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Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio

## The Gaia Hypothesis and Ecofeminism: Culture, Reason, and Symbiosis

Give thanks to the mother Gaia  
Give thanks to the father sun  
Give thanks to the flowers in the garden  
where the mother and the father are one  
...where the mother and the father have fun  
—Neo-Pagan song

### Introduction

In our time, the human species has acquired the capability to destroy both human life and much of the biosphere that hosts it. This potential is even more dangerous as the processes of globalization unfold, especially in their corporate and oligarchic modes, which contribute to increased poverty and environmental degradation. This situation makes the development of a new mode of reason necessary. In this article, I propose to analyze the discursive continuity between the Gaia hypothesis and ecofeminism as a space from where this alternative mode of reason is emerging. This alternative mode of reason, I claim, posits symbiosis rather than independence as the basic form of relatedness between individual entities. Symbiotic reason, I suggest, is experientially feminine, for women's bodies are predisposed to be two-in-one--to be hosts to other bodies in pregnancy.<sup>1</sup> Symbiotic reason understands life as an interrelated web in which each individual is a small node that exists thanks to the others' presence. Life resembles a Deleuzian rhizome, a multiplicity of elements in a free-range order, with each element different from the next,

yet all recognizably part of the whole.<sup>2</sup> If symbiosis is the axiom on which the new rational mode of thinking rests, then symbiotic reason is ecofeminist.<sup>3</sup>

Ecofeminism, short for ecological feminism, emerged from a feminist interest in science--the area of knowledge that claims reason and rationality as its own turf. In the 1980s, feminist science studies exposed the white male perspective behind the alleged objectivity of Western science.<sup>4</sup> In the 1990s, ecofeminism evolved as a mode of feminist discourse concerned with ecological issues that Western science was unable to resolve.<sup>5</sup> While major agents of corporate globalization such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are accustomed to treating the Earth as assemblage of consumable resources, many ecofeminist philosophers are keenly aware that the Earth may very well be an animated being, accepting the said postulation as one just as plausible as any other.<sup>6</sup> Postulating that Gaia, the Earth, has a life of its own, that it has a consciousness like an animated organism, produces a belief-system effective in moving towards more fair and sustainable forms of development. From an ecofeminist perspective one can clearly see why this is so. Feminist discourses represent those disenfranchised by gender. Prevalent belief-systems of the past, like Scholastic Philosophy, constructed women as beings without a consciousness or soul. Ante-Bellum Southern culture constructed enslaved African-Americans in the same way. But women and slaves did have a consciousness, and this consciousness caused them to organize and create change.

The experience of having been misconstrued as mere resources makes women, slaves, and other disenfranchised beings, more capable of understanding the Gaia Hypothesis and its consequences. What if the Earth, like women, like slaves, like the children whose homes we bomb in our oil wars, like the animals we kill in our felled forests, had a consciousness, and we did not know? What if she knows what we are doing to her, and is not happy, not happy at all? James Lovelock, the initial scientific proponent of the Gaia Hypothesis, compared the Earth to a tree. The trunk looks dead, but it is the symbiosis between trunk, branches, and leaves that makes the life of the tree possible (27). As he suggested, destroying the conditions that enable life on Gaia's mantle does not destroy the planet *per se*. It destroys the species that this mantle is hospitable to, such as humans. The Gaia hypothesis provides a framework

that helps to develop a sustainable, symbiotic ethics by which we may avoid this catastrophic outcome.

### 1. Italy: The Pre-Oedipal

Ecofeminism may also be described as a way to create a discursive symbiosis between feminism and a self-defined feminine. In this symbiosis, the feminine is the ecological principle that empowers feminism to transform the world. In my discussions of the feminine within feminist discourse, I've often encountered resistance for my positive view of the feminine as an empowering principle. I used to think this was due to the fact that, even as an academic, I've managed to navigate the feminine with my own body, which somehow inscribes it without surrendering to it; and to my early experience of motherhood, which made me in some ways a defender of a mother's need to be respected for her power to continue the species. But more recently, I have been able to analyze the issue in terms of cultural identity, and, in this context, the notion of the pre-discursive, as I understand it based on my ethnic identity and cultural upbringing, seems to be the crux of the controversy.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, I must frame this discussion of the feminine, and the feminist epistemology that I want to inscribe it in, with a preamble that relates it to the situatedness of my upbringing in the progressive middle-class culture of central Italy in the post-World War II era. In a modern Italian-Studies perspective, the relationship between the pre-discursive and performativity is reconfigured to accommodate the situated legacy of modern Italy. This situatedness might be characterized as one in which nothing is pre-discursive when it comes to collective and communal cultural experience. This might be better explained by pointing out the ways in which in a discursive system that has its "golden age" in the past (namely the supposed glories of the Romans in the Classical Era), that has proclaimed its own basis in rationality and freedom, and that has known what it means to be guided by the principles of mastery encoded in the expression, "I came, I saw, I conquered." The pre-discursive might be a category that applies to the individual, but it certainly does not characterize what these individuals perceive their collective experience to be.

Italy has been a player in the Western cultural arena where modernity emerged as a way to actualize a social order based in rationality and logocentrism--what I will henceforth call 'individual reason.' But the discursive space that we call Italy never really came into the Enlighten-

ment except through cultural impulses that were external to it, in an effort to reflect and mirror more rational and modern North-European influences.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, one of the paradoxes that constantly face Italianists and comparatists that focus on Italy is that the concept of the modern prince as a rational and enlightened leader was first elaborated in Italy, but never really took root there, while in other cultural arenas such as France and England, Machiavelli's notion of a modern prince who put reason before feelings was the modern nation's unifying principle. Regardless of how anxiously Machiavelli urged them,<sup>9</sup> Italians never embraced individual rationality enough to take his suggestion on, preferring instead to risk disunity in order to preserve the diversity and plurality that made them creative and unique.

At the price of later becoming a colony of those very nations that had followed Machiavelli's advice--and were now discursively constructing the Machiavellic as something obscurely evil that came from Italy--Italians remained attached to their pluralism, magic, and superstition.<sup>10</sup> In fact, a sense of individual rationality started to prevail in Italian discursiveness only at a time when, in Northern Europe, the Enlightenment had already given way to the impulses of Romanticism. Later Italian discursiveness recombined both Enlightenment and Romanticism in *Risorgimento* rhetoric, which hybridized the objective need for modern rationality with the more emotional desire for a people's sense of unity and redemption from servitude. I submit that this way of dragging one's feet into modernity, of slowing down the process and hanging on to the pre-modern as long as possible, is a result of the sense of déjà vu which is embedded in Italian discursiveness due to a construction of the past as a cyclical return of analogous situations in which the same actors play different roles, and in which the ebb and flow of transpersonal energies end up in an eternal return to a new beginning.<sup>11</sup> This sense of déjà vu makes Derridean citation a palimpsest of Italian discursiveness, in which nothing is pre-discursive because everything has happened already, has been talked about, and can only be repeated.

Yet, what is absent from the collective sphere is often present in the individual one. I remember my shock at the simplicity of baby and maternity-care aisles in the supermarkets of Southern California when I moved there from central Italy in 1981, where such products existed in lavish variety and were profusely advertised and where abundant mater-

nity-leave policies testified to a nationwide adoration of infancy. It occurred to me that in Italy this adoration may have *extended* from the pre-Oedipal to the amniotic and the fetal.<sup>12</sup> The pre-discursive that the collective unconscious had buried under the pervasive sense of repetition and déjà vu had reemerged in the worship of infancy, as if this natural pre-Oedipal phase, this amniotic amoebic stage of existence, was the only authentic one, ephemeral as it may have turned out to be. It is not a coincidence, I believe, that the philosophy of *pensiero debole*, in its effort to connote the post-modern as nonexistent, and to proclaim the end of modernity, has developed in this discursive arena.<sup>13</sup> The end of modernity, in the understanding of its prophets, is not the end of humankind and of his/story, but rather the end of a time when what we understand as rational ways of thinking are prevalent, effective, and useful. The end of modernity thus marks the beginning of an era in which non-logocentric, non-phallic, and non-rational thinking is going to be necessary to effectively manage the situatedness of post-modern humanity. This apology of weak thought, a thought that rejects the strength of a master's predicament, that refuses the scopophilic posture of "I came, I saw, I conquered," is the turning point towards a new epistemological system.

To the feminists that debate the issue of pre-discursiveness,<sup>14</sup> then, I suggest that the dichotomy between the pre-discursive and the discursive, or between the pre-Oedipal and the Oedipal, as Laden would put it, or between performativity and performance, as Butler would put it, or between parole and langue, to use Saussure's terms, or between allocutionary and illocutionary speech, as Austin put it, is an unnecessary burden. The pre-discursive defines itself in a synchronic opposition to the discursive and, in Saussurean linguistics, each pole remains undefined when its opposite disappears. Hence, when the legacy of Italian discursiveness becomes part of feminist performativity, it turns out that saying that nothing is pre-discursive is just the same as saying that everything is. Everything has happened already, all the cycles have repeated themselves at least three times, and so, if one forgets to forget that nothing is pre-discursive, one may as well *act as if* everything is. This new access to the pre-discursive exposes the continuity between feminism and a self-defined femininity to which I will return.

## 2. Social and Deep Ecology

Social and deep ecology offer two complementary perspectives on the debates regarding ecology and gender. Social ecology stresses the damages of environmental degradation to human beings, the uneven distribution of environmental hazards, and the uneven access and use of environmental resources. Social ecology is attuned to feminine concerns, such as the more frequent exposure of the poor to environmental dangers. Deep ecology stresses the damages of environmental degradation to so-called "non-human" nature, such as the decrease in biodiversity, the unsustainability of current levels of consumption, and the negative impact of excessive human presence on the habitat of other creatures and the biosphere as a whole. Deep ecology reflects a masculine perspective inasmuch as it focuses on the protection of non-human nature often at the expense of impoverished humans who cannot afford to recycle or conserve. For example, immigrants who live in satellite towns in the L.A. area produce more pollution when they commute to work than those who live near the Pacific coast. But there is no public transportation and they cannot afford to live closer to their jobs. As a result, their satellite towns have the lowest air quality, and they also get blamed for polluting the region as a whole. The position of those who blame pollution on commuters and on the absence of public transportation reflect the perspectives of deep and social ecology, respectively.

Feminist ecologists step right into the middle of this debate and claim that the distinction between humankind and non-human nature is dubious at best. As Val Plumwood explains:

The category of nature is a field of multiple exclusions and control, not only of non-humans, but of various groups of humans and aspects of human life which are cast as nature...It is not only women's labour which traditionally gets subsumed 'by definition' into nature, but the labour of colonized non-western, non-white people also. The connections between these forms of domination...are partly formed from a necessity inherent in the dynamic and logic of domination between self and other, reason and nature. (4)<sup>15</sup>

This distinction, as Plumwood suggests, is not natural, but is instead culturally manufactured, reflecting the bipolar thinking typical of the

West. It is part of a culturally-specific logic which many still believe to be universal but is not universal at all.

Ecofeminists are a relatively new voice in feminist discourse.<sup>16</sup> They are characterized by their emphasis on alternative epistemologies, alternative ways of assessing how it is that we know what we think we know, and by a generalized proactive attitude. If one could say that feminism is a reaction to modernity, then ecofeminists propose ways to go past that, to create a feminist discourse that is both post-materialist and post-modern. Traditional feminism affirms, in a reactive mode, that women are like men and, therefore, have the same rights that men have. Ecofeminism, in a proactive mode, affirms that women have something quite unique and special to offer to the world precisely because we are not like men. These special qualities, related to the perceived weakness of women, can help to shift cultural discourse towards an emphasis on care.<sup>17</sup> Ecofeminists, therefore, examine the humanity-nature dichotomy from a woman's viewpoint, as a construction based on gender. Based on this analysis, they propose a different epistemological perspective.

## 3. Women and Knowledge

Transforming means having a vision of what one wants the world to look like when the transformation is accomplished. It does not mean that we will ever get there, but at least we know in which direction we are going. As feminists, I suggest, a vision we could share is a world where there would be **equality in difference** for both women and men, for blacks and whites, and everything in between, including biracial and transgendered people. There are both learned and natural differences between women and men, but in our vision, sexual and gender "differences" between women and men would connote the variety of contributions to human life and endeavors that each of us can make. They would not be constructed as the negative and positive poles of a hierarchy in which the masculine dominates and the feminine submits. With these axioms established, the focus can shift to the question of how we can create a model for a theory and practice of feminism that will lead us to the world imagined in our vision.

To envisage this world, I propose a reflection on the rough tenets of white, heterosexual feminism. My reason is not that white feminism is superior to anybody else's, but rather that it has been constructed as

such and, therefore, has acted as a catalyst against which other feminisms, such as lesbian, French, African-American, Latin-American, Italian, queer, bisexual, and so on, have had to react if they wanted to be heard at all. In this roughly sketched her/"story" of mainstream Anglo-American feminism, one can see that in the course of the passage from the modern to the postmodern era we move from a "feminism of equality" to a "feminism of difference." Indeed, the suffrage movement, which animated modern feminism, can be thought of as a feminism of equality because its claim was that we (women) want the right to vote because we are **like** men. We exist in a system of representative democracy often complemented by direct democracy. This system operates inside the ideology of liberal capitalism, which we might have to defend even with its limitations, for capital without liberalism only makes things worse. Hence, if we are to be equals to men within this system, we need to express our political opinion through the vote. We cannot be content with influencing the political opinion of the men in our lives (as our grandmothers sometimes did). We must elect our own representatives. Thus, the feminism of equality that gathered its strength around the issue of the vote is a feminism that lives inside the prevalent ideology and demonstrates its limitations.

Indeed, these limitations were made apparent when a new feminist upsurge came into being in the postmodern era. In contrast to the suffrage movement, the pro-choice movement can be thought of as a social energy that generated a "feminism of difference," for its logic is that we (women) want the right to choose to be either pregnant or not because we are **different** from men. In fact, if we (women) were like men, there would be no pro-choice movement because we would not get pregnant and, hence, just like men, we would not need free and subsidized abortions. If looked upon in this way, these two feminisms appear to be complementary rather than opposing. Neither one seems to be dominant over the other, and both seem to be necessary in their own time and way. But in an either/or logic, which is the logic on which patriarchal epistemologies are based, these two feminisms appear to be mutually exclusive. In other words, if we accept that what is knowledge is what men know (about themselves and everybody else), then a feminism of equality cannot be a feminism of difference and vice versa. Furthermore, according to this model, there is no continuity between the two feminisms.

But feminist epistemology can defeat the logic of either/or and embrace a more inclusive logic of both/and. This logic is based on the theory of "concrete essentials" proposed by the inspiring Italian feminist political philosopher Adriana Cavarero. Pro-choice positions, she argues, provide only partial repair for the loss of maternal power that came with the discovery of paternity because,

The suggestion implied in the current [pro-choice] logic is that, of course, as a citizen a woman is supposed to be a full juridical subject, but, as a pregnant person, she is the container of the unborn child. As things stand, in sum, neither her womb nor what is happening in it belong to her so that...the act of engendering from maternal power [becomes] a concern of the state. (76)

For women, therefore, a matrifocal social order is not one that reduces us to our reproductive function, but one that empowers us with sovereignty over our bodies and the reproductive power that resides in them. When knowledge is neither dogma nor prejudice, but is based in experience, then there is a continuity between a feminism of equality and a feminism of difference inasmuch as both point to the vision of a world where there is equality in difference between the two genders (57-90).

I therefore propose that the philosophical history of feminism be traced as an oscillation between the bipolar opposites equality and difference. On the side of equality, we see that, as both feminists and women, we must believe that the sum total of women who ever lived have made contributions to human life on the planet which are equal to those made by men. Hence, in imagining the sum total of this knowledge and experience, we must agree that it is at least of equal value as the sum total of men's knowledge and experience. Nonetheless, we know that in the educational system, as it is today, the knowledge and experience attributed to men is that which is constructed as what there is to know. The rest is constructed as "ignorance," namely that which does not constitute a valid basis for true and objective knowledge. Indeed, women's responses, and in particular, postmodern feminist responses, to this (albeit hidden but nonetheless prevalent) epistemological axiom are what justify the existence of the women's studies programs and departments that we have today. So it appears that in a patriarchal epistemology, men's knowledge and experience are constructed as knowledge, while women's knowledge and experience are constructed as ignorance

and as something that cultured persons may safely ignore (with the due exception of women's studies majors). But how can women's studies departments and programs turn this "ignorance" into knowledge again if they are alone in their belief that it is knowledge in the first place? How can others see what's in there for them in establishing a new epistemology? An interesting gesture in this direction is the work of paleontologist Marija Gimbutas, who interprets the "V" signs on Neolithic artifacts as symbols of a pervasive presence of the Goddess, signs that male readers had heretofore mistaken for mere abstract decorations.<sup>18</sup>

I suggest that we think of the contributions that women have made to the sum total of human endeavor as what the French philosopher François Lyotard calls "the *différend*." The *différend* is that which happened but is either unrecoverable or not on record. For example, in the Jewish holocaust, the *différend* is the experience of having been a victim of the holocaust and having been burned in the crematory ovens of the concentration camps. With an example more suited to our case, Lyotard's concept can be applied to Sappho's poetry. It is well known that this Greek female poet of the island from which lesbians are named wrote nine books of poetry. But we can only read the fragments of her poems that were quoted by men, such as Plato and other male poets and philosophers. Some will say that it does not matter that her books were destroyed, since the most important things she said were preserved in the quotations. Indeed, a mind shaped by a patriarchal epistemology would no doubt proclaim that if she said anything important it would surely have been quoted by one of those very knowledgeable men. Yet, we women of today do not know which part of Sappho's poetry contained the most important knowledge for us. Thus, the *différend* is the impossible answer to the question of where was the most important knowledge that Sappho's poems contained. Was it in the parts that were lost or in those that were preserved?

Indeed, as long as a patriarchal epistemology is in place, women's knowledge and experience are not only dead but also buried under the false assumption that what women say about themselves is a lie. If women cannot be trusted to say what is important about themselves, then whatever they know can be ignored and destroyed under the false assumption that it will be better preserved when selectively quoted by men. Hence, a feminist posture to respond to patriarchal epistemology is that of "going at history backwards," as we (women) are encouraged to do by a female colleague of Lyotard (and a more optimistic philosopher

than himself), the French feminist moral philosopher Luce Irigaray. This ongoing action of "going at history backwards" for feminists is a way to look back at how history has been constructed from the viewpoint of a subject who is white, heterosexual, and male. With the knowledge that we have today—namely with the female models that are present today in the world—we can imagine what a different history would sound like, if we could write it as history, namely if the evidence of it was still recoverable somehow. Thus, in the process of finding out what was left out of what passed for history but was indeed only a his/"story," we can begin to imagine what a her/"story" would be like. We can begin to rethink the past with a different notion of what is knowable and what constitutes valuable knowledge.

This process can be imagined as a collective effort to re-enter the birth channel, to retrace the path of one's birth—as a species. The myth of the Great Mother, the belief that a matrifocal social order existed at one point, is the force that guided the collective feminist effort to unearth women's buried knowledge, which resulted in Gimbutas' ability to read Neolithic V shapes as concrete representations of female genitals.

When the pendulum oscillates on the side of difference, we see a linguistic system that constructs women as divided in twos. Thus, gender is pitted against sex, the feminist against the feminine. Hence, these twos are not complementary parts of a whole but rather diametrical opposites that do battle against each other inside her and compete for the possession of her soul. Indeed, feminism takes its name from the same stem as feminine, but modern feminists are constructed as mannish women estranged from their true "feminine" nature. Furthermore, a fully human person of the female gender is supposed to be feminine, but this implies she has to forswear feminism because patriarchal epistemology has constructed feminism and femininity as bipolar opposites. Indeed, would anybody find being masculine a problem if one is to be masculinist as well? Thus, a generation or two later, postmodern feminism creates the word "gender" to react against the problem that patriarchal epistemology attributes all behavioral differences between women and men to the shape of our genitals, to our menses, and the use made of our sexual organs in the reproductive process. "Gender is cultural," feminist militants claim, while sex is merely biological. "There is a huge difference between them." But no matter how clear the purpose of this differentiation is made, patriarchal epistemology recuperates it in its

either/or logic, thus putting a new dichotomy in place. "If this is sex, it is not gender and vice versa," it claims. Hence, we (women) lose again the language we were in the process of creating, a language in which it would be easy to express what it does mean to be a woman, to be a fully human person of the female gender.

As I move in the direction of reinventing this language, I follow once more the direction indicated by Luce Irigaray. Indeed, there is a way to embrace a woman's dividedness so that it becomes a choice instead of an imposition. The dividedness patriarchal knowledge attributes to women is an excuse to place us at the negative end of the spectrum, but if we take it on for ourselves, then the bipolar opposites can be turned into complementary parts of a two-in-one where both the one and the two are interrelated parts of a whole. Here we invent a language that celebrates our embodiedness and the beauty of our genitals. A symbiotic reason is born. In this new rhetoric, the bipolar opposites sex and gender become the two complementary parts of our sexedness. Here women's partaking in the process of being engendered as both sexed and sexual beings is so complete and essential as to cause men's role in the matter to seem almost irrelevant. Here the eros (the love and desire for life) that resides within each person, and in particular within females, is the sign of the individual trajectory of a life which is not simply being in motion from birth to death, but rather being immersed in an ongoing symbiotic process of generation and regeneration.

Thus, the feminist epistemology that I propose changes quite radically the way in which the past can be told. Indeed, this past is told from the viewpoint of a woman who defines herself as a "weak" subject for she is historically disenfranchised owing to her gender, but is privileged to a certain extent by race, class, and nationality.<sup>19</sup> Yet, this her/"story" is different from history on two counts: first, it is the story of the past told by her; second, it does not pretend to be universal, but admits that it is only one amongst the many possible "stories" that can be told from different subjective viewpoints. Indeed, this subject is "weak," but she has the potential to gather social energy around herself. She is symbiotic. At the "end of modernity," *pensiero debole* philosophers claim that there is a long past to be told, but there may not be many generations ahead of us to hear the tale, especially if we don't save the earth from pollution and oil wars. In this kind of situation, weakness can be a strength. Bacteria are weak. So are worms. But who will survive when all the resources are exhausted? Who will be stronger than, us (humans)

or them (bacteria, worms)? An epistemology that validates our (women's) knowledge can point to possible answers to these questions. It can also help in the effort of redirecting the social energy spent in debating issues of identity (such as those pertaining to differences of race, nationality, culture, ethnicity, and sexual orientation) towards more productive discussions that verge on symbiosis. One such direction is analyzing how the multiple groups that interact in the social fold contribute different kinds of energy to keep the balance of a community in place; another is determining how basic human rights such as peace, freedom, as well as personal and communal well-being can be respected.

#### 4. Hypothesizing Gaia

I now come to my anticipated focus on the Gaia hypothesis and ecofeminism. The so-called Gaia hypothesis is an ecological theory that uses the name of a Greek goddess, Gaia. Its central claim is that the Earth is a living organism, a being with a consciousness and will of its own. It is not only a very bold hypothesis, but also one difficult to demonstrate via some controlled laboratory experiment. It should, therefore, be taken as an axiom, one that is just as credible as its bipolar opposite: that the Earth is an assemblage of resources for the use and consumption of one species, humans.<sup>20</sup>

In the Greek cosmos, Gaia was one of many female and male deities. In the New Age Movement and in Neo Paganism--the subcultures in which the hypothesis was born--Gaia is a major, albeit not exclusive goddess. The sacred is feminine. It does not reside up in the heavens. It resides down in the Earth. This view of the sacred is part of a belief system--call it religion if you prefer--that recombines elements of Buddhism, Paganism, Witchcraft, Voodoo, Animism, and Hinduism, with their emphasis on human integration with nature, on polytheism, magic, spirituality, and the integration of the erotic and the sacred.<sup>21</sup> With its due variations, the view is popular among participants in the global justice movement and in holistic communities around the world.

Holistic communities around the world are often utopian spaces that experiment with symbiotic practices and ethics. The peace movement, that surprised warmongering administrations on February 15th, 2003 with its impressive anti-war demonstrations around the world, can be seen as yet another manifestation of global Gaian awareness. This



movement is an expansion of the global justice movement that has opposed corporate globalization and has the potential to become the agent of an alternative globalization mode based on symbiotic reason and justice among species and bioregions. The continuum between peace and ecology surfaces in people's consciousness when they post signs that oppose "oil wars." "Energy wars will kill both winners and losers," says the voice of direct democracy, "because we need to break out of oil dependency and seek alternative, renewable sources of energy." This will defeat oil oligarchies both in consuming and in producing regions.

From an ecological perspective, one must ask why this belief system makes sense, what it can do for ecology. It presents a plurality of deities centered on a main, one, Earth. This deity, it claims, is our hostess. She provides a hospitable environment for our growth and development, but we must be wise enough to respect it and share it. If we choose not to do so, then the environment will become unable to sustain us; it will become poisonous to the point that it will kill us as a species, and many other species will have to follow our fate. At that point we humans will cease to exist, but Gaia won't. Gaia will become one of many planets who are very happy being simply populated by minerals, stones, bacteria, other microorganisms, and perhaps worms. This symbiotic trunk will turn into a lifeless log. Unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately—we can destroy the environment that sustains our life on Earth, the wonderful mantle teeming with life that covers our planet. We cannot destroy the rock that's under the biosphere. If we continue to mistake Gaia for an assemblage of usable resources, we will kill ourselves, not her. It is up to us to create ecological health and sustainable development while we still can.

Ecofeminist philosophers observe that what we have done so far is exactly the opposite, at least within the so-called Western world. We have created armaments and weapons capable of blowing up our habitat. We have depleted the resources that make the biosphere hospitable to our species at such a rapid pace that if all existing human beings had equal access to them, in no time they would be gone.

Is this reasonable, the supporters of the Gaia hypothesis, ask? Clearly the answer is no! Why are we doing it then?

Ecofeminists have an interesting answer to that question. "We are doing it because the cultural legacy of the West has embedded certain paradigms in our way of thinking, certain shared beliefs in our cultural

discourse. As a result, we simply assume that these paradigms are universal when they are not." It is here that gender analysis comes into play.

An examination of the most important dichotomies helps to make this point.

"nature – humankind"

"body – mind"

We assume that these distinctions are natural, universal, reasonable, when they are not. The mind is made up of body, of flesh. As a child, I used to eat fried calves brains. My mother made them especially for me because I refused to eat meat. I still have them occasionally. They are a delicious entrée! The mind is made out of body and this body has a sweet, creamy taste. The distinction between humankind and nature is just as fuzzy and untenable. Male and female human beings are animals, 95% of our DNA is the same as a monkey's DNA. It is now known that some species—most notably dolphins and whales—have developed languages to communicate among themselves.

Dichotomous thinking places the sacred outside of the Earth, thus creating what French philosopher Georges Bataille used to call "the accursed share," the negative pole in the dichotomy which becomes expendable because its share of sacredness has been evacuated.<sup>22</sup> In looking at the so-called great religions, one realizes that most are based on a single male deity who resembles (or whose messiah resembles) the males of the populations that originally made them their own. Jesus is Caucasian, Mohammed is Arab, Buddha is Asian. We make these deities, then we look at them and we say, "Oh, look, God made me in his image, I must be real special!" As a result of this self-reflection, we then assume that we must be this deity's favorite species and that everything else he made was made for us and has no purpose of its own. But, ecofeminists ask, "Who made these deities in the first place?"

Next, we explain this sense of ownership by claiming to be more reasonable and intelligent than other creatures. But elephants have not spent valuable time and energy creating weapons capable of erasing the presence of their species from the face of the Earth! Monkeys have not depleted the habitats that are hospitable to them! Even lions, not famed as the kindest of species, never destroyed the jungles that provided them with their preys! "Who is stupid then? "Does our supposedly superior reason really work," ecofeminists ask.

I'd say it does not because it is not the universal, objective, impar-

tial reason it claims to be. It is a reason based on the very specific situatedness of a small percentage of human persons: white, middle-class, able-bodied, relatively young males of the industrialized world who have embraced the Western philosophical legacy.

In a Western epistemological framework, as shown in Table 1, the subject and the object are separate; the subject is superior to the object and must control it. This order is articulated in a series of principles that form a belief system and produce certain effects. For example, the principle that "man" can control "nature" produces depletions of environmental resources and losses in biodiversity. The principle that the mind must control the body produces an emphasis on allopathic medicine and a concept of medicine as war against disease agents. This in turn results in all kinds of anxiety-producing repressions that can have violent and explosive effects. The principle that masters must control slaves produces unpaid domestic labor and sex slavery, with their attendant devaluation of the social benefits of service and care. The principle that a husband must control a wife produces the underrating of service and reproductive work. The principle that a seed must control a womb produces the cultural notion of reproduction as destiny and its attendant excessive population growth.

**Table 1: Western Epistemological Framework.** Subject and object are separate. Subject is superior to object and must control it.

Principle - Belief System	Effect it Produces
Man must control nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depletion of environmental resources</li> <li>• Loss in biodiversity</li> </ul>
Mind must control body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on allopathic medicine</li> <li>• Medicine as war against the disease agent</li> </ul>
Master must control slave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unpaid labor</li> <li>• Sex slavery</li> </ul>
Husband must control wife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underrating of service work</li> </ul>
Seed must control reproductive organs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reproduction as destiny</li> <li>• Excessive population growth</li> </ul>

The belief system thus formed constructs a scopic notion of knowledge that presumes a distance between knower and known and a consciousness that believes that "what I see is what there is to know." The purpose of this knowledge is mastery, as in Julius Caesar's "I came, I saw, I conquered." The more tactile symbiosis and empathetic contemplation are brushed off. The imperative is: I must control. But, ecofeminists ask, "Does this work?"

**5. Ecofeminism**

The present crisis, ecofeminism claims, is an opportunity for change. True, environmental depletion is ancient, even Plato talks about deforestation in the Mediterranean basin, but we have come to a point of no return. We've never had the potential to terminate life on Earth as we know it. We've never been capable of globally impacting the climate, the natural elements. I think it is fair to propose that the current crisis forces all to seek a new model of knowledge.

But how? What new model? Which new logic? With other ecofeminists, I claim that women and our specific experiential perspective—which is not necessarily based in biology but is rather based in the social construction of the biological given called gender—are the key out of this dead lock. I think this is a good point. Let's see what this perspective can teach us.

Here, I must specify that I can only speak as a woman of the industrialized world, though one who has lived and worked along its borders, first in Italy, then in southern California, and now in Puerto Rico. This means that I have been included in what the West considers humankind, mind, civilization, rather than the more expendable nature, body, the primitive, the colonial. I am grateful for this privilege and aware that I have done nothing special to deserve it. It is also a clear limitation on my perspective.

But to come back to that perspective, I claim that we women know that this blessed inclusion within the realm of humanity, reason, subject, was not always bestowed on us by those who have appointed themselves as masters of the universe. We also know that we were not mere matter, even when medieval philosophers debated whether or not we had a soul. We were not matter; we did have a consciousness, but they did not know. "Who was blind? Who was ignorant? Who was operating on the wrong assumption," I ask. A similar change occurred with slaves. They did have a consciousness; they were not matter, but their masters did not know—or so they claimed. It was that consciousness that fueled the processes of liberation and emancipation that caused the inclusion from which we benefit today.<sup>23</sup> In the current crisis, then, those who are now treated as resources, as well as those who belong to groups that have a legacy of having been so treated, are empowered with a knowledge to which masters have no access. This knowledge, I claim, is necessary to turn the crisis into a new development.

Imagine, for a moment, that Gaia really had the consciousness the Gaia hypothesis attributes to it. Imagine that every bird, tree, stone was animated with a soul. Imagine that those beings were aware of what we are doing to them, that we are destroying them. Imagine that they were not happy, not happy at all, of the way we are treating them, of the way we are mismanaging and taking the lion's share of the communal wealth with which Gaia has enshrined herself to become a planet hospitable to complex biological organisms. Suppose, they knew that we are not sharing fairly, and that she can't be happy about it. Then, do you think that

we can look forward to a good fate? No wonder we have more war, violence, terrorism than ever before. They can be seen as a manifestation of Gaia's rage. "You think you're omnipotent," Gaia says to the human species, to these swarming cells that inhabit her body, to the restless nodes in her web. "I'll show you how you're going to destroy yourselves." Some of us have chosen to ignore the existence of this consciousness, of this interconnected web of consciousnesses, with no proof other than a masculine, monotheistic god we've created to please ourselves. Is it possible that this ignored will won't do something to teach us a lesson—a lesson of humility, a lesson of modesty? It seems wise to anticipate this lesson and amend ourselves. The peace movement that has surged in response to the oil wars can be heard as the voice of this symbiotic consciousness. Those who are listening to Gaia's message speak in the rhetoric of symbiotic reason and say, "We don't need this lesson, we know already."

### 6. *Symbiosis and Sustainability*

The ecofeminist shift towards Gaian belief systems is necessary to achieve what the 21st century needs: sustainable growth on a global scale. The peace movement is causing new belief systems and epistemologies to spill from utopian and holistic communities into the social fabric as a whole. When they impact people and cultures in a pervasive way, there will be the critical mass to achieve change. The Gaia hypothesis is reasonable, and we have plenty of indirect evidence that it works: the crisis that has resulted from assuming that the Earth is an assemblage of resources to be used by a narcissistic species whose alleged superiority is only vouched by its own fabricated deities.

Perhaps as a result of this crisis, in the 1980s and 1990s, much second-wave feminist thinking became reactive. In this effort to hold on to and firm up the advances of the 1970s, as well as extend them to wider circles, something was lost. Ecofeminism is a more proactive feminist mode that moves past identity politics to envisage encompassing spiritual coalitions that can create change. In so doing, it breaks up the binarisms of Western rationality that have caused the dichotomy man – nature, subject – object, and are responsible for the crisis to begin with.

When the Gaia hypothesis functions as the basic belief system or axiom upon which an epistemology works, it is possible to articulate a series of correlated dichotomies, the crises they caused, what can be done to repair them, and the alternative belief systems that must be gen-

erated. Ecofeminism articulates all areas of this dichotomy, and proposes productive ways to think of the interconnectedness of its bipolar elements. In an ecofeminist epistemological framework, subjects and objects are largely the same and control is replaced by dialog and collaboration.

The "nature – human" dichotomy has caused a series of ecological crises that have made nature sick to the point of capitulation. These include processes like global warming and the increasing amounts of toxic pollutants in air, food, and water, as well as the creation of nuclear and biological weapons capable of destroying entire ecosystems. We must now save nature to save ourselves. The "slave – master" dichotomy has caused the treatment of some humans and most animals and plants as mere resources. But humans are not mere resources. Nothing is merely a resource. All of creation has meaning, consciousness, purpose. We now know that those who have been mistaken for resources have superior knowledge and, therefore, believe that master shall learn from slave.

The "body—mind" dichotomy has caused the prevalence of allopathic medicine that uses the body as a battlefield for the war of medical drugs against disease agents. But disease is a message from the body that speaks of an imbalance in its ecology. We must learn to listen to the body. The body speaks to the mind, "I am sick. I need a break. I am unhappy. I need a cleaner space!" The "wife—husband" dichotomy has caused the separation between the feminist and the feminine—the first refuses to be "husbanded," the second accepts it. But a wife can husband herself. Partnership is mutuality and relatedness. The dichotomy "reproductive organs—seeds" has caused reproduction to be seen as a destiny, but we now know that reproduction is a choice. Women's reproductive potential must be protected and a woman's body/abdomen belongs to herself. Sexual players must collaborate to achieve sustainable global population growth. This framework is summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2: Ecofeminist Epistemological Framework. Gaia Hypothesis.**

<b>Dichotomy that Caused Crisis</b>	<b>Crisis it Caused What we must do to repair it The belief-system we must generate</b>
Nature—Human	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature is sick to point of capitulation</li> <li>• We must save it to save ourselves</li> </ul>
Slave—Master	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humans are not resources because nothing is a resource</li> <li>• All of creation has meaning, consciousness, purpose</li> <li>• Those who have been mistaken for resources have superior knowledge</li> <li>• Master shall learn from slave</li> </ul>
Body—Mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to the body, the body speaks to the mind "I am sick, I need a break, I am unhappy, I need a cleaner space!"</li> </ul>
Wife—Husband	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A wife can "husband" herself</li> <li>• Partnership is mutuality and relatedness</li> </ul>
Reproductive organs—Seeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reproduction as choice</li> <li>• Women's reproductive potential must be protected</li> <li>• A woman's body/abdomen belongs to herself</li> <li>• Sexual players must collaborate to achieve sustainable global population growth</li> </ul>

Gaian belief systems are multifarious just like the concept they represent. They operate in a variety of holistic communities, including the LovingMore community in Colorado, the Permaculture communities of northern California, the Alcatraz community in central Italy, the Zegg community in Germany, the Auroville community in Kerala, India, the Harbin Hot Springs community in northern California, and a variety of other similar communities based on utopian visions that are both synergistic and eclectic.<sup>24</sup> Gaian belief systems also find expression in certain aspects of third-wave feminism, such as the reclaiming of "bitch," "witch," and "slut" as terms of empowerment for young countercultural women determined to be in charge of themselves.<sup>25</sup> The concept of Gaia itself can be visualized as a Deleuzian rhizome, representing multiplicity in a free-range order, with identifiable repeat patterns like ginger-root shapes, all different from each other, yet all of one make.

## Conclusion

The globalization era has brought the fallacies of individual reason to the surface. In the face of possible extinction, humans need to think more symbiotically. Ecological feminism is a philosophical perspective that enhances the value of the Gaia hypothesis and demonstrates its reasonableness and effectiveness. Ecofeminists think in proactive rather than reactive ways and assume that, in a collective contest, the distinction between the pre-discursive and the discursive is irrelevant. By going back through the path through which Western culture was born one can think of a feminism that is also feminine and invent a matrifocal her/"story" which opens up new readings of pre-historical ages. These enable the formulation of a new mode of reason based on symbiosis. In this mode of reason control is not necessary and life resembles a Deleuzian rhizome made of elements in a free-range order, each different yet part of the same whole. Thinking of the Earth as a being with a life of its own breaks up the dichotomy between subject and object, mind and body, humans and nature. If the sacred is in the earth rather than in an abstract religious realm, then there are no mere resources, and every node in the web of life has its meaning and purpose. While a Western epistemological framework leads to a belief system that causes the depletion of natural resources and may even turn the biosphere into a habitat incapable of hosting human life, an ecofeminist epistemological

framework points to existing sustainability problems and to symbiotic ways in which they can be resolved.

## Notes

1. For theorization of the two-in-one see Luce Irigaray (1985, *passim*) and Anderlini-D'Onofrio (1998, 159-174).
2. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (3-26 and *passim*).
3. For a more detailed discussion of symbiosis and evolution see Margulis, *Symbiotic Planet* (1998).
4. See Evelyn Fox-Keller (1995), Sandra Harding (1986), and Nancy Tuana (1994), who focus on biology, science per se, and the philosophy of science, respectively. Harding does acknowledge her debt to Rachel Carson's pioneering work.
5. Carolyn Merchant (1994), Ariel Salleh (1997), and Joni Seager (1994), who focus on theory, politics, and grass-roots organization respectively. Also, of course, see Francoise D'Eaubonne's (1994) pioneering work.
6. Val Plumwood (1994), Vandana Shiva (1993), and Charlene Spretnak (1994) focus on problems with the Western tradition; alternative, vernacular, and Eastern traditions; and new spiritualities, respectively.
7. The notion of the pre-discursive is Lacanian. According to Lacan's interpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis, neither consciousness nor the subconscious are pre-discursive. Both are engendered by discourse itself. This theory is articulated in three essays, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," and "The Signification of the Phallus," in *Ecrits* (1977).
8. Walter Mignolo makes a distinction between a first phase of modernity (in the sixteenth century) and a "second phase of modernity" that includes the Enlightenment and the industrial revolution. While Italy contributed to the first phase, it never really got into the second phase other than by induction or osmosis (Mignolo 2000, 19). A similar observation is offered by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt in *Empire*, "Two Europes, Two Modernities," (69-83).
9. See *The Prince* (1999). This famous book is clearly a product of the Italian Renaissance but did not have the desired effect on it. In the early modern era, Machiavelli urged Italy to unify under a powerful prince,

but this never happened. Later on Italy became the prey of the colonial ambitions of the more powerful European nations who had actually followed Machiavelli's advice to unify. The book's strange relationship to the Italian Renaissance is interesting. In Deleuzian terms, the Italian Renaissance can be described as a rhizomatic multiplicity endowed with an awareness that if one becomes the center of a powerful empire--if one unifies and regiments multiple impulses into a system of domination--all one has to look forward to is a future where one's own central space is the envy and the prey of those positioned in the periphery (the Romans called them "barbarians") who will love and hate one's centrality and try to displace it. This awareness can be attributed to the long and painful period during which the former Roman Empire disaggregated. "Why want that?" Italian Renaissance people must have thought. "Isn't the rhizomatic multiplicity better?" The cultural memory of the Roman Empire must have functioned as a vaccine against Machiavelli's ideas. Ironically, after the unification of Italy in 1870, the belated colonial efforts of Mussolini came to be seen as pathetic by Italians themselves.

10. From the 17th to the 19th century, different areas of today's Italy were colonized by Spain, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, France, and, more indirectly, England. *La Nuova Enciclopedia Universale Garzanti* (1985), 733.

11. This cyclical pattern has been theorized by the 18th century Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico (1986). His system is similar to Hegel's but without the forward movement that implies a manifest destiny and an ever better future.

12. When I moved from Rome, Italy, to Riverside, California, in 1981 with my five year old, I could not help not notice these differences. In California maternity-leave policies were unheard of, but in Italy they included five months of leave with full pay (three before and two after the birth), for all full-time employed women in tenured jobs. Until the child turned three, part-time employment was also available at a parent's request, and so were subsidized leaves of absences based on the child's wellness needs. The country also had a well-organized, free of charge, public child care system. The marketing and consumption of baby wellness special foods and products was a major force in propelling on the economy.

13. Representatives of *pensiero debole* include Gianni Vattimo (1991, 1992) and Massimo Cacciari (1995).

14. The issue of pre-discursiveness has entered feminist debates via feminist film and theater scholarship. Representatives of the Lacanian position include Kaja Silverman (1994, 1990), Mary Ann Doane (1990), and Sue-Ellen Case (1988).

15. On deep and social ecology see also Murray Bookchin, "The Concept of Social Ecology," in Carolyn Merchant ed. *Ecology* (1994); and Robert Sessions, "Deep Ecology versus Ecofeminism: Healthy Differences or Incompatible Philosophies?" in Karen Warren ed. *Ecological Feminist Philosophies* (1996).

16. Ecological feminism has contributed to many significant areas of cultural debate, including globalization, sustainability, peace, deep vs. social ecology (Merchant 1994; Warren 1996), the use of nuclear energy (Caputi, 1993), animal rights (Sanchez, 1993), medicine, science, and health. Theorists like Carolyn Merchant and Ariel Salleh have focused on the debate between deep and social ecologists; scientists Sandra Harding, Evelyn Fox-Keller, and Lynn Margulis have exposed the gendered dimension of scientific knowledge; third-world biologist and activist Vandana Shiva points to the higher sustainability of native modes of knowledge; the writings of African-American critic Shamara Shantu Riley (1993), lesbian critic Greta Gaard (1997), and bisexual critic Maria Pramaggiore (1996), theorize exclusion and marginalization as empowering cognitive experiences; and the work of Starhawk (1979, 2002), Carol Christ (1998, 1994), and Marija Gimbutas (1989), in spiritual and religious studies, theorizes female deities and a feminine dimension of the sacred.

17. The main reference here is Carol Gilligan (1983), *In A Different Voice*.

18. *The Language of The Goddess*, and *The Living Goddesses*.

19. For a complete theorization of the "weak" subject, the "two-in-one, her/"story," see Anderlini-D'Onofrio (1998).

20. For a complete discussion of the Gaia hypothesis from a scientific perspective, see Lovelock (1979, 1995).

21. An important person in this context is Oberon Zell-Ravenheart, who formulated the concept in the 1970's, and founded the Church of All Worlds, which helped early neo-pagan groups find a space for their spiritual expression. See: <http://www.caw.org/>.

22. For a complete discussion see Bataille (1988), especially Vol. II, *The History of Eroticism*.

23. A more extensive discussion of this issue is included in Shamara

- Shanty Riley's "Ecology is a Sistah's Issue Too" (1993).
24. The communities I mention are just a small sample of many such communities now existing. The sample is based on my practice and research. See: LovingMore: <http://www.lovemore.com/>; Permaculture: <http://www.starhawk.org/permaculture/permaculture.html>; Alcatraz: <http://www.alcatraz.it>; Zegg: <http://www.zegg.de/englisch/eng.htm>; Auroville: <http://www.auroville-international.org/indexframes.htm>; Harbin Hot Springs: <http://www.harbin.org/>.
25. Some of these aspects are explored in Baumgardner (2000), Budapest (1989), and Tanenbaum (1999).

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#### Globalization in 25 Words or Less

Globalization describes the changing world from one large entity into a shrunken interconnected community, where communication, transportation, trade and information technology have more widespread accessibility.

Marlene Rose Segre  
University of the West Indies  
Kingston, Jamaica

Globalization is the coffee chain "Starbucks," a body of people endeavoring to please all with a wide variety of products and services, fulfilling the public's needs.

Luke Fraser  
Flinders University  
South Australia

Globalization brings the world together, yet drives the world apart. Brought together by networks of relations and ideals; alas kept apart by the same token.

Loh Huiling Samantha  
National University of Singapore  
Singapore