan again at the Wanariset Center. She is one of the sweethearts of our team of 'human orangutan mothers' at Wanariset" (Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation 2000). Another orangutan organization, Orangutan Foundation International, features an "orangutan of the month" to tell the stories of their orangutans. Mohtar, the orangutan of February 2000, is described as shy, scared, and lonely when he arrived at a rehabilitation center for orphaned orangutans (Orangutan Foundation International 1999–2000). Personification of Piyona and Mohtar occurs through describing them as babies who could be human and need to be mothered just as human infants require.

In many instances, the use of personification creates a strong bond

between orangutans and the technicians, researchers, veterinarians, and other staff at the rehabilitation and research centers. They become emotionally connected with these orangutan infants and adolescents, and use these experiences as a way to engage their audiences. Galdikas describes numerous stories of how attached she became to orphaned orangutans, becoming a surrogate mother for several orangutans. For example, in *Reflections of Eden*, she gives a lengthy account of her relationship with Akmad:

Akmad had given birth again, and I was photographing her newborn infant. Akmad was free; she had an infant who was free. In a moment of absolute clarity I realized the intensity of the bond that I had forged with Akmad. She had singled me out for this unique historic honor: I was a female of another species, but as her bonded mother I had been granted the privilege of sharing her newborn infant. I was probably the first human being in history who was truly an orangutan infant's grandmother. . . It had taken me more than a decade of living with orangutans, day by day in their great forest home, to understand finally that orangutans are not just simpler versions of ourselves. (Galdikas 1995, 16)

Galdikas's caretaking of orphaned orangutans also is illustrated by the 1980 cover of *National Geographic*, in which Galdikas's one-year old son, Binti, is featured playing in a small plastic tub with Princess, a baby orangutan. This photograph challenges the boundaries between humanness and orangutanhood, in that the photo presents two children playing together; that one child happens to be human and the other child an orangutan is of no importance to the viewer. These images and activities allow the audience member to see nature in a different way; nature is not separate and distinct from the human world, as orangutans demonstrate. Through orangutans, audiences can adopt an incongruous perspective, even if only momentarily, one that extends beyond orangutans to their endangered habitats as well.

Other examples demonstrate that visual images are powerful rhetorical strategies that blur the borders between humans and nonhumans. Photographs show juvenile or infant orangutans sitting in plastic baskets, playing with human baby toys, drinking from human baby bottles, and wearing human baby diapers. Captions accompanying the pictures describe the orangutans' human-like features. For instance, baby orang-

utan Theo's caption says "It's amazing, now Theo has five teeth. He looks so funny with his red upstanding hair, big ears and expressive mouth. He likes his blanket and looks comfortable while holding it before falling asleep" (Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation 2000). *Just Hanging On*, a documentary about orangutans, films the first ever open heart surgery for an orangutan (Searle, no date). Karen is a young juvenile orangutan at the San Diego Zoo who would have died without the surgery. The viewer almost does not know that it is an orangutan rather than a human infant who is having an important operation. The appeal in these visual images is often an effect of young orangutans' babyishness or cuteness, an effect that elicits a caring or protective response and can occur across species (Angier 2006; Miller 1989; de Waal 2001). Babyishness explains why researchers and technicians become so attached to infant orangutans. Just as a caretaker can bond with a child within a few days (Miller 1989), orangutan caretakers also form strong emotional bonds when an orangutan arrives at a reintroduction or rehabilitation center.

Environmental organizations also encourage this theme of caring for orangutans through their Orangutan Foster Parent programs (Balikpapan Orangutan Society–USA 1999–2000; Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation 1999–2000; Orangutan Foundation International 1999–2000). Individuals or organizations can adopt the orangutan of the month by paying for the orangutan's rehabilitation or reintroduction expenses. In return, the foster parent receives a photograph and biography of the orangutan. This rhetorical strategy appeals to those who may have developed a bond with an orangutan through photographs, documentaries, or ecotourism and seek to play the role of the caretaker. This strategy is not so unlike campaigns for foster parents for impoverished children around the world.

Finally, environmental organizations and primatologists emphasize the wildness of orangutans to foster audience identification with nature. The campaign to anthropomorphize orangutans has been so successful that readers and viewers must be reminded that orangutans are wild animals. Establishing the similarities between orangutans and humans help audiences to engage in identification, yet in order for any of these practices to occur, an audience must also be able to understand their differences. For instance, a photograph of an orangutan named Kacong,

on the cover of an environmental organization's newsletter, leads the reader to understand the wildness of orangutans. In the photograph, Kacong wears a chain around his neck, pulling on the chain with one hand and eating scraps of food from the ground (Balikpapan Orangutan Society, 1997). This image reminds readers that restraining wild animals is not appropriate, in part because we would not chain human infants in such a way. Such images may even lead some viewers to recognize that restraining domestic animals is also a questionable practice, and one that helps to stretch perspectives.

Many of these stories and photographs challenge human assumptions about nature and culture. Even though orangutans are wild animals, orangutan names and stories humanize them, establishing commonalities between humans and nonhumans. As Haraway explains,

Today, through our ideologically loaded narratives of their lives, animals “hail” us to account for the regimes in which they and we must live. We “hail” them into our constructs of nature and culture, with major consequences of life and death, health and illness, longevity and extinction. (2003, 17)

These rhetorical practices demonstrate how audiences engage in identification—humans change their concept of what it means to be an orangutan by adopting the perspective of an orangutan, or to envision themselves as a sort of orangutan parent. Audiences are able to adopt the perspective of an orangutan as if it were their own child. Perspective by incongruity requires that human audiences move outside of or beyond their perspectives to engage in the world that they live in, which includes orangutans and their habitats. As Frans de Waal contends, the great apes are “holding an entirely different mirror up to us, one in which apes are not human caricatures but serious members of our extended family with their own resourcefulness and dignity” (2001, 33). Howell, in her analysis of the study of chimpanzees, further explains that “Accepting kinship with chimpanzees may mean that we can learn to de-center humans long enough to focus on the animal's perspective” (2003, 189, citing de Waal).

Conversely, orangutans may also be engaging in their own perspective by incongruity in their efforts to adapt their interactions with humans. As Carel van Schaik (2004) observes, “The great apes we see in zoos and special research facilities are socially astute and intelligent. . . . Language-trained animals of all great ape species can use a few hundred

signs and maintain a polite conversation” (p. 2, citing Savage-Rumbaugh & Lewin 1994). Numerous examples demonstrate how orangutans have learned or imitated human behaviors, such as washing clothes, riding in boats, attempting to make fires, and many other human-oriented practices (e.g., see Galdikas 1995; van Schaik 2004). Learning human-oriented behaviors illustrates the process of enculturation, or the act of becoming “almost like people in behavior and cognition” (van Schaik 2004, 2, citing Tomasello et. al., 1993). However, these instances of imitation or learning are the result of exposure to “socially biased learning” (van Schaik 2004, 158). That is, orangutans may employ incongruous, human perspectives, but mostly because humans make these opportunities available to orangutans in captivity or in reintroduction/rehabilitation centers. As Mathews (this issue) notes, the world (or in this case orangutans) “spontaneously adapts or enlarges its ends in response to our encounter with it.” The human and nonhuman worlds are co-evolving with their increasingly frequent encounters (see Baldwin, this issue), through engaging incongruous perspectives.

However, in order to protect orangutans from extinction, their habitat must also be protected. Those who are able to see or interact with orangutans often become strongly committed to environmental protection of forests in Indonesia and Malaysia and other environmental causes. In many ways, orangutans provide powerful motivation for caring about environmental issues. Because orangutans have human-like characteristics, through their genetic makeup, intelligence, and behaviors, humans more readily identify with orangutans than other species, such as trees, plants, or insects. Audiences often find orangutans a compelling case for environmental activism. In essence, audiences are able to engage incongruous perspectives because of the human-like nature of orangutans. As Plumwood observes, “Overcoming the dualistic dynamic requires recognition of both continuity and difference; this means acknowledging the other as neither alien to and discontinuous from self nor assimilated to or an extension of self” (1993, 6). Orangutans provide a framework and bridge for humans to see both their continuities and differences with the natural world.

In this case, it is animalcentric anthropomorphism that allows audiences to see orangutans as a possible bridge to the nonhuman world. Frans de Waal suggests that

Closeness to animals creates the desire to understand them, and not just a little piece of them, but the *whole* animal. It makes us wonder what goes on in their heads even though we fully realize that the answer can only be approximated. We employ all available weapons in this endeavor, including extrapolations from human behavior. Consequently, anthropomorphism is not only inevitable, it is a powerful tool. (2001, 40)

De Waal calls this kind of anthropomorphism “animalcentric” in that environmental activists and researchers are interested in the animal’s view, “What is it like to be a bat” or an orangutan? (2001, 77). Furthermore, this kind of anthropomorphism can be used as a means to understand nonhuman primates more effectively through an exploratory method of what we do not know about primates (de Waal 1996, 1989). Yet, de Waal suggests the scientific use of parsimony presents a problem because “the principle of parsimony has two faces. At the same time that we are suppose to favor low-level over high-level cognitive explanations, we also should not create a double standard according to which shared human and ape behavior is explained differently” (1996, 64). That is, we should not avoid the similarities between animals and humans, simply because animals are not humans.

On the other hand, many people engage in what de Waal calls anthropocentric anthropomorphism, or “How would I feel in this situation?” (2001, 77). De Waal (2001, 1996) contends that while animalcentrism might foster a bridging function between nature and culture, anthropocentrism or “Bambification” perpetuates the divide between the human and nonhuman world. Many humans want to hold, cuddle, feed, and photograph orangutans; they want to treat orangutans as if they were human precisely because the orangutan is a powerful bridge. The human qualities of orangutans, popularized by films and television shows with orangutan actors, have created an international demand for orangutan pets (Balikpapan Orangutan Society–USA 1998; Galdikas 1995; Smits 1992). Furthermore, humans may strongly identify with orangutans, but may not feel the same connection with their habitats or with other species because trees and insects are too completely different. Audiences may passionately care about what happens to orangutans, but may not really engage in identification with rain forests, and other fauna and flora. Since deforestation, due to forest fires and legal and illegal logging (Russon 2000; van Schaik 2004) and more recently, due to conversion of forest to palm plantations (Brown & Jacobson 2005; Whyte, Desilets, & Warwick,

2005), is the major cause of the declining numbers of orangutans, this lack of identification with rain forest habitats is immensely important.

### CONCLUSION

The examples presented here serve to illustrate how humans can connect with the seemingly separate nonhuman world through identification that emphasizes Burke's notions of consubstantiality and perspective by incongruity, Butler's ideas about identification through critical understandings of self and other, and de Waal's discussion about animalcentric anthropomorphism. This rhetoric of identification allows humans to see the nonhuman world as a place in which we co-exist and as something other than an entity for human pleasure or exploitation. Orangutans function as a powerful representative image for the current state of natural habitats around the world. Ultimately, environmental organizations have to continue to create grounds for animalcentric anthropomorphism or profound interspecies events that facilitate understanding through identification. Identification may encourage a motive for audience action, destabilize nature/culture dualisms, increase respect for orangutans and their habitats, generate understanding of our natural environments, and challenge our human sense of self and other. Using identification to connect to the nonhuman world is effective and important in destabilizing the artificial boundaries between culture and nature.

### NOTE

The author wishes to thank Ronnie Hawkins, Richard Pineda, and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful suggestions in revising this essay.

### REFERENCES

- Angier, Natalie. 2006, January 3. "The Cute Factor." *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com>.
- Balikpapan Orangutan Society. 1997. *The Long Call* (4): 1.
- Balikpapan Orangutan Society–USA. 1998. *BOS-USA: Balikpapan Orangutan Society–USA: Dedicated to the conservation of the orangutan and their rainforest habitat*. [Brochure]. Aptos, CA: BOS-USA.
- . 1999–2000. <http://www.orangutan.com>.
- Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation. 1999–2000. <http://www.redcube.nl/bos/>.
- Brown, Ellie & Michael F. Jacobson, 2005. *Cruel Oil: How Palm Oil Harms Health, Rainforest & Wildlife*. Washington, DC: Center for Science in the Public Interest.

- Burke, Kenneth. 1969. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1984. *Attitudes Toward History*, 3rd edition. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that Matter*. New York: Routledge.
- Capra, Fritjof. 1995. "Deep Ecology: A New Paradigm," pp. 19–25. In George Sessions, ed. *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.
- Ciesielski, Dennis J. 1999. "'Secular Pragmatism': Kenneth Burke and the [Re]socialization of Literature and Theory," pp. 243–67. In Bernard L. Brock, ed. *Kenneth Burke and the 21st Century*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Galdikas, Biruté M. F., Nancy Briggs, and Karl Ammann. 1999. *Orangutan Odyssey*. New York: Harry N. Abrams.
- Galdikas, Biruté M. F. 1995. *Reflections of Eden: My Years with the Orangutans of Borneo*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.
- Goodall, Jane. 1999. *Reason for Hope: A Spiritual Journey*. New York: Warner Books.
- Haila, Yrjö. 2000. "Beyond the Nature-Culture Dualism," *Biology and Philosophy* (15): 155–75.
- Haraway, Donna. 1989. *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. New York: Routledge.
- . 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2003. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.
- Hawkins, Ronnie Z. 2002. "Seeing Ourselves as Primates," *Ethics & the Environment* 7(2): 60–103.
- Howell, Nancy R. 2003. "The Importance of Being Chimpanzee," *Theology and Science* 1(2): 179–91.
- Kaplan, G. & L. Rogers, 1995. "Of Human Fear and Indifference: The Plight of the Orangutan." In R. D. Nadler, Biruté F. M. Galdikas, Lori K. Sheeran, & Norm Rosen, eds. *The Neglected Ape*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Miller, Patricia H. 1989. *Theories of Developmental Psychology* 3rd ed. New York: Freeman and Company.
- Mills, Patricia Jagentowicz. 1991. "Feminism and Ecology: On the Domination of Nature," *Hypatia* 6 (1): 162–78.
- Orangutan Foundation International. 1999–2000. <http://www.orangutan.org>.
- Plumwood, Val. 1993. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. New York: Routledge.

- Rogers, Connie. 2005. "Revealing Behavior in 'Orangutan Heaven and Human Hell,'" *The New York Times* 15 November. <http://www.nytimes.com>.
- Rose, A. L. 1995. "Orangutans, Science, and Collective Reality," pp. 29–40. In R. D. Nadler et al., eds. *The Neglected Ape*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Russon, Anne E. 2000. *Orangutans: Wizards of the Rain Forest*. Buffalo, NY: Firefly Books.
- Savage-Rumbaugh, Sue and Roger Lewin. 1994. *Kanzi: The Ape at the Brink of the Human Mind*. New York: Wiley and Sons.
- van Schaik, Carel. 2004. *Among Orangutans: Red Apes and the Rise of Human Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Searle, M. (director and producer). No date. *Just Hanging On*. Storyteller, Prime Time.
- Sessions, George, ed. 1995. *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.
- Smits, Willie. 1992. *1992 Year report: Orangutan Reintroduction at the Wanariset I Station, Samboja, East Kalimantan, Indonesia*. Available: Wanariset Station, East Kalimantan, Indonesia.
- Spalding, Linda. 1999. *A Dark Place in the Jungle: Science, Orangutans, and Human Nature*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.
- Tomasello, Michael, Anne Krueger, and Hillary Ratner. 1993. "Cultural Learning," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* (16): 495–511.
- de Waal, Frans. 1989. *Peacemaking Among Primates*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 1996. *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 2001. *The Ape and the Sushi Master: Cultural Reflections by a Primatologist*. New York: Basic Books.
- Whyte, Sean, Michelle Desilets, and Hugh Warwick. 2005. *Save Orangutans from Extinction When You Next Shop—and Put an End to the Cruelty of Palm Oil* [Newsletter]. Aylesbury, UK: Nature Alert and Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation UK.
- Zimmerman, Michael E. 1995. "Feminism, Deep Ecology, and Environmental Ethics," pp. 169–97. In Alan Drengson & Yuichi Inoue, eds. *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Copyright of *Ethics & the Environment* is the property of Indiana University Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.