Ecocritical Forms of Engagement with Nature and Texts

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Abstract This essay critically examines eco-activism as commitment to various forms of engagement with the earth, and with literary narratives that feature often romanticized conceptions of nature and contemplations of place attachment, environmental awareness, and ecological values. The argument is that activism, as in the case of the Occupy Gezi Movement in Istanbul, would be more effective if supplemented with theory. Activism in ecocriticism is also associated with thematic interpretations of literary-environmental texts according to which experience articulates nature. The essay contests this idea that nature finds its best expression in texts that supposedly transparently reflect human experience in natural surroundings. It proposes instead a material ecocritical way of integrating ecocritical activism with its theoretical dimension to complete the activism-theory circle in a meaningful way. Thus, theory emerging from material expressions entails a new understanding of activism as part of theorizing, and theory as part of activism in a complex world of interrelations and border-crossings.
Key words ecocriticism; activism; theory; new materialism

What is the significance of activist component of ecocriticism? Asking this question today may seem dated, but although ecocriticism is now replete with a multitude of theories, activist sensibilities still play a vital role in the field. Being the moral impetus behind ecocriticism, activism in the broad sense means commitment to various forms of engagement with the earth, and with literary narratives that feature often romanticized conceptions of nature and contemplations of place attachment, environmental awareness, and ecological values. Giving meditative and often personal accounts of allegedly pure and untouched natural landscapes, wilderness, and dramatic encounters between the human and the nonhuman world, nature-writing epitomizes such forms of narrative that seek to reverse our estrangement from the natural environments. Ecocrititicism considers nature-writing — outdoor narratives,

or "environmental non-fiction in the tradition of Thoreau" (Clark 35) — highly important in creating perspicuous environmental perceptions. Ecocritical activism also involves ecopolitical forms of protest against environmental degradation caused by capitalist development such as hydraulic fracking and resource exploitation, protesting animal abuse, hunting, mining, as well taking ecopolitical action for remedying environmental injustices as demonstrated by feminist environmental justice actions. The "Occupy Gezi Park Movement" in Istanbul was, for example, one of the most conspicuous environmental activist movements in Turkey recently. On May 31, 2013, responding to the poignant call for protection of the trees that were going to be felled in Gezi Park in Istanbul in order to turn the area into a big shopping mall, the young protesters, known as the Y-generation, put up their tents in the park and their signature in a fast spreading social-environmental movement they called ResIstanbul. What transpired from the festive spirit the youngsters created in Gezi Park is not that the movement was homogeneous with the Y-generation, but that it is heterogeneous with other groups giving open support, such as movie stars, singers, hackers, lawyers, doctors, workers, left-wing revolutionaries, feminists, queers, and mothers from all walks of life. The trees had united these diverse groups in a mutual feeling of saving those remaining green spots from being turned into shopping malls. But, despite all the concerts, art shows, theater performances, book clubs, and tree planting that accompanied this ecopolitical activism, which spread to other cities' major parks in Turkey, the consequences were dire with shocking ecological casualties. The Swan Park in Ankara, for example, witnessed a carnivalesque display of resistance, but lost its beautiful symbols, the swans, to excessive use of gas the police used to disperse the protesters. Not only the swans died, but also many street cats and dogs and many birds were lethally affected. Although the Gezi Park Resistance Movement has exposed the capitalist greed for plundering, colonizing, and harassing the planetary ecosystems in the name of monetary interest, one cannot say that this activism has achieved much in saving the trees and protecting unsuspecting nonhuman lives. In what follows, I will argue that from the ecocritical perspective, activism may remain a major concern, yet it can hardly be the only one in challenging the anthropocentric cultural mindset. Thus, young Turks in Gezi Park shouting "We are only armed with flowers,""Green Strikes back," and "Leave the Trees Alone," were there to make a change, but it is unclear yet whether or not they were able to prevent the deep-seated capitalist greed set on translating fragile places into monetary terms. By the same token, the image of the woman in red[1] whose hair flying with close distance tear gas sprayed on her face may have become an international phenomenon, inspiring Italian women parliamentarians who appeared wearing red in solidarity, and Judith Butler's talk at MLA in Chicago in January 2014, but the effect of such eco-activist movements is short lived unless

they are endorsed by and transformed into adequate critical reflection and legitimate theoretical discourse. The argument is not that such concerted activism as we have seen in Gezi park is totally ineffective, but that if supplemented with theory its messages will be more efficacious. Significantly, activism in ecocriticism is also associated with thematic interpretations of literary-environmental texts, an argument which will also unfold in the second part of this essay. According to the thematic line of ecocritical argument, experience articulates nature. That is to say, nature finds its best expression in texts that supposedly transparently reflect feeling, doing and participating as constituents of human experience. First, however, we should consider the customary focus of early ecocritical inquiry on the significance of activist work as the only promising solution to initiate ecological attitudes and raise environmental awareness.

An activist agenda is inscribed in the very core of ecocriticism that unequivocally distinguishes ecocriticism from other literary theories. It is useful to remember, as Cheryll Glotfelty does in her "Introduction" to the landmark publication that she edited with Harold Fromm in 1996, *The Ecocriticisim Reader*, that "If we're not part of the solution, we're part of the problem" (xxi).Her question of how to "contribute to the environmental restoration, not just in our spare time, but from within our capacity as professors of literature" (xxi), was crucial for the literary profession because we felt compelled to respond to the global environmental crisis and its increasingly visible and world-wide effects.We could no longer sit back in our easy chairs and ignore the unprecedented environmental devestation. We did not want to reduce ourselves to the tragicomic position of Professor Jack Gladney in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*. Watching the environmental catastrophes on the evening news, he says:

> These things happen to people who live in exposed areas. Society is set up in such a way that it's the poor and the uneducated who suffer the main impact of natural and man-made disasters ... I am a college professor. Did you ever see a college professor rowing a boat down his own street in one of those TV floods? (114)

Though it seems unlikely for a literary scholar in fully industrialized nations to experience such things, the world is changing fast, and what seems unlikely today could easily happen tomorrow. Our connection with the natural world, however, remains tenuous as we continue to tamper with the environments for short term payoffs. Michel Serres's deliberation in 1992 in his influential essay "The Natural Contract" is still pertinent today concerning the urgency of finding long term solutions:

> Now we are confronting a problem caused by a civilization that has been in place for more than a century, itself engendered by long-lived cultures that preceded it, inflicting damage on a physical system millions of years old, fluctuating and yet relatively stable in its rapid, aleatory, and multisecular variations; we are facing a disturbing question whose principal component is time-in particular, a term of time that lengthens as we come to understand the size of the global system. For the waters of the oceans to mix, a cycle estimated at five millennia must be completed. But we only propose programs and solutions for the short term, because we live for immediate payoffs and from them we draw the essence of our power. (4)

Responding to the challenges posed by the inordinately polluted physical environments, and to "disturbing questions" thinkers like Serres have brought forward, ecocritics have been arguing for the necessity of reconnecting with the natural world and for urgent revisions of the dominant cultural conceptions of nature based on implacable anthropocentric visions. Scott Slovic, for example, proposes the notion of "ecocritical responsibility" in *Going Away to Think,* by which he means "various forms of engagement and retreat, in all pursuits of 'responsibility,' in quest of meaningful *response* to the world as I experience it and gather information about it" (3). As Michael P. Cohen has also stated, "by definition, ecological literary criticism must be engaged" (27). Similarly, underlining the notion of "engagement" in ecocritical inquiry, Lawrence Buell in *The Future of Environmental Criticism,* invokes the famous ecocritical insistence on "commitment deeper than professionalism" (97). Engaging with the world beyond the confines of academia, then, constitutes the main impulse in ecocriticism's developmental stages, making the central rationale of ecocriticism to "restore significance to the world beyond the page" (Rigby 154-55). Notably, the basic contention in the first phase of ecocritical inquiry was that unless environmental activism (as a form of effective engagement) is integrated into academic work, cultivating an awareness of environmental issues would be an almost impossible task. In his book *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, Buell highlighted the activist component in his definition of ecocriticism, stating that ecocriticism is "conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (430). However, insistence on praxis as part of what defines ecocriticism has been a point of contention. Part of this contention was that ignoring "a theoretically informed" questioning of its disciplinary alliances, ecocriticism espouses a self-serving ecocritical responsibility which is at best a textual activism of the sort that "gathers itself around a commitment

to environmentality from whatever critical vantage point" (11), as Buell describes it in *The Future of Environmental Criticism.* Buell defines ecocriticism as "a concourse of discrepant practices" (11), which has produced a resolutely provisional, or hybrid scholarship. Contradictory though it may seem, this manifest hybridity reinforces a kind of enduring thematicism that privileges praxis over theory and thus constructs an artificial theory/praxis dichotomy. In the result of this conflict, literary representations of the environment are assigned high priority leading to what Dominic Head has called, "a misconceived notion of how environmental representation functions" (32). In this conjuncture, the emblematic emphasis on praxis/engagement/activism has entailed an imminent weakness of ecocritical project, turning it into more a symbolic fiction than a truly activist intellectual endeavor to make a change. It is important to note that the pronounced commitment to activism is often associated with such activities as hiking, climbing, canoeing, and getting to know the etymological roots of flower names. Dana Phillips playfully explains in his 1999 article, "Ecocriticism, Literary Theory, and the Truth of Ecology" that "Good intentions and a receptive attitude while out hiking, canoeing do not enable one to make ecological judgements. Enjoying a good read does not make one a literary critic. It should follow, then, that enjoying a good read about hiking and or canoeing and sharing one's enthusiasm in lecture or print does not make one an ecocritic" (582).

If Phillips stands out as chronicler of ecocritical satire, beneath this humor lies a discomfiting reminder of the self-inflicted limits of ecocriticism and a deep concern for the future of the field. Moreover, seeking advantage in uncritical politics and poetics of experiencing the world without the necessary tools of theory, at best produces what one can call a strong partisanship among ecocritics with one camp favoring activism and the other insisting on theory. In her 2009 article, "The Sound of a Robin after a Rain Shower," Sabine Wilkie articulates similar concerns: "For a newcomer to the field of environmental criticism in literary and cultural studies," she writes, "the debate about the relationship between the natural world and its literary representation raises a central question about the direction in which the discipline is developing" (90). She claims that there are two camps in ecocriticism that try to mediate among these questions; namely the nature camp of ecocritics, who explore the relationships between the natural and the cultural processes; and the constructionist camp, with its focus on the historical construction of nature. But as a newcomer into the field, she also admits that ecocriticism is dominated by the American tradition of nature writing. By critically reflecting on this line, Wilkie avers that the assumption that thematic approaches produce more environmentally conscious readings reduces ecocritical inquiry to "the level of content invocations," which accordingly emerges from a model that "thematically, and referentially . . . simply assumes the

unproblematic existence of an un(re)constructed nature as allegedly described by the sciences (94). Wilkie's point is important when she reminds the reader that "Texts do indeed present their meanings on levels other than plot and invocation — which is what deconstructive models of literary criticism have so eloquently pointed out over the years" (95). She concludes by suggesting that the nature camp "could discover aspects of the environment in and of a text without having to resort to pre-critical referential models of reading" (95).

Giving a more perceptive voice to this discontent in his 2009 article, "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia," Simon Estok better explains the present theoretical contingency:

> Certainly, if ecocriticism can be said to have begun to founder, it can be said to have done so for two man reasons: (1) its failures to theorize itself adequately and (2) its failures to live up to its initial activist promises […] Our continued failure to either deal theoretically or practically with the activist challenges of ecocriticism bode well neither for the field nor for the environment. We labor under the delusion that theory is incompatible with praxis, that theory cannot lead to changes in public policy, that theory is no good for the "real world." (206)

As I have argued in "Ecocriticism's Theoretical Discontents," written as a positive response to Estok's essay, "no ecocritic would want to hear the fact that so far, for example, no worldly grounding of ecocriticism has enabled any reduction of carbon emissions in the real world, or that no thematic readings of any literary text has motivated anyone to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle" (164). Dana Phillips too in his characteristic sharp style strikes against the ecocritical insistence to remain outside the theoretical community: "Too many ecocritics are fond of assuming the posture of the faux naïf, and while standing in that posture like to suggest, among other things, that environmental literature (and art) ought not to be *read* (or viewed or audited) in the critical sense of the term" ("Ecocriticism, Ecopoetics" 39). This is so because among the conservative ecocritics the suspicion of theory seems to prevail Louisa MacKenzie and Stephanie Posthumus, for example, maintain that Simon Estok's "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness" **"**was sure to provoke debate, and it is still doing so" (758); and as they contend, "it is time to recast this debate not as an opposition, but asan invitation to *simultaneously* identify what we have in common and how our situated positions differ" (757).

Broadly speaking, the contest between theory and activism is a contest between "programmatic statements" (757) and "context-based studies" (757). In a way, whether we call it context-based, or thematic approach, this orientation is also

associated with activist work in the sense of direct engagement with reality,[2] as opposed to focusing on how language shapes that reality, producing programmatic statements. It is important to note here that, acknowledging the role of language in the meaning-making processes does not necessarily lead us to the prisonhouse of language, as the mainstream ecocritical opinion has advocated. Nor does it lead to the constructivist arguments that the world can only be viewed as a social or discursive construct; rather, it leads to the "constructedness of our concepts to their discursive character" (Bertens 202).

We know that reality does not speak without discursive mediations, and finding an extra-discursive ground for ecological interpretations of texts seems to be linguistically impossible. But there is a solution to this problematic issue. Serenella Iovino proposes that ecocriticism is "a 'cybernetics' of the text-world relationship: the text and the world are a complex information unit; they create a feedback loop consisting of the actions of the world on the text and, most of all, the possible action of the text on the world" (761). I have also opined that to "find rational remedies to the ecological challenges we need both theory and praxis, both activism and philosophizing... We should not forget that theory is always effective in constructing a cultural space that leads to political spaces for governments to take action as much as the impact of activist attempts to do so" ("Ecocriticism's Phobic Relations" 769). Conservative ecocriticism, however, separates theory and practice, choosing to argue only in terms of the material experience of the world and deliberately avoiding any mention of just how exactly our experience is translated into discourse. The postmodern theorist Linda Hutcheon provides a formidable argument about this point as she emphatically underlines the situatedness of all theoretical discourses in "a reflection on actual praxis and continue to derive their critical force from their conjunction with that social and aesthetic practice" (16).

The binary thinking, in contrast, denies much of the complexity of contemporary critical self-consciousness in its resistance to the philosophical conceptuality that allegedly comprehended it. Not being able to come to terms with this, the thematic approach in ecocriticism was designed precisely to let us think of reality independent of language, or rather independent of the discursive formulations of reality. Within this view, Scott Slovic has suggested that the only genuinely meaningful ecocritical engagement with the world can be achieved through "more explicit explanation of how and what environmental literature communicates" (Slovic 34), a goal which is not simply the equlibrium state of the texts and contexts, but a desire to privilege the context only, which Slovic calls narrative scholarship, or attending only to storytelling to understand "our existence in the physical world" (35). Therefore, "an appropriately grounded language" ('the language of stories) (35) is presumed by critics such as

Slovic to connect us better to the physical environment, and to better communicate our physical experiences. The model here is the familiar literary realism that is offered as an ideal way of connecting with the world. This approach claims that fiction takes its meaning from its situatedness in the world; thus what we need to do in order to make better contact is to analyze as literary critics the content of those stories that supposedly reflect the world unproblematically, which is "communication" in Slovic's words.

One of the representatives of this approach is Glen A. Love, who calls himself a "nature-endorser" in *Practical Ecocriticism* and condemns "nature-skeptics." Love asserts that the nature-endorsers "gain credibility in being drawn to real problems and in advocating and working toward analyses and solutions, while the nature-skeptics do not" (8). Love is simply wrong to assume that "to exclude nature except for its cultural determination or linguistic construction is also to accept the continuing degradation of a natural world that is most in need of active human recognition and engagement" (8). But it presents a telling example for the binary thinking in ecocriticism, which undermines its true potential, and goes against its spirit of inclusiveness. Love privileges the referential function of literature and condemns its alternative as nature's enemy. This is a deeply ingrained belief in the nature camp. For example, another nature-endorser, Robert Kern, mainstains that,

> One object of ecocriticism, as I see it, is to read in such a way as to amplify the reality of the environment in or of a text, even if in doing so we resist the tendency of the text itself (for our own conditioning as readers) to relegate the environment to the status of setting, so that it becomes a place chiefly interesting because of the human events that unfold in it, or to see its significance as primarily symbolic, so that it becomes essentially other than itself. (260)

Although this argument recognizes the symbolic significance of place in its literary interpretation, it is still grounded in the assumption that "ecological readings" can only be done if we resort to the refentiality of literary meaning. In *Ecocritical Explorations in Literary and Cultural Studies*, Patrick D. Murphy clarifies this manifest confusion by calling attention to the "dialogical concepts of answerability and anotherness," and claims that these Bakhtinian-based concepts help solve the referential versus textual problematic:

> …I want to claim that the dialogical concepts of answerability and anotherness provide a way of talking about how various movements within nature-oriented literatures ground their action and ground their readers in ethically referential

> situations aware of difference and responsibility.They do so without presuming that nonfiction equals fact and that facts are required for writing about nature. Thus the equation of nature writing = nonfiction = fact = truth that formed the dominant mode of literary criticism that privileged the nonfiction natural history essay over all other literary modes in the early years of American ecocriticism is cast aside for a recognition of the multivalent textual displays of the search for better ecologically ethical understanding. (33)

Even though, as Murphy compellingly explains, the thematic approach is replaced by a more interested focus on "textual displays," ecocriticism has yet to have a paradigmatic shift in terms of a serious theorization of its activist impulse always linked with nature-endorsement, and rethinking of its overemphasis on the ontology of nature outside of human reflection. But as Michael Rifaterre has demonstrated in his reading of Wordsworth's poem "Yew Trees," such a premise is a "referential fallacy." Citing Rifaterre in this context would be useful to understand the extent of which this fallacy marks ecocritical interpretations of texts:

> Referentiality of literary meaning is thus so basic an assumption that it involves the whole frame of interpretation and the very nature of descriptive poetry. I shall try to show that this postulate is a fallacy, and that the representation of reality is a verbal construct in which meaning is achieved by reference from words to words, not to things. (107)

Rifaterre maintains that the description of Yew Trees "refers to actual trees," there is no denying it (108), and that "a description is deflected from its surface meaning and makes the reader aware of a symbolic significance" (113). But he discerningly extends his contention to the concept of tree "with its various literal or metaphorical implications" (114), which provides the reader with an ideal model that opens up its semantic equivalences. According to Rifaterre, interpretation must involve these equivalences, not with the referentiality of the meaning of a tree:

> Yew-trees do grow singly or in small clumps, so this first trait would seem plainly referential. But only for a reader who already knows about yews; and the accuracy of the remark cannot justify the extremely heavy emphasis laid upon singleness. The isolation is a modality of 'descriptiveness' not because it coincides with a possible or common reality of the woods, but because it is an unavoidable fact of the text, because it is stated again and again in a cumulative sequence: with the proud 'strands single … as it stood over yore' (2-3), with

> 'solitary Tree,' with the underlining of an exclamation and the use of the capital letter. (115)

This kind of reading does not fix meaning; nor does it disrupt ecological value of the text. But by deconstructing the "self-present literal meaning," it unearths the poem's complexity and multiplicity of meanings with regards to both its semantic dimensions and the cultural discourses within which it is grounded. Recognition of this point would, in definitive ways, move ecocriticism from its self-defeating epistemological implications. In this precise sense, ecocriticism can critically reflect upon the human discourses that, as Hans Bertens points out, "govern our representations of nature" (203). But the way ecocriticism generally deals with representational issues, relegating them to the theme and content, ultimately subscribes the field to the limited standards of realist epistemologies that cannot help adequately and critically reflect upon ecocriticism's moral, cultural and political agendas. It must be remembered that this approach is, in the first place, primarily responsible for the anthropocentric conceptualizations of our relations with the world, thus for the crisis of knowledge and, by extention, for our environmental problems. It is common knowledge that it was through epistemological realism that the historically influential conceptions of nature were formulated. The defenders of realism then prescribe a strategy for ecocriticism that is fundamentally defective in view of its explanatory models. Ecocritics must not forget how the Newtonian mechanical order of nature, adapted to the political and social discourses by the materialist philosopher Thomas Hobbes, produced the dominant paradigm of economic progress and consequently the decline of the natural environments.

Since the time when Phillips punctually wrote about ecocritics' flight from theory, the abiding interest in nature's represented exteriority in texts continues, and the cultural foundations upon which such representations are grounded are not adequately examined. The underlying reason can be found in William Cronon's eloquently written chapter, "The Trouble with Wilderness," in his 1995 edited volume *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. Raising several "knotty questions" (85), Cronon goes a considerable way to demonstrating the cultural constructedness of our concepts of nature and the "very subtleties and complexities" underlying what he calls "the deceptive clarity of 'human' vs. 'nonhuman'" (85): "But the most troubling cultural baggage that accompanies the celebration of wilderness has less to do with remote rain forests and peoples than with the ways we think about ourselves" (85). It is this question of how we get to know the phenomenal world, and the ways we think of ourselves in our relations with the world that necessitates the conceptual tools of "theory" to be appropriated into the field of ecocriticism.

Although epistemological realism (always coupled with ecocriticism's activist sensibility) enabled ecocritics to take stronger moral and ecopolitical commitments, their insistence on the analysis of theme and content of texts initially placed them in a theoretically naive position. But if ecocriticism begins to look like nothing more than a self-sustaining referential subsystem trying to revive literary realism in defense of familiar humanistic ground, then the ecocriticial project itself looks like nothing more than an attitude which Dana Phillips describes as "curatorial and pedagogical" ("Ecocriticism, Ecopoetics" 37). The objections to theory does not stem from the fact that theory enables us to make sense of the world, or that theory is important in the sense that it invests in cultivating consciousness; rather it has to do with the complexity of language it employs to do so; that is to say, the objections mostly target the complexity of discursive formulations in which theoretical ideas operate. This is precisely why the activist orientation in ecocriticism has mistakenly pitted praxis against theory.[3] But, no matter how many "excursions into the wild ecocritics take," as Dana Phillips once again playfully writes in his 2013 article, "Ecocriticism's Hard Problems (Its Ironies Too)," "the issue at stake here is not the validity of personal experience, no matter how vitalizing and transformative" (456). In his characteristic style Phillips says, "you can no more be against theory these days than you can be for it," and continues his discussion which I will quote at length for the flavor of playful irony it inhabits:

> Yet in the US especially, many ecocritics are still spooked by literary theory and continue to resist the challenges it poses to the naive forms of realism central to the American nature writing tradition. A significant number of them have refused to acknowledge theory's importance outright, insisting that ecocritics need to set aside representations, especially theoretical ones: retreat from the quadrangle to the backcountry; put boots on the ground; and get real by, well, getting real and becoming more aware of the natural world. That sounds like fun, but it means whistling by the graveyard where all of ecocriticism's hard problems get buried on the way to the trailhead. It also means, or should mean, giving up on ecocriticism, which is as dependent on its hard problems — and on representations — as it is frustrated by them. For consistency's sake, as trail-bound erstwhile ecocritics vacate the premises they should probably cease to read American nature writing, too. (458)

This critique is pitched against the backdrop of an ongoing debate about activism versus theory.

Although it creates a disconcerting conceptual haziness, it is necessary to ask a

crucial question here in conclusion. Is it possible to use less words and more action in a scholarly discipline "whose primary materials and methods are exactly words" (2) as William Major and Andrew McMurry put it. Slovic offers a wise advice: "Encounter the world and literature together, then report about the conjunctions, the intersecting patterns. Analyze and explain literature through storytelling — or tell your own stories and then, subsequently, show how contact with the world shapes your response to texts" (28). In fact, encountering the world and literature together is another way of connecting stories and natures, ideas and natural-cultural practices about the-more-than-human world, which is at once a physical site and a rich terrain of imagination. Reading the world and texts through one another is also the diffractive method proposed by material ecocriticism that provides a palpable solution to the theory/praxis debate in ecocriticial studies. Its diffractive methodology results "from the intra-action between human interpreter and material textuality"(Iovino and Oppermann 6). As such, material ecocriticism opens" an interpretive horizon for the complex interrelations between discourse and matter"(2). As formulated by Serenella Iovino and myself, material ecocriticism "analyzes the interlacements of matter and discourses not only as they are re-created by literature and other cultural forms, but also as they emerge in material expressions"(6). But more importantly, material ecocriticism extends "the realm of textuality beyond the margins of canonical texts"(6). By focusing on the stories of matter and their narrative performance, "a dynamic process of material expressions seen in bodies, things, and phenomena" (7), material ecocriticism successfully integrates ecocritical activism, with its its theoretical dimension. Since it is the latest form of engagement with nature and stories, it completes the activism-theory circle in a meaningful way.

In conclusion, I would say that, seen from such a perspective, the woman in red in The Gezi Park Movement, mentioned earlier, becomes more than an icon of eco-activist protests. Her image captured when the policeman fired pepper spray directly into her face, sending her hair billowing upwards, transcends the boundaries of direct engagement with reality. This image is actually very useful in conceptualizing issues central to activism, theory, feminism, and politics, and thus showing "how discursive practices are related to the material world" (34), as Karen Barad would say. Her story is a concrete example of theory emerging from material expressions which entail a new understanding of activism as part of theorizing, and theory as part of activism in a complex world of interrelations and border-crossings.

Notes

1. Ceyda Sungur, known as the "woman in red," became one of the icons of the Gezi Park protests.

An academic at ITU (Istanbul Technical University), Sungur "was preparing a list of injured protesters who needed a medical assistance, along with university students." It is reported that "The scene in which she slowly walked away after tear gas was sprayed into her face marked an embryonic phase of the protests, increasing the outcry that would ultimately lead to them spreading across the country." See *Hurriyet Daily News* (January 16, 2014). http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/gezi-protest-icon-woman-in-red-cleared-of-provocation-charges.aspx?pageID=238&nID=61136&NewsCatID=341.

2. Although in his essay "The Question of Aesthetic Praxis" included in this special issue, Patrick Murphy objects to the argument that "activism is only represented by direct actions," which he says is a "narrow conception," I think this is a generally agreed-on position among many ecoactivists.

3. By saying "activist orientation pits praxis against theory," I am actually referring to the nature-endorsing camp that privileges realist conventions in literary texts which are allegedly more directly reflecting reality similar to activist engagements with the world.

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