

Chapter One



Prolegomenon for an Ecofeminist Dialogics

I

Pluralistic humanism has run its course. What may have once encouraged individual growth and intellectual diversity for some components of the culture is now producing a *laissez-faire* attitude that truncates the debate over cultural values through nonjudgmental or “undecidability” postures.¹ As Gerald Graff has trenchantly suggested, “real disagreement has become rare, for the multiplicity of tongues leads not to confrontation but to incommensurability and talking at cross-purposes” (*Literature* 190). The various cataclysms of the twentieth century that dethroned the idealist humanism that posited the linear progression of western civilization did not dethrone the anthropocentrism of religious and secular humanism, nor did they disrupt the androcentrism that arises from the patriarchal base of western culture. Similarly, the theoretical projects that arose to challenge humanism have produced an energetic skepticism and a shifting of foci of theoretical and critical attention, but they have not promoted neither a world view that enables any kind of affirmation of new values nor a praxis that enables the application of such values in the physical world. In marked contrast to the critical maladies of enervated humanism, solipsistic skepticism, and paralytic undecidability, a triad of (re)perceptions has appeared, which, if integrated, can lead toward an affirmative praxis: the Bakhtinian dialogical method, ecology, and feminisms.²

Dialogics enables the differential unification of ecology and feminisms, which is to say a conjoining that does not conflate particularities or subordinate one to the other. Such an integration can produce a new perception of the relationship of humanity and world, and a praxis that works toward the decentering dealienation of andro/anthropocentric humanism and the reintegrative, affirmative dissolution of the intellectual isolation of radical skepticism. Dialogics encompasses Marxist dialectics by emphasizing the unity of opposites and their interanimating dynamic tension (see Lenin 192–238 and 359–63; Mao 117–25).³ At the same time, it reveals that the most fundamental relationships are not resolvable through dialectical synthesis: humanity/nature, ignorance/knowledge, male/female, emotion/intellect, conscious/unconscious. And these paired terms are not even actually dichotomous or dyadic but only indi-

cate idealized polarities within a multiplicitous field, such as that of planet, thought, sex/gender, perception, and mind. Bakhtin's conception of centripetal/centrifugal tension provides a means of countering totalization, so that any totality is continuously recognized as already a relativized, temporal centripetal entity in need of centrifugal destabilizing. While human forces are always at work centralizing, quantifying, and coding phenomena, other human forces are always challenging and breaking up such reductions and constructions in order to sustain themselves.

II

Ecology and feminisms provide the groundings necessary to turn the dialogical method into a livable critical theory, rather than a merely usable one applicable only to literature, language, and thought. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak candidly observes, "one must fill the vision of literary form with its connections to what is being read: history, political economy—the world. And questioning the separation between the world of action and the world of the disciplines. There is a great deal in the way" (95). And one of the "deals" in the way consists of critical theories that can be represented as critical discourses in the classroom but cannot be implemented as transformative pedagogies or applied in the rest of our interpretive behavior, by means of which we act in the world.

Ecology as a discipline means, fundamentally, the study of the environment in its interanimating relationships, its change and conservation, with humanity recognized as a part of the planetary ecosystem. Ecology, then, is not a study of the "external" environment which we enter, or a management system for the raw materials at our command, although some misperceive it in these ways; it is a study of interrelationship, place, and function, with its bedrock the recognition of the distinction between things-in-themselves and things-for-us. The latter entities result from intervention, manipulation, and transformation. And, as a corollary, if we can render other entities things-for-us, the reverse also exists: other entities can render us things-for-them. Ecology can be a means for learning how to live appropriately in a particular place and time, so as to preserve, contribute to, and recycle the ecosystem (see Rolston 14–27). As Adrienne Rich expresses it, "I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history, within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist, I am created and trying to create" (8; see also Snyder, *Old Ways* 63–64).

In a very basic way, the recognition of the difference between things-in-themselves and things-for-us, and the corollary of us-as-things-for-others leads directly into feminisms, particularly in their interrogations of gender. Only by recognizing the existence of the "other" as a self-existent entity can we

begin to comprehend a gender heterarchical continuum in which difference exists without binary opposition and hierarchical valorization. And the “male” and “female” that constitute the dyad are not absolute gender categories but species generative distinctions in reproduction carried over into conceptualizations of the cultural formation of gender. Those feminisms committed to exposing, critiquing, and ending the oppression of women, overthrowing patriarchy and phallogentrism, demand male recognition of the other as not only different in more ways than binary configurations can recognize, but also of equal ontological status. And this would mean recognizing the concepts of both self and other as interdependent, mutually determinable, constructs; it would also mean female recognition of a woman not only as an other but also as a self. As the poet Sharon Doubiago dramatically states it, “because of sexism, because of the psychotic avoidance of the issue at all costs, ecologists have failed to grasp the fact that at the core of our suicidal mission is the psychological issue of gender, the oldest war, the war of the sexes” (4).

But that first recognition of the other as self-existent entity is just that, a first step. It enables the further recognition of interrelationship and interanimation, but on a heterarchical basis rather than on a hierarchical use-value or exchange-value basis, both of which would define autonomy from the perspective of individualism as a strength, rather than as a lack. Barbara Johnson notes that only a romantic androcentrism can phallogentrally raise autonomy over all other relationships: “Clearly, for Thoreau, pregnancy was not an essential fact of life. Yet for him as well as for every human being that has yet existed, someone else’s pregnancy is the very *first* fact of life. How might the plot of human subjectivity be reconceived (so to speak) if pregnancy rather than autonomy is what raises the question of deliberateness?” (190; see Keller 106–7). Such a question arises only as a result of feminist interrogation. It not only interrogates autonomy but also affirms relationship, and privileges nurturing over engendering to the degree that these two wholly interrelated phases of the parent/offspring relationship have been separated in Western culture since the time of the Greeks, with engendering having more status than nurturing. Thus, while slaves have always been thought capable of nurturing, they have never been officially delegated to engendering the wealthy classes. Johnson’s privileging provides a necessary corrective to the androcentric-based difference between the definitions of “fathering” and “mothering,” which in themselves have significant ecological implications, the former of begetting and unlimited expansion and the latter of sustaining and cultivating, as Annette Kolodny discusses at some length in *The Lay of the Land*.

But heterarchy does not reductively return us to pluralism. Hazel Henderson, in explaining heterarchy, speaks of such a viewpoint as meaning subset plurality within a system without dominant/subordinate ranking, and argues

that “hierarchy is an illusion generated by a fixed observer” (212). Thus we can recognize that biogender differences exist, can occur in both genders, and should not be comparatively evaluated to determine which are more useful or superior. Rosemary Radford Ruether makes the case that “without sex-role stereotyping, sex-personality stereotyping would disappear, allowing for genuine individuation of personality. Instead of being forced into a mold of masculine or feminine ‘types,’ each individual could shape a complex whole from the full range of human psychic potential for intellect and feeling, activity and receptivity” (210). At the same time, such a heterarchical viewpoint would necessarily challenge any effort to maintain and cultivate sociogender differences because these would limit subset plurality and serve oppressive and exploitative purposes. This viewpoint would lead to specific political practices that would subvert existing social structures and participate in the process of evolving new structures. Such evolution in turn serves a basic ecological function: “A healthy, balanced ecosystem, including human and nonhuman inhabitants, must maintain diversity” (King, “Toward” 119). Aldo Leopold’s “land ethic” is also often invoked in this regard: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise” (262). Diversity will occur within ecosystem homeostatis, i.e., dynamic balance, which is “an achievement and a tendency. Systems recycle, and there is energy balance; yet the systems are not static, but dynamic” (Rolston 14). It is the capitalist myth of unlimited expansion that is actually a static ideal no different from the dream for a perpetual motion machine.

Using the health of the ecosystem as the fundamental criterion for judgment enables us to introduce a new conception of value to oppose those that dominate capitalist and state capitalist economies. In opposition to either use value or exchange value as the criterion of worth, we need to develop a criterion of ecological value, which emphasizes interrelationship, maintenance, and sustainment (or “carrying capacity”). Diversity would be recognized as a necessary dimension of individual species survival, both within itself—as subspecies and cultural multiplicity—and within its ecosystemic relationships. I would argue that just such heterarchical differentiation explicitly, and a sense of ecological value implicitly, guides much of Carol Gilligan’s *In A Different Voice*. As she suggests, “through this expansion in perspective, we can begin to envision how a marriage between adult development as it is currently portrayed and women’s development as it begins to be seen could lead to a changed understanding of human development and a more generative view of human life” (174). The triad of dialogics, feminisms, and ecology, in that order, appear in this remark concluding her book.

In terms of judgmental criteria, feminists have criticized Marxists for subordinating the struggle against women’s oppression to the class struggle, and

for emphasizing the conditions and relations of production over those of reproduction. Such criticisms are directed against the limitations of a determinist interpretation that privileges the history of class struggle over the larger history of human inequality based on gender oppression and reproductive exploitation. Oppression and exploitation, gender and class, are intimately and inseparably linked, although with a significant difference. Specific conditions and relations of production and the classes that arise from them are historically transient. But sexual difference, like pigmentation, will exist with any relations of production, and will continue to produce a dynamic tension born of difference that can potentially result in oppression, particularly in terms of the power of cultural constructions of gender. The relations of reproduction, unlike those of production, are necessarily more dialogical than dialectical (see Spivak, "Feminism and Critical Theory" in *In Other Worlds*). And the struggles to end both patriarchy and capitalism need to be placed in an even larger context: the relationship of humanity within nature. The recent development of an ecological feminism (ecofeminism) has begun this process of explicitly intertwining the terrains of female/male and nature/humanity, which have been artificially separated by philosophical linearity for far too long.

The weaknesses regarding gender oppression and sociogender differences in "Deep Ecology" demonstrate the inability of environmentalism on its own to produce a sufficient livable theory.⁴ Feminist thought must be employed to bring to consciousness and thus enable the breaking of patriarchal habits of perception. But environmentalists have not initially recognized the identity of interests. Ynestra King noted only a few years ago that

For the most part, ecologists, with their concern for nonhuman nature, have yet to understand that they have a particular stake in ending the domination of women because a central reason for woman's oppression is her association with the despised nature they are so concerned about. The hatred of women and the hatred of nature are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing. ("Toward" 118)

King argues that domination of man over woman is the prototype for other forms of domination, but it is unlikely that they can be chronologically separated since they are founded on the same conception of reality. More important, however, are the four principles that King establishes as the basis for ecofeminism: one) the oppression of women and the building of "Western industrial civilization" are interrelated through the belief that women are closer to nature; two) life on earth is heterarchical, "an interconnected web"; three) a balanced ecosystem of human and nonhuman "must maintain diversity"; four) species survival necessitates a "renewed understanding of our rela-

tionship to nature, of our own bodily nature and nonhuman nature around us" ("Toward" 119–20).

Ariel Salleh critiques Deep Ecology in terms of its failure to make the paradigm shift necessary to achieve its professed goals. Specifically, she argues that it takes an anti-class posture, but ignores oppression, and that it remains trapped in a "tacit mind-body dualism" that downplays the significance of ideology as a material force in the world. "The feminist consciousness," declares Salleh, "is equally concerned to eradicate ideological pollution, which centuries of patriarchal conditioning have subjected us all to, women and men" ("Deeper" 342; see also Salleh, "Class," and Salleh, "Ecofeminism"). She concludes that the proponents of Deep Ecology remain locked in the old dualistic paradigms because they have not as yet denounced and sought to overthrow "the suppression of the *feminine*." And this "is not just a suppression of real, live, empirical women, but equally the suppression of the feminine aspects of men's own constitution which is the issue here" ("Deeper" 344).

Karen J. Warren begins her discussion of ecofeminism with this very problem of dualism, and for her the strength of ecofeminism is that it "encourages us to think ourselves out of 'patriarchal conceptual traps,' by *reconceptualizing* ourselves and our relation to the nonhuman natural world in nonpatriarchal ways" ("Feminism and Ecology" 7). Much of Warren's essay is given over to a critique of liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism, and their shortcomings which necessitate a "transformative feminism," that will "make a responsible ecological perspective central to feminist theory and practice" ("Feminism and Ecology" 18; see also Warren, "Power").

But how are all of these interrogational and transformative strands to be woven into a meta-philosophical net with a self-conscious method of critique and affirmation? Ecofeminism needs a critical method not only to link its fundamental aspects but also to enable it to remain an active, developing critique guiding practice, a meta-philosophy, rather than a monological political dogma or an abstract interpretative instrument. That method is dialogics. And the emphasis on consensus decision-making, as observed for decades in feminist and ecofeminist groups and communities, indicates that dialogical practice is already well underway and that, as usual, social practice precedes and generates the conditions that require theorizing (see Estes on "consensus").

III

The Bakhtinian dialogical method is becoming widely recognized across academic disciplines, but some character traits are less well known and more neglected than others. It seems no accident that *Freudianism, A Marxist Critique*, published under Vološinov's name, is the last Bakhtinian text to be reis-

sued and appear in paperback, although it was one of the earliest works published. Except for its appendix, it is the text least related to literature and literary theory per se, but one of crucial importance for the Bakhtinian concept of “utterance,” particularly in terms of the “inner word” and in terms of a larger conception of the dialogic method as reaching beyond aesthetic texts.⁵

In opposition to what was perceived as Freudian psychoanalysis, *Freudianism* presents dialogical conceptions of the self, the psyche, and the “content of consciousness,” which initiate recognition of the constitution of the individual as a *chronotopic relationship*, that is, a social/self construct developing within given social, economic, political, historical, and environmental parameters of space and time (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 85). Thus, the other, in its various manifestations, including *parole*, culture, place, class, race, and gender, participates in the formation of a self. The individual occurs as chronotope within the story of human interaction with the rest of the physical world, but that narrative is only a historical fiction organized by means of a limited perspective through which beginnings, middles, ends, and motivations are substituted for the non-human-centered, contiguously structured universal story that allots us only episodes—the self in and as part of the other (perhaps one of the most dangerous of these fictions currently in theoretical circles is the Lacanian claim of human “prematurity” and the necessity of a lifetime of “lack” and frustration, based on Lacan’s claims in “The Mirror Stage”). Conceptualizing self/other as interpenetrating part/part and part/whole relationships rather than dichotomy is fundamental for apprehending the mutually constitutive character of the dialogics-ecology-feminisms triad. Both ecology and feminisms are deeply concerned with the conception of the other as part of effecting crucial paradigm shifts in human understanding.

Just as the other participates in the formation of the self, so too does the self as individual-in-the-world participate in the formation of the other in its various manifestations. And, just as the self enters into language and the use of *parole*, so too does the other enter into language and have the potential, as does any entity, to become a “speaking subject,” although centripetal structures and cultural forces hinder such a realization. The implications of this other as speaking subject need to be conceptualized as including more than humans, and as potentially being constituted by a speaker/author who is not the speaking subject but a renderer of the other as speaking subject (Bakhtin, *Problems* 47–57). The pivotal questions here will be the degree to which language is recognized as one type of sign system, the degree to which volition is assumed as a prerequisite for becoming a speaking subject, and the degree to which the other speaking subjects who do not use the *parole* of human beings can “speak” in a sign system that can be understood by humans.

In *Freudianism*, Bakhtin attacks Freudian psychology as being based on “a sui generis fear of history, an ambition to locate a world beyond the social and

the historical, a search for this world precisely in the depths of the organic" (14). In contrast, he claims that "outside society and, consequently, outside objective socioeconomic conditions, there is no such thing as a human being. Only as a part of a social whole, only in and through a social class, does the human person become historically real and culturally productive" (15). All this is true in contradistinction to the ahistorical biologicistic bent under attack, but it is true only insofar as we are talking of a person as a sociocultural historical entity. Yet a human being is also a biologically developed entity. As Holmes Rolston III has expressed it, "kept in its environmental context, our humanity is not absolutely 'in' us, but is rather 'in' our world dialogue" (59). In his effort to reinsert the human being into history and culture, Bakhtin artificially removes that being from the environment. It has been the value of both feminist and postmarxist psychoanalytic study that the psychological dimensions of the individual are being analyzed as an integral part of the whole being, and not as a narrowly defined originary center, but the tendency remains to isolate qualitatively that being from the rest of the world.

From the opening of *Freudianism*, Bakhtin emphasizes the significance in psychology of the conflicts between inner and outer speech and various levels of inner speech, that communication between the conscious and the unconscious consisting of specific utterances that have a speaker and a respondent, a "self" and another "self," which are not identical but are parts of the same mind (23–24). Jacques Lacan views the unconscious as being "structured like a language," and some French feminists, such as H  l  ne Cixous, also view it as having language at least as it is constituted by means of the "Imaginary." But Bakhtin points out that this use of language always appears in the form of utterances made by the conscious speaking subject, even when mediating messages from the unconscious.

As Bakhtin insists, "every utterance is the product of the interaction between speakers and the product of the broader context of the whole complex social situation in which the utterance emerges" (*Freudianism* 79; see *Speech Genres* 71). Even the articulation of the unconscious is a social interrelationship by virtue of its minimal dynamic of being an utterance (79). This point is reinforced by Bakhtin's claim that "any speaker himself is a respondent to a greater or lesser degree" (*Speech Genres* 69). Thus, the other is always implicated in psychical activities, and indicates that the self itself is not singular, unified, or total, but is multiple, through the non-identity of the conscious and unconscious and self-conceptions and drives (see Paul Smith, Ch. 5). It is precisely this recognition of non-identity and the need for inner dialogue, specifically between masculine and feminine aspects of the psyche, that Salleh sees as missing from the propositions of Deep Ecology and seriously impairing its subversion of patriarchy's hegemony. As Cixous's attempts to write the Imaginary indicate, as in "The Laugh of the Medusa," all efforts to articulate

the mind involve social interaction. Even as she seeks to “break” the language, she does so in a sociohistorical context and through orienting her ideas toward an audience that is expected to participate actively in the constitution of meaning ([Bakhtin]/Volosinov, *Marxism* 102; see *Speech Genres* 111).

In like manner, as Freud recognized, “the unconscious speaks more than one dialect”; that is, it uses a variety of sign systems, verbal and nonverbal, to communicate (see Bruss 132–33). To the degree that we are able to articulate verbally the mental activities of our unconscious as well as the conscious parts of our mind, these articulations are oriented toward the rest of the world, and our position in that world. And they are articulated by means of words that always already introduce that other world to us as a result of the historicity of *parole*. But this also applies to articulation by means of other semiotic structures, which are also either culturally or naturally constituted so that the audience for them has the potential for responsive understanding (see [Bakhtin]/Volosinov, *Marxism* 10–12). I would argue that, like the unconscious, the nonhuman also articulates itself by means of various “dialects,” and that neither requires volition to do so.

In addition, Bakhtin argues for calling “the inner and outward speech that permeates our behavior in all its aspects ‘behavioral ideology.’” He goes on to say that “this behavioral ideology is in certain respects more sensitive, more excitable and livelier than an ideology that has undergone formulation and become ‘official.’ In the depths of behavioral ideology accumulate those contradictions which, once having reached a certain threshold, ultimately burst asunder the system of the official ideology” (*Freudianism* 88). Here one sees implicit the fundamental tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces, with the centrifugal privileged for its desystematizing power. The upshot of all this is that even at the level of the articulation of the unconscious the individual is already socially interacting, laying the basis for an impact upon the world that has been impacting on that individual.⁶ What is suggested here is the role of the individual, through self-reflection and self-conscious articulation of thought, in transforming ideology (*Freudianism* 90). This occurs as a result of the individual’s undergoing, reflecting on, and articulating the differences between experiences in social reality and the natural world that do not square with the official ideology, and then developing subject-positions through the playing-off and adaptation of non-dominant ideologies that enable resistance (Paul Smith, Ch. 1).

If, indeed, psychoanalysis and self-analysis involve a dialogue of the conscious and unconscious, which together constitute the life of the mind, then conscious/unconscious form an unsynthesizable dialogical relationship. Freud, recognizing that the unconscious could not be abolished, attempted to keep it in check through the Superego. Others before Freud attempted a similar maneuver in the realm of the intellect/emotion dichotomy construct,

believing that rationality and reason, products of enlightenment, would enable one to overcome the emotions. Emotions, of course, were the province of the feminine. Surprisingly enough, despite the obviously oppressive character of this hierarchical assignation of reason and emotion to the differing genders, we see its repetition in the attempted Lacanian identification of the unconscious with the female (see Jardine, "Gynesis," for a critique of this position). And yet again, we have both within each of us, emotion and intellect, conscious and unconscious, and at various times one serves us better than the other in our worldly encounters. Dialogics lets us recognize the mutually constitutive character of these dyads, with each aspect at specific times constituting a center of mental activity and requiring the other to act as centrifugal force to prevent the solidification of that center into dogma. If emotion and instinct arise from historical natural influences upon the evolution of the species, then their impact on our behavior, their entry into consciousness, are a form by which the nonhuman world speaks to us through signs that our conscious renders verbally. To deny emotion as feminine and/or instinct as primitive nature is to reserve the role of speaking subject only for the ego and to deny a voice to the other, which is in reality a part of ourselves.

The dialogical relationships of intellect/emotion and humanity/nature, conceptualized as complementary dyads rather than dichotomies, can be ascertained only by attempting to facilitate the coming into verbal being of both sides of the slash (/). And here one of the limitations of Bakhtin's formulations reveals itself, in his restricting the conception of the other to participants in human society. Ecology must be brought to bear, to break dialogics out of the anthropocentrism in which Bakhtin performs it (see, for example, "Discourse in Life" 95). The limitation he imposes renders it impossible for any aspect of the nonhuman to be rendered as a speaking subject, whether in artistic texts, other texts, or human behavior. Although he does argue that the object of the utterance is a living participant, a third constitutive factor of the utterance, which can be the external/nonverbal world to which the speech act is oriented, it remains an object ("Discourse" 101-2). And yet, does not instinct itself, which arises from outside of or prior to society, become a speaking subject through the unconscious and the emotions, which themselves create electrochemical changes in the human body?

Numerous authors and artists have attempted to render nature as a speaking subject, not in the romantic mode of rendering nature an object for the self-constitution of the poet as speaking subject, but as a character within texts with its own existence. I think here of the efforts of such writers as Dorothy Wordsworth, Robinson Jeffers, Mary Oliver, John Haines, Ursula Le Guin, Gary Snyder, and Linda Hogan. I think these attempts are most successful when they include human characters as well, enabling the differential comparison of self and other. An ecofeminist dialogics requires this effort to render

the other, primarily constituted by androcentrism as women and nature (and actually as the two intertwined: nature-as-woman and woman-as-nature), as speaking subjects within patriarchy in order to subvert that patriarchy not only by decentering it but also by proposing other centers. Speaking at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Gary Snyder called for establishing “a kiva of elders” to represent the nonhuman within democratic institutions:

Historically this has been done through art. The paintings of bison and bears in the caves of southern France were of that order. The animals were speaking through the people and making their point. And when, in the dances of the Pueblo Indians and other people, certain individuals became seized, as it were, by the spirit of the deer, and danced as a deer would dance, or danced the dance of the corn maidens, or impersonated the squash blossom, they were no longer speaking for humanity, they were taking it on themselves to interpret, through their humanity, what these other life-forms were. That is about all we know so far concerning the possibilities of incorporating spokespersonship for the rest of life in our democratic society. (*Turtle Island* 109; see also Rodman and Silko, “Landscape”)

That may have been about all we knew fifteen years ago, but feminisms have taught us much since then about incorporating at least part of the rest of life into our discourse, constituting women as speaking subjects. The point is not to speak for nature, but to work to render the signification presented us by other elements of nature into a verbal depiction by means of speaking subjects, whether this is through characterization in the arts or through discursive prose. To quote Snyder again:

What we must find a way to do, then, is incorporate the other people—what Sioux Indians called the creeping people, and the standing people, and the flying people, and the swimming people—into the councils of government. This isn’t as difficult as you might think. If we don’t do it, they will revolt against us. They will submit non-negotiable demands about our stay on the earth. We are beginning to get non-negotiable demands right now from the air, the water, the soil. (*Turtle Island* 108)

I don’t share his optimism about the facility of this move, but I believe in its necessity, and applaud Le Guin’s depiction of it in *Always Coming Home*. This takes us back to the question I raised earlier, whether or not volition is required for a speaking subject, for the existence of signs that can be transmit-

ted by a nonhuman speaking subject and that can be understood and interpreted by humans. When a person cries out in pain, is it volitional? Does the scream signify? When selenium poisons ground water, causes animal deformities, and reduces the ability of California farmers to continue to overcultivate through irrigation land with little topsoil, are these signs that we can read? And in reading such signs and integrating them into our texts, are we letting that land speak through us or are we only speaking for it?

Nonhuman others can be constituted as speaking subjects, rather than constituted merely as objects of our speaking, although even the latter is preferable to silence. The analogy I would use is that of men adopting feminist theories, practices, or interpretations. Far too often men continue to attempt to speak *for* women, with the following result: “when male theorists borrow the language of feminist criticism without a willingness to explore the masculinist bias of their own reading system, we get a phallic ‘feminist’ criticism that competes with women instead of breaking out of patriarchal bounds” (Showalter 127). It is possible, however, for men to render women as speaking subjects by means of their application of feminist theories, criticism, and scholarship (Heath 8–9, 27–28). The feminists who have constituted themselves as speaking subjects have enabled some men to render that voicing. Such rendering will always occur within the limitations of the author’s/ speaker’s refractive mediation, and there will always be two voices there, the feminist speaking subject and the rendering male author, just as there will be in the case of the nonhuman speaking subject and the rendering human author, but in neither instance does this remove the need to wage a struggle for such rendering. Richard Ohmann makes the point that

If [men] are “in” feminism at all, we were dragged into it kicking and screaming, and now that we’re there we should think of ourselves as on extended probation, still learning. What we do there with our experience, our competence, and our gender and class confidence, is a matter to be negotiated through caution, flexibility, improvisation, listening, and often doubtless through a strategic fade into the wallpaper. But I don’t see drawing back from the knowledge that feminism is our fight, too. (187)⁷

“Caution, flexibility, improvisation, listening” are certainly attributes of the best ecological and feminist work to date practiced by both women and men, and imply a strongly dialogical orientation toward critical work. And yet, how does one maintain such a stance and avoid tendencies toward dogmatism and totalization? Dialogical rigor.

IV

At the end of each of the preceding parts of this chapter, I have emphasized application of the dialogic method to avoid interrogative sclerosis and ideological calcification. Bakhtin himself presents a dyad that both explains the need to oppose dogmatism and totalization—that clarifies the heterarchical yet partisan character of dialogics—and provides a conceptual framework for being able to critique and affirm without absolutes. That dyad is centripetal/centrifugal, a mutually constituted relational unity of opposites: “Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward” (*Dialogic* 272). In language and ideology this dyad continuously manifests itself as “center” and “margin,” and has been a crucial basis for the development of deconstruction. Yet, deconstruction has found itself unable to affirm much beyond pleasure and play—hardly sufficient for the process of reconstruction that occurs following the overthrow of any outmoded system of thought, government, culture, or community. A paradigm shift requires not merely the scuttling of the previous paradigm but the institution of a new one, which in its turn will also need scuttling. In response to the Derridean critique of feminism, Cary Nelson makes the point that despite the valuable warnings against the dangers of totalization and essentialism:

What is needed is a commitment nonetheless to real social change, a recognition that monological and militantly certain discourses are often strategically necessary if people’s lives are to be better. On some local fronts, we need to believe that there are wrongs to be righted and real forms of progress to be achieved. Derrida does actually acknowledge this, but he tends to put his reservations first. (168)

And what is put first tends to be what is privileged. To effect change, commitments need to be made and risks taken. As deconstructionists recognize, centers continuously appear and form. The struggle is not to abolish any type of centering, but to recognize the relative nature of centers and their dynamic relationship with margins. Given the cultural and ideological hegemony of capitalism in the United States, ecofeminists must necessarily comprise part of the margin, serving as a centrifugal force which attempts to break up and fragment the totalizing discourse that perpetuates business as usual. At the same time, those working within the margins must recognize that at any given moment they are forming a center from/on which to work. But there are centers and there are centers. One type serves as foundation, cast in stone and

rendered immovable, on which to stand; the other serves as pivot, a base on which to step and from which to move on to another center-as-pivot. The distinction here is between dogmas or beliefs and perspectives or hypotheses (see Fuss on the limits of both essentialism and constructivism).

Defending Deep Ecology, George Sessions suggests the problems associated with failure to distinguish between dogmas and perspectives. He recognizes and opposes the way some forces within the ecological movement in the United States have become misanthropic due to an ecocentrism that requires an absolute "Earth First" position. At the same time, Sessions argues that "the Age of Ecology involves a major 'paradigm shift' to an ecocentric mode of understanding the world. . . . The ecocentric perspective involves a biological, as well as a cultural, understanding of the human species resulting in a new awareness of the place of humans in the ecological web and of the ecological limitations of humans in the Earth community" (66). It seems to me that this definition of an "ecocentric mode of understanding" is far more dialogical than the beliefs of many adherents of ecocentrism, including some whom Sessions cites. Yet he himself is caught up in a non-dialogical nostalgic conception of ecocentrism that would render its present-day formulations essentially identical with ancient and primal ones: "When we realize that over 99% of all humans who have ever lived on Earth have been hunters/gatherers, then it is clear that ecocentrism has been the dominant human perspective throughout history" (66). Here Sessions confuses conditions of existence with beliefs about that existence and overlooks the philosophical and experiential distances between our ancestors and ourselves.

Substitution of ecocentrism for anthropocentrism does not constitute the significant paradigm shift that Sessions, as well as many of the rest of us, wish to see occur, because it allows belief in and promotion of static absolutes to be perpetuated. We have seen this same problem arise in Marxism, with the establishment of the dialectic not as a method but as a blueprint in which the "synthesis" is idealistically preordained. Nostalgia is another dimension of the absolutist tendencies of dogmas, which reinforces static idealizations. If ecocentrism or androgyny existed once long ago in a virtually unblemished state, as some clearly claim, then we need only get back to that state and find the answer that has already existed, rather than to create a contemporary, relative answer that will invariably be flawed and inadequate to the complexities of the question that required it. The recognition of such inadequacy provides the skeptical self-interrogation necessary to maintain any answer as a pivot rather than a foundation, to be metaphilosophical even during the process of philosophizing. In like manner, different elements within the feminist movement have set specific goals and principles for themselves that need to be reversioned continuously if participants are not to end up asking "is that all there is?" in the absence of any method for projecting the next step.

Not long before his death Bakhtin wrote that “there is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context” (*Speech Genres* 170). The dialogic method is a way to incorporate that decentering recognition of a permanent *in media res* of human life and a constantly widening context for human interaction and interanimation within the biosphere and beyond. Coupled with the two basic pivots outlined here, ecology and feminisms, dialogics provides a method by which we may yet effect one of the paradigm shifts necessary to break down the dualistic thinking of patriarchy that perpetuates the exploitation and oppression of nature in general and women in particular. At the same time, it warns us that once we do succeed in dismantling patriarchy and its socioeconomic systems, a new host of problems and contradictions will arise, as yet unenvisioned, that will require new debates, new answers, and new pivots. Ecofeminist dialogics provides a place and method by which to step and dance, but not to stand.