Toward a Theory of the Body in Critical Social Change

Conceptions of Embodied Knowing and Being in Reform Environmentalism, Ecofeminism and Environmental Thought

by Karen Birkemeyer

Why the Body?

Understanding the significance of the human body as a locus in which to access and analyze environmental approaches requires first an understanding of the role of the body in post-modern culture and life. It is notable that the human body should, at this point in history, come to play a major role in some of the most important social issues of our time. After all, the development of Western civilization was premised on the cultivation of the human capacity towards calculative and analytic thought, ways of knowing reached via the suppression and denial of the animated body through its disassociation from, and therefore reification by, the human mind.

It is because of the Occidental fear[1] of the physical body that historical constructions of it continue to influence the growth and development of twentieth century life; views of human embodiment cannot be held separate from Western conceptions of nature, culture, sex (women and men), class[2] and society. These social categories are, in large part, premised on the perceived need to control and regulate the body as the basis for a 'civilized mode of being.'[3] In this paper, I am primarily concerned with conceptions of the body, and of embodied knowing and being as they pertain to relations of power and domination between women, men and nature in Western culture; I am also concerned with future directions for social and environmental change and how alternative conceptions of embodiment apply to these relations.

The word 'body' has held, and continues to hold, a range of meanings. In the Oxford English Dictionary, definitions of the word 'body' occupy over three pages; it is, as the editors say, one of the most powerful and important words in the Western lexicon.[4] The body is, however, most commonly thought of as: "The physical structure or material substance of man [*sic*] or any animal."[5] Literally, the idea of the human body exists to us as a frame or container; some thing we must look after and maintain.[6] As sociologist Bryan Turner notes: "Our everyday life is dominated by the details of our corporeal existence, involving us in a constant labour of eating, washing, grooming and dressing."[7] It is most often within this particular context of involvement that we think about our bodies otherwise; our 'mode of being embodied' is ignored until it inconveniences us, for example when we feel tired when we do not want to, or when we get sick.

But our human experience of 'having or being a body' is not limited to such simple and standard observations. For the last three hundred years, humans have been oriented within the time and space dimensions of a mathematical, scientific and mechanical worldview; a world profoundly different from anything we had previously experienced. For the most part, we take this world and this way of knowing and existing for granted, because according to the dominant Western worldview, or paradigm, it is the only legitimate way 'to be.' But this current mode of embodied existence continues to have tremendous implications for both our selves and the world in which we live. I believe that central to the destruction of human and nonhuman nature lie specific views of the human body, and with these, a specific mode of embodied being.

It is generally felt that, up until the scientific revolution, human interactions with nature and the world were characterized by a sense of belonging and enchantment. In previous eras, it has been supposed that we thought less of 'having and owning a body' and acted more as if 'our selves' and 'our bodies' were one. For example, in his discussion of the 'hidden history' of the human body in our past, Morris Berman characterizes the Palaeolithic lifestyle of hunting and gathering as a mode of existence in which people lived through their bodies in order to engage themselves in the lifeworlds of the plants and animals upon which their lives depended. Notes Berman: "...men and women took their cues from bodily feelings and the movements of the animals. This was a life governed by shifting moods rather than the demands of the ego."[8]

The embodied existence of some 'primitive cultures'[9] can therefore be characterized by what Berman refers to as a participating consciousness, a way of being in which one is intimately connected to the world through both one's body and mind. With this way of being, the mind does not exist as a distinct subject, peering out from the

body unto a separate and alien space; rather, the mind lives through the body and as part of its life-world and space.[10]

The idea that the participating consciousness was conceivably part of our past opens up a path for us to experience it in the present. In personal conversation,[11] people do speak of moments in their lives in which they have felt a celebratory sense of continuity with nature and the entire cosmos. I have felt this many times while hiking, being with my dog, and even playing pick-up basketball with my friends. As a student in physical education, during moments of unconstrained play (in other words, in an atmosphere of non-competition), my peers and I would often adopt a mode of being in which we would all be in tune with each other without having to verbally communicate. Such moments were rare, and impossible to will, but once in them, we would act as though we were one, running and passing in a fluid mode of interrelatedness. Although we could never explain this phenomenon, each of us described it as a 'relaxed,' 'free' and 'secure' state of existence, in which our minds seemed to be working with our bodies, rather than outside of, or against them. In his work, John Livingston describes these experiences of self-as-nature as states of 'free flow.' For Livingston, such moments have been characterized by a 'pure and inexpressible joy and happiness'; emotions that, based on my own experience, I can readily identify with.[12]

Although each of us is capable of states of 'free flow,' in Western culture these moments are generally cast aside because they hinder the processes of societal development, which depend upon a more detached mode of being. The primary goal of Descartes, science, mathematics and the technological revolution was to remove the human mind from the perceived 'constraints' and 'limitations' of the human body in order to establish a more predictable, controlled and objective mode of knowing, and hence, being.[13] As David Michael Levin notes:

> ...the homogenous world-space of Newtonian physics necessitates a freezing of being, a solidifying of boundaries, a condensing of energies. This world-space favors an ontology of objectification, permanence, constant positions, egocentricity.[14]

With the scientific revolution came the basis for a new kind of being, and a new experience of our life-space. In science, the world is already assumed in terms of a set of mathematically predictable relations in which objects act in accordance with the laws of gravity and space. Hence, as Merleau-Ponty notes, "..scientific thought moves within and presupposes the world, rather than taking it for its theme."[15] Instead of focusing on the relations between the embodied self and the world as the basis for knowing and being, the scientific worldview renders the living body obsolete. Scientific images are meant to stand for, and hence make permanent, things or events for which we may or may not have any experiential equivalents in our daily reality.[16] Thus, images are often confined to the mind's eye, and are therefore premised upon a very narrow mode of vision, as well as a specific and narrow mode of knowing and being. In response to his concern for the dominance of scientific vision in Western culture, Joseph Grange writes:

> We must consider this emphasis on the eye, for it represents a prejudice that will continue to manifest itself. What happens to the sensory field of our body if such stress is laid upon the eye? The realm of the heart loses its distinct feature, for harmonic contrasts evade distinct audition. Smells that escape detection haunt us as unreal. The tongue that savours the multidimensional must become discriminating. The body with its panorama of touch must be trained to detect only distinct qualities like hardness and density. The entire environment and its polyphonic call to our being is shrunk and desiccated.[17]

A scientific worldview, therefore, quells the human body's proclivity towards sensing and exploring the world in which it is situated. Rather than relate to the natural world as it is (to hear and listen, to see, to smell, and to touch the world in which we dwell) we deal with static images and atomistic representations of what we have grown to expect nature and the world to be, through the scientific and, more recently, capitalistic worldview.

In his will toward absolute knowledge and truth, Descartes severed the links between the mind and the realm of the sensual, and hence between the mind, body and nature. In the processes of the scientific and technological revolution, nature and the body were transformed from subjects in an enchanted and interconnected realm to objects of human cultural domination. During the past two centuries, we have indeed developed the means to spend more and more of our daily routine detached from our bodies and our surroundings in an existential defiance of our original sense of unity. For the most part, it is the image of the human body as object and machine which has afforded us this position.

In many ways, society restricts and otherwise reifies the living body because for us it has become a mere resource, an object of some utility. As with any resource, the tendency is to deny its being in favour of one's own needs. For example, we constantly deny our own bodily felt rhythms by consuming caffeine and other drugs, and by imposing inappropriate time structures onto our need to eat and sleep. As well, we tend to spend much of our time riding in vehicles (instead of walking), sitting behind desks, working in factories and watching television. We do these things primarily to fuel the needs of a

technological society organized around the economic incentives of capitalism. Together, however, these practices contribute to a diminished sense of our existence as truly 'embodied' beings.[18]

Perhaps the primary manifestation of how the body serves the impulses of Western consumer society is as a visual resource: over the past fifty years, entire industries have arisen in response to the sexual and aesthetic whims of our culture. According to John O'Neill, body images have become a dominant means for establishing social membership, a primary bond between the individual and society:

> We must think of the detail of such practises as body painting, scarification, adornment, hair-cutting and dressing, washing, perfuming, deodorizing, covering and concealing various bodily parts, as a resource for the incessant eye-work whereby we make the way people appear constituent features of social reality.[19]

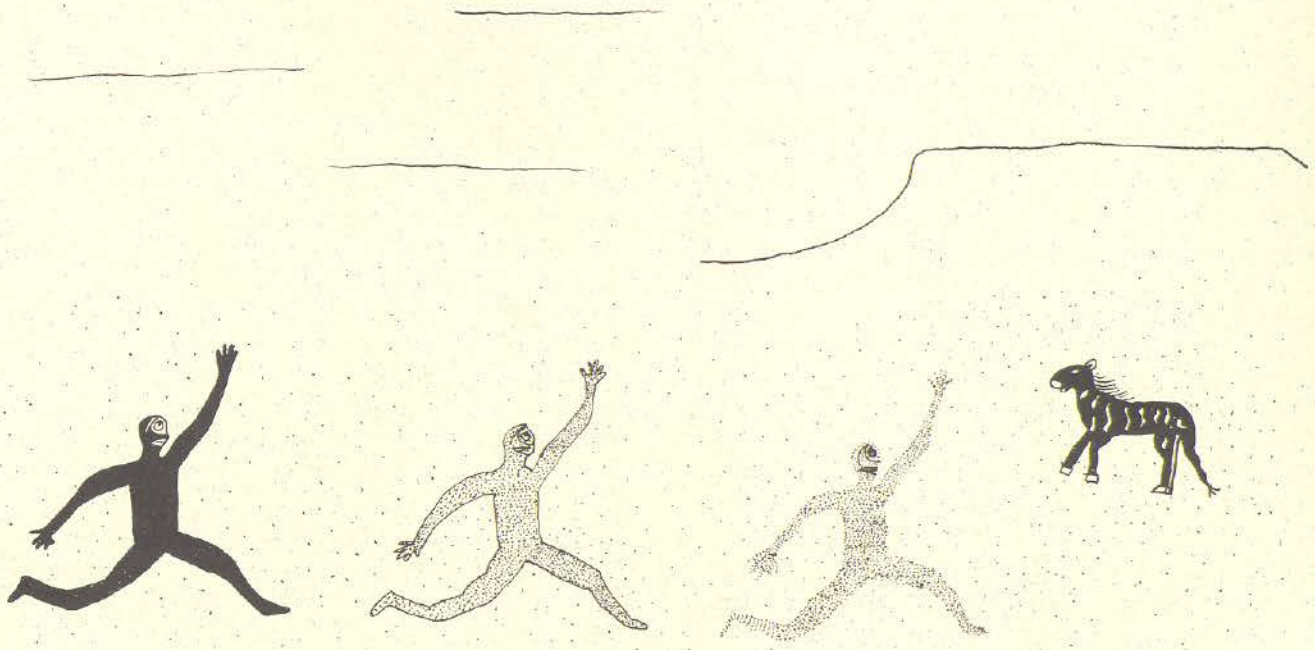
As O'Neill hints, the body is constantly being manipulated in order to fit with the accepted images of a given time: those whose looks fit with society's standards are rewarded and viewed favourably; these individuals *belong*, or *fit* into *some thing*. With an ironic twist, in our society individuals have therefore become preoccupied with their *body image* as a way of replacing a different, and perhaps more *embodied mode of knowing and being*.[20]

The problem with this mode of belonging, however, is that it comes at quite a 'cost.' When we see ourselves and others in accordance with the dominant imagery of a given time, we fail, as Levin notes, to live 'authentically':

> Although it affects different people in different ways, the dominance of the image in our culture produces a wide-spread pathology, for it means, in effect, being cut off from the truth of 'inner' - and that means 'one's own' - experience. We are being chained to the image and alienated from ourselves. If we become totally identified with the image, we are dispossessed: we belong only to others. The image obscures our capacity for authentic existence, true subjectivity, being true to ourselves.[21]

In other words, when we reduce ourselves and nature to this kind of social interaction, based on the reification of the human body (and mind), we do not deal with people as they are, but rather with how they rank in accordance with the images in our society. In this way, we deny ourselves any authentic experience of 'the other,' and, in doing so, we in turn deny them any opportunity for experiencing us as we truly are as living, dynamic and embodied beings.

Modern and post-modern life has culminated into a mode of existence in which the self is defined by the isolated mind constantly grappling to fit with the imagery produced by the dominant members of our scientific, economic and consumer society. In conjunction with the



rigid and distinct boundaries of our scientifically defined world-space, imagery of the human body as a commodity has therefore helped to transform the historically evolving disembodied mind into an anxious ego, which, because it sees itself as being separate from the world, and in constant competition with the changing imagery of our time, is, more often than not, fearful of 'its place' in the world and in society.

The dilemma of our existence is therefore that it is distinguished by an underlying sense of meaninglessness and despair. Existential philosophers refer to these experiences of dread, arising from the displacement of the mind from the body, in terms of 'angst.' Manifested on a cultural level, angst results in nihilism, the loss of all meaning and value that accompanies the death of the human spirit.[22] In our time, nihilism is both a perpetual cause, and extreme outcome, of our Western uses of imagery.

As I have already suggested, it is with and through our bodies that we experience a sense of belonging in the world, or 'place.' A denial of our embodiment, therefore, can lead to a sense of anxiety and disenchantment regarding our life-place. I believe that in Western society, the dominant way in which we have adapted to control our angst is by dominating and controlling ourselves and nature, and that the processes of development (including both the domestication of wild nature and the Western practices of neo-colonialism[23]) are the primary means through which this need or desire for control has been exercised.

If the processes of 'human development' exist in the cultivation of specific mental abilities, including especially the capacity towards abstract rationalization, then the development of the natural world lies in its transformation into something which has been 'tamed,' 'ordered' and hence 'rationalized' by humans. Understood in this light, pollution and other manifestations of environmental degradation, including species extinction and loss of habitat, can be seen not as 'by-products' of an improper or poorly managed developmental process, but rather as circumstances arising out of the historical will to control and dominate. In this way, the social and environmental crisis becomes not a crisis of political and economic conditions, but of our disembodied relations with each other and the world in which we exist.

Approaches to the Crisis: Reform Environmentalism and Imagery of the Earth as Living Body

Interestingly, our awareness of global environmental issues began with a concern for our bodily health. In the sixties, at the start of the 'environmental movement,' concerns regarding the human body resulted in an increased interest in a 'cleaner' living space. In order to help control our fear of toxic poisoning and death, and yet still maintain our current way of life, strategies for further management of nature and the environment were implemented. It was in response to these kinds of issues, then, that reform environmentalism (manifested in the practices of resource conservation) formally originated.

Currently, a primary model for approaching global resource conservation exists in the Gaia Hypothesis. According to its authors, James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, the earth is a self-regulating (cybernetic) organism whose systems work in concert, striving to achieve a sense of global balance, or homeostasis. As Lovelock notes, however, human technological intervention has begun to interrupt the earth's innate ability to self-regulate. Humans, therefore, are becoming what he sometimes refers to as "the brains and nervous system of the planet."[24]

Lovelock's way of seeing the planet is construed as revolutionary. Through his work, he has transformed our vision of the earth as a series of 'dead' and isolated geologic and biochemical phenomena, into a model which grants it the status of a living entity. According to Lovelock, the earth has a kind of self-will that manifests itself in the ability to adjust and adapt, and, hence, to survive.

In spite of this new vision, the Gaia Hypothesis continues to embody the traditional discursive structures of the dominant Western paradigm. Lovelock's understanding of humans and nature is premised on the idea of the earth as an animate (albeit non-sentient) organism/body, whose destiny lies in the control mechanisms generated by the human mind, and implemented by the processes of technology. Thus, the idea of Gaia is still premised on the narrow and disembodied vision of the scientific mode of knowing and being: Lovelock might have altered the image we have of the earth, but he did not alter the way in which we uphold or interact with it. Lovelock simply borrowed the Greek notion of an earth goddess and fused it with the discourses of cybernetics and general systems theory.

Thus, as the Gaia hypothesis goes, just as the human body has essential organs, so does the earth have its own essential major regional ecosystems which cannot be removed or destroyed without inviting the collapse of the entire biosphere. Our task, as the controlling hand, is to accumulate enough scientific data to help determine and direct which portions of nature are necessary for the continuous flow of life (energy).

The approaches and goals outlined by James Lovelock in his book **Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth** are therefore analogous to those conditions which exist between patient and doctor in our Western system of medical health care. The earth has been diagnosed as being ill; therefore, it must be treated. However, just as Western style doctors in particular, and Western medical practices in general, do not, or cannot address the root causes of the patient's problems, neither does resource conserva-

tion address the structural constraints which create the conditions of disease, or in this case, environmental exploitation.

Rather than attend to the individual circumstances of the patient's life-world, the Western doctor examines his or her client outside of any context of their mode of being: for the doctor, the patient exists as an abstraction; a system of classifications and categories incorporating a medical taxonomy. Understood in this manner, the conditions of disease are often acceptable, or at least irrelevant, and the doctor's task becomes one of masking symptoms via the application of drugs, or perhaps even surgery. In any case, the roots of the condition are rarely met with in a manner which would allow for a sense of quality of that life, or, often, a sense of long term, or even preventive health care.

The relationship between reform environmentalism and the 'natural world' is similarly marred by the practices of patient-doctor disassociation, except that rather than 'treat' nature (although this is increasingly the case in what is now known as restoration ecology) reform environmentalists speak of 'conserving nature.' Thus, rather than address the line of thinking that assumes that humans may quantify, objectify and manipulate living beings for human profit, economic or otherwise, reform environmentalists focus on, and point to, the problem of which species and how much habitat should be conserved, in order that we may continue to live in the manner to which we have grown accustomed.

Just as the hegemony of Western medical practice prevents the doctor from opening him or herself to the problematic conditions of their patient's existence, so too does the resource conservationist demonstrate a general kind of existential disregard for the circumstances underlying nature's so-called disease. Within reform environmentalism, changes to the conditions of social and environmental exploitation are therefore not immanent. As seen in the Gaia Hypothesis, reform environmentalism fails to address the assumptions which sustain the idea that the 'body of the earth' and that the 'bodies of humankind' exist as objects, separate from the mind, and hence culture, of humankind. Lovelock's idea for environmental reform does not confront the problems inherent in the Western will to control and dominate. On the contrary, his means towards resolving environmental problems lies first with recognizing the ecological limits to economic growth, and then making development sustainable through better environmental management. Hence, the future vision of reform environmentalism is premised on a relationship in which humans and nature are technologically interconnected. Lovelock's work conjures up the image of an enormous cyborg: an engineered entity whose ultimate purpose in life is to achieve an intraplanetary mode of geo-physiological stasis.

Towards a Critical Theory of Social Change: Environmental Thought, The Body and the Ideology of Anthropocentrism

Not everyone shares the vision of the body, nature and life outlined by the dominant scientific and economic paradigm. In environmental thought,[25] for example, the human body is believed to be an important element in understanding and experiencing the natural world; indeed, the body is considered neither a source of evil nor uncertain truth or knowledge, but rather as our living link with nature.

In environmental thought, individuals do not conceive of themselves as being separate from or above nature, but rather continuous with it. In response to the global environmental crisis, they are therefore motivated by the diminishment of their experience, which results from the destruction of both the beings with whom they live and the places within which they dwell. These beings and places create the smells, sounds, and feelings of their everyday life-world. Understood together, these sensual experiences constitute the basis for knowing and understanding one's place in relation to other humans and nature. Thus, environmental thought is not preoccupied with a concern for development (as is the case in reform environmentalism), but for our lost 'sense of place' that arises from the processes of 'developing.'

In order to recapture our place in and as nature, environmental thought sees as its task challenging the cultural assumptions underlying our anthropocentric worldview. In this project, environmental thought tends to centre around the idea of the development of Western civilization, in terms of its representing the domestication of both humans and wild nature. Thus, critical periods in Western history, often upheld as key stages in human advancement (for example, the origins of Greek philosophy and the scientific revolution) are viewed, within environmental thought, in a normative context in which they represent the progressive alienation (domestication) of the human mind from both nature and the body.

In the processes of domestication, the mind becomes increasingly detached from the body, and the body's way of knowing, because it has begun to rely on other means (culturally generated) for knowing and being. According to John Livingston, the distinction between humans and wild nature lies in the *role* of culture in our lives. Basically his argument is that whereas wild animals, too, have culture, for them it does not function as a kind of prosthesis; that is, it has not supplanted their 'biological mode of being.'[26]

Although we can perhaps never know why it emerged, Livingston speculates that the prosthesis had its origins in the development of both technology (such as the use of fire) and non-biologically based modes of social organization, which emerged in response to increases in

human population. According to Livingston, our use of these complex techniques of social control (for example, language) grew until we became dependent upon them, and so they formed a kind of bubble or conceptual overlay between humans and wild nature. The prosthesis, therefore, is what both distinguishes humans from wild nature, and prevents us from participating in that world. It is also an original source of the need to control (as compensation for a different and lost way of being), and the means through which we are then able to exercise this need.

According to environmental thought, to abandon the prosthesis is to recapture a more embodied and hence 'whole' way of being. In contrast to the imagery of the dominant paradigm, the human body and nature, in environmental thought, are not construed as wild or unruly; rather, in concert with the mind, they are considered experiential sources of a more compliant,[27] and therefore, non-hierarchal mode of being. The task, in their view, is to deconstruct the cultural rift that currently exists between the mind and nature, and the mind and body. As Livingston puts forth, we need to embrace a view of 'culturing,' that will oblige "..not only man [*sic*] the prosthetic domesticate but also man the whole sensate being."[28]

Women, Bodies and Nature: Ecofeminism and the Crisis of Androcentrism

Ecofeminism is an umbrella term covering a wide range of approaches and concerns pertaining to the androcentric domination of women and nature by men. In accordance with an androcentric worldview, differences between the mind and body and culture and nature are not only distinguished as being morally, politically and ethically appropriate, but are said to manifest themselves in the differences between women and men. Thus, in the case of androcentrism, men represent the mind, and women (because they give birth and menstruate) the body and nature. Since Western culture is biased against the realm of the physical, men are therefore seen as the subjects, and women and nature as the objects of their domination.[29]

The major difference between an anthropocentric and an androcentric worldview is that social and ecological problems stemming from within the context of androcentrism, cannot be understood outside of an analysis of the historical roots of misogyny. Thus, in their attempt to understand and move away from our anthropocentric tendencies, discussions within environmental thought have centred around the historical drive to disassociate the mind from the body. In environmental thought, these embodied goals and circumstances have been unaffected by gender, and are therefore evenly expressed throughout our entire society. Ecofeminists, however, disagree. They believe that for the most part, it is the *male*[30] mind which separated itself from nature, and the realm of the physical, and that it is the male way of being in the world that is responsible for both the idea and practice of a gap between the mind and the body.

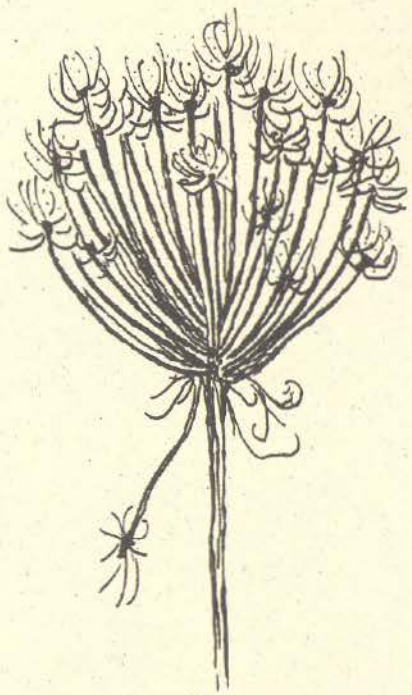
Whereas environmental thought and ecofeminism share a concern over mind-body dualism, and dualistic thinking in general, they do not agree as to how these dualisms are rooted and manifested. Along with feminists, ecofeminists share the view that, historically, women have been treated as sexual objects: pieces of meat with either no minds or poorly developed ones. Thus, like nature, women have been essentialized and trivialized in accordance with the wants and needs of our patriarchal society. This position is meant neither to deny the participation of women in the history of social and ecological decay, nor is it meant to subsume the views of environmental thought. Ecofeminists are concerned that just as patriarchy weaves its way throughout our culture, so does it endure in the streams of environmental philosophy; rather than continue to let men speak for them, ecofeminists seek to give voice to their own historical reality.

The circumstances surrounding the social conditions of women have differed from those of men in much of our Western history. For ecofeminists, these differences require divergent responses to the crisis in accordance with how it has been experienced, and therefore, how it is to be defined. Although this has recently been changing, during the past few centuries, women have been kept away from positions of power and closer to the 'domestic sphere,' in roles associated with more of an 'embodied' existence, such as having and caring for children. In light of the historical situation of women, many ecofeminists do not --because they cannot-- share with environmental thought the view that it is everyone's task to dismantle his or her ego, and to re-acquaint his or her mind with their body, so that society may deconstruct anthropocentrism, and hopefully, as well, the prosthesis. As Marti Kheel delineates: "Whereas the anthropocentric worldview perceives humans as the centre or apex of the natural world, the androcentric analysis suggests that this worldview is unique to men....women's identities, unlike men's, have not been established through their elevation over the natural world."[31] In other words, ecofeminists are less preoccupied with notions of deconstructing relations of domination amongst themselves, and between themselves and nature, because they believe that these forces played less of a role in the historical formation of women's identities.

If most ecofeminists agree with this analysis of the differences between anthropocentrism and androcentrism, they do not necessarily converge on how they should proceed: within the discourses of ecofeminism, there exist two major streams which can be distinguished by the view each holds of the role of the human body in

achieving an alternative foundation for a less oppressive society.

Certainly, the most 'popular' form of ecofeminism is that which has its roots in radical cultural feminism, and which, therefore, has ties with both the women's spirituality movement and neo-paganism. Radical cultural ecofeminists believe that because women are capable of giving birth, that they are therefore privy to a special way of knowing; one that is intimately tied to the rhythms of nature. According to radical cultural feminists, these 'body parables'[32] are appropriate images for a society that wishes to recapture a sense of harmony with nature. Ecofeminist Starhawk writes: "When birth becomes our underlying metaphor...the world shifts. The cosmos becomes a living body in which we all participate, continually merging and emerging in rhythmic cycles."[33] Radical cultural ecofeminists are therefore interested in re-affirming their connection to their bodies, and nature, in a social community that will not enforce upon them any stereotypical notion of mind (men) over body (women).



The second major stream within ecofeminism has its roots in socialist feminism. For socialist ecofeminists, the devaluation of women has been closely linked with the devaluation of the human body; issues pertaining to embodiment must therefore be dealt with cautiously. In response to the global social and ecological crisis, socialist ecofeminists are more concerned with deconstructing the historical forces surrounding the domination of women and other oppressed peoples, than they are with re-establishing a more 'spiritual' or 'embodied' mode of being.[34] They therefore uphold a view of society that is free of relations of domination, and yet somehow is still premised on the idea of a sustainable materialism.[35]

With respect to their understanding of the problems of our human embodiment, each of the two major streams is lacking. In exploring ways of bodily knowing and being, radical cultural feminists limit themselves to the realm of 'mothering'; there are many other ways in which women can feel connected to nature outside of the processes of reproduction and child-rearing. Secondly, whereas the strength of socialist ecofeminism lies in the emphasis it places on understanding how social and cultural circumstances lead to conditions of exploitation in Western culture, the work of socialist ecofeminists continues to frame nature and the body solely in terms of their value as providers of the 'material' base of society. Socialist ecofeminism therefore further perpetuates a reified and detached mode of embodied being.

Conclusions

Although not always specified, the human body clearly plays an important role in the thoughts and assumptions underlying much of our post-modern ideology. In this paper I have attempted to introduce the idea that there are different modes of embodied being, and that these different modes have implications for how we organize ourselves in relation to nature, and within society.

Currently, our system of social relations is premised on the need to control and dominate the human body. Out of this desire to govern our bodies, emerges, however, a cultural mode of being that repudiates our human need to 'belong' in the world, and to participate in nature. Efforts within critical social change which include a concern for the body can therefore be understood in terms of representing a movement towards a new cultural base; one in which humans do not use culture as a tool to manipulate the world, but to live through it. This view of culture is simultaneously inherently emancipatory, while nonetheless premised on a kind of belonging or 'social membership' in our inter-species community.

In this project, the continued exploration of our primary modes of 'knowing' and 'being' becomes necessary. The social conditions of our embodied existence, are, however, as complex as they are profound: we must each, therefore, begin this exploration from our point of reference; from our own particular position in Western society. In this way, the unfolding of the Western conditions of cultural constraint will be aided not just through a theoretical examination of the dominant assumptions we hold regarding our bodies; rather, we will, at the same

time, begin to open ourselves to experiencing the ecology of our bodily being.

When we start to feel both the harm we may be *inflicting* on each other, as well as any harm we may be *receiving*, it then becomes possible to at least acknowledge the nihilism in our society. In the effort towards an alternatively embodied vision of life, it seems that we must perhaps first disclose our existential pain before we can move away from both the prosthesis and the crisis of despair, and toward a more celebratory mode of being.

Notes

1. Although we tend to think of ourselves as living in a secular society, the early Christian idea of the body as the source of sin, evil and human weakness is still with us, and serves as part of our 'fear' or apprehension regarding matters pertaining to the physical body.

2. Issues of class are historically related to conceptions of the human body. For example, in **The Republic**, Plato maintained that rulers of a 'just society' (philosopher kings, in his terminology) would undergo ten years of study in mathematics and abstract thinking in order to prepare them to distinguish the world of appearances (the realm of imagination and sensual experience) from the intelligible world (the unchanging realm of form, essence and knowledge). It was the ability to distinguish 'true knowledge' from mere and simple 'belief' which Plato felt qualified certain individuals to rule. Though it is not our practice to have members of parliament hold degrees in mathematics (they do, however, most often hold degrees in law or commerce) there is nonetheless the expectation that individuals in positions of power in our society be capable of abstract and rational (and therefore, disembodied) modes of thinking, and that somehow it is this quality that helps them to distinguish 'right' from 'wrong.' In **The Republic**, those incapable of such tasks were assigned to the lower ranks of society, for example, 'guardian.' Francis Comford, **The Republic of Plato** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 186.

3. Peter S. Freund, **The Civilized Body** (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), p. 127.

4. **Oxford English Dictionary**, 2nd Edition, Vol II (1989), pp. 353-357.

5. **The Living Webster** (Chicago: The English Language Institute of America, 1971), p. 109.

6. An etymology of the word body reveals that it once had links with the German verb 'to live.' In its modern usage, however, 'body' is still thought of as a material object, contradistinctive in essence to the more active and animated qualities characteristic of the 'mind,' the 'soul' and the 'spirit.'

7. Bryan S. Turner, **The Body and Society** (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher, Ltd, 1984), p. 1.

8. Morris Berman, **Coming To Our Senses** (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 69.

9. There has been a tendency amongst some 'green' thinkers to romanticize hunting and gathering societies. It is difficult, either way, to make a statement regarding this since we really have no idea what our embodied modes of being were like at this point in our history. I am willing to offer, however, for the sake of argument and comparison, that life then must have been different, and that one of the primary factors for this difference has something to do with our modern preoccupation with images of the body, as opposed to our experience of it.

10. The idea of the participating consciousness originated with Owen Barfield. See his book, **Saving the Appearances**, 2nd Edition (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1988). For further discussion of the concept of participation as a way of being relevant to our current crisis of culturally induced modes of estrangement, see Morris Berman's book **The Reenchantment of the World** (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1981).

11. I distinguish personal conversation from the realm of public discourse, because I have found our society to be extremely biased against any 'mystical' or 'non-utilitarian' discussions of the non-human. To go public with one's love for nature is to risk being ridiculed, or even labelled misanthropic; talking about such issues is, therefore, usually conducted in private spaces and places only.

12. John Livingston, **The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation** (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1981), p. 101.

13. Descartes, in particular, is famous for surmising that the human self should be defined by the mind and its ability to think, as opposed to the physical body, which is not only incapable of 'thought,' but is also prone to errors of 'misinterpretation.'

14. David Michael Levin, **The Body's Recollection of Being** (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), p. 340.

15. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, **The Visible and the Invisible** (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 27.

16. For an interesting discussion of both the power of imagery, and the problems associated with the ways of seeing in our culture, see John Berger's **Ways of Seeing** (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972).

17. Joseph Grange, "On the Way Towards a Foundational Ecology" **Soundings** 40:2 (1977), p. 25.

18. A class analysis is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it would appear to be a useful and necessary study. There are, obviously, different modes of embodied being in this society; for example, it has been argued that labourers and craftspeople maintain more of a primal relationship with their bodies, than would say a professor of mathematics. For the purposes of this paper, I would argue that the embodiment of both these occupations is, to more or less degrees, still problematic.

19. John O'Neill, **Five Bodies** (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 24.

20. The condition of mind-body disassociation, coupled with a preoccupation with one's body image, is exemplified in anorexia nervosa. With this disease, the individual becomes preoccupied with his or her body image as a way of seeking control over not just their bodies, but over their lives. But, the preoccupation with one's body imagery can be seen as a response to a lost sense of security, which is itself a condition of a specific mode of bodily being. The experience of anorexia therefore becomes a vicious tautology--in attempting to exercise more control over one's body **in particular**, the more one fuels the need to control **in general**; a most difficult position from which to escape...

21. David Michael Levin, **The Opening of Vision** (Routledge: Chapman and Hall Inc., 1988), p. 129.

22. Anyone new to this stream of philosophy, known as existentialism and existential phenomenology, should refer to David Michael Levin's book **The Body's Recollection of Being** (referenced earlier in this paper). In this work, Levin synthesizes both traditional and critical perspectives on the field of existential thought in a manner which is both relevant and accessible.

23. It was often the belief amongst colonizers that those peoples they were helping to 'civilize' lived a more embodied, and hence 'primitive' existence. Thus there are links between conceptions of the human body and the rationale for historical (as well as current) instances of colonialism.

24. J.E. Lovelock, **Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 147.

25. Environmental thought is a male-dominated mode of inquiry whose primary concern is to challenge the notion of anthropocentrism in Western culture. It is an umbrella term that encompasses several streams within the field of critical environmental studies, including both deep ecology and ecosophy. In terms of my own typology, environmental thought refers specifically to the efforts of Morris Berman, Neil Evernden, Paul Shepard and John Livingston.

26. John Livingston, "Ethics as Prosthesis" in Philip P. Hanson, ed., **Environmental Ethics: Philosophical and Policy Perspectives** (Burnaby: SFU Publications, 1986), p. 67.

27. As far as I know, the notion of nature being inherently compliant originated with John Livingston.

28. Livingston, p. 75.

29. Karen J. Warren, "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism" **Environmental Ethics**, 12:2 (Summer 1990), p. 125.

30. By 'male' I mean those qualities that we have come to associate with being a man, as opposed to any pre-determined or biologically fixed 'male way' of being. In this sense, it becomes obvious that just as women have been reduced to cultural stereotypes in this society, so too, have men.

31. Marti Kheel, "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology" in Diamond and Orenstein, eds., **Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism** (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), p. 129.

32. For a discussion of the 'body parable' see Charlene Spretnak's article "Toward an Ecofeminist Spirituality" in Judith Plant, ed., **Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism** (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1989), pp. 127-132.

33. Starhawk, "Feminist, Earth-based Spirituality and Ecofeminism" in **Healing the Wounds**, p. 175.

34. For a discussion which links conceptions of the body with the historical oppression of women and nature, see Carolyn Merchant's book **The Death of Nature** (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

35. Carolyn Merchant, "Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory" in **Reweaving the World**, p. 103.

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