

# **TOWARDS AN ECOLOGICAL FEMINIST SELF BEYOND DUALISM AND ESSENTIALISM**

**An Inquiry into the contributions made by Cultural ecofeminism, Critical-  
transformative ecofeminism and Cyber-ecofeminism**

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Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master  
of Arts at the University of Stellenbosch

October 1998



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## **DECLARATION**

**I the undersigned hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.**

Financial assistance by the Center for Science Development is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed in this thesis or conclusions made, are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Center for Science Development.

## SUMMARY OF THESIS

In this thesis an inquiry is made into the contributions that cultural ecofeminism, critical-transformative ecofeminism and cyber-(eco)feminism make towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self that can generate or promote an ethical relation with nature from a position beyond dualism and essentialism.

In the first chapter, titled *Cultural ecofeminism*, different aspects of patriarchal Western culture are identified that are responsible for the twin dominations of women and nature. In the light of their critique of patriarchal culture and the alienated masculinist self that lies central to it, cultural ecofeminists endorse two alternative notions of the self, namely a *female self* and a *feminine self*. In both cases the notion of relationality between self and nature is stressed, and alternative "feminine" values such as care and nurturing are put forward as providing us with alternative ecological values. The contribution that this position makes towards the articulation of an ecological feminist self lies in its emphasis on a notion of relationality between self and nature, so as to establish an ethical relation between self and nature. From both a feminist and an ecological perspective however, this position is flawed given its inability to (adequately) overcome the problems of dualism and essentialism.

In the second chapter, titled *Critical-transformative ecofeminism*, the dualist conceptual framework of the rationalist philosophical tradition is identified as grounding the domination of women, nature and others. By employing the notions of continuity and difference, a strategy is proposed to move beyond dualism and by implication, essentialism. In this chapter, the notion of a *pluralist feminine self* is proposed and in the context of a critical-transformative ethics, the notion of the *mutual self* is endorsed that allows for continuity and difference between different selves and self and nature. The ecological values that are endorsed by this position include respect, care, and trust, therefore coinciding, but also diverging from cultural ecofeminism. Critical-transformative ecofeminism's contribution towards the articulation of an ecofeminist self beyond dualism and essentialism, lies in its successful movement beyond dualism, especially with regard to the notion of the

*mutual self* as a *feminist* notion of an ecological self. The shortcoming of this position is however that the *pluralist feminine self* which is proposed as an *ecological* notion of a feminist self, is unsuccessful in its attempt to address the problem of universalising female gender identity.

In the third chapter, titled *Cyber-(eco)feminism*, the notions of the *cyborg*, the *situated self* and the *Inappropriate/d Other* are discussed as alternative feminist subjectivities. In the discussion of a *politics of articulation*, an environmental politics that emphasises the social and artifactual dimensions of nature, is articulated. Through the figuration of nature as Coyote Trickster, an ecological dimension to these selves comes to the fore and together these notions are positively received from an ecological and feminist perspective as adequately overcoming the problems of dualism and essentialism. From an ecological perspective, it is however argued that the technophilic character of the *cyborg* is problematic and doubt is cast on its ability to forge significant ethical relations. The *politics of articulation* proposed by cyber-(eco)feminism is commended for its inclusivity, but in the final analysis, it is argued that to establish an ethical relation with nature, care must be taken not to overlook nature's difference, that is, that nature is an *independent* entity with needs and ends of its own.

## OPSOMMING VAN TESIS

Hierdie tesis behels 'n ondersoek na die bydraes van kulturele ekofeminisme, krities-transformatiewe ekofeminisme en cyber-(eko)feminisme tot die artikulering van 'n ekologies-feministiese self wat 'n etiese verhouding met die natuur kan voortbring vanuit 'n posisie wat die probleme van dualisme en essensialisme oorskry.

In die eerste hoofstuk getiteld *Cultural ecofeminism*, word verskillende aspekte van patriargale Westerse kultuur geïdentifiseer as onderliggend aan die dominasie van beide vroue en die natuur. In die lig van hul kritiek op patriargale kultuur en die vervreemding van die "masculinist self" wat sentraal staan daarin, onderskryf kulturele feministe twee alternatiewe konsepsies van die self, naamlik 'n "*female self*" en 'n "*feminine self*". In beide gevalle word die konsep van relasionaliteit tussen self en natuur beklemtoon, en alternatiewe "vroulike" waardes soos sorg en koestering word voorgestel as ekologiese waardes. Die bydrae wat hierdie posisie lewer tot die konsepsualisering van 'n ekologies-feministiese self, lê in die beklemtoning van 'n konsep van relasionaliteit ten einde 'n etiese verhouding tussen self en natuur tot stand te bring. Hierdie posisie skiet egter te kort vanuit beide 'n ekologiese en feministiese perspektief aangesien dit nie in staat is om die probleme van dualisme en essensialisme (toereikend) te oorkom nie.

In die tweede hoofstuk getiteld *Critical-transformative ecofeminism*, word die dualistiese konseptuele raamwerk van die rasionalistiese filosofiese tradisie geïdentifiseer as onderliggend aan die dominasie van vroue, die natuur en andere. Met behulp van die konsepte "continuity" en "difference" word 'n strategie voorgestel waarvolgens dualisme, en by implikasie essensialisme, oorskry kan word. In hierdie hoofstuk word 'n konsep van 'n "*pluralist feminine self*" voorgestel en 'n konsep van die "*mutual self*" word in die konteks van krities-transformatiewe ekofeministiese etiek voorgestel, wat ruimte laat vir beide kontinuiteit en verskille tussen selwe en tussen self en natuur. Die ekologiese waardes wat deur hierdie posisie onderskryf word, sluit respek, sorg en vertrouwe in. Dit sluit dus aan, maar verskil ook van kulturele ekofeminisme. Die bydrae van krities-transformatiewe ekofeminisme tot die artikulering van 'n ekologies-feministiese self wat dualisme en

essensialisme oorskry, lê in die suksesvolle oorskryding van dualisme. Dit is spesifiek die geval met die konsep van die "*mutual self*" as *feministiese* konsep van 'n ekologiese self. Die tekortkoming van hierdie posisie is egter dat die "*pluralist feminine self*" wat as 'n *ekologiese* konsep van 'n feministiese self voorgestel word, onsuksesvol is as 'n poging om die probleem van universalisme ten opsigte van vroulike identiteit aan te spreek.

In die derde hoofstuk getiteld *Cyber-(eco)feminism*, word die konsepte van die *cyborg*, die "*situated self*", en die "*Inappropriate/d Other*" bespreek as alternatiewe feministiese subjektiwiteite. In die bespreking van 'n "*politics of articulation*", word 'n omgewingspolitiek geartikuleer wat die sosiale en artefaktiese dimensies van die natuur beklemtoon. Deur middel van die figurering van die natuur as "Coyote Trickster", kom 'n ekologiese dimensie tot die verskillende konsepte van die self na vore. Gepaardgaande met die konsep van die natuur as "Coyote Trickster", word hierdie konsepte positief evalueer weens hul oorskryding van die probleme van dualisme en essensialisme. Vanuit 'n ekologiese perspektief word daar egter geargumenteer dat die tegnofiliese karakter van die *cyborg* problematies is, en dit word betwyfel of die *cyborg* in staat is om betekenisvolle etiese verhoudings aan te gaan. Die "*politics of articulation*" wat voorgestel word deur cyber-(eko)feminisme, word as prysenswaardig geag weens die inklusiewe karakter daarvan. In die finale analise word daar egter geargumenteer dat ten einde 'n etiese verhouding met die natuur tot stand te bring spesiale voorsorg getref moet word om die andersheid van die natuur in ag te neem. Dit is dat die natuur 'n onafhanklike entiteit is met doelwitte en behoeftes van haar eie.

## BEDANKINGS

Die skryf van hierdie tesis sou nie moontlik gewees het sonder die bystand van 'n verskeidenheid instansies en betekenisvolle mense nie. Hiermee wil ek dus graag die volgende instansies en persone bedank.

Die Nederlands Zuid-Afrikaanse Vereniging vir die toekenning van 'n studiebeurs wat dit vir my moontlik gemaak het om vir 'n jaar in Nederland navorsing te doen. Blootstelling aan die Nederlandse akademiese en intellektuele milieu was en is steeds vir my van onskatbare waarde.

My buitelandse navorsing is ook verder gesteun deur 'n Harry Crossley beurs.

Ek wil graag vir Dr. Joke Hermsen bedank wie tydens my verblyf in Nederland opgetree het as informele studieleier. My verblyf in Nederland is aansienlik verryk deur haar betrokkenheid by my navorsing.

Ek wil ook my studieleier Johan Hattingh bedank vir sy ondersteuning en aanmoediging en dat hy geduldig vir my die tyd en ruimte gegun het om te bereik wat ek wou.

Dankie ook aan my ma en pa vir hul onvoorwaardelike ondersteuning van hierdie projek. Spesiale dank aan my ma nie net vir haar eindelose onderskraging en begrip nie, maar ook vir die finansiële bystand wat sy uiters ruimhartig tot my beskikking gestel het.

En laastens wil ek dankie sê aan my grootste kritikus en ondersteuner, Ian.



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## Introduction

### Background and research question

It has become increasingly evident that industrial progress, whilst having liberated humans from many constraints, also has its downside, culminating in what is today commonly referred to as the environmental crisis. The environmental crisis is created by the cumulative negative effects of industrialisation. These include global warming, the unsustainable utilisation of renewable resources, the rapid depletion of non-renewable resources, the loss of biodiversity and the possibility of a nuclear winter. To the extent that modern industrial societies seem incapable of controlling the negative effects of industrialisation, they have become structural features of industrial development that pose serious threats to the integrity and stability of ecosystems.

Environmental degradation also threatens the health, wellbeing and autonomy of current and future generations<sup>1</sup>. The health risks associated with ecologically unsound practices and modern forms of agriculture have been put firmly on the Western public agenda by (mostly women) consumer activists. In the context of developing countries writers such as Vandana Shiva (1989) have shown that poor communities and countries usually bear a disproportionate level of the costs of environmental destruction without having an equal share in the benefits. It is often women who are responsible for sustaining their families by performing duties such as gathering firewood, fetching water, and growing edible and non-edible plants. It is therefore they who are most severely affected by the destruction of local environments in developing countries and who are most heavily involved in grassroots activism as exemplified by the Chipko movement.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the unsustainable use of resources compromises the ability of future generations to meet their basic needs. These considerations render the environmental crisis also a social crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> See Norton's (1991: 62, 213) distinction between three generations of environmental problems, and also Eckersley's (1992: 7-31) taxonomy of environmental problems.

<sup>2</sup> The Chipko (tree-hugging) protest movement was started by Indian women to protect fragile forests against commercial exploitation. This movement exemplifies Third World resistance to misdirected international development aid and resistance to foreign commercial exploitation of local resources. The movement is well documented in Braidotti *et al* (1994), Shiva (1989), Seager (1993), Sturgeon (1997).

Given the interconnectedness of the environmental crisis with socio-economic issues, pressing questions are thrust upon us regarding how to go about addressing or resolving this crisis. One approach that is followed is to reform political, economic and social institutions and structures. Without underestimating the significance of this reformist approach, it must be pointed out that it is insufficient, as it tends to treat the symptoms rather than the causes of the environmental crisis. The strategies that are followed to address or resolve environmental problems remain trapped in the framework that is responsible for environmental destruction and degradation in the first place.<sup>3</sup> This is where philosophical reflection may be of particular significance, as the task of philosophers is to analyse and reveal the deeper structures that ground the environmental problems we are confronted with. That is, philosophers can help us to fully come to terms with our particularly Western ways of thinking and being that inform and sanction the instrumentalisation of the natural environment purely as a resource for humans.

One of the insights of a philosophical reflection upon the instrumental treatment of nature by humans, is that the way in which we understand our selves significantly influences our treatment of those entities that are perceived as lying beyond the boundaries of the human self (Naess, 1985a, 1985b, 1989; Fox, 1990; Eckersley, 1992: 69; Plumwood, 1993; Cuomo, 1998; Matthews, 1991). For some radical ecologists, one of the primary reasons for the destruction and degradation of the natural environment is anthropocentrism (Plumwood, 1991, 1993, 1997; Naess, 1989; Fox 1990, 1993; Warren, 1990; Cuomo, 1998).<sup>4</sup> Broadly speaking, anthropocentrism entails for them the view that humans are superior beings and that their needs take precedence over and above all others. The value that humans are said to embody exceeds the value of nature by far, which warrants the treatment of nature as an instrument in the fulfillment to the needs and desires of man. This points towards another dimension of

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<sup>3</sup> See Naess (1985a, 1985b) for a discussion of deep ecology as opposed to "shallow" reformist ecology.

<sup>4</sup> Radical ecology consists of three streams, namely deep ecology, ecofeminism and social ecology. Ecofeminism and deep ecology shares an ecocentric (non-anthropocentric) approach in terms of which nature is accorded inherent value as opposed to having value only for humans. Such an ecocentric approach is, however, not shared by social ecology (Murray Bookchin: 1989, 1991), which is why social ecology is not included in this discussion.

anthropocentrism and that is that humans consistently form the point of reference in terms of which value is accorded to nature.<sup>5</sup>

Ecological thinkers argue that anthropocentrism is grounded in an understanding human self that is radically isolated from its physical environment. Radically separate from nature, the human self is regarded as superior due to exhibiting certain valued features such as rationality, which creates a hierarchical relation between humans and nature. Coupled with an overvaluation of rationality as distinctive quality of the human, radical separation and hierarchy work together to sanction the instrumental treatment of nature. A direct link is therefore discerned between anthropocentrism and the dominant notion of the self in Western culture that is conceived of in atomistic, rationalist and hierarchical terms. As such, at least within the context of ecological thinking, reconceiving the self as an ecological self takes on pressing urgency.

In an attempt to address the problems of anthropocentrism, deep ecology takes up the challenge of reconceptualising the dominant notion of the self in Western culture.<sup>6</sup> Deep ecology presents us with a notion of the Self that emphasises a relation of *identification* with nature (Naess, 1985a, 1985b, 1989). That is, the Self is expanded to include nature so that the interests of nature are also the interests of my Self. By emphasising human connectedness with nature, this deep ecological self (as an ecological Self) shows an unambiguous departure from anthropocentrism. The interests of humans are decentered so as to include also the interests of nature. As such, this notion of the ecological Self is put forward as generating and providing a basis for ethical conduct towards the natural environment.

Ecological feminism<sup>7</sup> has a different approach to addressing anthropocentrism. The point of departure of ecofeminism is that, given the various connections that exist or are said to exist between women and nature, the domination and

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<sup>5</sup> See Eckersley (1992: 35-45) for a discussion of the strong and weak forms of anthropocentrism.

<sup>6</sup> The founder of deep ecology is the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess. See also the work of Fox (1990) and Matthews (1991) who are prominent proponents of deep ecology.

<sup>7</sup> The terms "ecological feminism" and "ecofeminism" are used interchangeably as denoting roughly the same meaning, although the term "ecological feminism" imparts a particularly philosophical character, a quality expressly absent in some strands in ecofeminist thinking.

subordination of women and nature are inextricably linked.<sup>8</sup> As such, ecofeminism plays a unifying role in that it brings together ecological thinking with feminist thinking (Warren, 1987).<sup>9</sup> In an appeal to ecological thinkers, ecofeminists assert that the domination and subordination of nature and the domination and subordination of women are interconnected and that the one cannot be addressed in isolation from the other. For this reason feminists in particular have a special interest in ending the domination not only of women, but also that of nature (King, 1989). The significance of ecological feminism therefore lies in its articulation of the intersection of the interests of women and nature and finding ways to address these against a broader background of ecological and feminist concerns (Cuomo, 1998).

Highlighting the connections between the domination of women and nature, and in response to the notion of the ecological Self proposed by deep ecology,<sup>10</sup> ecofeminists advance the argument that the articulation of a notion of an ecological self cannot be conducted in a vacuum. That is, to adequately address the pervasiveness of anthropocentrism, a thorough analysis of the dominant notion of the self is called for. Ecofeminists argue that the conceptualisation of a notion of the ecological self is incomplete if the manner in which the self has been articulated in opposition and as superior not only to nature, but also to women and the feminine, is not taken into account as well. Taking heed of these additional exclusions (i.e. women and the feminine) not only throws light on the problem of anthropocentrism, but also on what is required to formulate a notion of the ecological self that does not display the same characteristics that have historically functioned to the detriment not only of women, but also of nature

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<sup>8</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the various connections that are identified between women and nature, see Warren (1993).

<sup>9</sup> This statement needs to be qualified however. Despite the "unificatory" role that ecofeminism plays, ecofeminism is neither a unifying nor unified body of thought aiming to replace either feminist or ecological thinking as separate disciplines. Whilst being a separate body of thought overlapping both with feminist and ecological thinking, by pointing out that and how ecology and feminism meet, it also has the goal of challenging feminist and ecological thinkers to scrutinise their own theories in order to strengthen and improve them (Warren, 1987; Plumwood, 1994). A commitment to diversity can also be detected within ecofeminist thinking itself. Carlassare (1994) has convincingly argued in favour of retaining the diverse character of ecofeminism in the face of pressure to conform to "academic standards" of writing.

<sup>10</sup> For an implicit or explicit critique of the deep ecological Self, see Salleh (1984), Plumwood (1991, 1993), Kheel (1990), and Cuomo (1998).

(Plumwood, 1986, 1988, 1992, 1993; Warren, 1987, 1990; Kheel, 1985, 1990; Cuomo, 1998).

As I have explained above, and as will be made evident during the course of this thesis, the environmental crisis that we are currently faced with calls for a thorough reconceptualisation of the self, of self-realisation, and the self's relation with others. In the section below and the chapters that follow, I will demonstrate how a direct link can be established between our environmental crisis and a notion of the self conceived of in dualist and essentialist terms.<sup>11</sup> Dualism and its correlate, essentialism, have structured the relation between humans and nature so as to sanction the domination and subjugation of both women and nature.

Dualism and essentialism form the backbone of Western philosophical thought, and represent two central themes that are grappled with in contemporary ecological and feminist thinking. The philosophical writings of the great "masters of suspicion", Marx, Nietzsche and Freud called into question the central tenets of Western tradition of philosophical thinking. This initiated the start of an irrevocable change in philosophy as a discipline, which has culminated in what some have come to refer to as the "crisis of philosophy" (Braidotti, 1991, 1994b: 149). Broadly speaking, this crisis points towards the deconstruction of the cornerstone of philosophical thinking, namely rationality and its close ally, truth. Pivotal to this project lies a scathing critique of essentialism and dualism, the repressive and exclusionary characteristics of which are revealed as not only undesirable, but indubitably untenable.

Dualism refers to a way of thinking that is characterised by the division of reality into hierarchical dualist pairs. The categories male and female in a dualist pair

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<sup>11</sup> Here it may be asked how, if we can trace the environmental crisis to dualism and essentialism, do we explain environmental destruction and degradation of the natural environment in non-Western cultures known for a philosophical orientation that is specifically non-dualist. In this regard it is useful to keep in mind that despite the *apparent* endorsement of a non-dualist philosophy, in practice, behaviour and actions are very much in line with a dualist conceptual framework. In the case of the Asian Tigers, in particular Indonesia, the reasons for this shift in orientation can be ascribed to globalisation and rapid industrialisation according to Western models of economic development. Subsequently it may be asked if any culture exists today that is untouched by Western modes of thinking and production and consumption.

are perceived as fixed and ahistorical, which explains why dualism necessarily implies essentialism. The relation of sharp differentiation that characterises a dualist pair reinforces the assumed superiority of the one as opposed to the other. The poststructuralist deconstruction of dualist thinking has revealed that the Self is in fact directly implicated by the Other in order to sustain its integrity (Foucault: 1970: 326-340). In this way the artificiality of the relation of radical separation between Self and Other is exposed. This is not to imply that differences between Self and Other are abolished however, rather, departing from the culture of sameness that dualism commands, it is asserted that there are always only differences (Derrida, 1981: 26).<sup>12</sup>

From an ecological perspective dualism is denounced for sanctioning the destruction and degradation of the natural environment. It is argued that anthropocentrism is grounded in dualism in terms of which humans are sharply differentiated from the natural environment (Warren, 1987, 1994; Plumwood, 1986, 1988, 1991, 1992, 1993). Coupled with the perception that humans are superior beings, the disconnection between the human and natural spheres serve to condone the instrumentalisation (read: exploitation) of nature. Unlike the poststructuralist emphasis on differences, environmental thinkers hold the view that some sort of significant connection between humans and nature should be established as part of addressing the environmental crisis and other forms of domination (Fox, 1990; Naess, 1985a, 1985b, 1989; Matthews, 1991; Plumwood, 1989, 1991, 1993; Cuomo, 1998).

From a feminist perspective, essentialism often denotes biologism, in terms of which women's identity and difference are perceived as biologically based and therefore ahistorical and fixed. In this scheme of things, naturalistic arguments are presented that identify women with nature, an identification that has historically served and been employed to oppress and subordinate women. This initiated a shift within feminism to a constructivist position according to which, to cite Simone De Beauvoir (1964), "women are not born, but made", which

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<sup>12</sup> See (Oger, 1995; Norris, 1987; Culler, 1983) for in-depth discussions of Jacques Derrida's deconstructive philosophical thinking.



renders women's identities socially and symbolically constructed and thus subject to change.<sup>13</sup>

In keeping with these two accounts of female identity, two dominant streams in feminist theory can be identified namely the Anglo-American *gender*, and French Continental *sexual difference* theorists. Sexual difference feminist theory, also known as the *écriture féminine* movement, draws its conceptual foundations from linguistics, literary studies, semiotics, philosophy and psychoanalytic theories of the subject.<sup>14</sup> Gender theory is a materialist feminist approach that has roots in De Beauvoir's existentialism and Marxist historical materialism and focuses on a political theory based on the will to change (Braidotti *et al*, 1994: 40). In opposition to a more conceptually orientated approach, materialist feminism focuses on the structure of social power relations rather than the symbolically structured psychological make up of individuals (Delphy, 1984). Accordingly, for gender theorists social power relations (socialisation) determine women's identity, whereas for sexual difference theorists, women's identity is an effect of their particular positioning within a symbolic system.

Given their divergent approaches it is perhaps not surprising that the relations between these two streams within feminist theory have been fraught with tension. Sexual difference feminism has been subjected to criticism not only with regard to the confusion created by the term *sexual difference* that has resulted in it being charged with biological essentialism, but also because of its narrow focus on language and the textual.<sup>15</sup> This focus on symbolic systems of meaning has been criticised for losing sight of the material reality of women, and they have also been criticised for espousing a psychic essentialism. On the other hand the materialist approach of gender theorists has been subjected to criticism with regard to what is perceived as a limiting critique of ideology and an endorsement of a gender free position. As a result both these positions lapsed

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<sup>13</sup> Firmly situated in the humanist existentialist tradition, De Beauvoir herself did not take symbolic systems into consideration. Predictably then, it was under inspiration of De Beauvoir's existentialism, along with (an adapted) Marxism, that Anglo-American gender theory emerged.

<sup>14</sup> An example of Lacanian and Freudian feminist psychoanalytic theory is Irigaray (1974/1985a, 1977/1985b), Cixous (1981) and Clement (Cixous and Clement, 1975/1986).

<sup>15</sup> This focus on language and the textual shows sexual difference theorists' allegiance to poststructuralist philosophical thinking.

into reductionisms, the one material and the other textual, that has resulted in an intellectual stalemate between the two positions.

The tension between the Anglo-American and French streams of thought can be further illuminated by the equality-difference debate<sup>16</sup> that coincides with a focus on gender on the one hand and sexual difference on the other.<sup>17</sup> A central issue in feminism is highlighted by the equality-difference debate. That is, although there may be agreement that equality is what feminists fight for, it is questioned at what price we are willing to attain equality. Central to this debate is the erasure of differences between men and women which has historically amounted to a reinforcement of the masculine self; something which is most explicitly demonstrated in the case of liberal feminism. The Anglo-American appeal to a gender-free position, often expressed in the endorsement of some form of androgyny, so as to bring about equality between men and women, fails to take into account the asymmetry between the sexes on a symbolic level. In a manner similar to liberal feminism, a disregard for the different cultural meanings and values that are associated with the masculine as opposed to the feminine culminates in a continued entrapment in phallogentrism. For this reason, sexual difference feminists have criticised the focus on gender as opposed to sexual difference as effecting a deflection of the attention away from women to assume a new symmetry between the sexes (Braidotti, 1994b: 150-151).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Scott (1988) for an interesting discussion and engagement with the difference-equality debate.

<sup>17</sup> According to Grosz (1990), equality feminism includes liberal (Mary Wolstonecraft) and socialist feminism, their emphasis being on equality as opposed to difference. Although an equality feminist position, socialist feminism differs markedly from liberal feminism. It is most critical of liberalism and the liberal self that we will see is a masculine self, but because it ultimately wants to erase differences between men and women, it is included in the equality feminist camp. With Braidotti (1991), Grosz (1990) includes De Beauvoir (1964), Firestone (1970) and Millet (1969) in the equality feminist camp. Grosz (1990) along with Gatens (1986) cites liberal feminists like Wolstonecraft (1978), De Beauvoir (1964) and Mitchell (1974) as equality feminists.

<sup>18</sup> An appeal to gender has also manifested in feminist academia and illustrates the erasure of difference succinctly. In American universities, the focus on *gender* studies (to make feminism more palatable to the faint-hearted) instead of feminism or sexual politics generated a proliferation of men's studies courses. This is a trend that is particular not only to American universities. If we can go by the appearance of men's studies at prominent South African universities, along with the popular appeal that is made to "gender equality" in political speeches and the media, this trend has found fruitful soil also in the South African context.

Opposed to focusing only on sexism and patriarchy, feminist thinkers like Gross<sup>19</sup> (1986) and Grosz (1988, 1990) and Braidotti (1991, 1994b) argue for a movement beyond phallogentrism. In a discussion of these terms in the context of theory and the production of knowledge, Grosz (1988: 93) asserts that sexism refers to obvious acts of discrimination privileging men and depriving women. As Grosz (1988: 93) puts it "[s]exism is a manifest phenomenon, easily illustrated for it ranges from the open expression of hostility or suspicion about women, to ignoring and excluding women altogether from being considered worthy or relevant objects of investigation". Patriarchy on the other hand is "... an underlying structure of evaluation, it can be analysed most directly in the examination of the unspoken assumptions lying behind the apparently sexually neutral terms, Reason, Truth, Knowledge". The point that she (Grosz, 1988: 94) makes is that "even if the sexes behaved in identical ways, their behaviour would still not have the same social meaning and value" if the underlying patriarchal assumptions are not addressed as well. As such, patriarchal theory is characterised by its unspoken repressed, unrepresented "feminine" foundations. Phallogentrism refers to the discursive or representational form of women's oppression in terms of which women are construed on the model of the masculine, whether in terms of sameness/identity, opposition/distinction or as complementary (Grosz, 1988: 94-95).<sup>20</sup> A central challenge of feminism is how to break out of the structure of phallogentrism, which has relied on the various dichotomous characterisations of man and woman. A simple reversal of the binary opposition is not a viable alternative, as this strategy remains trapped within a binary logic. Phallogentrism can, however, not be challenged from outside, as this leaves the system intact: but on the other hand, to remain only within its terms is to risk absorption, to be unable to move beyond it (Grosz: 1990: 100).

The strategy that is proposed by the French Continental strand of feminism (sexual difference theorists) as offering a way to move beyond phallogentrism is to shift the focus from equality to autonomy. Equality has historically been unable to guarantee autonomy and autonomy can only be expressed in a

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<sup>19</sup> Gross and Grosz is the same author.

<sup>20</sup> The strategies of equality feminists such as liberal feminists and those who ultimately aim at erasing differences between men and women, along with academical reformist-minded feminists, remain inadequate for failing to address the pervasiveness of phallogentrism.

reconstructive affirmation of difference (Grosz, 1990: 339-339; 1988: 92-103; Braidotti, 1994b). The goal of female autonomy signals women's claim to political, social, economic and intellectual self-determination. This involves the deconstruction of phallogentric discourses and a reconstructive project of constructing and developing alternative models, methods, procedures and discourses (Gross, 1986: 192). Part of this constructive project is to create alternative representations of women that move beyond an entrapment in phallogentrism. Engaging with the question of language and representation in their political and material effects is pivotal to this endeavour. Acknowledging language as a material, active, productive system is therefore part of the project of creating new modes of expression, new discursive styles, and new enunciative positions to articulate women's specificity. To acknowledge the materiality of language is to engage with power "not just as a force visible in the acts, events and processes within political and public life, but also as a series of tactical alignments between institutions, knowledges, practices involved with the control and supervision of individuals and groups" (Gross: 1986: 203).

An affirmation of difference in this context signals a refusal to submit to the ruling order and is performed as a political act of subversion, not only of the self, but also of the other. Insisting on difference is to demand acknowledgement and respect not only insofar one conforms to the norms and criteria of those in power, but it is also to claim the freedom to challenge and subvert existing structures of meaning and power. This is however not where it ends, exactly how such an affirmation of difference is performed, is of the utmost importance.

As we have seen, both the Anglo-American and French Continental branches of feminist theory fall short on crucial issues. Challenging dominant cultural values and meanings and striving towards the creation of different meanings and representations of women's difference by sexual difference feminism, is of course most commendable. This however, can only thrive against a background that simultaneously addresses women's social and material positions, that is, if the emphasis on equality is also taken seriously. Despite the emphasis and focus on women's social and material positions by gender theorists, a continued disregard of the significance of symbolic structures as metaphysical nonsense has proved untenable.

These points of critique were made all the more pertinent by post-colonial and US black feminists who criticised the universalist character of white feminist theory (and of course practice) (Spivak, 1990; Mohanty, 1988; Trinh Minh-Ha, 1989; hooks, 1990). What is highlighted here is that despite their claim to non-essentialism (read: constructivism), the materialist feminist appeal to “women’s experience” serves to erase differences between women which exposed feminism’s continued universalisation of white, middle-class women’s experiences. In the case of sexual difference feminism, this point of criticism pertains to the whiteness of psychoanalytic theory, and stresses the seriousness which the differing social and material realities of women have to be regarded with.

This charge of essentialism leveled at both the Anglo-American and French feminist currents pose interesting challenges to both. The predicament can be described as follows. The poststructuralist deconstruction of woman, and an emphasis on differences, particularly differences between women, has evoked concern with regard to the potentially paralysing effect that this can have on feminist politics. In a feminist context, an emphasis on differences between women undermines the ability to speak of women as a social group to the extent that it becomes problematic to claim that women are oppressed.<sup>21</sup>

Feminists such as Diana Fuss (1990) have an interesting approach to this dilemma. Fuss points out that talking about women, even in constructivist terms, necessarily presupposes some form of essentialism, which suggests that speaking of women is always already essentialist. For Fuss then, this is the dilemma of feminism and one that cannot be avoided. She does however conclude that despair need not follow, as “a strategic essentialism” takes into consideration the context within which essentialism is “committed” (Fuss, 1990: 20). That is, the focus should be not on the fact *that* an “essentialist” position is taken, but *why*. A strategic essentialist position that emphasises the radically specific, and therefore complex situatedness of different women, offers a way out of the Anglo-American – French feminist deadlock. In such a context, the

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<sup>21</sup> See also Grosz (1990), Alcoff (1988), Frazer and Nicholson (1990: 15-31) and Flax (1987, 1992) for an in-depth discussion of this problem.

sensitivity to differences that is generated by poststructuralist insights and black feminist critique can be fruitfully employed. Moreover, given her historical position as other (read: object), legitimacy is not only bestowed upon the endeavour to articulate a female feminist subject; indeed, it becomes pertinent also in the broader political project of feminism.

This brings us to a recent development in feminist thinking that, resolving the stalemate between gender and sexual difference theorists, can be described as a new feminist materialism.<sup>22</sup> What emerges here is the situated, specific, embodied nature of the feminist subject that avoids a biological or psychic essentialism. This feminist materialism is influenced by the poststructuralist redefinition of the body and incorporates Foucault's (1974, 1980) insights with regard to the materiality of discourse and the relation of knowledge to power. The materiality of discourse refers to the discursive construction of the subject in and through language. Embodiedness in this context refers to the subject as empirical bio-cultural entity (Braidotti *et al*, 1994: 50). Articulating a female embodied subject employs gender as a "regulatory fiction" that must be read in the framework of the critique of the ethnocentric and univocal meaning of the term gender. As suggested above, gender is also redefined as "marking the intersection of language with the social, of the semiotic with the material" (Braidotti, 1994: 154).<sup>23</sup> Here identity emerges as a site of differences where the subject occupies a variety of possible positions at different times that are organised along a multiplicity of variables such as sex, race, class, age and lifestyle. In the course of this discussion it will become clear that the position I support coincides with the above, but in the light of environmental concerns, it is qualified to suit the concerns and interests that are relevant from an ecological feminist perspective.

From the discussion thus far, it is clear that my focus on essentialism and dualism captures the related concerns of feminist and ecological thinking.

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<sup>22</sup> Amongst the feminist thinkers that can be grouped with this "new feminist materialism" are feminist critical theorists such as Benjamin (1988), Flax (1990a), and Benhabib (1987), post-colonial and black writers such as Spivak (1990a), Trinh-Minh-Ha (1989), bell hooks (1981, 1984), and other feminist theorists such as De Lauretis (1990), Haraway (1991), and Harding (1991).

<sup>23</sup> See also Scott (1986, 1989, 1992) for a discussion of the insufficiency of not integrating the social and discursive in contemporary feminist theory.

Whereas the tendency in ecological thinking is to concentrate on dualism, the problem that is most prominently grappled with in feminist thinking tends to be essentialism, although as we have seen, essentialism is part and parcel of dualism. In this study then, I would like to discuss the contributions that different ecofeminists make towards a conceptualisation of an ecological feminist notion of the self with the aim of (a) illustrating how the problems of dualism and essentialism are engaged with and (b) determining whether some avenue can be carved out that resists reinforcing dualism and essentialism without altogether abolishing the conceptual space needed to defend the related political agendas of both environmentalism and feminism.

For the purposes of accomplishing this task, I distinguish between three different feminist positions that are relevant, albeit in different ways, in this regard. As I will discuss in the section dealing with Methodology, I refer to these positions respectively as cultural ecofeminism, critical-transformative ecofeminism and cyber-(eco)feminism. Having illuminated the problems of dualism and essentialism in ecological and feminist thinking, I would now like to turn to the research question that informs this inquiry which reads as follows:

***What are the contributions that cultural, critical-transformative and cyber-(eco)feminism make towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self that can generate/promote an ethical relation with nature from a position beyond dualism and essentialism?***

The contributions made by the respective positions towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self that goes beyond dualism and essentialism can be interpreted and therefore evaluated on two levels insofar as they incorporate proposals towards the articulation of a *feminist notion of an ecological self* on the one hand, and an *ecological notion of a feminist self* on the other.<sup>24</sup> In the respective chapters of this study, the contributions to both an

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<sup>24</sup> The formulation of an ecological self and a feminist self are two separate undertakings that can be shown to overlap significantly in their challenge and transformation of the dominant notion of the self in rationalist philosophical thinking. As such, these are complementary and may be shown to comprise different facets of an ecofeminist notion of the self. Alternatively, such an ecofeminist notion of the self can also be described as a feminist subjectivity that is formulated in explicitly ecological terms and which at the same time also allows space for female specificity.

ecological self and a feminist self that are endorsed by different ecofeminists with different conceptions of ecology, nature, subjectivity, and the self, are evaluated from an ecological as well as a feminist perspective in the light of the shared concerns raised by the problems of both dualism and essentialism.

The separation of an ecological feminist notion of the self into an ecological self and feminist self is performed in the light of some central questions in both ecological and feminist thinking. In ecological thinking this pertains to the insufficiency of exploring the articulation of an *ecological self* without paying attention to ecofeminist perspectives nature, the female/feminine and the self in the articulation of an ecological self. At the same time, ecological perspectives cannot be ignored when it comes to the articulation of a (female) feminist self. Indeed, the articulation of both a (female) feminist self and an ecological self requires a reconceptualisation of nature, which in turn evokes woman's association with nature, which has historically coincided with the exclusion of women from the realm of subjecthood. In my view, this points towards the responsibility to rethink the relation between women and nature that resists an overidentification of women with nature, without placing women in an oppositional relation with nature.<sup>25</sup> In this study this task is executed by exploring different notions of nature, female identity and female feminist subjectivity. Carrying out this undertaking is particularly important if we take into account the perception that exists of ecofeminism as reclaiming and uncritically affirming the woman-nature connection.<sup>26</sup> Although this view is not entirely unfounded, I do hope to show that this is an incomplete representation of ecological feminist thinking.

For this reason then, it is fitting to explore the contributions that are made towards the articulation of an (ecological) notion of a female feminist self as an instance of an ecological feminist self. This may reveal an unambiguous movement away from a regressive over-identification of woman with nature, and an engagement with the female self or subjectivity that compares favourably with recent developments in contemporary feminist theory. As such, the suspicion which ecofeminism has been regarded with in feminist circles may also

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<sup>25</sup> See Soper (1995) for making similar observations.

<sup>26</sup> See footnote nr.28 below.



be corrected. This in turn may reveal a resistance in some feminist circles to engage thoroughly with ecological concerns and the need to conceive of a feminist self in ecological terms.<sup>27</sup> This brings us to my engagement with the concept of the self and the distinctions that are drawn to structure this inquiry.

## Methodology

As the research question formulated above indicates, this study is divided into three chapters, titled *Cultural ecofeminism*, *Critical-transformative ecofeminism*, and *Cyber-(eco)feminism*. The respective chapters are continuous with each other but, on the whole, each position can be shown to represent a distinct viewpoint with regard to the main themes that are analysed and discussed. The consecutive chapters also portray the historical development of ecological feminist thinking, which, alternately, is also continuous with the unfolding of feminist and ecological thinking.

These preliminary comments on the structure of the thesis opens the way for further elaboration upon the content of each chapter. The title of chapter one, *Cultural ecofeminism*, could be deceptive. In an attempt to systematise ecofeminism as a body of thought resisting neat classification, Plumwood (1988) nevertheless identifies two main streams in ecofeminist thinking namely cultural ecofeminism and social ecofeminism. She describes the former as being a predominantly spiritual tradition, whilst the latter is more politically orientated. In terms of feminist theory, the two positions coincide roughly with radical feminism on the one hand, and socialist feminism on the other. Plumwood points out however that the two streams are not mutually exclusive, given that some ecofeminists incorporate aspects of both strands of thinking, thereby defying rigid categorisation.

Other ecological or ecological feminist thinkers draw different distinctions or work with a different classification system that problematises, but also coincides, with the distinction above (Zimmerman, 1994; Mellor, 1997). What this illustrates and reflects is the eclectic and therefore complex character of

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<sup>27</sup> See Braidotti *et al* (1994: 161-167) for a rather unflattering portrayal of ecofeminist thinking.

ecological feminist thinking as a body of thought (Zimmerman, 1994; Carlassare, 1994). The strands that different authors identify and focus on, depend largely on their line of inquiry, and often also mirror the depth of their analyses. I, in turn, work with a classification system that is suited to my line of inquiry. I distinguish different nuances in what I refer to as cultural ecofeminist thinking, and identify two additional streams in ecofeminist thinking, namely *critical-transformative ecofeminism* and *cyber-(eco)feminism*. Before I proceed to name and discuss the different subdivisions within cultural ecofeminism, I would like to explicate the considerations that informed my particular engagement with and therefore classification of ecofeminist thinking.

My research question centers on the contributions of different ecofeminist positions towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self that will promote the establishment of ethical relations with the natural environment from a position beyond dualism and essentialism. It follows that this preoccupation is reflected in the structure of the thesis. First and foremost, I focus on those positions that have a particular contribution to make towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self beyond dualism and essentialism. Secondly, despite what might at first glance look like an integration of very divergent positions,<sup>28</sup> in each chapter, the notions of the self along with the ethic that is articulated can be grouped together. Another factor that played an important structuring role, is what I, also in keeping with my research question, have identified as the ethical as opposed to the more overtly political current that runs through ecofeminist thinking.<sup>29</sup> This approach crisscrosses through the distinction that Plumwood (1988) draws between cultural and social ecofeminism above, therefore upsetting the fixed order that she imposes. Given the focus of my research, the structure of my first chapter exhibits such a crisscrossing. Weaving my way around and between the two pillars that are cultural ecofeminism and social ecofeminism, the complexities of ecofeminist thinking are encountered head on.

In my discussion of cultural ecofeminism as a distinct ecofeminist position, a number of strands of ecofeminist thinking are integrated. That is, it

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<sup>28</sup> Here I am referring to Chapter 1 in particular.

encompasses spiritual, nature, and affinity strands, along with aspects of social/ist ecofeminism. In this discussion, the spiritual and nature strands can be positioned together, in that first and foremost, they share an affirmation and revalorisation of the body as female. Nature and spiritual ecofeminism celebrate women's bodies and affirm their connectedness to nature. As I observed above, it is then also these two positions that would generally be viewed as representative of cultural ecofeminism. Affinity ecofeminism is also included in this discussion because by focusing on women's reproductive labour,<sup>30</sup> it shares with nature and spiritual ecofeminism an identification of women with nature. To the extent that women's difference is affirmed and the notions of the self and ethics that are endorsed by cultural and social/ist ecofeminism coincide, these two positions are integrated in this chapter.

As will become evident during the course of this inquiry, most ecofeminists who do not fall into the nature or spiritual camps hold some allegiance to social/ist ecofeminism. The different strands in social/ist ecofeminism differ markedly in approach and focus. To discuss social/ist ecofeminism in a single chapter (as opposed to cultural ecofeminism), would therefore not do justice to the richness of this stream of thinking. The main reason for my particular arrangement of the different ecofeminist perspectives is the focus of my inquiry, which is on the contributions that different ecofeminist positions make towards the articulation of an alternative ecological feminist notion of the self. On account of the historical materialist tradition it is grounded in, the engagement with the self by social/ist ecofeminists is severely limited. The social/ist feminist focus on the sexual division of labour that includes *reproduction* in their historical materialist analysis does open up the way for a psychological dimension to their analysis. This is the aspect of social/ist ecofeminism that, because of its explicit focus on the self and ecological values, is regarded as relevant to the analysis and discussion conducted in Chapter 1. This aspect of social/ist ecofeminism is included because it enhances and builds upon the main arguments and viewpoints formulated by cultural ecofeminists (in this context as spiritual,

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<sup>29</sup> As I will argue in the body of this text, the ethical and political are strictly speaking not separable. The difference therefore lies not wholly in content, but rather in accent.

<sup>30</sup> Whereas in later socialist/materialist feminism the emphasis shifted from childbearing to childrearing, here it is the former rather than the latter that is stressed, accounting in turn for the link with those streams that emphasise women's bodily difference.

nature and affinity ecofeminism). What it shares with these strands of thinking is an emphasis on women's difference, and it overlaps and reinforces both the notions of the self and ethic that are endorsed by cultural ecofeminism.

The second chapter, titled *Critical-transformative ecofeminism*, focuses mostly on the work of ecological feminist thinker Valerie Plumwood. The reason why I devote most of an entire chapter to her work is because she is the only ecofeminist thinker who is explicit in her articulation of a notion of an ecological self and a concomitant ethic.<sup>31</sup> Although Plumwood's thought and writing forms the backbone of what I have termed critical-transformative ecological feminism, other ecofeminists such as Warren (1987, 1990, 1993), Cuomo (1998), King (1989, 1990), Merchant (1990, 1994) and Mellor (1998) enhance and reinforce her analysis. What is particularly noteworthy about Plumwood's approach is that unlike the work of the ecofeminists discussed in Chapter 1, there is a distinct *reconstructive* moment in her work. The absence of such a reconstructive moment in the chapter titled *Cultural ecofeminism* can be ascribed to their alliance to a materialist feminist tradition that is characterised by an empirical approach where the focus is on women's experience. Plumwood is less specifically situated. Having roots in German Critical Theory,<sup>32</sup> her work depicts also a shift towards integrating the conceptual and the material.

The third and last chapter in this inquiry into the contributions that the different ecofeminist positions make towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self and ethics, is titled what I have tentatively come to refer to as *cyber-(eco)feminism*, the main representative of which is Donna Haraway. Whilst Haraway is not an explicit ecofeminist writer and does not set herself the task of articulating a notion of an ecological self or ethic, her work on the self, nature and politics is highly relevant to ecological feminist thinking for a number of reasons. This is because she articulates her views in the context of post-industrial, late capitalist, high-tech culture, a position of particular relevance

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<sup>31</sup> Cuomo (1998) has followed in her footsteps, but as I acquired access to her book only recently, her work is integrated to the extent that it coincides with Plumwood's.

<sup>32</sup> The Frankfurt School developed the German tradition of Critical Theory. It breaks with orthodox Marxism's historical materialism and conducts a critique not of political economy, but enters Marxist debates through a critique of culture, scientism and instrumental reason (Eckersley, 1992: 97).

from an environmental perspective posing interesting challenges to ecological and feminist thinking alike. As such, it can be shown that her engagement with the self, nature and politics has significant contributions to make towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self. One thing that sets this chapter off against the others is that instead of discussing an ethic as in the previous chapters, I discuss what Haraway refers to as *a politics of articulation*. This absence of an ethic reveals not only Haraway's situatedness as poststructuralist theorist, but also her rootedness in socialist feminist theory.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I go to great lengths to explain and illustrate my focus on ethics and its effects. Here, in Chapter 3, in acknowledgement of the blurring of the boundaries between politics and ethics in poststructuralist thinking, I deviate a little and discuss Haraway's politics of articulation, (which is in keeping with the socialist feminist trend to focus epistemology and politics) mainly with the purpose to establish whether, in the face of rapid globalisation and increasing ecological degradation, we can indeed afford to do away with ethics. Regarding her socialist feminist background, what distinguishes Haraway's thinking from earlier materialist feminism, is that, (like Plumwood), and in keeping with her consistent integration of the social/material with the semiotic/symbolic, there is a definitive *reconstructive* moment in her work. These two attributes are what set her apart from all other social/ist ecofeminist thinkers, which in turn accounts for why I find it fitting to analyse and discuss her work in a separate chapter. The main reason why I find it appropriate to devote a whole chapter to Haraway's thinking, can however be ascribed to the fact that to my knowledge she is the only poststructuralist feminist thinker who seriously engages with ecological thinking and issues. Coincidentally, this is a void in contemporary feminist thinking that inspired the writing of this thesis in the first place.

In what follows I would like to give a broad outline of the structure and content of this thesis so as to guide the reader in reading this text.

## **Structure**

Consistent with the three streams that I identify in ecofeminism, the three chapters that comprise this thesis are respectively titled *Cultural ecofeminism*,

*Critical-transformative ecofeminism* and *Cyber-(eco)feminism*, the structure of which is roughly the same. Each chapter starts off with a contextualisation to situate each position within feminist and ecological thinking. In Chapter 1, the contextualisation is followed by an account of the different aspects of patriarchal Western culture responsible for the twin dominations of women and nature. They are, respectively, philosophical dualism, a psychology of fear of the other, and Western science and Cartesian-Newtonianism. Dualism is revealed as a hierarchical structure that puts “women down and men up”. What is revealed is that in dualist philosophical thinking, nature and women are identified with the flesh and with the body, and subsequently held to be inherently evil, as opposed to men who are identified with the mental and spiritual. From this perspective, the identification of women and nature with the body has sanctioned the domination of both. This is followed by the argument that it is the male fear of mortality that is the cause of the twin dominations of women and nature. From this perspective it is argued that the male fear of mortality manifests itself in the suppression of women and nature as reminders of change, vulnerability, finiteness and ultimately death. In the section on Western science and Cartesian-Newtonianism, knowledge and the methodology of scientific knowledge are exposed as being defined in opposition to women, and subsequently inimical to both women and nature.

In the section that follows, one response of cultural ecofeminism to the environmental crisis is discussed in the light of the different factors that are respectively put forward as the root cause of the oppression of women and nature. The focus of this discussion is on an understanding of female identity that I translate and discuss as a notion of a *female self*. The *female self* that is endorsed by cultural ecofeminists is placed in direct opposition to the alienated male self that is criticised in the preceding section. Representing a particular engagement with the question of difference, here the *female self* is perceived as significantly connected with nature. The view of nature that is embraced departs radically from its status as lifeless brute matter, and we are also introduced to the (feminine) values of intuition and care as offering alternative ecological values.

In the next section, the cultural ecofeminist employment of a vocabulary of care is discussed with reference to an exposition of an ethic of care. Rather than giving a detailed account of an ethic of care the focus here is on the notion of the self that informs this ethic. The conception of female gender identity that is socio-psychologically grounded offers what I translate and discuss as a notion of a *feminine self*. Whilst offering an account of women's difference, I show how this conception of the *feminine self* coincides with the ecofeminist appeal to the different social roles that women occupy as providing us with alternative (ecological) values. These values are consistent with an ethic of care and a *feminine self* that offer important insights with regard to the articulation of an alternative ecological feminist notion of the self. As I will show, however, cultural ecofeminism does not succeed in overcoming the problems of dualism and essentialism. This comes to the fore in the final part of this chapter that consists of an assessment of cultural ecofeminism in the light of the problems of dualism and essentialism from an ecological and feminist perspective.

The second chapter, titled *Critical-transformative ecofeminism*, starts with a brief contextualisation that is followed by an analysis of dualism as the root cause of the twin dominations of women and nature. I start by showing how dualism has structured the rationalist philosophical tradition and how the concept of nature employed sanctions the domination and instrumentalisation of nature. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of dualism, and the structure and functioning and main features of dualism are discussed. In the light of this exposition, I show how the critical-transformative ecofeminist approach to the domination of women and nature as a result of dualism distinguishes this position from cultural ecofeminism. This is followed by an explication of Plumwood's strategy to move beyond dualism.

In the sections that follow, an exposition is given of the contributions of critical-transformative ecofeminism towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self beyond dualism and essentialism. This section is divided into three parts. Performing a critical affirmation of female gender identity, Plumwood endorses what I translate as a *pluralist feminine self*. This *pluralist feminine self* is offered in an attempt to overcome the universalist character of the *feminine self* that is discussed in Chapter 1 on the one hand, and on the

other to liberate the *feminine self* from its dualist construal. The second notion that is discussed is a *degendered human self* that is proposed with the intention to create a setting against which an ecological self beyond gender can be articulated that leaves space for the flourishing of differences. This notion of the human self signifies an attempt to transcend what Plumwood views as the false choice between either endorsing a masculine or feminine self as an alternative ecological self. The third section moves into the realm of ethics, and shows how a non-anthropocentric notion of continuity between humans and nature can be established whilst leaving space for differences between humans and nature.

In the section on critical-transformative ecofeminist ethics, I give an exposition of the ethic that is endorsed by critical-transformative ecofeminism, in particular the notion of the self that is central to such an ethic. The notion of the self that emerges is the mutual self that, drawing on a broadened notion of intentionality, establishes a relation of continuity and difference between the self and nature. This notion of the self is articulated in response to what Plumwood views as deep ecology's over-emphasis on continuity at the expense of acknowledging differences. In the final section of this chapter, I critically assess the contributions that critical-transformative ecofeminism makes towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self beyond dualism and essentialism.

In the third and final chapter of this thesis, titled *Cyber-(eco)feminism*, the contextualisation is directly followed by a discussion of the different but related notions of the self that are endorsed by cyber-(eco)feminism. The absence of an explicit account of the cause of the twin dominations of women and nature cannot be ascribed to a lack of insight in this regard. This is made evident by the systematic deconstruction by Haraway of all the dualisms that have grounded sexism, racism, colonialism and naturism.

In the first part of this chapter the figure of the cyborg and the Inappropriate/d Other is discussed as instances of "monstrous selves". The second part consists of an exposition of the situated self that offers a notion of the female knowing subject that is radically specific. Emerging as half-human, half-machine, the cyborg is a poststructuralist entity par excellence. A subversive playful figure,



the cyborg stands out for its highly differentiated character and disregard for boundaries previously regarded as sacred. As possible cyborg subjectivity, the Inappropriate/d Other marks a moment of pause, curbing the radical differentiation of the figure of the cyborg. Socially and discursively constructed along variable axes of difference, the Inappropriate/d Other is presented as a notion of (female) feminist subjectivity that is neither self nor other.

The situated self comes to the fore in the context of Haraway's discussion of feminist epistemology. This notion of the self is articulated in an attempt to conceive of an alternative feminist knowing subject that is radically specific and which overcomes the stark boundary between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge. In the process, nature as passive object is reconceived in non-anthropocentric terms as the figure of the Coyote Trickster. In the section that follows, Haraway's concept of nature is further elaborated upon. In keeping with nature as Coyote Trickster, nature is conceived of as "artifactual" and as "social".

Emphasising the artifactuality and social dimension of nature, a way is opened up for the articulation of a politics of articulation as an ethically sound alternative political strategy to navigate negotiations around environmental issues. Moving away from a politics of representation, which often results in the obliteration of the voices of others, a politics of articulation is an inclusive politics. In the final section of this chapter, I perform a critical evaluation of the notions of the self, nature and politics that are proposed by cyber-(eco)feminism from an ecological and feminist perspective. The third chapter is followed by a *Conclusion*, which consists of a summary of my findings and a few concluding remarks.

In what follows then, I would like to explore the contributions that *cultural*, *critical-transformative* and *cyber-(eco)feminism* respectively make towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self that will generate ethical relations with the natural environment from a position beyond dualism and essentialism. In a field as young as ecological thinking, such an inquiry requires that we suspend our quest for fixed and final solutions for a moment and graciously allow for open-ended answers to the enormous environmental challenges and pressing concerns that we are faced with at the advent of a new

millennium. This might enable us to consider how far we have come, how we can creatively apply the knowledge and insights that has thus far been generated, and getting an idea of the direction we should be steering the process of establishing sound ecological feminist practices.

# Chapter One

## Cultural Ecofeminism

### 1. Introduction

In the following chapter I give an exposition of the contributions made by cultural ecofeminism towards the conceptualisation of the ecological feminist notion of the self and concomitant ethic beyond dualism and essentialism.<sup>1</sup> Although cultural ecofeminists do not set themselves the *explicit* task of formulating an *ecological feminist notion of the self*, I hope to show that cultural ecofeminist thinking does offer significant insights regarding the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self and an ethic that can be associated with it. As I have explained in the *Introduction*, this will entail an examination of the contributions that are made towards the articulation of a feminist notion of an ecological self and an ecological notion of a (female) feminist self. In the light of the problems of dualism and essentialism then, the aim of this discussion is to determine the viability of the notions of the self and the ethic articulated by cultural ecofeminism from an ecological and feminist perspective.

Articulating their views from an ecofeminist theoretical position, cultural ecofeminists locate the link between the domination of women and nature in patriarchy. In their critique of patriarchal culture, they expose what in their perspective are the foundations that ground the devaluation and subjugation of women and nature. The domination of nature is perceived as inextricably linked to that of women, which is ascribed to the age-old association of nature with women and the feminine. From this perspective, the twin dominations of nature and women can be shown to be the effect of philosophical, psychological and epistemological factors that shape Western patriarchal culture. Before I discuss the different factors that are respectively put forward to account for the simultaneous domination of women and nature, I briefly contextualise cultural ecofeminist thinking. The section that follows, titled "Patriarchal culture: self, woman and nature", consists of a discussion of what different representatives of

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<sup>1</sup> As I have explained in the *Introduction*, aspects of social/ist ecofeminist thinking are integrated in this discussion of cultural ecofeminism. As such, cultural ecofeminism here consists of nature, spiritual, affinity and social ecofeminist strands.

early ecofeminist thinking identify as the link between the domination of women and nature. In the first part titled "Philosophical dualism", the connection between the twin dominations of women and nature as an effect of dualism, is discussed. In ecofeminist thought, dualism is probably one of the most referred to (as opposed to analysed) problems implicated in the domination and subjugation of women and nature.<sup>2</sup> In *cultural* ecofeminist thinking it is most elaborately engaged with by Dodson Gray (1981) whose account of "hierarchical dualism" shall be focused upon. According to Gray, the masculine/feminine, mind/body, spirit/flesh dualisms in Western religious and philosophical thinking, in terms of which men are associated with the uppersides and women and nature with the undersides, provide an explanation for the simultaneous domination of women and nature in western patriarchal culture.

In the following section, an exposition is given of the psychological account of the domination of women and nature offered by Dodson Gray, (1981), Griffin (1989), Spretnak (1993) and King (1989). What is revealed in this section titled "A psychology of fear of the other", is that the dominant masculine conception of the self in patriarchal culture that invariably finds its expression in the male self, is one that is constituted through the denial and suppression of women and by implication also, nature. But, argue cultural ecofeminists, underlying these oppressive practices, lurks fear, and it is this fear of the other that lies at the core of the male psyche. This results in an impoverished self, marked by alienation and disconnectedness. Such is this sense of disembodiedness that it paradoxically manifests itself in self-destructive death-denying cultural practices.

In the final section, the focus shifts to the epistemological factors that are perceived to ground the domination of women and nature. In this section titled "Western science and Cartesian-Newtonianism", I discuss Merchant's (1980) arguments that Cartesian-Newtonian thinking employs images of women and nature that sanction the domination and subjugation of both. What is also illuminated is how, consistent with the images and views expressed of nature and women, the conditions for the acquisition of scientific knowledge too, are formulated in explicitly gendered terms (Fox-Keller, 1985). This exposes the

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<sup>2</sup> Other cultural ecofeminists, who refer to dualism without conducting a thorough analysis thereof, are Griffin (1978, 1989, 1990), Salleh (1984, 1992).

knowing subject and scientific knowledge as defined in opposition to all that is associated with women. Brought in relation with this critique of Western science and Cartesian-Newtonianism, is the cultural ecofeminist critique of the rise and role of technology in the domination and exploitation of nature.

Having discussed the critique of patriarchal culture in terms of the distinct factors that inform and legitimate the treatment of both women and nature, the section that follows, titled "Reconceiving the self", documents one cultural ecofeminist response to the environmental crisis. The spiritual poverty of Western consumerist culture in response to which this position took shape, is touched upon. The focus of this discussion is however on the celebration of the female self and her connectedness to nature as superior and in contrast to the male self identified in the previous section. This female connectedness to the body and nature is further elaborated upon beyond the initial spiritualist sentiments of cultural ecofeminism. Representing a particular engagement with the question of difference, the female self is valorised and affirmed in opposition to the male or masculinist self that is criticised and rejected in the preceding section<sup>3</sup>. Celebrating and revaluing what is devalued and oppressed in patriarchal culture, a conception of the self as female comes to the fore that is perceived to be significantly connected with nature and which embraces a view of nature that departs radically from its inferiorised status as lifeless matter. In keeping with this, (feminine) values such as connectedness, intuition and care are reappropriated as alternative ecological values.

In the third section titled "An ethic of care", I discuss the alternative ethic that is endorsed by cultural ecofeminists, focusing in particular on the notion of the self that is to inform such an ethic. Here, a second notion of the self comes to the fore, one that strongly resembles, but which also diverges significantly from the self that is acclaimed in the section titled "Reconceiving the self". In the first

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<sup>3</sup> As we shall see in the forthcoming sections, a distinction is drawn between a "male self", a "masculinist self" and "masculine self". The "male self" refers to biological males, whilst the "masculine self", being the dominant notion of the self in Western culture, is not restricted to men only. To show how the masculine self, has traditionally coincided with being male, when applicable, I use the phrase "masculinist self". Similar comments can be made with regard to the use of the "female self" and "feminine self". The "female self" refers to biological women, whilst the "feminine self" is articulated in opposition to a "masculine self", but, as we shall see, whilst this notion which is derived from an account of female gender identity, is also offered as alternative to the dominant masculine notion of the self, it is also referred to as a "feminine

part of the section on cultural ecofeminist ethics, "Rights, care and nature" I show how the feminist critique of rights based ethics is consistent with an ecofeminist rejection of rights based environmental ethics. As such, Carol Gilligan's articulation of an ethic of care is invoked by the cultural ecofeminist use of a vocabulary of care. As indicated above, rather than giving specific content to an ecofeminist ethic of care, cultural ecofeminists focus on the notion of the self and the values that are to inform such an ethic. In the section that follows titled, "Ethics, relationality and female gender identity" a feminine self, derived from a conception of female gender identity that is socio-psychologically grounded, is discussed. Whilst offering an account of women's difference, I show how this conception of the self coincides with the ecofeminist appeal to the different social roles that women occupy as providing us with alternative values. These values are consistent with an ethic of care and along with a feminine notion of the self, offer important insights towards the articulation of an alternative ecological feminist notion of the self. Conducted in the light of feminist and ecological concerns, I close this chapter with an evaluation of the cultural ecofeminist notion/s of the self and forthflowing ethic.

Before proceeding to discuss the cultural ecofeminist critique of patriarchal culture, I would like to take the opportunity to sketch some primary features that characterise cultural ecofeminism, also with the aim of placing it in the context of feminism.<sup>4</sup>

## **2. Contextualisation and background**

Following the overview given by Jaggar (1983) of the evolution of different streams in feminist thinking, I would like to briefly sketch the context that cultural ecofeminism emerged from. Cultural ecofeminism has come into being in opposition to two streams within feminism, namely liberal feminism and the first wave of radical feminism. Liberal feminism, which has its roots in the 18th century, reached its peak in the mid 1960's and had its focus on bringing about equality between men and women. Following Mary Wolstonecraft's *A*

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notion of the self".

<sup>4</sup> Although the discussion of cultural ecofeminism conducted in this chapter moves beyond the confines of its relation to radical feminism, contextualising cultural ecofeminism in this manner remains relevant to the chapter as a whole.

*Vindication of Rights for Women* (1978), a main argument of the liberal feminist strand is that women are not essentially different from men, and that the claim that women are biologically weaker than men is a ruse that men use to prevent women from equal admittance to the public sphere. Moreover, they argued that the differences between men and women are a function of socialisation, which determines gender, rather than biology, which determines sex. Over a period of time however, many feminists started expressing their discontent with the male-defined identities they were expected to adopt in order to gain access to a masculine-defined sphere and masculine institutions that the liberal feminist demand for equality, is uncritical of.

Out of this dissatisfaction, radical feminism emerged which holds the view that patriarchy is the root of all forms of oppression. An early phase of radical feminism however, shared with liberal feminism the view that women's liberation is possible only through the liberation from and control of biology, or alternatively expressed, nature. A prominent and well-cited representative of this first wave of radical feminism (relevant particularly from an ecofeminist perspective), is Shulamith Firestone (1970), who argues that the oppression of women is grounded in women's biological reproductive role. She argues that since patriarchy is grounded in women's biological constitution, women need to liberate themselves from the constraints imposed on them by their reproductive capacities. What Firestone proposes, is to transform the biological basis of women's oppression by replacing biological reproduction with artificial technological processes. According to Firestone, reproductive technology holds the key to women's liberation, and commends it for its 'victory over the Kingdom of Nature'' (Jaggar, 1983: 92; quoting Firestone, 1970: 9).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Together with liberal feminism, early radical feminist thought is also identified as equality feminism, given the respective arguments forwarded either explicitly or implicitly for the erasure of differences between men and women (Gatens, 1991; Braidotti, 1991; Grosz, 1990). The view of the self that is endorsed is one that is consistent with the liberal view of the self. The neutrality that this notion of the self is suggestive of has its roots in the liberal view of the human, which is by definition male or masculine. Leading figures of equality feminism then are Wolstonecraft (1792/1978), Millet (1969), De Beauvoir (1964), and Firestone (1970). Equality feminism however, has an additional branch, which is associated with those gender theorists whose aim is the establishment of equality between men and women outside of the liberal framework, and who, when it comes to gender identity, endorse some form of androgyny. It is particularly early socialist or materialist feminism that falls into this category. As I have stressed, in this chapter, the confines of radical feminist thinking are transgressed to include the insights of some social/ist ecofeminists. The reason why it is not inappropriate to do so, is because in ecological literature, this ecofeminist position is generally received as

In the course of radical feminism's development, however, a significant divergence from liberal feminism and the first phase of radical feminism occurred. The former's emphasis on the similarities between men and women is rejected in favour of an affirmation of women's difference. In stark contrast with Firestone's dim view of women's biology, a celebration and revaluation of women's (biological) difference and its connectedness to the natural world followed.

Cultural ecofeminism shares with radical feminism the view that patriarchy is the root of all forms of oppression.<sup>6</sup> Like later radical feminism, it also values women's difference positively, which distinguishes it sharply from liberal feminism. Deriving the attribute "cultural" from its call upon all women to found an alternative female culture to replace the "misogynist, hierarchical, domineering, violent and death-denying culture of patriarchy" (Zimmerman, 1994: 236), cultural ecofeminism sees patriarchy and all its manifestations also as responsible for the wanton destruction of the natural environment and thus principally responsible for the ecological crisis. This concern with the natural environment signifies a disjunction with the technophilia of Firestone's version of radical feminism, as the environmental degradation and exploitation along with nuclear and toxic waste and air and water pollution as a result of the implementation of technology, has come under sharp criticism by cultural ecofeminists (amongst others). The ideal of science - total control over nature - embodied in advanced technology is rejected outright by cultural ecofeminists as being one of the primary causes of environmental destruction and degradation.<sup>7</sup> In the following section, I will illustrate the aspects of patriarchal culture that cultural ecofeminists single out as sanctioning the domination and subjugation of both women and nature.

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affirming women's difference (thus coinciding with radical feminism) along with the different values that inform women's traditional roles (Zimmerman, 1994; Dobson, 1995). Because this notion of the self that coincides with these roles and values are however ultimately presented as desirable for both men and women which has a neutralising effect, the link is made with equality feminism. The analyses of these thinkers' work seldom move beyond this focus on women's difference, and the suggestion by some gender theorists that the differences in between the genders in terms of identity should be erased, (once these differences are acknowledged and the positive aspects incorporated), hardly receives any attention. In the last section of this chapter, the evaluation, this will receive the deserved attention.

<sup>6</sup>This is not always explicitly stated, but it is implied in the argument that the domination of nature is the effect of nature's association with women.



### 3. Patriarchal culture: woman, nature and the self

#### 3.1. Philosophical dualism

The belief that unites the diverse group of thinkers whose views I hope to show strengthen and overlap with each other, is that the twin domination and subordination of women and nature is an effect of patriarchy (Gray, 1981; Spretnak, 1993; Griffin, 1978, 1989; Daly, 1978, 1984; Collard, 1988; Salleh, 1984; Birkeland, 1992; Shiva, 1989, 1990; Plant, 1989). For the reader who would like to be reminded, patriarchy here, to put it in simple terms, refers to the rule of the fathers - and in more senses than one. Stating that patriarchy lies at the root of the domination of women and nature is in effect to argue that all forms of oppression can be traced back to patriarchy, that is the domination of women by men. In support of this view, Mary Daly extends the viciousness of patriarchy to include a number of other atrocities, asserting that "the polluting, poisoning, contaminating evil of men's rule of phallocracy" is ultimately responsible for the pervasiveness of "rapism, racism, gynocide, genocide and ultimately biocide" (Daly, 1984: 379).

To come back to the twin dominations of women and nature, different arguments are put forward to link the simultaneous domination and subordination of women and the natural environment in patriarchal culture. Often alluded to, but seldom accompanied by an in depth analysis,<sup>8</sup> it is maintained that the domination of both women and nature can be accounted for by philosophical dualism. In agreement with others (Griffin, 1978; Gray, 1981; Birkeland, 1992), who either explicitly or implicitly argue that dualism is an expression of patriarchal consciousness, Gray (1981: 5) asserts that hierarchical dualism has been revealed as a "patriarchal myth that rationalise and justify a society that puts women down and men up".

In her book *Green Paradise Lost* (1981), Gray, who is a theologian, maintains

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<sup>7</sup> This line of argument is particular to the social/ist stream within ecofeminist thinking.

<sup>8</sup> As we shall see, this lack of a thorough engagement with the nature and functioning of dualism can be shown to be the reason why cultural ecofeminists apparently have difficulty to adequately and convincingly move beyond dualism.

that the domination of both women and nature can be ascribed to philosophical dualism which generates "a vision of reality as hierarchical with God and man above and women and nature below" (Gray, 1981: 4). Accordingly, man and God are perceived to be closer to the spiritual as opposed to those occupying the lower sphere, who are perceived to dwell in the realm of the fleshly, unspiritual and subsequently, inherently evil. This hierarchical framework, argues Gray, sanctions the mistreatment, violation and killing of the members of the lower order - whether female, child, animal or plant - according to the needs of members of the higher order (Gray, 1981: 2-6).

Another significant feature of philosophical dualism is that its structure shapes and dominates our perceptions to such an extent that it creates severe distortions, these distortions pertaining specifically to the question of difference. That is, as Gray declares "when confronted with differences we distort differences ... so intimately is it a part of how we perceive that we never seem to assess difference as just that - different" (Gray, 1981: 19).

For Gray, the oppression of women and nature can ultimately be traced back to the masculine/feminine, mind/body, spirit/flesh dualisms. Identified with the superior realm of mind and spirit, Man (representing God's authority on earth), has historically occupied the privileged pole of a number of dualist pairs, whilst women and nature have been designated to the inferior realm of the physical and the material (Gray, 1981: 5-8). This identification of women and nature with the realm of the physical has served as a justification of the domination and exploitation of both. In contrast, the subject of philosophical reflection is portrayed as coinciding with the superior realm of the mental, and exhibits an explicit aversion to and denial of the body. She (Gray, 1981: 22-23) proceeds to quote Becker (1973: 25-27) who, in awe of what boils down to a narcissistic reflection of himself, illustrates this point succinctly:

His body is a material fleshly casing that is alien to him in many ways - the strangest and most repugnant way being that it aches and bleeds and will decay and die .... [Yet] he has an awareness of his own splendid uniqueness in that he sticks out of nature with a towering majesty ...

In conclusion, Gray (1981: 26) maintains that the domination and inferiorisation of women and nature as grounded in hierarchical dualism, is also a manifestation of deeper-lying emotions and widely held assumptions prevalent in Western culture. She writes:

Our culture's view of nature is deeply embedded not only in a hierarchical view of reality, but also in *deeply felt* attitudes towards what it views to be the bearers of sheer physicalness, namely sex, women, mother and death (my emphasis, FM).

The above quotation anticipates a different approach some cultural ecofeminists (King, 1989; Griffin, 1989; 1990; Gray, 1981; Spretnak, 1993) follow to account for the twin dominations of women and nature. The psychological account that is offered for the domination of women and nature, is related to dualism as discussed above, but, as dualism is ultimately offered as the manifestation of these factors, I treat it as part of a separate argument within cultural ecofeminism. (Although, as we will see, separating the two, does lapse into circularity.)

### **3.2 A psychology of fear of the other**

For ecofeminists such as Griffin (1989) and King (1989), the specifically masculinist self dominant in Western patriarchal culture, is one that is constituted through the severing of connections with and negation of the other. It is argued that this sharp separation from and denial of the other is evidence of a deeper impulse, fear: that is, fear of women and nature and ultimately the fear of mortality. In this regard King cites De Beauvoir (1968) who has pointed out that patriarchal culture gives expression to the male fear of mortality of which women and nature, who are associated with the physical, the vulnerable and change, are constant reminders (King, 1989: 21). This fear finds its expression in the objectification and domination of nature and women, turning both into others to be appropriated and controlled (Griffin, 1989: 12; King, 1989: 21-23). According to King (1989:22) the process of objectification is made possible and is based upon a profound forgetting by men. This is a denial of their dependence on the realm of what is generally considered as necessity, and therefore taken for granted:

They forget that they are born of women, were dependent on women in their early helpless years, and are dependent on nonhuman nature all their lives, which allows first for objectification and then for domination.<sup>9</sup>

Linking up with the above, but focusing specifically on nature, Griffin elaborates on what she identifies as a fundamentally “split culture”. According to Griffin (1989: 9-17), such a split is brought about by the severing and denial of the self’s connection with nature.<sup>10</sup> Picking upon King’s line of argument, she asserts that underlying the perception of the self as superior to nature, lies a dreadful fear, “and the fear that lies under this thought, like all fear, turns into rage” (Griffin, 1989: 10). For Griffin then, the control of nature signifies the ongoing struggle to deny the self’s connectedness with the natural which culminates in Western culture’s death-denying obsession to ameliorate our technology so as to escape the natural cycles and rhythms of nature, and ultimately death:

The very images that express our power over Nature take us back to our own memory and knowledge of Nature’s power both within and outside ourselves. Therefore our delusion demands that we gain a greater control over nature. We must escalate our efforts. We must improve our technology (Griffin, 1989: 12).<sup>11</sup>

To resist the infinite regress that an attempt to explain the existence of the male fear of mortality (as opposed to its apparent absence in life-affirming women), in this context necessarily leads us to, I would like to take this opportunity to shift the focus of this discussion somewhat.<sup>12</sup> Apart from the fear of mortality, which

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<sup>9</sup> Focusing on the denial of dependence of women and nature, the socialist feminist roots of much ecofeminist thinking is brought to light.

<sup>10</sup> Griffin’s focus on nature is characterised by a blurring of a distinction between women and nature. That is, to speak of nature is almost to speak of women. In defense of Griffin however, Davion (1994:9), and Caralssare (1994: 226-228), have argued that her book *Women and Nature, The Roaring Inside Her* (1978) offers a detailed illustration of how women and nature have been associated with each other and how this association has operated to the detriment of both. The problem as we will see, is not her exposure of the (material) relationship between women and nature, but her tendency to also *promote* a relation of identification between women and nature.

<sup>11</sup> This point of critique links up with the ecofeminist critique of instrumental rationality, which is discussed in the following section, titled, *Western science and Cartesian-Newtonianism*.

<sup>12</sup> This shift in focus is my suggestion. The inability to give a persuasive explanation of the source of this fear of mortality, that is, one that does not lapse into a circular argument, makes cultural ecofeminism vulnerable to criticism that has led to its dismissal by many a critic. As we shall see, this kind of argument is consistent with the shattering charge of biological

illuminates the male psyche, another psychological theory is offered to account for the male domination and suppression of women and nature. Not wholly inconsistent with the view of the male psyche as possessed by a deep lying fear, some cultural ecofeminists look toward object relations theory for insight. Drawing upon Chodorow's (1974, 1978) object relations theory, Gray (1981) asserts that the twin dominations of women and nature is the effect of a specific psychosexual orientation that is revealed if we analyse the process that shapes masculine identity. The line of reasoning of object relations theory is that the infant's relation to the mother (who most often is the primary caretaker), is of special significance in the development of male and female gender identities. This relation to the mother has a particularly profound impact on the male perception of women and the feminine.

According to Chodorow, at first both sexes experience a primary identification with the mother. When they start developing their own separate identities however, the experience of the two sexes differs significantly. The girl-child discovers that she has made her primary identification with a member of her own sex, and is encouraged to continue modeling herself after the female. The boy-child however, discovers that his identification with the mother is inappropriate, and that he has to model himself after a father figure that is mostly absent. The boy experiences an intense identity crisis that requires a severing of the ties with mother and an internalisation of this process of separation. Gray (1981: 37) quotes Chodorow (1974: 50) who articulates the boy's response to this crisis as follows:

A boy, in his attempt to gain an elusive masculine identification, often comes to define himself in largely negative terms, as that which is not feminine or not involved with women ... Internally the boy tries to reject his mother and deny his attachment to her and the strong dependence that he still feels ... He does this by repressing whatever he takes to be feminine inside himself, and importantly, *by denigrating and devaluing whatever he considers feminine in the*

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essentialism that is brought against cultural ecofeminism. This "reverse demonisation" makes obvious cultural ecofeminism's continued entrapment in dualist thinking. Moreover, as we shall see in the final section of this chapter, titled *An evaluation of cultural ecofeminism*, accounting for the twin dominations of women and nature in psychological terms are also received with severe skepticism.

*outside world*. As a societal member, he also appropriates to himself and defines as superior particular social activities and cultural (moral, religious, and creative) spheres - possibly in fact, "society" ... and "culture" ... themselves (emphasis Gray's).

What the above psychological account of the development and maintenance of masculine gender identity illustrates is that, and perhaps most significantly in this context, also *why* women and by implication nature, are experienced as threatening to the masculine self. As we have seen then, this identity is reinforced and affirmed through the systematic domination and subjugation of both women and nature.<sup>13</sup>

Charlene Spretnak (1993) concurs with Griffin, King and Gray and claims that "the elemental power of the female" threatens the security of the male self which is maintained by "guarding [his] autonomy and independence through domination and control" (Spretnak, 1993: 121). In keeping with the above analysis, Spretnak (1993) shows how the constitution of the (male) self in opposition to the "female" is reflected in the characteristics that are displayed by the masculinist self, which in turn accounts for the male fear of women or the feminine:

For men raised in (patriarchal) societies the informing obsession is to be 'not-woman', not emotionally invested in relationships, not 'vulnerable' through empathy, not weak in physicality, not docile. Autonomy is the goal, and there is great pleasure in distinguishing oneself from the pack. Life is often experienced as atomized,

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<sup>13</sup> What is of course frustrating and inadequate about Chodorow's account is that her argument is ultimately of a circular nature. She shows how certain gender patterns (read: male domination) are repeated by mothering performed by women. However, the explanation she offers *itself* appeals to male domination, that has its basis in the perceived inferiority of women (Nicholson, 1986: 86). This brings us to another shortcoming in Chodorow's theory, and that is that she does not explain why this gender pattern perpetuates itself, what is it that *enables* boys to establish their identities in the fashion explicated above (Scott, 1986: 1063). Conversely, as (Flax, 1990b: 47) points out, object relations theory "cannot explain why women have the primary responsibility in childrearing". Moreover, skepticism is also expressed about the suggestion that it is simply a question of socialisation and shared parenting that would "set things right" (Frazer and Nicholson, 1990: 30). In this regard, Gross (1990: 192) writes: "... such an equality, even if it is possible, will not provide a solution to patriarchal power relations, in so far as the same behaviour in the sexes will retain a different (unequal) meaning unless the very structures of significance and meaning, and not just social practices, are tackled. Chodorow's position does not address the intermeshing and interdependence of social and signifiatory practices".

alienating ... Rage, fear and loneliness are common psychological themes for men raised under patriarchy; detachment of feeling is the acceptable coping strategy (Spretnak, 1993: 119-120).

Back to the theme of male disconnectedness, the threat that women, and to a certain extent nature, pose to the establishment and maintenance of the rational, autonomous and independent (masculinist) self is consistent with a notion of the self that is alienated and disconnected from the other. Moreover, this fear of the other provides an explanation for the oppression and domination of both women and nature. From a cultural ecofeminist perspective, the psychological link that connects these two forms of domination is revealed. As I have shown, for cultural ecofeminists, this link is fear, and not any kind of fear, but a fear of an existential kind. A further aspect that links these two forms of domination that has been alluded to in the above discussion, regards the epistemological framework which expresses a relation of control and suppression of both women and nature. It is on this epistemological connection that I would presently like to focus.

### **3.3 Western science and Cartesian-Newtonianism**

Western science, specifically Cartesian-Newtonian science, is sharply criticised by cultural ecofeminism for embodying a mode of thinking that is hostile to both women (the feminine) and nature (Shiva, 1888, 1989; Griffin, 1989; Spretnak, 1993). This can be discerned not only in the images of women and nature that are employed in modern scientific discourse, but also the characterisation of scientific knowledge and by implication, its methodology. The former is revealed as promoting and legitimising the domination and subjugation of women and nature, whilst the latter, articulated in genderised terms, reinforces the denigration and inferiorisation of women and nature and therefore sanctions the mastery of both.

In *The Death of Nature* Carolyn Merchant (1983)<sup>14</sup> argues that the domination of

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<sup>14</sup> Coinciding with the critique of Western rationalism and its offshoots articulated by ecofeminists (Plumwood 1991, 1993; Merchant, 1990; King, 1989, 1990) who have their roots (partly) in the German tradition of Critical Theory, Merchant's analysis focuses on the rise of mechanistic science as the moment in history that announced the death of nature. Here, I am giving an exposition of aspects of her account, with the aim to illuminate what remains an

women and nature is linked to the rise of modern science, which conceives of the nature in mechanistic terms as opposed to that of an organism. She (1980: xvii) articulates the intersection of the domination of women and nature with the ascent of mechanistic science as follows:

In investigating the roots of our environmental dilemma and its connections to science [and] technology ... we must reexamine the formation of a world-view and science that, by reconceptualising reality as a machine rather than a living organism, sanctioned the domination of both women and nature.

Merchant contrasts what turns out to be a mechanistic worldview with a preceding organic era which "view of nature and society was based on the organic analogy between the human body, the microcosm, and the larger world, the macrocosm" (Merchant, 1983: 5). Significantly, during this period the natural environment was conceived of as nurturing mother, which functioned as a constraint on the behaviour of people.<sup>15</sup> Merchant proceeds to give a historical account of how this view of nature as living organism gradually diminished to the status of lifeless matter. With the scientific revolution during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the view of nature as nurturing mother gave way to be dominated by images of nature as wild woman: uncontrollable, to be tamed and subdued. Employing female imagery of nature oft quoted "father of modern science" Francis Bacon transformed scientific knowledge and method to a form of human power over nature: man was to enslave nature and torture her secrets from her (Merchant, 1983: 169).

Mechanistic philosophy, which views the world as consisting of interchangeable atomised parts that could be repaired and replaced from outside, was developed during the 1620's and 1630's by Descartes (Merchant, 1993: 272-276). Invoking the metaphor of the machine to describe the complex constitution and functioning of the natural environment was the final step in the declaration of

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unsatisfactory cultural ecofeminist analysis and critique of the role of Western scientific thinking, in particular Cartesian-Newtonianism, in the destruction of the natural environment. It is in Chapter 2 that a critique of Western rationalism takes on a slightly different countenance.<sup>15</sup> Merchant (1996: 77) also points out that at the same time, another female image of nature as "wild and uncontrollable nature that could render violence, storms, droughts and general chaos" was also prevalent at this time, which as we will see, later became the dominant view of nature.



the death of nature. Nature was reduced to passive and inert brute matter, subject to man's scientific and technological endeavours. Similarly, the image of nature was transposed onto women who were perceived as passive, emotional objects in opposition to her active, rational male counterpart (Braidotti *et al*, 1994: 30).

Feminist critics of science (Bordo, 1986; Fox-Keller, 1985) have revealed how, analogous to the manner in which nature has systematically been turned into the object of knowledge by means of female imagery, the exclusion and suppression of the feminine in scientific discourse has functioned to the detriment of women. First and foremost, scientific thought is articulated in specifically masculine terms, as rational, objective, and universally true, thus uncontaminated by the emotional, subjective and specific - qualities that are associated with the feminine. The knowing subject, in opposition to the body, emotionality and specificity, is depicted as representing mind, rationality and objectivity. The methodology that science employs, is one that invokes a sharp split between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge, a division which as we shall shortly see, is in keeping with the articulation of the scientific mode of thinking as masculine and the knower as male. Evelyn Fox-Keller (1985: 79), who was one of the first critics to point out the gendered and instrumental character of western science, argues that scientific thought and methodology are intertwined and articulated in explicitly masculinist terms, and conceived of in opposition to women and the feminine:

Having divided the world into two parts - the knower (mind) and the knowable (nature) - scientific ideology goes on to prescribe a specific relation between the two. It prescribes the interactions which can ... lead to knowledge. Not only are mind and nature assigned gender, but in characterising scientific and objective thought as masculine, the *very activity* by which the knower can acquire knowledge is also genderised. The relation specified between knower and known is one of distance and separation ... The modes of intercourse are defined so as to ensure *emotional and physical violation* of the subject. The scientific mind is set off from what is to be known ... and its autonomy is guaranteed by setting apart its modes of knowing from

those in which that dichotomy is threatened. In this process, the characterisation of both the scientific mind and its modes of knowing as masculine are indeed significant. Masculine here connotes ... autonomy, separation and distance. It connotes a radical rejection of any comingling of subject and object, which are ... quite consistently identified as male and female.

The sharp separation enacted between the subject and object of knowledge serves to reinforce the masculine character of the scientific mode of thinking, as this separation makes possible the acquisition of knowledge that is rational and objective. The metaphors used to describe the knowing subject's approach to the object further links a masculine mode of scientific thinking with the domination not only of nature but also women. In keeping with the images of domination that are utilized by Bacon in his description of scientific and technological enterprise, scientific methodology is articulated in highly sexualised terms. In this regard, the metaphor of penetration is significant (Fox-Keller, 1985: 51), as is vision or the scientific gaze as the instrument of penetration (Bordo, 1986). Through the eroticisation of scientific knowledge and the power it yields, the gendered nature of science is connected with the domination of nature, women and the feminine.

These genderised images of science and scientific knowledge, coupled with explicit images of domination and control are synonymous with a particular characterisation of the modern scientific project. If we recall, the image of nature as organism was replaced with an image of nature as disorder (wild and uncontrollable). This new image of nature paved the way for that which Merchant (1996: 77) identifies as "an important modern idea, that of power over nature". In keeping with this line of thinking, Griffin, invoking and exposing the non-innocence of the adage "knowledge is power", maintains that power over nature is attained through knowledge of nature, "[i]n order to control Nature, we must know Nature" (Griffin, 1989: 10). The mastery and control of nature, which lies at the core of the project of Modernity, culminates in what is commonly referred to as instrumental rationality (Eckersley, 1992: 97-104; Dobson, 1993: 191-194; Adorno and Horkheimer, 1973: 4-13). On the one hand, instrumental rationality denotes a view of nature as resource, instrument

to the endeavours of man. On the other, in its application of technology to turn nature into resource, it links up with the belief that through the application of scientific knowledge in advanced technology, humans can liberate themselves from the constraints of nature.

The cultural ecofeminist critique of science then, implies a critique also of instrumental rationality (Gray, 1981: 46-47; Griffin, 1990: 46-47; Diamond, 1994: 20-21), (although in cultural ecofeminist thinking proper, it is not accompanied by a thorough discussion or explicitly brought in relation with the instrumentalisation of nature). Griffin however, does allude to this explicitly. In addition to her critique of the implementation of technology as control (read: domination) of nature, Griffin writes: "we live not through the understanding of Nature, but through the manipulation of Nature" (Griffin, 1989: 14). As Griffin (1989) has also touched upon, from a cultural ecofeminist perspective, the view of science and its close associate, technology, as liberatory has paradoxically had catastrophic results in the form of environmental destruction and degradation. Moreover, toxic waste, chemical products and their by-products, a depleted ozone layer, acid rain and the risks involved in the use of nuclear energy, are but a few of the threats that are posed to the well-being and health of humans and ultimately - the survival of the planet (Diamond, 1994: 20).<sup>16</sup>

Having discussed the philosophical, psychological and epistemological factors that are respectively offered by cultural ecofeminism to account for the twin dominations of women and nature, I would now like to focus on one response to the environmental crisis which has particular implications for how we conceive of our selves in relation to the natural environment. What comes to the fore here is a notion of the self that diverges sharply from the dominant self in patriarchal Western culture.

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<sup>16</sup> Echoing this point of critique, albeit shifting the focus somewhat to the ecofeminist critique of the forms of development that the West imposes on developing countries, Shiva emphasises how it is the vulnerable, women and the poor in Third World countries who are disproportionately affected by environmental destruction. Shiva (1989, 1990) argues the distinctly social/ist ecofeminist point that development projects foreign to indigenous social organisation, renders Third World women in particular, vulnerable. And this is not only in terms of their health and wellbeing, but also their continued survival.

#### 4. Reconceiving the self

The different, but related notions of the self that are endorsed by cultural ecofeminists, are articulated in reaction and in opposition to the dominant conception of the self within patriarchal society. As I have illustrated in the preceding section, the masculinist self is conceived of oppositionally, in terms that designate the other to the realm of inferiority. It is argued by cultural ecofeminism that this relation between self and other sanctions the subordination and denigration of women and nature. To establish relations that move beyond the oppression and devaluation of nature and women, cultural ecofeminists endorse and affirm a revaluation of that which is systematically devalued and suppressed in patriarchal culture.

The view of the self that is alternatively celebrated and affirmed, is one that embodies a fundamental connection to nature so as to replace a masculinist self that is characterised by severe alienation and disconnectedness (Griffin, 1989, 1990; Gray, 1981; Metzger, 1989; Spretnak, 1989, 1991). It is believed that healing this split will transform the domination and control of nature. However, as the dominant self is conceived of not only in opposition but also as *superior* not only to nature, but also women and the feminine, the self that cultural ecofeminist endorse entails also a different appraisal of women and the feminine.

In this regard, Davion (1994: 23) refers to the enthusiastic affirmation among cultural ecofeminists, of that which is often referred to as "the feminine principle", the reason being that this principle offers a unique understanding of human connection with the natural world. Such a positive appraisal of the feminine is often found in literature on Goddess spirituality, which represents one strand within cultural ecofeminist thought.<sup>17</sup> In her illustration of the convergence between Goddess worshipping and ecological consciousness, Eisler (1990) argues that a positive valuation of the feminine principle instills respect and brings about a relation of care towards nature, thus offering a fruitful avenue for us to explore in transforming our treatment of the natural environment. She

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<sup>17</sup> Other prominent representatives of Goddess spirituality are Christ (1990, 1991); Starhawk (1989); and Spretnak (1989, 1991).

(1990: 23-24) writes:

Prehistoric societies worshipped the Goddess of nature and spirituality, our great Mother, the giver of life and creator of us all. But even more fascinating is that these ancient societies were structured very much like the more peaceful and just society we are now trying to construct. In short they were societies that had what we today call an ecological consciousness: the awareness that the earth must be treated with reverence and respect. And this reverence for life-giving and life-sustained power of the earth was rooted in a social structure where women and *'feminine' values such as caring, compassion and non-violence* were not subordinate to men and the so-called masculine values of conquest and domination. Rather, the life-giving powers incarnated in women's bodies were given the highest social value (my emphasis, FM).<sup>18</sup>

It is against this background that Spretnak (1989, 1991) articulates her understanding of how women are predisposed to establishing an ecologically sound relation with nature. Picking up on the life-giving powers of women and nature, she sets out to give content to how we can create an understanding of our selves as continuous with nature. An important aspect of Goddess spirituality is the honouring of the "earth body" via our "personal bodies" (Spretnak, 1991: 133). In contrast to the domination and denigration of women in patriarchal culture then, Spretnak calls upon her audience to celebrate and honour the "sacred elemental power" of the female (Spretnak, 1991: 191). This power finds its expression in the potentiality to grow people of "either sex from her flesh, to bleed in rhythm with the moon, to transform food into milk for infants" (Spretnak, 1991: 116). Moreover, the earth body and the female body are depicted here as significantly connected, the one continuous with the other, and it is asserted that the image of nature strongly emulates the above description of the female body. Spretnak, (1991: 134) writes:

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<sup>18</sup> Quite astonishingly, Eisler forgets that "respect" and "reverence" for women's life-giving powers is quite consistent with the oppression and subjugation of women. As such, respect for celebrating women's life-giving potentialities offers no guarantee that this will not be employed to "keep women in their place"! This is not to say that women's childbearing abilities should not be acknowledged and treated with due respect, on the contrary. However the romanticisation thereof, obscures the complex (socio-economical and political) issues that surround childbearing and necessarily childrearing - usually to the disadvantage of none other

... the bountiful manifestations of the Earth as emanating from a fertile body - an immense female whose tides moved in rhythm with the moon, whose rivers sustained life, whose soil/flesh yielded food, whose caves offered ritual womb-rooms for ceremonies of sacred community within her body, whose vast subterranean womb received all humans in burial. It is not difficult to understand why they held her sacred.

Honouring and celebrating the creative powers of the female is believed to generate renewed respect and humility toward the sacredness of the earth. Sharing the same creative potential and flowing with natural rhythms and tides, it follows for Spretnak (1991: 138) that women's experience of their bodies endow them with a "consciousness of a larger reality" that bestows upon them the potential to reveal "nature's mysteries" (Spretnak, 1989: 129).<sup>19</sup> The female self thus perceived, clearly embodies a different relation to nature, one that is not characterised by rigid division and fear of loss of boundaries, but rather by connectedness that induces a sense of harmony:

A woman often experiences a sense of soft boundaries of her body on the first day of menstruation. In the postorgasmic state, many women experience a peaceful, expansive mindstate of freefloating boundarylessness. (Many men, especially young men, describe their postorgasmic state as a sensation of weakness and vulnerability; some call it *la petit mort*, the little death) (Spretnak, 1993: 138).

In keeping with the above, Spretnak maintains that the experiences inherent to women's sexuality express the "essential holistic nature of life on earth, they are "body parables" of the profound oneness and interconnectedness of all matter/energy" (Spretnak, 1989: 129). Women's "oceanic feeling of oneness with the universe" (Spretnak, 1991: 138) and "experience of running on cosmic time" is offered as exemplary of a self defined as continuous with nature (Spretnak, 1989: 128). Setting women's experience off against men's, Spretnak

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than women themselves.

<sup>19</sup> In conjunction with Spretnak, Griffin invokes an almost spiritualist epistemology according to which women's closeness to nature endows her with special powers. Griffin (1978: 175) writes: "[w]e can read bodies with our hands, read the earth, find water, trace gravity's path. We know what grows and how to balance one thing against another ... and even if over our bodies they have transformed this earth, we say, the truth is, women still dream".

(1989: 128) argues that men's "moments of heightened experience" is the result of their relative exclusion from the process of giving birth and nurturing (Spretnak, 1989: 129). She (1989: 129) writes:

They have often written that such instances occur during the hunting of a large animal, the landing/killing of a large fish, the moments before combat. Not feeling intrinsically involved in the process of birthing and nurture, nor strongly disposed to emphatic communion, men turned their attention for many eras toward the other aspect of the cycle, death.

In an attempt to avoid an overgeneralisation and inferiorisation of male experience as marked by an essential disconnectedness, Spretnak later qualifies this statement by expressing the view that men too, can have life-affirming experiences. Inconsistent with this gesture however, she (1989: 131) concludes her essay by stating that "the authentic female mind is our salvation" (whatever that may be!), revealing a continued privileging of a notion of a female self, in opposition and as superior to a male self.<sup>20</sup>

Like Spretnak, Gray (1981: 109-114) views women as the "bearers of a different consciousness", also via her physical connectedness to "nature" (Gray, 1981: 109). Again the different bodily experiences of men and women are invoked as having significant bearing upon their perceptions of the world. Male bodily experience is "quite lacking in experiences which would help him forge an adequate worldview and relationship to nature or concept of limits" (Gray, 1981: 10). Women on the other hand, have a definite advantage as female bodily experience places an inescapable limit upon her physical existence, one that she has to adapt to and learn to live with. Given this awareness of limits, Gray asserts that this would prevent women from "dream[ing] up a sense of self as unlimited and all-conquering mind" (Gray, 1981: 111). Menstruation also provides women with an "inescapable connection with the natural world, a sense which is further heightened by the experiences of pregnancy and childbirth" (Gray, 1981: 111).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Here it is hardly possible to ignore the suggestion that womankind, thanks to her biological constitution, embodies *the* answer to our ecological problems.

<sup>21</sup> The emphasis that is consistently placed on women's connectedness with nature via her childbearing capacities and the power this endows upon her is also echoed by other cultural

In keeping with the above line of arguments, Gray views pregnancy, the awareness of the growing of life inside her, as instilling in women an orientation towards caring for future generations. For Gray, an awareness of long term implications is something that women are "intuitively" attuned to, whether it involves "women, or other social groups or the environment" (Gray, 1981: 112). Women's perceptiveness and intuitiveness, lauded as qualities that flow directly from their bodily experiences, are starkly contrasted with male consciousness. According to Gray, "... there is a definite limit in the perception of men which is imposed upon their consciousness by the lack of certain bodily experiences which are present in the life of a woman" (Gray, 1981: 113).<sup>22</sup>

In an argument that is ultimately self-defeating, Gray concludes that the male perception should not be rejected, but that a balance should be created by integrating what, in the final analysis remains a male and complementary female perspective:

... I suspect, a balance between male and female perceptions needs to emerge. A balance which would be based upon recognition that humans come in two diverse forms. This more inclusive human experience of reality has been prevented by the powerful social conventions of patriarchal society from ever shaping for us a more adequate worldview. Thus the problem is not that men perceive like men, - but that the male perception is not the entire human perception. What has been lacking is articulation of and attention to perceptions rooted in female experience (Gray, 1981: 116).<sup>23</sup>

In the light of the preceding discussion it is thus evident that the self that

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ecofeminists. Affinity ecofeminist, Andree Collard (1989: 106) is of the opinion that "nothing links the human animal and nature so profoundly as woman's reproductive system which enables her to share the experience of bringing forth and nourishing life with the rest of the living world. Whether or not she experiences biological mothering, it is in this that woman is most truly a child of nature and in this natural integrity lies the wellspring of her strength". Also in affinity ecofeminist mode, Salleh (1984: 340) echoes this view by asserting "[w]omen's monthly fertility cycle, the tiring symbiosis of pregnancy, the wrench of childbirth and the pleasure of suckling an infant, these things already ground women's consciousness in the knowledge of being coterminous with Nature".

<sup>22</sup> It is here that the "feminine" takes on a decidedly biological countenance.

<sup>23</sup> Revealing her socialist and materialist feminist roots, what Gray is ultimately arguing for here, is what is often referred to as the argument for some form of androgyny, characteristic



cultural ecofeminists view as offering a model for an ecologically sound relation to nature, is one that is specifically female. The ecological appeal of a female self lies in a connectedness to nature through biological capacities that are distinctly female. The characteristics, attributes, and values that are identified as feminine and held in high esteem, particularly due to their ecological significance, are mostly presented as directly linked to women's connectedness to their bodies and by implication, nature. Moreover, women's experiences of their bodies bestow upon them a different consciousness that generates the establishment of a relationship with nature that is marked by care and compassion. As nature is also depicted as female, it follows that women occupy a privileged relation to nature: one that is based on women's identification with nature through the female body.

Having discussed and outlined the self that cultural ecofeminism endorses as alternative to a male self or masculinist self then, I would now like to turn my attention to the ethic that is endorsed by cultural ecofeminism. In the process, the notion of the self that is affirmed in cultural ecofeminism will be further illuminated. As it was shown in the exposition above, a notion of connectedness between self and other is particularly significant in this regard, as this is perceived to provide a foundation or basis for ethical conduct in the relation between self and nature in particular. As I have also shown, cultural ecofeminism often depicts this connectedness between self and nature in terms of a biological relationship with nature *via the body*. In the forthcoming section, it will be shown that an ethic based on care as opposed to rights, emphasises connectedness and alternative values. However, in my discussion I will also argue that a shift can be discerned in cultural ecofeminism in that their focus shifts from a perception of women's seemingly inherently caring characters to a view of a female gender identity that is socially constructed. The implication of this shift for an ethic of care will also be discussed.

## 5. An Ethic of Care<sup>24</sup>

In this section, I focus on the cultural ecofeminist use of a vocabulary of care. What becomes pivotal to this discussion, is the notion of the self that informs an ethical relation to nature that is marked by care. As we have seen, references to conduct towards the natural environment that involves care, nurturing, conservation, intuition and so forth, are found in abundance in cultural ecofeminist literature. An ethical relation to nature that deviates from a traditional rights based ethic is therefore evident. Although an ethic of care is not explicitly articulated by cultural ecofeminists themselves,<sup>25</sup> their endorsement of an ethical relation with nature marked by nurturing and care, coincides with contemporary developments in feminist ethics,<sup>26</sup> and the ecofeminist (implicit or explicit) critique of moral extentionist environmental ethics (Donovan, 1993; Salleh, 1984; Warren, 1990; Plumwood, 1991, 1993). Bringing the cultural ecofeminist vocabulary of care in relation with Carol Gilligan's ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982) is useful for two reasons.<sup>27</sup> Firstly, it illuminates and situates the cultural ecofeminist use of a vocabulary of care. Secondly, an ethical relation marked by care denotes a specific conception of the self as relational. The notion of the relational self that is articulated here, whilst not conceived of in biological terms, coincides with an endorsement of a specifically female self to the extent that both express some notion of relationality with the natural environment. Moreover as I will demonstrate, the relational self articulated in terms of female gender identity moves beyond a restriction to women.

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<sup>24</sup> In the section on ethics in Chapter 2, that aspects of an ethic of care are also received positively by critical-transformative ecofeminists will become evident. I do, however, also show how an ethic of care is engaged with in a manner that differs significantly from the cultural ecofeminist use of a vocabulary of care along with the conception of the female self that lies central to such an ethic.

<sup>25</sup> See Warren (1990) for a creative ecological feminist appropriation of Gilligan's ethic of care. Warren's ethic is not included in this discussion as it also moves beyond an ethic of care as discussed here. Because of this, aspects of her contribution to the formulation of an ecofeminist ethic are included in Chapter 2, titled *Critical-transformative ecofeminism*.

<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, as Card (1991: 3-18) observes, feminist ethics branches out into two main streams, one that can be described as a "female ethic" and another that consists of a feminist reworking of existing ethical theories. To a certain extent the two streams coincide with the distinction that is drawn between difference feminism and equality feminism, the latter of which signals a reformist approach, whether liberal or socialist (Braidotti, 1991: 194-195; Grosz, 1990: 338). This distinction is however schematic, in the same way that feminist theory has moved beyond these categorisations, the same might be said of feminist ethics, at least, as we shall see, within the context of critical-transformative ecological feminist thinking.

<sup>27</sup> Other leading figures in the articulation of an ethic of care are Ruddick (1980) and Noddings (1984).

In the first part titled "Rights, care and nature" I will briefly show how the feminist critique of mainstream ethics transfers onto the ecofeminist rejection of mainstream environmental ethics.<sup>28</sup> To illustrate the central features of the ethic of care, I discuss Gilligan's (1982) notion of an ethic of care which can be shown to overcome the shortcomings of a rights based ethics as instance of moral extensionism. In the section that follows, titled "Ethics, relationality and female gender identity", an exposition is given of Chodorow's account of the formation of female gender identity. This is appealed to not only by Gilligan to explain the occurrence of a care-orientated approach in women, but complements the ecofeminist appeal to the different roles that women fulfill as offering alternative values to inform our engagement with the natural environment. In the discussion of an ethic of care an alternative notion of the self comes to the fore that is socio-psychologically grounded and therefore distinguished from a self that is biologically grounded. Like the female self that is conceived as significantly connected to nature, this feminine self is also a relational self, but being derived from a notion of female gender identity, it is grounded in women's socialisation.<sup>29</sup>

### 5.1 Rights, care and nature

Feminists have analysed and criticised ethical theories based on the "doctrine of natural rights of man" (Zimmerman, 1987: 29) and argued that it reflects a typically male set of experiences and values which replicate aspects of patriarchal dualist thinking. As such, rights based ethics has been criticised extensively by feminists who have argued that it is androcentric, atomistic, hierarchical, dualist, atomistic, universalist and abstract (Zimmerman, 1987: 29; King 1991: 76-80). These points of critique converge to challenge a central assumption that informs rights based ethics. This is the presupposition of a moral agent that is male, or less overtly, defined in masculine terms, that is,

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<sup>28</sup> The analysis and critique of rights-based ethics from an ecofeminist perspective below, is one that is not performed by ecofeminists themselves. The ecofeminist use of a vocabulary of care does however indicate a firm rejection of rights-based ethics, which is why King (1991) and Zimmerman (1987, 1994) can apply the feminist critique so successfully.

<sup>29</sup> Whereas earlier values were grounded in women's childbearing capacities, here the emphasis shifts for values to be grounded in women's childrearing roles. The shift echoes the "nature vs. nurture" arguments.

rationalist, individualist and autonomous - holder of the "natural rights of man".

The ecofeminist rejection of the strategy to extend rights-based ethics to the natural environment (a renunciation expressed predominantly by the use of a vocabulary of care), invokes and is grounded in the above points of critique. The assessment is as follows: because of the masculinist definition of the human, the conception of the human that informs rights based ethics is *androcentric*; it is *atomistic* because it conceives of humans as isolated individuals; and it is grounded in a *hierarchical and dualistic* structure because of its privileging of certain qualities as opposed to others that are perceived as inferior and sharply distinct from those valued, thus creating a *hierarchy between those who are morally considerable and those who are not* (Zimmerman, 1994: 241; King, 1991: 77).<sup>30</sup> The latter two aspects of a rights based ethic are criticised for enforcing a culture of sameness that leaves no space for differences - neither women's nor nature's (King, 1991: 78). A further point of critique regards the abstract and universalist character of rights based theories which "rely on abstract distinctions formulated in universalistic principles". These theories ignore the significance of emotions as basis for ethical conduct on the one hand, along with the particular traits and needs of the individuals involved, yet again erasing differences (King, 1991: 77; Zimmerman, 1994: 241).

Moreover, a rights-based ethics that is formulated in abstract universalist terms, invokes also a particular understanding of the human that is consistent with the liberal view of humans as atomistic beings that act primarily out of self-interest. As such, human beings are regarded as inherently egotistical (Zimmerman, 1987: 29).<sup>31</sup> When laid bare for its constructedness however, this powerful

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<sup>30</sup> In the context of environmental ethics, this point of critique is leveled at moral extensionism in particular. Moral extensionism is a strategy that is followed by proponents of animal liberation (Singer: 1975, 1985), and animal rights (Regan: 1982), who argue for the extension of the sphere of moral considerability to include animals. In this way the intrinsic worth of animals can be recognised, which, along with humans, endow them with rights. Inclusion of animals in the domain of moral considerability takes place on the basis of exhibiting certain specifically human qualities such as consciousness. This strategy is however anthropocentric and grounded in a hierarchical, dualist framework (Warren, 1994: 132; Plumwood: 1993: 131-133).

<sup>31</sup> Salleh (1984) articulates very similar points of critique, although she directs it at deep ecology. This in itself is misdirected, because, like ecofeminism (and social ecology) deep ecological thinking is a branch of radical ecology. Deep ecology is articulated in response to the shortcomings in what Naess (1985) refers to as "shallow ecology" or reformist environmentalism. Moral extensionism of which rights based environmental ethics is an

assumption becomes increasingly less inevitable or persuasive.<sup>32</sup> To illustrate the difference between an approach marked by care as opposed to an ethical approach that is rights based, I will briefly sketch Gilligan's description of the contrasts between the two approaches with the aim of illuminating the characteristics of an ethic of care. Interestingly this is a powerful example of the critical force and potential of feminist thinking.

Placing the significance of relationships central, Carol Gilligan's (1982) exposition of an ethic of care and the conception of the self that informs it, differ markedly from the notion of the self and ethics as it is traditionally conceived.<sup>33</sup> The identification of an ethic of care as representative of a "different voice" was generated by a study of female moral decision-making, which renders this ethic gender related.<sup>34</sup> Contrasting the care approach with rights, Gilligan (1982: 10) illuminates some salient features of the ethic of care

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example, is also grouped with such a reformist approach. The main shortcoming of shallow ecology lies in the attempt to address and remedy our ecological problems with the same means that are *responsible* for the destruction and degradation of the natural environment in the first place.

<sup>32</sup> Here I refer to "constructedness" in the sense that the view of humans as egotistical is part of a system of thought that has a history of say 300 years. It coincides with an interrelated cluster of social and historical "developments", comprising the industrial revolution, the consequent rise of capitalism, Liberalism, Cartesian-Newtonian science and especially (neo)-classical economics. The analysis of these theoretical and historical developments reveals assumptions that we take for granted as just that: not fixed or inevitable, but very much constructed and therefore subject to change and transformation. In this regard the significance of the contributions of feminist critiques can not be stressed enough. That is, in their analyses and critiques, feminist thinkers have made a generous contribution to deconstructing "self-evident truths", and have shown how a feminist analysis can open up new and different possibilities, earlier regarded as unheard of.

<sup>33</sup> As such, Gilligan's ethic of care has generated widespread debate, both regarding the gendered character of an ethic of care and the latter's seeming opposition to rights based political theories. A discussion of the care vs. justice debate is conducted by Kymlicka (1995: 262-292) and Flanagan and Jackson (1993: 69-85). The question as to whether the "feminine voice" is property only of women, is discussed in numerous essays in (amongst others) an excellent anthology on an ethic of care edited by Larrabee (1993). In this collection of essays, other controversies surrounding an ethic of care, its scientific merit, for example, are also documented and subjected to an in depth analysis and discussion.

<sup>34</sup> Gilligan's study was inspired by the psychologist Kohlberg's interpretation of the findings of his studies, that girls' moral development progresses slower than that of boys. Instead of accepting the apparent regressiveness of female moral decision making, Gilligan set out to demonstrate that and in which respects female morality is different, and perhaps even more desirable than moral reasoning that is abstract and emotionally detached (Marshall, 1994: 102; Larrabee, 1993: 4; Scott, 1986: 1065). As such, many have interpreted Gilligan's work as endorsing a specific female morality, but she insists that this is not the case. According to Gilligan, that an ethic of care is found mostly among (white middle class) females, neither suggests biological determinism, nor that it is exclusive to women (Gilligan, 1982: 2). The reasons that she puts forward to explain why women tend to display a care attitude more frequently than their male counterparts, will however be elaborated upon in the course of this explication.

as follows:

In this conception, the moral problem arises from *conflicting responsibilities* rather than from *competing rights* and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is *contextual* and *narrative* rather than *formal* and *abstract*. This conception of morality as concerned with the activity of care centers moral development around the understanding of responsibility and relationships just as the conception of morality as fairness ties moral development to the understanding of rights and rules (my emphasis, FM).

According to Gilligan, the two respective approaches to moral problems can then also be discerned that are related to gender:

The moral imperative that emerges repeatedly in interviews with women is an *injunction to care*, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the '*real and recognisable trouble*' of this world. For men the moral imperative appears rather as an injunction to *respect the rights of others* and thus to *protect from interference the rights to life and self-fulfillment*. Women's insistence on care is at first *self-critical* rather than *self-protective*, while men initially conceive *obligation to others negatively* in terms of *non-interference* (Gilligan, 1982: 100, my emphasis, FM).

The above passages are also suggestive of another aspect of the care ethic that pertains to the notion of the self that such an ethic presupposes. Intertwined with an ethic of care, lies a specific conception of the self, one that is conceived not in isolated individualistic terms, but as in-relationship-with others. Gilligan (1982: 74) writes:

... [t]his ethic, which reflects a cumulative knowledge of *relationships*, evolves around a central insight, that self and other are *interdependent* ... the fact of *interconnection* informs the central, recurring recognition that ... the activity of care *enhances both others and self* (my emphasis, FM).

In the light of the feminist critique of rights based ethics, it is not surprising that

an ethic of care has been embraced by feminists and ecofeminists alike.<sup>35</sup> The central features of an ethic of care outlined above, indicate how the shortcomings identified in rights based ethics can be overcome. First, that an ethic of care does not presuppose a moral agent conceived in masculinist terms, is self-evident: caring which denotes the involvement of emotions, casting doubt on the self as distinctly rational. That the self is conceived of in relational terms, is also of particular importance as it challenges not only the conception of the self as an individualist autonomous entity, but also the view of the self as an atomistic entity that acts primarily out of self-interest, thus challenging the assumption that the self is necessarily egoist. From an ecofeminist perspective the relational self is of specific importance, as this enables us to conceive of our selves as also related to the natural environment. Relationality can also destabilise the hierarchical dualist relation between self and other, as interrelatedness bridges the dis-connection between self and other, thus making possible, but not necessarily guaranteeing, an ethical response to non-humans not simply on the basis that they resemble humans. As we have seen, the contextualist character of an ethic of care thwarts the abstract and universalist character of rights based ethics. This enables us to view relationships as sources of ethical behaviour and makes possible an acknowledgement of the specific needs and interests of those we stand in relationship with.<sup>36</sup>

Having outlined the main features of the ethical approach marked by care, I would now like to turn to a discussion of the notion of the relational self that informs an ethic of care. As I will show, this notion of a feminine self coincides with the cultural ecofeminist appeal to women's social roles as offering us alternative ecological values.

## 5.2 Ethics, relationality and female gender identity

In the preceding section I have shown that central to an ethic of care lies a notion of the self that is conceived of in relational terms. The cultural

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<sup>35</sup> Although, as we have seen, with regard to the latter, it is more a case of a *vocabulary* of care that is adopted.

<sup>36</sup> That an ethic of care thus appropriated, is of particular significance from an ecofeminist perspective, is no doubt the case. However, as attractive as it may seem at first glance, it is, within the context of cultural ecofeminism at least, not wholly unproblematic. The causes for concern will be elaborated upon in further detail in the last section of this chapter.

ecofeminist conception of the female self that was discussed in the section "Reconceiving the self", can be said to offer one particular interpretation of the notion of relationality, specifically with regard to the relationship between women and nature. In this section I discuss a different but coinciding account of the relational self as feminine self that is endorsed by cultural ecofeminism. This is illustrated with reference to Chodorow's theory of the formation of female gender identity, brought to light by her ideas on the reproduction of motherhood.<sup>37</sup> Chodorow's thoughts on the reproduction of motherhood is invoked also by Gilligan (1982) to account for the tendency of women to display an approach marked by care. In the following discussion I hope to show how Chodorow's account of mothering theory, illuminates why an ethic of care is consistent with a feminine notion of the self. According to Grant (1993: 59) mothering theory can be defined as follows:

Mothering theories are theories that claim that women have learned certain values of their practice as mothers that can be used to understand gender, and to build an alternative ethic that is centered around "feminine values", such as nurturing and caring.<sup>38</sup>

As such, Chodorow's account of female gender identity sheds light on the notion of the self that lies central to the more socially inclined ecofeminist appeal to values that are specific to social/gender roles performed by women. Ecofeminist Gray (1981: 35-38) for example also draws on Chodorow's (1974, 1978)

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<sup>37</sup> Chodorow's articulation of the formation of female gender identity has been subjected to sharp criticism. The problems with Chodorow's account are manifold and complex, but here I will highlight the main objections. It is pointed out that she universalises childrearing practices in her employment of a model of the family that is white and middle class (Spelman, 1988; Bordo, 1990: 138). Moreover, she assumes the existence of a basic and stable masculine and feminine "deep self" that cuts across cultures, race, class and ethnicity rendering it both essentialist and universalist (Diquinzio, 1993: 1-9; Frazer and Nicholson, 1990: 30). Furthermore, she fails to take into account how factors such as race, class and ethnicity influence the formation of identity, thereby ignoring differences also between women (Nicholson, 1990: 30; Diquinzio, 1993: 1-9).

<sup>38</sup> Here, it must be stressed that Chodorow wants to distinguish her account of female gender identity from an account that views gender identity to be simply a product of socialisation, as in her view, the relational character of female gender identity, coinciding with the social, has a deeper, psychological, basis (Frazer and Nicholson, 1990: 30). To this definition of mothering theory then, it must be added that it is not only the practice of motherhood that sheds light on female gender identity, but also that mothering is performed by women, and the deep psychological impact this has on the formation of the respective gender identities. The question that Chodorow asks, is not "how we define female gender identity", as such, "but what keeps women subordinate, what are the reasons for the tenacity of the traditional gender patterns?". It is via this avenue then that she arrives at the account that is given of the respective gender identities.



insights regarding the effects that mothering by women has on the formation of male and female gender identities. As we have seen in the section "Patriarchal culture: self, women and nature" the formation of a boy's gender identity is marked by radical separation from the (m)other, which enables autonomy and independence. In contrast, a girl's gender identity is marked by perforated boundaries from the outset. At the same time that the boy realises that the person with whom he is identifying is from the wrong gender, the girl-child who identifies herself as female, continues to experience herself as continuous with the mother. The effect that the girl-child's identification with the mother has on female self understanding, is most significant:

Because of their mothering by women, girls come to experience themselves as less separate than boys, as having more permeable ego boundaries. Girls come to define themselves more in relation to others (Chodorow, 1974: 93).

The gender roles that girls are expected to adopt are built upon and reinforce the aspects of the female self described above. The socialisation of girls to occupy the role of caretaker or mother is facilitated by the girl's identification with the mother and it is this relationship with the mother then that is the primary source of socialisation (Chodorow, 1974: 54). This results in a sense of connectedness and involvement with others along with the manifestation of character traits such as caring and nurturance. The early relationship and identification with the mother is then offered as basis upon which further socialisation is built:

... her later identification with her mother is imbedded in and influenced by their ongoing relationship ... Because her mother is around, and she has had a genuine relationship with her as a person, a girl's gender and gender role identification are mediated and depend upon real affective relations. Identification is ... a *personal identification with her mother's general traits of character and values* (Chodorow, 1974: 51, my emphasis, FM).

The traits of character and values that are associated with the role of motherhood, include empathy, sympathy, caring, nurturing, love and attentiveness. As such then, mothering theory, because of the account it gives of female gender identity and the traits and values that accompany this feminine

self, coincides significantly with an ethic of care (Cuomo, 1992; King, 1991; Grant, 1993). This feminine self is invoked by other ecofeminists who appeal to women's socialisation and the social roles that women occupy as providing us with alternative values to inform our treatment of nature (Plant, 1989; Salleh, 1984; Gray, 1981).<sup>39</sup> In affinity ecofeminist mode, Collard links the identity of women and nature with the activity of mothering.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, she argues that women's "experience of mothering" ultimately places her in a better position to address the ecological crisis.<sup>41</sup> She (1988: 137-138) writes:

The identity and destiny of woman and nature are merged. Accordingly, feminist values and principles directed towards ending the oppression of women are inextricably linked with ecological values and principles directed towards ending the oppression of nature. It is ultimately the affirmation of our kinship with nature, our common life with her, which will prove the source of our mutual well-being ... Good women have kept house on the model of Mother Nature for as long as there have been mothers ... Women's experience with oppression and abuse, as well as their experience of mothering, can make them more sensitive to the oppression and abuse of nature as well as better situated to remedy it.

In line with the ecofeminist appeal to women's social roles (and the inevitable return to motherhood), Collard affirms that mothering also provides us with values that can contribute to ending the oppression of nature. The conception of

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<sup>39</sup> Here, the emphasis is on the values that are contained in the social roles that women fulfill, rather than an explicit endorsement of a specific notion of the self. The appeal that is conversely made to women's "socialisation" suggests that the notion of the self operative here, is not inconsistent with the relational self discussed above. As mentioned earlier, this position that appeals to women's social roles is a social/ist ecofeminist position, which is included in this discussion of cultural ecofeminism also because it coincides with the spiritual, affinity and nature (amongst others) ecofeminist revaluation of "feminine" values.

<sup>40</sup> Invoking the image of mother to identify women with nature has come under criticism from a number of ecofeminists as reinforcing a view of nature that is damaging not only to nature, but also to women in that it amounts to an underpersonification of women and overpersonification of nature which reduce both as existing primarily to provide for the needs of others (Roach, 1991; Vance, 1993; Merchant, 1990; Gray, 1981). Establishing a link between women and nature in these terms is also characteristic of a social/ist ecofeminism. This is derived from the socialist feminist analysis of the oppression of women in terms of the sexual division of labour.

<sup>41</sup> This is of course not all she is saying, but for the moment I would like to focus on these aspects. The argument that, women are better situated to address the environmental crisis because of a shared experience of oppression, is of course a specifically social/ist feminist argument.

female gender identity that is articulated within the context of an ethic of care is therefore shown as coinciding with the notion of the self described in the context of mothering theory. This notion of the self is consistent with the ecofeminist affirmation of the values that are contained by the social roles that women occupy as mothers or those closely related to that of motherhood. From a cultural ecofeminist perspective then, this conception of the self can be shown to make a specific contribution to the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self.

In the exposition above, I have discussed the central features that distinguish an ethic of care so as to illuminate the vocabulary of care that is employed by cultural ecofeminists. I have also shown how an ethic of care coincides with mothering theory in terms of the alternative values that distinguish an ethic of care, and also the notion of the self that lies central to such an ethic. As such, the cultural ecofeminist employment of a vocabulary of care and revaluation of women's social roles as presenting us with alternative ecological values is consistent with the conception of female gender identity as articulated by Chodorow. Accordingly, the relational self is embraced as informing an alternative feminine notion of the self that lays the basis for ethical conduct, also towards the natural environment.

In this chapter I have also discussed the aspects of patriarchal culture that cultural ecofeminists analyse and criticise as responsible for the twin dominations of women and nature. This was followed by a response in the form of an introduction to alternative notion/s of a relational self that would foster relations of care towards the natural environment. In the following section, I would like to assess the contributions that cultural ecofeminist thinking makes towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self and ethic beyond dualism and essentialism.

## **6. An evaluation of cultural ecofeminism**

In what follows, I perform a critical evaluation of cultural ecofeminist thinking, paying attention in particular to the notion(s) of the self and the concomitant ethic that are endorsed. I start off by examining the central cultural ecofeminist

argument that patriarchy is the root cause of the domination of women and nature. This focus on patriarchy is criticised as reductionist and the assumptions that accompany it, are also questioned. To regard patriarchy as the cause of the domination of both women and nature is to oversimplify the twin dominations of women and nature and to lose sight of the complexities involved in the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self. These points of critique are discussed in the section titled "Patriarchy as root cause of the domination of women and nature".

In the section that follows, titled "The link between the domination of women and nature", I evaluate the different accounts that are respectively offered for the twin dominations of women and nature in patriarchal culture.<sup>42</sup> Here it is remarked that a focus on dualism is a potentially fruitful avenue to explore, but that the analysis of dualism as performed by cultural ecofeminism needs to be deepened and refined. The psychological account given of the twin dominations of women and nature is also criticised as reductionist.<sup>43</sup>

As we have seen, contained in the critique of different aspects of patriarchal culture, is a critique of the dominant masculine/ist notion of the self, which is articulated and manifests itself in opposition and as superior to both women and nature. In contrast, cultural ecofeminists affirm a female self and a feminine self, both of which are offered as desirable from an ecological and feminist perspective. In the section titled "The failure to overcome dualism, essentialism and universalism", I show how a conception of the female self verges on affirming and endorsing a biological essentialist view of women. The feminine notion of the self, although offered as an account of relationality that moves beyond biological essentialism, itself is unsatisfactory, as it is complementary to the masculine notion of the self. This feminine self, which is derived from an

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<sup>42</sup> Because the critique of Western science and Cartesian-Newtonianism moves into the domain of feminist epistemology and politics, I refrain from discussing it further and therefore I do not evaluate it here. As we shall see however, in Chapter 3, titled *Cyber-(eco)feminism*, the notion of the "situated self", which is one notion of the self that Haraway endorses, is articulated within the context of feminist epistemology. The inclusion of a critique on Western science and Cartesian-Newtonianism in the discussion of cultural ecofeminism, fulfilled the purpose of introducing the reader to one of the central lines of critique in ecofeminist thinking, one which is elaborated on, albeit with a different focus, also in Chapter 2, titled *Critical-transformative ecofeminism*. In the context of cultural ecofeminism, this critique illuminates the cultural ecofeminist rejection of the instrumental treatment of nature as mere matter.

<sup>43</sup> See also footnote nr.12.

account of female gender identity, is also shown to be problematic for its seeming disregard for the differences between women. This shortcoming is further illuminated by a critique of the appeal to "women's experiences" which fails to take into account differences between women.

The sections that follow consist of an evaluation of different aspects of the ethic of care. In the section titled "An uncritical affirmation of the feminine principle" the values that are endorsed in a cultural ecofeminist ethic of care are subjected to critical scrutiny. Another concern that is raised with regard to the ethic of care, are the altruistic undertones that such an ethic conveys. This is discussed in the section titled "Altruism and care". In the final section of this evaluation, "Women's relationship with nature", another aspect of the cultural ecofeminist use of a vocabulary of care is discussed. As we have seen, relationships are central to an ethic of care and here the assumption that women necessarily view themselves as in relationship also with nature is examined. When asked what the basis of this relationship is, the cultural ecofeminist view of women's connectedness to nature by means of her childbearing capacities is invoked. What exactly is cared for when cultural ecofeminists appeal to a relation of care for nature, is put into question. In conclusion, I will highlight the important contributions that cultural ecofeminist thinking make to the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self.

### **6.1 The focus on patriarchy as root cause of the domination of women and nature**

Cultural ecofeminist thinking has evoked strong criticism not only from ecological, but also from feminist quarters. From an ecological perspective, the claim that patriarchy is the root of the domination of both women and nature (or as this implies, all forms of oppression) is criticised as reductionist. According to Eckersley (1992: 68), "it is one thing to note parallels in the logic of symbolic structures of different kinds of domination ... and another thing to argue that the kinds of domination that radical feminists and radical ecologists are addressing stem from one source". Moreover, the focus on patriarchy suggests that the principal focus in bringing about ecologically sound practice must be patriarchy rather than anthropocentrism. To maintain this argument however, Eckersley

(1992: 68) points out that it needs to be shown that patriarchy not only predated, but also gave rise to dualism and anthropocentrism, thus that there is a necessary connection between the events. A further question that arises is how do we explain a harmonious co-existence with the natural environment in patriarchal premodern societies. Furthermore, it is also asked what guarantee exists that the liberation of women will necessarily be followed or accompanied by the liberation of nature? As Eckersley (1992: 68), points out, the emancipation of women need not necessarily lead to the liberation of the natural world or vice versa.

Another consequence that a limiting focus on patriarchy has is that such an analysis slides into gross overgeneralisations regarding "men" and "women". That the dominant masculine notion of the self has been constituted by the suppression and denial of the other, specifically women, the feminine and nature, carries ground. Implying that all men unproblematically fit into this description, and to suggest that all women fit the feminine version, is to weaken the force of this analysis considerably (Segal, 1994). Moreover, to regard male domination of women as the fundamental relation of domination that all forms of domination can be traced back to is to overlook the complexities involved in the network of different forms of domination. Taking these complexities seriously is crucial to the endeavour of articulating an ecological feminist notion of the self. The tendency to generalise and oversimplify matters, features also in the analyses conducted of the link between the twin dominations of women and nature. If we recall, this entailed an analysis and critique of the philosophical, psychological and epistemological aspects of patriarchal culture, which will be assessed presently.

## **6.2 The link between the domination of women and nature**

The argument that the domination of women and nature is a function of philosophical dualism represents a potentially fruitful approach to account for the twin dominations of women and nature. However, Gray's focus on the masculine/feminine, mind/body and spirit/flesh dualisms as grounding the domination of women and nature, is restrictive which renders her analysis insufficient and in need of further refinement. Limiting the engagement with

dualism to the masculine/feminine, mind/body, spirit/flesh dualisms, obscures the reach of dualism, that is, how the different interrelated dualist pairs that form part of a dualist conceptual framework forms an extensive network of dualist pairs that overlap and reinforce one another. Of course, exposing the conceptual/symbolic foundations of the domination of both women and nature is most illuminating. This is achieved by showing how the perceived superiority of the masculine due to its association with the mind, as opposed to the perceived inferiority of the feminine and nature that is associated with physicality, functions to the detriment of both women and nature. However, not enough attention is paid to the role of other related dualist pairs such as the human/nature, reason/nature dualisms, and how they contribute to and complexify the dominations of women and nature. These shortcomings call for a more detailed analysis of the nature and functioning of dualism (Plumwood, 1986: 128).

Locating the domination of women and nature in psychological factors has problems of its own. The most prominent deficiency of this account lies in its attempt to explain the existence of different forms of domination (the domination of women and the domination of nature) as an effect of the psychological constitution of individuals. Such an analysis reduces the domination of women and nature to the psychological constitution of men. As such, it seems to want to relate the whole spectrum of factors that *together* contribute to the domination of women and nature, to a single psychological orientation that is neither satisfactory nor convincing. As Plumwood (1986: 130), puts it: "[i]f it aims at a total explanation it seems excessively reductionist, since it aims to explain the whole complex structure of interlinked [forms of domination] in terms of individual psychological experience and structure". Having assessed the cultural ecofeminist analysis and critique of aspects of Western patriarchal culture that are respectively viewed as the root cause of the twin dominations of women and nature, I would now like to turn to an evaluation of the notion/s of the self and the ethic that it implies that are endorsed by cultural ecofeminism.

### **6.3 The failure to overcome dualism, essentialism and universalism**

With regard to the notion/s of the self that are endorsed, cultural ecofeminist

thinkers have been accused both of perpetuating dualism and reinforcing essentialist views of women. The first type of essentialism that has been identified in cultural ecofeminist thinking, is naturalism and its close associate, biologism, as a result of their view of women as essentially connected to the natural world. Here I would like to stress that the positive valuation and affirmation of the body and nature are both very necessary and important in a culture in which its devaluation and subordination is crucial for the continued privileging of an elite (mostly white male) class of citizens. *How* this affirmation is performed, is however of utmost importance. The strategy of celebrating and valorising female connectedness with the body and nature in the manner discussed above is extremely problematic, if not dangerous. Numerous ecofeminist critics have pointed out that the cultural ecofeminist valorisation of female connectedness to the natural amounts to reinforcing stereotypical images of women. Ironically these images are also the *product* of the patriarchal culture that is criticised, and continue to be employed by conservatives to keep women subordinate to men, which is the very reason why feminism came into existence in the first place (Alcoff, 1988: 407; Biehl, 1991: 9-20; Davion, 1994: 24-25; Zimmerman, 1987; Eckersley, 1992: 66-67).

Invoking images of that overidentify women with the body and nature, particularly in terms of reproduction, is a short step away from reinforcing a conception of women as *inherently* intuitive, nurturing, caring, life-affirming and relational. Whilst acknowledging that caring and nurturing are values that would be highly prized in an ecological society, ecofeminist Janet Biehl criticises cultural ecofeminist theories for its "psycho-biologism". This psycho-biologism is ascribed to their tendency to depict certain personality traits as inherent to women. She states that, in contrast to feminists who have tried to dismantle gender stereotypes constraining women's development as "full human beings", these feminists enthusiastically embrace some of these same biological stereotypes.<sup>44</sup> She asserts that "when ecofeminists root women's personality

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<sup>44</sup> Of course what is meant by "full human being" is in itself a question of huge contention. This is the problem that social ecofeminists particularly Biehl (1991) conveniently overlooks. The uncritical assertion that women should "simply become human", is one of the central problems addressed in this thesis. What is overlooked here is that the notion of the human *itself* has been articulated in opposition not only to nature but also the feminine and by implication women. This gives further substance to the argument that neutrality is not a desirable feature to strive towards.



traits in reproductive sexual biology, they tend to give acceptance to those male-created images of women as primarily biological beings" (Biehl, 1991: 12).

In partial defense of cultural ecofeminist thinking, it has to be conceded that not all cultural ecofeminists endorse a conception of the female self that is essentialist in this sense. Seeking to avoid the charge of essentialism, some cultural ecofeminists (albeit often inconsistently) argue that female identity is not biologically grounded, but socially constructed, or a product of women's socialisation (Spretnak, 1993; Gray, 1981; Plant, 1989; Salleh, 1984: 342). Spretnak for example, (inconsistent with her earlier close identification of the female body with the earth body), has argued that the genders of both men and women are acquired through a process of "acculturation". It is not altogether clear what this process of "acculturation" refers to (Spretnak, 1991: 128). As I have shown, a view of female identity as socially constructed, in turn coincides with the notion of the self presented in the section titled "Relationality and female gender identity". This feminine self as relational, intuitive, empathetic, caring and nurturing, it is argued, is an effect of mothering by women and early socialisation that takes place as a result of the girl child-mother relationship. This represents the constructivist aspect of cultural ecofeminism.<sup>45</sup> In my view however, this attempt to overcome the charge of essentialism, is not altogether satisfactory or convincing either.

In the first place: this notion of the self is an explicitly feminine conception of the self that remains complementary and supplementary to the masculine self and therefore remains trapped in dualism.<sup>46</sup> Still in the realm of the problem of dualism, privileging of a feminine notion of the self as opposed to a masculinist

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<sup>45</sup> Constructivism as it is used here, denotes a shift from the perception of women as inherently caring and nurturing which is grounded in her childbearing capacities, to a view of women as caring and nurturing that is a result of her psychological constitution that is constructed in the mother-daughter relation and further built upon by her being socialised to become a mother. As we have seen the social strand of cultural ecofeminism also emphasises the social roles that women occupy as presenting us with alternative values to transform our relation to the natural environment. That the identity of women is a result of their being socialised to occupy certain roles is suggested, but not elaborated upon in much depth.

<sup>46</sup> It may be countered here that the relational aspect of the female self as articulated in the section "Relationality and female gender identity" is evidence that the feminine self overcomes dualism. At closer inspection this fails to be convincing, as this notion of the self continues to fit perfectly in the traditional model of a feminine self that is complementary and supplements a masculine self.

notion of the self, entails the reversal of the masculine/feminine dualism. As such, the content is changed whilst the structure of dualism remains the same. Moreover, this conception of female gender identity does not take into account differences between women. That is, adequate acknowledgement is not given to how factors such as race, class, and ethnicity shape the formation of gender identity. As such, this amounts to the denial of differences between women and an universalisation of female gender identity (Frazer and Nicholson, 1990: 30; Diquinzio, 1993: 1-9). As it will be made clear in Chapters 2 and 3, these deficiencies link up with the reductive analysis of the oppression of women and nature in terms of patriarchy on the one hand, and an inadequate engagement with dualism and essentialism on the other. That is, the manner in which different dualisms overlap and reinforce one another to complexify different identities, is not adequately acknowledged or engaged with. For these reasons, affirming the feminine self as an alternative ecological feminist self is undesirable. As we have seen, Gray's argument that the male and female perspective should be integrated, spills over into an endorsement of some form of androgyny that consists of a combination of positively valued masculine and feminine characteristics. As I have observed in the *Introduction*, an androgynous notion of the self is fraught with problems as a result of its pretense to neutrality. Such an appeal to neutrality has proven untenable, as such a claim has historically been conflated in a masculine viewpoint held to be rational, objective and universally true.

Universalising and essentialising female gender identity is closely connected to the frequent appeal that is made to women's experience by ecofeminists. What is invoked here is women's fulfillment and experience of certain social roles, which, along with women's experience of oppression grounds female gender identity. Together these factors serve to unite women and ultimately place them in a better position (ethically and politically) to address the environmental crisis. This appeal to "women's experience" made by white feminists universalises female experience and differences between women are lost out of sight. That is, factors such as race, class and ethnicity are axes of differentiation that are not adequately acknowledged or addressed by such an invocation of "women's experience" (Diquinzio, 1993: 5).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> That experience is not im-mediate either is also not reckoned with. See Scott (1992: 22-40)

This critique of the erasure of differences between and amongst women, overlaps with the reductionism of cultural ecofeminism's focus on patriarchy as source of the domination of both women and nature. The reason for this is that both arguments assume women's innocence regarding both racism and naturism. A focus on patriarchy and the call upon the uniting power of "women's experience" carries the implicit suggestion that women are incapable of being oppressors themselves (Davion, 1994: 20). In this regard, Third World women in particular have pointed out that white feminists in the West often participate in a consumer culture involving the technological and economic exploitation of poor people in the South (Zimmerman, 1994: 238). Moreover, the benefits those women from the North reap from the environmental destruction and degradation in the South is also disproportionate to the benefits of poor women in the South.<sup>48</sup> Once these factors are taken into account then, women's exemption from involvement or benefiting from environmental destruction and degradation, can also no longer be uncritically assumed. This also serves to somewhat relativise the claim that women are necessarily in a better position to address the environmental crisis. In the light of this critique then, the simplistic distinction drawn between oppressor and oppressed is undermined (Eckersley, 1992: 76; Davion, 1994: 18-20).

#### **6.4 An uncritical affirmation of the feminine principle**

This brings us to an evaluation of the ethic of care, or the cultural ecofeminist use of a vocabulary of care. The articulation of an ethic of care which is brought in relation with mothering or motherhood, shows how qualities and values that are traditionally associated with women, such as intuition, nurturance, care, compassion, conservation and relationality etc., if acknowledged and revalued, provide us with a foundation for an (ecological) alternative ethic. Conceiving of an ethic of care in these terms has been subjected to criticism that resonates with the criticism leveled at the cultural ecofeminist endorsement of a female and feminine self. An affirmation of the feminine principle is criticised for

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and Flax (1992: 445-463) for a discussion of experience as necessarily mediated in and through language.

<sup>48</sup> Of course it goes without saying that this is not for one moment to suggest that the North and South can be that clearly divided, or rather, that there are no divisions within the North

romanticising women's childbearing capacities, the role of motherhood and female virtues that not only raise unreasonable expectations of women, but also reinforces stereotypical images of women (Seager, 1993; Segal, 1994; Grant, 1993; Roach, 1991; Alcoff, 1988). According to Mellor (1992: 246), the uncritical endorsement of what is also referred to as the "feminine principle" amounts to endorsing an "ecofeminine rather than an ecofeminist position". Although the notions of relationality and caring, for example, have the potential to contribute to the articulation of an alternative environmental ethic, feminists and ecofeminists alike have pointed out that caution needs to be taken in particular with regard to a simple affirmation of values that are the product of women's oppression. In this regard Cuomo (1992: 354) writes:

Despite the potential of such a reclamation, theorists must remain mindful of the fact that any "aspects of our socialisation" are byproducts of the same oppressive system that promotes the devaluation of compassion and caring.

According to Cuomo, these values need to be thoroughly scrutinized and recontextualised before they can be reclaimed and considered useful. That is, the very notions of caring and nurturing should be redefined in a manner that transcends the powerlessness that these activities denote. Moreover, as caring and nurturing have been fundamental cornerstones in sustaining patriarchy and other oppressive relations, Cuomo rightfully points out that "caring cannot be evaluated if the object and purpose of care are not made clear" (Cuomo, 1992: 354-355).

## **6.5 Care and altruism**

In keeping with the concerns expressed above, an ethic of care is sometimes interpreted as espousing altruism, or as displaying a tendency to lean toward altruism (Tronto, 1986; Grant, 1993; Hoagland, 1991; Cuomo, 1992; Curtin, 1991; Grimshaw, 1986). As we have seen, feminists and ecofeminists find that an ethic of care that uncritically endorses feminine or female traits and values may in fact promote the oppression of women. Another question raised from a feminist perspective, is whether the blurring of boundaries that marks the

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and South itself.

feminine self, is indeed an appropriate starting point for a feminist ethic. Concern is expressed with regard to the merit of this notion of the self given that women have been and still are *expected* to sacrifice their needs and interests for the sake of others, or so as to tend to those of others.<sup>49</sup> The absence of clear boundaries has indeed facilitated women's historical inclination towards self-sacrifice. The cultural ecofeminist emphasis on (what culminates in) an other-orientatedness neglects to stipulate measures that can be taken to avoid a relapse into self-denial or self-sacrifice. In this regard, Cuomo (1992: 355) writes:

... given our socialisation and our present material conditions, like many other oppressed people, we must begin to feel *ourselves*, identify our feelings and what is in our own best interest. *This* experience should be our point of departure for any ethical decision making and theory building. Identifying one's own feelings and interests may be a necessary prerequisite to empathizing with another. If so then, ego denial is contrary to the kind of empathy that allows one to appreciate the oppression of another living being.

Identifying and acknowledging our own feelings and interests is of utmost importance and should most certainly form part of the process towards fostering ethical relations with others. The potential problem with Cuomo's exhortation is that caring about the oppression of others does not necessarily follow from identifying one's own feelings and interests. It is here that the significance of the undertaking towards a reconceptualisation of an ecological feminist notion of the self becomes pertinent. In the light of this then, some concept of relationality gains relevance, particularly from an ecological perspective. If we recall, a notion of the self articulated in terms of relationality was shown to have the potential to overcome the sharp separation between humans and nature, which in turn can contribute to fostering alternative relations to that of domination and instrumentalisation of the natural environment. Endorsing a relational self as articulated by cultural ecofeminism as ecological self, is however not sufficient

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<sup>49</sup> Both Chodorow (1974, 1978) and Ruddick (1980) are sensitive to this problem. In this regard, they suggest that women also develop a firm sense of self. What I am presenting the reader with here is the dominant reception and interpretation of an ethic of care along with cultural ecofeminism's appropriation of aspects of an ethic of care, which reflects similar tendencies.

for a number of reasons. Given its complementary structure, the relational self as conceived in terms of Chodorow's account of the feminine self, is not a desirable model for women to affirm, nor a convincing one for men to strive towards.<sup>50</sup> The suggestion that the feminine notion of the self offers an alternative notion of the self that is desirable for men and women is problematic in another sense also. Again from a feminist perspective, this, what ultimately boils down to a striving towards gender neutrality, will effect an erasure of differences between men and women, rendering insignificant differences that are indeed significant - in terms of power and meaning.<sup>51</sup>

To close this evaluation, it might be interesting to discuss the reception of the cultural ecofeminist appeal to relationality and its translation into practice from an ecological perspective.

## 6.6 Women's relationship with nature

In his analysis of an ethic of care as an alternative environmental ethic, King points out that the "appropriation of a vocabulary of care by some ecofeminists entails the appropriation of an ethic of care as the voice of women's experience of morality and of the 'givenness' of relationship" (King, 1991: 80). Here I would like to focus on King's reading of an ecofeminist ethic of care as assuming the "givenness of relationship" in particular with respect to the natural environment. In his search for the basis of such a relationship, King observes that women's identities and experiences are not universal and that factors such as class, race, sexual orientation, religious belief, nationality, ethnicity contribute to particularising an individual woman's conception of her relatedness to others. As such, the "givenness" of women's relatedness to nature too, becomes less than self-evident. In further support of his questioning of what is apparently assumed

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<sup>50</sup> This is a reading that is also discussed by Plumwood (1987).

<sup>51</sup> As Gray (1981) makes explicit, the suggestion is made that the positive aspects of the feminine should be integrated with those of the masculine. Predictably, as Chodorow herself suggests for men this will be facilitated by an increased involvement in the activity of mothering. Although the suggestion and argument that childrearing responsibilities should be shared equally between men and women is supported wholeheartedly, the assumption that this will establish equality between men and women, is severely doubted. As Grosz (1990) has observed, the manner in which the social intermeshes with the symbolic is not adequately addressed. As a whole, this line of argument, in favour of some kind of gender neutrality (also suggested by Eisenstein (1984: 94-95)), is not a convincing strategy to follow to bring about equality between men and women.

as given by cultural ecofeminists, he points out that in the increasingly urbanised and technologically advanced societies of Western Europe and North America, a relation to nature is no more given for women than it is for men. King (1991: 81) writes:

Both women and men are increasingly cut off from direct experiential relationships with natural, as opposed to artificial and urban, environments, and thus although we are unavoidably in relation with the non-human world, we do not, many of us, experience the relation to nature as given in all its concreteness and complexity.

What is it then that lays a basis for the argument that women occupy a position of being in-relationship-with nature, which then lays the foundation for caring for nature? This inevitably brings us to the cultural ecofeminist argument that women are connected to nature via her childbearing capacities. Apart from the already discussed problems of such an essentialist conception of women's relation to nature, the emphasis on reproduction as basis for an ethical relation, is inadequate for another reason. Here the crucial question is raised as to what exactly is cared about when caring about nature. This is succinctly captured by King (1991: 80) who writes:

Many ecofeminists have focused on those aspects of environmental destruction that impinge directly or indirectly on women's reproductive nature, that is on the consequences of the environmental crisis for individual and local community health and the conditions necessary for nurturing the life and growth of future generations of human beings.

What King finds problematic about the endorsement of an ethic of care based upon women's connectedness to the natural via the body, is that care for the environment is only conceived of in terms of the well-being of human beings (women in particular), thus rendering such a version of an ethic of care anthropocentric.<sup>52</sup> What lacks, according to King then, is a concern for nature in

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<sup>52</sup> Here a central debate in environmental ethics and politics is touched upon, namely the anthropocentrism-ecocentrism debate, the one being *human* centered, as opposed to the other which is *eco*, or *nature* centered. Anthropocentrism is not a uniform position; a distinction can be made between a strong and weak anthropocentrism. A strong anthropocentrism sees nature as resource of humans, and the preservation of nature is

its own right. The constant return to the welfare of human beings as standard for moral consideration is not only anthropocentric, but reproduces the dualism between what counts morally and what counts not (King, 1989: 82-83). This is of course a valid point of critique, but the contributions that these women's environmental activism has made to raise people's consciousness, must not be underestimated. Granted, the self-referentiality of these actions are limiting, but it may also be seen as one step towards caring for nature in its own right. A similar point can be made with regard to the essentialist strategies that have been employed in the political mobilisation of women. That these strategies are highly problematic is no doubt the case, but that significant results have been achieved, is nonetheless so (Mellor, 1997; Seager, 1994).

It is clear from the above that women's relatedness with the natural environment is less than self-evident if we do not want to posit an essentialist connection between women and nature. As I have argued throughout this chapter, this is not the only way to engage with the notion of relationality. Once the assumption of "self-evidence" is discarded, a path is opened up for conceiving of relationality in different terms. As we have seen, the more socially inclined ecofeminist strand engages with relationality in social terms, perceiving the self as being-in-relationship with others. Here relationality is explained by appealing to mothering theory. Translated in ecological terms, the argument is that caring for those in need can be widened to include nature. What is problematic here, is the cultural ecofeminist tendency to restrict caring to mothering and motherhood. Although the activity of motherhood is an activity (amongst other) that embodies significant values and develops extremely valuable social skills, in the final analysis, I would argue that it is ineffective to model relationality and an ensuing ethical interaction with the natural environment to an orientation that is totally synonymous with motherhood.<sup>53</sup> Another observation that I would like to make is that to argue that we necessarily occupy a position of relationality to nature, and that for this reason we have to ethically engage with nature, is a very valid

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argued for in these terms. A weak anthropocentrism remains human centered but would include sustainable development and the wellbeing of future generations as part of this position. For an in depth discussion of stronger and weaker forms of anthropocentrism, see Eckersley (1992: 35-45).

<sup>53</sup> The observation has also been made that such an employment of motherhood as model for ethical relations idealises motherhood, forgetting that not even motherhood or mothering is pure.



point to make. As I have argued elsewhere, the question I ask myself, however, is whether the account of relationality given above, is sufficient. Here I would like to make the suggestion that within an ecofeminist context at least, a shift in focus towards a non-anthropocentric reconceptualisation of nature (and for that matter, woman) is required so as to strengthen the basis for the ethical treatment of nature.

This brings us to another aspect of cultural ecofeminist thinking that needs further attention, and that is the conception of nature that is endorsed. As we have seen, in keeping with the cultural ecofeminist celebration and affirmation of difference, nature is revalued and celebrated via its connection with women's bodily differences. Although liberated from the status of mere matter by emphasising regenerative qualities of nature, this approach tends towards a reinforcement of the physicality of nature. This identification of both nature and women with the physical has however functioned to the detriment of the natural environment and women. The more spiritualist valuation of nature as an expression or manifestation of the goddess entails an anthropomorphic projection onto nature, whereby nature is imbued with spirit (Plumwood, 1993: 126-127). This image of nature tends towards a mystification of nature, and is therefore firmly located in the dualist framework discussed above. As such, it cannot be accepted without further refinement. The other more socially orientated ecofeminists discussed in this chapter offer little thought on how we can reconceive of nature, except that nature's status as mere matter is firmly rejected.

## **7. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed the notion/s of the self and the concomitant ethic that are endorsed by cultural ecofeminism. As we have seen, the cultural ecofeminist response to the environmental crisis is an affirmation of women's difference, and what is perceived as constituting this difference. The implicit or explicit argument that is forwarded by cultural ecofeminists is that women are better equipped to address the environmental crisis, both ethically and politically. In this discussion, I have tried to limit my focus to the ethical aspects of their arguments, although the two can necessarily not remain completely apart.

Despite its shortcomings, there are two main contributions that cultural ecofeminism makes toward the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self and ethic. This lies in the cultural ecofeminist insistence that we should reconceptualise our relation with the natural environment in terms that overcome the disconnectedness and alienation that fuel the domination and subjugation of nature (and slightly differently framed, also women). If we recall, this endorsement of some form of relationality is expressed in the female and feminine self that are affirmed in cultural ecofeminist thinking.

Insofar as a revaluation and celebration of women, nature and the body signals an unambiguous rejection of the patriarchal inferiorisation of women and nature which sanctions the domination of both, cultural ecofeminism's strategy to affirm women's difference can be positively appraised. Notwithstanding the magnitude of the problems surrounding the cultural ecofeminist valorisation and celebration of women, the body and nature, an emphasis on difference opens up the way for the daunting task of thinking and rethinking difference, also in the context of ecological philosophy. However, as I have tried to show, to effect lasting transformation in a culture that is marked by dualistically construed hierarchical power relations, more is required than the largely uncritical affirmation of what is devalued and regarded as inferior in Western patriarchal culture.

The most prominent inadequacies that have been identified in this position concern the dualist and essentialist or universalist character of the notions of the female and feminine self in cultural ecofeminist thinking. As I have argued and illustrated, these problems can be traced back to the focus on patriarchy as the cause of the oppression and subjugation of both women and nature, along with an inadequate engagement with the nature and functioning of dualism. A rejection of the male and masculine self is followed by an appeal to "women's experience" and a more or less uncritical affirmation and privileging of the female and feminine self. Apart from being criticised for reinforcing dualism through the strategy of reversal, the endorsement of these notions are revealed as bearing witness to the naive assumption that women are not implicated in naturism or racism.

A continued entrapment in dualism manifests itself in a number of ways. For example, the essentialism (which is part and parcel of dualism) of the female self as a result of its unambiguously biologicistic and naturalistic character, is untenable from both a feminist and ecological perspective. As I have shown, the strategy to replace a male self with a female self boils down to a simple reversal of dualism and reinforcement of damaging essentialist images of women. From an ecological perspective, the message that is thus conveyed is that men are inherently disconnected from the natural environment whilst women are connected and should be put in charge of "taking care of nature". Here we come face to face with another questionable effect insisting on women's privileged relation with nature, whether this is grounded in biological or social argument. Not only does this amount to a reversal of dualism, it also prevents other social groups to also shoulder their share of the responsibility for environmental destruction. As such we have a scenario where it is once again women who (are expected to) "clean up the mess", so to speak. As we have seen, women's privileged relation with nature is employed with another (related) objective in mind, and that is that women are capable of making a superior contribution to solving environmental problems. Once again we are faced not only with the reversal of dualism, but also the problems of essentialism or universalism.

In the light of this, it would seem appropriate to distinguish one central challenge of ecological feminist thinking. This is to carve out a strategy that overcomes these shortcomings noted above, but without forsaking a continued insistence on women's difference and their alliance with nature. The reason why this challenge is presented as pivotal to the ecofeminist project is because an insistence on difference is misdirected if it is employed to suggest that women are "better" than men. This amounts to a distortion of the feminist project in its entirety. An insistence on difference is a political act that demands acknowledgement and respect (read: ethical treatment) not only insofar as one *conforms* to the norms and criteria of those in power, but also as an insistence on the *freedom to challenge and subvert* existing structures of meaning and relations of power.

The second, feminine notion of the self that is endorsed by cultural ecofeminism

does not manage to secure a convincing position of difference for cultural ecofeminists either. Albeit not essentialist in biological terms, the feminine self of cultural ecofeminism is still hugely problematical. This is a result of its complementary character and subsequent continued entrapment in dualism, along with its – as already suggested above - universalisation of female gender identity. Moreover, to suggest that the relational self can function as alternative self (for men and women), specifically for its ecological significance has been shown to be unacceptable precisely for its complementary character. To overcome this complementarity by supporting an androgynous self is also undesirable for its ultimate erasure of differences.

This brings us to another prominent challenge to ecological feminist thinking which pertains to the feminist character of the ecological self. Such a notion of the self demands the articulation of a notion of relationality that stresses continuity but not at the expense of acknowledging differences. These differences pertain to the differences between selves, but also between humans and nature. Moreover, to conceive of an adequate notion of an ecological self, requires that the self moves beyond anthropocentrism. This requirement is revealed in the relation of identification that is endorsed by cultural ecofeminists. Such a relation of overidentification between women and nature necessarily results in self-referentiality, which maintains a disregard for the needs of nature in its own right. What is needed then, is a notion of relationality that does not merely rely on the assertion that we are in-relationship-with nature either. This claim does not adequately address the problem of anthropocentrism, as it tends to emphasise *human* dependency on nature, in terms of which nature is valued for its “usefulness” for humans. To convincingly move beyond anthropocentrism, a different strategy is required. This calls for a shift in focus to a reconceptualisation of nature and showing how the self is related to nature. As we have seen, this is an undertaking that is not successfully completed by cultural ecofeminism. The images of nature that are employed consist of an affirmation of the regenerative qualities of nature and depicting nature as female, along with a mystification of nature as imbued with spirit. These strategies are inadequate, as they too, remain trapped in dualism.

In the chapter that follows, titled *Critical-transformative ecological feminism*, I

will give an exposition of the notion/s of the self and the concomitant ethic that is articulated by this stream of thought. The aim of the discussion is to determine the contribution that this position makes towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self which can serve as basis for an ethical relationship towards nature, which at the same time transcends the problem of dualism and essentialism. As such, it will also be shown where and to what extent the shortcomings identified in cultural ecofeminist thinking are overcome. Conversely, it will also be shown if, and to what extent critical-transformative ecofeminism can conceive of difference and relationality in a manner that productively informs an ecological feminist notion of the self as well as ethics. In the process, the manner in which cultural and critical-transformative ecological feminist thinking can be shown to coincide and diverge from each other will also be elaborated upon.

## Chapter 2

### Critical-transformative ecological feminism

#### 1. Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I have discussed the contributions of cultural ecofeminism towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self beyond dualism and essentialism. In their critique of patriarchal culture, cultural ecofeminists bring to light the systematic suppression and devaluation of women and nature and what is perceived as "feminine values". Although cultural ecofeminists do make a significant contribution towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self, I argued that the notions of the self that are endorsed fail to overcome dualism and essentialism. These deficiencies can be ascribed to the reductive analysis of the twin dominations of women and nature, which manifests in a rather uncritical affirmation of what is perceived as constituting women's difference. The shortcomings that are identified in the notions of the self are transferred onto the ethic and values that are endorsed from a cultural ecofeminist perspective. As such, the contributions that cultural ecofeminism makes towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self, are in need of further refinement. In this chapter, I turn my attention to the ecological feminist position that is interchangeably referred to as "philosophical" (Buege, 1994), "conceptual" (King, 1991), "critical" (Plumwood, 1993; Andrews, 1994), and "transformative" ecofeminism (Warren, 1994). In my understanding, it is the critical and transformative qualities in particular that distinguish this ecofeminist perspective from others. As such, a classification of this position as "critical-transformative" ecofeminism seems well suited.

In the following chapter I give an exposition of the critical-transformative ecological feminist notions of the self and the ethic that is associated with it. The purpose of this exposition is to explore the contributions that are made towards the articulation of a *feminist* notion of an ecological self and an *ecological* notion of a feminist self beyond dualism and essentialism. Another, albeit implicit, aim of this discussion, is to determine whether and to what extent the deficiencies that are identified in cultural ecofeminism can be

overcome. As Val Plumwood is the main proponent of critical-transformative ecofeminism, specifically with regard to articulating an alternative feminist notion of an ecological self, I focus mainly on her contributions. Where relevant, I will show how other ecofeminists such as Warren (1987, 1994), and Cheney (Warren and Cheney, 1991), Plant (1989), King (1989, 1990), Cuomo, (1998) and Mellor (1992, 1997) to a greater or lesser extent, share or enhance her views.<sup>1</sup>

As in the previous chapter, I start off this chapter with a brief contextualisation and background. This will be followed by a discussion of the critical transformative analysis of the twin dominations of women and nature in a section titled "Women and nature and the realm of the other". Critical-transformative ecofeminist thinkers locate the source of the domination of women and nature in what is described by Warren (1994: 132) as an "oppressive conceptual framework" that involves a "logic of domination", or in Plumwood's case, a "logic of colonisation" (Andrews, 1996: 142). As we have seen, the argument that the oppression of women and nature can be traced back to dualism is not entirely new. However the critical-transformative ecofeminist analysis of the nature and functioning of dualism entails a particular engagement with dualism that distinguishes it markedly from the cultural ecofeminist position. It deepens our understanding of dualism and extends the reach of dualism so that the complexities involved in transforming a dualistically construed notion of the self and its relation to nature are brought to light. In my understanding, it is this feature that signifies the fundamental difference between the two approaches.

In the fourth and fifth sections of this chapter I give an exposition of critical-transformative ecofeminism's contributions towards the articulation of a feminist notion of an ecological self and an ecological notion of a feminist self. In my engagement with the literature at hand, I have come to distinguish a number of moments that together constitute the ecological feminist notion of the self that is articulated from a critical-transformative ecofeminist perspective. Although the different facets are to a greater or lesser degree part of a larger unfinished

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<sup>1</sup>Plant (1989) and King's (1989) positions, although sharing the view of the critical-transformative perspective on some points, are however hugely ambiguous.

whole, they are discussed separately. The first two notions that are examined, are a pluralist feminine self and a degendered human self. Plumwood's engagement with female gender identity and the human marks an attempt to create a setting against which an ecological self that does not do away with differences, can be articulated. In the section titled "A critical affirmation of female gender identity", Plumwood's proposal for the reconceptualisation of female gender identity beyond dualism and essentialism, is discussed. This notion of female gender identity finds expression in a pluralist feminine self. The notion of the degendered human that signifies an attempt to transcend the false choice between either endorsing a masculine or feminine model of the self is discussed in the section titled "The degendered human". The degendered human is shown to signal a movement towards the articulation a notion of the self that lends itself to *ecological* selfhood. The critical-transformative notion of an ecological self starts to unfold before us in a third moment which consists of a transformation of nature as continuous with the human. In the section titled "The human, intentionality and nature", I show that Plumwood's reconceptualisation of the self and nature as alike but also unlike, is accomplished. Acknowledging continuity along with difference, is a theme that occupies a central place in the critical-transformative engagement with transforming the relation between self and nature. It is in the section on critical-transformative ecofeminist ethics that the ecological self emerges in more detail.

The sixth part of this chapter titled "Critical-transformative ecofeminist ethics", consists of an exposition of a critical-transformative ecofeminist critique of environmentalists' continued adherence to ethics in abstract and universalist terms and the notion of the self that informs it. Plumwood (1991, 1993) and Warren (1994) propose a transformation of environmental ethics so as to include the contributions articulated from a feminist perspective. Instead of articulating a detailed account of an environmental ethic, Plumwood (1991, 1993) focuses on the relation between self and other that would provide a sound basis for the successful functioning of such an ethic. Here, another aspect of the critical-transformative ecofeminist notion of the self comes to the fore. Taking issue with what she argues reveals deep ecology's confusion of dualism with holism, Plumwood articulates a feminist notion of an ecological self beyond dualism.



This section is divided into two parts, "Beyond environmental ethics" and "Ethics and the mutual self".

Throughout this exposition, I relate and compare critical-transformative ecological feminism with cultural ecofeminism so as to show up similarities and differences between the two positions. Where appropriate, I will make critical comments to illuminate problem areas that will be discussed in further detail in the final section titled "An Evaluation of critical-transformative ecofeminism". The objective of this evaluation is to elucidate the strengths and weaknesses of this position with regard to the contributions that are made towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self beyond dualism and essentialism. As in the previous chapter, I will now proceed to briefly contextualise critical-transformative ecofeminism.

## 2. Contextualisation and background

Val Plumwood and Karen Warren represent a stream within ecological feminist thinking that considers the domination and subjugation of women and nature to be an effect of an oppressive conceptual framework.<sup>2</sup> Not denying the extent to which patriarchy contributes to the oppression of women and nature, Plumwood departs from the cultural ecofeminist assertion that patriarchy is the source of all forms of oppression, including the domination of nature.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This approach distinguishes their work from other social/ist ecofeminists such as Salleh (1992, 1984), Shiva (1989, 1990), Mellor (1997), Mies and Shiva (1993), whose analyses tend towards a more traditional materialism.

<sup>3</sup> Warren is ambiguous on this point (Grond, 1993; Pepper, 1996), not only because she fluctuates between phrases like "patriarchal conceptual framework" (1987, 1990, 1993) and "oppressive conceptual framework" (Warren, 1994) to explain the twin dominations of women and nature, but also for the reason that she gives for this fluctuation. Quite surprisingly, she elucidates this by stating that "there may be some patriarchal conceptual frameworks, (e.g., in non-Western cultures) that are not properly characterized as based on value dualisms" (Warren, 1994: 125). This explanation is surprising not because this is erroneous, but because even in Western culture, this would be oversimplifying the problem, a problem which is starkly illuminated by a thorough analysis of the domination of women and nature in terms of dualism. Warren's unsatisfactory explanation for the shift from a "patriarchal conceptual framework" to a focus on "oppressive conceptual frameworks", can perhaps be explained by the fact that she herself does not take her analysis of dualism further. That is, unlike Plumwood, Warren does not make a contribution towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self.

The analysis of the twin dominations of women and nature conducted by Warren and Plumwood is both historical and conceptual.<sup>4</sup> In Plumwood's case, this forms part of a critique of two prominent streams in ecological thinking. Both deep ecology and social ecology refuse to acknowledge the significance of the link between the domination of women and nature.<sup>5</sup> Plumwood's approach is also a response to the historical account that is offered by ecological thinkers such as Merchant (1982) who, supported by Capra (1982), argues that the domination of nature and women can be traced back to the rise of Cartesian-Newtonian science.

According to Merchant, the Cartesian-Newtonian view of nature as lifeless matter signifies a radical departure from a more organic approach to nature that prevailed during the pre-sixteenth century. In the light of the witch-hunts that took place during this so-called organic era, Plumwood responds by questioning Merchant's positive valuation of this historical period. She (Plumwood, 1986: 127), writes: "[t]he pre-seventeenth century organic view of nature seem rosy indeed, and the contrast between pre-seventeenth century organism and later mechanism far too simple". Plumwood's critique is based on the observation that such a historical account fails to explain the rejection of the physical and the treatment of women as inferior during the pre-Enlightenment era. For Plumwood, this shortcoming signals the need for a more thorough inquiry that stretches back further in history.

The kind of inquiry that Plumwood has in mind is contained in her critique of Merchant's discussion of the conceptual link between women and nature. She points out that in Merchant's analysis, the link between women and nature remains "little more than mere metaphor or convention" (Plumwood, 1986: 136). For a more comprehensive account, Plumwood (1986, 1991, 1992, 1993) argues that we can trace the conceptual link between the domination of women and nature back to the time of the classical Greek philosophers.<sup>6</sup> This is not to deny an intensification of the radical separation between man and nature in

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<sup>4</sup> Historical should here be understood in the literal, rather than the Marxist sense.

<sup>5</sup> Main exponents of deep ecology are Arne Naess (1985a, 1985b, 1989) and Warrick Fox (1990), and the founder of social ecology is Murray Bookchin (1989).

Cartesian-Newtonian thinking, which bolstered the instrumental treatment of nature. Locating the domination of women and nature in dualism provides a more complete picture of an overlapping network of power relations underlying the simultaneous domination and subjugation of women and nature.

Treating the link between the domination of women and nature as the result of a dualist conceptual framework, Plumwood's position corresponds with ecofeminists such as Gray who, as we have seen, also focuses on hierarchical dualism. Plumwood (1986: 125) points out that Gray's analysis of transcendental dualism tends to restrict itself to the rejection of the sphere of physicality. Although she does not dispute the significance of this link, Plumwood (1986: 128) asserts that to liberate nature and women from their entrapment in a dualist structure, a closer inquiry in the nature and functioning of dualism is required. In her view then, a thorough engagement with dualism can overcome the deficiencies displayed by these analyses which in turn obscure the ways out of relations between self and other marked by domination and subordination. This is what we will discuss in further detail in the section that follows.

### **3. Woman and nature and the realm of the other**

The analysis and characterisation of an oppressive conceptual framework that Warren and Plumwood respectively submit coincide on certain points but also diverge notably.<sup>7</sup> Plumwood's focus on dualism as characteristic of oppressive conceptual frameworks will be my point of entry into this discussion, as she situates dualism within the context of Western philosophical thought. The account she offers of the nature and functioning of dualism is more suited to this discussion than Warren's (1994) analysis. In what follows, I give a concise account of Plumwood's critique of the rationalist philosophical tradition whose dominance in Western philosophical thinking has proved to be inimical to both women and nature. The manner in which reason was construed so as to effect

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<sup>6</sup> Here Plumwood follows Rosemary Radford Reuther (1974) who traces the twin dominations of women and nature back to the time of the Greek philosophers; she however diverts from Reuther's view that "the subjugation of woman is the first subjugation" (Mellor, 1997: 50).

<sup>7</sup> See Warren (1994: 124-134) for an exposition of how the domination of women and nature is grounded in an oppressive conceptual framework.

*power over* nature receives special attention here. This is followed by a discussion of the main features of dualism that lies central to the rationalist philosophical tradition. The manner in which this focus on dualism situates critical-transformative ecofeminism, is also elaborated upon. In the final part of this section, I illustrate Plumwood's strategy to open up an avenue to move beyond dualism, and most importantly, to take up the challenge of articulating an ecological feminist notion of the self.

### 3.1 A critique of rationalism and the instrumentalisation of nature

In an in depth analysis of the dominant rationalist tradition in Western philosophical thought, Plumwood (1993: 69-119) reveals how the concept of the human as embodiment of the Western ideals of rationality, has been articulated in fundamental opposition to nature, woman and the feminine.<sup>8</sup> Since the time of Plato, reason is not only contrasted with nature, the sphere of the natural includes the body, passions, emotions, the animal, the senses, non-human landscape, the slave, the feminine, reproductive nature and matter as chaos. The deficiency of all these others, is their distance from "logos" ordering reason, which grounds the mastery of some, and sanctions the domination and control of others (Plumwood, 1993: 88). The ingredients for the perception of the human as essentially disconnected from nature and the sphere of the natural by virtue of a capacity for rationality are therefore already present in pre-Enlightenment thought. Not disputing the role of Cartesian-Newtonian mechanistic science in the domination and instrumentalisation of nature, Plumwood points out that the dualist structure of Platonic thinking provides the foundation for an intensification of dualism in Enlightenment thinking. It is in Enlightenment thinking then, that we are presented with a *fundamentally* alienated account of the human and a conception of reason that fosters relations of control and mastery of nature. During this period, old dualisms that were

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<sup>8</sup>Here Plumwood links up with feminist writers such as Lloyd (1984) and Bordo (1987). In their respective analyses of the history of Western philosophical thought, Lloyd reveals how reason is construed in opposition to women and the feminine, whilst Bordo shows how the preoccupation with "objectivity" in Enlightenment thinking marks a "flight from the feminine".

shaped by Platonic thinking, pave the way to be occupied by new ones (Plumwood, 1993: 75).<sup>9</sup>

This brings us to the manner in which “the western mechanistic conception of nature” is grounded in dualism (Plumwood, 1993: 104). Focusing on the human-nature dualism in particular, Plumwood (1993: 107) offers the following account of its development:

The first step ... is the construction of the normative (the best or ideal) human identity as mind or reason, excluding or inferiorising the whole rich range of other human and non-human characteristics or construing them as inessential. The construction of mind or reason as oppositional to nature is the second step. The construction of nature itself as mindless is the third step, one which both reinforces the opposition and constructs nature as ineluctably alien, disposing of an important area of overlap between humans and animals and non-human nature.<sup>10</sup>

The first two steps are present in Plato’s texts, and the third is implicit in his treatment of original matter as chaos upon which rational order must be imposed. The third step is the one that Descartes makes explicit. It builds upon and presupposes the earlier steps and together with these features, the great divide between the human and nature is construed. This is a significant change that occurs in the work of Descartes that distinguishes his thought from Plato’s. Plato’s position expresses a preoccupation with the “primacy of reason over *internal* nature, with dominating and disciplining the body, emotions and senses” (Plumwood, 1993: 109). According to Plumwood, Plato does not seem to think of the “natural world itself, *external* nature as a field of control, something

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<sup>9</sup> In her analysis of western philosophical thought, Plumwood (1993: 141) shows how the human as embodiment of reason or later, rationality as defined in opposition and superior to the realm of nature and the feminine, found its expression in different but related sets of dualisms at different periods in history. The rational as the distinctive mark of the human or individual, is also appropriated in the service of dominant political (liberal democracy), ethical (utilitarianism) and economic (liberal capitalist) ends. This analysis is also revealing of Plumwood’s socialist feminist leanings.

<sup>10</sup> An exception Plumwood notes is found in Aristotelian thought where rationality of the human sphere corresponded to a rational order in nature. However, she (Plumwood, 1993: 105) writes: “[t]he Aristotelian position left more room for continuity than is typically left in the rationalist tradition. But it was a continuity organised around hierarchy”.

humans have power over or have to struggle with”, in fact he regards it as an inferior sphere of little intrigue (Plumwood, 1993: 109).

What has changed with the rise of technology in the twelfth century is not so much the perception of the separateness and inferiority of nature, but the “confidence in controlling it” (Plumwood, 1993: 109). This shift in the perception of human power in relation to nature is implicit in the images of nature that Descartes employs at a later stage. Nature is conceived as passive, and as wax easily molded. Another dominant image of nature as machine further bolsters the allure of the power to control. Conceiving of nature as machine reinforces a restricted instrumental view of nature that is consistent with the technological outlook. Plumwood (1993: 109) puts it succinctly:

The machine’s properties are contrived for its maker’s benefit, and its canons of virtue reflect its users’ interests ... A machine is made to be controlled and knowledge over its operation is the means to power over it.

In this way, reason finds a new purpose. Rather than escaping the natural world and rising above it, it is to exercise *control over* the natural world.<sup>11</sup> The mechanistic view of nature defined as null and void of meaning is employed in the service of scientific mechanism. It is seen as passive, non-agent, non-creative and inert and action is viewed as imposed on it by an external force. Defined negatively in relation to the primary term the human, nature lacks interests and significance of its own and humans determine any purpose or value it might have. Not surprisingly then, this view of nature as devoid of meaning or purpose opens up the way for conceiving of nature in purely instrumental terms:

For if something is conceived in these mechanistic terms, as lacking any of the qualities of autonomy and agency which are required for us to be able to accord respect to it as its own thing, it can merely be seen as our thing. If it lacks its own goals and direction, it can impose no constraints on our treatment of it; it can be seen as something utterly neutral on which humans can and even must

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<sup>11</sup> Here Merchant’s (1982) point of “power over nature” as a particularly Modern idea is echoed.

impose their own goals, purposes and significance ... Thus a mechanistically conceived nature lies open to, indeed *invites* the imposition of human purposes and treatment as an instrument for the achievement of human satisfactions (Plumwood, 1993: 110-11, emphasis Plumwood's).

The goal of science which is to obtain rational knowledge of nature, (in itself an act of control) so as to mold it into an instrument that serves human ends, is fully consistent with the account of nature given above.<sup>12</sup> Instrumental rationality that lies at the core of the Western scientific project since the Enlightenment is grounded in the dualistically construed notion of nature as a mindless entity with no goal or purpose of its own.<sup>13</sup> To address the particular shape that the domination and instrumentalisation of nature takes on in Western culture, this dualistic view of nature, has to be transformed so as to challenge the human/nature dualism that grounds the instrumental treatment of nature. In the section of this chapter titled "The human, intentionality and nature", this will receive detailed attention, and will be further elaborated upon in the section "Critical-transformative ecofeminist ethics". But before such an undertaking can be embarked upon, we have to take a closer look at the structure of dualism as it is discussed in critical-transformative ecofeminism.

### 3.2 The structure of dualism

In keeping with her suggestion that an in-depth analysis of the nature and functioning of dualism is required so as to devise a strategy to move beyond dualism, Plumwood examines the main features of dualism. For Plumwood, hierarchy and radical separation are architectonic to dualism. In a dualist relation, the qualities that are associated with the hyperseparated other are

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<sup>12</sup> If we recall, this point links up with the critique of Western science and Cartesian-Newtonian thinking discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>13</sup> As I have observed in the previous chapter, instrumental rationality denotes a view of nature as resource for human use, and also the inclination to view everything and all things in instrumental terms, that is, reductively in terms of their use value only. This point of critique reflects critical-transformative ecofeminism's affinity to the tradition of German Critical Theory that delivers a powerful critique of instrumental reason. For an in depth discussion of the relevance of Critical Theory for ecological thinking, see Eckersley (1992: 97-117) and also Dobson (1993: 191-194).

systematically constructed and depicted as inferior. The structure of dualism is subsequently articulated as follows:

Dualism is a relation of separation and domination inscribed and naturalised in culture and characterised by radical exclusion, distancing and opposition between orders constructed as systematically higher and lower, as inferior and superior, as ruler and ruled, which treats the division as part of the natures of beings construed not merely as different but as belonging to radically different orders or kinds, and hence not open to change (Plumwood, 1993: 47).<sup>14</sup>

According to Plumwood (1993: 47-55) the logical structure of dualism can be illuminated with reference to five main characteristics. The features that she distinguishes all function together to support and maintain the hierarchical structure of dualism and the ensuing relations of domination it effects. Before discussing these main features, it is insightful to take note of Plumwood's (not necessarily exhaustive) list of the key sets of oppositional pairs (Plumwood 1993: 43):

Self	other
human	nature
reason	nature
culture	nature
male	female
mind	body (nature)
mind, spirit	nature
reason	matter (pure physicality)
subject	object
reason	emotion
masculine	feminine
rationality	animality

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<sup>14</sup> Essentialism as denoting a fixed and ahistorical truth is therefore necessarily implied in dualism. This is consistent with one of the main thrusts of the poststructuralist critique of dualism, a most prominent contributor being the French-Algerian philosopher, Jacques Derrida (1976, 1981). Exposing these fixed and ahistorical truths as constructed opens up the possibility for (among other things), reconstruction and change.



civilised	primitive
master	slave
universal	particular
production	reproduction
freedom	necessity
public	private

The qualities that are displayed on the left side of the division are associated with the self and those on the right side, are associated with the other. The self/other dualism can be shown to represent the wide range of interrelated and mutually reinforcing dualist pairs. For this reason then it is with reference to this pair that the characteristics are discussed.<sup>15</sup>

A main feature of dualism is the element of *radical exclusion*, which serves to establish an oppositional relation between the two categories that constitute a dualist pair. In terms of *radical exclusion*, the other is conceived of as radically different and hyperseparated from the self. The other's differences are emphasised and maximised so as to create maximal separation between self and other. To illustrate the artificiality of this distinction, Plumwood (1993: 49) writes that "[f]or otherness there need be only a single characteristic which is different, possessed by the one but not the other ...". What this construction thus achieves, is the radical exclusion of the other from the self, thus eliminating any recognition of continuity between self and other. Coupled with the inferiorisation of the other, radical exclusion is employed to sanction the domination of the other by the self. Moreover as Plumwood remarks, this construction serves to "naturalise domination, making it appear to be part of the nature of each and in the nature of things, and yields two hyperseparated orders of being" (Plumwood 1993: 51).

The relationship described above, is however fraught with tension. One source of tension regards the *dependence of the self on the other* in order to maintain unity and position of privilege. This is dealt with by *backgrounding* which

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<sup>15</sup> The features that Plumwood identifies and discusses as characteristic of dualist structures, namely hierarchy, exclusion, backgrounding, incorporation and homogenisation are consistent with the feminist poststructuralist analysis and critique of dualist structures that draws strongly on Derridian deconstructivism (Scott, 1988; Grosz, 1990).

negates this relationship of dependence (Plumwood, 1993: 48-49; King, 1989: 19-23).<sup>16</sup> Whilst being facilitated by polarisation and hierarchy, backgrounding at the same time reinforces polarisation and hierarchy. Backgrounding also entails the assumption that the perspective of the other is inessential, whilst the view of the self is set up as universal (Plumwood, 1993: 48; Grosz: 1990: 150). From this viewpoint, it never occurs to the self that there might exist a perspective in which he is the background. This inessentialness of the other and the essentialness of the self, is however an illusion, as it is the self who requires the other to define his identity as it is defined essentially in opposition to the other. Thus, according to Plumwood (1993: 49), paradoxically, it is the other the self is indebted to.

This brings us to a third characteristic of dualism, namely *incorporation* according to which the identity of the other is constructed always in relation and with reference to the self. That is, the other is constructed in opposition to the identity and needs of the self, the latter of which is taken as primary and defining of social value, whilst the other is defined as negative or lack. In this way the power of the self over and above the other is construed. As Grosz has observed, when the self serves as ultimate point of reference in the definition of the other as in opposition (or complementary) to the self, what is in effect achieved is sameness (Grosz, 1990: 150). In this culture of sameness, the other is not encountered as fully independent other. Given the dependence of the self on the other to preserve its superiority and maintain the relation of domination, "the master consciousness cannot tolerate unincorporated otherness" (Plumwood, 1993: 52). Consequently "the other is only recognised to the extent that it is assimilated to the self, or incorporated to the self and its system of desires and needs: only as colonised by the self" (Plumwood, 1993: 52). In the light of the above, it is clear that radical differentiation (exclusion) and incorporation are two sides of the same coin. These features of incorporation and radical exclusion are linked to the fourth and fifth characteristics of dualism, namely instrumentalisation and homogenisation.

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<sup>16</sup> This relationship of dependence operates on a conceptual as well as material level. Social/ist ecofeminist Mellor (1997) focuses on this relationship in her materialist analysis of the relation between women and nature. For an excellent analysis and discussion of this materialist connection between women and nature, see Mellor (1997: 162-192).

The oppositional terms in which the other is defined in relation to the self and the inferior value that is attributed to the characteristics of the other together create a justification for the self's domination of the other. According to Plumwood (1993: 53) this is enacted through a process of objectification and the *instrumentalisation* of the other. The lower sides of the dualism are required to set aside their own interests to serve those of the upper sides, and are conceived of as instruments, as means to his ends. Through objectification, the other is depicted as having no needs of her own, as the ends of the other are defined in terms of the ends of the self. Furthermore, due to the other's exclusion from the realm of the self, the self does not recognise the other as morally considerable, (having needs and ends of its own), thus rendering him free to impose his will.

Another feature that characterises dualism and the ensuing relation between self and other that is marked by domination, is *homogenisation*. Homogenisation refers to the manner in which differences between members of an inferiorised group are ignored which intensifies polarisation, which in turn functions also in the service of incorporation. The homogenisation of the identity of the other precludes differentiation that could challenge the "assimilated otherness" the self is dependent upon to maintain its integrity and privilege. Because radical separation or exclusion hinders the recognition of continuity between self and other, any confusion regarding this point is further eliminated through homogenisation. It is therefore not surprising that the instrumental treatment of the other is promoted by homogenisation. The dominated other must appear homogenous if it is to confirm, and conform, to its "nature", a "nature" which justifies and maintains an instrumental relation between self and other.

Having discussed the main features of dualism, Plumwood asserts that in order to transform the dualist structure of the relation between self and other, the particular characteristics of dualism need to be carefully reflected upon. The strategy that Plumwood offers in the light of the above analysis will be elaborated upon in due course. First, I would like to take a moment to situate the critical-transformative ecofeminist position in the light of the critique of the domination and subjugation of women and nature as grounded in dualism.

### 3.3 Situating the woman-nature connection

To focus on dualism as grounding the twin dominations of women and nature, a different light is cast upon the kind of connection that exists between the domination of women and nature. First, this connection is conceptual, but also finds expression in material reality. Plumwood makes clear that this conceptual structure manifests itself in social relations.<sup>17</sup> An analysis of dualism enables us to observe that and how the twin dominations of women and nature are intertwined with a whole range of other dualisms. These dualisms Plumwood asserts, form an interrelated web that functions in a mutually supportive manner. Focusing on dualism illuminates a wide range of exclusions that draws our attention to the fact that it is not only women and nature that have been oppressed. That is, others who have also been designated to the realm of otherness have shared the same fate.

Most significantly, the expansion of the realm of the other to include also a number of different others, expands and complexifies also the identity of the self. The characteristics of the self that we have to address in an endeavour to transform the relation between self and other marked by domination and subjugation are therefore broadened. It is in the light of this that Plumwood (1993: 42) writes: “[t]hus it is the identity of the master (rather than a masculine identity pure and simple) defined by these multiple exclusions which lies at the heart of western culture”.<sup>18</sup> This notion of the *master* is constituted by a wide range of exclusions that include human and non-human others, and serves to problematise what is often assumed by cultural ecofeminists as unproblematic. The cultural ecofeminist tendency to depict women as innocents as opposed to men, who are universally condemned, is significantly challenged by showing how the identity of the master is not *necessarily* specific to men. This is at the same time not to deny that the manner in which this symbolic

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<sup>17</sup> Plumwood’s materialist roots are thus laid bare, but as I read her, Plumwood ultimately wants to overcome the conceptual/material dichotomy. As we shall see, this is most markedly portrayed in her discussion of the mutual self as post-rationalist feminist subjectivity that is adapted to articulate an ecological self beyond dualism and essentialism.

<sup>18</sup> Plumwood’s use of the term “master”, especially in combination with what she refers to as a “logic of colonisation”, signals that the self-other dualism is a model that reaches wider into Western culture that can be shown to transfer onto the broader political, social and economic spheres: Western imperialism and its offshoots being exemplary in this regard. As such Plumwood’s socialist roots are obvious.

structure has organised Western culture, has rendered the identity of the master the property of (an elite group of white) males. However, by showing how the master/slave dualism is connected to and supported by other dualisms, a consideration of exclusions in terms of race, class and species for example, reveals how women too, can be and have been implicated in the identity of the master, also with respect to the exploitation of the natural environment. Plumwood's departure from opposing simply a "male" or "masculine" identity, brings to light the complex functioning of power relations that problematises the simplistic distinction between oppressor and oppressed.

Not denying that women's association with nature, and nature's association with the feminine, has and still continues to inform the treatment of both women and nature, Plumwood's analysis of dualism as the source of the oppression of the other moves one step further by disrupting the cultural ecofeminist privileging of the woman-nature-feminine connection. Detaching women's identification with nature and the feminine somewhat, it is made visible how being cast with nature and the feminine has functioned also to the detriment of others who suffer at the hands of the master. She points out that male slaves for example too, have been cast in the role of other and both feminised and naturalised (Plumwood, 1993: 50). What this illustrates is that an uncritical endorsement of a female or a feminine self as alternative ecological feminist self is a function of a too restrictive engagement with the twin dominations of women and nature. For Plumwood then, the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self requires more than replacing what is perceived to be simply a male or masculine notion of the self with a female or feminine notion of the self. Plumwood's contributions towards the articulation of such an ecological feminist notion of the self beyond dualism and essentialism will be elaborated upon in due course.

Approaching the domination and subjugation of women and nature in terms of dualism is significant in another sense. As we have seen, according to critical-transformative ecofeminism, dualism grounds a range of different but related forms of oppression, the one not reducible to the other (as in the case of cultural ecofeminism). Following Warren (1987), Plumwood (1994a, 1994b) asserts that ecofeminism can be described as a liberation movement that opposes all forms

of oppression, that is, the domination of non-human nature by humans and the domination of humans by humans.<sup>19</sup> In this regard Warren (1987: 18) writes:

... [t]ransformative feminism would expand on the traditional conception of feminism as a movement to end women's oppression by recognising and making explicit the interconnections between all systems of oppression ... Feminism, properly understood, is a movement to end all forms of oppression ... A transformative feminism would build on these insights [of black and socialist feminism] to develop a more expansive and complete feminism, one which ties the liberation of women to the liberation of all systems of oppression (Warren's brackets).

According to Plumwood (1994: 215), this is not to suggest that different liberation movements are to come together as one, but to acknowledge different forms of oppression as related. It is argued that such an acknowledgment of and sensitivity to the interconnectedness between different forms of human domination and the domination of nature, can only serve to deepen and enrich the analyses of different ecological positions along with the notion/s of the self that are endorsed.

This brings us to another distinguishing feature of the critical-transformative ecofeminist position. The argument that the oppression and devaluation of nature and women is grounded in a dualist conceptual framework suggests a specific approach towards addressing the twin dominations of women and nature. The strategy that Plumwood follows represents a shift, although not a departure, from the tendency of cultural ecofeminist to restrict their focus somewhat to the masculine/feminine, male/female dualisms in terms of which the domination of nature is explained and addressed. Instead, Plumwood broadens her focus by placing the human/nature dualism central to her analysis. By focusing on the human, not only the gendered character of the human is brought to light, but also the key role that reason played in the domination of nature and women. Taking into account the involvement of the reason/nature dualism in the domination of nature is consistent with Plumwood's assertion that

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<sup>19</sup> King (1989), Merchant (1992), Mellor (1997), and Salleh (1992, 1994) also share this understanding of ecofeminism.

to expose the identity of the self that has to be transformed, a more thorough analysis of the identity of the master needs to be conducted. She (1993: 69) writes:

The contraction by this feminist critique of the identity of the master to an identity that is simply male tends to obscure the real political issues and the real measures which are needed to bring about change (hooks, 1989: 20). To shake the conceptual foundations of these systems of domination we must unmask more fully the identity of the master.

From a critical-transformative ecological feminist perspective, the identity of the master finds its expression in *the human*. Subsequently, the human/nature dualism is concentrated upon as containing the masculine/feminine and reason/nature dualisms. To the extent that it focuses on the masculine/feminine dualism, critical-transformative ecofeminism shares with cultural ecofeminism a critique of the masculinity of the dominant notion of the self. However, an approach that includes the reason/nature dualism sensitises us to the range of other forms of domination generated by a dualist construal of reason. As such, it also opens up different possibilities towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self.<sup>20</sup> That is, a point of entry is provided that can be explored to conceive of a feminist notion of an ecological self that moves beyond the restrictions of a notion of the self defined in opposition to the masculine. Moreover, it makes possible an approach towards conceiving of nature beyond its limited and limiting association with the feminine. Lastly, refusing an erasure of differences, it encourages a conceptualisation of female gender identity beyond dualism and essentialism.

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<sup>20</sup> If we recall, in the previous chapter on cultural ecofeminism, the ecofeminist critique of Western science and Cartesian-Newtonian thinking is discussed which shows up the role of these related dualisms in the domination and subjugation of nature, the feminine and women. This discussion was however performed with the aim of elucidating the cultural ecofeminist references to the manner in which Western science and Cartesian-Newtonian thinking contribute to the instrumentalisation of nature, whilst simultaneously being inimical to women and the feminine. These points of critique implies the rejection of the reason/nature dualism, but as we shall see, Plumwood engages with this and related dualisms in a particular manner.

### 3.4 Moving Beyond Dualism

Speaking from within the context of critical-transformative ecofeminism, Plumwood (1993: 59-68) maintains that a first step towards addressing a dualistically structured relation between self and other, is to overcome the radical exclusion and inferiorisation that marks the relation between self and other. This, Plumwood (1991: 4-22; 1992: 18-23; 1993: 61-62, 27-34) asserts, must however be distinguished from two different but related strategies, that are followed to address the domination and inferiorisation of the other. These strategies are incorporation and uncritical affirmation. According to the strategy of incorporation, the other is assimilated into the sphere of the self by extending the qualities of the self to the other. Uncritical affirmation is a strategy that involves a positive affirmation of otherness in defiance of the inferiorisation of the other by the self. The inadequacy of both of these strategies lies in their reinforcement of, and thus failure to move beyond the structure of dualism. In the case of incorporation radical separation is overcome, but this strategy is a superficial challenge to dualism. Whilst the other is assimilated to the realm of the self, the dualistically construed sphere of the self is left perfectly intact. In the case of the uncritical affirmation, the inferiorisation of the other is defied. In spite of giving acknowledgement to the other, however, the oppositional relation between self and other is not sufficiently challenged. This is only possible if an affirmation of otherness is accompanied by a reconstructive moment.

From the perspective of critical-transformative ecofeminism, these pitfalls can be avoided by following an alternative strategy that is best described as a *transcendence* of dualism. For Plumwood (1993: 66-68) moving beyond dualism requires a rearticulation and transformation of the relation between self and other through the establishment of some kind of continuity, whilst holding on to differences.<sup>21</sup> This approach towards a movement beyond dualism is more intricate than it seems at first, posing a particular challenge for bringing about change. This challenge is captured in Plumwood's insistence that moving beyond dualism so as to transform relations of domination requires a reconceptualisation of both the other and the self (Plumwood, 1992: 20; 1993: 66-68). For



Plumwood, continuity can not be established on a basis that is identical to characteristics of categories that are dualistically construed. It is this requirement that contrasts critical-transformative ecofeminism with the two strategies noted above.<sup>22</sup> As we have seen, in the case of the strategy of incorporation, transformation occurs on the side of the other; but to the extent that it is incorporated into the sphere of the self, the self remains unchallenged and unchanged.<sup>23</sup> The second strategy that positively affirms the other's difference threatens to intensify the already existing hierarchical relation of radical separation between self and other. Although an affirmation and celebration of difference is important and challenges the self to a certain extent, this strategy lacks the power to effect lasting change.<sup>24</sup> As such everything remains, more or less, the same.<sup>25</sup> Plumwood's course can be said to mark an attempt to carve out an avenue between these two strategies - but with a different twist. For continuity to be established, a transformation of self and other is required which in turn alters the basis of continuity. The success of this strategy depends on the continued flourishing of differences, but these differences are multiple and subject to change, thus signifying also different differences.

In the following sections, I discuss the ecological feminist notion of the self articulated from a critical-transformative ecological feminist perspective. As we have seen, Plumwood places the interconnectedness of the masculine/feminine,

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<sup>21</sup> Plumwood proposes that in principle, this strategy could be followed with regard to all dualisms, but it is clear that some concepts would better lend themselves to such a transformation than others.

<sup>22</sup> This point is argued in a slightly different context by feminists who maintain that, given the asymmetrical power relations between self and other, a relation of continuity cannot be established between the self and other in their present form. As it is precisely incorporation and uncritical affirmation that is aimed at being avoided, a critical affirmation of the other is required so as to effect structural change without obliteration differences. It is only on this basis that existing social and discursive power relations can be challenged and transformed.

<sup>23</sup> Regarding the notion of the self endorsed, a stream of thought in feminist philosophy, referred to as "feminism of equality" has been criticised extensively for succumbing to this strategy (Grosz, 1991; Braidotti, 1991). The notion of the self endorsed by liberal feminism in particular, as instance of "feminism of equality", has come under sharp criticism also in ecofeminist thought (Warren, 1987; King, 1990; Plumwood, 1986, 1992).

<sup>24</sup> Within the context of ecofeminism, this strategy that lacks a constructive moment is of course the one that is followed by the cultural ecofeminists.

<sup>25</sup> The question can of course be raised as to how we can be sure that the self will undergo transformation along with the other. Differently formulated, what guarantee exists that the self will be willing to give up his privileged position, as this is after all what is required. Of course no guarantees can be offered, but that the arguments offered by this strategy places the other in a significantly better position to negotiate, is nonetheless the case.

human/nature, and reason/nature dualisms central in her analysis and critique of the dominant notion of the self that is defined in opposition to women and nature. Articulating her contributions towards conceiving of an ecological feminist notion of the self from a critical-transformative ecofeminist perspective, this endeavour entails amongst others, an engagement with female gender identity. This is followed up by the articulation of a notion of the human that signals a shift away from a female or feminine self as offering an alternative to a male or masculine self. This shift in focus to a human self that is neither masculine nor feminine, has the objective of opening up a space for the articulation of the other dimensions that are to constitute an ecological self.

#### **4. Reconceiving the self**

The following section consists of a discussion of Plumwood's engagement with female gender identity and the notion of the human. In my discussion, female gender identity is treated as informing her notion of a pluralist feminine self. Female gender identity and the human self are engaged with in response to the shortcomings identified in cultural ecofeminism. If we recall, the cultural ecofeminist position endorses a feminine model of the self that, despite its endorsement of a relation with nature marked by connectedness, remains trapped in a dualist framework, and by implication, fails also to overcome essentialism or universalism. The discussion below in the section titled "A critical affirmation of female gender identity" consists of an attempt to untangle a feminine self (as discussed in Chapter 1) from its dualist construal and to liberate it from its universalist character.

In the second part, titled "The degendered human", a notion of the degendered human is offered as a model of the self for both sexes. This concept of the human is articulated as an alternative to both the dominant "masculine" self and its rival "feminine" self. As such, the degendered self is a step in the direction of articulating an ecological self that is not necessarily gender specific. This marks a shift in the debate from whom is closer to nature to how our joint relation to nature can be conceived of differently. However, the degendered self still is not an ecological self, but lays the basis and opens up the way for the articulation of other facets that would together constitute an ecological self. This is embarked

upon in the section titled “The human, intentionality and nature”, which offers a non-anthropocentric account of continuity between humans and nature in terms of the notion of intentionality. The ecological self is however elaborated upon in further detail in the section on critical-transformative ecological feminist ethics.

#### **4.1. A critical affirmation of female gender identity**

In the previous chapter, it was argued that endorsing a feminine self as opposed to a masculine self is problematic for a number of reasons. Affirming what amounts to a traditional feminine model of the self is questionable given its continued entrapment in dualism and universalism. The reason for this is that a notion of the feminine self remains a complementary model constructed to supplement the masculine self (Plumwood: 1986: 20; Mellor, 1992: 246). Even if, as we have seen, female gender identity is acknowledged to be socially grounded, it remains problematic given its universalist character. Plumwood responds to this by pointing out that in its failure to conceive female identity in pluralist terms, major differences between women are obscured (Plumwood, 1993: 62). As we shall see shortly, the notion of the self that Plumwood articulates here, is a pluralist feminine self.

Acknowledging the dangers involved in positing a differentiated female gendered identity, Plumwood argues that an altogether departure from the concept “woman” would be undermining to feminist politics, as taken to its logical conclusion, it would render the claim that women are oppressed meaningless (Alcoff, 1988: 420 in Plumwood, 1993: 62). To follow the route to dissolving female identity in fear of being charged with essentialism is therefore not a viable alternative. With reference to poststructuralist feminists such as Judith Butler (1990), Plumwood asserts that the poststructuralist strategy of subversion by continually destabilising female gender identity is not desirable either. According to Plumwood (1993: 63), “these anti-identities continue to be defined in relation to the objects of parody which originate in the problematic of colonisation”, thus never managing to untie itself from the master identity in opposition to which it is constructed.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> This is of course a very one-sided interpretation of the meaning of the poststructuralist strategy of subversion of identity. As we shall see in the final chapter, Plumwood's own

For Plumwood, such an engagement with female gender identity also undermines the important role that giving positive content to the identities of women “can and must play in the empowerment, connection and liberation of women” (Plumwood, 1993: 62). Moreover, she also argues that simply rejecting female identity would negate the creative ways in which women themselves have engaged with the identities that have been assigned to them, thus reinforcing the perception of women as passive recipients of what has been made of them. Aware of the dangers implied in giving “positive content” to female gender identity, but willing to take up the challenge, Plumwood (1993: 62) qualifies this statement by writing:

They are, to be sure, *never problematic* given the power relations which shape social identities generally and traditional gender identities in particular. But they are capable of liberatory or *subversive reconstruction* without total demolition or abandonment. Despite the difficulties of the type of affirmation involved in reversal, *there is ultimately no viable alternative to a creative and affirmative reconstruction* of post-colonised identity (my emphasis, FM).

According to Plumwood (1993: 63), affirmation is “essential to counter the logic of the master subject” that entails an inferiorisation and devaluation of the feminine. However, recognition and compensation for this devaluation must be conducted in a *critical* mode and thus consist of an affirmation in modified form. These arguments shed light on Plumwood’s endorsement of a pluralist notion of female gender identity that purports to move beyond dualism, essentialism and universalism. Approached from a specifically ecofeminist perspective, it is clear that her strategy is double edged. First, she (1993: 35) addresses the issue of (biological) essentialism by stating that the perception of women as for example closer to nature, is erroneous. For Plumwood, the connection between women and nature is not an essential connectedness, but a result of their different social and historical positioning.<sup>27</sup> This is accompanied by an acknowledgement of the

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proposal regarding the reconstruction of female gender identity, is rather ironically not wholly incompatible with the proposals made by other poststructuralist feminist thinkers with regard to the articulation of a female feminist subjectivity.

<sup>27</sup> Here it is clear that critical-transformative ecofeminism is also a social/ist ecofeminist position. That women are located differently as a result of their social and historical

fact that some activities that have traditionally been performed largely by women can offer useful insights towards creating alternative relations with our natural environment. In this regard, she (1993: 35) writes:

To the extent that [many] women's lives have been lived in ways which are less directly oppositional to nature than those of men, and have involved different and less oppositional practices, qualities of care and kinds of selfhood, an ecological feminist position could and should privilege some of the experiences and practices of women over those of men as a source of change without being committed to any form of naturism (my brackets, FM).<sup>28</sup>

As we have seen, Plumwood stresses that it is crucial that affirmation is accompanied also by critical reconstruction. In a second move then, female gender identity must be reconceptualised in a manner that involves neither an uncritical affirmation, nor complete rejection of what constitutes female gender identity. For Plumwood, female gender identity can be reconceived as both continuous with, but also different from how it has traditionally been conceived. Moreover, to avoid universalisation Plumwood (1993: 62), citing Spelman (1988) and hooks (1984), endorses a plural notion of female gender identity, so as to acknowledge the differences that exist between women.<sup>29</sup>

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positioning, is the point of convergence. Here the reference to women's social and historical position denotes more than the social position of women in terms of the roles they traditionally occupy. Because Plumwood focuses on the conceptual as well as historical and material association between women and nature, a movement is made towards an acknowledgment of the manner in which the symbolic is inscribed in material relations and how female subjectivity is socially and discursively constructed. Of course Plumwood herself does not articulate these views given her stronger leaning towards the materialist as opposed to conceptualist position. At the same time her position does differ significantly from other materialist/socialist (eco)feminists in the contributions she makes towards the reconceptualisation of an ecological notion of a feminist self and a feminist notion of an ecological self, which necessarily locates her in the realm of the conceptualists.

<sup>28</sup> Again Plumwood's convergence with social/ist ecofeminism is evident, however, as I have argued and will show shortly, she moves beyond the acknowledgement of roles and kinds of selfhood that is consistent with the roles that have traditionally been performed by women.

<sup>29</sup> Here it may be asked to what extent Plumwood, by focusing on female gender identity, is not creating the same difficulties for herself as those that have been identified in the cultural ecofeminist position. Not only does it seem reductionist to focus only on gender identity which, as we will see, is engaged with in terms of qualities such as nurturance for instance. This approach also verges dangerously on the assumption that there exists a stable female gender identity that finds its expression in different contexts, such as race, class, generation, sexual orientation and so forth. I will return to this point in the course of this discussion and also in the evaluation conducted in the last section of this chapter.

A good example of how such a critical (re)appropriation can be carried out, is through the notion of nurturance. As nurturance has traditionally denoted powerlessness, Plumwood maintains that in the case of women, this quality should be critically affirmed so as to move beyond its inclusion in powerlessness. This would entail a denouncement of nurturing in contexts where it serves to maintain women's subordination whilst strengthening and sustaining the power of the master. What this amounts to is that the notion of nurturance should be reconceived beyond the active/passive, reason/emotion dualisms. In this way then, the qualities associated with the feminine are transformed in such a manner that it transcends its construction in dualist terms (Plumwood, 1993: 65-66).<sup>30</sup>

The above described strategy to transform female gendered identity marks an attempt to move beyond women's situatedness as radical other whilst resisting her incorporation into the dominant model of self or culture. As we have seen, this critical affirmation of difference signals an acknowledgment of differences not only between men and women but also between women themselves. Whilst such a pluralist feminine self has subversive potential that can be fruitfully applied, this process of transformation must be accompanied by the simultaneous transformation of the dominant self and culture. According to Plumwood (1992: 12) this would have to entail the following changes:

Women must be treated just as fully human and as fully part of culture as men. But both men and women must challenge the dualised conception of *human* identity and develop an alternative

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<sup>30</sup> Here the objection might be made that Plumwood's discussion of female gender identity with reference to nurturance suggests that she does indeed share the assumptions and arguments that inform the description and formation of female gender identity as articulated by Chodorow (1974, 1978). In this regard I would argue that it does not necessarily follow that a discussion of female gender identity with reference to nurturance, is to embrace Chodorow's arguments *wholeheartedly*. Moreover that Plumwood is explicitly critical of a notion of female gender identity as articulated by Chodorow, is evident. Given that nurturing is an activity associated largely with women (at least in the West) and often performed by different women in different contexts, such a discussion is not necessarily redundant, nor does it necessarily imply a simplistic reduction of female gender identities to nurturance and other related qualities. Rather, it signifies an attempt to revalue and transform these qualities that along with women, have historically been marginalised, and which, specifically from an environmental perspective, can contribute to foster alternative relations with the natural environment.

culture which fully recognises human identity as continuous with, not alienated from nature (my emphasis, FM).<sup>31</sup>

But before an understanding of human continuity with nature can be arrived at, we first have to challenge our conception of the human as part of the larger project of articulating an ecological feminist notion of the self. Plumwood's engagement with the human has the objective of conceiving of an alternative understanding of "closeness to nature". What is at stake here is to conceive of an alternative to the masculine ideal of domination and maximal distance from the natural sphere whilst resisting an appeal to a feminine "closeness to nature". For Plumwood, because this feminine alternative involves the denial of capacities for reason, intelligence and control of life conditions, it does not present a desirable alternative. In this regard Plumwood (1988: 23) writes: "... it is precisely such a denial which has formed much of the feminine "closeness to nature" and been part of women's historical experience". At the same time Plumwood (1993: 36) stresses that women should position themselves neither in a relation of identification with nature neither in opposition to nature, but *with* nature. A critical affirmation of female gender identity as performed above, seems to be an attempt at situating women in a relation to nature that is not one of identity, but affinity.

Plumwood's conception of the degendered human takes further her project to conceive of an alternative understanding of closeness to nature. In what follows I discuss the notion of a degendered human, which forms part of her endeavour to rearticulate and therefore transform the human relation of domination and the instrumentalisation of the natural environment.

#### 4.2 The degendered self

A second aspect of the self is illuminated by Plumwood's (1988) reconceptualisation of the traditional model of the human self. As has already been suggested in the section titled "Women, nature and the realm of the other," three different but related critiques converge in an engagement with the

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<sup>31</sup> That Plumwood's arguments also coincide strongly with those of social ecofeminism is made starkly evident here. However, as I have argued above, Plumwood moves on to occupy a much more sophisticated position.

human self. An attempt towards a reconceptualisation of the human self therefore necessarily implies also an attempt to address these points of critique. In brief, they consist of a critique of masculinity and the valuing of traits that are traditionally associated with it; a critique of rationality, “not only regarding its masculine and instrumental character”, but also, writes Plumwood (1988: 18):

... its *overvaluation* and use as a tool for the exclusion and oppression of the contrasting classes of the non-human (since rationality is often taken to be the distinguishing mark of the human) and of women (because of its association with maleness).

Last but not least, it takes into account the critique of anthropocentrism as the human domination and instrumental treatment of nature and the low value placed on nature in relation to human and cultural spheres (Plumwood, 1988: 18).

Plumwood’s articulation of a degendered model of the human is a response to the conception of the human as it is traditionally perceived. Focusing largely, although not exclusively, on the masculine character of the self, it involves a proposal of an alternative notion of the human self that moves beyond the false choice of either endorsing a masculine, or rival a feminine notion of the self. What is significant about Plumwood’s strategy is her rejection of both the masculine and the opposite, feminine model of the self as inadequate for both men and women. From a critical-transformative ecofeminist perspective, a rejection of a masculine model of the human is by now self-evident. Whilst the masculine model is problematical given its definition as in opposition to women, nature and others, the feminine model is also problematic. This is due to an overidentification with nature, which as we have seen, is often formulated in essentialist terms. If we recall, it is not only the female self that is problematic. The feminine self which is held to be relationally inclined and thus conceived of in less oppositional terms with the natural environment, is also unsatisfactory as alternative model of the self, as it remains complementary to the dominant model of the self. Rejecting both masculine and feminine models of the self, Plumwood (1988: 22) writes the following:



... women are in fact not more significantly connected with nature than men (except as all oppressed groups are connected and as an alleged connection has been used to inferiorise both) ... what is needed is an account of both sexes, which accepts the undesirability of the domination of nature associated with masculinity. This would be a strategy that rejected the masculine concept of the human, but because it denied any significant connection between nature and the feminine, was not committed to a rival feminine ideal. The fact that the concept of the human is up for remaking doesn't mean that it has to be *remade in the mold of either the masculine or the feminine* (Plumwood's emphasis).

As I read her, Plumwood's engagement with the human self is consistent with her overall project to make a significant contribution towards the conceptualisation of an alternative ecological feminist notion of the self. This rejection of the masculine, along with an alternative feminine notion of the self is consistent with her articulation of a feminist notion of an ecological self. Apart from the obvious untenability of both the masculine and feminine self as alternative model for an ecological self, this route is followed also with the intention of ultimately articulating an ecological self that is not necessarily gender specific. This is an approach that is supported also by other ecofeminists (Plant, 1989: 3; Eckersley, 1992: 69-71). Such an ecological self can facilitate change across gender boundaries, in a way that does not privilege one gender over and above the other. The transformation of the human self in a manner that diverges from both a masculine and a feminine self, is also consistent with a central undertaking of Plumwood which, in addressing the dualistically structured relation between humans and nature, is to move beyond dualisms:

The rejection of both masculine and feminine character ideals is linked with the traditionally associated dualisms of mind/body, rationality/emotionality, public/private, and so on, which are also rejected as false choices, so that the *transcendence* of the traditional gendered characters become part of, is linked with the systematic transcendence of the wider set of dualisms (Plumwood, 1988: 22-23, emphasis Plumwood's).

As to what the degendered model of the self should look like, Plumwood suggests that a selection of characteristics should be made on the basis of independent criteria of worth. These characteristics could be associated with one gender rather than another, and may turn out to more closely resemble the characteristic feminine rather than the characteristic masculine traits. As we shall shortly see, the selection of such traits will be made not in a straightforward, unproblematic manner. She stresses that “they’re degendered in the sense that they won’t be selected because of their connection with one gender rather than the other, but on the basis of independent considerations” (Plumwood, 1988: 23). These considerations would include the feminist critique of masculinity and would reflect the requirements for conceiving of a notion of the human that would contribute to fostering relations with the natural environment other than domination and instrumentalisation.

To prevent sliding into an oversimplification of what this process is to entail, and in recognition of the images of uniformity that the term “degendered” invokes, Plumwood is quick to qualify her strategy. This she does by drawing a distinction between a degendered and androgynous model of the human, and by articulating the degendered human in terms that allow for the play of differences. Stressing that the degendered model of the human should not be confused with the androgynous model, Plumwood shows how the two are to be distinguished. The androgynous human character denotes a human character ideal that can be achieved through a combination of already existing ingredients, suggesting that the good points of each gender can be selected and put together and the bad ones simply discarded.<sup>32</sup> The weakness of this model lies in its fusion of *already existing* qualities, which Plumwood (1988: 23) disapproves of in no uncertain terms:

... such a model is far too simple and shallow, ignoring relations of exclusion, complementation and so on between traits and suggests that their allocation to respective sex is arbitrary. It treats the problem as if it could be solved by an amalgam of *existing* characteristics thrown together ... (emphasis Plumwood’s).

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<sup>32</sup> If we recall, this is reminiscent of Gray’s proposal to integrate what she views as the masculine and feminine perspective. In this regard, see Chapter 1, section 4, titled *Reconceiving the self*.

Plumwood proceeds and asserts that the “androgynous strain” should be distinguished from the “transcendence strain”, the latter of which would produce a third set of characteristics that overcomes its interpretation as either masculine or feminine. Continuity between men and women will thus be accomplished by a display of qualities that are transformed beyond their dualist construal. Counteracting the neutralisation such a proposal could enact, Plumwood maintains that this is not to imply that all differences are to be erased. In a concerted attempt not to do away with all differences, she (1998: 23) writes:

The adoption of a degendered model does not imply either that a uniform character ideal must be adopted for both sexes, or that there will be no differences between the sexes in terms of character. Transcending the gender categories and the systematic network of false choices does not imply the dissolution of all differences ...

Plumwood thus offers quite clear indications as to how continuity between men and women is to be established, but remains vague with regard to the content of differences.

The implications that a degendered model of the human has from an ecological feminist position are, as suggested above, significant. The notion of a degendered human conceived above, opens up the possibility of articulating a different concept of “closeness to nature” than the one that has been the result of an exclusion from valued features of human culture. The question that we are confronted with then, is *how* we can reconceive of the relation between self and nature as one of significant connection. Conceiving of a notion of the self as continuous with nature is an important part of the process of articulating an ecological feminist notion of the self. This explains perhaps the ecofeminist reluctance to give up women’s privileged relation with nature, which is expressed in an endorsement of a female or feminine self. Reconceptualising the human self in less oppositional terms however, creates the potential for establishing human continuity with nature that moves beyond a restriction to and fixation on gender. Moreover such a notion of a degendered human self facilitates an engagement with nature beyond its mechanistic definition. From a critical-transformative ecofeminist perspective, a notion of the self’s continuity

with nature that resists both incorporation and identification, is regarded as vital to establishing ethical relations with nature. In the following section, I discuss the critical-transformative ecofeminist reconceptualisation of the dualistically conceived relation between humans and nature that has sanctioned the domination and instrumentalisation of nature.

### **4.3 The human, intentionality and nature**

In her endeavour to address the three points of critique that she has identified as converging in the human Plumwood shifts the focus to engage with the human/nature dualism. As we have seen these three points of critique pertain to the masculinist nature of the dominant self, rationalism and its instrumental application and anthropocentrism. In the section above I have shown how Plumwood addressed the masculine/feminine dualism by an endorsement of a degendered human. In this section the human/nature dualism that captures the problem of anthropocentrism is focused upon.

Before proceeding with this exposition, I would like to make a remark concerning Plumwood's diversion of her attention away from women to the human. In the light of this diversion, it is perhaps necessary to remind ourselves that Plumwood's shift in focus is not to negate differences between humans. As we have seen in her discussion of the degendered human, Plumwood continually emphasises that differences should not be negated. This sensitivity to differences is also reflected by her endorsement of a pluralist feminine self. In keeping with her particular analysis of dualism and her strategy to overcome dualism then, those differences that abound between humans (in terms of relations of power and identity) is therefore not lost out of sight. Such an acknowledgement of differences also serves as reminder that the weight of responsibility of some as opposed to others with regard to the destruction and degradation of the natural environment, varies significantly. That this is a fact that needs to be reckoned with is also suggested. Having proposed how other related dualisms can be overcome without the negating differences, she undertakes to rethink the human/nature dualism so as to offer a basis for the ethical treatment of nature. As such, we are already moving into the domain of ethics.

Plumwood's reconceptualisation of the human-nature relation is first and foremost an attempt to address anthropocentrism. As I have indicated, anthropocentrism finds its expression in instrumentalism: the view of nature as valuable only insofar as it serves human ends, thus sanctioning an unrestrained utilisation of nature as resource. As such, the human acts as norm and reference point in relation to which nature is oppositionally conceived. Special caution must therefore be taken to resist the strategy of incorporation where the other is assimilated into the realm of the self.<sup>33</sup> Examples of incorporation are moral extensionism<sup>34</sup> and a mystification of nature as imbued with spirit. Another strategy that must be resisted, is the strategy of valorising nature for its "regenerative" qualities. As argued in Chapter 1, in the section titled "An evaluation of cultural ecofeminism", these strategies of valorisation and mystification remain trapped in dualism, and thus fails to open up a non-anthropocentric engagement with the natural environment.

Consistent with her suggestions to transcend dualistically construed categories, Plumwood argues that to overcome the harsh separation between humans and nature, some notion of continuity has to be conceived to remedy this relation that grounds the instrumental treatment of nature. Appealing to the notion of intentionality, Plumwood offers an alternative to moral extensionism (one version of incorporation), in terms of which nature, by virtue of displaying mindlike qualities that resemble consciousness, is incorporated into the realm of the human. Departing from this narrow definition of the mental, Plumwood shows that there is not only one criterion of mind, but rather a whole cluster which includes consciousness, intentionality, experience, sentience, imagination, reason, goal-directedness etc. From an ecological perspective, the mental thus conceived presents us with a fruitful strategy to transform the mind/nature and related human/nature and reason-nature dualisms.

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<sup>33</sup> One strategy of incorporation that is criticised extensively by Plumwood (1993: 124-126; 165-189) is holism, proponents of which are Matthews (1990), Capra (1977) and Fox (1990). According to Plumwood holism addresses hyperseparation by stressing continuity to the extent that the other is assimilated into the realm of the self, thus denying difference. A spiritualist stream within ecological thinking that perceives nature as imbued with spirit endorses the opposite strategy. This often finds its expression in goddess pantheism, a proponent of which is Starhawk (1989). Honouring nature as mystical other, it fails to conceive of nature in a nonhuman-centered and non-dualist terms.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 1, section 5, titled *An ethic of care*.

By focusing on intentionality an avenue is opened up in terms of which continuity between humans and nature can be established. Conceiving of continuity in these terms overcomes the problems that a limiting association of the mental with consciousness imparts (Plumwood, 1993: 131). Intentionality is a category that denotes *going beyond what is given*, and is not confined to the mental, nor to human activity only. On the criterion of intentionality, it is found that mindlike qualities spill over beyond the boundaries of the human and “into the vast reaches of nature itself” undermining human discontinuity from nature (Plumwood, 1993: 132). In this way, the criterion of intentionality provides a basis of continuity between mind and nature, and therefore also humans and nature. Since on the criterion of intentionality a rich set of distinctions between the mindlike is made possible, and a basis for recognising continuity along with the heterogeneity of nature is created. Plumwood (1993: 134) writes:

Intentionality provides a way to realise continuity without assimilation, to represent the staggering and exuberant complexity of nature. It provides a complex of distinctions, a web of difference against an overall ground of continuity and a way to reject any absolute cosmic division between the human and natural spheres based on the possession of mind.

Intentionality is therefore an umbrella that can accommodate more specific criteria of mind, such as choice, sentience, consciousness, goal-directedness (teleology), but resists locating some break elsewhere in nature such as the absolute divorce between animate and inanimate nature, or sentience and the absence thereof.<sup>35</sup> In this regard, Plumwood (1993: 134) writes:

Because intentional systems are differentiated in terms of kind rather than degree of variation along the same axis, it is possible to conceive much of the field in terms of a non-hierarchical concept of

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<sup>35</sup> Plumwood is not clear on exactly how intentionality as one criterion of mind amongst many, can be singled out to accommodate also all the other criteria. I assume however that because all the other properties display some kind of intentionality, they can quite unproblematically be accommodated as instances of the criterion of intentionality. Intentionality, because it does not presuppose consciousness accommodates those properties that are related to consciousness, but makes possible a recognition of other entities as mindlike which previously would not have been regarded as such.

difference, rather than of an experiential meritocracy with humans at the top.

In the light of the above, Plumwood maintains that part of creating alternatives to mechanism (as discussed in the section titled "A critique of rationalism"), and part of moving beyond the human/nature dualism is the reinstatement of teleology. This notion of teleology need not follow Aristotle's anthropocentric version, or an anthropomorphic animistic one. The notion of intentionality as denoting some kind of teleology, makes possible the articulation of continuity between humans and nature that does not require consciousness. Given the diverse variety of teleological concepts the consciousness-non-conscious break is destabilised and subverted. In this regard, Plumwood remarks that whilst "... some require meta-levels of consciousness and may apply only to so-called higher animals, others can be applied without any anthropomorphism to non-conscious beings" (Plumwood, 1993: 135). According to Plumwood then, all creatures display a teleology or all-over life goal according to which its parts are organised, along with exhibiting a variety of other teleological concepts. The unfolding, development and directedness of natural processes also involve a kind of teleology and intentionality.<sup>36</sup> For Plumwood, then, notions of *growth* and *flourishing* are also teleological concepts that do not presuppose consciousness, along with concepts such as function, directionality and goal-directedness of a self-maintaining kind that apply to natural processes and systems in general (Plumwood, 1993: 135).<sup>37</sup>

By establishing continuity between humans and nature through this broadened notion of intentionality and expanding a concept of teleology to include flourishing and growth, Plumwood claims to have overcome both human-centeredness and the problem of providing a basis in terms of which complex natural phenomena such as mountains and waterfalls can be regarded as

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<sup>36</sup> Despite referring to "natural processes" Plumwood is explicit in distinguishing her position from an inherent value theory that is referred to as process theory. This position that is associated with Alfred North Whitehead and others who argue that "the ultimate constituents of the universe and everything in it are events or processes which are continually unfolding or perishing [therefore] there is no great gulf between the human mind and nature" (Plumwood, 1993: 129). Without wanting to digress any further, suffice it to say that Plumwood rejects this position for its erasure of differences (Plumwood, 1993: 128-130).

<sup>37</sup> See Cuomo (1998) who strongly echoes Plumwood in her articulation of *an ethic of flourishing* that draws on a non-anthropocentric Aristotelian account of the inherent value of nature.

valuable in themselves (Plumwood, 1993: 135-136).<sup>38</sup> It is also significant that the process of reconnecting humans and nature takes place in such a manner that not only nature is transformed from its status of lifeless matter, but also the human is conceived of in broader terms, that is, not in reductive terms of mind and its associated capacities of, for instance consciousness, but as sharing capacities with the natural environment. Moreover, by showing how humans are continuous with nature in terms of intentionality, we are made aware of the impressive diversity of nature, and consequently those qualities that are held to be distinctly human, are also relativised somewhat.

In the next section, titled “Critical-transformative ecofeminist ethics”, I will show how this notion of continuity between humans and nature occupies a central place in Plumwood’s articulation of a feminist notion of an ecological self.<sup>39</sup> What receives emphasis here, is Plumwood’s submission that for the engagement between humans and nature to be ethical, a double movement is required: the acknowledgement of difference along with continuity.

## 5. Critical-transformative ecofeminist ethics

In the section that follows, I give an explication of a critical-transformative ecological feminist ethics. In the first part of this exposition I discuss the critical-transformative critique leveled at the rationalist philosophical tradition within the context of environmental ethics. In response to the deficiencies identified in ethics conceived in rationalist terms, Plumwood introduces a conception of the

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<sup>38</sup> Plumwood’s inherent value theory can be distinguished from other ecocentric thinkers such as Matthews (1991) for whom ecological selfhood is articulated within the boundaries of autopoietic intrinsic value theory as articulated by Fox (1990: 165-175). As such, Matthews does not regard mountains and waterfalls as possessing inherent value other than as being part of an ecosystem that is self-renewing. A possible shortcoming of Plumwood’s focus on a reinstatement of teleology is that it requires that special measures be taken with regard to the self-organising characteristics (teleology) of machines. This is avoided in the autopoietic theory where *self-renewal* as opposed to *self-organisation* is the distinguishing characteristic for moral considerability. In the light of Plumwood’s inclusion of growth and flourishing as teleological concepts it can be argued that this point of critique is excessive. Flourishing and growth denotes self-renewal and whilst it can be applied to almost all natural phenomena, machines tend to fall beyond this classification.

<sup>39</sup> The observation may be made that Plumwood’s conception of human continuity with nature in terms of intentionality already implies a notion of the relational self. This is indeed so. However, but as I hope to illustrate, Plumwood, by drawing on her conception of continuity in terms of intentionality, argues for a refinement of the relational self (specifically as employed by other ecological thinkers, such as Matthews (1990) and Naess (1985b)), to a notion of the mutual self, that implies a notion of relationality, but in a modified form.



relational self as mutual self, and revalues and reconceives previously marginalised moral concepts.

It should be made clear from the outset that the engagement with ethics in critical-transformative ecofeminism is framed not so much in terms of giving a substantive account of an ecological ethic, but rather to articulate the requirements that a satisfactory ecological ethic must meet. As such, what is focused on in particular in this section, is the notion of the self and its relation to nature that is to inform such an ethic. Touching upon this in the first part of this section titled "Beyond environmental ethics", the second part, titled "Ethics and the mutual self", consists of an elaboration upon a feminist notion of an ecological self that is endorsed in critical-transformative ecofeminist thinking. Plumwood's notion of the mutual self as an ecological self, is articulated in response to the shortcomings identified in the notion of a relational self that is endorsed not only by cultural ecofeminists, but also other ecological positions, in particular deep ecology. As such, an ethic based on mutuality marks a movement beyond relationality and shows how continuity conceived in terms of the notion of intentionality promotes an encounter with nature as other, significant in itself.

### 5.1 Beyond environmental ethics

In a critique of contemporary environmental ethics, Plumwood (1991, 1993) exposes a continued adherence to the rationalist philosophical tradition that, given its dualist structure, is inimical not only to women but also to nature.<sup>40</sup> Plumwood singles out deep ecology in particular; the shortcomings of which are discussed below. Her critique is however also aimed at Taylor (1986) and Regan (1986), who respectively argue for moral considerability of nature and animals through cultivating respect for nature as teleological centers of life in the case of the former, and acknowledging the intentionality of animals in the case of the latter. She illuminates how both authors, despite diverting from traditionalist ethics, remain firmly situated in a rationalist framework.

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<sup>40</sup> This point of critique of course links up with the discussion conducted in this chapter in the section titled *A critique of rationalism*.

Taylor's distrust of emotions and the significant role that relationships can play in establishing ethical relations reflects an implicit endorsement of the reason/emotion, universal/specific, masculine/feminine dualisms. In Taylor's account, showing respect for nature is a "cognitive matter", which is consistent with the understanding of ethics in abstract universalist terms (Plumwood, 1991: 4-5). According to Plumwood (1991: 5), the problem here is "the inconsistency of employing, in the service of formulating an allegedly biocentric ethical theory, a framework" whose very structure operates to the detriment of nature. On similar grounds, she criticises Regan's account of moral concern based on rights "which requires strong individual separation and is set in a framework of human community and legality" (Plumwood, 1991: 8). The difficulties that Regan's position generate, is consistent with the problem of moral extensionism. Both authors implicitly rely on a rationalist-inspired account of the self that is dualistically conceived as atomistic, independent and rationalist entities. What Plumwood points out is that this conception of the self forms a large part of the very problem these authors are seeking to address. As we shall see, both Plumwood and Warren propose a movement away from a rationalist notion of the self, along with a consideration of moral concepts that have been marginalised by a preoccupation with rights and ethics formulated in abstract universalist terms.

In a different but related critique, Plumwood further exposes the expediency of endorsing a notion of the self conceived of in rationalist terms. She (1993:141) points out how, with the rise of capitalism, a definition of rationality as egoism was introduced. Whereas in science the human/nature, reason/nature dualisms paved the way for the Cartesian sense of objectivity that denounces the natural world to mere matter, the social and economic spheres are ordered accordingly. Built upon the perception of the human as hyperseparated from the other and acting primarily out of self-interest, egoism serves as further justification for the instrumental treatment of nature and others. In this framework, the opposite of egoism, namely altruism, is viewed as the *sacrifice* of the interests of the self, abandoning one's own interests and acting on behalf of the interests of the other. In reaction to attempts to overcome egoism, which have verged on endorsing altruism instead, Plumwood argues that this either-or choice relies on a perception of the self as hyperseparated. Thus to overcome egoism, a

reconceptualisation of the self is required that would reveal the choice between either egoism or altruism as a false one (Plumwood, 1993: 141-145).

In contrast to the hyperseparated self underlying egoism and altruism, Plumwood shows how a notion of the *relational self* provides us with a strategy to move beyond the egoism/altruism dichotomy (Plumwood, 1993: 150). According to Plumwood, if the self is perceived in a manner that recognises relationality and thus interdependence between self and other, it becomes possible to see that “interests” in the weaker sense, are relational in that there are interests of the self that overlap with those of the other. The point Plumwood thus makes is that when we reconceive the self as in relationship with the other, selfishness is countered: to care for the self is to non-coincidentally also to care for the other.<sup>41</sup> Self-sacrifice is also eliminated as caring for the other is at the same time to care for the self (Plumwood, 1993: 150-154). To overcome the false choice between either egoism or altruism, however, relationality has to be worked out more thoroughly. This will receive more attention shortly.

For the moment, suffice it to say that part of the critical-transformative redefinition of ethics consists of an introduction of a relational self.<sup>42</sup> For Warren (1994: 132), this signals a shift from a conception of ethics as primarily “a matter of rights, rules, or principles predetermined” to a conception of ethics as growing out of the relationships that define the self. It must however be stressed that this is not to imply that rights, rules or principles are not important and relevant, but that “that those to whom they apply are entities *in relationship with others*” which renders a critical-transformative ecofeminist ethic a contextualist ethic (Warren, 1994: 132). Along with Warren (1994: 132), Plumwood (1991: 8) maintains that a rights based ethics should move from the center of the stage to open up a space for previously marginalised moral concepts, such as respect, care, sympathy, gratitude, friendship, concern, compassion, and responsibility. This is further extended by Warren (1994: 133),

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<sup>41</sup> Here it is necessary to bear in mind that Plumwood's use of the notion of relationality is multiple. That is, although relationships are taken into account here, Plumwood deals with relationality also on another level. This becomes pertinent in her discussion of the mutual self where relationality is reconceptualised and where the basis that is articulated for relationality, gives a deeper meaning to the concept.

to include appropriate reciprocity, love and trust. Moreover, in reaction to the construal of some of these values as feminine, Plumwood asserts that at closer inspection these moral concepts are resistant to an analysis in terms of the reason/emotion dualism. That is, whilst being moral feelings, “they involve reason and behaviour and emotion in a way that seems inseparable” (Plumwood, 1991: 9). In this way then, an understanding of care in dualistic terms is also departed from.<sup>43</sup>

In the section above, it was illustrated how critical-transformative ecofeminism addresses the manifestations of dualism of the rationalist philosophical tradition in an ethical context. Along with endorsing a notion of a relational self as an aspect of an ecological self, a set of previously marginalised moral concepts is endorsed. These values resist a conflation with the feminine and therefore discourages a lapse into altruism. According to Plumwood, however, the relational self needs to be worked out in fuller detail so as to avoid overstressing continuity at the expense of differences. It is the notion of the *mutual self* as embodiment of a relation of continuity and difference that is the subject of the coming discussion

## 5.2 Ethics and the mutual self

In the preceding discussion, it is argued that to reconceive of the self in *relational* terms as *continuous* with the other can assist in addressing the instrumental treatment of the other. Accordingly, a relational self is invoked by a number of ecological thinkers, such as Naess (1985a, 1985b, 1989) and Matthews (1991), as providing a foundation for an ecological self. For

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<sup>42</sup> To a certain extent, Plumwood and Warren’s endorsement of the relational self coincides with the cultural ecofeminist endorsement of a relational self, although in Plumwood’s case, it also differs markedly. This will become clear in the section titled *Ethics and the mutual self*.

<sup>43</sup> This valuation of previously marginalised moral concepts of course coincides with the vocabulary of care employed by cultural ecofeminists. As illustrated above, however, these values are transformed in a manner that detaches them from their dualist construal, which signals a shift away from the cultural ecofeminist valuation of feminine values. If we recall, Card (1994) characterises feminist ethics as comprising a female ethic on the one hand, and on the other, an approach that consists of a critique and rewriting of ethics from a feminist perspective. It may be argued that the latter is a reformist approach (as opposed to a radical difference approach). Here, I would like to argue that Plumwood’s position can not be located in either of these camps. This is because whilst she articulates a radical critique of mainstream ethics, she does not discard it wholly. She also includes previously marginalised moral concepts, but in a modified form.

Plumwood however, relationality between self and other is a significant aspect of ecological selfhood, but not sufficient, as relationality constitutes only part of the ecological self. This is ascribed to the fact that although perception of the self as relational, embedded and continuous (read: significantly connected) with the other overcomes the problem of exclusion and hyperseparation, it still does not adequately or explicitly counter its opposite - incorporation, according to which the other is assimilated into the realm of the self. As Plumwood emphasises repeatedly, resolving or transcending dualism requires that two interlinked features which function to the detriment of the other, radical exclusion and incorporation, are addressed simultaneously:

The difference between radical exclusion and incorporation corresponds to two distinct elements in denying the other: radical exclusion corresponds to the conception of the other as alien, which denies kinship and continuity, while incorporation corresponds to the totalising denial of the other by denying difference, treating the other as form of the same or self (Plumwood, 1993: 155).

The concern Plumwood expresses with regard to the danger of incorporation, is captured in her critique of deep ecology, specifically concerning the notion of the Self proposed by deep ecology (Plumwood, 1991: 12-20; 1993: 154-155; 165-189). Plumwood (1991: 13; 1993: 125) takes on deep ecology for endorsing a holistic strategy that confuses dualism for atomism and subsequently for failing to unambiguously acknowledge the difference and distinctness of the other (Plumwood, 1991: 13; 15).<sup>44</sup> According to Plumwood (1991: 12-15), the deep ecological emphasis on the Self's "identification" with nature, threatens to blur the boundaries between self and nature to the extent that there is nothing to guarantee that the needs of the self will not be taken as those of the other. For Plumwood, this is in a certain sense not surprising, as the disregard with which

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<sup>44</sup> Making a similar point to that of Plumwood, Kheel (1985: 139-141) points out that an ecological ethic based on holism is problematic, given that the holistic overemphasis on continuity threatens to sacrifice the parts in favour of the whole. The individual entities that the whole consists of do not receive adequate consideration in an ecological ethic based on holism. It is perhaps in the light of this that we should view Plumwood's diversion from Matthews who focuses on natural *systems* in her autopoietic account of the inherent value of nature. Introducing concepts such as flourishing and growth, which recognises not only natural systems, but also individual natural phenomena as morally considerable, is part of Plumwood's project to address holism's overemphasis on continuity. As mentioned above,

deep ecology has treated the (eco)feminist critique of dualism and androcentrism, signals an unwillingness to sufficiently acknowledge and engage with differences (Plumwood, 1991: 11-17).<sup>45</sup> Emphasising the danger of incorporation Plumwood argues that to avoid subsuming the other in the realm of the self, recognition of kinship as well as difference is required. This view is shared by Warren (1993: 334), who states that “[e]cofeminism’s attention to relationships and community is not an erasure of difference, but a respectful acknowledgement thereof”. Emphasising this “second movement”, Plumwood (1993: 155) writes:

The second movement is essential to capture the mutual features of the social, the interaction between individuals who are recognised as distinct centers of striving and resistance, and as others who can transform and be mutually transformed by the other.

To illustrate this point Plumwood (1993: 156-158) draws on Jessica Benjamin’s (1988) development of a *mutual self* through intersubjective interaction. Benjamin describes the self-other relation as one which consists of an interactive process where each transforms and limits the other. For Benjamin, the process of mutual transformation forms the basis of the self, a process in which the external other sets a boundary or limit to the self and its desires. Central to this process of formation is the recognition of the other both as different so as to effect the transformation of the self, and alike, so as to evoke a response of the self to the other. At the same time, the self, being the other’s other too, is different in that it is not fully determined by the other, thus also like the other,

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Matthews is a prominent proponent of deep ecology and in Plumwood’s view, like deep ecology, she confuses the problem of dualism with holism.

<sup>45</sup> The deep ecology-ecofeminism debate is well documented in Salleh (1984, 1992, 1993), Zimmerman (1987, 1990, 1994), Sessions (1991), Kheel (1990), Plumwood (1991, 1993), Mellor (1997) and Slicer (1995). The extent of the incongeniality between these two streams of thought in radical ecology, is suggested by the title of a paper “Is there a Deep-ecology-ecofeminism debate?” (Slicer, 1995). The superficial engagement of deep ecology with ecofeminism is starkly visible in Fox’s (1993) rejection of ecofeminism which is based on an understanding of ecofeminism as seeing the root cause of the domination of nature as androcentrism instead of anthropocentrism. As Plumwood (1991: 21-22) and Slicer (1995: 157-159) point out, Fox conveniently overlooks the more subtle nuances of ecofeminist thought in favour of belittling ecofeminism as a whole. For Fox’s benefit, Plumwood points out that “anthropocentrism and androcentrism in particular are linked by the rationalist conception of the human self”. Ecofeminism’s engagement with andro-anthropocentrism “provides a different and richer account of the notion of anthropocentrism” thus deepening the analysis of human domination of nature (Plumwood, 1991: 22). As we have seen above,

sets boundaries to limit the other in turn. The individual conceived in terms of mutuality is, like the relational self, "bound to and in interaction with others through a rich set of relationships which are essential to and not incidental to his or her projects" (Plumwood, 1993: 156). Stressing separation, but distinguishing it from hyperseparation, Plumwood (1993: 156) writes the following:

Nevertheless, he or she can and must remain a distinct individual, separated but not hyperseparated. He or she is not simply at the mercy of these relationships, dissolved, passive and defined by others (as some holistic accounts about relational accounts suggest), but is an active participant in them and determinant of them.

Thus the mutual self is not only compatible with, but actually requires the existence of others that are distinct and not merged, to allow the flourishing of a "combination of resonance and difference" (Benjamin, 1988: 26). A meaningful interaction between self and other can therefore only occur when self and other remain distinguishable. Benjamin (1988: 47) expresses this succinctly:

Experiences of "being with" are predicated on a continually evolving awareness of difference, on a sense of intimacy that is felt as occurring between "the *two* of us". The fact that self and other are not merged is precisely what makes experiences of merging have such a high emotional impact.

Plumwood proceeds to show how Benjamin's account of the mutual self that expresses a specifically feminist emphasis on the acknowledgement of differences is not limited to interhuman relations. As a post-rationalist notion of the self, the mutual self offers a promising framework for the articulation of an ecological self. For Plumwood, the mutual self as an embodiment of continuity and differences meets the requirements that are necessary for the transformation of the dualistically construed relation between humans and nature. Although the notion of the mutual self expresses the relation between humans, Plumwood adapts it by replacing *subjectivity* as basis for mutuality with a broadened notion of *intentionality*. This makes possible the acknowledgement

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the failure to do so manifests itself in the endorsement of the notion of the self that verges dangerously on fulfilling exactly the opposite of what it claims to realise.

of nature as *an other* entity that strives and resists.<sup>46</sup> Grounding mutuality in this way, is of course perfectly consistent with Plumwood's conceptualisation of the human-nature relation on the basis of intentionality discussed earlier in the section titled "The human, intentionality and nature". The mutual self conceived in terms of continuity and difference then, meets the requirements of an ecological self beyond dualism that can foster an ethical relation of respect for nature. By recognising the other as a center of striving and resistance that puts limits on the self, the needs of the self do not disappear in the process. Responding to the needs of the other does not imply dissolution of the needs of the self. At the same time, being a separate center of striving and resistance, the other is not at the mercy of the relationship in which it stands to the self, but an active agent whose needs cannot be reduced to those it stands in relationship with. By retaining some sense of separation between humans and nature, the inadequacies of the deep-ecological "merger" self, which provides no guarantee that the needs of the other will not be confused with those of the self, is thus avoided.

The description of this relation, applicable to intra-human and human relations with nature, significantly captures ecological and feminist concerns. It is ecological in the sense that nature is recognised as a distinct center of striving and resistance, thus having ends of its own which sets limits on humans, but not to the extent that human needs become thoroughly subordinate to those of the natural environment.<sup>47</sup> That is, in this framework, the human need for sustenance for example, is accommodated which must however be adequately

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<sup>46</sup> What is somewhat troubling in Plumwood's articulation of the mutual self, is that mutuality is established on the basis of *recognising* the other as a center of striving and resistance. This leads to the question whether a range of natural systems or phenomena, despite being centers of striving and resistance, are not in effect excluded from a relationship of mutuality. A mountain for instance, cannot fully meet the requirement of mutuality. In this regard Plumwood asserts that "full subjectivity" (that makes recognising the other possible) is not necessary for the recognition of "earth others". Here the emphasis is rather on the need for human recognition of kinship with nature along with recognising nature as *different* center of striving and resistance (Plumwood: 1993: 157). That earth others respond to the presence of others is however the case. She writes: "[o]ther kinds of intentional interaction occur without subjectivity in ecosystems; for example the growth of plants that responds to the presence of other plants" (Plumwood: 1993: 213). Thus it seems that the emphasis is first and foremost on humans and their recognition of the intentionality of earth others which impose limits on humans, but that natural systems also respond to other centers of striving and resistance, which renders the manifestation of this aspect of mutuality, in the case of some natural systems, directed elsewhere.

<sup>47</sup> This addresses the misunderstanding that the ecocentric critique of anthropocentrism expresses anti-human sentiments (Eckersley, 1992: 55-60).



distinguished from human greed, which is a perversion of human needs.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, situated in a post-rationalist framework, nature's autonomy is acknowledged which in turn functions as the basis for continuity between humans and nature and the ethical treatment of nature. Articulated within the context of a post-rationalist subjectivity, here teleology, autonomy and agency acquire different meanings. From a feminist perspective, provision is also made for the concern that is expressed by critics with regard to the altruistic undertones of an ethic of care. The emphasis that is placed on continuity and *distinctness* is enabling to those women that are expected to give up their interests to tend to the needs of others.

In the preceding section, I offered an exposition of the ethic that is endorsed by critical-transformative ecofeminism. What is articulated here, is not a detailed account of an ethic of care and respect, but rather a conceptualisation of the relation between self and nature that is to inform such an ethic. In the process, the ecological self as mutual self, in terms of which nature is perceived as independent center of striving and resistance, is articulated. This feminist notion of the ecological self is offered as providing a basis for an ecofeminist ethic of care and respect towards nature. In the section that follows, I will give an evaluation of the critical-transformative ecological feminist contributions towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of self beyond dualism and essentialism.

## **6. An evaluation of critical-transformative ecofeminism**

Keeping in mind the problems of dualism and essentialism, the aim of this evaluation is to assess the contributions that critical transformative ecofeminism makes towards the articulation of a feminist notion of an ecological self and an ecological notion of a feminist self. Where relevant I will point out whether and to what extent this position succeeds in correcting the shortcomings identified in the cultural ecofeminist analysis of the domination of women and nature, and

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<sup>48</sup> How "human greed" can be regulated without resorting to oppressive measures is a central concern in contemporary environmental thinking. Modern economies thrive on consumerism which in turn perpetuates itself by continually creating new materialist desires (as opposed to addressing needs) for humans to strive towards. As we all know, escalating consumerism is

the notions of the self that are endorsed. This is dealt with in particular in the first section titled "Complexifying the self". Broadly in keeping with the structure of this chapter, a critical appraisal of the notions of a pluralist feminine self and degendered self is conducted in the sections titled "A critical affirmation of female gender identity", and "Erasing differences". In the section that follows, titled "Moving beyond dualism: ethics, continuity and difference", the ecological self that Plumwood articulates with reference to her theory of the inherent value of nature, is assessed. This is followed by a section titled "The false choice between moral hierarchy and moral equality" in which the critique that is advanced against critical-transformative ecofeminism concerning its focus on dualism and rejection of moral extensionism is discussed. In the final part of this evaluation titled "Anthropocentrism and inherent value", I discuss and evaluate Plumwood's account of the inherent value of nature within the context of environmental ethics. Before proceeding with an evaluation of the contributions that are made by critical-transformative ecofeminism towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self, I would like to pause at a point of critique leveled at ecofeminism in general. This point of critique threatens to render it fundamentally flawed on a theoretical level, is discussed in the section titled "Universalising the woman-nature connection?"

### **6.1 Universalising the women-nature connection?**

A basic point of departure of ecofeminism is that, because of the connection between women and nature, the domination of the one is inextricably tied up with that of the other. As such, to adequately address the domination and subjugation of nature and to conceive of an alternative ecological feminist notion of the self, this link has to be reckoned with. Doubt has, however, been cast on the validity of the argument that the domination of women and nature is interconnected. This argument has been criticised for being erroneous and universalising, since, as Segal (1994: 7) points out, women are not consistently, that is cross-culturally, associated with nature. This objection to the argument that the oppression of women can be explained in terms of her association with nature threatens to undermine the foundations of ecofeminism. According to

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also one of the main causes of environmental destruction and degradation. Addressing this very pressing issue is however the topic of a separate study.

Plumwood (1993: 11) however, although “we cannot see the alignment of women and nature as the entire basis and source of women’s oppression” this connection continues to serve as an illuminating analytical tool in specific contexts. She (Plumwood, 1993: 11) acknowledges that the oppression or “relative powerlessness” of women occurs also in cultures where women are not associated with nature, or in cultures that are “organised in terms of different genderised dichotomies”. This does not mean that the association of women with nature, and men with reason or culture, cannot yield significant insights regarding the domination of women and nature within the context of Western culture. In this regard, Plumwood (1993: 11) writes:

Nevertheless, the association of women with nature and men with culture and reason can still be seen as providing much of the basis of the cultural elaboration of women’s oppression in the west, of the particular form it takes in the western context and that is still of considerable explanatory value. Once cultural universalism is rejected, we can draw on these features to explain much that is especially western in our ways of relating to each other and nature.

In the light of the above the argument that the twin dominations of nature and women can be traced to classical Greek philosophy, the charge of universalism can be avoided by asserting that this connection is particular to Western culture. I agree with Plumwood that to give up the woman-nature connection because it is not universally true, would obscure the ways in which this association has contributed to the domination and subordination of women and nature in Western culture. Moreover, it would also prevent us from showing how the association of women (among others) with nature has had an impact that reaches far beyond the confines of Western culture.

## **6.2 Complexifying the self**

I have already quite elaborately illustrated and in the process evaluated the significance of locating the domination and subordination of women and nature in dualism, and how it distinguishes critical-transformative ecofeminism from

cultural ecofeminism.<sup>49</sup> For the sake of avoiding repetition, I will keep this aspect of my evaluation brief. By focusing on dualism, critical-transformative ecofeminism avoids the reductionism cultural ecofeminism has been criticised for. Taking into account the wide range of different dualist pairs the manner in which different relations of domination overlap and reinforce one another, is illuminated. Such an analysis makes visible the inadequacy of reducing all forms of domination to one, as women's domination is viewed as one amongst many (that are no doubt interlinked), and the untenability of a simple distinction between oppressor and oppressed is made visible. As such, approaching the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self in terms of the problem of dualism, critical-transformative ecofeminism emphasises that a number of dualisms that have contributed to the domination and subjugation of a range of others, have to be considered and taken into account. This is therefore not to deny that the feminisation of nature and the naturalisation of women have significantly contributed to the suppression and subjugation of both. In the light of the different sets of dualist pairs that overlap and function in a mutually reinforcing manner, the focus is somewhat enlarged here and the complexities involved in articulating an ecological feminist notion of the self are laid bare. Taking into account other dualist pairs such as the human/nature and reason/nature, a way out of the shortcomings displayed by the cultural ecofeminist perspective, is suggested. Moreover as the analysis of dualism makes visible a network of different dualist pairs, we are made aware of an abundance of differences. If we recall, an affirmation of the female self is problematic given its essentialist character,<sup>50</sup> whilst the feminine self too remains trapped in dualism rendering both notions inadequate from an ecological and feminist perspective. In her analysis of dualism and the strategy she proposes to move beyond dualism, Plumwood, however, emphasises not only continuity, but also differences. Plumwood's sensitivity to differences between women is expressed in her engagement with female gender identity, but whether she succeeds in adequately engaging with differences between women, remains to be seen.

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<sup>49</sup> See in this chapter the section titled *Situating the woman-nature connection*.

<sup>50</sup> With regards to the cultural ecofeminist affirmation of a female self, see Chapter 1, section 4, titled *Reconceiving the self*.

### 6.3 A critical affirmation of female gender identity

In the light of woman's traditionally essentialist identification with nature, an integral part of articulating an ecological feminist notion of the self is to conceive of a notion of a (female) feminist self. Both Plumwood and Warren's thinking has been received positively as succeeding in avoiding a relapse into a regressive essentialism (Davion, 1994; Beuge, 1994; Eckersley, 1992; Dobson, 1995). As we have seen an essentialist view of women entails a perception of women as closer to nature in that they are viewed as essentially, usually biologically, connected to nature. Another conception of female gender identity that is essentialist, albeit in universalist terms, is a notion of a feminine self that is complementary to a masculine self. Both these notions fail to overcome dualism and its correlate, essentialism.

The concerns Plumwood expresses as reason for holding on to female gender identity is not novel. Moving beyond gender is perceived by many as detrimental to feminist politics, although, as we shall see in the following chapter, this is not a view universally shared by feminists. The claim that giving positive content to female identity is also empowering for women is also reasonable, especially in the light of the historical oppression, denigration and devaluation that women have suffered on the basis of their not-being male.<sup>51</sup> How this is performed, or the framework within which this is articulated, is however of utmost importance.

Employing the strategy of continuity and difference that she proposes to address dualism, Plumwood shows how a dualised notion of female gender identity can be overcome. A critical affirmation of female gender identity renders it continuous, but also different, from its dualised construction as other. Moreover, in her engagement with what comes to the fore as a feminine self, Plumwood attempts to overcome the charge of universalism by endorsing a notion of a *pluralist* feminine self. Although this reveals a sensitivity towards differences between women, Plumwood's engagement with female gender identity remains inadequate. That is, she does not pay sufficient attention to *how* variables such

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<sup>51</sup> See Evans (1995) for taking up Plumwood's argument to hold on to women's differences, and advancing an opposing argument.

as race or ethnicity, for example, inscribes female gender identity. Critics have noted that the objection that black feminist writers have raised against the universalising tendencies in white feminist theory, can not simply be met by endorsing a pluralist feminine identity. The point that black feminists make is that race or ethnicity is inseparable from gender, and therefore female gender identity (Frazer and Nicholson, 1990: 29-33; Diquinzio, 1994: 1-9). This is no doubt a shortcoming in Plumwood's contribution towards an ecological notion of a female feminist self, but it is a problem that need not necessarily be insurmountable. Albeit unsuccessful then, Plumwood's proposal to conceive of female gender identity in pluralist terms, does show an acknowledgement and respect for differences between women.

Although Plumwood does not succeed in formulating an alternative female feminist self, she does make some contribution towards it by her critical affirmation of female gender identity. This is achieved by illustrating how dualistically construed "feminine" characteristics can be transformed. For Plumwood, this is not to endorse the universalist perception of women as necessarily and particularly caring, nurturing etc. To the extent that women have been identified with the feminine, and to the extent that different women, given their social and historical positioning, may display "feminine" characteristics to a greater or lesser degree, these qualities, given their dualist construal denoting powerlessness, are up for reconstruction.

A focus on female gender identity in terms of the "feminine" is also consistent with Plumwood's concerns as ecofeminist. Values and qualities such as nurturance, care, empathy and sympathy can be seen as relevant from an ecological perspective, but it is their dualistic construal as feminine which has rendered them problematic. The inferiority allocated to these values is a result of their exclusion from the superior realm of reason, which is challenged significantly by showing that these values move beyond the reason/emotion dualism. This brings us to Plumwood's introduction of the degendered model of the human.

## 6.4 Erasing differences

As I have illustrated, Plumwood's degendered model of the human represents an attempt to conceive of a viable notion of the human self for "both sexes" without obliterating differences between men and women altogether. Given the dualist construal of the masculine and feminine models of the self, a formulation of a degendered model of the human self entails the rejection of both. This is followed by a conceptualisation of a notion of the human self that establishes continuity in terms of a "third set of characteristics" whilst not erasing all differences.

Apart from the unfortunate choice of words in her classification of the notion of the human self as "degendered", which has its roots in a stream of feminist thinking that envisions some kind of androgynous society, a number of deficiencies have been identified regarding this model of the self (Braidotti *et al*, 1994: 42; Grosz, 1990: 338-339). Although Plumwood distances herself from androgyny she does not show how the model of the degendered self, consisting of the desirable qualities, would escape a characterisation as neutral. As such, this notion verges dangerously on - although clearly wanting to avoid - obliterating differences. For this reason, this notion of the self evokes images of, if not androgyny, an artificially imposed uniformity between humans in general that also raises questions regarding the possibility of feminist politics, also within an ecofeminist context (Birkeland, 1994: 443-444). To endorse a degendered self, the asymmetrical power relations that exist between men and women are overlooked. That is, Plumwood's focus on dualism and dualist structures is an explicit attempt to transform power relations between self and other, which loses momentum if differences are inadequately engaged with.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, this also paralyses the possibility of those who have been designated to the realm of the other, to actively challenge oppressive practices and meanings from a position of difference. Plumwood's description of how such a degendered model of the human is to be constructed (selecting specific characteristics,

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<sup>52</sup> As we have seen, in its quest for equality, some social/ist feminists endorses some kind of androgyny. However, such a notion of neutrality culminates in a reinforcement of the masculine because of the asymmetry that exists between the sexes. Holding on to differences in a modified form is a response and challenge to this asymmetry between men and women.

transforming them, and discarding others) is also reminiscent of the rationalist tradition she so effectively and convincingly criticises. The “installation” of such a model of the human self can hardly avoid coming across as a kind of social engineering.

In my view, the main weakness of this concept of the human self can be attributed to the fact that she refrains from engaging adequately with that which forms the basis of continuity between humans.<sup>53</sup> Concentrating on a “third set of characteristics” is limiting. Moreover, she is unspecific regarding the content of the differences she envisions, thus rendering this model vague and incomplete (Dobson, 1995: 190-191). She does reiterate that differences in male and female “characters” can and should prevail, but speaking of differences between men and women in terms of “character”, not only loses its critical edge, it also hardly captures the multifacetedness and richness of different selves that she herself clearly attributes great respect to.

In the light of her later work (1993) and her *explicit* departure from the degendered model of the self,<sup>54</sup> it can with relative certainty be assumed, that these differences would not be differences as they are traditionally conceived. However, such differences could do with at least *some* illumination. This is called for especially in the light of her engagement with female gender identity in terms of nurturance that, as I have indicated, is significant from an ecological perspective. For this reason it has been remarked that the pluralist feminine self that Plumwood endorses seems not entirely incompatible with the notion of the degendered human self (Dobson, 1995: 190). In my understanding, given the multitude of differences that are constitutive of female feminist identity or subjectivity, and Plumwood’s later emphasis on difference, a fusion of the female self with the notion of a degendered human self that verges on neutrality, can be avoided. (Such a fusion would of course also be a contradiction in terms.) This signals a tension in Plumwood’s position that is overcome at a later stage (1993) in her work.

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<sup>53</sup> This shortcoming is however remedied in her later work and her discussion of Benjamin’s mutual self as post-rationalist subjectivity.

<sup>54</sup> This was also stressed in personal correspondence with Plumwood (1996).



A clue as to how these problems that Plumwood encounters, can (perhaps) be overcome, lies in the classification of this model of the human self as “degendered”. The question that I keep on asking myself is whether we need a *degendered* model of the human to conceive of an ecological self? From an environmental perspective, Plumwood’s approach to conceive of a feminist notion of an ecological self is most significant, but how she goes about it in the case of the degendered self, is, however, unsatisfactory.

### **6.5 Moving beyond dualism: ethics, continuity and difference**

This brings us to the critical-transformative ethic, which shares with cultural ecofeminism a critique of abstract universalist ethics, the notion of the self that informs it, and a positive valuation of previously marginalised moral concepts. Despite these convergences, that critical-transformative ecofeminism diverges notably from cultural ecofeminism also in the sphere of ethics, is evident. This position refrains from a complete abandonment of ethics, and a transformation of “feminine” values is also argued for. What is more significant, is that a slight movement away from an adherence to “feminine” values that invoke images of motherhood, can be detected. The reintroduction of marginalised moral concepts such as responsibility and respect that resist a dualist construal in terms of the reason/emotion dualism is also proposed, and care is detached from its incessant association with mothering or motherhood. Most significantly, the notion of the ecological self as mutual self circumvents a notion of continuity between self and nature that is based on identity (cultural ecofeminism) or identification (deep ecology). Retaining an adequate measure of distinctness avoids a relapse into altruism (which is not adequately addressed by cultural ecofeminism). Acknowledging the other as continuous but also different from the self, also avoids the temptation to confuse the needs of the self with those of the other, that we have seen, the deep ecological Self fails to guarantee.

Plumwood’s articulation of an ecological self as a mutual self is significant not only from an ecological, but also from a feminist perspective. As we have seen, Plumwood’s articulation of a non-anthropocentric theory of the inherent value of nature is perfectly in keeping with the strategy she proposes for overcoming dualism. In this context the human/nature dualism is transformed by establishing

continuity between humans and nature without erasing differences, in particular the heterogeneity of nature. Articulating a non-anthropocentric basis for continuity, her broadened notion of intentionality forms the basis of the relation of mutuality between humans and nature whilst leaving space for the flourishing of differences. That the mutual self is articulated to express the intersubjective relation between humans must also not be overlooked, but I will return to this in due course. Within the context of articulating an ecological self, Plumwood succeeds in framing the mutual self in ecological terms by transposing what she conceives as the basis for continuity between humans and nature onto the mutual self. As such, in the case of the relation between humans and nature subjectivity as the basis for mutuality is replaced by the activity of striving and resistance, which is expressed differently by humans and nature, but which nonetheless, is at the same time shared by humans and nature. That continuity thus conceived is non-anthropocentric, is ascribed to the observation that this basis does not take what is specifically human as criterion for moral considerability. It is specifically designed to accommodate the flourishing of differences along diverse axes of differences, which in turn denotes the autonomy and agency of both self and other.

Having elaborated upon the ecological significance of the mutual self, I would now like to turn to its significance also otherwise. If we recall, Plumwood discussed a degendered notion of the human so as to present us with an alternative notion of the self that allows for continuity between men and women, but which also leaves space for differences. As I understand it, what Plumwood was in effect aiming at here was to articulate an alternative, post-rationalist subjectivity. Given the insurmountable problems of a degendered human self and Plumwood's concurrent abandonment of it, it is not unreasonable to hold that the mutual self replaces the degendered human self. What is particularly appealing about the mutual self then is unlike the degendered human self, that it offers a viable basis for continuity and is convincing in its allowance for the flourishing of differences. Whilst the basis for continuity between humans is a shared post-rationalist subjectivity, the emphasis that is simultaneously placed on difference, allows for the flourishing of differences. Being a post-rationalist subjectivity Plumwood's requirement that a movement beyond dualism through the notions of continuity and difference is

convincing only if a transformation of both self and other is attained, is also met. In this way, the dangers of both incorporation and uncritical affirmation are thwarted. As such then, the mutual self forms an interesting framework that has the potential to accommodate both an ecological self and a feminist self beyond dualism and essentialism. With the mutual self as backdrop, the articulation of a *feminist* notion of an ecological self is made possible. At the same time, because the mutual self is also an ecological self, the potential exists for the articulation of an ecological notion of a female feminist self. The shortcoming of critical-transformative ecofeminism is, however, that whilst a pluralist feminine self is endorsed, the requirements for articulating a complexly differentiated female feminist self beyond dualism and essentialism are not adequately met. This is unfortunate, as it seems that the mutual self as post-rationalist feminist subjectivity that embodies differences, would most certainly not impede such an undertaking.

## **6.6 The false choice between moral hierarchy and moral equality**

Critical-transformative ecofeminism has come under scrutiny for its purported rejection of moral hierarchy which is a characteristic of dualism. According to Andrews (1996: 143-144) an adherence to the "moral equality thesis" is presupposed in the critical-transformative critique of dualism, but it is not sufficiently argued for. Andrews infers the support for moral equality from the critique of naturism that, as we have seen, is brought in relation with sexism and racism. From this Andrews (1996: 144) deduces that "to hold that naturism is a similar injustice [to that of racism and sexism], implies a commitment to the moral equality thesis" (Andrews, 1996: 144). Andrews also criticises Warren and Plumwood's attempt to reconceive of the relation to nature in terms of continuity and difference. Still preoccupied with moral equality as opposed to moral hierarchy, Andrews claims that although it "*allows*" non-hierarchical moral perception, it does not show that this is the way we "*ought*" to perceive it (Andrews, 1996: 144). In his view, non-hierarchical moral perception is in any case not required. Moreover, that Plumwood and Warren's approach can also generate hierarchical ordering, proves for him his point that moral hierarchy is unavoidable and just.

This he (Andrews, 1996: 144) illustrates with reference to Plumwood's notions of continuity and difference which he reckons does not justify moral equality, as both continuity and difference are compatible with moral hierarchy, although continuity may defeat exclusion. Another point he (Andrews, 1996: 147) makes, is that Plumwood does not establish the equal moral importance of human and non-human ends, which is necessary if she places naturism alongside racism and sexism. In Andrews' view then, this is to imply that for Plumwood, naturism is a less serious injustice than sexism and racism, which is inconsistent with her rejection of moral hierarchy as inherent to dualism.

Having briefly sketched Andrew's main points of critique, the soundness of the central assumption that inform his critique, needs to be established. That is, is Andrews correct in maintaining that Plumwood and Warren's rejection of moral hierarchy implies an *adherence to moral equality*? In my understanding, Warren and Plumwood's critique of hierarchical thinking and practices does not necessarily denote a support of the principle of moral equality. At the same time, this does not imply a concealed adherence to moral hierarchy either, as Andrews seems to want to suggest. Nor, and this is the contentious point Andrews is driving at, does it imply that moral hierarchy is unavoidable. Regarding the question of hierarchy, that all evaluations imply some kind of ranking, must not be confused with hierarchy, which is absolute and applied universally regardless of particular contexts. This is the hierarchy that both Plumwood and Warren reject. By endorsing the notions of continuity and difference, Plumwood and Warren introduce a more flexible strategy that, depending on the context, allows for an evaluation in terms of the specific continuities and differences that are relevant within the particular contexts at hand.

What Plumwood and Warren seem to suggest is that everybody's interests deserves equal weight, which does not mean that the outcome of weighing up everybody's interests would necessarily result in equal treatment, an unfortunate but unavoidable consequence of the practical application of democracy. Therefore establishing continuity and difference between self and other is a necessary, if not entirely sufficient, requirement to enable us to consider all

interests equally, although this may not always result in equal treatment.<sup>55</sup> Moral hierarchy on the other hand, precludes even the possibility of weighing up all interests equally, as some are necessarily more morally considerable than others.

Moreover, Andrews' view that hierarchy can not be escaped, which is proved to him by the fact that critical-transformative ecofeminism does not explicitly show how racism, sexism and naturism are equally unjust, is also in need of further examination. In his view, that a rejection of moral hierarchy cannot consistently be maintained, shows that naturism is a less serious injustice than injustices committed against humans, rendering moral hierarchy not only inevitable, but also just.<sup>56</sup> Again Andrews' critique rests on the assumption that a rejection of hierarchy implies the adherence to moral equality. One reason why Plumwood refrains from explicitly establishing the equal moral importance of human and non-human ends, is that it is only in a specific context that this would be necessary, and this context would be where, for example, people's interests are set off against those of nature.<sup>57</sup> However, as Norton (1991: 86-89) argues, this is a problem of a very theoretical kind. He points out that the choice between either humans or nature is, in practice, often not the only choice available. This renders Andrews' determination to adopt moral hierarchy not only unnecessary, but also an obstacle in conceiving of ways to consider the interests of humans and nature equally.

Having shown that critical-transformative ecofeminism is unable to avoid hierarchy, Andrews (1996: 152-153) arrives at the point he has been driving at all along. He concludes that, despite her rejection of moral extensionism, Plumwood's argument for the moral considerability of earth others, itself is extensionist. This he ascribes to Plumwood's reference to nature as displaying

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<sup>55</sup> As it seems to be suggested by Andrews above, it may be asked whether continuity is not a sufficient basis for equal moral consideration. However, this approach is specifically rejected because it forms part of an assimilationist strategy, which strengthens hierarchical relations, thus rendering the recognition of both continuity and difference necessary.

<sup>56</sup> For fear of misrepresenting Andrews as a neo-Darwinist, it is perhaps fitting to point out here that the ultimate point he is trying to make is that hierarchy *need not necessarily* lead to injustices, that hierarchy is not *inherently* unjust, but rather a reality we have to deal with. However, my response would be that if this is what he is saying, why not show a commitment to equality in the face of inequalities and let go of concepts that instead of facilitating progress, hold us back?

<sup>57</sup> Should the interests of the parties involved, be vehemently opposed, this conflict can be resolved democratically, in a setting where the interests of nature are also articulated.

mindlike qualities that renders it worthy of respect. In my view this argument is flawed for a number of reasons. Firstly, as I understand it, moral extensionism involves selecting a particular human characteristic such as consciousness and extending the sphere of the human (defined in these terms), to include others on the grounds that they exhibit these qualities. In this way, the other is no longer regarded morally irrelevant, but more relevant, depending on the degree of closeness or distance to consciousness - hence the classification "hierarchical extensionism". In contrast to this approach, what Plumwood explicitly does, is to select a criterion that is not distinctly human, but one that humans and nature share, to show that extensionism is neither necessary, nor inevitable.<sup>58</sup>

Another feature that distinguishes Plumwood's position from a moral extensionist one, is that in the process of establishing continuity between humans and nature, (which in turn also renders nature as having value in its own right), transformation takes place not only of nature but also the human. That is on the basis of the continuity that is established between humans and nature, the human as defined in terms of consciousness alone, too undergoes change. This is made explicit in particular with regard to her endorsement of the mutual self as a post-rationalist feminist subjectivity. Not only is it shown that humans share capacities with nature, the capacities humans do not share with nature are decentered. Moreover, the criterion of a broadened intentionality enables us to recognise that there are natural phenomena that far outdo what humans take so much pride and arrogance in. Within an extensionist framework, the self is not significantly challenged. For the above reasons then, the argument that Plumwood is a moral extensionist, is an erroneous one.

## 6.7 Anthropocentrism and inherent value

Having argued that Plumwood's approach is not a moral extensionist one, an opportunity is offered to dwell on her account of the inherent value of nature. It can also be asked why Plumwood in her account of nature's inherent value, sees

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<sup>58</sup> That this criterion is mindlike is indeed the case, but to conclude that this is extensionist is to conflate intentionality with consciousness, which is exactly what Plumwood shows the criterion of the intentional resists, although it does not exclude consciousness.

it fitting to involve the human in the manner that she does.<sup>59</sup> This can be illuminated by setting off her position against the two main approaches to theorising the value of nature. The first is the anthropocentric approach that views nature as valuable because it has value for humans. According to this theory, nature has instrumental value variously defined as aesthetic, recreational, spiritual, a stock of resources, and in terms of its medicinal value, and therefore we should treat nature ethically. The other is an ecocentric<sup>60</sup> approach which views nature as having inherent value that is objectively present in nature, totally independent of humans. On the grounds of nature's inherent value thus defined, nature should be morally considered.<sup>61</sup>

As Callicott (1992: 129-138) convincingly argues, to assert that nature has objective value in an attempt to liberate nature from its anthropocentric use value, is self-defeating. Objective value theory remains anthropocentric, because the objective value nature purportedly has, is bestowed upon it by humans. This is because as Callicott observes, values are necessarily *human* values. This however does not mean that we are inevitably trapped in anthropocentrism. That is, it is possible to conceive of the inherent value of nature in non-anthropocentric terms and without "claiming that such value may exist independently of humans" (Callicott, 1992: 132).<sup>62</sup>

Rejecting both positions for their anthropocentrism, Plumwood's account of nature represents one avenue that is followed in articulating such a non-anthropocentric, theory of the inherent value of nature. That values are human values is in my understanding the reason why Plumwood does not and needs not exclude humans from her account of the inherent value of nature. That is, she

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<sup>59</sup> If we recall, according to Plumwood, the exclusion of the inferior sphere of nature from the sphere of the human facilitates the instrumental treatment of nature. It is argued that if this relation of hyperseparation is to be addressed, nature reconceived as continuous with, but different from the human, could contribute significantly to transform this relation. Here however, I place Plumwood's account of what constitutes continuity between humans and nature in the context of inherent value theory so as to shed light on her particular engagement with establishing continuity between humans and nature.

<sup>60</sup> This is one of a range of different strands in ecocentrism. See Eckersley (1992: 49-71) for a detailed discussion of ecocentrism and its variations.

<sup>61</sup> A prominent exponent of this position is Rolston (1988).

<sup>62</sup> For an argument defending this position, see Richard and Val Routley (now Plumwood) (1980) and Plumwood (1981: 140-141). See Callicott (1992: 129-143) for his own version of such an account which is based on an interactive model: it is in our interaction with nature that nature's inherent value is revealed to us.

articulates a notion of the inherent value of nature, which is not objectively given, but also not wholly dependent on humans. Her particular account of the inherent value of nature is based upon a conception of nature as independent center of striving and resistance, which renders it continuous with humans. Such a notion of continuity enables humans to recognise nature as an *other* center of striving and resistance which demands an engagement and treatment of nature with due respect.

## 7. Conclusion

In the preceding chapter I have discussed the critical-transformative ecological feminist contributions towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self and the concomitant ethic beyond dualism and essentialism. The articulation of an alternative notion of the self and ethic is approached in the light of an in depth engagement with dualism as the conceptual framework that grounds the twin dominations of women and nature. Locating the dominations of women and nature in dualism, critical-transformative ecofeminism draws attention to the network of different dualist pairs that overlap and function in mutually supportive manner. A thorough engagement with dualism makes visible differences that were previously ignored and has significant implications for the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self beyond dualism and essentialism. In the light of this analysis, the critical-transformative ecofeminist position problematises what cultural ecofeminism treats as unproblematic. That is, to articulate an alternative ecological feminist notion of the self more is required than simply replacing a masculine notion of the self with a feminine notion of the self that reinforces dualism and essentialism.

In her discussion of dualism we have seen that Plumwood stresses that the conceptual and material cannot be separated. This is a distinctive feature of critical-transformative ecofeminism and signals a shift from the predominantly materialist approach that is followed by cultural ecofeminism. This is also manifested in the (re)constructive approach that characterises the contributions of critical-transformative ecofeminism towards the articulation of a *feminist* notion of an ecological self and an *ecological* notion of a feminist self.



Plumwood approaches her contribution to the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self by focusing on the related human/nature, reason/nature and masculine/feminine dualisms. In the light of her strategy to move beyond dualism, she enacts a critical affirmation of female gender identity beyond dualism and she attempts to transform the notion of the human self. With regard to the latter she introduces a notion of a degendered human self with the objective of detaching the human self from its overtly masculine character so as to provide us with a backdrop against which human relations of domination and instrumentalisation of nature can be transformed. This endeavour is accomplished by illustrating how the human/nature dualism can be transcended through a broadened notion of intentionality. Whilst the notion of a degendered human self can be criticised and rejected for its inadequate engagement with differences, the reconceptualisation of the human-nature relation through a broadened notion of intentionality is positively received. Conceiving of continuity in these terms provides us with a non-anthropocentric account of the inherent value of nature, which succeeds in establishing connection between humans and nature without forsaking nature's differences.

Plumwood's engagement with female gender identity is undertaken with two objectives in mind. The first is to untie women from their "privileged" relation of identification with nature that has legitimated their oppression alongside nature. Whilst rejecting the liberal strategy that opposes any association of women with nature, Plumwood also rejects the uncritical affirmation of an overidentification of women with nature. As we have seen, Plumwood performs a critical affirmation of female gender identity by untying a feminine self from its dualist, that is, complementary character. Holding on to women's difference whilst transforming it at the same time, signals also the potential ecological character of such a feminine self. That is, a critical affirmation of women's otherness opens up the way for a situatedness of women *with* nature. In the light of the second objective, which was to address universalism as a form of essentialism, Plumwood endorses a pluralist notion of female gender identity, hence the identification of this notion as a pluralist feminine self. In my view then, Plumwood's engagement with female gender identity marks a movement towards the articulation of a notion of an *ecological* notion of a female feminist self beyond dualism and essentialism, although it is a project that remains

unfulfilled. The reason for this is that, in the final analysis, Plumwood's notion of a pluralist feminine self moves beyond dualism and (biological) essentialism, thus addressing the shortcomings identified in the notion(s) of the female and feminine self as endorsed by cultural ecofeminism. However, despite her consistent sensitivity towards differences, she still fails to engage adequately with the differences between women.

This brings us to the notion of the mutual self as a feminist notion of an ecological self. Emphasising continuity *and difference*, the mutual self is a refinement of deep ecology's endorsement of a notion of a relational self as ecological Self. If we recall, the mutual self that is also a post-rationalist feminist subjectivity, is articulated to address the dualist structure of the human/nature relation, particularly in terms of the reason/nature dualism. The mutual self as post-rationalist subjectivity is adapted by Plumwood to establish continuity between humans and nature in terms of a broadened notion of intentionality. Conceived of in the context of critical-transformative ecofeminist ethics then, the mutual self as ecological self stresses the acknowledgement of nature as *independent* center of striving and resistance. The basis that critical-transformative ecofeminism provides for the ethical engagement with nature, signals a move away from a relation of women's identification with the natural environment, which is consistent with a shift away from an endorsement of "feminine" values and a restriction to an ethic or vocabulary of care. The values that are endorsed move beyond a restriction to mothering or motherhood, and a range of previously marginalised moral concepts advanced by Plumwood and Warren. These moral concepts are also transformed in a manner that is resistant to a construal along the reason/emotion dualism and in this manner, these concepts are detached from their association with powerlessness.

In the final analysis, then, I would argue that the strength of the critical-transformative ecofeminist contributions towards conceptualising an ecological feminist notion of the self, lies in its thorough engagement with the problem of dualism. The strategy Plumwood offers to move beyond dualism is to establish a notion of continuity between humans and nature without erasing differences. As such, this approach addresses radical exclusion but not at the expense of recognising differences, therefore resisting the strategy of incorporation. The

success of Plumwood's strategy to move beyond dualism lies in the fact that the basis that she offers for establishing continuity transforms both self and other, and therefore differences too, do not remain the same. Conceiving of continuity between humans and nature in terms of a broadened notion of intentionality offers a non-anthropocentric account of the inherent value of nature. By establishing continuity between humans and nature, the inherent value of nature is acknowledged, which demands a departure from the view of nature as instrument to the fulfillment of the endeavours and needs of man, thus calling for a consideration of nature as having needs and ends of its own.

As we have also seen, Plumwood's endorsement of the notion of the mutual self provides us not only with a feminist notion of an ecological self that transforms the dualist relation between humans and nature. As a post-rationalist feminist subjectivity, the mutual self establishes continuity also between humans on the basis of subjectivity. That is, this notion of the self is offered also as alternative to a rationalist notion of the self that has systematically excluded women and others from the realm of subjecthood. The emphasis that Plumwood places on differences in the rearticulation of the self as mutual self, signals an acknowledgement of differences between humans in terms of identity and relative positions of power. As we have seen, Plumwood, speaking from the locatedness as ecofeminist, performs a critical affirmation of a notion of the female gender identity, which in itself is an acknowledgement of differences. As I have argued above, Plumwood's endorsement of a pluralist feminine self is not altogether satisfactory. Despite this shortcoming, the observation was made that the mutual self as post-rationalist feminist subjectivity invites and can accommodate the articulation also of a female feminist self.

In the following chapter, I will give an exposition of the notions of the self, nature and politics that are articulated from a cyber-(eco)feminist perspective. Although cyber-(eco)feminism is not widely regarded as an ecofeminist position, that the notions of the self, nature and politics as conceived by cyber-(eco)feminism, is significant from an ecological and feminist perspective, is evident. I therefore give an exposition of the different notions of the self, nature and politics offered by cyber-(eco)feminism so as to determine the contributions that are made towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the

self beyond dualism and essentialism. The aim of this discussion is therefore also to determine which aspects of cyber-(eco)feminist thinking are consistent with the articulation of a feminist notion of an ecological self, and an ecological notion of a feminist self beyond dualism and essentialism. Moreover, in the light of the shortcomings identified in the critical-transformative engagement with the female feminist self, whether cyber-(eco)feminism can make a contribution to remedying this deficiency, will also be looked into.

## Chapter 3

### Cyber-(eco)feminism

#### 1. Introduction

In the preceding chapters I have given an exposition of the contributions that cultural and critical-transformative ecofeminism make towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self beyond dualism and essentialism. I have shown how critical-transformative ecofeminism circumvents or improves upon some of the shortcomings that have been identified in the cultural ecofeminist strand, but also where and how the two positions overlap. In this chapter I explore the contributions that are made towards the articulation of a feminist notion of an ecological self and an ecological notion of a feminist self from a perspective that I have come to refer to as cyber-(eco)feminism.

As articulated by biologist and historian of science Donna Haraway, cyber-(eco)feminism differs markedly from cultural and critical-transformative ecofeminism. The notions of the self introduced by Haraway are neither articulated from an ecological feminist position, nor is she necessarily concerned with articulating an ecological feminist notion of the self as such. Moreover, consistent with a style that resists clear and distinct interpretations, Haraway's position is an unequivocally poststructuralist one. Poststructuralism is a stream in contemporary Western philosophical thinking that is often perceived to be directly opposed to and incompatible with environmental thinking.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Haraway's thought and writing have direct bearing upon central questions in ecological and feminist thinking. The significance of Haraway's work lies not only in her explicit references to ecofeminism which reflects her critical solidarity with ecofeminism, but also in her reflection upon pertinent ecological and feminist questions.

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<sup>1</sup> See Andermatt Conley (1997) for an exploration of poststructuralist thinking on the environment and Gare (1995) for an attempt to reconcile "postmodernism" with environmentalism. See also influential environmental thinker Zimmerman (1994) for a critical appraisal of "postmodernism" and radical ecological thinking. Zimmerman situates radical ecology in "postmodern" culture to show how radical ecology is compatible, but also irreconcilable with "postmodernism". This inquiry into Haraway's thinking, which is conducted from an ecological feminist perspective, is to a certain extent also a contribution to such an investigation into the relation between ecology, feminism and poststructuralist thinking.

In this chapter I focus on Haraway's deliberations upon a number of related issues that coincide with the activity that Haraway refers to as the "invention and reinvention of nature" (1991: 1). For Haraway, rethinking and reimagining nature is an act indistinguishable from rethinking the self, ethics and politics. Haraway's contemplation of the self, nature and politics are conceived of in "the belly of the monster", that is, in the context of post-industrial, late capitalist Western culture. As we shall see, it presents us with a very particular, that is, culturally specific response to the dilemmas that are thrust upon us in the late 20th century, one which holds both potential and challenges that need to be taken heed of in contemporary environmental and feminist thought.

As in the previous chapters, I will, in the section titled "Contextualisation and background", commence with a brief contextualisation to familiarise the reader with Haraway's background and the framework she writes from. Following the contextualisation, an exposition is given of altogether three different but related notions of the self that can be identified in Haraway's oeuvre. This section titled "Refiguring the self" is divided into two parts. In the first, titled "Monstrous selves", two notions of the self that are articulated by Haraway are discussed, namely "The figure of the cyborg" and "The Inappropriate/d Other". In the second part titled "The situated self", I discuss a third notion of the self that can be identified in Haraway's work.<sup>2</sup>

The notion of the cyborg signifies the transgression and destabilisation of boundaries previously regarded as fixed and stable. As such the cyborg, a figure that is half-human half-machine comes to the fore as a highly differentiated poststructuralist subjectivity beyond dualism and essentialism. As possible cyborg subjectivity, the Inappropriate/d Other marks a moment of pause, curbing the radical differentiation of the cyborg. The third notion of the self, the situated self, is articulated in an attempt to carve out an alternative notion of the feminist knowing subject that overcomes the sharp boundary between knowing subject

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<sup>2</sup> During the course of this discussion, it will become clear that the boundaries between these different notions of the self blur to a greater or lesser degree. The emphasis does however fall differently in each of these notions, which warrants some degree of separation. As I hope to show then, the distinctions that I draw between the different selves that are discussed and their evaluations are performed not at the expense of a thorough engagement with and careful reflection on the literature at hand.

and the object of knowledge. In the process, the concept of nature as passive object is transformed into a non-anthropocentric figure of Coyote Trickster.

Having already started discussing Haraway's perception of nature in the section titled "The situated self", Haraway's view on the concept of nature is further elaborated upon in the following section which is titled "A politics of articulation". In this section, consistent with the image of nature as Coyote Trickster, nature is simultaneously conceived of as "artifactual" and as "social". This multifaceted reinterpretation of nature opens up the way for Haraway to put forward a politics of articulation as an ethically sound alternative political strategy to navigate negotiations around environmental issues. A salient difference between cyber-(eco)feminism and cultural and critical-transformative ecofeminism then, is that a reconceptualisation of the self by these ecofeminist positions, is accompanied by the formulation of an ethic, and the self is offered as laying a foundation for ethical behaviour. Cyber-(eco)feminism on the other hand shifts the emphasis from ethics to politics (although politics and ethics here become less distinguishable). Haraway's politics of articulation draws upon the different conceptions of nature that she articulates. These conceptions in turn are directly linked with the notion(s) of the self that are articulated from a cyber-(eco)feminist perspective.

In the final section of this chapter, the different notions of the self that are proposed by cyber-(eco)feminism are evaluated from a feminist and ecological perspective. The different notions are brought in relation with one another and are played off against one another. Haraway's thoughts with regard to the concept of nature and her closely linked politics of articulation are also held up for closer inspection. This evaluation is of course not conducted in isolation from the previous two chapters, thus Haraway's work is continually assessed by relating it with and distinguishing it from the previously discussed two positions.

## **2. Contextualisation and background**

In the introduction to her book, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991), Haraway gives the reader a brief glimpse into the background of the author of *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-*

*Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* (1985).<sup>3</sup> This essay has become a cult piece of writing and articulates the main tenets of what is today commonly referred to as cyber- or cyborg feminism (Braidotti, 1994a: 7-13; Diergaard, 1994: 4; Sturgeon, 1997: 194). She writes “once upon a time the author was a proper, US socialist-feminist, white female, hominid biologist who became a historian of science to write about modern Western accounts of monkeys, apes and women” (Haraway, 1991: 1).

Haraway has shed and reworked many of the presuppositions that these affinities have historically assumed and a plurality of different voices and concerns resonate through her current work as “cyborg feminist”.<sup>4</sup> Firmly situated within a poststructuralist framework, Haraway’s texts are thoroughly fragmented and interdisciplinary: intricate allusions to discourses from psychoanalysis to primatology and information-technology together support and constitute her arguments to bring about the desired effects. Intertextual references abound (which requires a pre-knowledge of the reader that is at times simply overwhelming), which link her various essays to form a richly textured, albeit incomplete whole. It is here that comes to mind what is most striking of her style, namely a diligent resistance to and subversion of any attempt at fixed and final interpretations or categorisations.

Faithful to engaging with the pressing issues her environment thrusts upon her, Haraway takes up the challenge of working through complex contemporary philosophical, epistemological, and political questions in the face of the deconstruction of the subject, the deligitimisation of totalising grand narratives, and the escalating technological advancement that characterise post-industrial/late capitalist/postmodern Western culture. She embarks upon these journeys from a purposeful rejection of the dualist conceptual framework that has structured Western philosophical thought and culture and sets out to tell different stories, to envision and invent other possibilities. Like cultural ecofeminism and critical-transformative ecological feminism, Haraway’s rejection of dualism is pivotal to her project. Haraway’s engagement with dualism and

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<sup>3</sup> In future references, due to the length of the title, I will refer to this essay as *A Cyborg Manifesto*.

<sup>4</sup> For an interesting historical account of Haraway’s unfolding as cyborg feminist, see Munnik (1997: 70-75).



essentialism differs from the previous two positions in that it takes on a distinctly poststructuralist visage - a position which offers other (or not so other) perspectives and some interesting challenges to contemporary ecological and feminist thinking.

### **3. Refiguring the self**

In the following section I would like to discuss the different conceptions of the self that can be distinguished in Haraway's texts. There are three such notions of the self that weave their way in and out of her collection of essays, namely the figure of the cyborg, the Inappropriate/d Other, and the situated self. Some features of these selves recur and repeat themselves in others, leaving traces that render a clear-cut differentiation somewhat artificial and forced. However, although I do not underestimate the significance of the overlap between these different notions of the self, I treat these notions separately (or relatively separately) due to the distinct characteristics that distinguish them and the effects that these differences give rise to.<sup>5</sup>

The section titled "Monstrous selves", is divided in two parts namely "The figure of the cyborg" and "The Inappropriate/d Other". I start off by discussing Haraway's notion of the cyborg that comes to the fore as a poststructuralist identity par excellence. The cyborg is a highly differentiated, playful entity that takes pleasure in the transgression of boundaries. It inhabits a world unmarked by dualist structures and embodies the destabilisation and subversion of the human/machine, human/animal, culture/nature and man/woman dualisms amongst others. In keeping with its embodiment of differences, the cyborg is shown to take on at least two faces, the second manifesting itself in what Haraway refers to as the Inappropriate/d Other. Despite the fact that for Haraway the notion of the Inappropriate/d Other acts as alternative cyborg subjectivity, I treat it not as disconnected, but as distinct from the figure of the cyborg. In my view the Inappropriate/d Other, marks a moment of pause where the radical differentiation of the cyborg is slightly curbed. This observation is made in the light of Haraway's discussion of the Inappropriate/d Other as moving

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<sup>5</sup> An in depth discussion and evaluation of these differences and their effects will be conducted at the end of this chapter.

beyond the identity of other, whilst at the same time holding onto its situatedness as other. Following my discussion of the cyborg then, the Inappropriate/d Other is discussed as an alternative feminist subjectivity, one that does not affirm the other of the self, but the other of the other.

In the second section titled "The situated self", the third (albeit not unrelated), notion of the self is discussed. This conception of the self is articulated via an investigation into the epistemological question of objective knowledge. Here Haraway presents us with an understanding of objective knowledge as situated knowledges. The knowing subject is situated, therefore non-neutral and *therefore* accountable for the knowledge that she produces. It is here, in her deconstruction of the subject/object and human/nature dualisms, that Haraway's creative re-imagining of nature comes to the fore, thwarting the relations of domination that structure and marks these dualisms.

### **3.1 Monstrous selves**

#### **i) The figure of the cyborg**

It is in *A Cyborg Manifesto*, (originally published in 1985), written as a vision on the future of socialist feminism in the 90's and the next millennium, that the notion of the cyborg is first articulated and given content to. Defined as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, [the cyborg] is a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (Haraway, 1991: 149). Likewise, the cyborg is an entity that is neither purely "cultural", nor purely "natural" (Dobbelaar and Slob, 1995: 5).

As such then, the cyborg is the embodiment of a particular moment in the history of Western culture. It makes its appearance in an era that is characterized by escalating technological advancement, a development that according to Haraway has had a remarkable impact on Western culture. In her socio-cultural analysis, she points out that technological development has generated three particular boundary breakdowns that are of profound historical significance. These are respectively the blurring of the distinction between humans and machines, humans and animals and the blurring of the boundary

between the physical and non-physical (Haraway, 1991: 152-153).<sup>6</sup> Concerning the blurring of the distinction between humans and machines, the creation of machine-like figures that strongly resemble humans (here popular culture figures such as Robocop and Terminator spring to mind), or machines that display human-like qualities, destabilise a wide range of previously taken for granted distinctions respectively associated with humans on the one hand and machines on the other (Diergaarde, 1994: 4). On the effects of this phenomenon, Haraway (1991: 152) writes:

Late twentieth century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed and other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively and we ourselves frighteningly inert.<sup>7</sup>

Even in our everyday surroundings, the breaching of the organism/machine distinction is visible all around us, which accounts for Haraway's view of the cyborg as both a reality and myth. Moreover she asserts that we are *all* cyborgs: the extension of ourselves to include machines is nothing extra-ordinary if we think about the range of "tools" that we employ in our everyday existence and which we can hardly imagine living without. In this regard, our daily use of and interaction with computers and computerised technology, comes to mind. Already we are not so distinct from our machines as we would like to think we are.

Concurrently, the human-animal divide is challenged and questioned by those who, as Haraway (1991: 152) puts it, "no longer feel the need for such a separation" which is expressed in "many branches of feminist culture [that] affirm the pleasure of connection of humans and other living creatures". Baboon

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<sup>6</sup> In this discussion an analysis of the boundary breakdown between the physical and non-physical is omitted, as it is not directly relevant to this discussion.

<sup>7</sup> As Zimmerman (1994: 359) points out, whether machines will "eventually become self-conscious and even autonomous" as Haraway appears to suggest, is a hotly disputed topic. This however, does not undermine the point that Haraway is in fact trying to make. The pace at which technological advancement is occurring, is in fact alarming. The reason for alarm is not because technology is *inherently* bad, but because increased automatisisation threatens to replace human labour on a scale that has left many economically stranded already. It is in the light of this that her assertion that we are surprisingly passive as opposed to the "liveliness" of our machines that threaten to have more power over us than we have over it has to be understood.

heart transplants on babies is of course another example of the transgression of the human-animal distinction. This is a boundary confusion that ironically elicits simultaneous criticism from animal rights activists and causes upheaval in human purist circles (Haraway, 1991: 164-165). It is out of this milieu where dilemmas are created and pleasure is taken in human-animal boundary-transgressions that the cyborg emerges:

The cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed. Far from signaling a walling off of people from other living beings, cyborgs signal disturbingly and pleurably tight coupling. Bestiality has a new status in this cycle of exchange (Haraway, 1991: 152).

That these developments mark the subversion of some of the most cherished distinctions and closely guarded boundaries that structured Western culture and thinking is evident. Haraway goes on to argue that this confusion of boundaries irrevocably challenges and displaces those dualisms that are fundamental to Western philosophical thinking and which operate in the service of Western imperialist culture. According to Haraway (1991: 177) then:

... certain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals in short, domination of all constituted as others ... Chief among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilised/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, God/man.

In her description of the notion of the self that lies central to Western philosophical thinking, Haraway criticises the relationship between self and other in terms of which the other is defined in relation to self, being instrumental to the self in more ways than one. To distinguish the self from the other, the other is constructed as radically different from the self, but this difference, because it is a difference that is complementary to the self, is a difference that amounts to sameness (Haraway, 1991: 177).<sup>8</sup> In this framework, the other is systematically oppressed to uphold the (illusion of) autonomy and unity that the self makes

claim to. This, what in effect amounts to a relationship of dependency renders the other an ever-present threat to the unity of the self. To contain this potentially volatile relationship, the other is systematically repressed and dominated by self:

The self is the One who is not dominated, who knows that by the service of the other, the other is the one who holds the future, who knows that by experience of domination, which gives the lie to the autonomy of the self. To be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God, but to be one is to be an illusion, and so to be involved in a dialectic apocalypse with the other (Haraway, 1991: 177).

For Haraway, this dualistically structured relation between self and other can only be subverted if the seemingly innocent longing for unity, wholeness or harmony is firmly rejected. According to Haraway, the fulfillment of the desire for unity and wholeness *inevitably* manifests itself in oppressive and exclusivist politics and practices, as the promise of oneness is a promise that cannot be delivered. Striving towards unity is achieved “at the cost of deathly practices, almost a worship of death” (Haraway, 1990: 16). Zimmerman (1994: 363) is correct in his observation that Haraway’s “crucial insight is that the *longing for unity always produces duality*”, as in this framework, the yearning for unity results in a system where “one is too few, but two are too many”. Historically this has manifested itself in a systematic repression of difference and otherness (Haraway, 1991: 177).<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, Haraway’s deconstruction of the One and dualism is “in effect a call for the emergence of non-dualism” and along with it, the free play of differences (Zimmerman, 1994: 363).

In the light of her deconstruction of the One, the figure of the cyborg is introduced as alternative to the unified self-enclosed subject in contrast to whom “it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end (or until the world ends)” (Haraway, 1991: 180). In the wake of a deconstruction of the self/other dualism differences are set free, and the rule of

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<sup>8</sup> This point will be further elaborated upon in the section titled “The Inappropriate/d Other”.

<sup>9</sup> In the Twentieth Century, Fascist Nazism and Apartheid stand out in history as particularly dire examples of this pursuit of oneness, the horrifying manifestations of which exposed a fanatic quest for sameness.

the One is replaced by a notion of the self where "one is too few and two is only one possibility" (Haraway, 1991: 180).<sup>10</sup> It is at the moment of this historical event that the cyborg emerges as a multiple, multifaceted and fragmented entity that takes delight in the transgression of boundaries, some of which, as we have seen, were previously held sacred. The cyborg inhabits a world beyond dualism, a world where there are only differences (Prins, 1992: 76). As a figure that is partly human, animal and machine, the cyborg also inhabits a space in-between culture and nature. It comes as little surprise then that the figure of the cyborg thoroughly undermines and destabilises the foundations upon which Western self-understanding is based. As Haraway (1991: 176) writes:

Cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine. These are the couplings which make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire, the force imagined to generate language and gender, and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of "Western" identity, of nature and culture, the mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind.

Given its non-dualist, highly differentiated character, it is perhaps not surprising that "[t]he cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world", a world where gender ceases to be a salient feature of identity (Haraway, 1991: 150). It also follows that for a cyborg that inhabits a world beyond gender, powerful stories of original unity and organic wholeness that not only presuppose, but also systematically reinforce dualism, cease to remain meaningful. Alluding to two of the most powerful grand narratives the twentieth century has proffered, Marxism and psychoanalysis, Haraway writes of the cyborg:

... it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to which organic wholeness through final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense the cyborg has no origin story ... An origin story in the

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<sup>10</sup> It is perhaps useful to recall here that the deconstruction of the self/other dualism reveals the self's dependence on the suppression of the other to uphold the illusion of his unity and also superiority. As soon as this relationship is unveiled, the constructedness of the differences that separate the self and other are revealed. At this point the boundaries that separate self and other become less clear and distinct. This is however not to argue that the differences disappear, on the contrary, the point of deconstruction is that there are always

"Western" sense depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate, the task of individual development and of history, the twin potent myths inscribed most powerfully for us in psychoanalysis and Marxism ... The cyborg skips the step of original unity of identification with nature in the Western sense (Haraway, 1991: 150-151).

Not suffering from the illusion of original unity, the sense of loss and dis-ease that these respective stories articulate and attempt to address, escape the cyborg completely. Instead, the cyborg feels itself at ease in a highly differentiated and fluctuating postmodern culture. Prins (1992: 76) articulates this succinctly:

De cyborg voelt zich thuis in een postmoderne wereld waarin allerlei grense van geen betekenis meer zijn: de grense tussen organisme en machine, mens en dier, fysische en niet-fysische wereld zijn voor een cyborg poreus geworden. Ze kent geen oorsprongsgeschiedenis - het verlange naar het herstel van een verloren gegane eenheid is vir haar daarom volkome vreemd.<sup>11</sup>

It is exactly in what at first glance presents itself as the attractive side of the cyborg, its playful subversion and transgression of rigid boundaries (read: radical differentiation) and its resistance to being pinned down, that the danger of the cyborg lurks. Haraway is thoroughly aware that ironically, it is in its appeal that the danger of the cyborg lies. She (1991: 161) writes:

But in the consciousness of our failures, we risk lapsing into *boundless difference* and giving up on the confusing task of making partial real connection. Some differences are playful, some are poles of world historical systems of domination (my emphasis, FM).

In its ceaseless transgression of boundaries, the cyborg is an entity that makes

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only differences.

<sup>11</sup> Approximate translation: The cyborg feels at home in a postmodern world where all sorts of boundaries have ceased to have meaning: for a cyborg the boundaries between organism and machine, human and animal, the physical and non-physical world has become porous. She has no origin - the longing for a restoration of a lost unity is therefore completely alien to her.

endless connections that are looked upon in a favourable light. At the same time, however, because it is such a free-floating sign, the figure of the cyborg threatens to fulfill the logical outcome of the western ideal of the completely independent and autonomous individual (Prins, 1992: 76). Playing on the fantasy of the disembodied disembedded man in total control, Haraway (1991: 151) observes that:

The cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic telos of the “West’s” escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last of all dependency, a man in space.

To combat the cyborg’s radical differentiation, Haraway introduces the notion of affinity as a means to establish connections that are enabling for political engagement and action. Haraway’s figuration of the cyborg also as alternative model for political subjectivity and specifically feminist subjectivity, gives further substance to this endeavour.<sup>12</sup>

Pressed for making a commitment, Haraway (1991: 19-20) concedes that whilst being an inhabitant of a post-gender world, the cyborg is female, a “bad girl”, she is a bad girl who is trying not to become “Woman”. Through imagining the cyborg as “bad girl”, Haraway distances herself explicitly from the tendency exhibited by some feminists to endorse a view of “woman” as the direct opposite of “man”. In direct opposition to the cultural ecofeminist revaluation and celebration of the “feminine”, Haraway (1989: 256) expresses her view on this matter as follows:

Holism, appreciation of intuitive method, presence of “matriarchal” myth systems and histories of women’s cultural innovation, cultivation of emotional and cognitive connection between humans and animals, absence of dualist splits in objects of knowledge, qualitative method subtly integrated with long term quantification,

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<sup>12</sup> Contrary to popular interpretations of the poststructuralist declaration of the “death of the subject” as having given politics and political agency the final blow, Haraway departs from such an interpretation. Part of the objective of the *Cyborg Manifesto* is to come to terms with the demise of former grand narratives and the social environment that these changes are taking place in. In fact, it is most evident that Haraway is trying to redefine politics and imagine different routes open for the continuation of critical political engagement in a cultural era that is characterised by an atmosphere of apathy and disillusionment of once optimistic radical revolutionaries.



extensive attention to female social organisation as the infrastructure grounding more visible male activities, and lack of culturally reinforced fear of loss of personal boundaries in loving scientific attention to the world are all perfectly compatible with masculinism in epistemology and male dominance in politics.

Whilst being vehemently critical of white male patriarchal culture, Haraway has no nostalgic yearning for a return to an untainted female culture long lost – in short, there is no paradise out there to rediscover and return to. The cyborg “is not innocent, it was not born in a garden” (Haraway, 1991: 18). Uncompromisingly, in response to the tendency to (uncritically) revalue feminine activity and “name it as the ground of life”, Haraway (1991: 180) dares to demand:

What about all the ignorance of women, all the exclusions and failures of knowledge and skill? What about men’s access to knowing how to build things, to take them apart, to play? What about other embodiments? (Haraway, 1991: 181).

As such then, *A Cyborg Manifesto* is also a compelling call upon women to inform themselves adequately of the effects that a rapidly changing contemporary culture has on their lives and to be actively involved in shaping their lifeworlds. Giving credit to the liberatory side of technological advancement, Haraway (1991: 181) writes that it “is not just that science and technology are possible means of great human satisfaction”, at the same time she also warns “as well as a matrix of complex dominations”. Thus, those others who are especially vulnerable to escalating technological advancement, particularly in the workplace, and whose lives will be drastically influenced, need to take heed. Women in particular are urged to become literate in certain skills that would enable them to effectively fend for themselves, as the key word operating in this context is “survival” (Haraway: 1990: 26).

To become competent participants in a high-tech world, little choice is left but to take what was previously perceived to be the tools of oppression in our/their own hands. To achieve this, Haraway invites women to follow the example set by the cyborg and not only become literate in techno-land, but to embrace that

which has been the object of feminist contempt, the cold and deathly machine. Contrary to the feminist tendency to resist or even detest technology as part of the male drive for dominance and control, the cyborg does not fear machines, it is an integral part of her lifeworld, to the extent that she embraces it as an aspect of her embodiment. Haraway (1991: 180) writes:

Intense pleasure in skill, machine skill, ceases to be a sin, but an aspect of embodiment. The machine is not an it to be animated, worshipped, and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of embodiment ... Up till now (once upon a time), female embodiment seemed to be given, organic, necessary: and female embodiment seemed to mean a skill in mothering and its metaphoric extensions.

Through the figure of the cyborg Haraway's disavowment of the metaphors that are identified with woman, such as the organic, natural, the body, and so forth is expressed: her project being to deconstruct it. Fittingly, Haraway (1991: 181) concludes that to be a cyborg:

... means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories. Though both are bound in a spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess.

In the next section, I would like to explore the notion of the Inappropriate/d Other as another dimension of the image of the cyborg. In Haraway's writing the two images are intertwined. As different instances of the same (multifaceted) being however, the above exposition of the cyborg can be distinguished from the Inappropriate/d Other, in that the latter, along with figures such as "Eccentric subjects" and "women of colour" is specifically presented as an alternative notion of a female feminist self or subjectivity.

## ii) **The Inappropriate/d Other**

Following Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1989), Haraway (1992b: 86) employs the notion of the "Inappropriate/d Other" in her undertaking of the difficult task of articulating a space from which it is possible to imagine the "human in a post-humanist landscape". What she sets out to do is to show how the Inappropriate/d Other

signifies an alternative notion of the human or feminist subjectivity. It is in this context that the Inappropriate/d Other as model for female feminist subjectivity emerges as Haraway depicts her by the figure of Sojourner Truth that personifies a specific black female feminist subject. During the course of this discussion, it will become clear that through the figure of Sojourner Truth, the Inappropriate/d Other operates not only as feminist subjectivity, but also as a specific gendered, racial subjectivity. As such, it is evident that for Haraway, there is a multitude of Inappropriate/d Others. In this discussion "women of colour" and "eccentric subjects" are also introduced as examples of Inappropriate/d Others.

In her essay *Ecce Homo, Ain't (Ar'n't) I a Women, and Inappropriate/d Others: The Human in a Posthuman Landscape* (1992b), that was written in an effort to refigure humanity, we are introduced to Haraway's notion of the Inappropriate/d Other as offering an alternative notion of subjectivity. The context that the notion of the Inappropriate/d Other is articulated in, is one which is trying to come to terms with the formidable task of rearticulating a notion of the "human" that is other to

the Enlightenment figures of coherent and masterful subjectivity, the bearers of rights, holders of property in the self, legitimate sons with access to language and the power to represent, subjects endowed with inner coherence and rational clarity, the masters of theory, the founders of states and fathers of families, bombs and scientific theories - in short, Man as we have come to know and love him in the death of the subject critiques (Haraway, 1992b: 87).

Haraway's vehement rejection of the concept "Man", also referred to as the "unitary subject" above, by now almost speaks for itself: throughout the history of Western imperialist culture, it has been employed in a most vicious manner to privilege and legitimate the domination of a few (literally) at the expense of many. The "common humanity" employed in this discourse of "man", turned out to be common to, or the property of, only a selected group.

In contrast to the above notion of the self then, and in keeping with contemporary feminist thinking in general, Haraway explores the notion of Inappropriate/d Other as offering an alternative notion of the human and of

(female) feminist subjectivity. This she discusses with reference to a particularly significant historical figure named Sojourner Truth. The manner in which this is done, as I have indicated above, fully recognises the numerous challenges brought about for feminist thinking by the poststructuralist critique of subjectivity. If we recall, the deconstruction of the subject is often interpreted as signaling the "death of the subject". Such talk threatens to silence women precisely at a time in history where women are at last in a position to speak for themselves. Haraway (1992b: 96) expresses her disdain with these interpretations as follows:

Nonfeminist poststructuralist theory in the human sciences has tended to identify the break-up of coherent or masterful subjectivity as the "death of the subject". Like others in newly *unstably* subjugated positions, many feminists resist this formulation of the project and question its emergence at just the moment when raced/sexed/colonised speakers begin "for the first time", that is, with an "originary" authority, to represent themselves in institutionalized publishing practices and other kinds of self-constituting practices (emphasis Haraway's).

In the same way that we have to rethink the human in a post-human world then, as feminists, we have to think through and articulate what it means for women to claim subjecthood. As such, how we articulate our selves is a matter of great complexity where caution needs to be taken. Haraway repeatedly points out that reinforcing oppressive essentialist identities that have caused great suffering, is self-undermining in more ways than one:

Consciousness of exclusion through naming is acute ... With the hard won recognition of their social and historical constitution, gender, race and class cannot provide the basis for belief in essential unity ... Gender, race and class is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism (Haraway, 1991: 155).

Uncritically affirming otherness is not only undesirable because it reinforces oppressive identities, it is also highly problematical because it too, can function

in an oppressive or exclusivist manner.<sup>13</sup> This brings us to the challenge faced by feminist theorists - how to conceive female subjectivity at a time when the concept "woman" itself is a site of contestation. The deconstruction of the notion of "woman" by feminists of color has severely problematised the appeal to shared identity as ground for political unity. An inquiry into who this "us" is, needs to be rigorously performed:

And who counts as "us" in my own rhetorical? Which identities are available to ground such a potent political myth called "us", and what could motivate enlistment in this collectivity? Painful fragmentation among feminists (not to mention among women) along every possible fault line has made the concept "woman" elusive, an excuse for the matrix of women's dominations of each other (Haraway, 1991: 155).

Feminism itself is therefore neither pure nor innocent. When subjected to scrutiny, even here an avoidance of the oppression and domination of some by others is not guaranteed. However, this revelation of the non-innocence of feminism, brings with it new possibilities that are long overdue. In this regard, Haraway (1991: 157) writes:

I do not know of another time in history when there was greater need for political unity to confront effectively the dominations of "race", "gender", "sexuality" and "class". I also do not know of any other time when the kind of unity we might help build could have been possible. None of "us" have any longer the symbolic or material capability of dictating the shape of reality to any of "them". Or at least "we" cannot claim innocence from practicing such dominations. White women, including socialist feminists, discovered (that is, were forced kicking and screaming to notice) the non-innocence of the category "woman".

Stressing the untenability of fixing the meaning of woman, Haraway (1991: 155) proceeds to assert that "there is nothing about being "female" that naturally

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<sup>13</sup> Here the problems surrounding the cultural ecofeminist affirmation of female identity and female gender identity come to mind. If we recall, the criticism that these notions of the self have received, pertain their essentialist characters. The untenability of an affirmation of a (biologically grounded) concept of the female self is evident, whilst the feminine self too has been revealed to be essentialist. Universalising gender identity, the differences that exist

binds women” and deconstructing the term further, she writes “there is not even such a state as ‘being’ female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual discourses and other social practices”. In the wake of the above critique then, shared identity can no longer serve as ground for political unity. Through trial and error feminists too have learned that to claim unity through identity is an exclusivist strategy. Differences between women cannot be accommodated and is thus ignored/negated and excluded. Instead of grounding politics in identity, or sameness, Haraway then ventures forth and offers us a different grounding for politics and this is “affinity: related not by blood, but by choice”<sup>14</sup> (Haraway, 1991: 155).

As Haraway (1991: 155) has asserted, this is not to renounce the endeavour to articulate an alternative notion of a female feminist self. On the contrary, this is a challenge undertaken by Haraway herself, but at the same time she wants to emphasise the impossibility of such an undertaking. To show awareness of *what* we are doing and *how* we go about it, is therefore of utmost importance. It is here that the notion of the Inappropriate/d Other as alternative female feminist self or subject is significant. The Inappropriate/d Other “refers to the historical positioning of those who cannot adopt the mask of either self or other offered by previously dominant Western narratives of identity and politics” (Haraway 1990: 23).<sup>15</sup> The appeal of the Inappropriate/d Other as model for feminist subjectivity is twofold. It neither buys into the notion of the self as traditionally understood, nor does it affirm otherness defined as oppositional to the self thus not simply the other of the self: “multiple, without clear boundary, frayed insubstantial” (Haraway, 1991: 177).

The Inappropriate/d Other is however not without history - it enunciates from the locatedness as other. No longer serving as mirror to the self, and no longer proper to the self, owned by the self, the other transcends its status as property of the self, thus rendering it inappropriated. Articulating a subversive and

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between women are negated or ignored.

<sup>14</sup> Haraway’s notion of political unity through *affinity* as opposed to *identity* will be elaborated upon in more detail in the section titled “The situated self”.

<sup>15</sup> We are reminded here that the Inappropriate/d Other as coinciding with neither self nor other, is also an alternative notion of the human, as is suggested by her assertion that “feminist humanity must have another shape, other gestures, but I believe we must have feminist figures of humanity. They cannot be man or woman” (Haraway, 1992b: 86).

excessive identity that disrupts its designation to the realm of otherness, by “seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other”, the other becomes inappropriate (Haraway, 1991: 175). The subversive character of the Inappropriate/d Other also effects a destabilisation of the master subject in that it “disrupt[s] the humanisms of many western traditions” thus posing a challenge the self to transform in turn.

To elucidate the notion of the Inappropriate/d Other, Haraway (1992) introduces the former slave woman Sojourner Truth, who was a speaker for feminism and abolitionism and famous for her 1851 speech in Akron, Ohio. In preparation of her discussion of Sojourner Truth as historical figure, but also metaphorical figure of poststructuralist woman, Haraway (1992b: 91), raises the following questions:

What kind of sign is Sojourner Truth - forcibly transported, without a home, without proper name, unincorporated into the discourse of (white) womanhood, raped by her owner, forcibly mated with another slave, robbed of her children, and doubted even in the anatomy of her body?

The name “Sojourner Truth” signifies “someone who could never be at home, for whom truth was displacement from home” (Haraway, 1992b: 92). These qualities of not being static or fixed, but always becoming are distinct to the Inappropriate/d Other. The reason why Sojourner Truth is such a compelling figure is because she embodies the recognition that “the essential Truth would never settle down; that was her specificity. S/he was not everyman; s/he was inappropriate/d” (Haraway, 1992b: 92-93).

The Inappropriate/d Other is further illuminated by the closing words of the famous speech that Truth delivers at a woman’s rights convention in Ohio in 1851. It ends with the words “ain’t I a woman?” a phrase which “bristles with irony” as “the identity of woman is both claimed and deconstructed simultaneously” (Haraway, 1992b: 96). This utterance affirms the identity of woman/other whilst subverting it at the same time, throwing it open to new and different meanings. Also, confronting her public in her capacity as black woman, toughened by the work she had to do as slave, she challenges the dominant

associations of womanhood with whiteness, fragility and innocence – an image that evokes male protection (Prins, 1994: 73).

What's more is at a later stage it was made known that this phrase was incorrectly transcribed. Consistent with the multiple meanings that her name signifies, Sojourner Truth's words "aren't I a woman?" makes us "rethink her story", and as Haraway puts it, "the difference matters", and in more ways than one (Haraway, 1992b: 97). Not only does it throw a different light on the specific identity of Sojourner Truth, but also the meaning of the Inappropriate/d Other as model for female subjectivity itself is deepened. The resistance to fixation and the impossibility of fixed and final definitions is reinforced by this shift from the singular "ain't" to the plural "ar'n't". This signals the complexly differentiated character of the Inappropriate/d Other, emphasising the multiplicity of differences between and also within women. The figure of Sojourner Truth as the Inappropriate/d Other, embodies what Teresa de Lauretis (1990) has named the "eccentric subject": a notion of the female subject that moves beyond her dualist constructed identity by affirming otherness whilst at the same time being in critical excess of this otherness. This recognition of difference opens up the way for the recognition and accommodation of a broader range of differences. She (De Lauretis, 1990: 116) writes:

That, I will argue, is precisely where the particular discursive and epistemological character of feminist theory resides: its being at once inside its own *social* and *discursive* determinations, and yet also outside and excessive of them. This recognition marks a further moment in feminist theory, its current stage of reconceptualisation and elaborations of new terms; a reconceptualisation of the subject as *shifting and multiply organized across variable axes of difference*; a rethinking of the relations between forms of oppression and modes of resistance and agency ... an emerging redefinition of marginality as location of *identity as disidentification* (my emphasis, FM).

Another instance of an Inappropriate/d Other identity, is Chela Sandoval's (1984) notion of "women of colour". Haraway describes this as "a hopeful model of political identity called "oppositional consciousness", born of the skills of reading webs of power by those who refused stable membership in the social categories



of race, sex and class" (Haraway, 1991: 155). Women of colour is

... a name contested at its origins by those whom it would incorporate, as well as historical consciousness marking systematic breakdown of all the signs of Man in "Western" traditions, constructs a kind of postmodernist identity out of otherness, difference and specificity (Haraway, 1991: 155).

The use of the plural "women" is a first indication that this conception of the female feminist subject is not universal, fixed and stable, but one that allows for, and accommodates differences between women and within women themselves. Moreover, it is pointed out that there lacks "any essential criterion" for identifying who is a woman of color. Membership to a collectivity such as "women of colour" is "conscious appropriation of negation" (Haraway, 1991:156). Multiple, heterogeneous and highly differentiated, Haraway (1991: 197) writes that "women of colour" as instance of the Inappropriate/d Other, denotes a "potent subjectivity synthesized from fusions of outsider identities" (Haraway, 1991: 174).

At this point, the reader might be asking him or herself of what significance the preceding discussion of Haraway's endorsement of the Inappropriate/d Other as alternative (female) feminist subject is to the rethinking of an ecological feminist notion of the self. In the next section, titled "The situated self", I hope to bring to light the interconnectedness between the different notions of the self that populate Haraway's texts as well as their relevance to ecological feminist thinking.

### **3.2 The situated self**

The notion of the situated self comes to the fore in the context of Haraway's reflection upon and engagement with the epistemological question of objective knowledge. In this discussion of Haraway's understanding of objectivity, the situated self is proposed as alternative to the apparently neutral "knowing subject" that features in rationalist epistemological thinking. A rearticulation of "objectivity" transforms not only the subject of knowledge, but also the object of knowledge: nature is redefined. By way of giving an exposition of her

understanding of objectivity, Haraway rewrites the knowing subject as situated, and she reconceptualises nature as Coyote Trickster. The ecological feminist significance of these notions of the self and nature will become evident during the course of this discussion. Brought in relation with the notions of the cyborg and Inappropriate/d Other, its relevance to an inquiry into a rearticulation of an ecological feminist notion of self is illuminated.

In her essay on objective knowledge, Haraway (1991: 184-191) shows how, for different but related reasons, given that they are mirror images of each other, both empiricism and constructivism are inadequate epistemologies. Empiricism's pretense to universally valid knowledge is criticised for being totalitarian whilst radical constructivism is shown to effect a lapse into relativism. According to Haraway (1991: 189), universalism is unacceptable because it entails a "god trick" that insists on "seeing everything from nowhere", or as Prins (1994:58) translates it "being everywhere whilst claiming to be nowhere". Concurrently its opposite, relativism, is also inadequate given that it represents "a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally" (Haraway, 1991: 191).

Whilst rejecting empiricism's pretense to "objectivity" in its universalist scientific knowledge claims, Haraway refuses to buy into the cynicism of radical constructivism. Since the assumption that we have immediate access to the world around us has been exposed to be an illusion, the claim that knowledge is *discovered* loses its credibility. Rather, argues the radical constructivist, knowledge is *produced*, thus rendering all knowledge claims equally valid, and what eventually passes off as knowledge is simply a matter of power.<sup>16</sup>

In acknowledgement of the constructivist insight that we do indeed not have immediate access to the world, Haraway points out the "rich and historically specific mediations through which we and everybody else must know the world". Resisting a full blown constructivism she argues for a position that allows us "to think that our appeals to real worlds are more than a desperate

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<sup>16</sup> Haraway would of course be the last person to deny the significant role that power plays in the production and establishment of knowledge, but as we will see, Haraway (1991: 185) rejects the assumption that we cannot make claims about "the real world". Moreover, in this context, Haraway's (1990, 1991, 1992a) constant reference to and emphasis on democratic structures and institutions are of particular relevance.

lurch away from cynicism and an act of faith like any other cult's".<sup>17</sup> As such then, Haraway (1991: 185) wants to hold on to both ends of the pole: radical constructivism and critical empiricism. That is, she attempts to carve out a space which permits us to still come up with what Haraway refers to as "faithful accounts of the world". According to Haraway however, these accounts - because we do not have un-mediated access to the world - can only be objective if we acknowledge the specific and embodied character, that is situatedness of knowledge claims (Haraway, 1991: 188).

To illustrate what she means by such a notion of objectivity, Haraway announces that the time has come for a switch of metaphors. In defiance of the predatory masculinist gaze that "scientific objectivity" denotes, Haraway sets out to reappropriate "vision" and to disengage it from its association with the detached, disembodied, penetrating scientific gaze to a concept that serves as metaphor for the non-neutrality of objective knowledge. She (Haraway, 1991: 188) writes:

I would like to insist on the embodied nature of all vision, and so reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into the conquering gaze from nowhere. This is the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation. This gaze signifies the unmarked positions of Man and White, one of the many nasty tones of the word *objectivity* to feminist ears in scientific and technological, late industrial, militarized, racist and male dominant societies (emphasis Haraway's).

A dualistically construed notion of vision is thus starkly set off against how Haraway wants to reinterpret and employ the term. The gaze signifies the power to look, pin down and control and has historically had (and still has) the seduction of total mastery, for being untouchable, indebted or answerable to no

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<sup>17</sup> Aligning herself "with those of us who would still like to talk about reality with more confidence than we allow the Christian Right's discussion of the Second Coming" Haraway reminds the reader of the potentially negative consequences of a radical constructivism taken to its extreme: that is a position that breaks completely with the notion "reality" (Haraway, 1991:185).

one.<sup>18</sup> In response to this fantasy of total control and by invoking her rejection of universalism, Haraway hints at the physical/material/social disasters that the dream of the disembodied gaze realises:

But of course that view of infinite vision is an illusion, a god-trick. I would like to suggest how our insisting metaphorically on the particularity and embodiment of all vision (though not necessarily organical embodiment and including technological mediation), and not giving in to the tempting myths of vision as a route to disembodiment and second-birthing, allows us to construct a usable, but not an innocent doctrine of objectivity ... So not so perversely, objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility (Haraway, 1991: 189, 190).

To acknowledge the embodiedness of vision denotes for Haraway the impossibility of taking in a neutral stance.<sup>19</sup> This however, is not to endorse relativism. The key word here is "responsibility": it is only in our willingness to be held accountable "for what we learn how to see", that we can claim for knowledge to be objective (Haraway, 1991: 190). It follows then that "only partial perspective promises objective vision" because an acknowledgement of one's locatedness is to acknowledge that that one's view is partial, in both senses of the word: necessarily incomplete and biased (Prins, 1994: 59). It is this concession that "initiate[s], rather than closes off the problem of responsibility" (Haraway, 1991: 190).<sup>20</sup>

In their failure to meet this requirement, the inadequacy of universalism and

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<sup>18</sup> Here Haraway's critique of the scientific gaze as masculine and knowledge employed to establish power over, control and mastery, links up with the cultural and critical-transformative ecofeminist critiques of Western science and Cartesian-Newtonian thinking as sanctioning the domination and control of nature and women.

<sup>19</sup> Illumination of the meaning of the term embodiedness is called for here. Embodied subjectivity makes visible the "biocultural" and "empirical" aspects of subjectivity, which brings to light the material and symbolic situatedness of the self. Embodiedness therefore emphasises the corporeality of subjectivity, which in turn reminds of our mortality and our dependence on nature for survival.

<sup>20</sup> Here it can be noted that Haraway (1991: 192) qualifies this statement further and asserts that not "any partial perspective will do", but that "acknowledged and self-critical partiality" must be accompanied by a commitment to construct knowledge that generates "worlds less organized by axes of domination". For Haraway, the production of knowledge therefore has a particular ethical and political dimension.

relativism is revealed: “both deny the stakes in location, embodiment and partial perspective, both make it impossible to see well” (Haraway, 1991: 191). Given its pretensions to neutrality, universalism’s totalising, but impoverished “single vision” whose power “depends on systematic narrowing and obscuring”, refuses and makes impossible being held accountable from the outset. Relativism, too, in its “being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally” resists critical engagement. Haraway remarks that “[t]he ‘equality’ of positioning is a denial of responsibility and critical inquiry” (Haraway, 1991: 191):

In her call for situated, embodied knowledges as opposed to “various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible knowledge claims”, Haraway (1991: 191) distinguishes her notion of situatedness from an interpretation of situatedness as coinciding with the identity politics endorsed by Harding (1987). Haraway’s critique of Harding’s position is double edged. According to Haraway, although the perspectives of the subjugated are appealing because they *promise* a more adequate, sustained, objective and transforming account of the world, great care must be taken not to romanticise the view of the other. The positionings of the subjugated are not “exempt form critical re-examination, decoding, deconstruction” and she points out, “*how* to see from below” requires certain skills which make the critical difference (Haraway, 1991: 192). She writes:

A commitment to mobile positioning and to passionate detachment is dependent on the impossibility of innocent “identity” politics and epistemologies as strategies for seeing from the standpoints of the subjugated in order to see well. One cannot “be” either a cell or a molecule - or a woman, colonized person, laborer, and so on - if one intends to see and to see from these positions critically. “Being” is much more problematic and contingent ... These points also apply to testimony of the position of oneself. We are not immediately present to ourselves. Self-identity is a bad visual system. Fusion is a bad strategy of positioning (Haraway, 1991: 192).

Not only is the assumption that the view from below is necessarily *better* departed from, the existence of such a position is also challenged. Otherness too, is shot through with difference. This brings us to another reason why situatedness for Haraway does not denote identity politics. In the same way that

the illusion of self-identity is oppressive in that it obliterates difference by appropriating and ordering all difference, claiming to see from the perspective of the other can have the same effect. "Identifying" with the other, holds the danger of appropriating the view of the less powerful and thus subsuming the view of the other.<sup>21</sup> In the above citation, Haraway is playing on the impossibility of the existence of any pure or singular identity. In the light of this recognition of the heterogeneity of the other Haraway shows that the continued belief in the possibility of taking on the identity of the other, is best departed from, given that this results in a strategy of fusion that is part and parcel of a system of thinking that is reductionist and exclusivist.

Moreover, as noted, situatedness understood in terms of identity politics is rejected because it reinforces existing differences between groups of identities (Prins, 1994: 65). Haraway proceeds to question and challenge the existence of any such pure identities. The situatedness of the self that Haraway has in mind is not readily definable, it is a complex, heterogeneous self that is not simply other. Subverting and deconstructing any notion of the fixed and pure other, Haraway repeats her distrust and departure of the situated self conceived of in oppositional terms. She (Haraway, 1991: 193) writes:

There is no way to "be" simultaneously in all or wholly in any of the privileged (subjugated) positions structured by gender, race, nation and class. And that is a short list of critical positions. The search for such a "full" and total position is the search for the fetishized perfect subject of oppositional history, sometimes appearing in feminist theory as the essentialized Third World Woman. Subjugation is no ground for ontology; it might be a visual clue.<sup>22</sup>

The situated self is thus a self that is heterogeneous and incapable of being squashed into isomorphic slots or cumulative lists. The situated self is one that moves beyond oppositional identities, and instead of taking in a position of self-

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<sup>21</sup> Here the "other" refers to and invokes the other of the Western feminist, the Third World woman. Haraway uses the concept of the "other" also to designate both women's otherness and the difference and otherness amongst women themselves.

<sup>22</sup> What this quote seems to suggest is, that although Haraway wants to distinguish her position from an "identity politics" one, a complete break is not made. As Prins (1994: 66) has noted, Haraway continues to endorse an identity politics to the extent that this has a transformative effect on existing identities. That is that identities are destabilised and recoded

identity, it is marked by a critical positioning (Haraway, 1991: 193). What Haraway wants to achieve here is to articulate a notion of the knowing subject that departs from the illusion of self-identity by throwing open identities to affirm critical difference, multiplicity and fragmentation:

The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, perfect, whole, simply there and original; it is always stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another. Here is the promise of objectivity: a scientific knower seeks the subject position not of identity but of objectivity; that is, partial connection (Haraway 1991: 193, emphasis Haraway's).

It is in the acknowledgement that the knowing self is not one, identical to itself, that connection with the other is made possible. Approaching the other out of this location of difference, the illusion of identification that obliterates the other makes way for a notion of connection that is best described as "passionate detachment": joining with the other without obliterating the difference of the other (Haraway, 1991: 1).

This brings us to Haraway's rearticulation of the object of knowledge, nature, traditionally conceived of as brute matter, either appropriated as resource "for the instrumentalist projects of destructive Western societies" or serving as metaphor in discourses that express the interests of the dominating class (Haraway, 1991: 197). In contrast to this conception of "nature", Haraway insists that nature, on both material and conceptual levels, ceases to fulfill the role of resource, screen or ground. Instead, Haraway envisions nature as active actor that subverts and destabilises the human/nature and subject/object dualisms in particular (Haraway, 1990, 1-5; 1991: 197-205). This destabilisation of boundaries and affirmation of the other as independent agent challenges the self-understanding of the master and therefore also what counts as self-realisation:

Acknowledging the agency of the world in knowledge makes room for some unsettling possibilities, including a sense of the world's

independent sense of humour. Such a sense of humor is not comfortable for humanists and others committed to the world as resource (Haraway, 1991: 199).

Departing from the tendency of some cultural ecofeminists to visualise nature as “primal mother”, Haraway (1991: 176) suggests the Coyote or Trickster as image to refigure nature as witty agent.<sup>23</sup> The Coyote is an animal that can not be pinned down and controlled, it is evasive and resilient and survives because it can retreat into geographical areas that are completely inaccessible to humans. For this reason it is a trickster, forever playing pranks on humans who attempt to pin down and control it:

The Coyote or Trickster, embodied in American Southwest Indian accounts, suggest our situation when we give up mastery but keep searching for fidelity, knowing all the while we will be hoodwinked. Feminist objectivity makes room for surprises and ironies at the heart of knowledge production; we are not in charge of the world. We just live here and strike up non-innocent conversations ... (Haraway, 1991: 199).<sup>24</sup>

Locating agency on the side of nature has far reaching implications. Liberated from the status of mere matter to material-semiotic actor that generates meaning,<sup>25</sup> the subject/object dualism is effectively subverted. Conceiving of nature as agent or actor, some notion of continuity between humans and nature is established that subverts the human/nature nature dualism.<sup>26</sup> Conceiving of nature as agent can contribute to transforming the domination and instrumentalisation that characterises human treatment of the natural environment. However, it remains to be seen whether locating agency on the

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<sup>23</sup> The Coyote Trickster is a mythical character in American Indian folklore. It is a character that can change from human to animal to spirit, comfortably moving between the boundaries of the human, animal and spiritual worlds.

<sup>24</sup> Haraway's use of the Coyote Trickster with reference to both “nature” and “the world” can be confusing. In my understanding this is to emphasise that objects of knowledge are actors, and that these actors are both human and non-human. Taking this into account makes this interchangeable use of the figure of the Coyote Trickster becomes less jarring. Given the focus of my project however, I focus on the Coyote Trickster as signifying the natural environment. At the same time using these terms in such a broad sense is somewhat disconcerting, as everything in “the world” seems to enjoy the same moral status, both the rainforest and the bulldozer.

<sup>25</sup> In the next section titled *A politics of articulation*, this point will be further elaborated upon.

<sup>26</sup> This understanding is shared by Alaimo (1994: 144-146, 150).



side of nature in the manner that Haraway does, is in fact sufficient to ensure the ethical treatment of the natural environment.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4. A politics of articulation

In the preceding section titled "Refiguring the self", I have discussed the different notions of the self that can be identified in Haraway's work, namely the cyborg, the Inappropriate/d Other and the situated self. That such a rearticulation of the self necessarily has implications for how nature is conceived is evident, especially in the case of the situated self, which is accompanied by a reconceptualisation of nature as Coyote or Trickster.

Having entered the domain of ecological thinking, Haraway proceeds to elaborate upon her understanding of nature in a discussion of what she refers to as a politics of articulation. Haraway's politics of articulation is consistent with two different but related notions of nature, the one being a notion of nature as artifactual, and the other a conception of nature as social nature. The difference and connections between these two notions are discussed in detail in the sections below, titled "Nature as artifact", and "Politics and social nature". Rather than offering her audience an ethic that can serve as guideline in our treatment of the natural environment, Haraway formulates a politics of articulation instead. In the following section then, I give an exposition of Haraway's politics of articulation, central to which lies a particular notion of nature.

##### 4.1 Nature as artifact

In the opening paragraphs of her discussion of the concept of nature, Haraway, following Spivak, asserts that nature is "that which we cannot not desire" (Haraway, 1992a: 296). Despite our awareness of nature's construction as other and its deployment in the histories of sexism, racism, colonialism and class dominations, "we nonetheless find in this problematic, ethno-specific, long-lived and mobile concept something *we cannot do without, but can never have*" (Haraway, 1992a: 296, emphasis mine, FM). This, what appears to be a

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<sup>27</sup> This matter will receive further attention in the last section of this chapter that consists of an evaluation of Haraway's notions of the self, nature and politics.

paradoxical statement, gives us a glimpse of Haraway's understanding of nature. Contrary to the manner in which nature has traditionally been conceived, Haraway holds that nature cannot be represented, pinned down, its essence captured. Nonetheless, it is a "topic of public discourse" that imparts an authority "on which much turns, even the earth" (Haraway, 1992a: 296). Here Haraway is explicitly alluding to the extent to which our understanding of nature affects our treatment of nature (and others), and also our understanding of selves. Notwithstanding the impossibility of fixed and final meanings then, how we conceive of nature has far reaching implications that are determining for the continued existence of our natural environment that sustains us.

This prompts Haraway to argue that the time has come to envision and articulate a different relationship with nature than the one that has thus far been our cultural heritage. Marked by "reification, possession, appropriation and nostalgia" (Haraway, 1990: 65), this relationship is coterminous with the Western endeavour to essentialise nature, "to stabilize, and materialize nature, to police its/her boundaries" (Haraway, 1992a: 296). In the light of escalating environmental degradation and destruction and the deconstruction of dualism and fixed essences, this relation is indeed in critical need of transformation and change.

For Haraway the widespread, albeit divergent conceptions of nature that circulate in Western culture are all different expressions of the relationship with nature that is described above. The prevailing images and references to nature that abound, are all drenched in an understanding of nature that bears witness to an essentialist and dualistically construed conceptualisation of nature. Scathingly critical of these images of nature, Haraway ventures forth to reveal the underlying mechanisms of these seemingly innocent projections of nature. Commencing with a reminder that the images of nature that circulate in Western culture coincides with a brutal colonial history, she writes:

Efforts to travel into nature become tourist excursions that remind the voyager of the price of such displacements - one pays to see funhouse reflections of oneself. Efforts to preserve nature in parks remain fatally troubled by the ineradicable mark of the founding

expulsion of those who used to live there not as innocents in a garden, but as people for whom the categories nature and culture were not the salient ones (Haraway, 1992a: 296).

By revealing that nature as culture and the human's other is an artificial construction - a projected image of the self which necessarily requires an act of repression - the concept of nature is deconstructed. Haraway also illustrates how a conception of nature as opposite to culture and humans - as entity out there - lays the ground for losing sight of physical nature altogether. In apparent recognition of the inherent value of nature, grand attempts are being made to "save nature" and treasure nature's "diversity". The irony of seemingly commendable actions such as these are fully revealed when they are placed next to and contrasted with the continued systematic destruction of physical nature. Signifying a complete disconnectedness from nature, the misguidedness of projects of this kind becomes intolerable. The nature that is referred to here is the nature that we (and especially those who neither have access to large bank accounts, nor any use for nature stored away) are dependent upon for survival, and whose destruction is facilitated by institutions that profess to assist progress and development. Haraway (1992a: 296) writes:

Expensive projects to collect nature's diversity and bank it seems to produce debased coin, impoverished seeds, and dusty relics. As the banks hypertrophy, the nature that feeds the storehouses "disappears". The World Bank's record on environmental destruction is exemplary in this regard. Finally the projects for representing and enforcing human "nature" are famous for their imperializing essences, most recently reincarnated in the Human Genome Project.

The latter signals a final instance of the appropriative impulse that accompanies an essentialist notion of nature. Constructed as essence to be discovered and captured, nature is reduced to the status of object. In this way nature remains no more than an instrument in the realisation of man's self-obsessed desire to have nature under total control, or differently formulated - to have complete control over "human nature". In conclusion, Haraway (1992a: 296) criticises the different roles that nature has historically fulfilled as other, and declares them obsolete:

So, nature is not a physical place to which one can go, nor a treasure to fence in or bank, nor as essence to be saved or violated. Nature is not hidden and so does not need to be unveiled. Nature is not a text to be read in the codes of mathematics and biomedicine. It is not the 'other' who offers origin, replenishment, and service. Neither mother, nurse nor slave, nature is not matrix, resource or tool for the reproduction of man.

Rejecting, and wanting to move away from and beyond these very problematic images of "pure other" which operate to the (short-term) advantage of nobody but the master, Haraway proposes a different conceptualisation of nature as artifact. Quick to distinguish her position from a very crude form of postmodern artifactualism, Haraway distances herself from a form of hyper-productionism, according to which nature is viewed as fully malleable. Hyper-productionism is the logical consequence of a transcendental realism, according to which nature is pure other that can be discovered and known. The drama that is enacted upon this stage however, is one where there is only one actor and that is the self who projects a reflection (an oppositional at that) of himself upon what he sees as screen that is being deciphered. At the point where nature's agency is denied to the extent that it becomes the blank slate that only receives inscriptions, we are confronted with hyper-productionism, which renders physical nature obsolete.<sup>28</sup> This state of affairs signifies the culminating point of Western anthropocentrism.<sup>29</sup> In a hyper-productionist world the illusion is suffered from that, having now lost even its use value, nature is totally dispensable as it can be replicated at will. In defense of her specific understanding of artifactualism and how it contrasts with hyper-productionism, and illuminating what two seemingly opposing positions such as hyper-productionism and transcendental naturalism have in common, Haraway (1992a: 297) writes:

This is a very different vision from the postmodernist observation that all the world is denatured and reproduced in images or replicated in

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<sup>28</sup> In this discussion it is succinctly demonstrated how the material welfare of nature is crucially tied up with our understanding of the concept of nature.

<sup>29</sup> Taking this critique of anthropocentrism further, Haraway identifies and elaborates upon the relation between hyper-productionism and humanism. She (1992a: 297) writes: "[p]roductionism and its corollary, humanism, come down to the story line that man makes everything, including himself, out of the world that can only be resource and potency to his project and active agency".

copies. That specific kind of violent reductive artifactualism, in the form of hyper-productionism, actually practiced widely throughout the planet becomes *contestable* in theory and other kinds of praxis, without recourse to a resurgent transcendental naturalism. Hyper-productionism refuses the witty agency of all the actors but One; that is a dangerous strategy - for everybody. But transcendental naturalism also refuses a world full of cacophonous agencies and settles for mirror image sameness that only pretends to difference (emphasis Haraway's).

Having stated the reasons for rejecting a conceptualisation of nature in either transcendental realist or hyper-productionist terms, Haraway's notion of artifactuality calls for further illumination. Not shying away from constructivism altogether, Haraway (1992a: 297) writes that

for us, nature is made, as both fiction and fact. If organisms are natural objects, it is crucial to remember that organisms are not born; they are made in world-changing techno-scientific practices by particular collective actors in particular times and places.

Artifactualism alludes to the discursive character of nature which instead of being "discovered", comes into being at specific times in specific contexts. This however is not the last word: that Haraway's position is to be distinguished from an anthropocentric one, and taken to its extreme, a productionist one - is also crucial. The distinctive feature that marks the artifactuality of nature, is who the participants in this endeavour of constructing nature are. Haraway overcomes anthropocentrism by refiguring the parties involved in the construction of nature. This is achieved in a movement beyond the dualist constructions of culture and nature, and humans and nature that gives new meaning to who and what we perceive as actors. She (Haraway, 1992a: 297) writes:

The actors are not all "us". If the world exists for us as nature, this designates a kind of relationship, an achievement among many actors, not all of them human, not all of them organic, not all of them technological. In its scientific embodiments as well as other forms nature is made, but not entirely by humans; it is a co-construction amongst humans and non-humans.

Tearing through the human/nature dualism, nature's status as object is surmounted and refigured as active agent. Here the image of nature as "Coyote Trickster" (1991) as "material-semiotic actor" whereby nature is imaged as actively generating meaning, is recalled (Haraway, 1991, 1992a: 298). Doing away with the assumption that nature is an entity that exists separately from humans, Haraway states that nature's boundaries are established in the interaction between humans and non-humans, she writes:

Objects, like bodies, do not pre-exist as such. Similarly, nature cannot pre-exist as such ... Nature is a commonplace, a powerful discursive construction, effected in the interactions among material-semiotic actors, human and not (Haraway, 1992a: 298).

Faithful to her commitment of acknowledging and engaging with nature on conceptual and material levels and showing how they are bound up with each other, Haraway shifts her focus to another aspect of nature as part of our everyday environment. In her discussion of social nature Haraway brings together the social with the natural. In what follows I discuss Haraway's notion of social nature and its political implication referred to as a politics of articulation.

#### **4.2 Politics and social nature**

Displaying similar features, the concepts of nature as "social" and "artifactual" meet and reinforce each other in Haraway's politics of articulation. Similar to the view of nature as artifact, the conceptualisation of nature as *social nature* diverges from a conception of nature "out there" and in need of re-presentation. As such, the concept of social nature links up with the artifactuality of nature in which the rigid separations that mark the human/nature and culture/nature dualisms are transcended. As part of the movement away from an essentialist and dualist representability of nature, the notion of social nature promotes a politics of articulation as opposed to a politics of representation.

Introducing us to a particular approach to environmental politics, Haraway argues that the difference between conceiving of nature as social nature and conceiving nature as entity out there waiting to be *discovered* and *represented*,

is justice. To illustrate her point, Haraway contrasts a politics of "saving nature" with a politics of "social nature". The former is riddled with images of nature as empty space, pure, "uncontaminated" by humans, national parks and walled off reserves being exemplary in this regard. Picking up on an earlier reference to the injustices that accompanied the construction of these images of nature, she cites the Amazonian rain forests as example of such a construction. Only after the greater proportion of what had originally amounted to six to twelve million indigenous people had been "sickened, enslaved, killed, and otherwise displaced from along the rivers, could Europeans represent Amazonia as "empty" of culture, as "nature", or, in later terms, as a purely "biological" entity (Haraway, 1992a: 309).

In opposition to the above conception of nature which effects a politics of "saving nature", Haraway endorses the concept of social nature as designating an altogether "different organization of land and people" (Haraway, 1992a: 309). "Social nature" alludes to a concept of nature where nature is not conceived in isolation from culture or humans, but as habitat, which throws a different light on how addressing environmental issues should be approached. Such a notion of nature paves the way for a politics not of representation where nature is spoken for, but of articulation, where all interest groups are given a voice. The point Haraway wants to make is that in the same way that social nature is a more just image of nature, a politics of articulation is a more just way of practicing politics, and the suggestion is made that this will generate just decisions and consequences.

The operations and effects of a politics of representation in opposition to a politics of articulation are illustrated as follows. Integral to the discourse of "saving nature", are images and agents that are employed "to represent, to reflect, to echo, to act as ventriloquist for the 'other'" (Haraway, 1992a: 309). A politics of representation employs a dualistically conceived notion of nature as devoid of agency, which evokes echoes of Marx that "they cannot represent themselves, that they must be represented". Such a politics of representation is however more likely to erase the other and obliterate the interests of others (Haraway, 1992a: 308). Losing sight of the fact that "nature" exists not in a vacuum, but as part of a specific context, those who are in closest proximity to

nature are depicted as posing the greatest threat to "nature". In Haraway's discussion, the jaguar and fetus are employed as examples of nature. She (Haraway, 1992a: 311) writes:

The effectiveness of such representation depends on distancing operations. The represented must be disengaged from surrounding and constituting discursive and non-discursive nexuses and relocated in the authorial domain of the representative. Indeed the effect of this magical operation is to disempower precisely those - in our case, the pregnant woman and the peoples of the forest - who are close to the now represented "natural" object. Both the jaguar and the fetus are reconstituted as objects of a particular kind - as the ground or the representational practice that *forever* authorizes the ventriloquist ... The represented is reduced to the permanent status of recipient of action, never to be co-actor in an articulated practice *among unlike, but joined social partners* (my emphasis, FM).

In its failure to acknowledge the social aspect (and by implication, artifactuality) of nature, a politics of representation has a silencing effect in its acts of objectification. Here it is necessary to emphasise that the claim to articulate derives not from "being" nature, nor having the power to speak *for* nature but to articulate from a position of relationality.<sup>30</sup> Haraway conveys this point succinctly when she discusses how a defense of nature grounded in social nature differs from a defense grounded in a dualistically conceived notion of nature. Here, she is referring to the different groups of peoples of the Amazonian forests whose fight to protect nature is a significant example of a politics of articulation as opposed to representation:

Their position as defenders derive not from a concept of "nature under threat", but rather form a relationship with [the forest as the protective covering in their own elemental struggle to survive]. In other words, their authority derives not from the power to represent from a distance, nor from an ontological natural status, but from a

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<sup>30</sup> That Haraway's (1992a: 31) notion of relationality is not a limited or limiting one, is conveyed by her assertion that "assuredly North Americans, Europeans and the Japanese among others, cannot watch from afar as if we were not actors, willing or not, in the life and death struggles of the Amazon". At the same time, I am not hesitant to stress that this is a



constitutive social relationality in which the forest is an integral partner, part of natural/social embodiment. In their claims for authority over the fate of the forest the resident peoples are articulating a social collective entity among humans, other organisms, and other kinds of non-human actors (Haraway, 1992a: 310).

From the above it is clear that social nature is intertwined with and gives expression to artifactual nature. She (1992a: 310) elaborates further:

Social nature is the nexus I have called artifactual nature. The human "defenders of the forest" do not and have not lived in a garden; it is from a knot in the always historical and heterogeneous nexus of social nature that they articulate their claims. Or perhaps it is within such a nexus that I and people like me narrate a possible politics of articulation rather than representation.

Here Haraway's story comes full circle, which brings us to what in my mind is suggestive of the ethic (albeit a very slim one indeed), that runs through Haraway's figuration of nature. If we recall her initial citation of Spivak's phrase that nature is "that which we cannot not desire", this is illuminated somewhat. We cannot represent nature, because representation depends on possession of a "passive resource, a silent object, a stripped actant" (Haraway, 1992a: 313). It is therefore suggested that for Haraway, to engage ethically with nature an acknowledgement of nature beyond these terms is required. By figuring nature as artifactual, social nature, nature is released from its status as object, thus challenging our illusion of having the power over nature, and ability or authority to represent nature. Her promotion of artifactual nature signals a rejection of the pretense that we can *know* nature in the sense of discovering the objective facts about nature, the essence of nature. This is not to suggest that we can not learn about nature, but this knowledge of artifactual social nature is a co-construction effected by human and non-human actors. In the awareness that we are dealing with the Coyote Trickster, our knowledge and authority is therefore always relativised somewhat, in that it is never fixed nor final, but always provisional. In conclusion then, Haraway (1992a: 312) suggests that to address the destruction of the natural environment, we must not move "back to nature" as in empty

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relationality that is not untouched by differences.

wilderness, which implies an adherence to “philosophical realism”, rather, she maintains, “where we must move is not ‘back’ to nature but elsewhere, through and within artifactual social nature”. In this way, the dualist conception of nature is destabilised, and through such a non-dualist conception of nature, a more inclusive environmental politics, consisting out of a range of (complexly differentiated) voices is facilitated.

Having discussed Haraway’s politics of articulation which is informed and strengthened by her conceptions of nature as Coyote Trickster, artifactual and social, I would now like to close this chapter with an evaluation of her contributions to a reconceptualisation of the self and nature, along with her politics of articulation.

## **5. An evaluation of cyber-(eco)feminism**

In the following section I will conduct an evaluation of Haraway’s contributions towards a reconceptualisation of the self, nature and politics. Notwithstanding the fact that Haraway does not articulate a specifically ecological feminist notion of the self, that the notions of the self that do feature in her work are of ecological and feminist significance, is evident. In this evaluation, I hope to shed further light on its relevance by comparing the insights articulated from a cyber-(eco)feminist perspective with the contributions that are articulated by cultural and critical-transformative ecological feminism. In the section titled “An assessment of the cyborg” I evaluate the figure of the cyborg as it has been received by ecological and (eco)feminist thinkers. This is followed by an evaluation of the Inappropriate/d Other and the situated self in the section titled “An assessment of the Inappropriate/d Other and situated self”. What comes to the fore here is that these notions of the self can be shown to share significant features that act as remedy to some of the shortcomings that the figure of the cyborg display. Here other possibilities are opened up regarding aspects of the self that the figure of the cyborg fails to contain in a satisfactory manner. If we recall, it is also in her discussion of the situated self that we are introduced to a significant dimension of Haraway’s conception of nature which is evaluated in the section titled “Nature as Coyote Trickster”. Following this, Haraway’s politics of articulation, with reference to her concepts of social and artifactual

nature is assessed in the section titled "Social nature and a politics of articulation".

## 5.1 An assessment of the cyborg

### i) The figure of the cyborg

The amount of enthusiasm with which the cyborg has been received in some feminist circles (Braidotti, 1994a, 1994b; Balsamo, 1996) seems to have been tempered somewhat by the caution with which ecological and feminist philosophers have greeted the figure of the cyborg. The hesitancy that has been expressed pertains to the manner in which the non-dualist character of the figure of the cyborg manifests itself. This is apparent in the purported post gender character of the cyborg and the world it inhabits. One response is formulated by Halsema and Van Lenning (1995: 449) who question the possibility of the continued existence of the feminist project if a post gender world is what is strived towards, which leads them to question the feminist character of the cyborg.

That Haraway's figuration of the cyborg is prescriptive, but also very much descriptive, is also the case. This is emphasised by her repeated assertions that the cyborg already exists, that we are *all* cyborgs (Haraway, 1991a: 179) and that we have no choice but to be cyborgs (Haraway, 1991b: 68). More so than striving towards a world beyond gender, this assertion too gives reason for caution. Haraway seems to suggest that we already inhabit a world beyond gender, a world beyond dualism.<sup>31</sup> This might be so to a certain extent but that we continue to live in a society where sex/gender continues to function as ordering principle, can hardly be contested. Halsema and Van Lenning (1995: 453) who assert that for the time being daily reality remains firmly grounded in old patterns affirm this. Haraway thus seems to be slightly hasty in her claim

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<sup>31</sup> That non-dualism itself offers no guarantee regarding the transformation of traditional gender patterns is also pointed out by De Castro (1994: 34-45) who conducts an investigation of the use of the Internet. It is in this environment, which is held to be an exemplary space for the destabilisation of previously salient dualisms that traditional patterns persist. In this regard Halsema and Van Lenning (1995: 450) remark that even in virtual reality, traditional gender patterns prevail.

that we already live in a world that is beyond dualism and beyond gender.<sup>32</sup>

It has also been remarked that maintaining that we live in a post gender world is damaging to feminism and feminist politics as this functions to undermine the ability to speak about women (Alcoff, 1988). That this is indeed the case is true. This concern is however slightly ameliorated if Haraway's use of the term post gender is interpreted not as denying the significance of gender, but as an attempt to bring to light the complexities involved when we speak of gender; that is that gender is not the only axis of difference that structure identity and power relations. Gender is of course only one of a range of differences that we need to take heed of when we speak of women (Scott, 1985: 1075; 1989: 216), but at the same time it is one that cannot be ignored. In further elaboration on this point, Prins observes that Haraway's movement beyond gender is not to deny women's agency. She writes:

Het verlies van een duidelijke sekse-identiteit staat niet gelijk aan het verlies van vrouwelijk actorskap. Volgens Haraway is het heel goed mogelijk die idee van vaste sekse-identiteiten los te laten zonder daarmee vrouwen het vermogen te handelen te ontnemen (Prins, 1994: 65).<sup>33</sup>

Thus, a departure from a fixed gender identity is not necessarily undermining to feminist politics, and, as we will see at a later stage, it can also be shown to enable a more inclusive form of feminist politics. More on this later.

The cyborg's movement beyond dualism that is manifested in a post gender character has received criticism also from an ecological feminist perspective. In this regard, Alaimo writes that "ecofeminists reaffirm [the link between women and nature] in order to fight for both women and nature" (Alaimo, 1994: 141). According to Alaimo (1994: 140-150), to embrace the figure of the cyborg

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<sup>32</sup> If what Haraway is trying to communicate is that we must *strive* towards a world where gender is no longer a salient ordering principle, how we should envision such a world should be elaborated upon in more detail. In the absence of such an explication, it might be asked whether Haraway is perhaps not a little hasty here, if she is not skipping a transformative moment in her quest to move beyond dualism. As I hope to show, the endorsement of the Inappropriate/d Other and situated self does, however, signal such a moment of pause.

<sup>33</sup> Approximate translation: giving up a clear gender identity is not to give up women's agency. According to Haraway it is very much possible to let go of fixed gender identities without impeding women's agency.

would mean that “women give up their privileged ecofeminist position as comrades with nature”. In Alaimo’s view, this is to “abandon a female connection with nature” which is irresponsible, as such a leap “to a “post gender” environmentalism ignores the interdependent constructions of women and nature” (Alaimo, 1994: 149). Illustrating the insufficiency of such a disregard of gender, she quotes social ecologist Murray Bookchin (1971: 17), saying that “both men and nature have always been common victims of hierarchical society”. In response, Alaimo points out that an antihierarchy stance thus formulated, is unsatisfactory as “some ‘men’ have been more consistently dominated than others” (Alaimo, 1994: 149).

I agree with Alaimo that denying a link between the oppression of women and nature is indeed irresponsible. I do however hesitate to accept her argument as a whole. This pertains to the ambiguity of her statement that women occupy a relation of “privileged comradeship” with nature. In this regard I find myself asking whether this “comradeship” with nature is indeed a “privilege” that should receive uncritical support. Should we not ask how this privilege came about? Why are we affirming such a privileged relation, and what are the effects of doing so? Is it in either women or nature’s interest to perpetuate such a privileged relation and to limit the connection with nature to women? What she understands to be the connection between women and nature might shed some light on this ambiguity. As we have seen a reaffirmation (accompanied by a celebration) of the connection between women and nature is potentially self-undermining for ecofeminists.

Some ecofeminists do however illuminate this link between women and nature as part of a more critical exercise where it is argued that the oppression of the one cannot be addressed without addressing the oppression of the other, and that both concepts need to be thoroughly transformed. That Alaimo’s position is compatible with the latter approach, is suggested by her rejection of stereotypical conceptions of women and nature that serve to perpetuate the domination of the other (Alaimo, 134-138, 149). She also refers to women and nature as constructions that need to be rearticulated so that they can continue to be “comrades in a struggle that would benefit them both” (Alaimo, 1994: 149). Having reached some clarity on what Alaimo perceives to be a connection

between women and nature, I still have difficulty with her assertion that women have a *privileged* connection with nature. Alaimo seems to suggest that endorsing the notion of the cyborg is to give up women's privileged comradeship with nature along with the claim that there is a connection between the oppression of women and nature. In my view, however, it does not follow that because there is a link between the oppression of women and nature, women have a relation of *privileged* comradeship with nature. The soundness of this critique as a whole is thrown into doubt.<sup>34</sup>

If endorsing a figure such as the cyborg prevents us from arguing that there is a link between the oppression of both women and nature, Alaimo's criticism is in my view perfectly legitimate. Whether we should reject the cyborg because it makes women's comradeship with nature less self-evident, is another question altogether. That is, such a gesture seems to insist on the perpetuation of the privileged connection between women and nature, a connection that is dubious from the start. Moreover, it can be argued that this would have the effect of restricting "true" comradeship with nature to women, a limitation that not only grants women a privilege that is suspect, but one that is also counterproductive in a political sense, in that this tends to place an uneven burden of responsibility on women. It serves to undermine broader involvement in addressing environmental affairs and issues and hinders a thorough transformation also of the (in masculine terms conceived) self.

## ii) The technophilia of the cyborg

Despite the amount of space granted to the above evaluation, the post gender character of the cyborg can almost be said to be the least problematic aspect of the cyborg. Criticism of the figure of the cyborg is not limited to this characteristic and takes on a much more serious tone regarding some of its other features. Contrary to the general trend in feminist thinking, we have seen that

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<sup>34</sup> This questioning of the notion of a "privileged" comradeship is not to deny the necessity to think through women's relation with nature, but thus formulated, Alaimo initially seems to be hovering onto endorsing an essentialist connection between women and nature, based on shared identity. Given the historical and conceptual link between women and nature, I would replace the claim of a "privileged" relation with nature, to a "different" relation to nature, a difference that warrants both recognition and some degree of compensation. However, this relation with nature should not be limited to women either, but all those who have been cast in the realm of the other.

through the figure of the cyborg, Haraway embraces technology rather than wishing away its existence and rejecting it as a whole. This refusal to simply demonise technology is of course refreshing. However, whether Haraway can allay the fears of those who are severely skeptical of technology, and whether she provides adequate measures to exercise effective control of escalating technological advancement, remains to be seen.

From an ecological feminist perspective, concern is expressed with regard to what can be described as the overtly “technophilic” character of the cyborg. More specifically, it is Haraway’s suggestion that a blurring of the human-machine boundary can contribute to a more responsible engagement with our machines that is regarded with suspicion. If we recall, she (1991: 180) writes that “we can be responsible for our machines; *they* do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are *they*”. In reaction to this, Alaimo (1994: 147) points out that “thinking of machines as part of ourselves doesn’t necessarily mean that the machine won’t be worshipped or feared”. In Alaimo’s view, this argument ignores our current cultural context where the blurring of the human-machine boundary is already a reality and not a very appealing one at that. Alaimo (1994: 147-148) writes:

If Haraway’s argument for machine/body blurring is to make our machines less threatening, more controllable, less Other, a phallogocentric discourse has already accomplished these goals with a destructive twist ... In this culture the predominant ideology connected to the blurring of machines and humans is one of masculinist force and domination, an erotics of power particularly terrifying in a nuclear age.

What Haraway does not address in a satisfactory manner then, is the fact that we live in a culture where a blurring of the human/machine boundary is already a reality (one which she is clearly very much aware of). The form that this blurring takes on is reflective of disconnectedness, an obsessive love for technology, and the power that it yields over others.<sup>35</sup> The technophilia that marks contemporary

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<sup>35</sup> Zimmerman’s (1994: 370-372) discussion of Haraway’s encouragement of women and men to engage with technology, also touches upon this point. With reference to extreme forms that the fascination with virtual reality threatens to take on, he (1994: 372) writes: “this fantasy is the latest version of the death denying masculinist ego’s denial of mortality, limitation, and

Western culture is an extension of a culture characterised by domination of others and a relationship with technology that has allowed extensive damage of the natural environment, and continues to pose great threats and risks to our natural environment. In Alaimo's opinion, these are obstacles that the cyborg does not seem to be able to avoid or overcome. It fails to convince that the pleasures of boundary confusion are of a sort that can disengage technophilia from a phallogocentric politics of domination, and that a feminist technophilic position such as the one endorsed by Haraway, does not merely bolster the dominant technoglorification that functions to the detriment of women and nature (Alaimo, 1994:148). As we have seen however, Haraway does not pretend to give any guarantees, she seems only too aware of the dangers that lurk in the figure of the cyborg being the "illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism", but she expresses her hope that the cyborg "like other illegitimate offspring" will be "exceedingly unfaithful to its origins".

It appears that Haraway is calling upon feminists to overcome their aversion to technology and engage with it in a responsible manner. In my understanding she seems to want to communicate that given the power that technology can potentially have over our lives, we simply *have* to face up to the impact of technological advancement and take responsibility for our machines in order to prevent them from dominating us. This is the only hope that exists for thwarting the relations of domination that are facilitated by technological advancement on the one hand, and for challenging the dominant cultural role and meaning of technology as an extension of the alienated disembodied mind. The question that follows is whether or how the cyborg can be shown to be different? Is there anything about the cyborg that would prevent it from simply following the patterns already firmly entrenched in Western culture? The moment has therefore arrived for us to determine whether the figure of the cyborg is competent to actively challenge and subvert the destructive manifestations of technological progress. Keeping in mind these questions, I would now like to move on to another aspect of the cyborg that has caused discomfort. Linked to the issues pointed out above, an examination of this problematic can shed light on our final valuation of the figure of the cyborg.



### iii) Radical differentiation

In the discussion of the figure of the cyborg, it was observed that the highly differentiated cyborg threatens to realise a vision of the wholly autonomous, independent (read: disconnected) individual, a figure which is looked upon with little short of horror. Aware of the dangerous ground she occupies, Haraway introduces the notion of "affinity" as a mechanism to curb the cyborg's radical differentiation into infinity. This signals an attempt to make political engagement central to the life of the cyborg along with a "no-nonsense commitment" to political transformation. Affirming her departure from identity politics, she (1991: 155) writes: "Affinity: related not by blood, but by choice, the appeal of one chemical nuclear group for another, avidity". Translated into Dutch it reads "Affiniteit: met elkaar verbonden niet door het bloed, maar deur keuze, de aantrekkingskracht van een nucleaire groep door een andere, begeerte" (Prins, 1994: 81-82). It is a notion of affinity formulated in these terms that cast doubt on the significance of the cyborg's yearning to connect. The cyborg is said to strive towards connection and connect it does, to the extent that some commentators have asked whether the cyborg "knows how to say no" (Crosby, 1989: 208), which brings us to the question "what serves as motivation for the cyborg's connections?" In this regard, Prins writes:

Een cyborg kiest haar partners op grond van aantrekkingskracht - maar hoe goed is haar oordeelsvermogen eigenlijk? En mocht dat oordeelsvermogen betrouwbaar zijn, is aantrekkingskracht eigenlijk wel voldoende basis voor het aangaan van een politieke binding? Moet er ook niet nog zoiets "ouderwets" zijn soos een goed doel waarvoor je de gesamentlike verbinding aangaat. De cyborg verhoudt zich tot de "ander" alleen op grond van aantrekkingskracht en begeerte.<sup>36</sup>

This flaw in the figure of the cyborg is not inconsistent with the depiction of the cyborg as rootless, playful entity that is bound by nothing, having no

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<sup>36</sup> Approximate translation: A cyborg chooses her partners on the basis of attraction - but how good is her judgment really? And may that judgment be reliable, is attraction a sufficient basis for forming political alliances? Should there not be something as "old fashioned" such as a good cause that we forge joint alliances for? The cyborg connects with the "other" only on the grounds of attraction and desire.

subconscious and no awareness that something may be amiss. Being fearless, the cyborg affirms all contradictions and ambivalences that come her way. This lack of vulnerability (which can also be read as a lack of connectedness in any significant sense), is what makes it impossible for the cyborg to feel with the other, she apparently has no experience of pain, a basic awareness that makes us strive for a better world.<sup>37</sup> In conclusion Prins (1992: 82) writes:

Al bewonder ik de cyborg om haar creativiteit, de manier waarop ze zogenaamde natuurlijke grenzen ontkent, en wars is van elke zuiverheidsideologie, en ben ik jaloeers op haar speelsheid en onkonvensionaliteit - de vonk slaat niet over.<sup>38</sup>

That the cyborg forges connections purely on the basis of attraction seems to locate the cyborg uncomfortably close to an intensified version of the self-interested, autonomous independent self, eliciting much concern (Doanne, 1989: 211). Seen in this light, severe doubt is indeed cast on the likelihood that the cyborg is competent to make no-nonsense commitments to social issues and political transformation.

In the final analysis then, the figure of the cyborg can be shown to lack the features that are required to render it a viable or desirable alternative notion of the self. One of the main weaknesses of the cyborg lies in its inability to critically reflect on the ethical status and implications of its desires which I hope to have shown, is consistent with the particular form that its radically differentiated character takes on.<sup>39</sup> It is in the light of these observations that I would now like to turn to an evaluation of the Inappropriate/d Other and the situated self as alternative conceptions of a more specific (female) feminist self beyond dualism and essentialism.

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<sup>37</sup> See Doanne's (1989) article, *Cyborgs, Origins, and Subjectivity*, for putting forth a similar argument.

<sup>38</sup> Approximate translation: Although I admire the cyborg for her creativity, the manner in which she disavows so-called natural boundaries, and is loathe of every ideology of pureness, and although I am jealous of her playfulness and unconventionality - she fails to convince.

<sup>39</sup> For example, how likely is it that a young mobile and technophilic urban individualist will critically reflect on the environmental impact of the high tech consumer goods s/he so often desires? Will s/he refrain from buying a product s/he can afford on the basis that the core components was produced in a low-income country where workers are not allowed to unionize and have to work 15 hours a day?

Before I proceed to discuss the Inappropriate/d Other as alternative conception of the (female) feminist self, I would like to make a remark on this endeavour. As this discussion is framed within the context of ecofeminist thinking and a central point of departure in ecofeminist thinking is the argument that there exists a historical and conceptual link between the domination and subordination of women and nature. To conceive of an ecological feminist notion of the self is therefore incomplete if attention is not paid to how the notion of a feminist self can be reconceptualised beyond dualism and essentialism. In the light of the contributions that are made towards the articulation of a female feminist self in the previous chapters, all of which have displayed shortcomings to a greater or lesser degree, we are compelled to look further into other possibilities. As I have argued and demonstrated elsewhere, such an (ecological) notion of a feminist self is also a significant moment in the layers that constitute the ecological feminist notion the self.

## 5.2 An assessment of the Inappropriate/d Other and the situated self

In the discussion of the figure of the cyborg, Haraway's aspiration to move beyond gender was observed. At the same time she also supports the articulation of a notion of a female feminist self beyond dualism and essentialism.<sup>40</sup> The ambiguity that this creates is the result of her commitment to destabilising and subverting dualism and essentialism through an endorsement of the free play of differences on the one hand, and on the other an awareness of the historical significance of articulating differences.

It is quite evident that Haraway rejects a notion of the female self that is articulated in biological essentialist terms, and that she views a notion of the feminine self articulated in terms of relationality as complementary to the masculine self and therefore perfectly consistent with patriarchal social structures. Similar to Plumwood, who we have seen endorses a pluralist feminine self, Haraway opposes discarding a notion of a female feminist self,<sup>41</sup> and argues that the articulation of such a notion should be conducted in a

<sup>40</sup> This is stated explicitly in her essay titled *Ecce Homo, Ain't (Ar'n't) I a Woman and Inappropriate/d Others: the Human in a Posthuman Landscape* (1992b: 96).

<sup>41</sup> In this chapter, a shift can be detected from the "female self" or "feminine self" to a "(female) feminist subjectivity" which is discussed as Haraway's contribution to the articulation of an

critically affirmative mode.<sup>42</sup> The notion of the Inappropriate/d Other expresses such a critical affirmative moment, although Haraway takes this project one step further. As we have seen, a salient feature of the Inappropriate/d Other is the emphasis on differences. Feminist subjectivity is introduced as organised along diverse axes of differences, thus allowing space for the acknowledgement of complexly differentiated subjectivities that are socially and discursively constructed. The heterogeneity of the Inappropriate/d Other as alternative notion of female subjectivity therefore corrects the shortcoming displayed in Plumwood's endorsement of a pluralist feminine self that exhibits a sensitivity to differences, although an adequate engagement with differences between women is wanting.

The accommodation and affirmation of radical differentiation is a salient feature also of the situated self - not only is respect for differences central to the articulation of the situated self, but the situated self itself is radically differentiated. Haraway's consistent emphasis on differences has led me to ask yet again whether holding this view does not function to the detriment of feminist politics. As we have seen however, Haraway's notion of affinity acts to curb radical differentiation which in turn is enabling for political engagement. However it can still be asked what grounds affinity, or, how is affinity established if there seems to be so little, in fact, if we are to take Haraway seriously, apparently nothing that connects women. Formulated differently, what would motivate the enactment of affinity in the face of radical differentiation? For Haraway to take in this position, is to place herself in direct opposition to the ecofeminist valuation of some form of connectedness or continuity as conducive to ethical behaviour and similarly, political engagement. This is where Haraway's position becomes interesting, because in her view, political engagement (and I presume ethical behaviour), on the grounds of affinity is perfectly possible despite radical differences. As I interpret it then, affinity can be established not on shared identity, but rather a commitment to specific political issues shared by different women.<sup>43</sup>

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(ecological) notion of a feminist self.

<sup>42</sup> Coincidentally Haraway (1992b: 96) uses the exact words in her discussion of emerging feminist theories of "gendered racial subjectivities".

<sup>43</sup> Moreover, to envision the basis for political engagement in these terms, is in effect an invitation to all of those individuals who are committed to particular causes, thus enabling the formation of political alliances that resists any exclusivist tendencies.

This brings us full circle. In the light of the above, is it not, at closer examination of the Inappropriate/d Other, possible to assert that some degree of connection can be asserted on the grounds of otherness. Unlike the dualistically and essentialistically construed notion of the other, this otherness is an expression of Inappropriate/d Otherness: the realm of the other is not fixed and accommodates a whole range of complexly differentiated positions. Inappropriate/d Otherness marks a resistance to and transformation of the dualistically conceived other, which is suggestive of a critical positioning that presumably all those who fall into the domain of Inappropriate/d Other share. In the light of the above, is it not reasonable to ask whether it is not such a critical positioning that connects different women? This is consistent with Hampshire's (1995: 95, 99) suggestion that "dissonance" as an attribute of Inappropriate/d Others and the "complex positions" of situated selves, is what connects women (and others).

Having argued that some kind of connectedness, (albeit no longer dualistically conceived of in terms of an essentialist "identity"), can be discerned in the notions of the Inappropriate/d Other and situated self, it may be asked if otherness thus conceived does not provide a possible basis for expressing solidarity also with nature. However, a nagging question continues to trouble me. Locating connectedness in the realm of the Inappropriate/d Other and situated self, is fine and well and can be argued to facilitate organizing political action and ethical conduct. However, where does this leave us with regard to those individuals who do not share progressive political convictions? What can we appeal to when we are faced with the master who refuses to acknowledge the other? Is the above formulated notion of the self not comparable to "preaching to the converted"? Is it sufficient to locate connectedness amongst those who understand themselves as in solidarity with the other? On what basis can we convince the master of his responsibility to ethically treat and engage with the other, in particular, the natural environment? Before returning to this obstacle, I would like pay attention to Haraway's rearticulation of the concept of "nature".

### 5.3 Nature as Coyote Trickster

It is quite evident that, by conceiving of nature as "Coyote Trickster" Haraway distinguishes her position from some (cultural) ecofeminists' tendency to uncritically celebrate and endorse a notion of nature as goddess, or nurturing mother. Although the appeal to these images marks an attempt to transform nature from passive resource into an active agent, they continue to be highly problematic. Not only is such figuring consistent with the conception of nature as "threatening and withholding mother" (which, as we have seen, plays in the hands of those who see "taming and controlling" nature as the suitable treatment of nature) it also reinforces stereotypical images of nature which renders it still trapped in dualism (Zimmerman, 1994: 364). By not formulating nature in "overtly gendered" terms, Haraway steers clear from potentially debilitating images (Alaimo: 1994: 145). Moreover, her visualisation of nature as Coyote Trickster is decidedly nonanthropocentric. Casting nature as active agent succeeds in moving beyond dualism in that whilst no longer "an ahistorical passive resource for human domination", the image of the Coyote remains within the realm of nature, thus resisting assimilation and denial of difference. Nature as active agent thus resists not only "glorified mystification" but also destabilises the active/passive, human/nature, knower/known, user/used dualisms upon which an epistemology and politics of nature is based (Alaimo, 1994: 145). For these reasons, it is not surprising that Haraway's figure of nature as Coyote Trickster has been received with approval by ecological (Zimmerman, 1994) and ecofeminist thinkers (Warren 1987; Hampshire, 1995; Alaimo, 1994) alike.

Haraway's conception of nature described above indeed serves to establish continuity between humans and nature in a different, albeit analogous manner to that of Plumwood's notion of continuity between humans and nature. If we recall, Plumwood transforms the dualistic relation between humans and nature by establishing continuity between humans and nature on the ground of agency, whilst at the same time emphasising the acknowledgement of differences.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Establishing continuity in this way improves upon the transgression of boundaries characteristic of the cyborg, that is, continuity between humans and nature formulated in terms of agency suggests an acknowledgement and respect for nature's difference. The universe of the cyborg is of course also marked by differences, but as we have seen such an

Interestingly, Haraway (1992c: 90) expresses an explicit appreciation for “continuity, connection and conversation” as conducive to ethical conduct in our relation with “other worlds”, also with the natural environment. This she qualifies by stating “without the frame that leads to essentialism” (Haraway, 1992c: 90). Illuminating her point she (1992c: 90) writes: “[e]ssentialism depends on reductive identification, rather than ethical relation, with other worlds, including with ourselves. It is the paradox of *continuity and alien relationality* that sustains the tension ...” (my emphasis, FM). It is in the light of this assertion that we may ask whether this does not imply an ecological dimension to her notions of the situated self and by implication also the Inappropriate/d Other?<sup>45</sup> From an ecological perspective then, the Inappropriate/d Other and situated self in particular are cast in a favourable light. As alternative notions of feminist subjectivity that are continuous with nature as active material-semiotic agent, these two notions meet the requirement of formulating an *ecological* notion of a feminist self. It still remains to be seen, however, whether such a reconceptualisation satisfies the requirements needed for an adequately formulated ethical relation between self and nature.

#### 5.4 Social nature and a politics of articulation

In the preceding section I pointed out that Haraway’s rearticulation of nature as active agent establishes continuity between humans and nature which is conducive to ethical behaviour. This in turn can be brought in relation with Plumwood’s endeavour to establish continuity between humans and nature. In what follows, I would like assess Haraway’s notions of social nature, artifactual nature and her politics of articulation. Marking her commitment to non-dualism on the one hand and concurrently a commitment to an inclusive politics, Haraway’s conception of nature as social and artifactual emphasises the social, that is human, dimension of nature. As we have seen, Haraway rejects the notion of nature as something out there that needs to be saved, and insists on giving acknowledgement to those people for whom nature is a partner in a mutual struggle to survive. In doing so, she also candidly reminds us that nature

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acknowledgement of differences is not sufficient as it does not necessarily entail or guarantee a respect for differences.

<sup>45</sup> That the Inappropriate/d Other also functions as an alternative notion of the human, renders it an alternative notion of the self with an ecological character that is not necessarily gender

conceived in typically Western terms is a place that only the elite have access to in any case, a place which can and could only have become "wilderness" at the expense of the indigenous inhabitants whose livelihoods depend/ed on nature.<sup>46</sup> Haraway's endorsement of a politics of articulation is however not to deny the role of other articulators, but rather signals an attempt to convey the importance of giving others a voice - those others, human and unhuman whose "voices" are often obliterated by the authority of the "experts" (1992a: 314-315).

In the light of the above, two questions come to mind. Although the notion of social nature is definitely one I would support, I do wonder how this notion can help us to prevent the destruction of those parts of nature that are no longer the habitat of indigenous peoples. Perfectly in keeping with the notion of social nature this obstacle is resolved by the fact that Haraway does not perceive the act of articulation to be the privilege of indigenous peoples only, thus making it perfectly possible for those who care to articulate their case. Haraway's invokement of relationality becomes significant here. However, whilst in agreement with the need for an inclusive politics, I still wonder whether a politics of articulation, whilst most certainly necessary, is a sufficient strategy to follow in addressing environmental issues. What mechanisms does Haraway's position offer to prevent a democratically arrived at decision to destroy a rainforest? It seems that here, a more substantive valuation of nature is called for. It is here that Plumwood's more sophisticated and detailed exposition of nature formulated in the context of environmental ethics, provides substantive ethical criteria with which to evaluate the outcome and quality of democratic decisions. Her conception of nature as entity that flourishes *independently* from humans, can be argued to have an important role to play when we come to stand before a situation as the one described above. It is somewhat ironical then (given that at first glance Haraway seems to be more of a difference theorist than Plumwood) that it is Plumwood's insistence on nature's independence, concurrent with her consistent formulation of nature in terms of *continuity* and

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specific, whilst at the same time accommodating differences.

<sup>46</sup> Plumwood's (1993: 162) view on this point shows a marked resemblance to Haraway's in that she asserts that "stereotyping wilderness in either of these ways, as Same or Stranger, indicates the dilemmas of difference symptomatic of unresolved dualism ... further problems are created by hyperseparated understandings of the concept of wilderness which demands apartness of nature to the point of insisting that there can be no human influence at all on the *genuinely* natural".



*difference*, that offers us with a way out of this dilemma. Plumwood's argument is that we need to reconceive our relationship with the natural environment from one that is hyperseparated to one that is continuous. The notion of continuity that she endorses is formulated with the explicit intent to generate a relationship of respect and care based on an acknowledgement of difference. In doing so, she goes one step further than Haraway to emphasise that for the flourishing of differences, an acknowledgment of and respect for autonomy and independence is a prerequisite.

This brings us back to the figure of the cyborg, which presents us with an alternative to the isolated individual self which characterises modernist or Cartesian epistemology. The cyborg is an open system that is connected to its environment. In this way the dualist split between humans and nature is overcome. But to get rid of dualism and to acknowledge that humans are connected with nature does not amount to much from an environmental perspective since it does not guarantee a responsible interaction with that with which you connect. In a patriarchal marriage no one will dispute the fact that the husband and wife are connected, but whether they have an equal relationship in which they engage with each other in a morally responsible way by respecting the autonomy and independence of each other (which makes possible a respect for difference) is certainly disputable. In other words, the fact that the cyborg is connected to nature does not mean the cyborg will respect the autonomy and independence (read: difference) of nature. It is entirely possible to destroy that with which you are connected. Which in its turn implies the importance of safeguarding the independence or difference of nature. Plumwood provides one such a safeguard by arguing that nature should be morally considerable on the grounds that natural entities have a good of their own towards which they strive intentionally. In the final analysis of Haraway's politics of articulation, the difference between Haraway and Plumwood can be described as follows. Plumwood (1996: 140), who also stresses the importance of the free flow of information and communication, formulates this point succinctly:

It is increasingly apparent that the "interest group" politics of actually existing democracy is inadequate for ecological protection: it cannot create stable measures for the protection of nature and is unable to

recognise that nature is not just another interest group or another speaker, but the condition of all our interests and all our speech.

## 6. Conclusion

From the above, it is evident that the figure of the cyborg is one that has many facets, some of them which have more or less to contribute to the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self beyond dualism and essentialism. Articulated in the "belly of the monster", the figure of the cyborg is presented as a radically differentiated poststructuralist entity that takes pleasure in destabilising boundaries previously held sacred. The cyborg's disruption of the dualisms that underpin sexism, racism, colonialism, and naturism is most appealing. Despite the attraction that these characteristics of the cyborg hold, caution is in order. This regards the serious questions can be raised concerning the overtly technophilic character of the cyborg. Already a salient feature of masculinist Western culture, such a technophilia is viewed as promoting an eroticisation of domination of others and as fuelling a rapacious destruction and degradation of the natural environment. Concurrently, severe reservations are expressed with regard to what seems to be a dangerous leaning towards a reinforcement and intensification of the disembodied, highly individualist self. Seduced by the quest for total control over nature and human limits, such a notion of the self displays a disturbing disconnectedness from material reality. This distorted view of humans as invincible is in keeping with a disregard of our dependence on nature not only for the survival of humans, but also life on earth as we know it.

Despite its non-dualist character, the radical differentiatedness of the cyborg gives reason for pause. As I have observed, the cyborg seems unable to establish or affirm a relation of significant (ethical) connection with the other. From an ecological perspective it is argued that to convincingly overcome the dualist structure of the human-nature relation, some notion of continuity between humans and nature that also acknowledges the other's difference, is required. As such, the cyborg fails to meet the requirements that are needed to promote an ethical engagement with the natural environment. Moreover, given

the cyborg's playful affirmation of contradictions and what seems to be an indiscriminate connection with everything that comes her way, along with the seeming lack of dis-ease with the world that she inhabits, severe doubt is cast on the cyborg's competence to make no-nonsense political commitments.

In contrast, Plumwood's notion of the mutual self as an ecological self is much more promising. The difficulties that we are confronted with in the figure of the cyborg are overcome by Plumwood's strategy to establish some notion of continuity between humans and nature, but not at the expense of acknowledging differences. As we have seen, Plumwood's endorsement of the mutual self as ecological self successfully overcomes the human/nature dualism in that continuity between humans and nature is established in terms of a broadened notion of intentionality. This notion of intentionality denotes heterogeneity not only between humans and nature, but also within nature. Establishing continuity and difference in these terms that acknowledges the autonomy and independence of nature, makes possible the respect for nature's difference, as having needs and ends of its own that are strived towards intentionally. Thus conceived Plumwood's feminist notion of an ecological self is conducive to generating an ethical relation with the other that thwarts relations of domination.

The Inappropriate/d Other and situated self (albeit different instances of the cyborg), rectify some of the deficiencies of the cyborg. The Inappropriate/d Other, is articulated as an alternative female feminist subjectivity that is socially (materially) and discursively (symbolically) constructed along variable axes of differences. Given its critical and reconstructive affirmation of otherness along with a thorough engagement with differences between and within women, this notion of a female feminist subjectivity is positively received. Moreover, regarding the question how to conceive of an ecological notion of a feminist self that resists an essentialist relation of identification between women and nature without forsaking women's alliance with nature, the question is posed whether shared otherness (Inappropriate/d otherness) can not be fruitfully employed here. The suggestion is made that Inappropriate/d otherness can be viewed as a basis for alliance not only between different women, but also for situating women with nature. This proposal receives further support in Haraway's discussion of

the situated self as alternative female knowing subject that overcomes the sharp separation between the knowing subject and object of knowledge. Here Haraway's depiction of nature as material semiotic actor that refuses to be pinned down and controlled also emerges as Inappropriate/d Other. The ecological character of Haraway's notion of female feminist subjectivity is laid bare by sharing with nature a socially and discursively constructed complexly differentiated Inappropriate/d otherness.

Compared to Plumwood's notion of a pluralist feminine self that fails to overcome universalising female identity, these notions of female feminist subjectivity pose a more viable alternative. In keeping with the development in contemporary feminist theory, the situated self and Inappropriate/d Other are complexly differentiated embodied subjectivities that are socially and discursively inscribed. In contrast to the cultural ecofeminist valorisation of the female body, the embodiedness that these notions of female subjectivity denotes, emphasises the materiality of subjectivity. That is, the body is biologically, socially and discursively marked. The appeal to embodiedness is not to lapse into a regressive essentialism, the marked body is an interpreted body, but the body is not a clean slate that passively receives inscriptions. Embodied subjectivity, in terms of which the body is recognised as bio-cultural being, is to emphasise the materiality of discourse and therefore the cultural and social specificity as opposed to the neutrality of subjectivity.

Haraway's conception of nature as Coyote Trickster that locates agency in nature, signals a creative transformation of nature as it has traditionally been conceived, and resists a lapse into anthropocentrism. Consistent with the ecological character of the female feminist subjectivity noted above, this refiguration of nature coincides with Plumwood's nature as continuous but also different from humans. As Inappropriate/d Other – which we have seen is a differentiated other - the differences within nature seems to be accommodated as well. In keeping with her integration of the social and discursive, the material and symbolical, another notion of nature is introduced by Haraway.

The importance of Haraway's politics of articulation that is informed by a conception of nature as social nature, lies in its appeal to give equal

consideration to the arguments and interests that are articulated by those whose (complexly differentiated voices) are often silenced by the authority of the experts. Haraway's employment of the notion of relationality is important in this regard. In the context of social nature, relationality acquires the meaning of living in material relationship with and close proximity to nature. This might come across as privileging the voices not only of those who see nature as partner in a mutual struggle to survive, but also those who are traditionally identified with nature, women and others. Haraway avoids the charge of privileging the voices of those that live in and are perceived as occupying a closer proximity to nature by stressing that relationality is not restricted to a physical or symbolical proximity to nature. What is communicated here is that the different relations to nature that can be identified, for example the woman's relation to the fetus, has to be acknowledged and taken seriously so that those who are directly affected are not silenced by the experts. In this way, compensation for the domination and subordination of the other can take place in a setting that is predisposed to negotiation and communication. Like Plumwood who also stresses the embeddedness of self in relationships, Haraway also rethinks nature on a conceptual level, as artifact and Coyote Trickster. Haraway's inclusive politics of articulation therefore deserves serious consideration and could be employed to address a wide range of political issues. This brings us to Haraway's engagement with technology.

Although the cyborg as half-human half-machine is most definitely not a desirable alternative notion of an ecological feminist self, Haraway's confrontation of the powerful impact of technology deserves recognition. Unlike Haraway, Plumwood avoids the issue of technology in her formulation of self and concomitant ethic, which is most unfortunate. Haraway's stance towards technology is insightful in that she resists the temptation to demonise technology or to avoid the topic altogether. Aware of the risks involved in a culture marked by escalating technological advancement she calls upon us to educate ourselves and actively engage with these developments so as to curtail its harmful effects on humans and nature.

Significant comparisons can be drawn between cyber-(eco)feminism and critical-transformative ecofeminism. This is made apparent by the fact that like

Plumwood whose notion of the mutual self is a post-rationalist feminist subjectivity, Haraway submits the Inappropriate/d Other also as an alternative notion of the human in a post-human landscape. Like the mutual self then, the Inappropriate/d Other is not necessarily female, but it allows for the articulation of specificity. In this regard it can be asked whether such an inclusive feminist subjectivity does not erase differences that continue to affect different social groups. This can be illustrated by playing off the critically positioned black South African woman against the critically positioned white South African male. Given the complexly differentiated character of the Inappropriate/d Other however, differences in terms of relative positions of power and meaning are not negated.

I would like to conclude that despite their obvious discrepancies, there are certain points of significant overlap in the respective notions of the self and nature that *cyber-(eco)feminism* and *critical-transformative ecofeminism* articulate. As we have seen, some aspects of Haraway's notions of the self and nature exhibit significant features that are required towards a conceptualisation of an ecological feminist notion of the self. This is particularly evident in her articulation of the Inappropriate/d Other and situated self as alternative female feminist subjectivities. Haraway's notion/s of female feminist subjectivity offer a more suitable alternative to the pluralist feminist self that Plumwood endorses. This is not only for its complexly differentiated socially discursive character, but also for the ecological dimensions of these notions of a feminist self. As Plumwood also emphasises, this makes possible a positioning of women as situated *with* nature. Haraway's articulation of nature as artifact and as Coyote Trickster that imparts agency to nature is also most commendable, not only for moving beyond anthropocentrism, but for establishing continuity between humans and nature. In the final analysis I would like to remark that Haraway's concepts of nature are not wholly unproblematic. Articulated within the context of feminist epistemology, the refiguration of nature as Coyote Trickster is of course a welcome departure from the harsh separation between knowing subject and the object of knowledge. From an environmental perspective however, it can be asked whether this figuration of nature is indeed sufficient. This moment of pause is consistent with the hesitation that is expressed with regard to the concept of social nature and a politics of articulation. Both these notions have been positively assessed, but whether Haraway's reinvention of nature allows

adequate space for the independence and autonomy of nature as an other that has goods and ends of its own, is uncertain.

Having discussed the notions of the self and the concomitant ethic or politics that are endorsed by the respective positions of cultural, critical-transformative and cyber-(eco)feminism, I would now like to close this inquiry into the contributions that the respective ecofeminist positions make towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self beyond dualism and essentialism. This will entail giving an overview of the notions of the self and ethic or politics, and evaluating them with reference to the question that informs this research project, namely, *"What are the contributions that cultural, critical-transformative and cyber-(eco)feminism respectively make towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self that would generate the ethical treatment of nature beyond dualism and essentialism?"* This is done in the last section of this thesis titled *Conclusion*.

## Conclusion

In what follows, I would like to conclude this inquiry into the contributions that *cultural ecofeminism*, *critical-transformative ecofeminism* and *cyber-(eco)feminism* make towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self that can generate an ethical relation with nature beyond dualism and essentialism. This will consist of a summary of my findings followed by a few concluding observations. Before I proceed however, I would like to make a few preliminary remarks. As a discipline of thought, environmental philosophy which originated in the mid 1960's and early 1970's is still in an early stage of development. Along with the nature of the literature at hand and the fact that we, at the dawn of a new millennium, are in the midst of a cultural period of transition characterised by a mistrust of coherent grand narratives, it has to be kept in mind that this study was not embarked upon with the objective of arriving at any fixed or final answers. I therefore appeal to the reader to suspend for a moment the quest for clear and distinct answers and graciously allow for *one* open-ended answer to the enormous challenges and pressing concerns that we are presented with in the face of the environmental crisis. From the outset these qualifications characterised this study, the aim of which can be described as an ecological and feminist exploration of different notions of the self and an associated ethic. Different aspects of these notions were revealed as having the potential to be fruitfully incorporated as different dimensions of an ecological feminist notion of the self. It must be stressed, however, that an articulation towards such an ecological feminist notion of the self has no pretense to *so/ve* our ecological and related political and socio-economic problems, but, as one response and modest contribution to addressing the environmental crisis, it is certainly deserving of our attention.

In the first chapter, titled *Cultural ecofeminism*, we have seen that the cultural ecofeminist response to the environmental crisis as an effect of patriarchy is an affirmation of women's difference and what is perceived as constituting this difference. The implicit or explicit argument that is forwarded by cultural ecofeminists is that women are better equipped to address the environmental crisis,



both ethically and politically. In this discussion, I have tried to limit my focus to the ethical aspects of their arguments, although the two can necessarily not remain completely separate.

In the light of the research question informing this study, I have concluded that, despite their shortcomings, there are two main contributions that cultural ecofeminism makes toward the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self and concomitant ethic. This lies in the cultural ecofeminist insistence that we should reconceptualise our relation with the natural environment in terms that overcome the disconnectedness and alienation fueling the domination and subjugation of nature. As a result, some form of relationality is endorsed, and finds expression in the female and feminine self that are affirmed by cultural ecofeminists.

Insofar as a revaluation and celebration of women, nature and the body signals an unambiguous rejection of the patriarchal inferiorisation of women and nature, cultural ecofeminism's strategy to affirm women's difference can be positively appraised. Notwithstanding the magnitude of problems surrounding the cultural ecofeminist valorisation and celebration of women, the body and nature, an emphasis on difference opens up the way for the daunting task of thinking and rethinking difference, also in the context of ecological philosophy. As I have tried to show, to effect lasting transformation in a culture that is marked by dualistically construed hierarchical power relations, more is required than the largely uncritical affirmation of what is devalued and regarded as inferior in Western patriarchal culture.

The most prominent inadequacies that have been identified in this position concern the dualist and essentialist, or universalist character, of the notion/s of the female and feminine self in cultural ecofeminist thinking. As I have argued and illustrated, these problems can be traced back to a reductionist focus on patriarchy as the cause of the oppression and subjugation of both women and nature, along with an inadequate engagement with the nature and functioning of dualism. As we have seen, a rejection of the male and masculine self is followed by an appeal to

“women’s experience” as providing us with characteristics and values that are desirable, particularly from an ecological perspective. This is accompanied by a more or less uncritical affirmation and privileging of the female and feminine self. Apart from being criticised as reinforcing dualism through the strategy of reversal, the endorsement of these notions are revealed as bearing witness to a naive assumption that women are not implicated in naturism or racism.

The continued entrapment of cultural ecofeminism in dualism and essentialism was shown to manifest itself in a number of ways. For example, the essentialism (which is part and parcel of dualism) of the female self as a result of its unambiguously biologicistic and naturalistic character, is untenable from both a feminist and ecological perspective. As I have shown, the strategy of replacing a male self with a female self boils down to a simple reversal of dualism and reinforcement of damaging essentialist images of women. From an ecological perspective, the message that is thus conveyed is that men are inherently disconnected from the natural environment whilst women are connected and should be put in charge of “taking care of nature”. Here we come face to face with another questionable effect of insisting on women’s privileged relation with nature, whether this is grounded in a biological or social argument. Not only does this amount to a reversal of dualism, it also prevents other social groups from shouldering their share of the responsibility for environmental destruction as well. As such we have a scenario where it is once again women who (are expected to) clear up whilst others continue their business undisturbed. As we have seen, women’s privileged relation with nature is employed with another (related) objective in mind, and that is that women are capable of making a superior contribution to solving environmental problems. Once again we are faced with the reversal of dualism, and essentialism or universalism.

By taking these points of critique seriously, a central challenge to ecological feminist thinking emerges. This is to take up the task of carving out a strategy that overcomes the shortcomings noted above, but without forsaking an insistence on women’s difference and their continued alliance with nature. The reason why this challenge is presented as pivotal to the ecofeminist project is because an insistence on women’s difference is misdirected if it is employed to suggest that women are

“better” than men. This argument is to distort the ecological feminist project entirely. An insistence on difference is a political act that demands acknowledgement and respect (read: ethical treatment) not insofar one conforms to the norms and criteria of those in power, but in an insistence on the *freedom to challenge and subvert existing structures of meaning and relations of power*. Moreover, as I will argue shortly, it is not sufficient to appeal to the social constructedness of female gender identity in order to remedy the essentialist overtones that an affirmation of difference has thus far invoked. Adequate measures have to be taken to prevent the universalisation of female identity. This however, as we shall see in the summary of *Critical-transformative ecofeminism*, is not adequately addressed by appealing to a “pluralist notion of female gender identity” either. As I have argued in the *Introduction* such an undertaking is possible only if a shift in focus is enacted from female gender identity to a female feminist subjectivity that is socially and discursively constructed.

The second notion of the self that is endorsed by cultural ecofeminism does not manage to secure a convincing position of difference for cultural ecofeminists either. Although not conceived of in biologically essentialist terms, the feminine self remains problematical. This is a result of its complementary character and subsequent continued entrapment in dualism, along with its – as already suggested above - universalisation of female gender identity. Moreover, to suggest that the feminine model of the self as an instance of a relational self can function as alternative self (for men and women) specifically for its ecological significance, has been shown to be unacceptable precisely for this entrapment in dualism. Supporting an androgynous self that is endorsed in an attempt to liberate the feminine model of the self from its dualist construal is also undesirable as such a notion of the self culminates in an erasure of differences.

This point of critique brings us to another challenge to ecological feminist thinking, pertaining to the feminist character of an ecological self. Such a notion of an ecological self demands the articulation of a notion of relationality that stresses continuity, but not at the expense of acknowledging differences. As suggested above, these differences pertain to the differences between and amongst selves,

but also to differences between humans and nature. To conceive of an adequate notion of an ecological self then, requires a notion of the self that moves beyond anthropocentrism. This requirement was illuminated in particular by the relation of identification that is endorsed by cultural ecofeminists. Such a relation of overidentification between the self and nature necessarily results in an entrapment in self-referentiality that maintains a disregard for nature as having ends and needs of its own. As I have argued, what is needed instead is a reconceptualisation of nature, an undertaking which we have seen, was not successfully accomplished by cultural ecofeminists. The images of nature employed here consist of an affirmation of the regenerative qualities of nature and a depiction of nature as female on the one hand, along with a mystification of nature on the other. Both strategies are flawed, as they remain trapped in a dualist framework.

✕ This brings us to the second chapter, titled *Critical-transformative ecofeminism*. As in Chapter 1, the aim of this discussion was to determine the contributions made by this position towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self and an accompanying ethic beyond dualism and essentialism. An additional objective was to show where and to what extent the shortcomings identified in cultural ecofeminist thinking are overcome. In the process, the manner in which cultural and critical-transformative ecological feminism coincides and diverges from each other, was remarked upon.

The contributions made by critical-transformative ecofeminism towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self and the ethic it implies, were approached in the light of an in depth engagement with dualism as the conceptual framework that grounds the twin domination of women and nature. Locating the domination of women and nature in dualism, critical-transformative ecofeminism draws attention to the network of different dualist pairs that function in a mutually supportive manner. As I have argued, a thorough engagement with dualism and the significance of acknowledging differences have significant implications for the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self beyond dualism and essentialism. In contrast to cultural ecofeminism then, the critical-transformative ecofeminist position problematises what cultural ecofeminism treats as

unproblematic. That is, to articulate an alternative ecological feminist notion of the self requires more than simply replacing a male or masculine self with a feminine self that reinforces dualism and essentialism.

In her discussion of dualism, Plumwood stresses that the conceptual and material cannot be separated. This shift in focus from a predominantly materialist approach followed by cultural ecofeminism is a distinctive feature of critical-transformative ecofeminism. This is also manifested in the (re)constructive approach that characterises the contributions of critical-transformative ecofeminism toward the articulation of a *feminist* notion of an ecological self and an *ecological* notion of a female feminist self.

As I have illustrated, Plumwood approaches her contribution towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self by focusing on the related human/nature, reason/nature and masculine/feminine dualisms. In the light of her strategy to move beyond dualism, she enacts a critical affirmation of female gender identity beyond dualism and she attempts to transform the notion of the human self. With regard to the latter, Plumwood initially introduces a notion of a *degendered human* with the objective of detaching the human from its overtly masculine character so as to provide us with a backdrop against which human relations of domination and instrumentalisation of nature can be transformed. As we have seen, this endeavour is accomplished by showing how the human/nature dualism can be transcended through a broadened notion of intentionality. Whilst the notion of the degendered human has been criticised and rejected (also by Plumwood herself in her later work) for an inadequate engagement with differences, the reconceptualisation of human-nature relations through a broadened notion of intentionality has been positively received. Conceiving of continuity in these terms provides us with a non-anthropocentric account of the inherent value of nature, which succeeds in establishing a notion of connectedness between humans and nature without forsaking the heterogeneous interests of nature.

It has been shown that Plumwood's engagement with female gender identity was undertaken with two objectives in mind. The first is to untie women from their

“privileged” relation of identification with nature that, as it has by now been stressed too many times, has historically been employed to legitimise the oppression of women alongside that of nature. Whilst rejecting a relation of overidentification between women with nature, Plumwood stresses the undesirability of the alternative liberal strategy that entails an unambiguous and in some cases, a rather vehement rejection of any association of women with nature. For this reason Plumwood suggests neither a relation of identification with nature, nor a relation of opposition to nature, but one that positions women *with* nature. As we have seen, Plumwood enacts this by performing what she describes as a *critical affirmation* of female gender identity. In this way Plumwood holds on to women’s difference, whilst also transforming, that is, dedualising female gender identity. Moreover, in an attempt to address the problem of universalism as a form of essentialism, it was shown that Plumwood endorses a pluralist notion of the female gender identity, hence the identification of this notion as a *pluralist feminine self*. In my understanding, Plumwood’s engagement with female gender identity marks a movement towards the articulation of a notion of a *female feminist self or subjectivity* beyond dualism and essentialism, although this is a project that remains unfulfilled. In the final analysis Plumwood’s notion of a pluralist feminine self indeed moves beyond dualism and (biological) essentialism, thus addressing the shortcomings identified in the notion(s) of the female and feminine self as endorsed by cultural ecofeminism. However, despite her consistent sensitivity towards differences, it was argued that she fails to adequately engage with differences between women.

This brings us to Plumwood’s notion of the mutual self as a feminist notion of an ecological self. Emphasising continuity *and difference*, the mutual self is a refinement of the relational self that is espoused by deep ecology as an ecological Self. The mutual self that is also a post-rationalist feminist subjectivity addresses the reason/nature dualism and transforms the dualist structure of the human/nature relation. The mutual self as post-rationalist feminist subjectivity is adapted to establish continuity between humans and nature. As mentioned above, this is achieved through a broadened notion of intentionality. Conceived of in the context of critical-transformative ecofeminist ethics, the mutual self as ecological self makes

possible the acknowledgement of nature as autonomous or independent other with a good of its own. The basis that critical-transformative ecofeminism provides for the ethical engagement with nature, which is a move away from a relation of (women's) identification with nature, is consistent with a shift away from an endorsement of "feminine" values and a restriction to a vocabulary or ethic of care. The values that are endorsed move beyond a restriction to mothering or motherhood and both Warren and Plumwood advance a *range* of previously marginalised moral concepts. Moreover, these moral concepts are transformed in a manner that is resistant to a construal along the reason/emotion dualism, thus detaching these concepts from their association with powerlessness.

My final evaluation of this chapter is that the strength of critical-transformative ecofeminist contributions towards conceptualising an ecological feminist notion of the self, lies in its thorough engagement with the problem of dualism. The strategy Plumwood offers to move beyond dualism is to establish a notion of continuity between humans and nature without erasing differences. In my understanding, the success of Plumwood's approach lies in the fact that the basis she offers for establishing continuity transforms both self and other; and therefore differences too do not remain the same. For this reason Plumwood successfully addresses the problem of radical exclusion without lapsing into an uncritical affirmation of differences. At the same time she manages to avoid the pitfall of incorporation. Conceiving of continuity between humans and nature in terms of a broadened notion of intentionality offers a non-anthropocentric account of the inherent value of nature and of human continuity with nature. This demands a departure from the view of nature as instrument of the fulfillment of the needs and endeavours of man, calling for the consideration of nature as alike, but also unlike, having needs and ends of its own.

Plumwood's endorsement of the notion of the mutual self provides us not only with a feminist notion of an ecological self that transforms the dualist relation between humans and nature. As an articulation of a post-rationalist feminist subjectivity, the mutual self establishes continuity also between humans on the basis of subjectivity. That is, this notion of the self is offered also as an alternative to a rationalist notion

of the self that has systematically excluded women and others from the realm of subjecthood. The emphasis that Plumwood places on differences in the rearticulation of the self as mutual self, signals an acknowledgement of differences between humans in terms of identity and relative positions of power. As we have seen, Plumwood, speaking from her locatedness as ecofeminist, performs a critical affirmation of a notion of female gender identity, which in itself is an acknowledgement of differences. However, it was concluded that Plumwood's endorsement of a pluralist feminine self is not altogether satisfactory. At the same time, as I have argued, the mutual self as post-rationalist feminist subjectivity invites and can accommodate the articulation also of a female feminist self.

In the final chapter, titled *Cyber-(eco)feminism*, I have given an exposition of the notions of the self, nature and politics that are articulated from a cyber-(eco)feminist perspective. Although cyber-(eco)feminism is not widely regarded as an ecofeminist position as such, the notions of the self, nature and politics as conceived by cyber-(eco)feminism make significant contributions towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self beyond dualism and essentialism. Moreover, these notions make visible the challenges that we are faced with in contemporary post-industrial, high-tech capitalist culture, challenges that are relevant from both feminist and ecological perspectives. As in the previous chapters, the exposition that was given of the different notions of the self, nature and politics as endorsed by cyber-(eco)feminism had the objective of determining the contributions that are made towards the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self beyond dualism and essentialism. Given its situatedness in poststructuralist philosophical thinking, an additional aim of this discussion emerged, which was to determine which aspects of cyber-(eco)feminist thinking are consistent with the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self. Moreover, in the light of the shortcomings identified specifically in the engagement with female gender identity as discussed by critical-transformative ecofeminism, whether or how cyber-(eco)feminism can make a contribution to remedying this deficiency was also looked into.



In the discussion of cyber-(eco)feminism, which is an unambiguous poststructuralist (eco)feminist position, it was observed that the figure of the cyborg is one that has many faces. As we have seen, some have more, and others less, to contribute to the articulation of an ecological feminist notion of the self. Articulated in a context that Haraway describes as "the belly of the monster" - late-20<sup>th</sup> century post-industrialist capitalist culture - the figure of the cyborg is presented as a radically differentiated poststructuralist entity that is marked by the playful transgression and subversion of boundaries previously held sacred. The appeal of such an unabashed destabilisation of the powerful hierarchically structured dualisms that the cyborg embodies can hardly be denied. These dualisms that have underpinned the Western philosophical tradition, have systematically been employed in the service of sexism, racism, colonialism and naturism. As I have argued, however, despite the initial seduction that the figure of the cyborg holds, a different picture of the cyborg emerges at closer inspection. In the face of the challenges posed to us by escalating technological advancement coupled with globalisation along with an increasingly consumerist culture, rather than inspiring hope, the cyborg inspires great caution at best, and at worst, a profound feeling of dread.

Serious questions are raised regarding the overtly technophilic character of the cyborg which seems to bolster the technophilia that already marks Western masculinist culture. This technophilia has been exposed as promoting an eroticisation of domination of others and as fuelling the unrestrained destruction and degradation of the natural environment. As such, severe reservations are expressed regarding what seems to be a dangerous leaning towards a reinforcement and intensification of the disembodied, autonomous and individualist self. Suffering from the illusion of total control over nature, such a notion of the self displays a disquieting disconnectedness from material reality. A distorted view of humans as invincible is in keeping with a disregard for our dependence on nature for the survival not only of humans, but also life on earth as we know it; a very basic sensibility that is completely lost sight of.

The countenance that the cyborg takes on here, is of course perfectly consistent with the observation that it is precisely in its appeal that the danger of the cyborg

lurks. That is, the radically differentiated (non-dualist) character of the cyborg renders it unable to establish or affirm a relation of significant connection with the other. From an ecological perspective it is argued that to convincingly overcome the dualist structure of the human-nature relation, some notion of continuity between humans and nature is required. As such the cyborg fails to meet the requirements that are needed to promote an ethical engagement with the natural environment. Moreover, given the cyborg's playful affirmation of contradictions and what seems to be an indiscriminate connection with everything that comes her way, along with the seeming lack of dis-ease with the world she inhabits, severe doubt is cast on the cyborg's competence to make no-nonsense political commitments for working towards justice and equity. Similarly, the cyborg does not seem to be able to provide a basis for deciding on issues where the intrinsic value of nature is threatened by human greed or exploitative endeavours.

As we have seen, it is specifically with respect to the cyborg that Plumwood's notion of the mutual self as an ecological self becomes as particularly appealing. The difficulties we encountered in the figure of the cyborg are overcome by Plumwood's strategy of establishing some notion of continuity, but not at the expense of acknowledging differences. As we have seen, Plumwood's endorsement of the mutual self as ecological self successfully addresses the human/nature dualism in that continuity between humans and nature is established in terms of a broadened notion of intentionality. The very notion of intentionality denotes heterogeneity, not only between humans and nature, but also within nature. Establishing continuity and difference in these terms, that is, that acknowledges the autonomy and independence of nature, *makes possible* a respect for nature's difference, as having needs and ends of its own that are strived towards intentionally. Thus conceived, Plumwood's *feminist* notion of an ecological self is conducive to the generation of an ethical engagement with the other that thwarts relations of domination.

In the light of the shortcomings displayed by Haraway's conception of the cyborg, the Inappropriate/d Other and the situated self (albeit different instances of the cyborg), were shown to rectify many of the deficiencies of the cyborg. The

Inappropriate/d Other is articulated as an alternative (female) feminist subjectivity that is socially (materially) and discursively (symbolically) constructed along variable axes of differences. Given its critical (read: reconstructive) affirmation of otherness along with a thorough engagement with differences between women and within women, this notion of a (female) feminist self was positively acclaimed. Moreover, regarding the question of how to conceive of an *ecological* notion of a feminist self that resists an essentialist relation of identification between women and nature without forsaking women's alliance with nature, the question was posed whether shared otherness (read: inappropriate/d otherness, or otherness differently conceived) could not be fruitfully employed here. That is, an inquiry was made as to whether Inappropriate/d Otherness can not be viewed as a basis for the alliance not only between women themselves, but also for the alliance of women *with* nature. This suggestion finds further support if we recall Haraway's discussion of the situated self as an alternative female feminist knowing subject that overcomes the radical separation between knowing subject and object of knowledge. Here Haraway's rearticulation of nature as Coyote Trickster, depicted as material-semiotic agent, also emerges as an Inappropriate/d Other. As such, on the basis of a shared complexly differentiated Inappropriate/d Other subjectivity, the ecological character of Haraway's notions of female feminist subjectivity is laid bare.

As I have observed above, the situated self that is articulated in the context of feminist epistemology overcomes the harsh separation between knowing subject and the object of knowledge. Highly differentiated and radically specific like the Inappropriate/d Other, the situated self is also offered as (female) feminist subject. It was argued that in keeping with contemporary developments in feminist theory, these notions of female feminist subjectivity are complexly differentiated embodied subjectivities that are socially and discursively inscribed. As such, these notions of female feminist subjectivity overcome the inadequacy of Plumwood's contribution towards the articulation of a female feminist self, which found expression in an endorsement of a *pluralist feminine self*. Moreover, in contrast to cultural ecofeminists' uncritical affirmation of the female body, the embodiedness denoted by these notions of female subjectivity, emphasises the materiality of subjectivity. Materiality here denotes an embeddedness of the self, not only physically and

socially, but also discursively. That is, the body is biologically and socially and discursively marked. To appeal to embodiedness is not to lapse into a regressive essentialism. The marked body is an interpreted body, where the body is not a clean slate that passively receives inscriptions. Embodied subjectivity in terms of which the body is recognised as bio-cultural being, is to emphasise the materiality of discourse and therefore the cultural and social specificity as opposed to the neutrality of subjectivity.

To come back to Haraway's conception of nature as Coyote Trickster, the location of agency on the side of nature has been argued to effect a creative transformation of nature as it has traditionally been conceived, whilst resisting a lapse into anthropocentrism. Consistent with the ecological character of female feminist subjectivity noted above, this refiguring of nature coincides to a certain extent with Plumwood's notion of nature as continuous but also different from humans. In keeping with Haraway's integration of the social and discursive, or the material and the symbolical, another notion of nature as *social nature*, emerges. This is illuminated by her notion of a *politics of articulation*.

The significance of a politics of articulation informed by the conception of nature as social nature, was shown to lie in its appeal to give equal consideration to the arguments and interests articulated by those whose (complexly differentiated) voices are often silenced by the authority of the experts. Here Haraway's appeal to a notion of relationality is interesting. In the context of social nature, relationality acquires the meaning of living in a material relationship with nature and also in close proximity to nature. As I have noted this may come across as a privileging of the voices not only of those who see nature as a partner in a mutual struggle to survive, but also those who are traditionally identified with nature, women and others. Avoiding the charge of privileging the voices of those who live in, and are perceived as occupying a closer proximity to nature, she stresses that relationality is not restricted to a physical or other proximity to nature. As I have shown, what is communicated here is that the different relations to nature that can be identified (for example the woman's relation to the fetus) have to be *acknowledged and taken seriously* so that those who are directly affected, are not silenced by the so-called

experts. In this way compensation for the domination and subordination of the other can take place in a setting that is predisposed to communication and negotiation. Moreover, like Plumwood, who also stresses an embeddedness of the self in relationships, Haraway conceives of relationality in conceptual terms, which if we recall, was illustrated by the notions of the self and nature that she articulates. To come back to a politics of articulation then, such a notion of an inclusive politics deserves serious consideration and could be employed in addressing a range of political issues, including those pertaining to technological development.

Although we have seen that the cyborg as half-human, half-machine is most definitely not a desirable alternative notion of an ecological feminist self, Haraway's confrontation of the powerful impact of technological advancement in late industrial Western culture is most commendable. The reason for this is that she resists the temptation of demonising technology altogether. In fact, as we have seen, she urges women especially to "take responsibility for our machines". At the same time, she is most definitely not uncritical of the dangers that technological advancement hold. That these dangers are not only social, but also ecological, is also noted. This is most strongly conveyed by her vehement critique of an artifactualism that is part and parcel of the illusion that we can know and control nature to the extent that we lose sight of physical nature altogether. That caution should be taken in the light of the risks that technological advancement hold for the natural environment, was pointed out. Unlike Haraway, Plumwood avoids the issue of technology in her formulation of the self and the concomitant ethic, which is most unfortunate. As I have observed, Haraway's stance towards technology is insightful in that she resists the temptation to demonise technology or avoid the topic altogether. Aware of the risks involved in a culture marked by escalating technological advancement, she calls upon us to educate ourselves and actively engage with these developments so as to curtail its harmful effects on humans and nature.

As we have seen above, significant comparisons can be drawn between Haraway and Plumwood's notions of the self and nature. This is made all the more evident by the fact that, like Plumwood who offers the mutual self as an articulation of a post-rationalist feminist subjectivity, Haraway has been shown to endorse the

Inappropriate/d Other that is a conception of the human in a post-human world. Like the mutual self, the Inappropriate/d Other is not necessarily female, although it allows for the articulation of specificity. In this regard it was asked whether inclusion in the realm of Inappropriate/d otherness does not level out the differences that continue to affect different social groups. This can be illustrated by playing off the critically positioned black South African woman against the critically positioned white South African male. As I have tried to illustrate however, given the complexly differentiated character of the Inappropriate/d Other, differences in terms of relative positions of power and meaning are not lost.

In conclusion I would like to observe that, despite the strong divergences that cyber-(eco)feminism and critical-transformative ecofeminism respectively display, there are certain points of significant overlap in their particular conceptions of self and nature. Moreover, some aspects of Haraway's notions of the self and nature can be shown to exhibit significant features that are required towards a conceptualisation of an ecological feminist notion of the self. This is particularly evident in her articulation of the Inappropriate/d Other and situated self as alternative female feminist subjectivities. I argued that in the final analysis, Haraway's notion/s of female feminist subjectivity offer a more suitable alternative to the pluralist feminine self that Plumwood articulates. This is not only for its complexly differentiated socially and discursively constructed character, but also because of the ecological character of these notions of a feminist self. As Plumwood has also emphasised, this makes possible a positioning of women neither as identical nor as in opposition to nature, but situated *with* nature. Haraway's rearticulation of nature as Coyote Trickster that imparts agency on nature as material-semiotic agent, is also most commendable, not only for moving beyond anthropocentrism, but for establishing continuity between humans and nature, apparently without obliterating nature's differences.

However, here I would like to make a final concluding remark that, especially in the light of the problematic features characterising the cyborg, Plumwood's conception of continuity between humans and nature in terms of a broadened notion of intentionality is preferred. The reason for this is that such a reconceptualisation of

nature takes special care to stress the autonomy and independence of the natural environment, which is fundamental if we are to respect the different needs and interests of nature. This conceptualisation of nature is therefore a more suitable strategy to ensure the ethical treatment of the natural environment. As such, from an ecological perspective in particular, Plumwood's adaptation of the mutual self as *feminist notion of an ecological self* emerges as more sophisticated. However, to be fair to Haraway, it has been noted that she does not set herself the task of articulating an ecological self. Subsequently, in the light of the compatibility of much of the thinking of these two positions, it can be held that the cyber-(eco)feminism and critical-transformative ecofeminism complement and challenge each other in a significant manner. This means that an ethical relationship with nature cannot be achieved without the ecological perspective of nature as an independent, active agent that has goods and ends of its own that it strives towards intentionally. At the same time, it cannot be achieved without a feminist perspective that acknowledges the material and discursive construction of a complexly differentiated female feminist subjectivity. Further elaboration on these ideas however, would be the purpose of a more comprehensive inquiry than the one I have set out to perform in this study.

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