Dialogical Construction of Goddess Worship: Locating 1980s Religious Movements in the Environmental Movement

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I. Abstract

As a consequence of the complex relationship between religion and environmentalism throughout American history, the modern environmental movement struggles to find firm footing in its position on religion. I take a deep dive into the environmental movement of the 1980s in order to track its relationship to the Goddess-worship movement, the budding environmentally-minded religious movement of the same era. I analyze environmentalists' language in their descriptions of Goddess worship, as well as Wicca and nature worship, in order to identify what characterized Goddess worship according to environmentalists. In doing so, I dive into the boundaries that environmentalists created both around themselves and around the religious groups they interacted with.

II. Introduction

The 1980s were a moment of critical reshaping in the environmental movement. After the bureaucratization of the movement in the 1970s with the advent of the EPA, the movement had the chance to look towards new horizons. The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 also dramatically altered the state of the environmental movement, as conservatives became increasingly disturbed by the 'conservation' movement and the attention to public resources associated with the Democratic Party. Following the economic slowdown of the late 1970s, Reagan's policies of dissolving the bureaucracy around environmental laws and public lands appealed to working class Americans.[1] This conservative pushback was the most significant organized anti-environmental movement that the country had seen.

The escalating conflict with the right caused environmentalists to splinter into factions, with the rise of two radical strands of environmental thought– social ecology and deep ecology. Deep ecology describes an ecological philosophy that sees the natural world as intrinsically valuable outside of human usage and seeks to protect the natural world from interference and extraction. This philosophy inspired and informed "militant wilderness activists" like noted environmental activist Dave Foreman and Earth First!, his organization. In contrast, the philosophy of social ecology, as most famously theorized by Murray Bookchin, embraces a more humanist approach to being in relationship with the natural world. Bookchin sought to create an ecological society that was founded on the absence of hierarchy and synergistic relationships with other beings on Earth.[2] Debates between the adherents of these ideologies in large part sculpted the shape of the environmental movement of the 1980s. The conservative attack on the environmental movement was essential in defining this identity crisis within the movement. What had previously been considered mainstream environmentalism, which was closely tied to deep ecology, began to fracture and secularize in an attempt to gain greater political legitimacy. At the same time, the countercultural movement of the 1960s fed the Goddess worship movement, which embraced neopaganism and nature worship. Goddess-worship groups and their ideals, like rejection of traditional religious dogma, the dissolution of spirit-matter dualism, and belief in a universal oneness of all beings, flourished through the 1980s. The conflicts between the sects of the environmental movement, as well as their respective relationships to New Age, shaped the spiritual and religious tones of what is now the

[1] Turner, James Morton and Andrew C. Isenberg. The Republican Reversal: Conservatives and the Environment from Nixon to Trump. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018, p. 54-57.

[2] Bookchin, Foreman, and Chase. Defending the Earth, p. 8-9.

modern environmental movement.

There was significant fluidity between the categories of 'environmentalism' and 'Goddess-worship,' in that many people who ascribed to Goddess movement ideals also identified themselves as environmentalists. Nevertheless, these categories were often invoked to depict discrete categories of people, in particular by environmentalists who sought to distance themselves from eco-religions and nature worship. Even those Goddess worshippers who positioned themselves as aligned with the goals of the environmental movement described themselves as in conversation with environmentalists, rather than as a part of the movement. The critiques of Goddess worship from those who identified as environmentalists (sans Goddess-worship motivations) had such an impact that they inspired this positioning of environmentalists and Goddess worshippers as discrete categories, rather than overlapping identities amidst the same group of people. In this essay, I use the term 'environmentalist' to describe a broad subset of people who took part in the activism around climate change and environmental contaminants.

I use the term 'Goddess movement' to categorize the umbrella of New Age religious beliefs, ecofeminist religion, neopaganism, nature worship, and Wicca. Social ecologists like Bookchin and Biehl only occasionally referred to Goddess worshippers specifically, but they often used terms like 'New Age,' 'eco-religions,' 'neo-paganism,' or 'nature worship' interchangeably. Their nonspecificity in using these terms interchangeably is both exactly what I want to examine, but also presents a challenge for how I am able to coherently talk about these ideas as a singular unit. In fact, for example, movements like New Age and Wicca were historically distinct movements. Their use as interchangeable terms facilitated a cultural expectation whereby these groups' shared values became their defining features, glossing over their meaningful differences. I chose to use the term 'Goddess movement' to categorize these shared values, because it refers to a broad subset of people who chose to worship a feminized Goddess, rather than a God. This style of worship ranged from people who ascribed to an essentially Judeo-Christian tradition and chose to replace the term 'God' with 'Goddess,' to religious ecofeminists, to Wiccans. This term also works because it encompasses many of the people that were publicly in conversation with environmentalists, like Starhawk and Carol Christ. Both Starhawk and Christ come to the movement from different backgrounds and beliefs, but fit into the category of Goddess worshippers.

In particular, Bookchin and his peers in the field of social ecology were critical to positioning Goddess worship outside of, and sometimes antithetical to, the environmental movement. Due to their prolific writing and the public visibility of their debates, Bookchin and his peers highly influenced the environmental movement. As a result of Bookchin and his peers' attacks on Goddess worship, these words became strategic terms in a political environment. Consequently, their discursive meaning began to separate from a more historically accurate meaning. In this essay, I will examine the language of environmentalists like Bookchin in their descriptions of Goddess worship and discuss how this language discursively produces Goddess worship as a category and identity. By doing so, environmentalists played a significant role in defining the boundaries of New Age, Wicca, and nature worship–what and who could be included and excluded in the use of those terms? By examining the degree to which these terms were embedded in environmentalists' political project, I argue that the boundaries around these terms in turn shaped the function of femininity within the environmental movement. I use the work of gender theorist Judith Butler to frame my approach to the construction of gender in this context.

III. Theoretical Approach

My theoretical approach to examining how this particular rift in the environmental movement constructed the category of the feminine is guided by Butler's theory of gender performance outlined in their book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Butler argues that gender and sex have recently been defined in the American context with "radical discontinuity" between the two.[3] Building on this idea, they argue gender is only a cultural interpretation of sex. In defining gender in this way, however, we simultaneously permit that sex itself is a gendered category. By identifying that this understanding of the relationship between gender and sex is nonsensical, they develop a definition of gender that encompasses the production of sex as a gendered

[3] Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 10.

category.[4]

Butler locates themselves as building off of the work of Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, in which Beauvoir argues that gender is constructed–people become a gender over time rather than being born into a gender identity. In some ways, Butler engages this idea of construction, while in some ways rejecting its premise in locating the body as a passive medium which construction is enacted upon, and taking Beauvoir's work to a more radical premise.[5] Butler theorizes that gender is not innate or essential, but rather is the result of "words, acts, gestures and desire." For the purposes of my project, I am particularly interested in the role that words play in this construction of gender. These acts of "corporeal signification… produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body" rather than being produced by the body itself.[6] Consequently, they argue that these words, acts, gestures, and desire are performative, in that the identity that they indicate are constructs only sustained through those behaviors themselves.[7] Butler importantly *does not* seek to invoke performance to signify that they are artificially or inauthentically carried out as we might think of performative in the context of acting.

Butler's notion of the production of gender relies heavily on what they refer to as the "heterosexual matrix," as suggested by their citation of desire as one of the bodily acts that constitute gender performance. They argue that heterosexual norms are essential to facilitating gender performance. The particular importance of heterosexuality is derived from the role that heterosexuality plays in inscribing the gender binary; they write, "That institutional heterosexuality both requires and produces the univocity of each of the gendered terms that constitute the limit of gendered possibilities within an oppositional, binary gender system."[8] Here, Butler points to the importance of heterosexuality in differentiating between masculine and feminine characteristics, practices, habits, etc. The importance of differentiation as a goal of gender norms furthers their claim that gender is performed rather than a stagnant identity. Consequently, Butler sees their work in theorizing gender performance as "an effort to think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power."[9]

By looking at the language of social ecologists in their descriptions of Goddess worshippers, I identify what comprised the category of gender in this particular rift in this environmental movement. Social ecologists like Bookchin both produced the category of femininity in their discussion of Goddess worship and reflected existing ways of talking about femininity. Consequently, painting a picture of femininity in this moment allows us to locate opportunities for intervention where this relationship to femininity informs the values of the environmental movement in harmful ways.

IV. The Language of Environmentalists

Before the National Green Gathering in June 1989, the Burlington Greens, the Burlington, Vermont chapter of the Green Party, drafted policy statements to present at the gathering. The national gathering would define the American Green Party's policy strategy. Murray Bookchin and Janet Biehl, both members of the Burlington Greens, drafted policy statements for this gathering and published them in their newsletter, *Left Green Perspectives*, published from 1986 through 2000. Left Green Perspectives had significant influence in defining the environmental consciousness of the political left.[10]

In one of Biehl's policy statements, "On Theistic Spirituality," she adamantly rejects the idea that Goddess worship should have a place in building the environmental movement envisioned by social ecologists. Her critique of Goddess-informed environmentalism is

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4 Ibid, p. 11.
5 Ibid, p. 13.
6 Ibid, p. 173.
7 Ibid
8 Ibid, p. 30.
9 Ibid, p. 44.
10 The newsletter itself had between 200 and 300 subscribers, but its articles, especially those written by Murray, were often widely reprinted. Biehl herself also recounted that many editors of European anarchist periodicals subscribed to the newsletter and translated the articles for their own newsletters, so "the impact of [*Left Green Perspectives*] went far beyond the immediate subscribers."
Biehl, Janet. 'Re: Left Green Perspectives'. Email, 2023.

twofold.[11] Firstly, she writes that religion necessitates social hierarchy through priests and priestesses. Drawing on the tenets of social ecology, she asserts that all forms of hierarchy legitimize the politics of domination. Secondly, she is concerned with religious traditions' abandonment of rationality. Biehl claims that this rationality is essential for ecologists' ability to "take the hard-headed look at hierarchy and domination so necessary to bring about the destruction of hierarchy and domination."[12] Without this hard-headed mindset, she believes that people are susceptible to loss of critical thinking and at risk for manipulation. At times, Biehl's approach becomes extremely defensive, attempting to portray Wiccans as completely out-of-touch. This is most poignant when she writes, "In nature, there is not now, never was, and never will be a goddess–or a god–of any kind. The dualism of 'spirit and matter' is not overcome by goddess religion but rather is perpetuated by it."[13] Her language here leaves no room for discussion on the topic; Biehl prioritizes separation of Wiccans from environmentalists rather than using language to change their minds and hearts. Rather than proposing solidarity across the religious/secular boundary, Biehl's assertion that there "will never be a goddess… of any kind" suggests that Goddess worshippers do not deserve a place in the movement.

Biehl's criticisms sparked rebukes from Goddess worshippers. The witch and Wiccan priestess- Kym Lambert, wrote a letter to the editors claiming that Biehl misrepresents Wiccan views and misunderstands the purpose they serve. Moreover, Lambert points out that in Biehl's claim that Goddess texts are written at a "sixth-grade level," she reinforces a hierarchy that establishes intellectuals as the authority on environmental matters.[14]

Bookchin also made his feelings about Goddess worship and religiously informed environmentalism clear. In November 1989, the Learning Alliance, a New York City alternative education center, sponsored a dialogue between Bookchin and Dave Foreman, one of the icons of the deep ecology movement. During this public dialogue, later transcribed into the book *Defending the Earth: A Dialogue Between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman*, Bookchin stated the importance of differentiating between a spirituality that acted as a "wholesome sensitivity to nature" versus a religiously informed environmentalism that "required or expected belief in an atavistic, simple-minded form of nature worship peopled by gods, goddesses, and eventually by a new hierarchy of priests and priestesses."[15] His belief that this worship distracted from real change led him to assert that the inclinations towards this religious movement "among many deep ecologists, eco-feminists, and 'New Age' greens" deeply worried him.[16] Bookchin's grouping of 'nature worship,' 'deep ecologists', 'eco-feminists', and 'New Age greens' as all threatening to the environmental movement positioned each of those terms in the same ideological category; a category in which the belief in an innate spiritual value in all beings was a threat to the success of the movement.

Bookchin's critiques of Goddess worship were informed by his association of Goddess worship with deep ecology. A significant part of Bookchin's critique of the deep ecology movement was his belief that it fed the eco-religions that he so despised. In another article in *Left Green Perspectives*, he writes that deep ecology is so concerned with prioritizing 'nature' over humankind, that, as a philosophy, it functions in close tandem with "nature-worship."[17] Bookchin cites ancient Egypt as evidence for the harms of nature worship, as it was a society both filled with animal or part-animal/part-human deities while simultaneously being one of the "most hierarchical and oppressive societies in the ancient world."[18] He goes so far as to use the term "Eco-la-la" to refer to this type of nature worship.[19]

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[11] Though she does not reference Wicca explicitly in this article, her signaling towards it is clear with her references to eco-feminist religious traditions that worship the Goddess and draw on cultural inspiration from Neolithic Europe.

[12] Biehl, Janet and Murray Bookchin. "Capitalism, Consensus, and Theistic Spirituality." *Institute for Social Ecology*, June 24, 1989. https://social-ecology.org/wp/1989/06/capitalism-consensus-and-theistic-spirituality/.

[13] Ibid

[14] Ibid

[15] Bookchin, Foreman, and Chase. *Defending the Earth*, p. 36.

[16] Ibid

[17] Bookchin, Murray. "Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology: A Challenge for the Ecology Movement." Green Perspectives: *Newsletter of the Green Program Project*, nos. 4-5, 1987, http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bookchin/socecovdeepeco.html.

[18] Ibid

[19] Ibid

Impact of their Rhetoric

News articles about Bookchin from the time period draw our attention to how his work was received and understood by the general public as his own writing's denseness and complexity often made his ideas relatively inaccessible to the general public. In one *L.A. Times* article published in 1989, reporter Bob Sipchen describes Bookchin's critique of the "radical environmental movement" as focused on two threads within the movement; Sipchen writes that Bookchin is both concerned with biocentrism in deep ecology and the "overlapping" New Age ideas that seek "mystical or meditative solutions to environmental woes."[20] Sipchen pays significant attention to the responses of other central figures of the environmental movement to Bookchin's critiques. Deep ecologists acknowledge that Bookchin's assessment of deep ecology as unconcerned with social justice is in some instances fair- but claim that he exaggerates its importance in deep ecology. They rebuke Bookchin by calling his approach so intellectualized that it is out of touch and lacks an important element: a personal connection to nature.[21] Importantly, Sipchen highlights critiques of Bookchin from people who identify as environmentalists, rather than people who purport to align more closely with New Age.

Sipchen cites Peter Borrelli, editor of the National Resources Defense Council's Amicus Journal, in tracking the trajectory of both deep ecology and social ecology's radical critiques as becoming more present in the minds of "mainstream environmentalists" as the consequences of environmental destruction were becoming more apparent and more grave.[22] Even those mainstream environmentalists who were only "amused" by the debate were nevertheless paying attention to it.[23] Not only does he cite a wide variety of environmentalists that were discussing this particular conflict, but he also published coverage of this debate in one of the most well-read newspapers in the United States. Both of these facts point to the ways in which this debate between social ecologists and deep ecology/nature worship was reconstructing the contours of the environmental movement in the public eye.

The Goddess movement, as defined by environmentalists

By examining the language used by environmentalists, especially Murray Bookchin and the radical left, we can conclude that 'Goddess worship' was used to invoke certain qualities and features that did not paint a perfectly accurate picture of their meaning. Whether or not environmentalists' representations of Goddess worship were accurate, each of these terms was embedded in a particular political project. Their colloquial use impacted the boundaries around these groups despite the inaccuracy of these depictions. That being said, I identify several qualities of Goddess worship that Bookchin and his peers invoke through their discussion of this religious movements, which include feminine character, orientation towards consumerism, ideological totalitarianism, hierarchy, heresy, and nature worship/ecocentrism. Given Butler's claim that gender is a dialectical process and construction, rather than a stagnant category, I argue that each of these facets of the Goddess movement, as characterized by social ecologists, also functioned to characterize femininity more broadly within the environmental movement.

V. Feminine Character

Bookchin leans on "remarkable ecofeminist" Chaia Heller to describe nature-worship as "Eco-la-la."[24] Bookchin does not take the time to precisely describe what he means in his use of the term Eco-la-la, nor does he offer a citation to find where and how exactly Heller herself defined Eco-la-la. Because Heller had no formal publications before 1987 (the year Bookchin published his article), it seems that the term's coining likely took place in some sort of personal interface between Heller and Bookchin. Bookchin's lack of a specific definition allows us to read the term with all of the qualities of femininity that it implies at face value. The implications of the term are manifold; it argues New Agers are in-the-clouds and out of touch with reality, as well as assuming a kind of general silliness. The assumption of ungroundedness and silliness builds on Bookchin's critique that nature worship

[20] Sipchen, Bob. "Ecology's Family Feud: Murray Bookchin Turns Up Volume on a Noisy Debate." *L.A. Times*, March 27, 1989. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-03-27-vw-425-story.html.

[21] Ibid

[22] Ibid

[23] Ibid

[24] Bookchin, "Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology."

and eco-religions are not solution-oriented and that they distract from the real problem at hand, as he articulated in his Learning Alliance debate with Foreman.

As previously mentioned, Biehl also wrote with disdain for what Wicca was doing to the environmental movement. Especially in her language of demanding "hard-headed[ness]" in the environmental movement, she aligns herself with the values of masculinity and rationality.[25] Biehl's aversion to the feminized softness and emotionality present in the spiritual and religious circles of environmentalists reads as if she is disciplining these women. By accusing Wiccan writing of being childish and working to instate a masculine stoicism into the movement, she argues for its political legitimacy.

In his sharp critiques of Eco-la-la as completely missing the point in addressing the ecological crisis, Bookchin utilizes a gendered bias to further the idea of their lunacy and advance a secular social ecology. Therefore, representations of Wiccans ungroundedness or out-of-touch nature became intertwined with representations of femininity. Paired with his academic and dense writing, "Eco-la-la" suggests his belief that the women seeking to contribute to the environmental movement could stand to read some more political theory and touch some more grass.

Importantly, Bookchin did not align himself with ecofeminists across the board. In his book *The Philosophy of Social Ecology: Essays on Dialectical Naturalism*, he writes,

"Only later was ecofeminism reduced to the antirational and crudely visceral level of a Starhawk, where invocations of magic, goddess worship, and witchcraft become 'feminist' ways of eluding reality. Too many ecofeminists, albeit not all, now tend to privilege women over men cognitively and morally, while the original universalist and egalitarian approach of the feminist movement has withered significantly."[26]

While Bookchin aligned himself with a brand of ecofeminism that fit his liking, he demonstrated his comfort with relegating certain brands of feminism to elementary-level theory. Not only did this theory "elude reality," but it was also essentially useless in its "anti-rational[ity]."[27] His emphasis on anti-rationality calls on a long legacy of associating femininity with irrational thinking.

VI. Ideologocial Totalitarianism

Bookchin also takes issue with Eco-la-la's ideas about the falsehood of the self and participation in a universal oneness. In particular, he is concerned with the potential to lose one's individuality in submission to universal oneness, which obscures your capacity to think critically and independently. He writes that the Eco-la-la movement-

"preaches the 'realization of self-in Self where 'Self' stands for organic wholeness.' That a cosmic 'Self' is created that is capitalized should not deceive us into believing that it has any more reality than an equally cosmic 'Humanity.' More of the same cosmic Eco-la-la appears when we are informed that 'the phrase 'one' includes not only men, an individual human, but all humans, grizzly bears, whole rainforest ecosystems, mountains and rivers, the tiniest microbes in the soil and so on.' A 'Self' so cosmic that it has to be capitalized is no real self at all. It is an ideological category as vague, faceless, and depersonalized as the very patriarchal image of 'man' that dissolves our uniqueness and rationality into a deadening abstraction."[28]

The language of positioning religious ideology in contrast with independent thinking, and especially rationality, calls on the intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment. With this language, Bookchin paints rationality and uniqueness as functioning in tandem, in turn reinforcing an intrinsic value in uniqueness. Bookchin's sense of the importance of uniqueness highlights his fear of losing independent thinking. In fact, in his Learning Alliance debate with Foreman, he condemns the "uncritical rejection of the Enlightenment's valid achievements."[29] In other words, Bookchin argues that adherence to religious traditions or use of rituals as mechanisms for societal organization and identity formation makes people gullible, and therefore

[25] Biehl and Bookchin, "Capitalism, Consensus, and Theistic Spirituality."

[26] Bookchin, Murray. *The Philosophy of Social Ecology: Essays on Dialectical Naturalism*. 2nd ed. Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1996, p. 5.

[27] Ibid

[28] Bookchin, "Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology."

[29] Bookchin, Murray, Foreman, and Chase, *Defending the Earth*, p. 59.

subject to ideological totalitarianism.

VII. Consumer Orientation

Bookchin's fear that universal oneness promotes ideological totalitarianism is derived from his theory that this oneness is defined by commodity culture, which surrenders the self to "corporations, centralized government, and the military."[30] Bookchin's assessment of the role that corporations play in creating this common identity is supported by the work of American ethnographer Courtney Bender in her book *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination*. Bender maps the institutions that produce modern American spirituality–an identity tightly tied to the ideas and legacy of the 1980s New Age. In her mapping, Bender seeks to refute the idea that the discourse around and production of spirituality is derived exclusively from personal experience or contact with the divine. Through qualitative research of the spiritual community in Cambridge, Massachusetts, she identifies a wide variety of institutions that produce American spirituality, many of which are organizations that commodify spirituality through yoga classes, alternative medicine, etc. In her reflection on the bulletin board at The Harvest Cooperative's cafe, she writes "If religion in America is represented by First Baptist's brick and mortar buildings, institutional stability, and continued community presence, then spirituality is represented by the bulletin board… jostling with advertisements for all sorts of for-profit services"[31] With its rotating promotion of services that claim to heal one's body and mind, American spirituality takes on many of the features of late stage capitalism, whereby one's identity as a spiritual person is subject to the marketplace of commodified traditions that become personal branding mechanisms. This spirituality is intertwined with the universal oneness that Bookchin fears. In fact, Bender finds that the idea of a universal oneness is essential to American metaphysicals' explanations of their spirituality and spiritual experiences.

Nevertheless, Bender does not claim the relationship is one to one; while the universal oneness may be impacted by consumerism to varying degrees, Bender does not suggest that corporations entirely define spiritual identity. In addition to her discussion of the role of commodifying industries in producing spiritual identity, she also notes institutions like churches and art collectives play a significant role in facilitating spiritual community by offering these groups their space. Moreover, Bender makes no mention of the government or military in shaping how metaphysicals conceive of the universal oneness. She would likely find it a gross oversimplification to say that the concept of universal oneness necessitates the loss of individual uniqueness in its subservience to corporations. The most critical analysis of Bookchin's argument suggests then that his inability to distinguish between acknowledging one's existence as part of a unified oneness and losing one's personality to consumer capitalism reveals a fatal flaw in his own logical flow on the relationship between communalism and individualism. Instead, it reveals his attachment to the ultimate importance of individualism.

VIII. Hiearchy

One of the central themes among social ecologists' critiques of New Age and nature worship is that religion facilitates a hierarchy of gods, goddesses, priests, and priestesses. The abolition of all forms of hierarchy is a central tenet of social ecology and essential to the way that Bookchin's work was received and understood. It was so central, in fact, that it was the only thing mentioned in Wes Enzinna's one-sentence synopsis of Bookchin's popular book *The Ecology of Freedom*. He writes, "[Bookchin] argued that man's destruction of the environment is the result of his domination of other men, and only by doing away with all hierarchies… could humanity avert ecological and economic collapse."[32] In Bookchin's mind, any form of worship or reverence fell into the trap of constructing hierarchies along with it. While New Agers and Wiccans argued that their forms of spirituality deconstructed the spirit-matter dualism present in traditional forms of Judeo-Christian religions, Bookchin argued they perpetuated it. The spirit-matter dualism was

[30] Bookchin, "Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology."

[31] Bender, Courtney. *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010, p. 22.

[32] Enzinna, Wes. "Bizarre and Wonderful: Murray Bookchin, Eco-Anarchist." Pulitzer Center. Last modified July 21, 2017. https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/bizarre-and-wonderful-murray-bookchin-eco-anarchist.

important for their thinking on hierarchy, as it identifies the divine as being outside of or above physical matter. Therefore, Bookchin's understanding that New Age and Wicca exacerbated a spirit-matter dualism led him to conclude that the construction of the divine separated from physical matter necessitated the construction of hierarchy.

IX. Heresy

It is important to situate both Bookchin and Foreman's feelings on the Goddess movement within their own religious contexts. Both Bookchin and Foreman leave some space for spirituality within their ideologies, but never explicitly align their environmental philosophies with any religious tradition. This is especially true of Bookchin, who adamantly works to separate his theory of social ecology from any sort of theological grounding. Excavating their personal religious backgrounds helps us add an essential axis of identity to the way that they talk about and relate to Goddess worship.

Mark Stoll, a scholar of religion and environmentalism, however, rigorously assessed the personal religious backgrounds of Bookchin and Foreman in order to situate their ideas within the complex historical relationship between religion and environmentalism in the United States. Stoll finds that despite Bookchin's claims to a only a light spiritual grounding of social ecology, his "advocacy of social solutions based on reason and of rules restricting the socially destructive actions and behavior of individuals, his hostility towards ruling hierarchies, and his vision of a future utopia of small communities, all bear the hallmarks of his Russian Jewish background."[33] Stoll tracks this origin of Bookchin's ideology in his discussion of the Jewish tradition's de-emphasis on discovering God in nature relative to the Christian tradition and its greater emphasis on the importance of community and communal ritual.[34]

Foreman is much less explicit than Bookchin in denouncing religion's place in the environmental movement. In his Learning Alliance debate with Bookchin, Foreman made no mention of religion, even after Bookchin's sharp critique of New Age religious ideals, and eco-religions in general. Importantly, Foreman's relationship to his religious tradition is much more theologically oriented in comparison to Bookchin's more cultural orientation towards Judaism; Foreman actually sought to become a Church of Christ preacher in his teenage years.[35] The legacy of this relationship to Christianity manifested itself in the style in which he delivered his speeches and the rhetoric of restorationism present in his call for the return of "an original Pleistocene, Paleolithic relation to nature."[36] Stoll goes so far as to align his entire theory of ecological restoration within the legacy of American Protestantism;

"When Foreman denounces greedy exploiters of nature (the sinners), praises the virtues of wilderness (whose purity and authority rival the significance of the Bible to a Christian), calls the repentant to adopt a wilderness ethic (salvation), and preaches return to reverent Paleolithic attitudes to nature (restoration), he is carrying forward in a secular context the values preached by Protestants for nearly five hundred years."[37]

Understanding the religious legacy of their environmental philosophy allows us to add complexity to each of their relationships to New Age religious movements. In his 1998 essay "Alternative Spirituality and Environmentalism," Jon Bloch interviews 22 practitioners of 'alternative spirituality' and finds that more than 75 percent of them began engaging with the ideals of countercultural spirituality after becoming disenchanted with "mainline Religion," a term he uses to describe a variety of mainstream Christian religious sects/institutions.[38] Bloch clarifies that he uses "alternative spirituality" to describe the broad variety of neo-Pagan and New Age practitioners–the same broad group that Bookchin attacks in his own work. 21 of Boch's interviewees described one of their primary frustrations with 'mainline religions' as being their tendency towards dualism, which they see as not incompatible with the spiritual complexity of life. The overall sense from the

[33] Stoll, Mark. "Green Versus Green: Religions, Ethics, and the Bookchin-Foreman Dispute." Environmental history 6, no. 3 (2001): p. 423.

[34] Ibid, p. 418.

[35] Ibid, p. 417.

[36] Ibid

[37] Ibid, p. 416.

[38] Bloch, Jon P. "Alternative Spirituality and Environmentalism." Review of religious research 40, no. 1 (1998): 55–73.

interviewees is a rejection of the rigidity of religious dogma.[39] Bloch's qualitative analysis of the rhetoric and principles of self-identified alternative spiritualists situates Bookchin and Forema's approach to the Goddess movement within the long history of heretics and anti-heretical movements or rhetoric within the Church. From this lens, we might ask what it does to Bookchin's critique if we imagine it as Christian critique of heresy. Even with a Jewish background, the language of anti-heresy has pervaded so much of history that it is easy to see that Bookchin would still have been steeped in it. Even if Bookchin himself did not believe in the framework of heresy and its relationship to the church, what boundaries did it create to frame Goddess worshippers in this light?

In the reference on heresy in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade et al. track the changes over time in the language around heresy and the manner in which it is invoked. Importantly, they note that the invocation of heresy in the modern era serves more to draw political and social boundaries rather than to make claims to religious truths.

"Matters of social control, power relationships, consensus, and the labeling of normality and deviance are intelligible to both the church and its scholarly critics, for the church's drawing of boundaries to mark off heresy parallels in many ways the drawing of boundaries that most societies engage in to mark off deviance."[40]

The entry highlights the entanglement of the language of deviance with that of heresy; they build on one another by highlighting social fears and locating these fears within a familiar legacy of deviance. Bookchin capitalizes on the language of the Christian church in deterring people from abandoning a more complex, evolved system of thought (social ecology) for one that is "simple-minded" and "atavistic" (nature worship).[41] This language was especially powerful in defining a group like Goddess worship, which had come to be closely associated with people who identified themselves as witches–a group which has been notoriously branded by the language of heresy.

X. Nature Worship and ecocentrism

Goddess worshippers and Bookchin alike would agree that the rituals of the Goddess movement center on the act of nature worship. While Goddess worshippers view nature worship as a way to integrate matter and spirit, Bookchin argues that nature in this framing becomes "mystified."[42] He writes that the reification of nature allows those who worship it to deny the reality that nature includes human communities and the built environment in their form of environmentalism. This critique of nature becoming separated and unique shapes his belief that nature worship inspires inaction, which is the thrust of his frustration with nature worship.

Bron Taylor explores the relationship between activism and nature worship in his article "Earth and Nature-Based Spirituality (Part II): From Earth First! and Bioregionalism to Scientific Paganism and the New Age." He studies environmental activists at Earth First! and their relationship with New Agers, at times identifying significant overlap between the two. Taylor argues that for environmental activists in the late twentieth century, social and spiritual rituals bond activists together and reinforce their spirituality and activism, for Earth First! activists in particular.[43] Taylor's careful qualitative assessment of these environmental activists confirms Bookchin's assessment that Earth First! and the theory of deep ecology are founded in a spiritualization of nature. What Taylor finds, however, is that spiritual/religious beliefs promote direct action or other forms of activism, unlike Bookchin suggests in his critique of nature worship.

A central element of Bookchin's critique of nature-worship and eco-religions is that it directs attention away from change and action and towards a sort of spiritually-justified inattention to the material realities of people. Taylor's work suggests that this critique is not necessarily well-grounded. Because of the ways in which more ecocentric environmental philosophies like deep ecology center the intrinsic value of non-human beings, Taylor argues that these philosophies cultivate an impetus towards activism that is promoted and supported by the sort of nature-worship that suggests a spiritual relationship

[39] Ibid

[40] Eliade, Mircea, Charles J. Adams, et al. "Heresy." *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. New York, N.Y: Macmillan, 1986.

[41] Bookchin, Foreman, and Chase. *Defending the Earth*, p. 36.

[42] Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*.

[43] Taylor, Bron. "Earth and Nature-Based Spirituality (Part II): From Earth First! and Bioregionalism to Scientific Paganism and the New Age." Religion (London. 1971) 31, no. 3 (2001): 225–245.

between human and non-human beings. He represents this entanglement of activism and spirituality with his examples of people doing 'tree sits,' where they occupy the branches of trees in order to prevent logging efforts. The activists that Taylor both emphasize the ways in which their spiritual connection to the tree allowed them to occupy for as long as they did. Taylor's findings amplify my claim that Bookchin's characterization of nature worship was embedded in a political project of isolating Goddess worshippers from the environmental movement, rather than an accurate excavation of what motivates people towards environmental action.

This overlap between activists and nature-worshipers who subscribed to New Age religious ideals complicates the efforts that Bookchin made to separate out this eco-religious movement from the more mainstream environmental movement. Taylor notes that New Agers and radical greens were often able to find common ground when they came together, whether through ritual, debate, or activism.[44] Nevertheless, Taylor uses the language of 'radical greens,' 'environmental progressives,' and 'New Agers' as ways of identifying different groups of people. While Bookchin's critiques may not have rung true, the ways in which he and others reinforced the language of political environmentalism as discrete from spiritual environmentalism still had an impact. The production of these discrete categories promoted the idea that environmentalism and religious ideals had to be reconciled, or that even when 'environmentalists' and 'New Agers' came together, they had initially been at odds. Ultimately, though Taylor's work refutes some of the distinction between activism and nature worship, Bookchin's language in categorizing New Age and Wicca as primarily worship-oriented groups prevaded.

XI. Conclusion

The discursive production of the Goddess movement and its relationship to femininity broadly shapes the environmental movement. Because Bookchin, Biehl, and their peers defined femininity as entangled with spirituality, irrationality, emotionality, etc., their work in defining the environmental movement's goals as antithetical to those traits in turn also worked to define the movement's relationship to gender. Despite a core support group composed primarily of women, the leaders and credited figures of the environmental movement are primarily men. The prioritization of masculinity within the movement goes beyond the heralding of men themselves as representatives of the movement; it also affects the broader movement's tendencies to prioritize science and data as motivating forces over religious connection to 'natural' ecosystems. The invocation of New Age and Wiccan ideals as feminine, as well as ungrounded and not solution-oriented, also discursively creates the category of 'the feminine,' just as it does for all of the descriptors that I discussed. Therefore, I do not intend to suggest that male presence in the environmental movement came before masculine values, but rather that they were co-produced. Categorizing the entire environmental movement requires broad brushstrokes and the movement has certainly evolved since the 1980s, but the current political fracture between the goals of religious groups and the environmental movement speaks to the legacy of this moment.

Indeed, the discursive production of identifiers as broad as New Age is not unique to these specific identities and groups. In fact, New Agers themselves are well known for their own constant misuse and appropriation of terms that both misrepresented and reified the knowledge and traditions of East Asia. Differing traditions like Taoism, Buddhism, yoga, and acupuncture (to name just a few) became lumped together under the broad identity of the mystical knowledge of the East.[45] Not only were the boundaries and cores of these traditions often blurred, they were also frequently commodified by voyeuristic white people in the United States. Particularly in the context of a movement already grappling with a long history of neocolonialism, I do not seek to argue that the environmental movement would have been better off had it embraced the spirituality of New Age. In identifying the ways in which these terms were used to produce meaning, I seek to identify a paradigmatic approach to thinking about the way that the current environmental movement relates to science, spirituality, religion, femininity, and other broad categories, identifiers, and values that we associate with masculinity or femininity. These reflections on the movement need not lead us to the conclusion that environmentalists should strive to reincorporate

[44] Ibid, p. 236.

[45] Bender, *The New Metaphysicals*, p. 109-110.

New Age spirituality in order to achieve the paradigmatic shifts necessary to change our relationship to the Earth and mobilize against climate change. Nor do my reflections suggest that this particular moment exclusively shaped the environmental movement's sociopolitical dynamics; it is only one piece of a complex puzzle. Rather, these reflections make available the information necessary to begin to untangle the complicated intertwinedness of the movement's values–including its scientific obsessions and weak spiritual affiliations.

That being said, however, unlike many academics, I do not purport to have identified the link that will inspire necessary change within the movement I am discussing. I do not think that excavating this particular moment in the history of the environmental movement will allow us to dramatically alter the way that the construction of gender plays out within the movement. Even to claim that certain dynamics in the modern environmental movement are the result of this important moment in environmental history is virtually useless. These suggestions within the context of academic work are far too self-important for their own good.

The ecosystem of this movement is dynamic and complex. In reality, while the particular moment in environmental history has an important legacy, it is just as much a flash in the pan as any other important moment. I do not believe, however, that this work needs to have a significant and readily identifiable impact on the environmental movement broadly in order to be important or relevant. If we could admit to ourselves that most academic work rarely impacts material reality outside of the academy, we can be much more honest about how this work is important - in turn, allowing it to actually embody its full purpose.

So what then does this work contribute? I began this project as an organizer myself, and, more importantly, a member of the generation that is staring down the barrel of the climate crisis. To be a member of this generation is to understand that we can no longer engage the rhetoric of 'solutions.' There is no turning around at this point. And moreover, to be shocked or indignant by this fact is to have grossly misunderstood what it is to be a member of this generation. What is available to us, however, is the opportunity to build resilience and solidarity *in the face of* the crisis that we face. Building resilience and solidarity requires intimate knowledge of the roles that we play in the ecosystems that we occupy, deep understanding of what we owe to the communities that we are a part of, and close attention to the harmful socializations that we perpetuate both within ourselves as well as interpersonally.

Consequently, this work is more personal than anything else. It helped me understand a piece of the broader puzzle of my role as an environmentalist, an organizer, and a member of my community. It expanded my understanding of how I occupy and perpetuate gendered categories and locate the ways in which these categories are harmful, as well as opportunities to uproot and repair some of those harms. What is most significant is that I realized I was only putting two pieces of a very large puzzle together, even after a year of work on this particular project, which was informed by many more years prior of studying the environmental movement. It will be a lifelong project, then, to begin to work through the historical legacies that play out not only in my world, but also in my relationships and communities. This project has contributed to that project for me. I hope that it is able to be a part of that process for others.

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