

# **Domination in Ecofeminist Discourse**

by

Sharon Woodill

A thesis submitted to

Mount Saint Vincent University, and Saint Mary's University,

Halifax, Nova Scotia

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Joint Master of Arts in Women and Gender Studies

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Dr. Susan Walsh: Supervisor

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## **Abstract**

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In this thesis, I explore the concept of domination in ecofeminist discourse. This exploration is facilitated through theoretical discussion and personal narrative. I specifically consider three ways in which domination is conceptualized: as a product of progress; as a way of thinking; and as a complex system of interconnected oppressions. For each of these categories, I outline the general tenets of ecofeminist theory pertinent to the categorization; I highlight some issues with the theory; and I explore some resulting insights. I argue that although ecofeminist theory contains some contradictions and intricacies, taken together, it offers a valuable perspective on the issue of domination, and this perspective seems to be neglected by academic scholarship. In conclusion, I draw on the work of Maria Lugones. I explore her concept of curdled logic and complex communication as a possible means of addressing some of the problematic issues within ecofeminism, and as a means of addressing academic marginalization.

October 2008

To The Woodill Family from Dutch Brook

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My father, Harold Alexander (Sandy) Woodill, passed away during the writing of this thesis. I am sorry that he missed it, he would have been proud.

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## Chapter 1 - An Introduction

### **The Road Behind Me**

As an undergraduate student in jazz studies, I came more or less by chance on a book entitled *The Web of Life* by Fritjof Capra. Completely unrelated (seemingly) to my studies at the time, it took a very cold and snowy day with a minuscule reading selection in the house for me to pick the book up and read the first few pages. After having sat on my shelf untouched for several months, I finished it (for the first of many times) by the next day. In the descriptions of the living world as dynamic, complex, non-linear, emergent, creative, evolving, and adaptive, I recognized a perspective that I embraced as a jazz improviser. I further recognized how this perspective was contrary to the classical training I had received and had taught for so many years. My undergraduate thesis was entitled “Sustaining Master Musicians: Complexity and the Jazz Tradition, Implications for Music Education and Performance,” and in it I explored the patterns that connect complexity theory and jazz improvisation.

Capra’s book includes a very short section on ecofeminism (*Web* 8) that is followed by an outline of a set of values that a complexity perspective (a term I have now adopted) endorses: an ecofeminist perspective and a complexity perspective share (more or less) a basic set of values. These values, according to Capra, include conservation, cooperation, and partnership (*Web* 10). After further investigation, I discovered that ecofeminist thinkers have rather elaborately engaged in theoretical analysis of domination, or what I sometimes like to call “classical-only social-organizing practices.”<sup>i</sup> Draw-

ing on a basic tenet that suggests that the oppression of women and the destruction of nature are grounded in a common ideology, ecofeminists attempt to analyze why basic (eco/complex) values are not widely visible and promote ways to implement them. I recognized the rather strong and (now) obvious connection(s) between gender and oppressive social-organizing practices, and I began to read ecofeminist literature in more depth. Inspired by my ecofeminist journey, and outraged at a society that seems so bent on thwarting creative complexities, I applied to the MA program in women's studies. My application essentially included saving the world as an official objective by working to create some medium to communicate and inspire the proliferation of eco-values. But I have come to notice a few other things: the university does not readily accommodate a complexity perspective, and saving the world might take a little longer than I had anticipated. In an essay regarding women's education, I explored in more detail the overlap of complexity and ecofeminism in the context of post-secondary education (2007).

After I presented this paper, I began to wonder: what would an educational space centred on complexity (eco) values look like? Now to be clear, I define "education" very broadly to mean "being" and "becoming." I wrote a thesis proposal entitled "Becoming Spaces," and I participated in a couple of innovative classes only to realize that I (and others or so it seems) do not know how to "be" in spaces not structured by familiar hierarchical practices. What would be the point of a 'free' space if people do not know how to be 'free'? I began to wonder why I (and seemingly others) had such a difficult time in such spaces. I began to reflect on my own ways of being-in-the-world and how these ways connect to the concept of un-freedom and possibly to domination.



As I continued to read through the ecofeminist literature, it became apparent that the concept of domination, while often purported to be the central issue of interest, is not clearly defined. How could I ask questions and philosophize on freedom without a firm grounding in the central issue? The term seems to be taken for granted or as a given, but it is sometimes used in contradictory ways. This thesis follows from this reflection. From the abstract philosophical constructions of the logic of domination to incident-specific narratives, the aim of this thesis is to review and consider the discussion of domination in ecofeminist discourse to answer the question: what exactly are they talking about, and what does it have to do with me?

### **The Road Before Me**

The emergence of ecological perspectives is likely connected to a growing concern with environmental issues such as environmental degradation and interconnected oppressions. That this degradation has a disproportionate and negative affect on traditionally othered members of the global population (women, children, non-white, and disabled people, for example) has been a central insight of ecofeminist concerns since its inception (Shiva, *Staying Alive* 23). Although the streams of ecofeminism are diverse, the common bond is an assertion that there is (are) a connection(s) between the domination of women (among others) and the domination of nature (Warren, “An Overview” x). Thus, regardless of the varieties of understandings of these connections, a foundational concern lies with the issue of domination itself.

Concern with the issue of domination is certainly not the exclusive domain of ecofeminism; in fact this concern has been THE issue of feminism in general. However,

the extension of feminist concerns to the environment highlights a slightly different set of relationships. Ecofeminism brings into view a variety of connections between feminism, science/development/technology and local perspectives to illuminate ways of thinking and doing that result in the various “isms” of domination (Warren, “Taking Data” 4), racism, sexism or ableism being familiar examples.

While ecofeminism may provide important insight into oppressive social-organizing practices, judging from the relatively small amount of recent scholarship in this area, it is an academic region that is somewhat overlooked.<sup>ii</sup> Neglect of ecofeminist scholarship possibly reflects the discrepancies in the concept of domination; however, these discrepancies may derive from a broader issue that involves a discrepancy in values and the concept of knowledge itself. Some ecofeminist writers propose a promotion of values that include intuition, improvisation, and a focus on feminine deity. Starhawk’s *Spiral Dance* is such an example. Considering this, clashes within staunch academic forums are not surprising. Arguments against ecofeminism include charges of essentialism, universalizing and reactionary anti-rationalism, which are issues that feminist theorists have long argued against (Biehl 15; Code, *Ecological Thinking* 18). Although some of these arguments may be warranted, ecofeminism seeks to challenge basic, fundamental, and historically engrained perspectives, and this makes criticism of ecofeminist discourse challenging. For example, ecofeminist discourse tends to question normative approaches to reasoning such as those based on dualisms, yet a common criticism of ecofeminism is that it is irrational, which of course is the point when rationality depends on a mode of reasoning that is deemed oppressive—an issue that I cover extensively in chapter 4. In other words, ecofeminist theory challenges dualistic-based reason-

ing, which is the dominant standard of reasoning in Western philosophy (Plumwood 34). This challenge seeks to undercut this epistemic standard and delve into alternative ways of knowing. The result is “un-reasonable,” according to the dominant standards, which is exactly the objective of the theory. This challenge aside, there is a substantial body of work identified under the heading of ecological feminist philosophy and ecofeminist theory that presents highly articulate and persuasive arguments for a variety of ecofeminist perspectives; Cuomo, Cudworth, Merchant, Shiva, and Warren are several such examples. It is these texts that I draw upon to explore the concept of domination.

Although there has been much defense of ecofeminism, it remains relatively obscure (Cudworth 12). As I read through the ecofeminist literature, including the adamant defenses, I am struck by a sense of confusion, and I suspect that ecofeminism needs more of a clarification than a defense. By exploring the space of domination, the issue that binds the rather disparate academic factions within feminism and beyond, perhaps it will be possible to eke out a liminal space in which a complexity of perspectives constitutes a diversity of ways of being that will provide some pro-social benefits.

### **The Road Itself**

Feminist approaches to research have included several themes that often challenge the status quo, and these themes are implicated in the questions I ask and the ways I attempt to answer them. Perhaps one of the most prevalent themes of feminist work involves the situatedness of the researcher in her research. Although I do not engage in empirical research per se, the questions I ask and my attraction to ecofeminism are products of some sort of personal engagement—both past and present. I am not an objective

observer but rather a co-participant in the happenings of the world around me. In this thesis, I draw on my relationship to the material I cover to highlight my interactions with it and to extrapolate from it the ways in which my location shapes the questions I ask and conclusions I do and do not reach.

Certainly this thesis is motivated by a desire to create social change, which is another important feminist research theme; however, this thesis will likely not go that far. In other words, I am more concerned with understanding the problem than how to “fix” it. Feminist and ecofeminist discourses already offer a plethora of insight into social change, and I see my work as contributing to a space for dialogue amid and between the confines of a traditional academic forum. My work will delve into the diversity of perspectives inherent in ecofeminist ideas; it will both embrace and challenge these ideas while contributing to and resisting their place in the academic milieu.

This thesis is written in a liminal academic space: it both accepts and resists “classical” academic forms. Liminal spaces, according to Maria Lugones, are those places that lie outside the centers and structures of power (“Complex” 76). Such spaces are unknown to those who deal solely in an epistemic economy, or in other words, those who trade information, knowledge and ideas within social structures with no concession of legitimate attachment or connection between the knower and the known. Rather, knowledge, ideas, or information are conceived of as entities, products, or objects onto their own. For example, the centers of power are those people with the social capital to determine academic standards: what is valid academic work and what is not. Centers of power become oppressive when they elide knowledge from knowers and exclude some knowers from consideration and privileges that accompany the set academic standard.

So long as knowledge and knowers are conceptually divided, those within the centers of power are unaware that exclusion and marginalization of some ways of knowing is also an exclusion and marginalization of some knowers. The limen then is the place that is not structured by such politics, and is inhabited by those who are familiar with both the centers of power and the negative space which surrounds them.

The concept of liminality is integral to this thesis. At minimal, a definition of domination includes some reference to social power, and to look at the concept only from within the constraints of the established academic power structures, is to be blinded to the problems that arise as a result of such constraints. The liminal space allows me to step outside the structure, to comment on it, to resist it, while exhibiting a familiarity with it, and without leaving it altogether.

The writing style of this thesis is the means by which I step into the liminal dimension. Stringent academic forms, as I have already mentioned, can often be represented by the “classical only” concept as I have already described it. So while this thesis challenges ecofeminist theory in its own right, it also challenges academic norms that would typically exclude some ecofeminist tenets. Academic norms represent a large center of power and are therefore implicated in the minimal definition of domination. Maria Lugones writes that “the creation of liminal spaces involves this going back and forth from domination, negotiating that movement so as to maximize our freedom in an unfree situation” (79). In this thesis, I do exactly that: I move between rigid academic theorizing and loose personal narratives where I sometimes challenge my own rationale. Although I risk being branded as non-academic, or as lacking academic rigour, I seek to draw on the modes of academic activism in a manner similar to the ecofeminist theorists

to whom I refer to in chapter two (see page 16). I seek to resist those very labels which often constrict ways of knowing and being.

This perspective is ecofeminist, as will be demonstrated throughout this work. In the next chapter, I provide a more in-depth overview of ecofeminist theory along with a more specific outline of how I approach this project.

## **Chapter 2 - Theories and Methods**

In this chapter, I outline the general theoretical perspective on which this thesis is grounded and the approach I take to the material in question. I begin with a general overview of ecofeminist theory and discuss the implications for this project. I then discuss the process by which I arrange the material that I explore. I conclude with a discussion of the personal narrative that permeates the work.

### **Ecofeminism—A Summary of the Theory**

This thesis is not a defense of ecofeminism but rather an attempt to isolate and build upon understandings of the common bond that unites the various streams of ecofeminism and connects it to any social/environmental-justice theory—domination. Although I adopt a responsibly critical approach, I work within the insights of ecofeminist theory and the worldview that it espouses.

Ecofeminism is a heterogeneously defined subject; however, the one common denominator seems to be a consensus that the oppression of women is connected to and/or essentially is the oppression of non-human nature. Francois d'Eaubonne is credited with coining the term “ecofeminism” in her 1974 publication entitled *Feminism or Death*, where she addresses a fundamental issue regarding the mechanism of oppression, which she sees located in a historical move to ownership of production and reproduction (d'Eaubonne 67). Not surprisingly, contemporary discourse falling under the banner of ecofeminism typically deals with ideologies that propel domination and present recommendations intended to uproot these structures. Ecofeminism tends to take a broad and

overarching perspective, which aims to alleviate oppression in general, regardless of the specific group in focus (“The Power and the Promise,” Warren 24).

Ecofeminist thought is varied and complex but not without some overriding themes. Nancy Howell writes that “a first presupposition and expectation of ecofeminism is that social transformation is necessary for the sake of survival and justice” (233). An assumption of this statement is that our current methods of social organizing deter survival.

The fact that a fundamental mode of social organizing is hierarchal is a complaint that carries over from feminism in general. Hierarchy, in this context, refers to “systems of human rankings based on force or threat of force” (Eisler xix). Hierarchies in their most basic forms are structures of command and control that work effectively for large organizations such as religions and the military (Brofman and Brekstrom 19). In times of stability, hierarchies might legitimately be claimed as a successful means of management, if issues of social equity are excluded from the definition of “successful.” The problem, however, is that the present era is marked by rapid dramatic change, and hierarchies simply cannot respond fast enough.<sup>iii</sup> Alternatively, “power-based, hierarchical relationships must be replaced with reciprocity and mutuality” (Howell 233). Based on “reciprocity and mutuality,” survival and justice are dynamic processes rather than stable states, and therefore they are fluid, uncertain and more readily adaptable to changing environments.

Chris Cuomo describes ecofeminism as a metaphysical exploration of uncertainty (“On Ecofeminist Philosophy” 11), which directly stems from the dynamism espoused in the ecofeminist embrace of reciprocity and mutuality. With a critical eye to-



wards science and technology, ecofeminist theory challenges what it sees as problematic in a positivistic worldview: the essence of the complaint with a positivistic worldview is that it perpetuates an obsession with prediction and control. This point is expounded in the third chapter of this thesis that examines the concept of domination as a product of progress. Uncertainty as a counter to positivistic assertions defines a space of creativity and contributes to the dynamism at play in those creative spaces where life is formed, evolves and reproduces. Ecofeminism “sees meaning as relational, and history as shaped in myriad ways, in part by chance and unknowns” (Cuomo, “On Ecofeminist” 9); therefore, it sees uncertainty, instability and adaptability as important elements of experience.

The quest for social reform has long been the focus of social philosophers, theorists, and policy makers—to name a few, but the conjunction with basic survival seems to be a more recent phenomena. While certainly religious and mystic philosophies have engaged in various predictions of the destiny of ‘mankind,’ arguably social reform has never before been more urgent. Popular intellectuals such as David Suzuki and Noam Chomsky make repeated references to the present era as possibly being “a terminal phase of human existence” (Chomsky interview). While it might be considered narcissistic to obsess over the survival of the ‘dominant’ species in light of the fact that many earlier species have already passed on to extinction, there is much evidence to suggest that the destruction of the human race is inextricable from the destruction of *all* of life (“Suzuki Speaks”). Thus the need for social reform remains so long as survival is a valued objective.

Ecofeminist theory often insists that social change must involve an intellectual transformation (Howell 234, Warren, “Power and Promise” 21; Plumwood 42). The par-

ticular point of contention is the Western world's bedrock of normative logic that depends on dualistic reasoning and hierarchical organizations (Howell 234). Karen Warren argues that this form of logic becomes problematic in oppressive conceptual frameworks where being of greater value justifies subordination (Warren, "The Power and Promise" 21). It is within this framework that women are associated in a negative way with 'nature' as objects to be conquered, tamed and managed (Howell 234; Shiva, "Reduction" 33). Ecofeminists seek non-dualistic approaches to intellectual interrogation and seek to challenge normative dualisms that serve to organize society into domination-based hierarchies. Some very common sites of challenge are: nature/culture, mind/body, reason/emotion. Ecofeminism then embraces connection and relational perspectives that differ somewhat from an oppositional and adversarial approach to reason. In other words, ecofeminism sees how concepts and ideas are related without necessarily constructing dualism as fundamentally opposite and mutually exclusive. Although critics have used such terms as "anti-theoretical" and "anti-rational" to describe ecofeminist discourse (Glazebrook 20), Warren's claim to "transformative feminism" (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 95) appeals to readers like myself who frequently retreat in disillusionment from many traditional manifestations of theory and reason.<sup>iv</sup>

Ecofeminist theory tends to encourage a broader theoretical and reasoning perspective than traditional dualistic approaches imply. Cuomo describes ecofeminist philosophy as "a positive philosophy of complexity and connection" that "takes objects of curiosity, study, and understanding to be multifaceted, and embedded in arrays of interdependencies...and sees the components of reality as constituted and defined through relationships" ("On Ecofeminist" 9). This understanding of relationships necessarily

highlights the limits of knowledge by underscoring its contingency on human situatedness and the consequential partiality of any given position. Knowledge is afforded a socially dynamic definition rather than an abstracted object of purely instrumental value.

Ecofeminism portrays deep concern with the social values at play that allow and account for oppressive behaviours. A primary goal of ecofeminism is to address the value of nature, such that “reforming the way that nature is valued should transform human relationships with nature. Ecofeminism calls for a shift from instrumental value to intrinsic value” (Howell 234). Intrinsic value suggests a shift of focus from “having” to “being” which dramatically undercuts the consumerist ideals that proliferate in the present era. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva extrapolate the notion of intrinsic value to propose a subsistence perspective that endorses a way of life that meets the day-to-day needs of people and largely rejects the enticements of a commodity-based and perpetual-profit system (*Ecofeminism* 298). Intrinsic value, in ecofeminist discourse, is used to disrupt oppressive power distributions by assigning value to what something or someone is, which counters values assigned based on what something or someone has or can do.

The ways in which ecofeminist theory makes its way into practice account for a number of its defining elements. Historically, ecofeminism has been inextricable from grass-roots activism that challenged corporate advances of technologies and practices that threatened ecological degradation and the lives of those who depend directly on the land for sustenance. The Chipko movement in India is an often cited example. Women from the Chipko community successfully confronted a mining company that threatened the forest on which their livelihood depended (Mies and Shiva, *Ecofeminism* 249). Other such events focus too on the relationship between development and environ-

mental/sociological impact brought to light by direct action intervention via nonviolence and open communication processes (Lehar 4).

Political activism is one space where ecofeminist theory and action converge, but ecofeminist spirituality, which has often corresponded with political action (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophies*, 194), also boasts a unique form of praxis. Drawing on the concept of a sacred earth-based deity, ecofeminist spiritualities tend to assert a pantheistic notion of the divine as existing throughout the experiential world and constituted in the immanence of all things (Eaton, online article). Like ecofeminist theory, ecofeminist spirituality consists of multifarious approaches and practices, which can include the use of ritual and symbol, but what they tend to adhere to is a challenge to a patriarchal history of religion and a challenge to the impact of that history on social-organizing practices (Eaton online article). Starhawk suggests that radical social change follows from radical change in long entrenched religious symbolism such as would be the case in affirming the sacred as feminine—counter to the patriarchal past (19). Like other religious notions, ecofeminist spirituality has been assailed in academic texts as being essentialist and counter-productive to feminist goals in general by reasserting the association of women with the non-rational—an association that feminism has long sought to override. One of the central themes of ecofeminism, however, is an absolving of notions of Truth in favour of truths, which makes its “essentialism” somewhat weak and difficult to pin down. In other words, ecofeminist theory tends to embrace truth as plural, multiple, dynamic and adaptive; therefore, anything that is essential or “True,” must necessarily be broad and fluctuating. Essentialism in such a context, even if it does appear in ecofem-

inist theory, cannot hold the same oppressive status as it does in the articulations that feminism generally rejects.

The bulk of ecofeminist philosophy offers some defense of spiritual associations; however, praxis in this area tends to appear in a variety of literary approaches that might be categorized as academic activism, which is aimed at writing style, language and subject. Mary Daly, for example, in her earlier work *Gyn/Ecology*, uses language specifically designed to counter what she theorizes as a phallogocentric literary tradition (5), and constructs definitions specifically suited to her cause. Furthermore, Daly uses this language to depict “racism, militarism, nationalism and environmental degradation as manifestations of the processes of rape and vivisection which characterize the phallic culture” (McMahon website). Susan Griffin’s earlier work uses poetry and prose as a vehicle to explore the complexities of the connections between oppression of both women and nature (xv-xvii). Rosemary Radford Ruether, in *New Women New Earth*, examines religious symbolism and imagery to trace the subjugation of the Goddess in Patriarchal religion and connects this to fundamental social organizing practices. Famously, she writes: “women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination” (204). In this work, she transverses the territory between and among philosophy and theology, thus she forges a new (eco)feminist model for considering the relationships between and among peoples and environments. Karen Warren suggests first-person narrative as a form of ecofeminist methodology because it provides a wider context in which relationships and interconnections are made explicit (“Power and Promise” 25). Chris Cuomo points out that academic activism lies in the subject

matter upon which theory is focused, and these have included animal rights, anti-racism and discussion about sexuality (*Feminism and Ecological Communities* 148). What defines ecofeminism in this academic work is that it includes a perspective on the assumptions about nature—both human and non-human—that lie seemingly undetected in social norms.

Ecofeminism as a theoretical framework for this thesis provides a means to explore connections and relationships among discrepant perspectives with conventional academic approaches while at the same time challenging the dogma of entrenched academic norms. While I do not argue against or discuss this specific point here, conventional academic approaches extol the written word as the supreme forum for the exchange of knowledge and ideas. Furthermore, to meet academic standards, the written word must conform to conventions of linearity, clarity, and unmitigated rational thought. I do not reject these standards; however, I adopt a non-dogmatic approach to them by including validation of possibly conflicting ideas. What I mean is that in ecofeminist discourse are seemingly disparate utilizations of a concept of domination, but rather than dismiss the theoretical work, or attempt to iron out the problems, I see these discrepancies as important structural elements in the concept of domination. Within an ecofeminist framework, I can look for patterns and connections in seemingly incongruent points of interest. My objective is to review the map of domination that is provided by ecofeminist theory to explore the space in which domination is conceived and functions. My work is limited specifically to the theoretical articulations of ecofeminist theory, and I do not delve into ecofeminist theology or spirituality. This limitation is not meant as a

reflection on that work, but rather a reflection of my personal issues with academic discourses of the Divine.<sup>v</sup>

### **Methodological Approach**

My central claim in this thesis is that ecofeminism describes domination in a variety of ways that do not readily lend themselves to a unified definition of what exactly domination is or how it works. This problem has likely contributed to the marginalization and overlooking of important ecofeminist insights by the mainstream academy. My objective is to explore the concept of domination in such a way as not to dismiss the theory outright, but rather, to draw the points of discrepancy into a broader space of consideration.

I began this project by reviewing the literature for patterns of descriptions of domination. What I found was that descriptions can be broadly and loosely grouped into three overlapping and interrelated themes: domination as a product of technological development; domination as a way of thinking; and domination as a complex system of interrelated oppressions. These themes appear in the chronological emergence of key ecofeminist texts.

I use a three-pronged approach to address each category. I first establish some context by outlining the central tenets of ecofeminist theory in the particular area I am looking at. I then point out some issues that I find problematic. Finally, using these problems as sites of exploration, I discuss some insights that they lead to as is pertinent to the topic of domination.

My methodological approach involves reviewing the ecofeminist discourse of domination in search of patterns. I am looking for the common thread that makes domination...domination, regardless of its specific manifestation(s). At the outset, however, I was not sure what I would find.

Throughout this work I include a substantial amount of first-person narrative. This element of my methodology has two explicit purposes: to situate myself in the material and to expose my approach to it. Feminist methodologies typically involve a notion of intersubjectivity, which describes the researcher as embedded in the research and not a separate objective observer (Hale 125). Ecofeminist methodologies draw on the notions of relationality and uncertainty, and first-person narrative provides a forum for improvisational exploration of the web of relationships between and within the material in question and me. Dualistic approaches to reasoning are a cognitive inheritance that are not easily relinquished, so to present arguments that challenge this history, first-person narrative provides a way to show the function of rational thought—be it dualistic or otherwise. As Cuomo writes:

Theorists interested in creating ecological feminist philosophies must allow a variety of forms of experience and insight to inform our theories. We may consider our theoretical projects as more collaborative efforts, and include our practical knowledge in our accounts and analyses. An incorporation of our own narratives can continue to enrich ecological feminist ethical theory by emphasizing the ties between ethical decision-making, ab-



stract ethical concepts, and personal experience. (*Communities*  
148)

In short, first-person narrative allows me to make transparent the reasons why I ask the questions I do and how I try to answer them.

The method whereby I go back and forth between theory and personal narrative was devised during a graduate methodologies class. While I cannot say that it stems from any specific precedent, in retrospect, there are a couple of models that I have turned to in order to reinforce the narrative methodology. In her book, *Am I a Women?*, Cynthia Eller draws on her own day to day life to explore the contradictions and tensions between the theoretical claims of feminism, particularly in relation to concepts of gender. Her daily activities place her at various theoretical positions, which are often not coherent with her ideals. Her life becomes the mediator between what she does and how she thinks. To the extent that I turn to events in my day-to-day life to explore ecofeminist theory and my connection to it, Eller serves as somewhat of an example. The actual writing style, whereby I switch between overt theory and inward thought, was again derived at without reference to a specific model. That being said, I later came across the work of Maria Lugones, which becomes prevalent in this thesis. In her book *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, Lugones also moves between the two spheres of theory and thought in a way similar to myself. Lugones uses the term “levels” to describe her different types of writing, and she uses these levels strategically to move the reader through experiences of uncertainty in order to foster an openness to new ideas and perspectives (26).

*To begin with, my investment in the issue of domination reaches back to my childhood, and my personal narrative begins here:*

*“Just as I am without one plea.” As the song rings in the ears, my body begins to tremble slightly, and a faint tear threatens my composure. The strong visceral reaction is not exaggerated nor contrived, but as I sit in awareness of this reaction, the meaning(s) of the words themselves fall away.*

*For some reason, which may or may not be relevant, I can remember very little of my childhood. I remember very little of the nine siblings that came before me, and I remember very little of the house that was seemingly always filled with people. What I do remember is the very large old piano that occupied a substantial portion of the living-room. I remember the shiny burgundy tint (I learned the name of the color much later) of the engraved vines that stretched from one corner of the backboard over the top and to the opposite corner. I recall trying to reach the vine leaves from chair that was always too low. I recall the blotches of reddish orange (varnish, I now know) that dotted the middle “C” (as I came to know its name), and I do not recall wondering how the blotches got there. The question never entered my mind. All I knew was that they were, that it was, *The Piano*.*

*“Just as I am, without one plea.” Sunday nights, after *The Gospel Meeting*, was usually *Hymn Sing*. *The Gospel Meeting* is the regular Sunday evening service that is geared toward bringing lost souls to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. The format is so routine that it is almost a science. Virtually always held in *The Gospel Hall* (the name of the church), it starts at 7:00pm with the singing of two to three hymns followed by the preaching of a sermon by a *Preacher*, followed by usually one or two versus of another hymn, followed by another sermon preached by a *Preacher*. No musical instruments are allowed in the *Gospel Hall* (as instruments were not specifically in-*

*cluded in Paul's doctrine to The Church), but the hymn sing is held in someone's home, and very often it was my home. It was here that The Piano was central to activity, and it was here that I learned the hymns of the Christian faith. It was here that I learned, physically, emotionally and rationally that I was, "Just as I am, without one plea."*

*"The Gospel Message is so simple, even a child can understand it," The Preacher says, and He is right. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," The Bible says (KJV Romans 3:23). "As it is written, there is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God..." The Bible says (Romans 3:10-11). Furthermore, there is nothing you can do about it. "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast," The Bible says (Ephesians 2:8-9) "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy..." The Bible says (Titus 3:5).*

*"Just as I am, without one plea" Do what you will, but you are worthless. Intertwined in worthlessness is much fear. How many nights did I wake feeling alone and scared? What must I do to be saved? Nothing on your own, just believe, just believe. What if it doesn't make sense? Just believe, just believe. What if I don't?.... "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. (Mark 16:16). Just believe, Just believe.*

### **Chapter 3 - Domination as a Product of Progress**

The death of nature,<sup>vi</sup> along with constituting the title of Carloyn Merchant's foundational text on ecofeminism, is heralded as a pivotal historical event that accounts for the widespread ecological degradation throughout the world (24; Shiva, *Staying Alive* 17). That this degradation is visited in a disproportionate manner upon traditionally othered (women, children and non-white, for example, see page 3) members of the global population is the more specific realm of environmental ethics, and that women constitute the majority of the traditionally othered members of the global population is a specific concern of ecofeminism. In this account, as I will explain further in this chapter, domination is seen as a two-pronged oppression of both women and nature that resulted from the Industrial and Scientific Revolution and the proliferation of associated perspectives (Eisler 35; Shiva, *Staying Alive* 12). The description of domination as a product of progress contradicts overriding ecofeminist philosophies, which I will show in due course. These tensions, however, point to important elements in the concept of domination. To elucidate these elements, I outline the main claims and insights of ecofeminist theory in this area; I point out several contentious issues, and use these issues as points of exploration. As part of this exploration, I document my thinking in a narrative that exposes a connection between the macro theory (and/or theories) and some micro manifestations.

### **Some Context**

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Western world experienced radical epistemological shift: a change in philosophical and scientific inquiry (Shapin 18). Although the label of “The Scientific Revolution” is contested among scholars (4), this time of change introduced a number of ideas and assumptions that remain prevalent in the present culture and impact on the natural (human and non-human) world (Shiva, “Reductionism” 22). The metaphor of the world as a machine as a structuring concept arose during this time, and it refers to the “predictable behavior of each part within a rationally determined system of laws, while power [is] derived from active and immediate intervention in a secularized world” (Merchant, *Death of Nature*, 193). Furthermore, the combination of order and control both constitutes and influences power (193). This conceptualization renders the identity of nature as ‘dead’ and seemingly incapable of self-governance, and is thus immune to deprecation by humans. As well, inasmuch as the world is viewed as a non-living ‘machine,’ the manipulator or the inventor holds supremacy, and thus has power over the ‘machine.’ This form of reductionist science (reductionist because it views an entity from the perspective of its parts) has been detrimental to nature because by reducing living entities to discrete parts it diminishes the power and potential of operating as a whole. Reductionism, however, has not always been this prevalent.

Prior to the machine metaphor, the universe was considered as “organic, living, and spiritual,” a way of thinking introduced and maintained by Christianity and Aristotelian philosophy (Capra, *Turning Point* 53); however, the drive of ‘progress’ introduced

some ideas that undermined the predominant cosmology. There were several factors that converged to bring about this conceptual movement. One factor was the introduction of the Baconian inquiry method, which objectified nature as a female force to be managed and controlled (Merchant, *Reinventing* 81; Shiva, *Staying Alive* 15). Another contribution came from Descartes and the popularization of his philosophy that was built on the assumption of the existence of God and Truth, and moved to a split realm of mind and matter (Capra, *Web* 20). This train of thought is often extrapolated into the binary manifestation of self and ‘other’ (Capra, *Turning Point* 57-9). The separation of ‘self’ and ‘other’ not only sets humans apart from the very natural world but also apart from each other. It accentuates the notion of individuality and independence, which negates an assertion of ancient wisdom—the unity and interdependence of the universe (Spretnak 48). The isolation of the ‘self’ in the context of objectivity forms the basis of an aggressive and combative “ ‘modern’ civilization [that] is based on a cosmology and anthropology that structurally dichotomizes reality, and hierarchically opposes the two parts to each other; the one always considered superior, always thriving, and progressing at the expense of the other” (Mies and Shiva 5). The mechanistic perspective might be summed up as a divide-and-conquer perspective.

A significant element of the Scientific Revolution was the introduction of Newtonian physics. This development provided empirical tools for methodically manipulating and controlling the natural world and facilitated extraordinary inventions specifically geared to take advantage of its commodities (Prigogine and Stengers 37). These factors aided the establishment of the era in which the conception of the universe as a well-constructed clock became the dominant cultural symbol (Prigogine and Stengers 46).

The clockwork metaphor has several inherent assumptions. Implied is that the world is simple, deterministic, and understandable once it is dissected and examined. The concept of the 'well-constructed clock' implies that there is a supreme clockmaker (Prigogine and Stengers 46) with apparent immense wisdom who must have inscribed good reasoning for the predicaments of inhabitants within the spectrum of social classes. Within this narrative also lies the assumption of an external absolute truth. External empowerment prescribes a perspective of personal disempowerment for the individual parts and can render them as subject to the greater systemic good. The natural laws as posited by Newton were embedded into this metaphor; they were viewed as universal, eternal and objective to the practitioner (Prigogine 28;44;160;164). They were considered static and time-independent (Prigogine 2; Capra, *Web of Life* 184), and without question have fuelled industrial and technological evolution.

Immense "progress" resulted from the application of these laws, as evidenced by the technical explosion of the last century, which is to say that humanity now has a wide breadth of technology at its disposal. At the same time, scientists began to acknowledge that the laws were incomplete because they left out key concepts such as irreversibility,<sup>vii</sup> which is significant in regards to the creative processes of nature (Prigogine 62). The Western ideal of progress has led to widespread ecological degradation, which has consequently impoverished a vast number of societies who rely directly on the earth for sustenance (Shiva, "The Impoverishment of the Environment" 71). The United Nations places global poverty at surprising levels (United Nations Statistics), and while this fact might not be readily visible in the capital rich Western world, the global economic current connects societies in an unbalanced oscillation that often sees wealth in one country

come at the expense of another (Kerr and Sweetman 5). One of many possible examples is the familiar story of workers in poor countries paid low wages and working long hours for wealthy North American companies in order to produce goods that the companies then sell back to wealthier markets at astronomically inflated prices. An awareness of these connections and a return to a more relational perspective of the living world via a return to the organic web metaphor is a key objective of this stream of ecofeminist theory.

*As I sit here in front of my computer, reading and writing about the issues of domination, I realize that I know quite a bit about it. As I read Carolyn Merchant and Vandana Shiva, their critiques of the scientific paradigm strike a familiar chord in my being, and I don't have to struggle to grasp their meaning. Why is this? Do I possess some heightened intellect or reasoning skill? I don't think so, because it takes a while to pinpoint what is so familiar about their complaints. I know little about history, little about science and even less about philosophy, yet I recognize a familiar pattern....something I have seen before. Take this passage for example:*

There seems to be a deception inherent in divided and fragmented knowledge, which treat non-specialist knowledge as ignorance. I characterize modern, Western patriarchy's special epistemological tradition of the "scientific revolution" as 'reductionist' because: 1) it reduced the capacity of humans to know nature both by excluding other knowers and other ways of knowing; and 2) by manipulating it as inert and fragmented matter, nature's capacity for creative regeneration and renewal was



reduced. Reductionism has a set of distinctive characteristics which demarcates it from all other non-reductionist knowledge systems which it has subjugated and replaced. Primarily, the ontological and epistemological assumptions of reductionism are based on uniformity, perceiving all systems as comprising the same basic constituents, discrete, and atomistic, and assuming all basic processes to be mechanical. The mechanistic metaphors of reductionism have socially reconstituted nature and society. In contrast to the organic metaphors, in which concepts of order and power were based on interdependence and reciprocity, the metaphor of nature as a machine was based on the assumption of divisibility and manipulability. (Shiva, "Reductionism" 23)

*I am sitting in my room, and it is my room, my space, and I have the choice to either share it or not. I have a door that I can close or open at my leisure. My room is warm and cozy on a winter day. I have a table, chair, cushions, blankets, books, a computer, music and art supplies. I have the world at my fingertips and more available information than I could possibly process in a single lifetime. My room is furnished with all the necessary modern technology, yet as I read Shiva, I identify a problem. Shiva goes on to talk about severe hardships endured by women in less developed countries as a direct consequence of progress, but the technologies and resources, regardless of where they come from, are for me, now, a necessity. So why do I understand and empathize when I*

*hear her talk of hunger and the physical maladies which accompany this social machine?*

*I sit in my room, alone. I open the door, and I am still alone. I walk the street, go to the mall, meet a friend for coffee, and I am still alone. I have a family; my partner is busy with his work, my children are in their appropriate places—school, daycare—and I am alone. Later they will return, and their attention will largely be engaged with the technologies that inhabit our world, the television, the computer, even the toys which are bathed in recently invented colours will keep them pinned, cornered, separated. In the mechanistic world of which Shiva speaks, I am an individual, separate and distinct from all others. I am a part of the machine, insignificant on my own but essential for the functioning of the machine. My claims to life are realized in the dead machine. I do not feel good, I am hungry. I am reduced to having everything I need. I have a room of my own. So what is the problem? “Reductionist science is a source of violence against nature and women, in so far as it subjugates and dispossess them of their full productivity, power and potential” (Shiva, “Reductionism” 24). If I am a part of a machine, then I am some **thing**. A clockmaker made the clock, and presumably the pieces for the clock. So who made me?*

*Little lamb, who made thee?*

*Dost thou know who made thee,*

*Gave thee life, and bade thee feed*

*By the stream and o’er the mead;*

*Gave thee clothing of delight,*

*Softest clothing, woolly, bright;*

*Gave thee such a tender voice,  
 Making all the vales rejoice?  
 Little lamb, who made thee?  
 Dost thou know who made thee?<sup>viii</sup>*

*My life in many ways is structured around the notion that someone made me, knows what is best for me, controls my day-to-day life, and demands precision, and unmitigated attention.*

*Little lamb, I'll tell thee;  
 Little lamb, I'll tell thee:  
 He is called by thy name,  
 For He calls Himself a lamb,  
 He is meek, and He is mild,  
 He became a little child;  
 I a child, and thee a Lamb,  
 We are called by His Name.  
 Little lamb, God bless thee!  
 Little lamb, God bless thee!*

*I am not a watch to be tossed away like a useless stone. Who threw their watch away? Why?<sup>ix</sup> I am not a machine, I am a living entity, with flesh and blood and fears and foes. I was not made...I grew. “ I a child and thee a Lamb; We are called by His Name” I am not a watch—neither is the lamb.*

Key to understanding ecofeminist theories of domination is an understanding of embodiment. Simply put, the world, the universe, the cosmos, humanity are all made up of material entities—bodies—at least this is a key presupposition. “The material level is where dominations assume physical form, often embodied in specific institutions and their associated practice” (Cudworth 3). The mechanistic ordering of the intellectual world translates into institutions, practices and technologies that structure the material world in specific ways. These structures impact social and ecological environments and “are often experienced most directly and pertinently as effects on human bodies” (3). It is the body that fuses the biological and social construction into a stream of indistinguishable boundaries that spiral into some form of reality. This reality engenders a notion of progress in which the lands and seas from which the sustenance of life comes is laid to waste in the service of accumulation. For women in places where the social reality assigns them to the task of reproductive labour, this reality is often lived out in a myriad of ways: greater walking distances for food and water, or no food or clean water at all for examples.

*Well this is all very interesting, but what does this have to do with my body? I am separate from the “third world,” wherever that is. I am not there, why does this bother me? It doesn’t, truthfully. It doesn’t bother me at all, well perhaps a little. But I am too preoccupied with my own body in my own social/biological realm. In my room I sit, alone. Through the world I wander, alone. The same ideology that destroys the land in the name of progress furnishes me with my conveniences. And how is that played out on my body? I sit in the room of my own. I need not move too far. I have everything I need. Yet there stirs in me a discontent. It is not constant, but appears regularly. I dive into my*

*books, my TV and my Internet. I swivel my chair and draw curly cues on my notepad. My back is sore from sitting, and my head is sore from thinking. I want to talk about it. I run my hand across the grainy texture of my table, and I glance out the window. Perhaps Sartre is right, it probably all means nothing, but I desperately want it to mean something.*

*I feel hungry. Not for food, but for life. Thoughts and ideas bounce and banter in my mind, but why? I do not need to leave my space, except that I am drowning in my difference, in my details, in my uniqueness. I am hungry for life, other life, and although I can't say exactly why, I feel the urge to talk, to laugh, to be in and with the world. Yet we, myself and others, are busy in our own worlds with our own technologies, and we are busy with all the things we need. So my body stays put. My eyes are tired and my back is sore, but I open another book, write another line, watch another show. Where is the watchmaker now? Clearly I am in need of repair, maintenance, and He is no where to be found. Am I tossed away like a stone?*

*My eyes see the world of images from a place from where I need not move, and I engage a world of media and science to which I connect but am not connected. I am hungry, in my room with everything I need and from where I need not move. But I must eat. Yeah, see I **do** need to move after all. I get up, walk out, eat, but then what? There is nothing else I need. So I return to the work, in my room, with everything I need and from whence I need not move.*

*My mind is my body, and society my environment. My unsatisfied hunger for life and connection to the rest of the world entraps me in a world where my body is well fed, but docked to a grey melamine surface. I long for a place, a belonging, a connection,*

*and this longing traps me in despair. Depression enfolds me, and I open another book, write another line, watch another show. I draw on the need for food as a real excuse to leave my room, and I eat frequently. My body is big. I am at high risk for diabetes, heart disease, cancer and so on and so forth. But fear of death is not a factor. I live in the machine. Death is the new life. The Watchmaker is silent.*

The metaphor of the machine allows the world to be viewed as dead and inert and thus it permits its exploitation with little ethical consideration. This exploitation is exercised in a reductionist approach that categorizes the world in groups of separate, distinct parts readily extractable from the whole. Translated into a social context, this categorization of separation functions to isolate individuals, thus it slashes the relational bond between living entities. The slashing of this bond leads to death on multiple levels because life is constituted by other life. In other words, living entities require other living entities to live, whether it be socially, spiritually, and/or physically.

Bodies experience the deadening associated with the mechanistic metaphor. The effects on bodies vary according to geography, race, class, age, gender, sexuality and a myriad of possible factors. For example, in some contexts bodies may experience the mechanistic perspective in terms of exertion and hunger, among other things, and in other contexts bodies may experience it in terms of idleness and obesity. Each effect is different; probably some effects are worse than others. Although the effects are different, and it is important not to conflate them, they are connected.

### **Some Issues**

The problems associated with a mechanistic worldview make clear the imperative of a holistic perspective—at least some of the time. Regardless of other possible connotations of the term “holistic,” here it is meant to suggest a relational perspective that spans a broader terrain than can be covered in the details of difference. In other words, a holistic perspective is a perspective that sees patterns produced by differences from a vantage point that sees the world as an integrated whole. This perspective, however, is contingent on details and operates counter to the mechanistic ideals of separation and isolation. If we apply this perspective to ecofeminist arguments in which domination is characterized as a product, several images emerge that add a degree of dimension. What we see is that this stream of ecofeminist thought does not entirely reject the mechanistic worldview, and the impact of this insight is to inspire another look at this area of the theory and to question the ontological status of domination: perhaps domination is not just a product.

The key insights of ecofeminism that describe domination as a product of progress suggest that the ideology that underscores the social milieu of a mechanistic era is the same ideology that accounts for the oppression of women. Furthermore, the call to return to an organic perspective permeates the discussion, but this call to nature embraces the mechanistic paradigm to which ecofeminists object. As I outline this problem, I do not dismiss the critiques that ecofeminism makes because there is certainly a problem when the discontinuous atomistic metaphor functions to structure the social/material configuration of the world.

*Clearly, if I interrogate the work of these ecofeminist writers, I can see issues or patterns that make me question the overall theory. These questions seem to require a different way of looking. So, let me see if I can do this: My narrative is about how I am connected to an otherwise very abstract theory and how that theory is pertinent to my own life. So if I can see issues in the theory via a holistic (patterned) perspective that causes me to reconsider or reframe this theory, doesn't it make sense that I would, could, and/or should reconsider my own narrative? So what are the issues exactly, and how do they change the picture?*

Carolyn Merchant, in *The Death of Nature*, explains how the departure from the organic worldview in the Industrial and Scientific Revolution involved an adoption of the death metaphor for nature, thus setting the stage for its domination via exploitation of natural resources among other things. She writes: "As the sixteenth century organic cosmos was transformed into the seventeenth century mechanistic universe, its life and vitality were sacrificed for a world filled with dead and passive matter" (*Death of Nature* 105). Drawing on the new potential of mining and the emergence of new technologies, the death of nature furnished a philosophy from which "Bacon fashioned a new ethic sanctioning the exploitation of [Mother] nature" (164). In this explanation, a straight line is drawn from the organic worldview to the mechanistic worldview via technological revolution, suggesting that the domination of nature was caused by this development. This train of thought then leads to the question of what caused that development in the first place: the preceding organic worldview? As in the infamous account of the chicken and the egg, the eternal question remains: which came first? The answer to this question would merely lead to the inquiry as to the origin of that origin, and thus the infinite



string of linear causation meets no satisfactory conclusion. A linear causal relationship, as is evident in Merchant's account, espouses and depends on the same conceptual framework that is being rejected.

Merchant's account not only depends on a mechanistic framework to explain the problems, but also engages a mechanistic framework to suggest a means of "fixing" it. She writes that "a reassessment of the values and constraints historically associated with the organic world view may be essential for a viable future" (*Death of Nature* 289). In speaking of the laws of the physics (of which I am by no means an expert), one thing that separates the living world from the non-living world is the notion of irreversibility.<sup>x</sup> The Newtonian laws of physics suggests that causal relationships are bi-directional, meaning that if something causes something, then doing the opposite will return it to its original state. This law often works quite well in machines and has allowed for massive technological advances; however in the case of living organisms, such laws do not apply (Prigogine 62). Calling for a return to an organic worldview constitutes an inversion of the problem of domination and suggests an action similar to the oppressive acts being objected to. If domination was the predictable outcome of the proliferation of a mechanistic worldview that heralded the death of nature, would it take any lesser exercise of power to resurrect it? The operation would still be a "power-over" operation, but instead of the power of society over nature, the operation would be an exercise of the power of nature over society. The suggestion of a return to an organic worldview to reverse the damages done by the mechanistic worldview is to suggest a mechanical solution to an organic problem.

Comprehension and correction are not the only evidence that ecofeminism adopts the mechanistic paradigm to which it objects. Very often it seems domination in terms of patriarchy<sup>xi</sup> and colonization is detached from actual people. For example, Vandana Shiva writes, “The colonization of regenerative sources of the renewal of life is the ultimate ecological crisis: patriarchal science and technology, in the service of patriarchal capitalism, have torn apart cycles of regeneration, and forced them into linear flow of raw materials and commodities” (Shiva, “Reductionism” 33). In a statement such as this, one is left wondering who exactly the referents are. It is not surprising to find absent referents when domination is conceptualized as a product. A product conjures up the notion of an object, manufactured and produced that is separate and distinct from its producer. Thus when I read through the accounts of how patriarchy and colonization work to create oppression I am left wondering: who exactly is doing what? Who is Patriarchy, Colonization? This segment of the ecofeminist discourse does not answer this question, but it does point us in an important direction.

It seems to me that this cyclical array of reasoning is not a rejection of the mechanistic worldview *per se* (because if it did then it could not rely on linear reasoning to make the argument), but rather a rejection of the specific machine (the social model) it constructed. Domination as a product of progress is more about the social model revealed in a mechanistic worldview. This ‘machine,’ or social model, is described by Mies and Shiva as “maldevelopment” (10), and I will explore this more in the next segment of this chapter.

*I can't help but wonder that if the mechanistic worldview is not entirely rejected in ecofeminism, which it clearly is not, then there must be something in it that is good, or*

*useful or whatever. In other words, it can't be entirely bad. Can I extrapolate from this to suggest that my life or circumstances are not entirely bad? Would re-reading Shiva's work be helpful at this point? I can easily flip through her book Staying Alive and point out holes in her discussion, but would that help? I think I have established that there are holes to be found, and I do not want her extremely important criticisms to be dismissed or undercut. But how can I criticize the social mechanistic model without essentially throwing the whole thing out? How can I criticize the mechanistic model without being hypocritical? I have to re-read my own narrative.*

*I like my room. I like my machines and many days I like my life. I like to have a quiet place to think, read, write, watch TV and whatever. I like having everything I need. Yet, it is so easy to equate my life and world with death, with idleness, stagnation, decay.*

*In my room I am not always alone. I can talk with friends and family from all over the world. I have random conversations with strangers I will never meet, and I develop relationships with people I may never want to meet. There are different ways of seeing my room. Some days my room is a haven of rich creativity as I paint pictures, write papers and dream dreams. But does that mean that if I just change the way I look at my room that the problems are gone? I don't think so, because there are still times when I long to be around other people, real bodies, and my room is never obliging. So what is this social machine that hosts both good and bad and seems bent on keeping people apart? I am living amid a world of constructions, of things built and made. But where is the space where things grow? Develop? Change?...On their own. Like magic.*

*I guess that since I have more or less reached a conclusion (conclusion here is intended to mean a temporal resting place or platform and not necessarily something*

*concrete and complete) that it is the social machine or relational model at issue more so than the actual mechanistic worldview. I should probably interrogate this machine and ask how it this shapes the concept of domination.*

### **Some Insights**

A central issue of this stream of ecofeminist theory is a concern for connection between scientific/technological progress and its impact on both people and the earth. Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies have documented and theorized extensively as to how the proliferation of the mechanistic worldview plays out and is visible in material circumstances of traditionally othered members of the global population. These problems are the predictable results of the patriarchal social-organizing practices that Mies and Shiva discuss under the banner of “maldevelopment” (10).

Maldevelopment, according to Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, is the model of progress in which accumulation over and above the necessities of sustenance is the main objective. In this paradigm, value is placed on only those things that produce surplus, and anything that provides renewable goods is not considered valuable even though it may sustain life and life cycles. Because reproductive work only provides enough and not extra, it remains invisible, thus discredited and subject to exploitation (Shiva, *Staying Alive* 4-5).

The social model of maldevelopment encompasses several social institutions that are constituted by a common pattern of power distribution: patriarchy, colonization, and capitalism,<sup>xii</sup> and this model appears to be the “machine” that ecofeminism rejects. The patriarchal structure that constitutes a portion of maldevelopment is largely dependent

on the value of men over women, which is apparent at multiple levels of analysis: historical, symbolical, literal and material, as Merchant's *Death of Nature* demonstrates. Under this system, the reproductive work of both women and nature become invisible and diminished: "nature and women are turned into passive objects, to be used and exploited for the uncontrolled and uncontrollable desires of alienated man" (Mies and Shiva 6). This exploitation is of course yoked to the values of surplus.

The creation of wealth or capital is the obvious fuel of this problematic social machine (although the definition of "wealth" might itself pose a difficult challenge). 'Development' as capital accumulation and the commercialization of the economy for the generation of 'surplus' and profits thus involved the reproduction not merely of a particular form of creation of wealth, but also of the associated creation of poverty and dispossession" (1). In this social dualism of wealth and poverty, power is concentrated in the having and holding of some people over others, and the power differential is concentrated between rich and poor. Thus, from one perspective, it seems that capitalism constitutes a fundamental axis of domination.<sup>xiii</sup> The standard tactics of accumulation-based development inevitably involve some degree of violent appropriation of work and goods from both women and nature. The results of this patriarchal process are apparent in an increased difficulty in securing the basic necessities of life in less developed countries and an endorsement of global unsustainability. While it is likely not an appropriate move to conflate capitalism and patriarchy, it is easy to notice a strong overlapping correlation.

The function of patriarchal-capitalistic maldevelopment constitutes a third perspective: colonization. "Development was thus reduced to a continuation of the process of colonization; it became an extension of the project of wealth creation in modern west-

ern patriarchy's economic vision, which was based on the exploitation or exclusion of women (and of the West and non-West), on the exploitation and degradation of nature, and on the exploitation and erosion of other cultures" (Mies and Shiva 2). Via the proliferation of Western values of science and technology, local and Indigenous knowledges are routinely discredited and discarded in lieu of "expertise" (Shiva, "Reductionism" 24).

At this point, there are several issues that need to be addressed in the interest of feminism in general. The mountain of discussion in the various arenas of feminism have made it clear that race, class and gender differentially locate people in domitory social relationships. These differences cannot and should not be conflated because inevitably someone will be excluded and/or marginalized. As well, race, class and gender are not necessarily sufficient categories for analyses of oppression: one might also consider sexuality, physical abilities or geographical location, for example. I do not argue or dispute these insights; however, for the purposes of this investigation, I am looking for a commonality in diverse perspectives of domination.

There are several things that patriarchy, capitalism, and colonization have in common. They are all relationships that involve an extensive power differential predicated on some formation of the concept of "having" and "not-having." Patriarchy involves, among other things, the social power of men over women under the guise of women lacking in intellectual capacities and rational vigour (Lloyd 150)<sup>xiv</sup>; capitalism entails power of rich over poor in which the poor lack the material surplus or capital, and colonization entails power of white/Western over non-white/Western in which the non Western white person is seen to lack myriad elements that are cumulatively considered

to constitute civilization—Western-type knowledge arguably being the most prominent. From the ecofeminist discourse in which domination is conceptualized as a product of progress, we can carry forward the notion that domination involves a relational power-differential contingent on some perception of lack exploited for the purpose of accumulation.

*Ok, now let me see, how does being alone in my room connect to patriarchy, capitalism, or colonization? The mechanistic worldview has to some extent created the possibility of an isolated existence, and a dead-like sense of life. I have everything in my room that I need, but everything that I need is tethered to the capitalist system. My technology needs regular updates, my entertainment needs constant renewal, even my intellectual/artistic pursuits require a steady supply of goods and services, and I am connected to other people via the forum of the market. My interactions are mediated by what I do and do not have. My very existence depends on my engagement with the market(s).*

*As a woman, the extent of my “haves” and “have-nots” are amplified in regards to my participation in capitalism. Success of participation is tied to appearances: the “better” the appearance, the greater the odds of increased engagement (I don’t really know if this is true or not but this is certainly a familiar message). All around me I am hammered with messages to “love the skin you’re in”—by buying some cream; “lose 10 pounds in 10 days”—by buying these pills; “take control of your future”—by shaving your legs with high tech multi-layered razors. I am constantly reminded how much I lack: cleanliness—buy soap; beauty—buy cosmetics; connection—buy a new phone; prestige—buy a new car, and the list goes on and on. But if I was a clock, these deci-*

*sions would not be made by myself. The One who knows would make those decisions for me. But the ads are not targeted at Him. They are at me.*

*I cannot think of a single social institution in which I can engage that does not depend on a perception of lack. The university depends on me as having a lack of knowledge, the government depends on me having a lack law and order, and the church depends on my having lack of salvation. Yet, I can't help but wonder if all of these structures can be classed as domination? Are all instances of extreme power differential in combination with perceptions of lack instances of domination? What about when I deal with my children? Very often I exercise power-over in dealing with them because I perceive them has having a lack of judgment—I admit it, I **do** make them eat their vegetables. What about criminals, is it domination when we as a society exercise power-over by locking them up? We perceive them has having a lack of self-control, or a lack of morals, or something. We become the watchmaker, deciding what others need. Perhaps some domination is justified, or not all power-over instances are domination; either way, there is more to this issue.*

In the next chapter I discuss a segment of ecofeminist theory in which domination is described as a way of thinking.



## **Chapter 4 - Domination as a Way of Thinking**

A mechanistic worldview is attributable to a particular conceptual process that divides the world into competing adversaries, say some ecofeminist thinkers (Plumwood 41, Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophies* 46). In this chapter I highlight some of the major claims and insights of ecofeminist theory in which domination is characterized as a way of thinking. I then problematize several issues and follow the trail to whatever insights they provide.

### **Some Context**

A mechanistic worldview is facilitated by a conceptual process that dissects the world into opposing parts, or value dualisms, as Karen Warren describes them (*Ecofeminist Philosophies* 46). Dualisms are distinct sets of idea pairs where each member of the pair is constructed as an opposite, separate and distinct entity. Dualisms constitute the concrete basis of classical reasoning in that they formulate absolutes for which no objection can be grounded. White is white and is not black. Sociologically speaking, dualisms are not typically as simple as the presence or absence of light and often include a high degree of abstraction as in the oft-cited cases of nature/culture, mind/body, and male/female. Dualisms are ubiquitous epistemological elements and are thus difficult to label as specifically problematic on their own.

Dualisms need to be considered contextually in order to see how they constitute oppression. In the conceptualization of domination as a way of thinking, value hierarchies, which are the conceptual placement of ideas into an up-down arrangement, play a

pivotal role (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophies* 48). The value dispersion in these hierarchies sees the upper portions as the more desirable position while simultaneously discrediting the bottom. While it is not difficult to anticipate problems that might arise from this arrangement, value hierarchies, even when undesirable, do not necessarily constitute oppression, and like value dualisms, are only one element of what Warren calls “the logic of domination” (48).

The logic of domination is the culmination of value dualisms and value hierarchies in an oppressive conceptual framework. Consisting of values, beliefs, attitudes and assumptions, conceptual frameworks become oppressive when any or all of these elements commit, contribute, sustain or reproduce ideas that support social inequities (Warren, “The Power and Promise” 23). As Warren explains: “The problem is not simply *that* value-hierarchical thinking and value-dualisms are used, but *the way* in which each has been used *in oppressive conceptual frameworks* to establish inferiority and to justify subordination” (21). The proliferation of this logic is evident in normative social-organizing practices and resulting social institutions.

Val Plumwood describes the logic of domination in terms of a master/slave narrative passed down from the musings of Plato and reproduced in numerous variations to the present era. Plumwood writes; “a dualism...results from a certain kind of denied dependency on a subordinated other. This relationship of denied dependency determines a certain kind of logical structure in which the denial and the relation of domination/subordination shape the identity of both the relata” (41). In this description, dualistic structures of domination are notions that are so focused on one point that the contingency is invisible. The simplest example is perhaps the notion that black is black and

white is white and black negates all instances of white and vice versa; however, each relies on the other for meaning. In other words, one cannot know black without knowing (perhaps tacitly) white. This way of thinking becomes problematic when one element of the dichotomy is pitted against the other rather than understood as sharing a relational meaning.

Plumwood outlines a series of specific characteristics that both make and result from dualistic thinking. These characteristics include: backgrounding or denying conceptual contingency by devaluing or minimalizing those persons or ideas associated with the lower strata of the hierarchy (48); radical exclusion, which is the notion that difference must include absolute separation (49); incorporation, which means to include the other in a relationship that defines the lower members in terms of lack (52); instrumentalism or objectification (53); and homogenization (53). These characteristics are woven together in an intricate practice of oppression:

A dualism is more than a relation of dichotomy, difference, or non-identity, and more than a simple hierarchical relationship. In dualistic construction, as in hierarchy, the qualities (actual or supposed), the culture, the values and the areas of life associated with the dualised other are systematically and pervasively constructed and depicted as contingent and shifting. But once the process of domination forms culture and constructs identity, the inferiorised group (unless it can marshal cultural resources for resistance) must internalize this inferiorisation in its identity and collude in this low valuation, honouring the values of center,

which form the dominant social values. As Albert Memmi puts it, “colonization creates the colonized just as it...creates the coloniser’ (Memmi 1965: 91 as cited by Plumwood). A dualism is an intense, established and developed cultural expression of such a hierarchical relationship, constructing central cultural concepts and identities so as to make equality and mutuality literally unthinkable. (47-8)

In this conceptual practice, dualisms function as mediators between the cultural and material world by facilitating a reasoning process by which technologies and other material arrangements are developed and dispersed to accommodate an unequal distribution of wealth (42).

*At this point, I am myself wondering what I am talking about. I guess in many ways the old metaphor of life as a play comes to mind. Each person has a role, be it a worker, a boss, consumer, producer, or whatever, but the hierarchal arrangement of people seems so normal. The master/slave narrative revolves around some sort of economic community, which is in play more for the sake of accumulation and power than to meet the various needs of communities and individual community members. Our whole society is organized in terms of the boss at the top and the worker at the bottom, but for what purpose? Perhaps it the President at the top and the people at the bottom. Sometimes I feel that I am the Mother at the top and the kids at the bottom. When I look around me, when I look at the relationships around me, I tend to want to place others in*

*'correct' hierarchical position: "Is that person worth more or less than me," I ask in order to decide how to present myself.*

*The master/slave narrative that I used to use to assess hierarchical placement in a relationships is a story in which I was never actually labeled as the slave. I was born a sinner, void of any goodness, utterly evil and worthless. Surrender was my only hope.*

*Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!*

*Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.*

*Mold me and make me after Thy will,*

*While I am waiting, yielded and still<sup>v</sup>*

*I am nauseous. Who is raping my mind? Who has seduced my will? What does He want? He is the Potter and I am the clay...not quite a clock...but something completely useless without some major external intervention—a slave to some form of validation.*

*As I learned to sing and play "Just as I am without one plea," and other hymns of the Christian faith, I learned that I did not exist outside the umbrella of The Church. So the story I am about to tell, should come as no surprise. I am not going to tell you about horrors and oppression of the non-existence of "I" because I did not know them as horrors and oppression. I did not assume any oppression from the doctrine that says: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak: but they are commanded to be under obedience," (1 Corinthians 14:34), or "let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but is to be in silence," (1 Timothy 2:11-12). I did not assume any oppression in the doctrine that says: "For if the woman be not covered, let her*

*also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered” (1 Corinthians 11:6). I did not presume oppression when I watched wayward constituents being disciplined for disobedience to God’s word (lusts of the flesh was the typical accusation). The Woman’s discipline was to be literally escorted from the (literal) circle of fellowship and the Man’s discipline was to be prohibited to speak. None of these symbolized anything oppressive to me. “All to Jesus I Surrender, All to Him I freely give.”<sup>xvi</sup>*

*But of course, it was not an option: you ‘freely’ choose to surrender to Him (The Church) or be faced with the prospect of eternal damnation among an assortment of literal, material ramifications. But, once accepted, I am filled with the Holy Spirit. And now, I too have some social capital. In this narrative, I manage relationships of those around me judging, assessing, their level of worth in comparison to mine. Are they believers? Are they non-believers? Do they live according to God’s word? The judgments were easy to make, do they believe or not believe? Do they live ‘good’ lives or ‘evil’ lives? Do they talk ‘correctly’ or ‘wrongly’? When one thinks dualistically, judgments are often quite easy. I see validation from this place in the hierarchy—the web. But do I steal if from elsewhere?*

*From whence cometh my value?*

*Can it be that domination is located at this seemingly mundane level? Is domination the point at which I construct hierarchical perceptions (a judgment) of my relationships to the people around me? Perhaps I should head back to my room, shut the door, write another line, watch another show, and draw curly cues on my desk.*

One commonality between domination as a way of thinking and domination as a product of progress is their contingency on the pursuit of accumulation. “They [dualisms] are formed by power and correspond to stages of accumulation; any account of their development would also be an account of the development of institutionalized power” (43). Accumulation is predicated on a foundational interest in “having” and “have-notting” (a non-technical term that I use to refer to the dualistic counterpart of “having”) that seems to permeate cognition. In the earlier part of the discussion, however, having and have-notting were represented more materially in terms of actual physical configurations of people and objects whereas here the having and have-notting are represented as cognitive and cultural processes. For example, children are often deemed as *not having* a reliable moral compass or reasoning capabilities, and women are often deemed as *having* pervasive intuitiveness and *lacking* abilities in sophisticated logic. These perceptions have translated into such cultural practices as disciplining children and gender-segregated workplaces—women in domestic jobs and men in public office, for one example. Notions of ownership—have and have-notting—work in tandem with each other such that those persons considered to lack cognitively tend to be relegated to the social spectrums that also lack materially.

The logic of domination relies on an understanding of external (typically instrumental) value. By external value I mean that those entities (goods/services/people and so on) or ideas that can be had (read: owned or possessed) are pursued presumably under the guise of increasing one’s own worth. Hence, one’s own value in the context of the logic of domination depends on one’s position in the hierarchically arranged dualism. For example, take the reason/nature dualism. If a person is said to *have* reason, one is

considered to be *above* nature, able to subjugate or harness nature for production, and thus she is more socially valuable (and likely male and White, as history demonstrates). So value is perceived to be externally rather than intrinsically located.

*I have thought this through before, in an earlier essay on ecofeminist theory.<sup>xvii</sup> It goes something like this:*

*Is life valuable? Put another way: Are you valuable? If the answer is 'yes,' then perhaps all I need to show is that an individual life is dependent on the whole of life and vice versa in order to inspire the valuing of all life (if this demonstration is even necessary). If the answer is 'no,' then perhaps I should take a different approach. Let me see..., we are alive and able to read/write this paper, which means that we have lived for some time and have fed ourselves at least enough to exist until today. Our food, in order to have sustained us, has come from some form of life; therefore, I/You have extracted a manifestation of value whether or not it is claimed (I am referring here to an instrumental type of value). Furthermore, the fact that we have perpetually fed **ourselves** manifests a self-value. Physicist and ecological scientist Fritjof Capra writes about the connection between ecological communities and human communities: "both are living systems that exhibit the same basic principles of organization.....the first of those principles is interdependent" (The Web of Life 297-8). David Suzuki has written several books to show explicitly the interconnection between and within systems. The Sacred Balance, for me, represents an amazing explanation of the connection and interdependence of all life. Based on this notion of interconnectedness and inter-dependency, attributing value to any form of life implies the attributing of value to all forms of life.*



*So now I work from the position that life is valuable. I have no way of making this into a logical argument to any greater degree. I am therefore forced to plead with readers to assume and assert their own experience of life as a foundation of value. On the foundation of personal experience, we are forced to assume a profoundly self-centred world, which entails the statement: "I am valuable."*

*I have to admit that this is one of the hardest statements to make. Every time I say these words I am filled with feelings of fraud. I am so full of shit. My life has been indoctrinated with a deep sense of self-loathing that permeates my being. The Judeo-Christian message of being born a sinner structures my unconscious mind: "Just as I am, Without one plea; But that Thy blood was shed for me; And that Thou bidst me come to Thee; Oh Lamb of God, I come, I come."*

*How can I begin to build relationships with people around me based on intrinsic value when I don't feel that sense of value in myself. I have practiced surrender for a long time; it's now second nature.*

*If domination is connected to the way we think, and when we think dualistically we make judgements of other people that determine the boundaries of our relationships, how does this relationship process change if we begin to practice self-intrinsic value? This seems to be a building block for non-domination based relationships. And if we can build relationships that are not domination based, maybe a whole society would emerge....The walls in my room are shaking, my imagination is running wild and free. I am dreaming of being valuable---not because of who I am, but because I am.*

For both Warren and Plumwood, narrative plays a significant role in addressing the problem of dualistic thinking that constitutes domination. Warren recommends the

use of first person narrative as a way to escape the trappings of dualisms. First person narrative as a way of thinking allows for the serious consideration of the relational aspects of both knowing and knowers while exposing attitudes, assumptions and values that contribute to oppressive conceptual frameworks (“The Power and Promise” 26). In this way, first person narrative allows for the emergence of an ethical sensibility that is in tune with, and thus appropriate for, the context from which it is derived and not extractable as an absolute to oppress others in different circumstances (26). First person narrative places self into the picture and absolves the knower of the eye-in-the-sky perspective. In a similar vein, Plumwood advocates the imagining of narratives to counter the master/slave trope that constitutes a western conceptual inheritance. These counter narratives, according to Plumwood, elucidate the relational make-up of life and “recognize and eject the master identity in culture, in ourselves, and in political and economic structures” (195). From an ecofeminist perspective, narratives that resist the Master narrative and its inherent oppressive dualistic nature are essentially narratives, stories, knowledges of survival.

*According to this stream of thought, domination comes from thinking in terms black and white, one’s position in a master/slave narrative, and the diminished value of self based on the lacking of something—something important, I guess. I know this story well:*

*The Master in my mind says that I am worth nothing, that I have nothing and that I am nothing. If I am nothing, do I even exist?*

*But I feel like I am here; I see something that looks like a world around me, I feel, I want, I hope, I breathe, I dream, I hear, I smell. Is it all just an illusion? The Mas-*

*ter in my mind says that I need something to be something, but striving seems to presuppose that I exist. Perhaps it is the need to strive that is the illusion.*

*“What does this spell Mommy, what does this spell...c-a-l-l-e-d?” my daughter asks.*

*“Called, it spells called,” I answer and return to grapple with my sense of value and the problem of my existence in dialogue with the Master in my mind.*

*I was born a sinner—all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Zondervan Parallel Bible, Romans 3:23). There is no confusion, and the boundaries are clear—The wages of sin is death (Zondervan Parallel Bible, Romans 6:2); those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved and will rise one day to live in the glory and presence of God...eternal bliss **up** in heaven. Those who refuse the call of the Lord will be banished to the burning fires of hell, **down** where there is no sun.*

*I no longer believe this story, but for some reason I am still a sinner. “Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ,” realistically, means to be an active and accepted member in the community of The Church and to be contributing regularly to its organization and structure<sup>xviii</sup>. God is the head of the church, Man is the head of Woman, and Woman is the head of Children (Zondervan Parallel Bible, Ephesians 5:22-3<sup>xix</sup>). Children are to be subject to women, women to men and men to God.. But who is God? Ah-ha. This structure is the Master in my mind. My brain says to strive for something to give me value... salvation. I no longer believe this story, but the structure doesn’t change. I need neurological intervention, a transplant—I need to be born again.*

*I can so easily see the problems of thinking dualistically. I know all too well the pain and suffering associated with thinking in terms of right/wrong, up/down, left/right,*

*heaven/hell, black/white. I know well the pain and suffering associated with hierarchies and being demeaned and discredited just for not being at the top. I know all too well the pain and suffering associated with demeaning and discrediting those below me in the hierarchy. I know what it is to seek for something to make me valuable—even when it means stealing it from others around me. It's all so normal.*

*This is no way to live. There must be another way. Looking for holes in the notion that domination as a way of thinking equates to looking for an escape route, a way to be born again. To be born not into sin, not even into salvation, but to be born just for the sake of being.*

### **Some Issues**

There are three issues that I will address in this section: anthropocentrism, bifurcated reasoning, and values. In each of these areas I will show that there is an inconsistency within the discourse, but that these inconsistencies lead to interesting insights.

Anthropocentrism generally refers to a human-centeredness that ascribes human values and experiences to the non-human world (Merriam-Webster Online, Cudworth 18). Deep ecology theorists label anthropocentrism as an ideology and major contributor to attitudes and practices that enable environmental exploitation, and this concern carries over into ecofeminist theory (Capra, *The Web* 7, Cudworth 17). Seeing the world in human terms obscures the view of the ecological elements as they are, demarcates humans from non-human nature and shields non-human nature from ethical considerations (Capra, *The Web* 7, Cudworth 18). Furthermore, the non-human world, by virtue of its non-humanness, has historically been viewed mainly in terms of its in-

strumental value for human ends (Cudworth 18). Reason seems to be the hallmark of humanity, and it is therefore not surprising that reasoning comes under the scrutiny of those who criticize anthropocentrism in social practices. It is this scrutiny that I find problematic.

Do the ways we think account for the material configuration of the world? What I mean is that if domination, as is implied by the phrase “the logic of domination,” is a concept that structures the material world in an undesirable way, the implication is that the way we think constitutes the constructed makeup of the world; thus, the founding premise of this argument is that humans (by virtue of their cognitive abilities) have power over the environment. This segment of ecofeminist theory constitutes an anthropocentric position to the extent that it negates the impact and agency of the environment in which such logic develops.

*If I think that my thoughts have the power to change the world, then do I take on responsibility for the world around me? If, however, I see my thoughts as derived from a specific circumstance with perhaps some degree influence in the present, then perhaps I take on the responsibility for myself that allows for the input of uncertainty.*

Furthermore, ecofeminist theory in this area maintains and reinforces a dichotomy between humans and all other(s), which runs contrary to its explicit intentions. The dichotomy is produced in the ontology of the dominatory relationship between humans and the environment. In other words, ecofeminist theory states that humans wrongfully exercise domination over non-human nature (with which women are often associated). This statement however grants a separate and distinct ontological status to humans and the non-human environment. Resistance to the domination of non-human nature relies

on an assumption that such separation actually exists. Thus, ecofeminism reproduces the assumption that humans have power over their environment (which invokes the contested dichotomy) in order to ground their theory.

The logic of domination as an anthropocentric theory leaves a few glaring gaps. It suggests that minds—cognitive functioning—are culpable in the domination relationship, but it does not explain why some minds come to dominate other minds. It constitutes a bit of a riddle: if what we think has so much power, can we just change our thinking to not think that our thinking is so powerful, or is our thinking beyond our control? Perhaps it would be beneficial to abandon thinking altogether, but of course this is not a practical solution. Perhaps *The Secret*<sup>xx</sup> is real, and we simply need to think ourselves out of dominitory<sup>xxi</sup> relationships. Furthermore, why does a dominator's perspective trump the perspective of the dominated? I mean why is the thinking of the dominated subsumed under the thinking of the dominator? What determines the victor? While Warren's analysis distills the mechanism of domination into an understandable and manageable thesis, it still does not explain tacit cognitive events that underlie this conceptual framework. Why do we think the way we do?

*To be completely honest, I am not convinced that anthropocentrism is as problematic as some theorists say. If I think about evolution, it seems that we are driven by the need for survival and so I can't help but think that our ways of knowing and doing have been successful, if not kind or pretty. Furthermore, I am not sure that it is possible to avoid an anthropocentric perspective. Am I to think like a tree? Who do I think I am that I should know or be able to know the experience of another, be it a tree or whatever? If things need to change, are they not again being driven by the evolutionary*

*process? Badgering us onwards to survival, to “be fruitful and multiply? (Zondervan Parallel Bible, Genesis :28)? I watch those shows; n(N)ature can be so ugly.*

*But what about the Master in my mind? What about the low self-esteem and pain and suffering that goes with it? I do think that things are changing, and every ounce of my experience and various interpretations thereof contribute to who I am today, and frankly, I like who I am, at least who I’ve become. Besides, like it or not, I am who I am. This is the new neurological structure, drawing on the past, plucking from the present to fuel the evolution of the future. There is no “born-again,” only a constant cycle of being and becoming.*

The principal ecofeminist complaint with cognitive processing concerns the tendencies to think dualistically, yet, on their own, dualisms—in terms of separating and differentiating—are integral to an articulation of diversity. Janet Biehl criticizes what she sees as an overemphasis on wholeness that tends to hide difference and writes that to collapse dualisms “is to unthinkingly dissolve all particularities and real boundaries between things that must ultimately be negated, assimilated, and transcended” (84). Furthermore, unless we reproduce the human/nature dichotomy, dualistic thinking is as “natural” as any other phenomena and cannot be disregarded outright.

Warren does say that the problems arise when dualisms are a part of an oppressive conceptual framework that hosts “a justification of subordination” (21), but oppressive conceptual frameworks are not sufficient explanations to warrant the abolishment of dualistic thinking. They are not sufficient because domination as a way of thinking does not explain which conceptual frameworks can be classified as dominitory. In other words, the logic of domination appears to be the same in both the master/slave narrative

and in a justice/criminal story, or perhaps a parent/child story. In the case of children or criminals (and I apologize for this parallel picture), it seems that “power-over” relations are justifiable in the interest of the safety of the child and the safety of society, and it is possible that neither would be considered as “domination” at all. Thus, some oppressive conceptual frameworks, defined by Warren as sets of attitudes, beliefs and values that enable relationships of domination and subordination (20) are themselves justifiable (or at least appear to be). Warren does make it clear that she is talking about “unjustifiable domination” (*Ecofeminist Philosophies* 48) as opposed to justifiable domination, which includes “healthy, morally permissible relationships” (48). What is unclear, however, is how such standards are determined.

The issue then seems to be one of values; which values account for the acceptance of some relationships of domination and subordination and the rejection of others? Thanks to much difficult work of feminists, for example, the domination of women by men is no longer as widely acceptable (one might argue), and a conceptual framework that propels such attitudes and behaviours constitutes domination. Such is not (typically) the case for criminals and children. It seems suspicious to me that social values permit oppressive conceptual frameworks, which involve persons that often inhabit the lower strata of social power being excluded from consideration under the category of domination. Ecofeminist theory, at least in this category, seems to have missed this correlation. Although intrinsic value is the stated position of ecofeminist theory, it is not clear how this translates into the practical world of social-organizing practices of which domination in its various configurations and connotations seems to play a prominent part.



*Once again, I disagree with this theory, yet I am not willing to let it go. I can and do see problems with the ways we think. I see problems when I allow my creative urges to overtake my thinking, and I make art or music instead of writing something logical and sensible. I get annoyed with an education system that teaches math and science ten hours a week and music and art only two. I do think that we as a human race are selfish and mean sometimes, especially to those outside our familiar social circles. But I still think that these are all elements of our “nature.” We are what we are.*

*We probably need to change, but I do think we are always changing whether we need to or not; it seems that change cannot be stopped. Sometimes I think that our rationality is a bit of a veneer over our other biological processes, including our unconscious—our second nature. Perhaps reasoning is merely a leisure activity for the sole purpose of entertainment. Whichever, I can see the problems that ecofeminism asserts, but I don’t see the answers.*

### **Some Insights**

As I have already stated, the conceptualization of domination as a way of thinking diminishes the impact and agency of the environment in which it develops, and therefore it seems that it would be helpful to draw on evolutionary insight. Evolutionary processes tend to enable the reproduction and development of phenomena that aid survival (Gould 234). Thus, ways of thinking, be they dominitory or otherwise, must have served some role in our present existence (from which we can now criticize those same processes). The maladaptive nature of hierarchal systems is perhaps no longer appropriate for the present social environment; thus new forms should emerge. I am uncertain

about the role of rationality in this evolution; however, it seems safe to say that it occupies but one element in the web of life. Part of the adaptive process might involve seeing the role of dualistic thinking in a different light. Janet Beihl, for example, writes that “the divisions between subject and object, good and evil, feeling and intellect... are indispensable phases (or ‘moments’) in the process of differentiation and the formation of more *complete*, richly articulated, and fully developed wholes” (129). This framing of dualistic thinking, to me, looks remarkably similar to the process of development in other natural systems. Let me explain.

Bifurcations in the development of living systems are critical points of differentiation at which newness appears (Capra, *The Web* 136). What this means is that as living entities develop, they proceed through a process or processes of interaction with their environment from which they draw resources and expel waste (which are in turn resources for other organisms). When this exchange reaches a critical mass, new forms emerge. This point of emergence is described as a bifurcation point, a point at which a single entity becomes plural—one becomes two, and a bifurcation, or perhaps dualism, is created (136). This point of newness appears as an apparent fork in the road, so to speak, as the system branches into different directions (136). The identification of the new is dependent on the differentiation from the old, and it is at this point that I want to suggest a correlation with the ways of thinking that ecofeminist theory critiques.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson theorize that conceptual processes are metaphorical, meaning that cognitive structures mimic experiences and interactions with the physical world (3). Typically, conceptualizations draw on concrete experiences, or experiences derived from interactions with the material world, which structure more ab-

stract ideas (5). A common example is LIFE IS A JOURNEY (8) in which the concept of life is characterized by systemic associations of a physical movement from point A to B including the notions of departure, arrival, destinations and so on (8). While I do not intend here to engage in an analysis of this theory, I find it sufficiently credible to suggest that it provides a basis for questioning why ways of thinking assume a dichotomous structure that according to ecofeminist theory, so often leads to problems. What 'natural' or material experience might this process be mimicking? Conceptual metaphors, or cognizing one thing in terms of another, is largely unconscious (3), and this is important because it exposes the weakness of the idea that human cognition is on its own so powerful by showing that it is shaped and energized by its situatedness in a much larger context.

I want to suggest that the dualistic nature of reasoning is metaphorically derived from the natural process of bifurcation. This idea is implied by Janet Biehl's criticism of the potential of ecofeminist theory to collapse the differentiation inherent in dualistic reasoning. She writes: "the human mind sometimes seems as if it were magnificently developed for understanding the order in the natural world. Just as the world is, at least in part, ordered in a certain way, the human mind is so organized as to be able to comprehend it at various levels of adequacy" (107). The significance of understanding the process of bifurcating in natural processes is to suggest that if we take up Lakoff and Johnson's argument that cognition is a process of abstraction based on embodied experiences, then the problematic cognitive events of value dualisms might be seen as conceptual metaphors of the bifurcating process. Thus the objective of eradicating dualistic thought might not only be unhelpful but potentially damaging to life processes in gen-

eral. Yet how are we to define domination if the way of thinking that is taken to be culpable for social injustice is also accountable for the creative processes of life?

The answer, at least in part, may lie in the location of values within social relationships. Both the master/slave narrative and the logic of domination rely on the pursuit of external value. As Warren notes, domination becomes justified “on the grounds of some alleged characteristic (e.g., rationality) which the dominant (e.g., men) have and the subordinate (e.g., women) lack” (*Power and the Promise*, 20). Thus it seems domination involves a pursuit of an external value: a commodity of some sort that would on one hand be in possession of the havers and absent in the have-notters. Intrinsic value, with which ecofeminist theory is typically aligned, ascribes value to what is just because it is. External value is contingent on the function or potential benefit of whatever or whoever is being assessed. Intrinsic value attaches a moral boundary around the immanence of the living world, which contradicts the death-of-nature metaphor. While both Plumwood and Warren recommend that social values be addressed, the significance of intrinsic value seems to take second place to the need for contextualization and a perception of connection—in other words, for a bigger story. Seeing intrinsic value in all things should draw questions about areas of social organizing that are lost in apparently ‘justified’ dominations, such as those apparent in practices around child-rearing (the term itself being problematic) and justice and legal issues.

In this area of ecofeminist discourse, there are several elements to be added to the definition of domination. Domination involves a dualistic way of thinking that resembles the bifurcating process of biological development, is environmentally grounded, and engages a pursuit of external value. I want to be clear that I am not claiming that

only these elements constitute a complete and concrete definition of domination, only that these elements seem to be an important part.

In the unpacking of the issues derived from domination as a way of thinking, the first item I encountered was the problem of anthropocentric notion of the power of human cognition—the way we think constitutes the material world. Yet, to reject the criticism of dualistic thinking would be to reject the very real material consequences with which it is associated. So on one hand I want to suggest that there is a world ‘out there,’ irrespective of how or what humans or any other species think. On the other hand, the whole notion of ecofeminism or any other environmentally oriented discourse is moot if we discard any influence of cognition on the material world. So where does that leave us?

*Ok, let me just think this through. The world is not made of human thought, but human thought affects what people do, thus it affects the material world. Yet, are we not also a product of this world? Are we not also a part of this world? Did we not evolve in response to the very conditions in which we now find ourselves? If domination is a way of thinking in value dualisms within oppressive conceptual frameworks, but the world is not made of these thoughts, then domination must not be located ‘out there’ but rather in here, with me. Great, the born-into-sin-scenario all over again.*

*But it’s easy to see an interesting thing going on...inside and out. Domination is an internal cognitive process of accruing external value; some sort of epistemic economy. Could the fundamental problem be that we see cognition, be it dualistic or otherwise, as basically external to ourselves? I mean, could it be that that we think of cogni-*

*tion as separate and distinct to the material or biological entity? I think that I will pursue this in the concluding chapter.*

From this chapter there are several elements to carry forward. Dualistic thinking can be problematic in terms of the issue of domination. Dualistic thinking may also embody a characterization of creative processes of living systems that are essential to life in general. It seems then that what is necessary for the issue of domination—to the extent that it can be affected—is a need for thinking both in terms of differentiation and contingency. In other words, perhaps we need to develop into more complex thinkers.

## **Chapter 5 - Domination as a Complex System of Interconnected Oppressions**

More recent ecofeminist theorists recognize that domination is not well explained by any single description and must be considered from a pluralistic perspective. In the work of Erika Cudworth for example, domination is explicitly defined as an intricate interrelation of oppressions at different sites of social interaction. In this chapter, I outline this concept of domination to explore the pertinent implications for this thesis. I also draw on complexity theory from a broader articulation to challenge its usage in ecofeminist discussion. I conclude by suggesting that if complexity theory is to be utilized as a theory for social change, then it must be engaged more fully than is the case with some current ecofeminist theorists.

### **Some Context**

Chris Cuomo identifies oppression as the core concern for both feminism and ecofeminism, and she draws on a wide spectrum of philosophical conventions to establish a pluralistic definition of oppression. Some of the key components include a basic idea that oppression is the state of being held down (32) which, more than pain and suffering, refers to a severe reduction in options, limited access to the necessities of life, including material and social resources, and immobilization (33). The difference between oppression and domination, though not specifically stated, seems to be that domination is the act of holding down and oppression is the act of being held.

Cuomo situates the definition of oppression in a relatively large context. She writes that definitions of oppression “are made more complex by the fact that multiple

systems of oppression coexist, intertwine, and overlap in societies and persons. The result is that an individual or group may experience itself as fully occupying dominant and subordinate identities” (33). The intricacy of oppression understood in this way leads Cuomo to posit an “ethic of flourishing” (62).

An ethic of flourishing, for Cuomo, involves granting full moral agency to all living entities and systems (63). Such a move involves a massive revolution of normative social values and consequential practices, which is a move that she sees as imperative. Cuomo suggests that such an ethical movement “should be *naturalistic*—grounded in...facts about people, societies, animals, and ecosystemic processes—but not [be] *teleological*—based on the assumption that there exists a determinate final end to which things and processes inevitably aim” (63). Such a foundation invokes the necessity for current or present well-being (63). Although Cuomo does not collapse the needs of different agents into a list of specific requirements, she does draw on a more general systems understanding of the living world to suggest a number of common necessities. These necessities include communities, self-directedness, and resource rich environments (73-77). Central to this ethic is a characterization of the living world as dynamic, adaptive, and acting in reciprocal relationship with the environment.

In *Developing Ecofeminist Theory: the Complexity of Difference* (2005), Erika Cudworth also argues for a multiple systems approach to describing domination. Drawing on the earlier work of Chris Cuomo, Cudworth writes: “I define domination as not merely pertaining to intra-human relations and formations...I see it as limiting life chances or...inhibiting the potential of an individual organism, group, micro or macro landscape, to ‘flourish’” (7). Cudworth conceives of domination as involving three lev-



els or degrees of formation: marginalization, exploitation, and oppression, which are all predicated on difference (7). Taken together, these levels constitute “anthroparchy” which is a term that Cudworth develops “to refer to a complex system of relations in which non-human living environment...is dominated by human beings as a species. This systematic conception involves structures, sets of relations of power and domination which operate to different degrees and have different forms, and are resultant from normative practice” (8). It is the coherence created between the various social/environmental structures that constitute domination as a complex system. Cudworth draws on complexity theory to ground the rather specific use of the concept of “system” upon which this definition of domination is based; therefore, I will provide a basic overview of complexity theory itself.

### **Some More Context: Complexity Theory**

Complexity theory is a rather broad area of scholarship that looks at emergent patterns of collective behaviour. Complexity theory looks at patterns that are produced by and/or are constitutive of dynamic systems; a system is a group of two or more agents whose interaction constitutes a whole (Complexity Made Simple). A complex system often involves many agents interacting in many different ways (Waldrop11) and this is frequently expressed structurally as a network (Barabasi 225). Complex systems are open, which means that they interact with their surroundings. These interactions are non-linear and are facilitated by the process of inputs and outputs. For example, a person (a biological complex system) needs to take in sustenance and oxygen to stay alive; in re-

turn the person outputs work and waste. Living systems are said to be adaptive because, within limits, they change in response to the environment while simultaneously changing the environment (Johnson 73).

The continuous process of interaction is performed via feedback and feedback loops, and the patterns that are created by the local interactions form a global structure and are referred to as 'emergent properties' (Johnson 19). These properties form a layered structure. For example, cells interact to form an organ, which constitute an emergent property of a network of cells; organs interact to form a body which is an emergent property of a network of organs; people interact to form communities which are an emergent property of a network of people, and so on. These properties, because they are a function of the interaction of multiple agents, cannot be seen from the examination of an individual agent; therefore, reductionism is not appropriate for understanding emergent properties.

A key element of complexity theory is context. Complex systems are organized from the bottom up which means that they develop as a result of local co-specifying interactions among individual agents (Davis 216). The term "self-organizing" is often used to describe this organizational process. The subject of collective properties is elusive, but as network expert Albert Laszlo Barabasi explains, in regards to the tendency of cohesion: "a subtle urge to synchronize is pervasive in nature" (45). The 'co-specifying' process is a result of feedback interactions between a system and its environment which consists of other systems. Some common examples of complex systems and their interactions are: "ants self-organize into ant hills, birds into flocks, and humans into various sorts of social collectives" (Davis 216).

To understand domination in terms of a complex system, it is necessary to highlight the elements of Cudworth's definition as it corresponds to the main elements of complexity theory.

### **Some More Context: Complexity Theory and Cudworth**

Complex systems are nested structures that require some degree of perceptual agility. Nested structures, such as in the organ-body-community example, are not hard and fast structures with distinct boundaries. Rather, they are loosely bounded structures that largely depend on an observer's perceptual focus moving further and further into abstraction relative to some original point of interest.

In Cudworth's definition, the nested structure of domination is focused on three specific levels of abstraction, the first of which is discourse (158). Here, discourse is conceptualized as ideas that materialize in social institutions and practices. Domination at this level involves the embedding of ideas of oppressive power relations, such as those ideas that constitute patriarchy or any other type of oppression, into day-to-day practices—social, economic, and political (158). In other words, discourse, as is articulated by Cudworth, is the level of thoughts, values, and norms that govern individual action. When the discourse involves thoughts, values, and norms that facilitate the oppression of one social faction by another, then the discourse is dominitory. From the interaction of multiple discourses, new patterns or structures emerge which then require a perceptual jump to a broader level of analysis.

Using the organ-body-community analogy of the nested aspect of complex systems, we can metaphorically map discourse to the “individual” level and structures to the “community” level. In this scenario, the structures are more stable and more enduring than the discourse level—for even though an individual/discourse may cease, the community/structure may continue. This is, of course, a loose and partial mapping, but the point is rather strong: “structures are deep-seated sets of institutional/organizational/procedural relations, which shape social life in important ways but do not determine it” (159). These structures are social units such as churches, states, or families that develop from specific discourses. To say that structures are more stable than discourse is not to say that they are static or unchanging; rather, they are dynamic and adaptive, which contributes to their overall endurance capacity. While structures result from the coherence of discourse patterns, structures themselves cohere into systems—which is another perceptual macro-movement.

Systems, according to Cudworth, entail seeing the sets of social structures derived from individual discourses that cohere into a specific theme (160). Patriarchy, for example, is a set of social structures that developed from ideas of the subordination of women into a set of social institutions and practices, or structures, that constrain women (Cudworth 79). “Development,” in this context, is a process of emergence whereby ideas and practices are repeatedly reinforced and reproduced by the environment and the system itself. One example of this constraint might be obstacles that diminish or prohibit women’s participation in political processes or familial norms that reduce a women’s ability to engage in the work force, thus enforcing various degrees of poverty. Other examples of complex systems include anthroparchy (the domination of humans over the

non-human environment), capitalism, and post-colonialism. These are interrelated and interpenetrated, not separate and distinct units but general themes with specific characterizations (161).

The form of complex systems is that of a web of interconnections and overlaps, which is how Cudworth describes domination, and this form is indicative of a specific process of formation and functioning. Complex systems are self-organizing, which is to say that they develop from the local interaction of individual agents or components. It is the local interactions of the individuals that constitute the community, and it is the local interactions of dominatory discourses that constitute dominatory structures that in turn constitute dominatory systems. “Systems have autonomy, and are self-organizing in the sense that their form and pattern (or structures and operation/behavior) is not imposed externally, but generated internally” (161). This process of self-organization requires regular interaction or a relationship between the individual units of the system, which means that individual units or agents must remain open to their environment (that in turn consists of other individuals or agents and systems).

Complex systems are both open and closed systems. They are open in that they regularly interact with their surroundings (which includes others) and closed in that this interaction facilitates a rather stable form (Capra , *The Web* 48). Similar to the way that the form of the human body is maintained by the exchange of energy and waste with the environment, so complex systems are both open and closed. In this state, the systems are highly dynamic, relying on the constant and regular interchange for sustenance and continued being.

The term “emergence” is often used in complexity theory to characterize the development of novelty and is generally used with reference to ‘natural’ or self-organizing phenomena as opposed to the constructed forms of human design (Capra, *The Web* 84). Because of this, “a complexity understanding of both systems and structures means that we can speak of social systems and their constitutive structures emerging at higher levels of complexity as they reflexively incorporate additional material, changing contexts and undergoing internal shifts” (161). Complexity in this light allows for a double-vision of sorts in which multiple levels of phenomena can be addressed simultaneously.

Complexity theory derives its history from the natural sciences and has at times been labelled as a major paradigm shift in scientific thought (Capra, *The Web* 5; Prigogine 31). The shift involves a move away from the linear approach of classic Newtonian physics to embrace non-linearity as a major constituting universal force. Within the Newtonian worldview, more weight is placed on elements of certainty, control, evenness, uniformity, and constancy (Prigogine 76). Complexity theory as a new paradigm redirects importance to diversity, openness, creativity, disorder, and dynamic fluctuations. Fritjof Capra extrapolates from complexity theory as a perspective to the utilization of a set of personal values that adopt an integrative perspective (*The Web* 10). These values include: conservation, cooperation, quality and partnership (10). These values, according to Capra, run counter to those associated with the Newtonian paradigm including the self-assertive values of expansion, competition, quantity and domination. Although it might not be helpful to completely embrace such a dichotomy-based characterization of science, complexity as a way of seeing seems to provide immense depth, and it challenges some rather well ingrained notions of absolutes and certainty.

*My first encounter with complexity theory was in the third year of my BA. I had returned to school as a mature student with two kids and was struggling with issues of locating myself in such a vast array of thoughts and ideas. Even though I am not sure why, I had reached a number of conclusions about truth and reality that often left me at odds with what seemed to be very normal intellectual approaches. I say that I “reached” a number of conclusions, but actually I think I let go of a number of beliefs and ideas that I had held for so long. I had spent hours and hours trying to manipulate concepts and ideas into ridiculous configurations in an attempt to achieve Truth, but every time I would reach a satisfactory conclusion, another perspective would come to mind and Truth would topple like a wind-swept house of cards. But the one notion that I never entertained was that perhaps there is no Truth.*

*I have lived for so long with the Master-in-my-mind. The notion of the ideal, the perfect, the clean, the pure, the absolute, the Truth and the Way. I can recall the adrenaline coursing through my body as I looked at that notion, lying there...perhaps there is no Truth. I poked it with my foot, scared to get too close. I looked over my shoulder...this is sacrilege, what if someone sees me? What if there really is a hell, what if my family disowns me, what if I don't know what to do with it, what if I pass it on to my kids? All these doubts flooded my mind, and my heart raced. But it looked so beautiful, lying there, a perfect fit. With my heart still pounding, and emotions so strong I could hardly stand, I bent over and scooped it up. Perhaps there is no Truth.*

*With this notion in my pocket, I changed the way I looked at things. I could look at it one way on one day and another way the next. I could move with my thoughts, allow them to take me to the craziest places, vibrant, changing, adapting, creating, challeng-*

*ing and destroying. I could look at the strongest truth claims and see their anchors to contingency. Unfortunately, the university, along with most social institutions I encountered, seems to see the anchors as firm and immutable foundations. I guess this is why I had experienced such conflict.*

*Complexity theory for me was a validation of an intellectual perspective that was furnishing me with such a rich expedition. It allowed me to acknowledge the Master-in-my-mind without being a slave to him. I could see how I can be here without being 'made,' 'assembled,' or 'baked.' The God the Father, Creator was never available to me; being a woman, I would never occupy the upper echelons of The Church, I would always be Woman of little intrinsic value. Complexity provides a new narrative—a story of being and becoming that never stops. It's a dream of eternal motion, a truly sacred imaginative. But even as I write and work on this thesis, it is difficult to challenge the authorities that set the status quo, even though it is perhaps here, at these levels, where adopting new and multiple perspectives may be an important key to social change, a signal to a new era of social evolution. Perhaps a new hymn:*

*Verse 1:*

*I picked myself up from under the rug and set her on the shelf  
round the windows the sun beamed down, through the trees she saw a clown  
made her laugh and made her cry, never stopped to wonder why  
she was sitting on a shelf*



*Of course, within traditional philosophical reasoning boundaries, the question arises, can it be true that there is no such thing as Truth? The answer is simple: yes and no.*

### **Some Issues**

Domination as a complex system makes sense for a number of reasons. That domination refers to sets of relationships between people and groups of people suggests the need to develop ways of describing and investigating group behaviour. Furthermore, groups—be they societies of any description—are in constant flux, and complexity theory is well poised to address such movements. My criticisms of its use in conjunction with concepts of domination are focused on what is in my opinion an underdeveloped engagement with the theory. To explain this, I focus on the issue of complicated versus complex, the rules of complex systems and hidden pitfalls of complexity theory.

In the literature on complexity science, upon which Cudworth draws, a rather sharp distinction is made between “complicated” and “complex;” it seems, however, that this distinction is somewhat lost in Cudworth’s definition of domination, and this loss crucially undercuts potential benefits of the multiple systems approach that she advocates. The difference between “complicated” and “complex” lies in the extent to which a system can be dissected and understood for the purposes of predictability and control. What I mean is that a complicated system, such as a furnace, or an automobile, can be systematically taken apart, and given enough time and ambition, it is possible to predict and control that system’s form and function. In complex systems, such is not the case.

This distinction recalls ecofeminist complaints of the mechanistic worldview that reduces the living organic world to “complex.” Cudworth loses this distinction by carefully dissecting and delineating the various elements of domination into a set of particular ideologies with the specific intention of understanding and altering society in some rather specific ways. Complexity is a more-than-the-sum-of-its-parts kind of theory, and therefore, what is of interest is that which emerges from the various parts working in tandem to one another and the surroundings.

Furthermore, complexity seems to require a great deal of reflexivity because complex systems are ambiguously bounded, and it is the observer(s) who must make the distinction between various levels. For example: where is the boundary between individual and a community? At what point is a community formed? Does this boundary even exist? Is there actually an individual and a community: are they two different things? These questions expose an epistemic orientation that underlies the construct of a complexity perspective and challenges the ontological status of separate systems. So to state that domination is a complex system is simultaneously a statement of what the observer(s) is as well. It should follow then that any ideas or attempts to modify social-organizing practices (when considered in terms of a complex system) are simultaneously an idea or an attempt to modify the observer(s) (perhaps one might say the “self”).

*This sounds remarkably dangerous territory for an academic paper, but it is an idea that is ancient. If I change the way I look at things, the things I look at change. First of all, I am not sure as to what extent free will or the ability to choose for oneself actually controls our behavior. That being said, I am going to move from an assumption that at least to some extent, we—meaning humans—have the capacity to make choices.*

*So to the extent that we can actually choose how we see the world, our perceptual practices govern what we take to be real or true.*

*So if domination is a complex system, and complex systems require a specific perceptual practice, then can domination be changed or eliminated by changing how we look? In other words, if I change, is society changed?*

*Of course this is metaphoric, and I am not suggesting that I can wield some kind of Superman laser eye and convert solid objects to dust. But clearly I can engage a variety of perspectives on a single issue that allows for a degree of uncertainty, which would in turn grant a degree of freedom to whatever it is that is subject to my gaze.*

*I think the biggest problem is, however, that even if we change the ways we look at the world, how can we predict what effect the change will have? I cannot see a way to guarantee something better, and furthermore, the ways we see are conditioned by what we look at, as I discussed in the previous chapter. So what then is this whole project for? And what is the difference between changing how we think as a way of changing the world?*

There is little question that in the goal of investigating the issue of domination lays a motive to make change. Complex systems are notoriously unpredictable; therefore, searches for means of prediction and control of a system negate its status of complex. Complex systems emerge from the autonomous interaction of individuals; thus complex systems are single units of multiple underlying activities. The need for a complexity perspective derives directly from the inability of our perceptual systems to represent and process the extensive and dense number of activities intrinsic to collective action. Once again it becomes evident that complexity is as much a function of human

cognition as it is of the actual state of the world “out there,” and modification then is as much internal as external and cannot espouse notions of prediction and control beyond a very superficial level. Rather, perhaps it suggests the need for a radical reinvention of epistemological and ontological norms, which I will explore further in a later section of this thesis.

*On the other hand, perhaps the need to predict and control is a valid and important human activity. Certainly I am not ready to part with the technological furnishings that have been developed under its practice. For the basic goal of survival even, the ability to predict and control, at least to some extent, is crucial. One needs to know that falling off a cliff will likely incur death, and if one cannot avoid cliffs, then building a fence is a good idea. I think that problems arise when a single vision occupies one’s perspective and excludes all other experiences. The postmodern world requires the ability to curdle epistemic and ontological norms such that contradictory notions can co-exist. What I am trying to say is that just because complexity theory is being used in an attempt to create social change, or in other words to facilitate a specific mode of prediction and control, doesn’t necessarily mean that complexity itself is completely negated. In other words, as long as we are aware, it’s a contradiction I can live with. I am thinking more and more that living is a matter of balance—some certainty and some uncertainty.*

*Back in my room, the Master-in-my-mind, The Church at my door, and my changes to make, I decide to be. I need not gather value from the world around me; I am value. I am sometimes alone; I am sometimes not. I sometimes plan my day, and sometimes it flops. Domination, in each way I have looked at it, is highly entrenched in fear.*

*Fear of being tossed away like a stone, fear of being rejected by the group, fear of hell, fear of others, fear of thinking, fear of silence. In the machine, the mechanistic, domination is fear of being split into sections, moulded and manipulated for a purpose, for what can be had. Domination as a way of thinking is fear of being wrong, fear of not being clear, fear of not being precise, fear of not having a rationale, fear of not making sense. Domination as a complex systems involves fear of uncertainty, fear of lack of control.*

*But there are ways around it. It seems to me that it is sometimes possible to find escape routes.*

*I remember the days of the Hymn Sing, when the members of my family were present, and The Church enclosed every space of my world. I know (“I believed,” I could say now), that I am nothing and worth-less, myself, but in The Church, as the first strain of music waffles in the air, I can close my eyes even now and tremble at the sheer bliss of existence. I can see the faces standing around in the circle, women singing the harmony parts, at first it was my mother, then my sisters, but quickly it became me that was playing The Piano. My talent at The Piano granted me a privileged position, and I became a bit of a star, so to speak. I remember singing at the top of my lungs: “JUST AS I AM WITHOUT ONE PLEA.” “I AM ALIVE,” the words could have been. For the duration of that hymn, and the ones that followed, I AM.*

*The bliss of “Just as I am” was a direct consequence of imposed silence and obedience and isolation and degradation during the rest of the week, which of course, I did not see as oppressive until later. As I got older and progressed through school, I became more and more aware of the possibility of there being life Out There. Furthermore, my place as a musician contradicted the doctrine of silence and subjection by al-*

*lowing me, a young female pianist, to virtually lead the congregation. This contradiction allowed me to see inherent weaknesses in the doctrine and The Church's umbrella began to spring leaks. In many ways, it was The Piano that was my saving grace.*

*To move beyond domination, however it is defined, whatever it means and however it's theorized, seems to be a move beyond fear.*

*New Hymn verse 2:*

*the strongest woman I ever knew,  
 lived deep within my soul  
 when she walked or talked or laughed  
 her words would turn the world to gold  
 and when she smiled the largest moons  
 would open up their eyes  
 and when she winked,  
 her eyebrows rose and grazed the sun-scorched sky.*

There is an element of complexity theory that is not covered in this area of ecofeminist theory. Complex systems develop from the local interaction of individual agents, and this interaction is often based on a set of simple rules (Wolfram 28). The question then is: how do we decipher these rules and what is the connection to the perceptual basis of complexity? In other words: what are the rules and how can they (assuming they actually can) illuminate new ways of knowing and doing that are not dominitory?

Even when or if the simple rules of domination can be ascertained, using complexity theory as a model for social change requires diligent and cautious consideration. Complex systems develop through the local interaction of individual agents; however, they are typically not egalitarian. Often discussed in terms of network theory, agents of complex systems are referred to as nodes, and the development of the network generally involves the super connectedness of only a few nodes in a vast network (Barbarasi 64). These highly connected individuals—called “hubs” in network theory (55)—are responsible both directly and indirectly for the growth and development of the system. So, if we use complexity theory as a model for social change, there is a high probability of the development of such powerful individuals. This might not be problematic if the individuals are morally conscious, but this scenario differs little from that of a potentially benevolent dictator. Furthermore, although complex systems demonstrate a high degree of stability, they are susceptible to a fairly simple demise: it takes only one blow to a highly connected individual to destroy the whole system. Awareness of these pitfalls seems to me to be a basic requirement of successfully engagement of complexity theory.

### **Some Insights**

In this area of ecofeminist theory, both Cudworth and Cuomo describe domination as a set of complex social systems, and although these systems differ in important and specific ways, the problem of domination—whatever it actually is—remains as a common element. So if domination is a complex system (or systems), and a complex system is as much a perceptual function as an actual state of the world, then domination must also be a perspective. In other words, if complexity is a way of looking at the

world, and if domination is defined as a complex system, the implication is that domination, at least to some extent, is a way of looking at social collectives. Yet again, domination correlates to one's own way of seeing the world that suggests a need for reflexivity and not just a critique on surrounding realities.

That domination correlates to a certain perspective is not to suggest that it is in some sense not 'real.' Cudworth employs the notion of "embodied materialism" to demonstrate the realities of domination. Embodied materialism refers to "the embedding of socio-economic practice in corporeality. Ecological impacts are often experienced most directly and pertinently as effects on human bodies, and ecofeminism acknowledges that our embeddedness within the 'environment' is derived from our embodied position as human animals" (3). It is clear that there is a causal connection between perspective and realities, but the gap between the two is largely unexplored in this discourse.

In the gap between perspective and realities lies action. In other words, the ways in which the world is conceptualized affects the types of actions in it. This is of course not such a linear process as this sentence implies, and in fact there is no doubt that behaviours or actions in turn affect perception, but it seems to me that regardless of the causal direction, the space between and around conceptualization and action needs much greater investigation if major social change is to be achieved.

*I am not so convinced, however, that domination can actually be eradicated. Perhaps domination is unavoidable. I am reminded of Kurt Vonnegut's Cat's Cradle where the protagonist exclaims that ridding the world of evil also entails ridding the world of good, and it is the tension between the two that accounts for the creation of all things. This seems to be the inevitable conclusion and makes the task of eradicating*



*domination somewhat pointless and arduous. Yet I cling to the hope of change, if for no other reason than its motivational effect on my own life. I can dream of living without fear.*

*New Hymn verse 3:*

*On the shelf is a different world, where everyday life seems so absurd*

*Joys and sorrows are all choice, and nagging demons have no voice*

*It's the only place to get a view, to smell the flowers and feel the dew*

*It's a wonderful place*

Knowing that complex systems tend to develop from the interaction of agents based on simple rules, it seems imperative to ask what these rules are in regards to social systems. The literature on complexity theory talks much about implementing simple rules and watching the resulting complex system, and computer simulation programs have demonstrated this phenomenon repeatedly. The Game of Life is a familiar example in which a computer places black and white dots onto a grid using a couple of rules regarding the number of neighbouring colours. As the program is executed, elaborate graphic formations appear in a rather stunning array of interesting patterns. When the rules are changed only slightly, another new and entirely different formation appears. But how can we look at complex systems in order to discover underlying developmental principles?

Perhaps the answer lies in a close examination of patterns in a broad open-minded approach. That the complexity literature speaks little of the determining of simple rules may reflect an almost ineffable process of seeing similarities. This approach

seems to require a move beyond the level of difference to an abstract dimension of relationships and constructing seemingly unjustifiable categories for comparison. For example, in attempting to explore the complexity of camouflage patterns in cuttlefish and cephalopods, biologist Roger Hanlon began by attempting to separate and categorize different patterns. This of course led to an extensive list of differing characterizations. After a great deal of time spent on the project, Hanlon began to see that from a relational perspective, there were only three categories of patterns: uniform colour, mottled patterns, and disruptive patterns (Chen; Zimmer). The simple rule is: from three possibilities, select a camouflage that best resembles the surroundings.

The question that arises then is how does this strategy apply to social systems? To answer this question would seem to require an entire alternate thesis; however, the point is that if complexity theory is to be employed in ecofeminist theory, this is an important question to ask. Feminist theories have long been concerned with difference: as an individual function in the construction of identity (Benhabib 109); or as a group construction of situation or standpoint (Collins 72); or as a marker of essentialism (Fuss xii); or as a process of social construction (Cudworth 72). No matter where in this discussion a particular feminist theory is situated, difference factors in. This difference is perhaps downplayed or overlooked by theories of abstraction and generalization, but a more effective way of navigating between them might be possible, even necessary. Perhaps there is a way that allows the simultaneous utilization of both that might challenge the epistemic and ontological norms that have appeared and reappeared as culprits in just about every facet of this exploration of domination.

*Every time I think of the simple rules of social domination, I cannot help but think of God's Plan of Salvation. There is an absolute realm, a holy place, a state of perfection. You **should** be a part of such a realm, but You are not fit for such a place. You are sinful, unholy and deserve death. There is a way for you reach perfection; simply do what I say. Accept the Master, surrender yourself to him, and live happily ever after.*

*This does not sound so different from soap commercials. There is a level of cleanliness, which you **should** but don't have. We can provide a way to achieve this state, simply submit to our products, buy in, and live cleanly ever after.*

*Maybe it's the university's mission statement: Knowledge and Knowing are supreme entities reserved for only the fairest of the fair. Thus you **should** partake in such activity, as this is the civilized thing to do, but You are only a lowly individual and simply cannot possibly be aware of such grandeur. There is a way for you to move up the epistemic ladder, just come here, buy our program and perhaps, if we find you to be acceptable, live knowingly ever after.*

*Of course it's never forever after. There are all sorts of enticements and barriers that prevent you from disengaging. You can't live dirty, the Church requires maintenance, and the university asks for results. Every time I grasp the provided Way, I seem to slip into some sort of commitment, some sort of bondage. Yet I accept the messages; I reach out, often 'freely.'*

*Are these the simple rules of complex domination? Establish and promote an ideal, devalue individuals to create a gap, offer a way to fill that gap, then enslave all participants by continually discouraging disengagement? I don't know. Maybe this will be my next thesis.*

*New Hymn, verse 4:*

*You can't love another till you love yourself*  
*You can't love yourself unless you're sitting on a shelf,*  
*dusted and well lit*  
*Treat her well,*  
*and she will love you back*  
*'Tis the only love you need*  
*To give or to receive<sup>xxii</sup>*

From this chapter, there are several elements of domination to carry forward. Domination is derived from ideas-in-practice that result in a complex system of social-organization in which power is distributed in a problematically unequal way. In that domination is a complex system, it is a learned (read: adapted or evolved) phenomenon that is dynamic and highly adaptable. In this case, change cannot be created because complex systems are self-organizing. However, individual agents can alter their environments, which in turn alters the environment of the entire system and can inspire the development of novelty in the system. The evaluation of the novelty is a human endeavour, subject to the faculties of reason. Since complexity is ubiquitous throughout the living world, and because it requires a substantial conceptual input from observers, deeming what is domination and what is not is a tricky business; however, the process of cognition (itself a complex system) needs to evolve such that it does not project domination

onto the world around it, thus forcing a dominitory social-organizing practices and behaviour.

Complexity theory offers both helpful and problematic elements for the problem of social change. Throughout this thesis, we have seen pieces of the problem of domination in various streams of the discourse, and it is my argument that individually each offers an important piece of the problem—but to effectively make change it is necessary to look at the pieces together from a more holistic perspective. Not only is it necessary to look more holistically (as I am not convinced that there is a ‘completely’ holistic perspective), but we must also challenge fundamental ways of seeing. What I mean is that there seems to be a need to broaden *what* we look at, and also *how* we look. In the next chapter, I review the problems of domination in ecofeminist discourse and explore the issue of knowing and being.

## **Chapter 6 - Knowing and Doing**

The loving eye does not make the object of perception into something edible, does not try to assimilate it, does not reduce it to the size of the seer's desire, fear and imagination, and hence does not have to simplify. It knows the complexity of the other as something which will forever present new things to be known. The science of the loving eye would favor The Complexity Theory of Truth and presuppose The Endless Interestingness of the Universe. ( Frye 76)

In this chapter, I review the concept of domination as conceptualized in ecofeminist theory, and explore some alternative ideas to the criticisms that I raised. I posit that even though there are problems in the three conceptualizations of domination I have outlined, taken together they describe the space in which domination constitutes problematic social relationships. This space houses seemingly inescapable contradictions and paradoxes, and it appears to me that normative ways of thinking that seek to eradicate such problems amounts to a Sisyphean project. I therefore explore Maria Lugones' concept of curdled logic and complex communication as an alternative conceptual space for challenging the fundamental habits of knowing and doing that permeate this discourse.

## **Review**

In this thesis I have looked at three ways in which domination is conceptualized in ecofeminist discourse: domination as a product of progress, domination as way of thinking, and domination as a complex system of oppressions. Though each category has its own set of problems, each offers an important insight into the topic of domination. The insights that they offer become more pertinent when they are viewed from an integrated perspective.

Early ecofeminist writers offered prolific criticism of the mechanistic worldview that subsumed organic ideology and practices. The central complaint was that the mechanistic worldview imposed a view of the non-human or 'natural' world as dead and inert, thus immune to ethical consideration and free for unrestrained exploitation. Women (and children, and non-white, and other others) have been typically included in the category of nature and therefore have suffered from the unethical behaviours that this worldview permits. The technological progress that has marked the recent past has come at the cost of immense ecological degradation, yet the view of the world as a non-living machine persists.

The problems of domination, as a product of progress, lie not so much with the criticism of the mechanistic worldview but with labelling the mechanistic worldview as a cause of domination. The essential problem is that this approach quickly falls prey to its own criticism: to suggest that the move from an organic perspective to a mechanistic perspective caused the domination with which it is associated is to infer a linear causality, which is itself mechanistic. Furthermore, redemptive strategies that suggest a return to an organic worldview imply an inverted power-over exercise similar to the one criti-

cized in the mechanistic paradigm. If the notions of cause and redemption are set aside, at least in this context, the criticism of the problems associated with “the death of nature” can be carried forward. The criticism from this conceptualization describes domination as that which is facilitated through the metaphor of death that enables a specific problematic model of social organization. This model involves reductionist notions predicated on the perception of lack for the purpose of surplus accumulation.

The next conceptualization of domination that I considered was domination as a way of thinking. The central thesis of this category is that domination is constituted in the dualistic methods of cognizing the world. More specifically, the problem is with value dualisms when they are arranged in a hierarchal way and in which being of greater value justifies subordination (Warren, “The Power and Promise” 22). Domination then is a process of power-over based on a location of values evidenced in (perhaps caused by) the way people think.

The problems of domination as a way of thinking are threefold. First of all, this conceptualization is anthropocentric because it implies that human thought constitutes the material world. In other words, the material world (actual situations in which domination occurs) is a product of human thought. While there is likely a degree of truth in this, discounted are other possible influences, including biological impulses such as impulses or instincts and influences of other living entities not subject to human cognition. Furthermore, values—both personal and social—are dynamic and not static, and this picture does not accommodate such dynamism. Finally, this perspective does not account for how particular thoughts become dominant. If human cognition is the source of domination, what determines whose thinking becomes the dominant? In other words, not



everyone's thinking, even though it is dualistic is implicated in "power-over" situations, so what determines whose do and whose do not? Added to the picture of domination then is dualistic thinking as a piece of the larger picture in which domination is an exercise of power-over another when the other is constituted in an uneven ontological split predicated on the pursuit of external value.

The third area I considered was domination as a complex system of oppression. In this area domination is characterized as a dynamic interplay between various discourses, institutions and systems that embody ideas and practices of exploitation, oppression and exclusion of othered social members. Complexity theory, a theory of the self-organizing characteristics of dynamic collectives that originated in the physical sciences, is drawn on to elucidate the properties of domination at various social sites. The objective of this perspective is to understand more thoroughly how complex systems work in order to make pro-social changes that take into account the embeddedness of human society in the natural or more-than-human world.

The problems with domination as a complex system largely reside in a diminished engagement with complexity theory. Complexity theory differentiates "complex" from "complicated" with the notion of prediction and control. Complex systems are resistant to prediction and control by the very nature of complexity—the locations of cause and effect are simply too vast. Therefore, using complexity to predict or control dominiatory social-organizing practices denigrates the system from complex to complicated (as prediction and control of complicated systems are possible even if it takes a long and meticulous dissection). Furthermore, complex systems are largely dependant on observation in that they are dependent on the observer's characterization of some phenomena as

“complex.” This implies that the definition of domination largely relies on how the situation is viewed and not necessarily on the actual material organization. As a self-organizing system, domination is a view of the emergence of oppression, marginalization and/or exclusion of any group based on the dynamic interactions of discourses (ideas-in-practice) (Cudworth 31) that culminate into institutions and systems that embody—sustain and reproduce—such practices.

Each area of ecofeminism that I have examined has a valuable contribution to make to the problem of domination. Though each has a unique perspective, the concern with social malady is common ground. The social malady with which ecofeminism is concerned is described as domination and although the conceptualizations vary, the commonality is that they each depend on a specific mode of human cognition—a worldview, an epistemic practice (the logic of domination), and an observational judgement.

Each of the categories that I discussed employed a normative epistemic practice (in that epistemic practices involve worldviews, logics, and observations). The mechanistic paradigm entailed the death metaphor for nature, but nature is not actually dead—at least not yet. That is a **perspective** or worldview that is adopted to accommodate a specific set of actions. Likewise, domination as a function of dualistic reasoning (the logic of domination) implies some degree of cognitive dysfunction or the need for some sort of cognitive adaptation—at least in the interest of pro-social change. Domination as a complex system blurs the line dramatically between the observer and the observed, and thus relies heavily on one’s conceptual orientation. Therefore, to the extent that being and thinking are intertwined, radical social change requires radical adaptation of cognitive functioning, normative epistemic practices, worldview articulation, or whatever it is

to be called. In other words, to the extent that domination is a function of how the world is perceived or how the mind works, or some such cognitive operation, change relies on radical modification of these faculties. Whether or not this is possible, or the extent to which this is possible, or whether or not this is actually desirable is a matter for another discussion; however, I find it helpful to assume that some degree of change is possible and desirable, even if it is only slight.

The remainder of this thesis will focus on two interconnected issues: curdled logic and complex communication, as possible alternative approaches to normative perceptual (epistemic) practices (by which I mean to refer to the afore-mentioned facets of cognitive functioning).

### **Curdled Logic**

*The conclusion that I have reached is that there are no conclusions, which means that there could be a conclusion, and there could not be a conclusion. Domination is both real and imaginary; it is instituted by the ways we think, and it also institutes the ways we think. It is both mechanic and organic, and it is neither; it is both simple and complex, and it is neither simple nor complex. Meaning, thought, and being are a vast chaos of possibility that borders on order, structure and form. In the thin space between the two, the tension of oppositions moves the world through stage after stage of infinite diversity and multiplicity. To see only one point, to look only for the straight and narrow, to cling to a single Truth, is to walk blindly past all that might be and is: Domination in all its splendour. But this is a truth, not Truth.*

Purity, for Maria Lugones, is a concept that describes a pervasive epistemic norm. “According to the logic of purity, the social world is both unified and fragmented, homogenous, hierarchically ordered” (“Purity” 463). In this logic lies a familiar world in which everything that is clear is true, correct, desirable, powerful, valuable, coherent and obvious. Clarity describes purity as absolute, thorough and unified. Literal and symbolic ideas of purity are so intertwined that it is difficult to make a distinction, and this interweaving hails from “a historical process of domination in which power and ideology are at all times changing into each other” (464). The problem of epistemic norms is that they demand purity and certainty, which subsumes diversity and maybes.

The logic of purity characterizes a world that ecofeminist theory critiques in each characterization of domination that I have discussed. Fragmentation under the logic of purity describes a worldview that demands the reduction of all things, living or otherwise “into pieces, parts that do not fit well together, parts taken for wholes, composite” (463). The assumption that underlies such a perspective is that the world is composed of basic units, fundamental parts, final causes, and absolute foundations. As a product of progress, a central complaint of ecofeminist theory centred on the mechanistic paradigm, which developed into a coherent worldview. Although “reductionism” is the term generally encountered in the ecofeminist theory, the term “fragmentation” might well be interchangeable in that whole beings are subsumed by a perspective that converts the multiplicity of living entities to single, unified foundational beings. Furthermore, this perspective is normative in that it is understood as the ‘natural’ state: “That’s the way it is, that’s the way it’s always been, and the way it always will be.” But such a perspective denies the living history of the world in which beings become, develop and change.

Such a perspective negates the dynamic adaptation and creative existence of beings who are irreducibly complex.

The logic of purity relies on a particular form of reasoning. This reasoning involves the breaking down of complex and multiple entities into fundamental parts such that only what is core, absolute, and necessary remains. All elements that are extraneous to the essence are disregarded as waste. This process of purification is achieved through a form of reasoning that involves “abstraction, categorization, from a particular vantage point” (464). Lugones labels this process as “an act of split separation...or to...exercise a split-separation imagination” (464). From domination as a way of thinking, the logic of purity describes the dichotomous approaches to reason that construct dualisms and places them into hierarchal configurations of up and down in which up is granted value and prestige—the purest position. The question that arises is this: how does one know what the core or fundamental or essence is—assuming there is one? And how can impure beings know their own impurity?

The logic of purity relies on the notion of correctness, but in order to achieve such a status, there must be a standard against which correctness can be measured. How does one know of a pure standard? Knowing purity requires a vantage point that “is not of this world, it is otherworldly, as ideal as its occupant, the ideal observer...himself pure, unified and simple so as to occupy the vantage point and perceive unity amid multiplicity” (465). Yet the ideal vantage point defeats its own rational standards because if the observer is constituted from anything of this world, then the observer is subject to the shortcomings with which it views others. If it is not constituted from anything of this world, then the result is a disembodied objectivity, which has no verifiable means of im-

plementing the standards in the material world. There are no natural laws that allow for the more-than-natural without a preceding assumption of such. In other words, unless a “god-trick” as Donna Haraway puts it, or “other-worldly vantage point” as Lugones puts it, is first assumed, then there is no natural basis for its existence. It quickly becomes apparent that the standards of rationality or purity are those set by people in privileged positions of power for the explicit purpose of exercising control. The mechanistic paradigm extrapolates this way of thinking, this mission of sorts, from the realm of levers and pulleys to people, social structures and other dimensions of the living world. As recent ecofeminists who describe domination as a complex system explain, the need for a more complexity-based approach to reasoning is imperative.

Yet, I do not advocate that purity be done away with entirely; epistemic norms are important and necessary. There is no turning back. The world is our history, and the ways in which it has been known contribute to how it is and who we are. Clarity is still an important quality for communication, growth and development. When I take my children to the hospital, I would prefer that the attendants are clear, sure and absolute about what they need to do and how they need to do it. I want my mechanics to be clear, sure and absolute about what my car needs to run safely. It is not yet time to relinquish epistemic norms entirely.

At the same time, is anything ever pure? There is very little certainty. The attendants at the hospital make an informed guess as to the appropriate actions to take, but there is no guarantee. So it seems to me that to the extent that epistemic norms exclude multiplicity and uncertainty as important elements of purity, domination is that “in which power and ideology are at all times changing into each other” (463). To challenge

and resist requires a “curdled logic” (459). What is needed is a way to have one’s cake and eat it too—so to speak.

Curdled logic implies an open view of the world that spans an expansive epistemic territory. “According to the logic of curdling, the social world is complex and heterogeneous and each person is multiple, nonfragmented, embodied” (463). Like a kaleidoscope of colours, ambiguity renders dichotomies powerless and calls focus to the worlds of dreams and imaginations. It validates contradiction and paradoxes as critical constructors of interest and complexities. Derived from the imagery of separating eggs for making mayonnaise, “curdled” describes the “yolky oil and oily yolk” of a failed separation. Lugones writes:

I think both of separation as curdling, an exercise in impurity, and of separation as splitting, an exercise in purity. I think of the attempt at control exercised by those who possess both power and the categorical eye and who attempt to split everything impure, breaking it down into pure elements (as in egg white and egg yolk) for the purposes of control. Control over creativity. And I think of something in the middle of either/or, something impure, something or someone mestizo, as both separated, curdled, and resisting in its curdled states. Mestizaje [the state of impurity] defies control through simultaneously asserting the impure, curdled multiple state and rejecting fragmentation into pure parts. In this play of assertion and rejection, the

mestiza is unclassifiable, unmanageable. She has no pure parts to be “had,” controlled. (460)

In this logic lies the possibility for reasoning in the classical sense with all its dichotomies, hierarchies and searches for absolutes and concretes; but it limits them to specific situations and conditions. For the issues of domination in ecofeminist discourse, curdled logic offers some helpful conceptual tools.

For domination as a product of progress, curdled logic produces a different view of parts. Entities are seen as consisting of multiple parts—identities, cultures, practices, experiences—that often work in contradiction to one another and feed on the tensions of ambiguity. The parts are not separable because it is what they produce together, what emerges from their interactions, that constitutes the entity. Lugones describes the logic of curdling as a “hybrid” imagination, and this description challenges the unity of worldviews that claim broad closed territories. It allows mechanistic reasoning to work well for machines and technology without stretching that conceptual canvas to cover entire cosmologies and smother the living world.

The metaphor of the machine contains by silent reference the assumption of a designer or a supreme intelligence, but curdled logic exposes the man behind the curtain. The God-at-the-top model of social organizing permeates the newly globalized world. In other words, the type of development that Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva label as “mal-development” (10) has rapidly spread, as is evident by the plethora of critical social commentary in various disciplines.<sup>xxiii</sup> Yet by viewing the multiplicities of the living, it becomes apparent that they cannot be reduced to a single and pure “it.” Thus the reduc-



tion is an imaginative move “that generates the fictional construction of a vantage point from which unified wholes, totalities, can be captured. It generates the construction of a subject [God] who can occupy such a vantage point” (464). The narrative of control is flaunted in the pageantry of the technological masterpieces that have become central to our lives, but hidden behind the gallantry of flashy steel are little specks of rust that make it plausible to wonder if perhaps humans only control those things specifically built to be controlled. Perhaps purity is as artificial as plastic forks, airbrushed thighs and the Wonderful Wizard of Oz.

Curdled logic runs counter to the ways of thinking that ecofeminist theory calls domination. Classical reasoning is concerned with what can and cannot logically be claimed as true. These claims are assessed through the process of dichotomy-based thinking. For something to be ‘reasonable,’ it must contain clarity, consistency and coherence. Curdled logic doesn’t change this. What is clear, consistent and coherent, however, is tied to situations and circumstances of that rationalizer, as feminist philosophers have been suggesting for some time (Code, “How Do We Know” 18; Harding 3; Haraway 579, for example). What curdled logic then allows for is a relational perspective that draws on the situation, the identity, and/or the location of the knower/thinker. Curdled logic accommodates “*going back to mestizaje, in the middle of either/or, ambiguity, and thinking of acts that belong in lives lived in mestizo ways...thinking of breaching and abandoning dichotomies...thinking of resistance*” (Lugones, “Purity” 459). For classical epistemology and the logic of purity, the nagging undermining of situatedness in a sea of unknown and unknowable diminishes its power to bully and batter by undermining the authority of “the way it is, always has been, and always will be.”

Curdled logic, according to Lugones, is an act of complexity. Describing it as an art form, she explains some of the ways in which it can be manifested. Some of these ways include experimenting with languages, forms, gender roles, stereotypes, cultures and caricatures. She writes: “thus curdled behavior is not only creative but also constitutes itself as a social commentary...when curdling becomes an art of resistance, the curdled presentation is highlighted” (“Purity” 478). Curdled logic addresses ecofeminist concerns by crediting multiple, dynamic, creative, and reciprocal positions as legitimate, rational and moral.

*Curdled logic allows me to review my narrative, to understand that this twisted tale does not “make sense” and is certainly not “logical.” Yet am I to disregard my past, all that is me? How can I see so clearly the impact of abuses and still love dearly the ones who cause(d) so much pain? Worse still, why do I love some and hate others? It is crazy.*

*Yet I can remember fondly the times that felt good. All the confusion and illogical experiences that make up my person, my identity need not be dismissed because they don’t make sense. I am the strange coagulation of all the contradictions and unholy coherences.*

### **Complex Communication**

In the opening of this thesis, I suggested that I hoped to contribute something to bridging the gap between marginalized ecofeminist theory and traditional academic forums; however, I am not sure that extolling the virtues of “curdled logic” will do the trick. One of the problems that arises from this logic is an unsettling feeling of distrust.

What I mean is that if we are to move to modes of reasoning that accommodate contradictions and ambiguities, how will we ever be able to rely on shared knowledge and information?<sup>xxiv</sup> How can anyone ever function collectively without some reliable presuppositions? The answer, it seems to me, involves moving from conceptualizing knowledge as separate and distinct from knowers. In other words, I am suggesting a shift from trusting knowledge and information to trusting actual people.

In traditional academic forums, knowledge is generally detached and demarcated from the knower(s). Trish Glazebrook describes this knowledge as phallic logic, which, similar to the logic of purity, “takes its paradigm from scientific objectivity” (76), “makes its object and other female,” and “takes its metaphors from the traditionally male sphere of warfare” (81). It is as if the human species is engaged in a gigantic game, moving and shaping each other’s spaces, worlds and realities as we bat about and gesticulate wildly at some unseen and silent entity that is known to be there because it’s known to be there.

On one hand ecofeminist theory explicitly resists such logic, but on the other hand it also embraces it. Karen Warren’s logic of domination, for example, relies on a conception of reasoning that, as I have argued, neglects the impact of the environment in which it arose. This neglect implies that knowledge, the ‘product’ of reasoning, be it via the logic of domination or otherwise, is somehow extractable from the living being. The problem is that reasoning, as an abstracted item, becomes subject to systems of value and exchange, without the necessity for consideration for the subjects involved. If classical ways of knowing are to be criticized (and by “classical” I mean to refer to knowing in terms of the logic of purity), then a new conceptual program must be constructed and

communicated; otherwise, critical theories fall prey to their own criticism. In other words, ecofeminist theory relies on the conceptualization of reasoning and knowledge as separate and distinct from people as does the classical reasoning it critiques. The project then, for ecofeminist theory, is twofold: imagining something new and communicating this newness with others who will likely have no idea what is being talked about.

*So I have now reached an impasse—my favourite location because it always seems to lead me somewhere unexpected. I, personally, am very fond of intellectual pursuits, in their classical sense, and am not quite willing to advocate a banning of all reason (although at times I suspect the world around me has done just that—but that is perhaps a slight arrogance on my part); however, the only way that I know of to think of knowing is in the normalcy of the framework that I have been discussing. Like ecofeminists, I am sure that I am falling prey to my own criticism because I can scarcely imagine other ways to think of knowing. I think we need a new way to think and a way of sharing this new-thinking experience. In other words, we need a new (or perhaps different) communication (read: knowledge) system.<sup>xxv</sup> Of course, once we leave the boundaries of normalcy—it (whatever ‘it’ is) might no longer be called “knowledge.”*

As I read through Maria Lugones’ article “On Complex Communication,” I was looking for conceptual constructions of knowledge and knowing, and at first I did not find any. This is of course ridiculous because how does one talk about knowledge and knowing without talking about knowledge and knowing? But in fact, the terms “knowledge” rarely appears in Lugones’ article: the word “ignorance” appears only in the abstract, and the term “knowledge” appears only once in the body of the essay. Lugones writes that “the resistant oppressed develop knowledge to deal with the oppressive real-

ity” (78). It is only out of the necessity of interacting with dominant ideologies that knowledge is specifically conceptualized as something external (because they are conceptualized as external in dominant discourses). The fragility of this conception, however, is immediately addressed: “We have maxims to deal with men, for example, that condense the wisdom of women all over the globe, maxims that do not necessarily speak to each other knowingly, but nevertheless recognize that there is more than one reality and that women cross back and forth between them” (78). In this short statement, Lugones confronts the dominant conceptualization of knowledge as an external entity and converts it into an act of being: thus we see a swift movement from “develop knowledge” to “speak to each other knowingly” (78). This movement characterizes the overall conceptual shift that is symbolized, to me at least, by this article and might be helpful to an ecofeminist project: knowledge is being.

### **Knowledge as Being**

In Lugones’ article, she describes a liminal space that lies on the fringes of social power structures, and is therefore a space in which knowledge/ignorance is not conceptualized as an external entity, but as a relational practice. This idea, that knowledge is being, is difficult to articulate because the resulting articulation will likely not resemble what we think of as ‘knowledge’ in anyway, and this is the point. But, if knowledge is conceptualized as being, I can imagine some radical scenarios.

The first thing that I can imagine is that the imaginary “thing” in the human species game that I mentioned earlier vanishes, and rather than looking and gesturing into thin air, people begin to look at each other. In other words, personal relationships—even

random and in passing—become more prominent. When knowledge is an external object, it is detachable from the knower, but here such a concept has no meaning because how is a being separated from itself? Thus knowledge is embodied in the communicative gestures from person to person.

The connection of people to people requires an explicit attention to the immanence of others. Drawing on the work of Humberto Maturana, Lugones writes “openness to the interlocutor as real—rather than a shared vocabulary—is a central condition for communication” (“Complex Communication” 76). From this perspective, knowing communication may not be verbal at all, and may stem from a rationale that is informed by an intuitive physiological state of being. By now, I am so far from ‘normal’ conceptualizations of knowledge that it is difficult even to speak—our language is woefully inadequate and inappropriate for this perspective. I want to talk of a way of being that engages the warmth of living entities in which knowledge is constitutive of the very fibre of being and dwells within the relational spaces of physical organization, and where space connects, not distances—but I risk sounding loony rather than liminal.

For the ecofeminist project in relation to the academy, knowledge as being offers an important tool: the possibility of coalition with other marginalized theories/theorists. Lugones explains that the journey to the limen differentiates its inhabitants (79). In other words, one’s identity based on race, sexuality, or gender, for example, may situate one outside of dominant social norms, but being outside does not erase all differences, nor does it follow that all those outside share a common language. It may not be possible then to rely on individual theories (derived from different identities, situations, and languages) as foundations for coalition. However, when knowledge is being, those persons

outside of the dominant structures of power can use this space as a backdrop for “reading their words and gestures differently” (79). In other words, even though it may not be possible to understand properly what is being said in other theories (for whatever reason), it is possible to recognize what is not being said, or how one is. Lugones goes on to say that “though it is not true that if we stand together in the limen we will understand each other...if we recognize each other as occupying liminal sites, then we will have a disposition to read each other away from structural, dominant meaning...and go from recognition to a deciphering of resistant codes” (79). Although I cannot here explore other such theories, the exclusivity of dominant structures in academic discourses leaves many possibilities for contenders.

One possible task of a coalition might be to enact some type of ethical epistemology. Knowledge as being forges a reconnection between the knower and the known and therefore it allows moral consideration to be extended to the theory. I am not suggesting an abdication of critical thought out of some sort of sacred respect for the theorists; rather, I am suggesting that critical thought begin with a presupposition that theory stems from beings in particular situations at particular historic sites. Just because a theory is untenable to some set of people (particularly those in dominant positions of power) is not sufficient justification for an outright rendering of any theory as null and void. An ethical epistemology, in my mind, would require a careful negotiation between truths, continual reference to the contingency of the known, and a fervent acceptance that knowledge is not separate and distinct from beings but rather is intrinsic to the living world.

Taking knowledge to be intrinsic to life—the human species being but one form—means moving out of the dichotomous tyranny of phallic epistemic systems. This means that we (whomever “we” might be) may need to refocus back to a blurred vision in which the things we look at bleed into a continuous, though not shapeless form. I recall the ‘magic’ pictures that were so popular several years ago. They are images of many small repetitious figures produced digitally (meaning that the images are crystal clear), but if one stands back several feet and blurs her eyes intently, an amazing three-dimensional image begins to emerge. This perspective sees wholeness of being and might alleviate oppressions that are materially (and otherwise—although I might argue that there is no otherwise) tied to social practices based on absolutes and certainties and tiny clearly fragmented images. For academic practices, a blurred vision means being able to talk about Truth in the language of truths.

### **Some Concluding Comments**

Conceptualizing knowledge as being might involve embracing the unknown, which means embracing the uncertainty that lies beyond the knowledge/ignorance project. Dichotomous frameworks that demand fragmentations such as the separate conceptualization of knowledge and living entities are oppressive frameworks because, to borrow the language of Chris Cuomo, they diminish the capacity to flourish (77). Fragmentation and separation requires that the world be seen in separate and distinct concepts and implies that if “something” is something then it is not “something else” and the “something’s” potential is reduced to one. Possibility is eliminated as ontological status is secured. By this I mean that by naming something specifically—such as knowledge—



as separate and distinct from something else—such as person, then a degree of certainty is achieved and to what extent can it (the knowledge or the person as they are conceived of separately) develop into something else? Little, I would say, hence the capacity to flourish is reduced and thus oppression is constituted.<sup>xxvi</sup> The problem is that I have now just securely named oppression, perhaps even domination, thus I am acting in a way that resembles the complaint I am lodging against epistemic norms. The difference is that even as I make this statement, I hedge it securely in uncertainty.

Lugones suggests “complex communication” as a relational way of interacting that is not ‘known’ to dominant norms and that is at play in liminal spaces where knowledge is being and vice versa. Complex communication involves a way of relating to others that accepts contradictions as a constitutive base to the extent that difference becomes the platform of coalition. In other words, it is a space in which difference is a commonality. In this liminal space, “Knowing is being” seems to require a degree of epistemic artistry:

Complex communication thrives on recognition of opacity and on reading opacity, not through assimilating the text of others to our own. Rather, it is enacted through a change in one’s own vocabulary, one’s sense of self, one’s way of living, in the extension of one’s collective memory, through developing forms of communication that signal disruption of the reduction attempted by the oppressor. Complex communication is creative. In complex communication we create and cement relational identities, meanings that did not pre-

cede the encounter, ways of life that transcend nationalism,  
root identities, and other simplifications of our imaginations.

(84)

I cannot even imagine what this idea would mean for social-organizing practices, but I do think it means extending the sacred to the living as an epistemic practice that informs the more abstract knowing. By returning the sacred to the living, we trust in each other and accept the uncertainty this may entail. I have no idea what all this means; I am therefore at a good starting place.

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<sup>i</sup> This phrase draws on my musical background. It refers to a style of learning via the conventions of teaching classical music—repetitive practice of fragmented exercises along with a rigid canon of musical texts. Other approaches and genres are sometimes demeaned from this perspective.

<sup>ii</sup> On August 24, 2008, I did a small, casual, unscientific survey of several major academic databases. These databases included: Academic Search Primer, ProQuest, Project Muse, and JSTOR. In the past five years, the average number of publications containing “feminism” in the subject field was approximately 5000. The number of publications containing “ecofeminism” in the subject matter was approximately 50. Based on these results, I make the claim that there appears to be little recent academic scholarship involving ecofeminist theory. Furthermore, I suggest given the rather some strong criticism (Biehl 11, Code 18 for example), coupled with relatively little published work, it is plausible that ecofeminist theory is somewhat marginalized within many academic forums.

<sup>iii</sup> The development of this paragraph comes from the insights of Gary Woodill, and I am grateful for his input.

<sup>iv</sup> I often retreat from traditional manifestations of theory and reason because it seems to me that very often, reasoning is teleological in that the objective is to reach a Truth. The problem is that Truth is contingent on a variety of circumstances, conditions and perceptions that change and adapt. I find the search for Truth oppressive at times because it attempts to obscure this contingency by asserting the universality, immutability and static nature of Truth, which seems to me to be unwarranted.

<sup>v</sup> I draw on the concept of the Divine in terms of my own upbringing in an Evangelical Christian setting. I draw on this theme throughout this thesis to explore the connections with my childhood and the concept of domination. I do not feel that I can fairly address the theological elements of certain sects of ecofeminist theory without first exploring my attitudes, assumptions, and biases: this thesis is part of that exploration. My biases at this point are too strong to deal fairly with ecofeminist theology, and so I limit my work to considering the philosophical/theoretical aspects of ecofeminism. I may delve into the more spiritual elements at another time.

<sup>vi</sup> Nature here is meant to refer to the realm or realms of the living world that are conceived as extraneous to humanity. The meaning should come clear as the context is developed.

<sup>vii</sup> Irreversibility refers to a concept associated with the laws of thermodynamics. According to a Newtonian scientific perspective, all things are causal and determinate, thus predictable and reversible (Capra, *Web* 184). Such is not the case in quantum mechanics and natural systems. In his work on dissipative structures (structures such as living systems), Ilya Prigogine showed that “irreversible processes play a constructive and indispensable role” (184). Self-organization, a defining characteristic of complex systems, is an irreversible process that involves non-linear feedback loops. That which develops from a process of self-organization is highly unpredictable, and the process of exponential growth leads to the emergence of newness. This newness is undetermined, unpredictable and irreversible: in other words, it “brings order out of chaos” (Prigogine and Stengers 292).

<sup>viii</sup> This is a hymn by William Blake from 1910: “Little Lamb Who Made Thee?”

<sup>ix</sup> I am referring to the argument from design as put forth by William Paley. He argues that if one were to find a watch while walking on the beach one day, the finder would pick it up and immediately know that it had a designer. Included in this argument is the idea that the precision and detail whereby the watch works testify to the intelligence of the Watchmaker (Ruse 18-9).

<sup>x</sup> The Newtonian laws of physics suggests that causal relationships are bi-directional, meaning that if something causes something, then doing the opposite will return it to its original state. See footnote vii.

<sup>xi</sup> The concept of patriarchy in this thesis is derived from a number of sources: throughout this thesis, it is meant to refer to a “system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby 20). This system is played out in the material domain in such ways as domestic labour demands on women and their capacity to access essential economic resources, as suggested by Maria Mies (1986). Patriarchy is structured by hierarchy which typically is enacted either by force or the threat of force (Eisler xix), and is reproduced through institutional processes (Cudworth 79). Cudworth defines patriarchy in terms of a web of gendered relations that sustain social power in favor of the male (79).

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<sup>xii</sup> Certainly there could be other social institutions visible, but these three allow me to demonstrate that the social machine that is being rejected is any social institution that involves such extreme power differentials.

<sup>xiii</sup> It is important to note that I am not yet discussing any notion of justifiable domination, which may account for capitalism. I will delve into this issue at a later point.

<sup>xiv</sup> There are perhaps other categorizes of “lack” that are implicated in the concept of patriarchy; however, the rational/emotional dualism play a fundamental role (Tong 132).

<sup>xv</sup> “Have Thine Own Way” is a hymn by Adelaide Pollard, 1907.

<sup>xvi</sup> “All to Jesus I Surrender” is a hymn by Judson W. Van De-Vent-er, 1896.

<sup>xvii</sup> This section is derived from an earlier essay submitted in a Feminist Theory class in 2006. See works cited.

<sup>xviii</sup> This is not the explicit doctrine and many evangelical Christians might argue that believing on the Lord Jesus Christ means simply belief and need not be followed by participation in a specific church organization. However, my experience has been that the faith of a professed believer is seriously questioned if there is no participation in the organized church.

<sup>xix</sup> This passage does not specifically refer to children; however, considering a separate passage that commands children to obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1), it seems to be an appropriate placement.

<sup>xx</sup> *The Secret* refers to a popular video that suggests that manifesting one’s desires is achievable by setting one’s intention on the desire and visualizing its appearance.

<sup>xxi</sup> This term is adopted from the writings of Erika Cudworth. She uses this term as an adjective, and I interpret it to mean “domination-based.”

<sup>xxii</sup> This is an excerpt from “The Shelf” by Sharon Woodill 2003.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Here I am referring to a wide spectrum of popular scholarship by such writers as Naomi Klein, Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, not to mention a large contingent of environmental activist and writers. While I do not delve into the issues here, my understanding of such criticisms leads me to think that they fit with Mies and Shiva’s concept of maldevelopment.

<sup>xxiv</sup> I use the term knowledge throughout the remainder of this thesis to include information.

<sup>xxv</sup> I desperately want to sort out the connections between knowledge and communication, but I cannot at this time without delving, virtually, into another entire thesis. So, I proceed from this point with the assumption that knowledge and communication are not separable, and not specifically verbal and/or linguistic, and not necessarily conscious.

<sup>xxvi</sup> I find myself conflicted here because I suspect that there may be times when we do not want something to flourish (living or not), and so I wonder if perhaps a values evaluation is in order. Should we always embrace flourishing? Is that really any different from any other excess? I certainly have a few arguments that I could launch against myself (this is a place of uncertainty that I love; who knows what insights I will create).

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