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Dark Vibrations: ecofeminism and the democracy of creation
Annual Howard Harrod / CRSC Lecture at Vanderbilt

Catherine Keller, April 6, 2005

If you have come to hear a talk on the Brazilian technopop dance music series called Dark Vibrations, you'll be really disappointed. I am thinking more of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "concepts" as "centers of vibration"; and they darken by turning theological. I will however try to keep some rhythm in my reasoning!

The problem I have set myself for this evening could be stated thus: ecological and ecofeminist thinking has significantly altered the face of theology. Indeed one of its most influential avatars, Sallie McFague, taught for decades at Vanderbilt Divinity School. Yet Christianity on the whole continues to function as an anti-ecological public force; our doctrine of creation seems to invest humans with an ever more arrogant dominion over the nonhuman. While the Christian right colludes apocalyptically with United States policies of environmental mass destruction, the religious middle-to-left muddles along with only occasional interruptions of its indifference to so-called "nature." Is it possible that a hermeneutical reconstruction of the overused and multiply abused text of Genesis 1, a reconstruction such as I had attempted in relation to the creation from the chaos, might help to energize an ecological politics? I'm wondering if ecotheology, or ecofeminism, is burdened by an objectifying concept of Nature that inhibits interest, *inter-esse*, engagement; and if, oddly enough, the numbingly familiar text of the biblical creation can display a defamiliarized, darker and energizing face.

In the interest of discerning that hermeneutical possibility, I'll consider with you three conceptual vibrations, *oscillations* that also, dangerously, turn to *bifurcations*. They will organize this talk into three parts. I hope that the movement within and between these oscillations will offer hopeful hints for the *possibility of a cosmic democracy as the collective work of humans and nonhumans*.

1. **Cosmos/chaos:** Theology has classically framed the creation as an act of order over a nothingness that then occasionally rears its ugly head as chaos. We may however redirect this bifurcation of cosmos and chaos into an oscillation: what James Joyce called a "chaosmos." This first vibration therefore refers to the narrative that begins the bible and in its beginningness, a vibration stifled by a certain dry dogma of origin. For genesis is routinely referred to as the prooftext for the classical doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*; but as scholars of scripture have long established, there is no notion of creation from a true nothing in Genesis—and in fact nowhere in scripture [cf Hermann Gunkel, Gerhard von Rad, Jon Levenson, Gordon May].¹ It is ironic that not only classical theology but self-

¹ Cf. my *Face of the Deep: a theology of becoming*, for scholarly notes and references for this section and its deconstruction of the *creatio ex nihilo* (London/NY: Routledge, 2004).

designated evangelical, biblicist theologies consider the *creatio ex nihilo* a non-negotiable foundation of Christian belief. For what the text yields is a version of the vision most of the ancient world shared—the cosmos is formed out of a fluid chaos. The universe of the priestly authors of Genesis is not summoned forth out of nothingness by a great supernatural fiat. Newer translations, like the NRSV, have been subtly altered by the revival of the tradition of the great French grammarologist and rabbinic commentator Rashi a thousand years ago. If you look at the version I gave you, you see there is no longer the single declarative first verse but a complex sentence that pulls the second verse into a new priority. It now grammatically signifies that which always already was.

Verse two is anything but nothing: *as in the beginning elohim was creating the heavens and the earth, the earth was tohuwabohu darkness was upon the face of the deep, the tehom, and the ruach elohim was pulsing on the face of the waters.* That spirit ruach is wind or breath, is God—though theology is at pains to reduce this *spiritus creator* to a mere exhalation of a great transcendent God above, always above, a birdy emission of a paternal deity. In the text the spirit moves before speech—vibration before the word. Thus Jurgen Moltmann suggests that when the word comes it is as song. Starting with Gunkel a century ago, the suggestion has been made that the verb *mhrapht* is most accurately translated as *vibrate*. So here we have the primal dark vibration: the spirit synching with *tehom*, the primal sea of chaos: as spirit the Elohim becomes, it seems, rhythmically entrained with the motion of the waters; and in this silent oscillation, an intimacy, a discernment, a contemplation suggests itself—out of which speech first arises. Heard thus, of course, the word—then Elohim said “let there be light.” V.3-- has another feeling than that of command, of order, the imposition of order from outside and above—onto nothingness, a nothingness traditionally construed as something between sheer emptiness and a rebellious disorder.

Instead a theology of genesis, of becoming, might read the tehomic chaos as the Sheer flux of creative potentiality. In *tehom* the world takes form: the chaos in which for a while substituting a *creatio ex profundis*. In Genesis the elohimic word may read more like the divine lure of process theology than like omnipotent fiat. But it was in the interest of maintaining God’s omnipotent sovereignty, unconstrained by any otherness, that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* was imposed on texts that did not readily suggest it. The text of Gen 1.2 with its gentle spirit remained a bit of an irritant, sometimes provoking true dismay. Thus Karl Barth could only read V 2 as a mockery, a parody of pagan mythology, counteracted by a god who cannot be quiet, who can only create by sovereign speech...

In that monstrous sphere even the Spirit of Elohim...is condemned to the complete impotence of a bird hovering or brooding over shoreless or sterile waters. (III.1).

Male impotence and a sterile womb—hermeneutics becomes sexual ridicule! The text’s history of interpretation is a story of its own, Theologians for all of these centuries have been clamoring to eliminate the mysterious *tehom* of the beginning for the sake of a simple story of absolute origin. Thus the chaos was forcibly divided from the cosmos to which it was giving birth. I began to spot everywhere signs of what I could only call *tehomophobia*. Alternative theologies were getting condemned as heresies

from already the late second century. Hermogenes for example, suggested against the Gnostic and the patristic versions of the *ex nihilo* that if God is all-powerful then God is responsible for evil; whereas if there is in reality always this chaos which God forms, from before any particular beginning point, this chaos has the capacity to resist God. In the indeterminacy of what we may now call an open universe, freedom for real good and real evil is irrevocable. This is important for unhinging theology from theodicy, the attempt to justify God's omnipotence in the face of evil. Process theology has argued that we can reimagine God's power as *persuasive* rather than *coercive*, as "lure" rather than fiat; and thereby understand God as always creative, always in relation to a world—though not necessarily this particular one, begun with its big bang; or if you prefer, big birth.

I am presuming that in the imaginary of *creatio ex nihilo* is encrypted the argument for formal omnipotence—and with it the understanding of divine power that jeopardized not only human freedom but divine goodness. When then classical Christianity produces this novel doctrine of creation, it carries with it an *icon* of the omnipotent male word—of God as the one in whose *image* the human is created. I hope the implications for power are clear: a unilateral anthropomorphic, indeed andromorphic power got locked into the western imagination of the human—and into its corresponding view of the nonhuman nature, as the background and resource for the human. Theology is power discourse, for good and for ill. Theology is always **theopolitics**.²

The schism between chaos and cosmos enables, I have suggested, the construction of a cosmos with no tolerance for chaos—chaos is reduced to is evil, or nothing, or both. A tehophobic theology is of course inimical with the messy processes of democracy. Theology has had until recently little interest in the swarming, diverse multitude of the human—and even less in the teeming, iterating multiplicities of the nonhuman world. So to let chaos and cosmos oscillate together again reopens the chaosmos as the proper milieu or matrix of our shared human and nonhuman world. Indeed as Joyce meant his neologism to refer to writing itself as much as the world one writes about, so theology is itself a chaosmos, comprised of trembles or tremors between solidity and flux, between an order emerging in the flux and a chaos iterating through the solidities. If the first oscillation, then, opens up the space for the subsequent vibrational patterns: all three now will appear as *tehomitic trembles*, pneumatic oscillations over the waters of uncertainty.

This means that *theology itself pulses between theopoetics and theopolitics*—attention to the beauty as well as the power of the *kosmoi* we construct together. I am suggesting that theology itself lives—if it does not merely ossify-- in disciplined attention to its own ecology, that is to the complex spatiality of the creation itself. But then we are speaking ipso facto of a *theo-political ecology*.

2. Political ecology, especially as interpreted by the French philosopher of science Bruno Latour, will provoke the second oscillation: that between *subjects and objects*, considered here specifically as a bifurcation between the *subjects of creation* and the

² This is the argument of the essays in my *God & Power: counter-apocalyptic journeys* (Minneapolis: Fortress), 2005.

objects of nature. This subject object split will itself bifurcate in this hermeneutic into a relation between *dominion and domination*.

Political ecology would designate the work of social movements and legislative efforts to protect nonhuman nature from destructive and ultimately self-destructive human uses. These uses comprise habits of consumption and exploitation that fail to internalize the costs for future generations of humans, even as they fail to consider the intrinsic worth of nonhuman existence. Ecological theologies operate as a form of political ecology, contributing religious “moods and motivations” (Clifford Geertz) to the environmental movement; and they retain a strong sense of the political as the democratic pursuit of social justice-- poised between attention to social justice for vulnerable human collectives and sustainable interactions with nonhuman collectives. Where ecotheology has conceptual strength it advances an understanding of human subjectivity as embedded in, not transcendent of, the socialities of the nonhuman.

But any theopolitics of creation confronts the biblical notion of *dominion*. It continues to be used with great force to reinforce a bizarre interpretation of genesis—according to which the creation of the human being in the image of God licenses reckless exploitation and annihilation of other species. Secular theorists since Lynne White have blamed Christianity for the ecological devastation of the planet, and theologians since John Cobb have from the same period of the 60’s performed a certain Christian repentance, attempting to uproot the dualistic supernaturalism that has made itself so convenient to corporate capitalist abuse of ‘nature.’ This critique and autocritique are all to the good (anything I do is an offshoot of Cobb’s *metanoia*) but seem at this point a bit off the mark.

According to Latour, “nature” is not the victim but actually the problem! With French hyperbolicism, he declares that “political ecology has nothing at all to do with ‘nature’—that blend of Greek politics, French Cartesianism, and American parks.”³ He goes further: “If political ecology poses a problem, it is not because it *finally* introduces nature into political preoccupations that had earlier been too exclusively oriented toward humans, it is because it *continues, alas, to use nature to abort politics.*”[19] At first glance this rhetoric might read as one more blithe deconstruction of nature as human construction. If this is what it is, it belongs to a field of poststructuralist side-effects that have helped to undermine persistent cultural interest in the state of the earth. All that nonhuman speechless stuff falls beneath the radar of urban, urbane theorists interested only in the delectations of human difference. In feminist theory this has taken the form of the project of “denaturalization”: to demonstrate that what is called “natural” in human behavior is culturally constructed. Denaturalization is an indispensable strategy vis a vis sexual essentialisms and gender roles. But we have lost the language or the nerve with which to ask—is what is called “culture” *naturally* constructed? Within which ecologies, which complex social patterns of nonhuman nature, do human cultures and their genders materialize?

³ Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2004.

Latour is warning that the very term “nature” needs deconstructing—in order to reconstruct our understanding of the social. Yet he is not interested in remaking the banal point that nature is socially constructed. If that is all it is, he notes, his whole project goes right out of business. He is instead pointing to the way in which a Platonic metaphysics of Nature as a physis that allowed public life to be formed around two centers, culture and nature—indeed it is this metaphysics that divides reality fundamentally into human subjects and their objects, to which count all the nonhuman things. And this subject/object bifurcation is he argues fundamentally hostile to politics conceived “as the progressive composition of the common world.” For the common is always already split in two—and only the experts, either philosophers, or later, scientists, can cross between them. It is this Platonic Nature that he means us to dismantle. It has served as the stage, the silent background, cold and objectified or warm and romanticized, for the human Subject. Thus he argues that: “under the pretext of protecting nature, the ecology movements have also retained the conception of nature that makes their political struggle hopeless.”[19] This Nature empowers Science—vs. “the sciences.” It “renders originary political life impotent through the threat of an incontestable nature.”

Though he himself is typically dismissive of theology, speaking always in the voice of the pristinely secular European, his argument is interesting for the present ecotheology in two ways. It allows us to reflect on how this incontestable Nature has appropriated Christianity since more or less the origin of church orthodoxy. The imperial reconstruction of Christianity was well served by a theology of “natural law,” holding in place a hierarchy of command and use, descending from the absolute subject of creation, the Father God, through the ecclesial and imperial authorities, the patriarchal family and finally of course, the objects of nonhuman nature, nature at its lowest common denominator. And we don’t have to look far to see a current theopolitics that “renders political life impotent through the threat of an incontestable nature.” Did not this Nature—strangely disguised as an issue of burning Christian moral importance—play an indispensable role in the last election? Homosexuality and abortion may have negligible inscriptions in scripture, and none at all in the gospels. But they were effectively deployed for a politics that threatens to abort politics itself—at least in Latour’s sense of politics as the open and progressive composition of the common world.

There is a second angle of unintended theological relevance in Latour’s deconstruction of Nature: it lets biblical religion off the hook. For the chain of blame goes back to philosophy, not scripture. “Creation,” not “Nature” is the biblical concept. But is creation not equally culpable, with its dominion passage? Actually I think it is not. Of course there is a tendency in the monotheistic patriarchy that would meld well with the Hellenistic metaphysics, to comprise a formidable synthesis of creation and nature: the creation is reduced to the single omnipotent act of supernatural production by a God who thereafter intervenes freely within the static Nature He controls; gradually he fades back to the mere clockmaker of deism, yielding ever more to monolithic Science. But there is another side to the story: the Genesis legacy funded the idea of the creation as a dynamic event designated as “good, very good”—and so worthy of interest. That biblically based interest according to Whitehead in *Science and Modern World* accounts for the uniquely

western phenomenon of the emergence of the experimental sciences in the multiple, open and exploratory sense that Latour celebrates.

Still what about *dominion*—that toxic anthropocentrism, linked to the imperative to subdue (*kabash* in Hebrew!) the nonhuman? We cannot do an exegesis here. But let me suggest that in its context the dominion passage bears little resemblance to the right wing Christian and wise use corporate deployments.⁴ Genesis 1 is a narrative composed in or after Babylonian exile. Intentionally, even parodically, it echoes and challenges the Babylonian creation epic—in which the *tehom* figure is the goddess Tiamat; and in which the universe created from her slaughtered corpse by the warrior Marduk contains humans without biological or botanical company. Moreover, humans in the *Enuma Elish* are created to be servants of the kingly gods; in *Genesis* the humans are in the image of Elohim and thus themselves take on royal attributes. And the ultimate gift to them after the *imago dei* in the dominion is articulated, the final utterance of creation itself, capping the *imago dei* passage—is quite a letdown to the later man- over -nature mentality: it is that humans are offered the same vegetarian rights as all the other animals!. [cf Gen 1. 29-31] When it comes to their favored sixth day, the dominion folk never quote through to the end!

As with the chaos verse, biblical literalism must disregard key passages in one of its primary texts. Also they never consider how much of Genesis 1 is about delegation—the earth and the sea bring forth the creatures—and the creator seems delighted. This is how the creator creates—through a time-bound relational process of co-creativity. So I want to build on an argument of Michael Welker's to say that the biblical notion of creation has an advantage over "nature"—in that it reflects the dual character of genesis as event and relationship.⁵ Left there, the argument remains a bit too theologically self-serving. He does not consider how the relationality and event-character of genesis can be defeated by the ex-nihilism of the classical tradition—reduced to a unilateral, external relationship and a single event. As theology fused the creation with philosophical Nature, it garnered for ecological politics the worst of both worlds: an anthropocentric ontotheology of the sovereign Subject presiding over an increasingly objectifiable Nature. So in the bifurcation of subject and object, notions of creation and of Nature constantly oscillate within our cultural imaginary. Creation carries with it the high anthropology of the *dominion* symbol; Nature carries with it the metaphysics of *domination*.

Eco-theologically I want to attempt the risky suggestion that *dominion* does not or need not entail *domination*. Dominion in its textual context can only mean *responsibility*—and the narrative of the creation in this way reads as an anachronistic prophecy: that is, it plants in the myth of origins the future which may have already been predictable: a future of the complete planetary dominance by our aggressive, gifted species. I do not advocate dominion as a theological notion. [For me it belongs along with all the king, lord and father imagery—in the past tense of the text.] But like the patriarchal language, when it steps forth with biblicist force one can reinterpret rather than dismiss it. This is perhaps

⁴ The corporate and Biblicist concerns are powerfully fused in the Cornwall Declaration, 2000.

⁵ Michael Welker, *Creation and Reality* tr., John Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1999).

a move to affirm the increasingly difficult and important work of the creation-care evangelicals.⁶ They have to face a public who identify any environmentalism outright with paganism, with worship of the creation rather than the Creator, akin to new age and black magic: talk about dark vibrations! So it may be rhetorically useful to let “dominion” name this tragic truth of our history: we will now either be good managers of the planet, who interact wisely, justly and caringly with the other creatures, indeed who will as much as possible intervene aggressively to protect them from our further interventions—or we will proceed on course with ecocide.

It would perhaps be a healthier world if we were not in charge. But this cannot be. The alternative is not return to a womb of oceanic immersion in the nonhuman, where we might interact as dreamy equals with other creatures. *Equality* with other species is not the issue.⁷ *Negotiation* with their multiple agencies may be. We can evolve new ways to negotiate with the nonhumans who surround us, or who make us up, or whom we make up. As Latour argues, we must learn how to represent them—as they lack human voice--democratically within the collectivity to come.

Religion may help create discourses that represent the nonhuman as *agents* rather than *objects*. For ultimately ‘the social world is no more made up of subjects than nature is made up of objects’ [51]“ Thus Latour suggests that we put an end to the pairing of nature and politics and introduce instead “the public life of a single collective.”[31] This is I find an extraordinary and welcome gesture of connectivity within the poststructuralist scene. It is the in-gathering of what Latour calls the multiverse. Ecological theology can in its poetic and political symbolisms help to collect this collective, or rather help it to collect itself: as precisely the collective of humans and nonhumans emerging in and as the chaosmos of genesis. It comes down neither to an objectivism presided over by absolute subjects, not to a relativism of mere social construction. It comes to a relationalism in which we compose ourselves as a collective of humans and nonhumans. The oscillation of subject and object shakes creation free of the singular, original act of a super Subject; it breaks open the notion of an incontestable objective nature. We then distribute subjects and objects. One might speak not then of subjects and objects but of Whitehead’s superjects, emergent compositions of self—human, animal, vegetable or mineral self—with the others of its felt universe; or Latour’s “associations of humans and nonhumans.” At this point of dark vibration, luminosity gathers around an *interbecoming: an intergenesis* that is always an event of relation, enabling a democracy of creation. God the supremely nonhuman thus no longer needs to preside, burdensomely, as Sovereign Subject, but is redistributed as the matrix and lure of becoming. Within this matrix of ongoing creativity we construct our shared cosmos at the edge of a chaos of associations—with the bipeds and quadripeds, the creeping and the crawling, the winging and the swimming, the mechanical and the virtual, the engaging or the indifferent, the

⁶ The Evangelical Environmental Network (easily googled).

⁷ Yet such an excellent ecotheology as Mark Wallace’s does indeed argue for biocentric equality of all species. See, for example, Wallace, *Fragments of the Spirit: Nature, Violence, and the Renewal of Creation* (New York: Continuum, 1996). Perhaps because I have been influenced by Luce Irigaray’s arguments against “equality” with its predication of sameness as appropriate even for articulating gender or sexual difference, I hear “equality” of species as misleading. Equity however may be the appropriately respectful basis for the needed adjudications.

balmy or the stormy, the cute or the terrifying nonhumans. But in our constructive process we have become more or less indelibly conscious, now, that in the interest of our human creations we are perpetrating *discreation*—knocking entire species out of existence with casual indifference, as though a world of monocrops and monocultures would be an acceptable substitute for the prodigal plurality of genesis. Or of what we may call, to draw us all into connection without pretending unity, the genesis collective, a collective of our shared becoming.

3. This very multiplicity has been an offense to the paternalist imaginary of the One, which reduces all the rest to its Other, in an order of external objects. And there is at this historical moment little cause for optimism that a more open democracy of the creation is taking form, with more care for the diverse integrities of humans and of nonhumans. [For instance the Bush choice for director of the EPA, Stephen Johnson, was responsible for Children’s Environmental Exposure research study (CHEERS), a research program near Jacksonville, Fla, that offered money to low-income families willing to allow the agency to measure the effects of pesticides on their children under one year of age.] Certain humans and most nonhumans are being exposed to strange protection indeed. However, we must not get trapped in a cheerless myopia of current apocalypses. From a wide angle view, there is reason for hope. I think the hope has something to do with the extraordinarily rapid public rearrangement of our species sex and gender habits. This movement is older than ecology, and shows more concrete political achievements—however disappointed we may be by various backsliding and backlashing trends. But this revolution in our sexual self-composition has set off unprecedented vibratory fields—often experienced as trembles of horror, provoking reaction; but also extending through the planet in irrepressible waves, undulations of desire not even controllable by, say, white privileged feminists. So we find ourselves at the third tephomic tremble, where the bifurcation of Man and Woman comes into question—and into play. It evokes, with an *oscillation between male and female*, an ecofeminist engendering of the genesis collective.

Of course both genesis creation narratives have played outsized normative roles in the regulation of sexuality. But also in its reconstruction. The second, the Eden story, could be used endlessly to recode male supremacism. But persistently through history, and with a kind of crescendo over the last century and a half, the women’s movement has surged forward under the banner of Genesis 1:26— male and female created simultaneously in the image of God, with, stunningly for its context, no hint of inequality. That is its own overtold story. There are also undertold traditions. [You might for instance talk with Professor Shai Cherry here about the sexy and sexually fluid kabbalistic readings of the gender dyad, from the hermaphroditic to the internal bisexuality to the divine imperative of good marital sex.]

Here I just want to point to the possible relation in that text between the cascading multiples of the diverse creatures and the gender binary. The name of the creator is Elohim, a plural form of *Eloh*, god— intriguing that within the fierce freshness of monotheism this inherent multiplicity of the divine was not altogether erased. The trace

of the many within the one is especially suggestive in light of the pronouncement of 1.26f ‘let us create humankind in our image’, ‘as male and female...’. Of course if a fish or a bird were telling this story, it might come to a different climax. This honorific status of the human is usually deployed to distance Nature again, as the mere foil for our superiority. Yet in its actual context the human imaging of the divine surges up from the nonlinear process whereby earth and sea are also privileged co-creators, generating multitudes of life-forms. Out of the *tehom*, not out of nothing—out of the profound matrix of the nonhuman. So out of this womblike feminine matrix the creatures materialize collaboratively with a deity whose spirit is the oscillating feminine *ruach*. In a suggestive doubling, this deity is pronouncing a “we” in relation to the ‘they’ of male/female. This we-he-she mirroring happens at the very moment of the anachronistic prophecy I read into the dominion, which is festively and unambiguously shared between the sexes. But as the celebratory We-god has been since crudely stabilized as a domineering He-God—so also woman has been trapped within the next genesis chapter’s narrative of woman as the helpmeet of man. Plurality and femininity get reduced as masculinity inflates into a unity—requiring Nature as its background.

The possibility for a creativity in the image of the creator—that is a co-creativity responsive to the other creatures and only thereby responsible for conditions of their wellbeing—is betrayed by the empires of domination. So by the same logic our gender difference in its initial potential for equity is betrayed by the patriarchalization of the planet. Indeed patriarchy is in Gen. 3 narrated as an effect of the fall. The fall into violence, as Marjorie Suchocki argues, is a fall into wholesale sin against the creation: it is part of our sin, not our redemption, that we translate that sin into a religious matter of mere relation to the creator—and thus evade responsibility for our worlds.⁸ The focus of religions on sexual sin renders the concept of ‘sin’ almost useless. For it just conjures “sex” in people’s imagination. Thus it reduces morality to a private matter of intimate relations supervised by a moralistic parent. This moralistic myopia is convenient for the forces of systemic destruction which perpetrate daily *discreation* with the entire blessing of the religious right. The privatization of sin and of morality may be read from this theological point of view as a symptom of *irresponsibility*—the *failure* of our ‘dominion’ as responsibility to the planet as a whole. And it requires the patriarchal deformation of the equity of the bi-gendered creation to effect this sexual privatization of morality—which of course is in fact the utter political manipulation of sex.

Thus ecofeminism diagnoses the naturalization of our sexuality and the feminization of “nature” as the complementary symbolisms of domination. In our primary resistance to the canons of oppressive natural essences, we cannot content ourselves with mere antiessentialism, with declaring simply that woman is made not born. No more should feminists content ourselves with the mere declaration that Nature is socially constructed. (We don’t want to counter manipulation with *womanipulation*.) Deconstructions of nature that do not explicitly embrace an ecological politics will leave us only further dissociated from the nonhuman around and within us.

⁸ Marjorie Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

There is a *tehomie* tremble in the oscillation between our experiences of maleness and of femaleness, an undercurrent of the unknowable, that keeps our gender/sex performances alive and creaturely—actively embodied. Let me cite here a recent paper of David Wood, interpreting Luce Irigaray as a way of putting ontology into play:

It may be that if we allow the very idea of sexuality to become just a bit uncanny, a little less familiar, we will find it recrystallizing as coherent shapes of desire ...As the individual humans we are, we tend to think we know what it is to be sexed beings. And of course at one level we do. But it is no bad thing if from time to time we pause to wonder – what does it mean that I am a living being? That I ‘desire’ this or that other? That I acknowledge biological drives that I cannot fully identify with? Can I really separate my relation to the ‘external’ world from my biological and sexual existence? Might not all our ontological categories deep down reflect this fundamental situation?⁹

And I would add: our *theological* categories—at least if they go “deep down”. For this uncanniness is precisely the vibration of the spirit over the deep, luring forth unpredictable materializations of our shared embodiment. So the male and female dyad is not our problem once it has been put into play —it gives us a clue to the biological, sexual, chemical and elemental vitality we share with the nonhumans. Thus the regenerative force of queer theory, in tandem with postcolonial forms of hybridity, suggest a complex sexual flow that redistributes the sexual pair—more or less as Latour helps us to redistribute the subject/object, human/nonhuman pair.

Only when overlaid with the incontestable Nature does the male/female oscillation lock down into the binary hierarchy of heterosexism. And it is that binary hierarchy which holds in place the whole paternal chain of being, with its justifications of the exploitation of the nonhumans along with the vulnerable or alien humans. Ecofeminism holds a key to unlocking that chain. Latour notes that Nature as the unquestionable serves as the unmarked norm, the way Man does—over and against the marked culture and woman. This is confusing, given icons of Mother Nature. One must remind him that Nature itself is not after all the problem for ecological politics, but the unmarked males who need it to be a Her—sometimes fixed, sometimes fickle. This is the premise of ecofeminism: that our species has treated the earth like a “woman”—to be alternately taken for granted like mom or romanticized like a fresh love, exploited when convenient, discarded when used up, and demonized when like a monster of chaos she/it storms out of bounds. She/it forms the background for manly business as usual. I suspect this is part of the problem of mobilizing the mainline churches and other reasonable people—there is just something drab, boring, backwards looking about nonhuman nature —like the mom we used to take for granted. But then this is why Latour’s argument remains vitalizing: associations of humans and nonhumans can interact with lively and individuating interest, as we cannot with Nature. Or with women trapped in traditional roles not of their choosing. Moreover the association of the unruly and chaotic side of Nature with a woman who revolts against her role is still with us. The redistribution of subjects and objects thus depends upon a comparable oscillation of maleness and femaleness—else the same normative mankind will continue to unify itself over against the background, tamed or chaotic. Perhaps indeed we will not be able to face the deep—that is to face nonhuman

⁹ David C. Wood, “The Truth about Sexual Difference” (Delivered at Drew University 2.05)

chaos, until we take responsibility for the messes we make of our cosmos. Thus a truly down-to-earth ecofeminist theology comes not surprisingly in the voice of Ivone Gebara, writing from a Brazilian slum:

I see that ecofeminism is born of daily life, of day-to-day sharing among people, of enduring together garbage in the streets, bad smells, the absence of sewers, and safe drinking water, poor nutrition and adequate health care. The ecofeminism I see is born of the lack of municipal garbage collection, of the multiplication of rats, cockroaches, and mosquitoes, and of the sores of children's skins.¹⁰

Hers is truly creation from the chaos. As the women's movements and the ecological movements of the planet come ever more into alignment, new possibilities for a full-bodied democratic collective—are collecting. Everywhere people are provoked to ask: what it means to be alive, to be living beings, to be spirited bodies enmeshed in a complex sociality with a sometimes awful sometimes awesome pluriverse of other spirited bodies.

In a theological paradigm where body and spirit no longer bifurcate but also oscillate, we may without inhibition affirm theopoetically the metaphor Sallie McFague has systematized: that of the universe as God's body. There is deep tradition behind the metaphor of God's radical immanence. Gebara, building on McFague's body of God, says that: that "our hope is ailing, that our Sacred Body is ailing." But not therefore yet dying, she avers—this body can be healed. That body may be the pluriverse, a body playing out infinite riffs of the divine eros, in which male and female are a fundamental but not exclusive earth rhythm. The gendered tremblings of humans perform the gestures of a sexy, fecund, messy creation—if it routinely bifurcates into male and female, it continuously displaces and reconfigures the dyad in the primal multiplicity of creation.

If the first tectonic tremble of order and chaos yields the chaosmos of genesis; if the second, between subjects and objects, encodes a democratic collective of the bodies of creation—a collective in becoming; the third has sexed the creation itself. It suggests a fluid, ever contestable oscillation of gender, as the point of reconnection to our endangered creatureliness. These three oscillations manifest a rhythm of Spirit itself. Its dark vibrations inspire persistence in the face of ungodly loss, waste and cynicism. And delight in the ever possible beauty.

¹⁰ Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation (Biblical Reflections on Ministry)* trans., David Molineaux (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1999).