

# Beyond Mother Earth

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*Is the symbolism of the Goddess useful to the future of ecofeminism?*

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MA Gender Studies

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## Abstract

The catastrophic implications of climate change and impending ecological devastation are becoming increasingly urgent topics of conversation for scientists and environmental activists alike, even as high-profile global leaders encourage the emergence of climate change denial and abandon agreements to implement solutions. Meanwhile, conversations surrounding environmentalist concerns appear to have gradually dropped off the feminist agenda with a steady decline in ecofeminist debate visible since the rise of the alleged third wave of feminism in the 1990s. The purpose of this research is to ascertain whether it was the symbolism associated with the Goddess Movement of the 1970s and 1980s that helped secure a place for environmentalism in the feminist movement and therefore whether the reinstatement of a Goddess-centric or ‘divine feminine’ philosophy back into ecofeminist theory would serve a valuable purpose in the future of the ecofeminist project. This question is explored through a genealogy of ecofeminist scholarship in order to assess the concepts, themes, implications and problematics arising from Goddess-based ecofeminism and its criticisms. The conclusion of the research is that, rather than centring epistemologies regarding a ‘divine feminine’, the future of ecofeminism might lie in the pursuit of multiplicity within a framework of non-anthropocentric ecological holism.

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## Declaration

I undertake that all material presented for examination is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part, by any other person(s). I also undertake that any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged in the work which I present for examination.

## Acknowledgements

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## Dedication

I wish to dedicate this work to the memory of my grandfather Ray Cortens and all the mystical/mad members of my tribe: blesséd are the cracked for they let the light shine in.

## Introduction

This project is the result of several years' rumination on narratives surrounding goddesses, representations of the so-called 'divine feminine' and what such mythology signifies when considering societal attitudes toward Planet Earth and its inhabitants. In 2010, while attempting to reconcile my Jewish practice with a crisis in faith and a growing interest in feminism, I was given a copy of Merlin Stone's *When God Was A Woman* (1976). Presenting me with a captivating tale of ancient Goddess-worshipping societies in which a feminine deity reigned supreme and inspired mass worship of a sacred Earth, this myth captured my imagination and was my first step on the long journey that has led to this point. I felt as though I had uncovered the truth. I had confirmed there was a way of being and knowing that humanity had somehow forgotten and needed to remember, and that violence, war, ecocide and overwhelming human cruelty need not be the reality of life on Earth. It was the symbolism of 'The Great Goddess', I thought, that represented the key to redemption for humankind via representations of the 'feminine aspects of Creation', which could heal the world while celebrating the awesome power and glory of both Woman and Nature. If only it were that simple...

As may be apparent by now, my initial entry into this field of study was shaped by a specific narrative on what relationship existed between 'Woman' and 'Nature', a narrative that has decomposed and rearranged itself throughout the course of this research project. Having originally approached the question "Is the symbolism of the Goddess useful to the future of ecofeminism?" with the intention of proposing that a philosophy encompassing the 'divine feminine' was a crucial step toward achieving a harmonious and sustainable planet, I now find myself unable to argue this

position. I believe this is a consequence of the approach I took in answering my research question, namely by embarking upon a genealogy of ecofeminism through which to assess the usefulness (or otherwise) of Goddess symbolism as pertaining to feminist ecological philosophies.

While I could have tackled the question by investigating primary sources of Goddess mythology, I chose instead to present an historical overview of ecofeminist perspectives as an underlying framework onto which to map the prevailing themes and narratives that emanate from Goddess symbolism, specifically those themes as interpreted and presented by the North American Goddess Movement of the 1970s and 1980s. The first chapter provides an overview of this movement, the key thinkers and concepts within it, and serves to provide a literature review as well as an epistemological foundation for the rest of the project. The second chapter investigates social ecofeminist knowledge production and the consequences of interventions into Goddess-centric cultural ecofeminism. Chapter Three examines the philosophies of the deep ecology movement and its lengthy, unresolved argument with ecofeminism, with the aim of uncovering where the two philosophies converged and whether or not there is anything to be retrieved from this debate in regards to future ecofeminist knowledge production. I conclude with a summary of the key discoveries made throughout the research and present my thoughts on whether a conceptual divine feminine mythology provides anything of value to the future of ecofeminist epistemology.

## Notes on Terminology

Throughout this work, the phrase ‘Goddess Movement’ is used as an umbrella term for feminist spirituality groups active in North America during the 1970s and 1980s that held the image of a feminine deity as their principle figurehead in the context of Goddess-based spiritual practice. The term includes those who categorise themselves as ‘neo-Pagan’ or members of the Wicca, Craft or Dianic Wicca movements (Witches) but it should be noted that, while all Wiccans worship the Goddess, not all Goddess worshippers are Wiccan (Weinstein 1991:25).

When referring to ‘the Goddess’ it is in reference to an amalgamation of female deities that have been embraced by followers of Goddess mythology rather than any specific, temporally or geographically located figurehead. This is due to the tendency of the Goddess Movement to consolidate a number of different cross-cultural figures and present them as ‘The Goddess’. Starhawk provides a typical example when she states that, “The Goddess has many names: Isis, Ceridwen, Astarte, Miriam, Oshun, White Buffalo...” and so on (1990 [1982]:73).<sup>1</sup>

Where the words Woman, Nature, Man and Culture appear capitalised it indicates the status of these terms as signifiers for social constructs of gender and imagined social structures. References to ‘female’ or ‘male’ should be considered as references to biologically-sexed bodies. I am acutely aware that there is considerable debate within feminist circles concerning the legitimacy of the term ‘female’ to describe a physical body (see e.g. Dennis 2017). While acknowledging the value of scrutinising language and investigating the concept of sex as a social construct (see e.g. Butler 1999:144), the key texts I will be discussing are dated prior to the

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<sup>1</sup> I will be referencing texts along with their original publication date in order that their historical place within the genealogy of ecofeminism be established.

emergence of these dialectics and, since that debate is not the focus of this research, I shall be using the word to refer to that which it is most commonly understood to signify: a human body that (prior to surgical intervention or complications arising from disease or other anomalies) produces ova, bears a uterus and displays the primary and secondary sex characteristics and reproductive functions associated with oestrogen production.

Finally, I feel duty bound to acknowledge that much of the material that emerged from the Goddess Movement is based upon the premise that a woman is defined as someone with female sex characteristics and that some readers may find this problematic. This is one of the qualities of the knowledge production I am investigating and, since it is beyond the scope of this project to fully explore Goddess and divine feminine symbolism from a transgender perspective, I wish to simply state my awareness of this fact and ask those readers for whom it is an issue to remember the historical context within which the content was produced.

## Chapter One

### Cultural Ecofeminism / Rise of the Goddess

The emergence of the Goddess Movement represents a significant phenomenon in the genealogy of ecofeminism, with some of its principal ideologies providing key philosophical foundations for early ecofeminist discourse in regards to the political and symbolic relationship between women and ecological concerns. Placing an emphasis on a 'fundamental' connection between Woman and Nature, feminist Goddess-centric spirituality groups arose from the era's cultural and radical feminist dialectics and helped characterise feminist interventions into environmentalism. By way of establishing the epistemological groundwork for this enquiry into the value of Goddess symbolism for the future of ecofeminist knowledge production, this chapter seeks to demonstrate how cultural ecofeminist discourses utilised narratives of matriarchal pre-history, philosophies of 'Oneness', and the reinforcement of women's alleged connection with the natural world in order to validate the mobilisation of women with environmentalist activism.

#### *The Myth of Matriarchy*

In her seminal essay, 'Is Female To Male As Nature Is To Culture?' (1972), Sherry Ortner encapsulated many of the principle concerns for cultural and radical feminists of the epoch, with her exploration of the construction of Woman as an expression of Nature, and Man as representative of Culture (Sandilands 1999:6) acting as a significant marker in a long-running debate among feminists on the ideological construction of Woman as Nature. While Ortner branded this ideological construction as the root of female subjugation and proposed an exit strategy from what she argued

was the oppressive yoke of a linguistic and philosophical fallacy (1972:28), a substantial portion of the scholarship emerging from the Goddess Movement not only embraced links between women and the natural world, it sought to provide archeological evidence of the connection via a narrative of ancient matriarchal, Goddess-worshipping societies whose reverence for a female deity resulted in peaceful and ecologically sustainable societies. Among the most controversial of these matriarchalist researchers were art historian Merlin Stone, who became a revered figure within the Goddess Movement following the publication of her highly influential book *When God Was A Woman* (1976), and archeologist Marija Gimbutas whose work *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (1982a) was embraced by the Goddess Movement in an effort to bring credibility to claims of a universal ancient Goddess-centric religion (Eller 2006:38).

Like Ortner, Stone sought to explain how and why the universal oppression of the female sex under a patriarchal system had emerged, but while Ortner proposed that a linguistic correlation between the concepts of Woman and Nature had culturally justified Man's domination of both the female sex and the natural world (1972:10), Stone pursued the historical roots of male supremacy (1976:xv). An uncritical reading of *When God Was A Woman* appeared to provide an answer to feminism's unanswered question of how Man came to rule Woman, lulling the reader into a false sense of utopian nostalgia. Apparently backed up by archaeological evidence, Stone presented a narrative of a global pre-patriarchal social order in which not only was the ideological principle deity a female rather than male representation of the divine, but that worship of 'the Great Goddess' resulted in a matriarchal, egalitarian and harmonious society in which women were universally revered and held in high esteem (pp.31-32). The leap from archeological suggestions of female deities and

matrilineal kinship structures to an assumed social order governed by principles that writers such as Carol P. Christ would go on to describe as embodying “female power” (1978:10) would later be expanded upon and made more explicit by Gimbutas (1982b:64), whose work became increasingly relied upon by the Goddess Movement. This concept of ‘female power’ subsequently became rhetorically employed by Goddess-centric ecofeminists to pull together the strands of Woman, the female body, Planet Earth and ‘The Great Goddess’ into a unified matrifocal philosophy, as exemplified in the later work of Christ:

When the earth is the body of Goddess, the radical implications of the image are more fully realised. The female body and the earth, which have been devalued and dominated together, are resacralised...The image of earth as the body of the Goddess can inspire us to repair the damage that has been done to the earth [and] to women...” (1997:91)

### *Goddess ‘Remembered’*

The feminist ecological philosophies that developed out of the work of Stone and Gimbutas were portrayed in *Goddess Remembered*, a 1989 documentary by Donna Read that featured Stone alongside a number of other key figures in the community and made the case for the principles of Goddess-centric religion as crucial to ecological wellbeing. From the opening shots of the film (Fig.1), the philosophical foundations of the Goddess Movement in this regard were established, as a wide view of a rocky mountain transformed itself into the silhouette of a female body throughout the narration: “The spiritual journey of earth’s peoples began with the idea of a goddess, universally called ‘the Great Mother’”.



Fig 1: Stills from 'Goddess Remembered'. Dir. Donna Read, 1989

This opening sequence encapsulated many of the issues at stake within the Goddess Movement and its approach to ecofeminism, with its universalising statement about a single female divinity known under one name – the Great Mother – to all peoples across the globe (yet, in the work of Stone and Gimbutas, mostly limited to Europe and the Mediterranean) veering dangerously close to an act of cultural erasure of the Far East and global South, and the image of a female body conflated with a natural structure strongly suggesting Woman's place as a universal signifier of Nature. There are issues of credibility on top of this, with an ontological leap being made between archeological findings of (assumed) female divine images<sup>2</sup> and a global matrifocal ideology. This imagined society in which, “the power to give and nurture was supreme”, allegedly saw peaceful communities placing women at the heart of society while wandering the landscape in search of “the secrets of the earth” and painting red ochre on “vulva-shaped openings” in the rocks. This romantic vision, presented as fact but ultimately pure speculation (Eller 2000:123-124), highlights a major downfall within the matriarchalist strand of cultural ecofeminist philosophy: in seeking to demonstrate fundamental connections between Woman and Nature via archeological

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<sup>2</sup> A large number of apparently female figurines dated to the Neolithic period (including those found by archaeologist James Mellaart at Çatalhöyük, Turkey in 1958) were used by matriarchalists within the Goddess Movement as ‘proof’ of a matriarchal pre-history. It is worth remembering that even a scientific mode of enquiry such as archaeology is susceptible to considerable epistemological contamination as a result of subjective interpretations by the relevant archaeologist (Goodison and Morris 1998:9). The case for historical legitimacy for matriarchy was founded on a series of subjective assumptions made by Gimbutas (heavily relied upon by Goddess writers yet criticised by fellow archaeologists for presenting speculation as fact [e.g. Tringham 1993]), Mellaart before her (himself influenced by narratives of matriarchal archetypes emerging from the Jungian branch of psychology [Goodison and Morris 1998:8]) and going back to Victorian archaeologists caught up in a cultural construct of Woman as ‘primitive’ and fundamentally connected to Nature (p.13). The mythology of a universal Goddess-worshipping religion was therefore founded upon an elaborate game of Chinese Whispers performed by actors with specific motivations and desired outcomes.

evidence, ecofeminist voices ended up having to fill in the blanks to compensate for an era bereft of written documentation. In the case of Gimbutas, this involved selecting archeological evidence that would fit her narrative of the Goddess while rejecting that which did not (Tringham 1993:197). As for Stone, sporadic evidence for matrilineal systems existing in somewhat ambiguously categorised “historic times” was enough to build the case for an ancient matrifocal philosophy (1976:32). These writers therefore left themselves open to questions of credibility even as supporters queued up to dismiss the importance of historical accuracy.<sup>3</sup>

There is, however, a case to be made for abandoning efforts to find historical evidence of a matriarchal utopia and assert instead that the cultural relevance of Goddess symbolism and its creative rituals, along with its subjective value to the community emanating from the Goddess Movement, made the matriarchal myth inherently valuable (Coleman 2005:217). Given that, historically speaking, the most dominant creation myths have revolved around equally empirically contentious male figureheads, perhaps the intense scrutinising and criticising of matriarchal theory runs the risk of reproducing normative epistemologies that tell us that women’s stories, voices and practices are less valuable than those of men. With this in mind, a certain amount of creative license might be forgivable in a movement and religion that chose to centre women’s experiences at the heart of its philosophy and practice. Z Budapest’s *Holy Book of Women’s Mysteries* (2007)<sup>4</sup>, for example, presented a ritual to help women to emotionally heal following a rape with the help of her female friends, who bathe, nurture and support her in the aftermath of the assault while

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<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Christ’s essay “A Different World”, in which the author dismissed criticism of Gimbutas’ conclusions and working methods by “[l]eaving aside the merits of her argument” (1996:57) and explained that “one of the motivations of critics of her work is to defend patriarchal Western hegemony” (p.56). Also see Vest, who argued that the work of Gimbutas should be viewed as “imaginal” and suggested that critics were suspicious of her due to her association with the Goddess Movement (2005:245), or Adler who asserted that “[spiritual feminists] do not feel they need the words of scholars to affirm or deny their reality” (1986 [1979]:191-192)

<sup>4</sup> Originally published in 1975 as a small handbook called *The Feminist Book of Lights and Shadows*

declaring, “May patriarchy fall” (pp.47-48). I would argue that rituals such as these, which were informed by Goddess spirituality, provided the opportunity to engage in personal healing and communal care within a safe space and could be deeply valuable to those who chose to participate.

*Casting a Circle: Drawing Borders on the Body*

The matriarchalist project not only sought historical legitimacy for a philosophy of Woman as Nature, it used images of goddesses to conjure up mythologies centring the female body and its relationship to Earth in order to narratively frame Man’s dominance over Woman and patriarchal dominance over Nature. In exploring the ritualistic elements of the Goddess Movement and the philosophies that underpin them, the emphasis on the female body as fundamentally intertwined with the natural world and therefore crucial to the salvation of the planet became more explicit in its mobilisation. As Margot Adler observed in *Drawing Down the Moon*, the result of years of extensive anthropological research into the neo-Pagan movement in North America, significant numbers of adherents came to the community specifically as a “response to a planet in crisis” (1986 [1979]:22), while many Goddess-worshipping women “[saw] a return to some form of matriarchal values...as a prerequisite to the survival of the planet” (p.196).

It would appear that these “matriarchal values” most often found themselves expressed via female fecundity and, as Christ declared in ‘Why Women Need The Goddess’, through “reclaiming the powers of the female body” (1978:11), these powers being menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth. Drawing links between the 28-day cycle of the earth’s moon and the apparently universal phenomenon of a 28-day menstrual cycle among fertile females, Christ described a menstruation ritual in which

participants ‘birthed’ each other through a symbolic birth canal and marked each other’s faces with menstrual blood while reciting incantations (pp.10-11). This ritual was not just a symbolic conflation between Woman, Nature and the functions of the female body, it was intended as political activism in the face of Western societies’ rejection of the “sacrality of the female body” and as a means through which to “overcome the spirit/flesh dualism of Western culture”. This last point is particularly intriguing given that, in ascribing social meaning and cultural significance to female biology, such rituals created highly gendered bodies that depended upon binaries for their construction, which in turn created those same symbolic borders around the female body that were essential for the mobilisation of those systemic oppressions of Woman that Christ decried as “denigration of the female body” (p.10). In this regard, the philosophy of the Goddess Movement was indeed cyclical, but perhaps not in the manner its adherents imagined it to be: by performing rituals reliant on a constructed dualism of female-as-distinct-from-male, participants reproduced and maintained those dualisms even as they pursued an ideal of ‘Oneness’.

While ritual performance varied in its enactment, a key principle among adherents of the Goddess Movement was a philosophy of Oneness and interconnectivity among all beings, Planet Earth and the cosmos. Imagery involving circles, spirals (Starhawk 1999 [1979]), spider webs and weaving (Budapest 2007:178) were often employed to symbolise the interwoven strands of life, with a chant written by Shekhinah Mountainwater to this effect becoming canon within women’s spirituality gatherings:

We are the weavers, we are the web

We are the flow and we are the ebb.

We are the flow and we are the web

We are the witches back from the dead! (in Budapest 1991:19)

The irony of this philosophy of Oneness and interconnectedness was that it frequently depended upon linguistic mechanisms grounded in binaries and dualisms in order to establish itself as a valid and understandable concept. Take for example Christ's essay, 'Rethinking Theology and Nature', in which she asserted that, "we fail to recognize our profound connection with all beings in the web of life" (1989:314). Christ proceeded to compare and contrast the work of theologian Gordon Kaufman and ecofeminist scholar Susan Griffin, with the former presented as the rational "voice of male philosophy" (p.315) and Griffin deployed as the mystic bearer of non-linear thinking espoused by the Goddess Movement. Similarly, Rosemary Radford Ruether proposed a feminist theology of Nature that would transcend "dichotomised thought patterns that divide reality into dualism" (1989:148) yet embedded herself in binaries by describing the differences between linear and relational thinking styles, ascribing these thought process to the left and right hemispheres of the brain (p.149).<sup>5</sup> Relying on binary mechanisms in order to establish a philosophy of universal interconnectedness arguably undermined the intended point, namely that the salvation of the planet depended upon the transcendence of dualism. Griffin sought to intervene in this dilemma with *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (1994 [1978]), written as a linguistic thought experiment that rejected the linearity of scholarly processes and injected multiple poetic forms, investigative themes and snapshots of history into a stream of lyrical consciousness. She did, however, rely upon the presence of two distinct voices (represented by two different typefaces) that embodied

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<sup>5</sup> Contrasts between 'linear left brain' and 'intuitive right brain' were prevalent throughout the Goddess Movement, encapsulated later in *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess* when Leonard Shlain claimed the arrival of writing and therefore linear thought was the beginning of women's subjugation (1998).

the cold, rational voice of Enlightened Man versus the passionate, emotive voice of Oppressed Woman, thus falling into the dualist trap despite her best intentions.

### *Summary*

Having explored how the Goddess Movement sought to validate ecofeminist theorisation through Goddess-centric philosophies I have touched upon three strands of an attempted synergy between Woman and Nature: a matriarchal pre-history that could not be empirically confirmed; ritualistic glorification of the female body that reinforced sexual difference, one of the primary mechanisms of women's global oppression; and a philosophy of 'Oneness' that relied upon dualistic rhetoric to be understood in philosophical terms. Given that each of these facets of the Goddess Movement had fundamental flaws and contradictions, it would be easy to conclude that the philosophies and cultural constructs surrounding goddesses hold nothing of value to offer a contemporary ecofeminism. Moving into the second chapter, however, I will explore the criticisms of and alternatives to cultural ecofeminist philosophies that were presented by social ecofeminism and consider whether the abstraction of Goddess mythology from ecofeminist theories lead to a collective decline in ecofeminist scholarship and activism.

## Chapter Two

### Social Ecofeminist Interventions

As the Goddess Movement explored modes through which to establish and validate an ecological philosophy based upon Woman's connection with Nature, social ecofeminist voices began to critique essentialist categorisations of the female body and universalist approaches to women's experiences, while offering alternative theoretical methodologies to the broader field of ecofeminism. Less concerned with spiritual visions of a 'divine feminine' and more focused on the socio-political implications of an historically and socially constructed connection between Woman and Nature (Plumwood 1992:10), scholars pursued the social ecofeminist project to disrupt the Woman = Nature construct throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In this chapter I will outline the critical response of social ecofeminism to its cultural counterpart and examine the knowledge production that emerged from these criticisms in the form of social ecofeminist interventions into the Woman = Nature construct.

#### *Interventions into Woman = Nature*

Ecofeminist philosophies emerging in response to the abundant optimism of the Goddess Movement's spiritual and experiential approach to ecological ontology grounded themselves in disrupting the Woman = Nature construct that cultural ecofeminism had embraced through a project of reclamation, as explored in the previous chapter. Critics such as Janet Biehl condemned what she argued were essentialist attitudes within the Goddess Movement and launched a scathing attack on its leading writers. She described Charlene Spretnak as producing "psycho-

biologicistic” ecofeminism (1991:13-14), and sharply dismissed Starhawk, declaring that “[m]agically ‘dreaming the dark’<sup>6</sup> cannot affect the realities of domination and power” (p.91). Published just as the wider feminist movement entered into its alleged third wave, Biehl’s work helped fire up a new round of debate within ecofeminist discourse, despite the irony of her overall conclusion that a future for ecofeminism required women to join existing ecological movements established by men in order to make significant progress (p.157).

Other scholars such as Chaia Heller also criticised cultural ecofeminism’s perceived essentialism (1999:43-44) but somewhat reluctantly conceded that debates regarding the politics of the body initiated by authors including Mary Daly, Susan Griffin and others within the radical strand of the movement ultimately gave rise to the development of a socialist approach to ecology (p.54). Ynestra King, on the other hand, had long sought a happy medium between social and cultural connections between Woman and Nature, arguing that neither an essentialist nor entirely materialist approach to the violences committed against the planet could satisfactorily explain or dismantle the co-constituted oppression of Woman and Nature, since both biology and society played a role in the establishment and maintenance of these constructs (1981:15). King was among the few sympathetic social ecofeminists in regard to the Goddess Movement, defending the use of ritual as a valuable community-building practice that inspired and motivated direct activism within a close-knit ‘sisterhood’ (1995:19).

As well as criticising cultural ecofeminism’s embrace of the concept of Women = Nature, scholars such as Catherine Roach pointed to problems inherent to the rhetoric of the wider environmentalist movement, specifically in regard to the idea

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<sup>6</sup> A reference to Starhawk’s book of the same name (1990 [1982])

of 'Mother Earth'. She argued that the trend for likening the planet to a universal 'mother' failed to solve the issues of environmental destruction since mothers were regularly and continuously exploited the world over (1991:46-47) and thus took a different approach previously employed by cultural ecofeminists in her assessment of the Woman = Nature question. Far from denying that a connection between Woman and Nature existed, Roach made the case for this association being an historical social construct that, in and of itself, lead to the creation and maintenance of ideological and systemic oppressions of both women and the planet. This approach to Woman = Nature, in which focus was placed on criticism of the framework itself alongside analysis of the environmental practices that arose from its establishment, represented a crucial difference between social and cultural ecofeminists: while the latter embraced and reinforced the connection, the key contributors to social ecofeminism including Val Plumwood (1993), Greta Gaard (1997), Ynestra King (1981), and Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993) critiqued the concept as a mechanism of oppression rather than an innate 'essence' within the female body.

### *Disrupting Dualisms*

Much of the methodological focus of social ecofeminism was applied to the analysis of dualistic structures and the role of binaries in constructing systems of oppression. Plumwood (1993), for example, expanded upon the work of Hélène Cixous' 1975 essay 'Sorties' (in Cixous and Clément, 1996 [1975]:63-132) by outlining a number of dualities (Fig.2) assumed as justified within Western thought, demonstrating how they created hierarchies through the value placed upon them, a value based upon the signified's perceived proximity to Nature.

<b>culture</b>	/	<b>nature</b>
<b>reason</b>	/	<b>nature</b>
<b>male</b>	/	<b>female</b>
<b>mind</b>	/	<b>body (nature)</b>
<b>master</b>	/	<b>slave</b>
<b>reason</b>	/	<b>matter (physicality)</b>
<b>rationality</b>	/	<b>animality (nature)</b>
<b>reason</b>	/	<b>emotion (nature)</b>
<b>mind, spirit</b>	/	<b>nature</b>
<b>freedom</b>	/	<b>necessity (nature)</b>
<b>universal</b>	/	<b>particular</b>
<b>human</b>	/	<b>nature (non-human)</b>
<b>civilised</b>	/	<b>primitive (nature)</b>
<b>production</b>	/	<b>reproduction (nature)</b>
<b>public</b>	/	<b>private</b>
<b>subject</b>	/	<b>object</b>
<b>self</b>	/	<b>other</b>

*Fig. 2: Plumwood's set of "interrelated and mutually reinforcing dualisms", 1993 pp.42-43*

Asserting that the higher value placed upon the categories in the left-hand column justified oppression of those categories in the right hand column, all of which have been allocated qualities associated with Nature, Plumwood proposed that this set of dualities formed the basic structure employed by what she termed the "master model", where the white male elite was assumed to be the universal subject in order to establish and maintain power (pp.22-23). While this argument did not in and of itself expand a great deal upon the work of previous feminist theorists such as Cixous, with the hierarchal quality of dualisms of difference having been established prior to Plumwood's text (in Cixous and Clément 1996 [1975]:63-64), it represented a significant marker in the journey of ecofeminism in that Plumwood used it to validate her contention that the liberation of Nature from a dualistic hierarchy was essential to the liberation of Woman and all oppressed Others from domination, and vice versa (1993:36). Furthermore, Plumwood contended that the inclusion of non-human beings, as well as the confrontation and disruption of anthropocentrism and

speciesism, must be included in feminist discussions surrounding power and domination alongside dialectics on sexism, racism and classism (pp.1-2).

Absent from the set of dualisms listed in *Fig.2* of course was homosexuality and the status of queer identity as existing in the right-hand column, with non-heterosexual identity being associated with a hyper-erotic (binary opposite to reason), non-normative and therefore 'non-natural' sexuality (Gaard 1997:118-119). The omission of queer identity from Plumwood's master model lead to scholars such as Greta Gaard developing a theory of queer ecofeminism where she argued for the necessity for Woman, Nature and queers to be liberated simultaneously on the grounds that all those associated with Nature endured an experience of colonisation at the hands of patriarchal systems of domination (p.132). This intervention into ecofeminism to include queer identities, along with moves to centre Third World voices and people of colour into ecofeminist discourse (see e.g. Olguin 1981, Shiva 1989) helped push feminist environmental discourse forward throughout the 1980s and 1990s in ways that moved beyond the idealistic and universalist solutions to ecological destruction proposed by the Goddess Movement.

Nevertheless, what social ecofeminists did share with the Goddess Movement (however reluctant they may have been to admit it at the time) was the mutual belief that the route to a sustainable ecology lay in resolving and transcending dualist, binary structures. While for the likes of Starhawk and Christ the route to that transcendence lay in a mythology and set of spiritual practices that they believed would result in a universal understanding of the interconnectness of all things, Gaard and Plumwood endorsed the resolute rejection and dismantling of binary constructions of difference via explorations of the intersections between hierarchical mechanisms of power and their shared epistemological heritage of dualist thought.

### *Death of Nature / Rise of the Cyborg*

Carolyn Merchant's text *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1990 [1980]) arguably represented as significant a foundation to social ecofeminism in terms of a central hypothesis of the historical roots of the oppression of Woman and Nature as *When God Was A Woman* did for the Goddess Movement. With meticulous precision and extensive depth of research, Merchant explored the era leading up to the Western Enlightenment, the "mechanisation of nature" (p.22) that developed during that period, and the subsequent shifts in human attitudes towards the environment that lingered on. Her central argument was that this much-lauded period of history marked a watershed in an epistemological separation of mind and body, which occurred through the formulation of a mechanistic view of Nature that ultimately lead to humankind's inability to view itself as part of a wider ecological system (pp.290-292). This separation and the subsequent reduction of Nature to a mechanical structure rather than living organism, Merchant asserted, was a key component in giving rise to the great, rational mind of Man holding power and dominion over Woman and Earth itself (pp.214-215). In a theme familiar throughout the various strands of ecofeminism, Merchant concluded that unity and synthesis were essential, this time between Human and Nature via the recognition of the position of humanity as but one component in an holistic ecology (p.293).

While Merchant's work laid much of the groundwork for social ecofeminist thought and provided many of the methodologies essential to the analysis of structural coalescence between domination of the female sex and Planet Earth, it may well be the case that *The Death of Nature* inadvertently initiated the slow and painful death of ecofeminism as a core component of both academic and activist branches of the feminist movement. As ecofeminist scholars expanded into areas such as animal

rights and advocacy, with Carol J. Adams leading the charge in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (2000 [1990]), and explorations of the ideological connections between denial of humankind's agency in ecological destruction and the denial of personal agency to women (Seager 1993), the steady rise of poststructuralist feminism and its assimilation into third-wave feminist thought began to rattle the bars of ecofeminism (Gaard 2011:31). The poststructuralist penchant for destabilising the roots of linguistic assumptions, structures and patterns of thought posed a major challenge for ecofeminists seeking to highlight and analyse the very structural modes of oppression responsible for the denigration and domination of Woman, Nature and the feminised Other. On top of this methodological incompatibility, both Thompson (2006:511) and Gaard (2011:32) noted that, while ecofeminists sought to acknowledge and take on board the criticisms leveled at their work by poststructuralist and other third-wave feminists, their critics failed to follow suit by incorporating environmental issues into their scholarship, leaving ecofeminists feeling unheard and unfairly misjudged.

Among those scholars running a parallel poststructuralist path to the ecofeminist project was Donna Haraway, whose 1984 essay 'A Cyborg Manifesto' presented an "ironic political myth" of a cyborg future with which to outline her vision for a genderless (and natureless) society (in Haraway 1991:49). Urging readers to 'transgress boundaries' between concepts of human-animal and animal-machine (p.154), Haraway's manifesto denied any and all commonality between women's experiences and notions of being female (p.155) and declared 'the Goddess' to be dead (p.162). She also called for feminists to embrace "the breakdown of clean distinctions" of self, identity and environment (p.174) and proposed that the future of feminism lay in the image of the cyborg, whose "disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self" (p.163) was the key to the rupture of

hierarchical dualisms and the identity politics that apparently plagued the feminist project (p.175). Haraway managed to work in a number of subtle digs at the Goddess Movement's expense throughout her piece, with her pronouncement that the future of binary transcendence lay in a metaphorical "networking", since "weaving is for oppositional cyborgs" (p.170), and a reference to Starhawk's 'spiral dance' in her conclusion that she would "rather be a cyborg than a goddess" (p.181). Using unapologetically impenetrable language, Haraway sought to challenge the notion of Gender and Nature as global identities and realities by offering her own take on Cixous' grid of hierarchical dualisms (*Fig.3*), which demonstrated the 'transgressive' modes through which her cyborg could operate outside normative binaries.

Functional specialization	Modular construction
Reproduction	Replication
Organic sex role specialization	Optimal genetic strategies
Biological determinism	Evolutionary inertia, constraints
Community ecology	Ecosystem
Racial chain of being	Neo-imperialism, United Nations humanism
Scientific management in home / factory	Global factory/electronic cottage
Family/Market/Factory	Women in the integrated circuit
Family wage	Comparable worth
Public/private	Cyborg citizenship
Nature/culture	Fields of difference
Cooperation	Communications enhancement
Freud	Lacan
Sex	Genetic engineering
Labour	Robotics
Mind	Artificial intelligence
Second World War	Star Wars
White capitalist patriarchy	Informatics of domination
Representation	Simulation
Bourgeois novel, realism	Science fiction, postmodernism
Organism	Biotic component
Depth, integrity	Surface, boundary
Heat	Noise
Biology as clinical practice	Biology as inscription
Physiology	Communications engineering
Small group	Subsystem
Perfection	Optimization
Eugenics	Population control
Decadence, <i>Magic Mountain</i>	Obsolescence, <i>Future Shock</i>
Hygiene	Stress management
Microbiology, tuberculosis	Immunology, AIDS
Organic division of labour	Ergonomics/cybernetics of labour

*Fig 3: Donna Haraway's grid of transgressive dualisms (pp.161-162)*

Although Haraway aligned herself more with posthumanist and postmodernist strands of feminist theory, 'Cyborg Manifesto' fit within the production of poststructuralist feminist epistemology pioneered by Cixous and Luce Irigaray (1985 [1977]) and culminated in the publication in 1990 of Judith Butler's game-changing text *Gender Trouble*. While Butler did not explicitly deal with ecofeminist concerns in her work, she did reference and criticise efforts by feminists to pinpoint an accurate origin of Man's domination over Woman (whether searching for pre-patriarchal, matrifocal eras or pre-materialist modes of thought) by suggesting that, in pursuing the origin story of gender hierarchies, these structural anthropologists resorted to the employment of "pre-suppositional fictions that entail normative ideals" (1999:47). With those pre-suppositional fictions including Nature/Culture and Sex/Gender, all of which Butler declared to be "discursive formations" (pp.47-48), the ecofeminist project was swiftly and brutally undermined. Once Nature/Culture and Sex/Gender ceased to exist, there was no stable location for a feminism concerned with the simultaneous structural formulation and systematic oppression of both Woman and Nature. So began the rapid decline of ecofeminism, not as a result of the removal of the Goddess, but due to the rise of a poststructuralist path that would ultimately triumph over ecological feminist philosophies in the quest for epistemological credibility.

### *Summary*

Social ecofeminism brought to the table a rich and diverse array of analyses that elevated ecofeminist knowledge production beyond the problematic tendency of the Goddess Movement to contain Nature within the body of Woman. Demonstrating the capacity of a feminist ecological philosophy to avoid the universalist and essentialist

discourse that was so often used to fuel fierce criticism of the field, with hindsight it almost seems that social ecofeminism should have indelibly left its mark on academic feminism. However, as Gaard notes, the term and indeed the field was all but abandoned by the end of the 1990s, with even those remaining staunch environmental feminists quietly abandoning the word ‘ecofeminism’ lest it prove too unappealing to academic peers (2011:27, 41).

With the enduring success of the poststructuralist project to dismantle all linguistic and historical assumptions and experiences of meaning in regard to Sex, Gender and Nature, it is arguably futile to question whether a mythological symbol so imbued with representational meaning through categorisations of sexual difference as the Goddess could recover a sense of renewed importance in the furthering of an ecofeminist project: such a project would simply not be viable if Woman and Nature have been irrevocably deconstructed. In the final chapter, however, I will investigate the philosophies behind deep ecology, their relevance to the knowledge productions of both social ecofeminism and the Goddess Movement, the response of ecofeminism to deep ecology, and common themes that may help to locate future epistemological progress in the field of ecofeminism.

## Chapter Three

### Deep Ecology / Divisions in Oneness

Emerging alongside cultural and social ecofeminisms that explored the myriad of gender issues pertaining to environmental philosophies and concerns, the deep ecology movement developed from the work of Norwegian scholar Arne Næss, specifically his 1973 paper ‘The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary’ in which he outlined distinctions between what he defined as ‘shallow’ and ‘deep’ approaches to ecology. A wide-ranging debate about what common ground existed between deep ecologists and ecofeminists ensued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, only to be left unresolved and with the ecofeminist community once again feeling unheard and misunderstood by their critics (Gaard 2011:39, Slicer 1995). This chapter explores some of the basic principles of the deep ecology movement, examining if and how they relate or correspond to the philosophies of either Goddess-centric or social ecofeminisms. I will also investigate what possibilities exist for an alliance between ecofeminism, Goddess-based spirituality and deep ecology, and conclude with thoughts on what philosophies may be retrievable from these movements when approaching the further development of ecofeminism.

#### *Intrinsic Value*

Broadly defined as the recognition of the complex series of interconnections that exist between organisms and their wider planetary environment (Capra and Mattei, 2015:25), ecology as a mode of understanding brought environmental enquiry back to the realm of non-linear holism described by Merchant (1990 [1980]), as opposed to

the mechanistic understanding of the universe espoused by Descartes, Newton and other thinkers from the Western Enlightenment onwards. For Arne Næss, the significant differences between a ‘shallow’ and a ‘deep’ ecology lay in the tendency of the former to focus on the surface level symptoms of a degraded environment, while the latter prioritised the quality of the relationships between the complex systems at play, thus tackling the metaphysical root cause of the degradation. Viewing organisms that exist within such systems as “knots in the biospherical net” (Næss 1973:95), the deep ecology movement that developed from his paper ruminated on what value systems and theories might emerge from this net of relations when beginning from a position of the “intrinsic value” of all living things (Fox 1984:194).

In the first of their 8 Basic Principles of deep ecology, Næss and another prominent scholar in the field, George Sessions, expanded upon and articulated the quality of this belief or ‘intuition’ that all human and nonhuman life on Earth retained intrinsic value and that this was true regardless of any perceived “usefulness” that a given life might possess within a human context (Devall and Sessions 1985:70). Næss and Sessions explained in their commentary that ‘Life’ encapsulated not just those organisms that a biologist would consider to be ‘alive’, but also biologically ‘nonliving’ participants in Earth’s ecosystem such as rivers and landforms (p.71). In terms of a definition of the “inherent value” around which Næss and Sessions’ first Basic Principle revolves, the phrase is left undefined and explained simply as being a term used and understood within deep ecology literature (p.71).

This foundational principle, described as “biocentric equality”, was a result of deep ecology’s belief in interconnectivity, the explicit rejection of anthropocentrism (a topic I shall explore later in this chapter) and what deep ecologists considered the mistaken belief that Nature could or should be categorised into a system of hierarchies

in which human beings hold all the power (p.68). Similar themes of interconnectivity, network systems and Oneness that were observed in some of the ecofeminist epistemologies explored within the first two chapters of this project can thus be found within deep ecology, along with a shared goal of the dismantlement of hierarchical systems of power. With this in mind, it appears on the surface as though deep ecology and ecofeminism shared similar and corresponding ideals, with the placement of inherent value and respect for the planet's biosphere aligning quite neatly with Goddess-centric ecofeminism's principles of a sacred, interconnected Earth. However, a number of issues arose from the concept of intrinsic value and biocentric equality within an ecofeminist context. As Plumwood noted in her critique of deep ecology, a biocentric equality that broadened the definition of Life to include everything within the biosphere would arguably result in a state of indistinguishability that would compromise environmental ethics (1991:13). For example, would this broad categorisation of inherently valuable Life include the plastic bags that clog up oceans and damage sea life? Should we ensure the "wellbeing and flourishing" (Devall and Sessions 1985:70) of the bulldozers that clear the Amazon Rainforest for the production of soya beans (which themselves hold intrinsic value too, of course)? In this erasure of distinction and difference, Plumwood declared deep ecology "far too powerful" in destroying not only individuation and autonomy in difference, but also the capacity to build an ethic of care, since "care for others [is] only possible if one can adequately distinguish oneself *from* others" (1991:13-14, author's emphasis).

In their second principle, Næss and Sessions perhaps sought to override this problem by stating that the "[r]ichness and diversity of life forms" made the awareness of intrinsic value possible (Devall and Sessions 1985:70-71), but they failed to expand further in this principle on *how* diversity contributes to the desired

obliteration of difference necessary for biocentric equality. Meanwhile the issue of indistinguishable value status arising from biocentric equality's understanding that "if we harm the rest of Nature then we are harming ourselves" and where "[t]here are no boundaries and everything is interrelated" (p.68) represented significant practical issues when navigating the resulting lack of ethics. For example, as Devall and Sessions observed, a vegetarian would find their decision to not eat animals resulted in them placing more value on animals than on plants (p.67). It would appear then that deep ecologists saw no philosophical distinction between eating a beefsteak and eating a carrot, despite the fact that the production of the steak caused a great deal more destruction to the global ecosystem than the carrot (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 2006). Deep ecologists thus removed any emphasis on the moral obligation an individual might feel to make life-choices in accordance with a sense of an ethical code of conduct based upon what would cause more or less damage to an ecosystem.

That said, the stark dismantling of difference and hierarchy of both human and nonhuman life forms represented by deep ecology's first principle did at least serve to address global systemic speciesism highlighted by ecofeminists such as Carol J. Adams (1991) and Plumwood (1993), an issue that deep ecologists argued was generally ignored by ecofeminist scholars (Sessions 1991:150). The debate on anthropocentrism that ensued led to a fundamental split between the two philosophies: ecofeminists argued that deep ecologists failed to acknowledge the multitude of oppressions that human life forms experienced on account of their location within a patriarchal system, while deep ecologists felt that ecofeminists should join them in their focus on genderless "ecocentric egalitarianism" (Fox 1989).

### *Anthropocentrism / Androcentricism*

Deep ecology's lack of interest in issues of positionality and intersecting modes of systemic oppression raised further issues from an ecofeminist perspective when addressing Næss and Sessions' third Basic Principle, namely that the aforementioned "richness and diversity" among life forms should not be reduced, destroyed or otherwise interfered with, "except to satisfy *vital* needs" (Devall and Sessions 1985:70, author's emphasis). Their commentary on this principle almost proudly highlighted the ambiguity of the phrase 'vital needs' and declared that it was "left deliberately vague to allow for considerable latitude in judgement" (p.71). As well as leaving unattended the fact that whatever was considered 'vital' at any one time has always been liable to change (as Yuval Noah Harari noted, "[o]ne of history's few iron laws is that luxuries tend to become necessities and spawn new obligations" [2014:98]), this principle raised questions in regard to *who* decides what is vital, *to whom* is it vital and to whom is it *not* vital? Arguably a broad waving of the arm in the general direction of "considerable latitude in judgement" is woefully inadequate in its failure to address the not-insignificant hierarchical systems of power that make life-changing decisions on what is and is not 'vital'. While Devall and Sessions did acknowledge the significance of the question of how vital needs might be established in their process of discussing an 'ecotopia' (1985:163), they failed to explore how issues of power, hierarchy and positionality would factor in this determination. Of course, if the world's entire population had already accepted the first two Basic Principles of intrinsic value and the importance of richness and diversity, it could be argued there would be no need for concern, since the acceptance of biocentric equality would move human consciousness into the much sought-after 'paradigm

shift' often referred to by deep ecologists,<sup>7</sup> in which Oneness would remove the hierarchical power systems responsible for implementing such control, while ensuring the needs of the entire global ecosystem were met. Leaving aside the practicality of achieving such a goal, this would arguably lead to similar issues observed in the principle of intrinsic value insofar as *everything* is a 'vital' need because it is vital to *someone*.

Issues such as these exposed an underlying incompatibility between social ecofeminism and deep ecology, with the latter focused on the importance of rejecting anthropocentrism and the former asserting that refusing to acknowledge hierarchies within anthropocentrism meant androcentricism was the default position.<sup>8</sup> As Ruether noted, "[a]ll humans do not dominate nature equally" (in Barnhill and Gottlieb 2001:230) and the inability of deep ecology to award epistemological significance to this contention ultimately lead to an impasse between the two sparring factions (Gaard 2011:40).

Turning to the Goddess-centric quarter of cultural ecofeminism, however, it would appear that a degree of congeniality existed in relation to the principles of deep ecology. Both philosophies held spiritual values and ethics at the core of their movements, with deep ecologists assigning spiritual meaning to the concept of ecological interconnectedness (Capra 1997:7) and the Goddess Movement of course representing a branch of earth-based spirituality whose concern for the wellbeing of Planet Earth stemmed from an internal sense of humanity existing as part of a great cosmic body (Starhawk 1989:175). Arguably the two movements represented an inverse of each other in regard to ecological reverence: for the Goddess acolyte, the

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<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Fox 1984:194, Capra 1997:4

<sup>8</sup> This fundamental disagreement was encapsulated in a long-running debate between Karen Warren and Warwick Fox (Sessions 1991:144-148).

female body represented the route to connection with the earth via ritualistic celebration of female sexual difference, as seen for example in Antiga's "Blood Mysteries" where menstruation provided the path to communion from the inside out (Antiga 1991:159). Meanwhile, deep ecologists worked from the outside in, pursuing external, scientific modes of enquiry such as quantum physics, complexity, chaos theory and systems networking in an attempt to reconcile the empirically scientific with experiential Oneness, as in the case of theoretical physicist and deep ecologist Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* (1992 [1976]).

The movements further converged in a rejection of so-called linear modes of thought and in advocating a 'cyclical' or holistic' approach to existence and Nature. Just as Susan Griffin charted the history of Woman's oppression through a narrative of the Western Enlightenment's mechanistic approach to the natural world and a philosophical justification of the domination of Nature (1994 [1978]), so deep ecologists pinpointed the mechanisation of Nature as instigating a crucial split between humankind and the wider ecology, a split they hoped to reconcile through a holistic model of the cosmos attained through "new physics" (Devall and Sessions 1985:88-89). The ideal of holistic unity as distinct from linear and mechanistic thought was most often expressed through the metaphor of networks, as seen in Fig. 4 by Capra and Mattei in *The Ecology of Law*.

<b>The Mechanistic Paradigm (“World as Machine”)</b>	
Physical reality is an aggregate of separate building blocks.	Social reality is an aggregate of discrete individuals.
Scientific knowledge is used to dominate and control nature.	Law is used to protect extractive ownership as an individual right.
Scientific truth (the “laws of nature”) can be arrived at through reasoning.	Natural law is based on human reason.
Scientific descriptions are objective, independent of the human observer.	Law is an objective framework separate from a human interpreter.
<b>The Systemic, Ecological Paradigm (“World as Network”)</b>	
Physical reality is a network of inseparable relationships.	Social reality is composed of social networks and communities.
Scientific knowledge (“ecological literacy”) is to be used to learn from and cooperate with nature.	The new ecological legal order is to be used by ecoliterate citizens to protect and generate commons.
Scientific knowledge is always approximate; it emerges from a process of establishing consensus in the scientific community.	Law emerges from actively engaged citizens in self-organizing communities.

Fig 4: Capra and Mattei’s depiction of “paradigm shifts” that have occurred within the scientific community (2015, p.24)

As in the previous chapters of this project, enquiry into ecological epistemology again returned to the concept of the reconciliation of a split, whether by transcendence of dualistic thought and binary opposition through social ecofeminism, the conjoining of Woman and Nature sought by the Goddess Movement, or synergy with the metaphysical interconnectedness of the cosmos pursued by deep ecology.

### *To Be One or Not To Be One?*

With the ideal of unification, interconnectedness or holistic transpersonal experience running as a recurring theme throughout the epistemologies explored in this project, it is worth spending time at this point questioning the value (or otherwise) of approaching ecological concerns with a central philosophy of ‘Oneness’. As I have already discussed, issues arose within deep ecology’s approach to the interconnectedness of all things in regard to ecofeminist understandings of hierarchical systems of power, yet both social and Goddess-centric cultural

ecofeminist thought were seeking unification in their own way. Given this connective concept running throughout the genealogy of ecofeminism, the pursuit of this project might have been not whether the symbolism of the Goddess is useful to the future of ecofeminism, but whether the concept of Oneness is useful.

In *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity*, Laurel C. Schneider (1997) argued for a divinity of multiplicity rather than unity and questioned how the ‘manyness’ of reality could fit into a framework of spiritual Oneness (p.80). Stating that the logic of the One could not reconcile the “fleshiness and stubborn shiftiness of bodies [and] it cannot abide ambiguities and unfinished business” (p.ix), Schneider asserted that Oneness reduced living experience to the same state of bland, undesirable uniformity that Plumwood had accused deep ecologists of seeking (1991:12-13). While recognising that Schneider’s focus was on the One God of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, to argue that models of divine Oneness are philosophically devoid of multiplicity and therefore promote sameness arguably does a disservice to the intricacies of non-Abrahamic religious and spiritual traditions. As Capra observed, multiplicity and awareness of individuality and autonomy exist within the mystical traditions of Hinduism, Zen Buddhism and Taoism (1992:157), while the Goddess Movement explored the multiplicity of the divine feminine principle through three archetypal symbols of Virgin, Mother and Crone (Starhawk 1999:53). Nevertheless, the tension between the Many and the One, the individuation of human experience as distinct from the ideological pursuit of identification with Oneness is a dissidence that is arguably reminiscent of the long-running feminist debate over the pursuit of justice for the autonomous individual versus the pursuit of relational care for the wider community (Cornell and van Marle, 2015:4). It would seem to me to suggest that a balance between the *I* and the *We* that can produce a

stable social system, reconciling justice for the *I* and the *I*'s immediately extended *Us* with care for the *All* and the collective wellbeing of the *One*, is what must be strived for in seeking progression within ecofeminism.

As for an epistemological starting point from which to theorise the long-lasting wellbeing of the *I* within a wider context of *All* and *One*, I would like to propose that one route of enquiry might emerge from the observations of complexity researcher Paul Cilliers. At its most basic level (if indeed it is appropriate to think of complexity as 'basic'), the study of complex systems investigates the manner in which systems with multiple components operate, form patterns and networks, and subsequently create dynamic self-organising systems out of initial chaos (Capra 1997:112-113). In his research into patterns within complex systems, Cilliers observed that hierarchies are fundamental to the successful running of any given system and noted that, "systems cannot do without hierarchies...for them to exist at all there has to be some form of hierarchy. Problems arise, however, when these hierarchies are seen as either too clearly defined, or too permanent" (2001:7). Cilliers demonstrated that self-organising systems are dependent upon the emergence of hierarchies, which interpenetrate rather each other and without which the system cannot function or organise communication between the component parts. If all this sounds as if I am leading toward a conclusion praising the dominance of hierarchical systems of power within our society, it is Cilliers' comments on how problems within complex systems arise that interest me most:

Although hierarchies are necessary in order to generate frameworks of meaning in the system, they cannot remain unchanged. *As the context changes, so must the hierarchies...* [H]ierarchies are furthermore not permanent, they have to be transformed. Transformation does not imply that

hierarchies are to be destroyed, but that they should be *shifted* (p.7, my emphases)

For me, this observation holds exciting implications within the context of ecofeminism given the extensive body of work that ecofeminist scholars have created around the analysis and deconstruction of hierarchies. What would occur within an ecofeminism that, rather than seeking to dismantle and destroy hierarchies altogether, accepted the important role that hierarchies play in facilitating the overall functioning of our complex social systems? What if, as social contexts change, ecofeminism sought to transform and “subvert hierarchies that may have become too dominant or obsolete” (*ibid*), and instead encouraged those hierarchies that support the overall health and wellbeing of the system to flourish? Further, what epistemology extends from an ecofeminism that seeks such transformation by means of an underlying goal of the attainment of justice for the *I* within the context of care for the *All* and the *One*? I wish to propose that an ecofeminism based on these principles may be able to retrieve the most beneficial observations brought to the table throughout the conversation between deep ecology and both social and Goddess-centric ecofeminisms.

## Conclusion

In exploring the implication of Goddess symbolism through the history of ecofeminism, this project has highlighted a number of issues arising from the question of whether the Goddess is useful to the future of ecofeminism. The first chapter in which I investigated the principle themes and concepts of the Goddess Movement highlighted several flaws in the attempt to ground an ecofeminist theory in a narrative of a feminine deity or 'female energy'. The most obvious issues with essentialist discourse and gynocentricism merely scratched the surface when looking at the philosophical inconsistencies inherent in a movement that sought to transcend the dualist epistemologies of post-Western Enlightenment thought through the intense gendering of the female body. While social ecofeminism sought to expose the problems characteristic in its cultural counterpart, explorations in the second chapter revealed that an ecofeminism focused largely on the analysis of the hierarchical structures at play in the Woman = Nature debate was unable to weather the storm of feminist poststructuralism.

Meanwhile, the long-running debate between ecofeminists and deep ecologists explored in Chapter Three ended in stalemate, which I find incredibly disappointing given the huge amount of ecologically-focussed knowledge production emanating from both camps and the potential meeting points between them. This chapter, however, highlighted the significance of the concepts of interconnectivity and Oneness that have been a recurring theme throughout this research. This leads me to conclude that any future that exists for ecofeminism must encompass a stable theory or methodology that can reconcile the tension between human individuation and interconnective ecological networks throughout the biosphere. In other words, it is my

contention that ecofeminism must pursue epistemologies that can not so much heal the divide between *I*, *Us* and *One* but can allow the *I* to exist and receive justice within a network of *Us* whilst also maintaining optimum levels of care for the ecological *One*. I believe this should be approached not just by examining the relationships that exist in our complex social systems (a task previously undertaken in social ecofeminist discourses and which can always benefit from further pursuit), but also in reaching for a methodology that can promote ecological solutions via the pursuit of justice and care. I believe too that part of this process will involve abandoning efforts to either deconstruct or destroy hierarchies and instead create visions for new transformational hierarchies to replace those that have outlived their usefulness and which will be better able to support the flourishing and wellbeing of the global community. I would assert that one of those hierarchies that has outlived its purpose is that of humankind's assumption of hierarchal superiority over non-human life, and that this is a principle that ecofeminism must pull to the centre as it seeks to move forward. An ecofeminism that seeks to reconfigure those hegemonic systems of power that enforce multiple oppressions and the colonisation of both Woman and Nature is arguably bereft of epistemological consistency if it fails to address human beings' assumption of the right to dominate nonhuman life forms and their habitats. In other words, if we are to ask the question, "Whose Nature is it?" when investigating the colonisation of natural environments the answer cannot, in an ecofeminism of multiplicity be, "Whoever's Nature it is, it must be human's".

As for the role of the Goddess in all this, insofar as I am suggesting an ecofeminism of multiplicity – which pursues justice and care for the individual components of an ecological system of networks in order that they can operate successfully within and as a whole – I propose that it is entirely possible for

ecofeminism to encompass the mythology and symbolism of the Goddess. I make this case on the basis that a) it is a part of the history and legacy of the ecofeminist project and can be viewed as an important developmental stage of its genealogy; and b) the symbolism of the Goddess may very well provide a sense of justice and care for those with whom the image resonates and to whom it inspires responses of justice and care for the wider ecological biosphere. Ecofeminism, I suggest, can hold the Goddess mythology within itself even if the Goddess can no longer be situated as a founding principle for ecofeminism. I would suggest too that it could well be beneficial for Goddess mythology to be purposefully utilised in the context of strategic essentialism (Spivak in Grosz 1985) in order to engage individuals and small groups within communities of women that might not otherwise participate in environmental activism. I suspect, however, that such an approach would only prove useful outside of academic and mainstream feminist communities, whose wariness towards essentialist discourse is likely to keep them at arm's length from Goddess mythology.

I would like to conclude this research with the proposition that, not only is there an exciting epistemology of ecofeminism available through the pursuit of multiplicity founded on principles of justice and care, but that *all* feminism must ultimately become ecofeminism. If the ecological component of ecofeminism recognises the complex interweaving of multiple strands throughout a universal system of networks, and seeks to place this understanding at the foreground of gender-focused knowledge production, I assert that the future for all feminisms is to incorporate ecological philosophy into their methodologies and become Eco-Feminisms. Just as the multiple strands of oppression running throughout the global social order via hierarchical systems of power are of concern to feminists, so the methodological approaches of feminists toward the wider non-anthropocentric

ecology is of concern to the global biospheric order. Therefore if feminism seeks social justice for the oppressed, it must do so with the recognition that only an ecological approach to this task will yield the desired results. While the Goddess may no longer be at the centre of this pursuit, I contend that the ecocentric philosophies and dialectics that Goddess mythology initiated deserve re-energising, recontextualising and, dare I say it, rebirthing.

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