

Nature on the Move III: (Re)countenancing an Animate Nature

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ABSTRACT: Current market logics in environmental governance for conservation and sustainability tend to disaggregate nonhuman natures into discrete units to which monetary value can attach, such that these new units may be released into markets of circulating commodities where they can accrue more “value.” As Bram Büscher and James Igoe describe and theorise in “Nature on the Move” I and II, new techno-configurations of nature permit its circulation in emerging environmental markets, and the gathering of more monetised value through proliferating product exchanges. The new “value entities” with which these circulations are associated require abstractions of nature’s immanent vitality so as to manufacture and make commensurable tradable units deemed representative of nature health and harm. Through these de- and re-territorialisations of nature, “value” may be created for some but arguably pathology is enhanced for all. These abstractions proliferate a nature that is distant, stilled and transcendent, at the same time as tuning out the *communiqués* of other(ed) sustainability practices and socionature possibilities. My contribution in this third panel of our “Nature on the Move” triptych, then, is an experiment in bringing into the frame, conceptually at least, connective and ecological possibilities associated with animist “amodern” ontologies. I develop ethnographic and theoretical explorations of what might be implicated ecologically and ethically by a *milieu* of immanent embodied ecologies, enfolded in an epistemological and ontological move of “becoming-animist.” “Becoming-animist” is framed here as a normative subjectivity that refracts the current disconnective and virtualising impasse in both the theory and practice of socio-ecological relationships, and as such is worthy of intellectual, political and ethical engagement.

KEYWORDS: nature, culturenature, animism, commodification, green economy, ecocultural ethics, immanence, transcendence, value

Dedicated to the memory of Kadisen ||Khumub, rain-shaman of the Etosha Hai||om, and road-labourer for Etosha National Park, Namibia.

From the invisible atom to the celestial body lost in space, *everything is movement... It is the most apparent characteristic of life.* (Etienne-Jules Marey, 1830–1904, cited in Oberzaucher and Grammer 2008:151, emphasis added)

In the Oedipal relation the mother is also the earth, and incest is an infinite renaissance. (Deleuze and Guattari 2004:177)

They lived firmly and wholly in the real world. Spiritual yearning and the sense of sacredness they knew, but they did not know anything holier than the world, and they did not seek a power greater than nature. (Le Guin 2000:118)

To refract ... To change direction as a result of entering a different medium. ... To cause... to change direction as a result of entering a different medium.¹

Coding Nature?

In the beginning, the primal Mother Tiamat was creator of the Universe, Heaven and Earth, water, air and plants. This female serpent emerged from the sea to teach human kind the arts of living well. Over time, a complexified pantheon of Gods and Goddesses began to bear curious resemblances to the egoic and heroic struggles of an emerging

¹ <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/refract>, accessed 26 November 2010.

metropolitan élite. But their transcendent and celebrated glamour was not without challenge. Threat came from their own labourers, and from envious neighbours and other barbarians; not to mention the capricious dance of the elements, which brought drought, flood and all manner of earthly chaos to challenge their élite order and control. It was clear to the ruling class that Tiamat needed disciplining. And so a young God kills Apsu, her favoured consort, thereby crowning himself king. With his wife, Damkina, he has a son named Marduk. This son is a murderer driven to crush all chthonic, chaotic threat to the growing Babylonian hierarchical order. He kills the genetrix Tiamat, and from her split and deadened body he remakes Heaven and Earth. From the blood of her (also murdered) consort Kingu, he makes humans to be slaves to the ruling-class Gods, assistants in the latter's pursuit of war, leisure and pleasure. This complete revolution *turns the generative cosmos into dead matter*, to be fashioned for use through the artisanal expertise and force of the ruling class. Standing astride the dead body of the genetrix, they assume transcendence over and possession of their new objects of the cosmos. The rest, as they say, is history.²

Bram Büscher and James Igoe, in the first two panels of this “triptych” of papers,³ diagnose the contemporary moment as saturated with a dizzying range of commodified, financialised and spectacularised “other-than-human natures.”⁴ Many of these

are new commodities designed to service a “green economy” suturing of economic growth and environmental sustainability (cf. UNEP 2011). This in part relies on market logics to solve the environmental harms caused through the failure of capitalist markets to adequately account for the costs of environmental degradation.⁵ Carbon credits, environmental options and futures, biodiversity derivatives, mitigation insurance, species credits, biodiversity offsets and so on, are among the plethora of actual and proposed entities populating the resultant new ecology of monetised and marketised nature (Sullivan 2012 and 2013a). They are made through particular abstractions, significations and conceptual transformations of nonhuman nature, to create a circulating commensurability of environmental healths and harms that can be managed through the remote control of the market. And they become visible through lively marketised exchanges in which the “value” of nature, as the \$ signs and zeros and ones of digitised “natural capital,” becomes materialised (as described and discussed in Robertson 2006, 2011; Sullivan 2010, 2012, 2013a, 2013b; Szersynski 2010; Pawliczek and Sullivan 2011; Bracking 2012; Lohmann 2012; also see Plant 1998).

At the same time, these universalising abstractions seem to amplify and even require a deadening of nature's immanent and vivacious movement. As Igoe (this volume) writes, “making nature move first required making it sit still as an increasingly deadened object of contemplation.”⁶ The liquid, capitalised nature of which Büscher (this volume) speaks thus is simultaneously an abstracted, contemplated and stilled nature, legible to the extent that it can be packaged into units that can be calculated and traded (cf. Castree 2003): for “it is only when “nature” is dead that a full-scale Nature™ Inc. becomes a possibility” (Arsel and Büscher 2012:62). The commodity fetish-

2 From the Sumerian creation myth of around two thousand years BCE, later retold as the Babylonian story *Enuma Elish*. Summarised in Willis and Curry (2004) and Young (2011).

3 This paper was first presented at the conference *Nature™ Inc.: Questioning the market panacea in environmental policy and conservation*, Institute for Social Studies, The Hague, June 2011, where it was accompanied by a short film that can be viewed online at: <http://siansullivan.net/talks-events/>. A version of this paper is forthcoming in the volume *Nature™ Inc.: New Frontiers of Environmental Conservation in the Neoliberal Age*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, edited by Bram Büscher, Wolfram Dressler and Rob Fletcher (Sullivan in press).

4 I use the term ‘other-than-human’ nature(s), and occasionally ‘nonhuman nature’ and ‘more-than-human nature’ when referring to organisms, entities and contexts other than the modern common sense understanding of the biological species *Homo sapiens* (also see Sullivan 2013a). As highlighted in this paper, however, these terms are already culturally-embedded and constructed. For cultural contexts where the “nonhuman” is “personified” and there is a tendency towards the assumption of one humanity and many different embodied perspectives, these terms may be problematic and even nonsensical. In the ontological domain of shamanic “perspectivism,” for example, there are no “nonhumans” (Viveiros de Castro 2004).

5 As framed, for example, by the EU and UN supported TEEB (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity) programme, on which see Sukhdev (2010), and by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP 2011). For critical engagement see Büscher et al. (2012).

6 Note that this is a move that echoes the rise of the signifier of equilibrium in colonial ecology and the imperial tendency to view ecosystems of the “periphery” in terms of a definable and desirable climatic climax with anything different to this classed as degradation through irrational (usually indigenous) use practices (see, for example, Anker 2001; Sullivan and Rohde 2002).

ism⁷ that animates capitalist circulation thus not only strips away the “incorporated creative life [of workers] toward equivalence within an exchange,” such that labour value is deflected towards “the account of capital” (Nancy 2001:3). In the biopolitical subsumption of life itself, the “zombie-soul” (Holert 2012:4) “animating” the commodity form also makes productively exchangeable but deadened objects of life’s immanent vitality and diversity. The current reframing of a working nature as provider of discrete services (cf. Daily and Ellison 2002:5), and as a bank of units of natural capital,⁸ might thus be seen as an extension of “thanato-politics” and “neco-capitalism” (Banerjee 2008) in the environmental sphere, even whilst claiming exactly the opposite. Through these

7 Commodity fetishism emerges in Marx’s writings to clarify “the relationship between exchange value and use value as it is embodied in the commodity” (Holert 2012:4), whereby the value of an object is seen as residing in the thing itself in a manner that obscures and thus alienates the labour (and nonhuman life) from which it is made (Graeber 2001:65). The systemic screening-out of materiality and labour relations from commodity production and consumption under capitalist commercialisation, creates a logic that endows commodities with something akin to a soul, wherein they appear to assume human powers and properties and thus to act to satisfy wants. Marx derived his theory of commodity fetishism from interpretations of the fetishistic abstractions of objects amongst non-capitalist societies at the colonial frontier, stating that “fantasy arising from desire deceives the fetish-worshipper into believing that an ‘inanimate object’ will give up its natural character in order to comply with his desires” (Marx 1975:189 in Nancy 2001:4). He extended this to the abstracted commodities and currencies produced under capitalist relations of production, including money – hence “the magic of money” (in Nancy 2001:5). A corresponding attribution of agency to capital, capitalism and markets has led Michael Taussig (1987) to speak of a “capitalist animism” (see discussion in Holert 2012; also Jones 2013). A “post-capitalist animism” (cf. Holert 2012) instead might note that a modern removal of subjectivity and intentionality from nonhuman entities was itself an historically embedded discursive move that facilitated the creation of a scientifically knowable, exploitable and tradable world of objects. Marx’s understanding of “primitive” fetishistic practices and “the brutalising worship of nature” (Marx 1962) derive from this context. Whilst foregrounding the “truths” that are screened out by the activities of commodities and capitalisms, it is worth noting, then, that the concept of “commodity fetishism” is steeped in particular understandings of the “fetish” as a component of “primitive” and animist thought, and is associated with a broader modern dismissal of amodern animist ontologies as ‘savage’ and irrational. This paper seeks in part to reclaim amodern animist ontologies from such dismissals, noting that in any case the apparently exterior “matters of fact” and commodity objects of the modern are themselves fetishised “factishes” – as Latour (2010a) puts it – brought into being through human work but charged with acting from a distance as exteriorised facts animated technically and socially with authoritative, objective power. Thus, we may never have been modern, because we are all fetishists: “modern” or not, we all endow the materialities we create, and with which we are entangled, power to shape our actions, choices and affects.

8 cf. The Bank of Natural Capital website established by TEEB at <http://bankofnaturalcapital.com/>

new “myths” of nature (cf. Sullivan 2013b), “the soul of capital” extends its vampiric subjugation of life in service to the juggernaut momentum of “value” production, economic growth and corporate power (Crouch 2011).

Current socio-ecological accounting practices conceived as emphasising the monetised “value” of nonhuman nature (cf. Costanza et al. 1997; Sukhdev 2010), such as in ecosystem service science, carbon metrics, biodiversity offset metrics, “the TEEB approach,” REDD+⁹ calculations and corporate ecosystem valuation (see, for example, BBOP 2009, 2012; TEEB 2010; WBCSD 2011; DEFRA 2012), thus are conceptualising and constructing other-than-human natures such that they can be further entwined and entrained with transcendent monetary categories and measures (cf. Mackenzie and Millo 2003; for key proposals by significant corporate and financial “visionaries,” see Kiernan 2009; Sandor 2012; Sukhdev 2012). These accounting practices attach monetary value to selected indices of nonhuman nature. Notwithstanding the work of those in the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) process to mobilise finance through enhancing regulatory mechanisms and fiscal reform,¹⁰ they are permitting the emergence of new market exchanges in these measures.¹¹ At the same time, ecosystem services and natural capital accounting perhaps does relatively little to transform the underlying value practices tending towards problematic nature exploitation and the obscuring of socio-ecological parameters produced by the new layer of associated fetishised commodities (cf. Kosoy and Corbera 2010). Instead, they rely on economic incentives that appeal to individual self-interest so as to alter behavior, thereby extending the *zeitgeist* of (neo)liberal individualism and competitive entrepreneurialism with which exploitative and dissociative socio-environ-

9 Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation in Developing Countries, www.un-redd.org

10 As I have observed through the privilege of participating in meetings held by the UN Secretariat of the Convention on Biodiversity and partners on ‘Scaling up Biodiversity Finance’ (in Quito, Ecuador, March 2012, <http://www.cbd.int/financial/quitoseminar/>) and ‘Ecology and Economy for a Sustainable Society’ (in Trondheim, Norway, May 2013, <http://www.dirnat.no/tk13/>).

11 See, for example, the emerging environmental exchange platforms at <https://environmentbank.mmearth.com/login> and <http://mmearth.com/>.

mental relations currently are linked. As MacDonald and Corson (2012:159) claim, the “endeavour to put an economic value on ecosystems makes nature legible by abstracting it from social and ecological contexts and making it subject to, and productive of, new market devices.” In a Foucaultian sense new nature valuation technologies act to intensify capital’s power-effects (Nealon 2008 and discussion in Sullivan 2013a), whereby all is subsumed to the “truth regime” and associated accumulations of “the market” (Foucault 2008). The subsequent release of new nature values into the totalising and biopolitical control of the smooth flows of capital associated with globalised markets thus intensifies capital’s power-effects, while also sustaining the subsuming dynamic of capital present since at least the European Enclosure Acts (Federici 2004).

In the process, new constitutions of material nature are brought forth, together with new means of its practical appropriation. The discursive and calculative technologies (cf. Callon and Muneisa 2005) that create and prime entities for marketised exchanges – from genetic plant resources under the UN CBD to insurance derivatives on the Chicago Board Options Exchange – thus structure and shape the materiality of the things that thereby become traded, with effects on the ecosocial contexts from which they derive (Mackenzie and Millo 2003; Brand and Görg 2008). At the same time, contemporary techno-configurations of circulating commodified nature are amplifying an ecology that resides in a radically disembedding and disembodying ontology. Through this, the fates of diverse rainforest assemblages are influenced and managed through the remote control of electronic exchanges;¹² online cyber-safaris of African savannas seemingly generate authoritative knowledge of “the real thing;”¹³ and radical geographies of non-locality become the basis of nature conservation through the marketised exchange of

varied “conservation credits” between landowners and localities.¹⁴

These approaches to environmental management for conservation constitute both recent innovations, and intensified conceptual decouplings of culture from nature familiar in Europe since at least the Enlightenment, an era that itself is rooted in Renaissance interpretations of classical Greek philosophy (Merchant 1989). They are part and parcel of a broader series of epistemic shifts, that can be traced to successive transformational moments in different cultural milieux, such as that summarised in the Babylonian story with which this paper opens (also see Merchant 1989; Roszak 2001). In the western context they extend and entrench an older occidental biblical creation hierarchy asserting “man’s” dominion over other creatures (Cohen 1986:15), and the dominion of a singular God over all. As returned to in the epilogue to this paper, the associated *transcendence* or “set-apartness” of experience of the sacred is a related and relevant construct flowing from this monotheism. It corresponds with both a removal of “the sacred” from the immanent vital materialities of “nature,” and an associated separation of leaders from followers through variously rigidified hierarchies that serve(d) political, economic and technological inequities (Young 2011).

The phenomena described above invoke a significant paradox: of the intensified lively circulation of new commodified digital units of nonhuman nature intended to signify the incorporation of environmental harms into productions of economic value (what Büscher (this volume) calls “liquid nature”); and of the simultaneous dependence of these lively representations and circulations on an amplified treatment of nonhuman nature as distant, stilled, bounded and mute object (cf. Ingold 2006). A key effect of this, as Latour (2004) gestures towards in his *Politics of Nature*, is that human nature has been rendered increasingly deaf to a stilled and desacralised nonhuman nature that is its mirror (Weber 2001; Curry 2008). Environmental philosopher Andrew Dobson (2010) elaborates the implications of this,

12 As, for example, in the binding of distant localities to financialised trade in carbon and associated option and futures exchanges, as well as in weather derivatives and various environmental futures and derivatives (see the emissions trading page of the Intercontinental Exchange (ICE) (<https://www.theice.com/emissions.jhtml>) and discussion in Böhm and Dabhi (2009), Cooper (2010), Randalls (2010) and Lohmann (2012)).

13 See, for example, WildEarth™ <http://www.wildearth.tv/home>, last accessed 08 November 2013.

14 For examples of such environmental conservation markets see Carroll et al. 2008, and Briggs et al. 2009; for discussion see Robertson 2004, 2006; Morris 2006; Robertson and Hayden 2008; Pawliczek and Sullivan 2011.

noting an associated entrenching of an Aristotelian position that “Man” alone is a political animal, with nonhuman nature rendered mute in political terms. Anselm Franke (2012a:12-13, emphasis added) thus invokes Indonesian narratives that tell of “*the falling silent of the world* under the burden of “primitive accumulation,” of capitalist exploitation, and of colonial administration.” And so behind the contemporary proliferations and circulations of the fetishised abstractions of nonhuman nature described above, is a deepened muting and deadening of the enunciative possibilities of nonhuman natures; accompanied by an intensified “tuning out,” as irrelevant and obstructive, of the *communiqués* of other(ed) culture/nature ontologies.

This predicament, and its tendency towards inequity and a possibly global ecocidal moment, generates significant questions. What relationships and ontologies are strengthened through these contemporary constructions and circulations? What is demoted and negated? And what “gaps” remain for (re)embodying socio-ecological arrangements that are both differently democratic and nourishing of life’s alive diversity?

Deleuze and Guattari (2004:177-178), on whose work I draw in the remainder of this paper, refer to nature’s immanence as “the germen” – the original full and flowing body of the intense germinal and generative earth. They argue that inhibition of the incest-like desire for possession of this full and flowing force has always required systemic cultural codifications. Thus, “in indigenous and other ... rural communities of the world, one almost always finds institutions with rules that serve to limit short-term self-interest and promote long-term group interest”, which tends to be coincident with concern regarding ecological sustenance (Berkes 2008:238). Indeed, for most of human history and cultural circumstances the separating culture/nature assumptions described above seem to have been understood and refused as negative in their effects. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, the abstracting and fictionalising impetus that enables state-capitalism’s de- and re-coding of the *ecosocius* has tended to be thoroughly resisted, prevented and contained (cf. Clastres 1989; and discussion in Melitopoulos and Lazzarato 2012a).

They write, for example, that “the primitive machine is not ignorant of exchange, commerce, and industry; it exorcises them, localizes them, cordons them off, encastes them ... so that the flows of exchange and the flows of production do not manage to break the codes in favor of their abstract or fictional quantities” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004:168; also Polanyi 2001). Anthropologist Laura Rival echoes this in writing of Huaoroni, Zaparo, Shuar and Tukanoan nations of the Upper Marañón river of Peru that “they have constituted nomadic and autarkic enclaves fiercely refusing contact, trade, and exchange with powerful neighbours” (Rival 1996:146). As such, the separation of market exchanges from ecosocial relations (as in the ideal of free market economics) has been variously inhibited in part because this separation is known to break embodied ties of living community: ties which otherwise might be understood as binding all emplaced¹⁵ entities in moral *and maintaining* economies of connection, cooperation and sharing (Bird-David 1992; Lewis 2008b; Graeber 2011).¹⁶

In the modern era of industrialism, capitalism and the controlling freedom of the market, human endeavour instead has seemingly become untethered from these codes. The effect has been a chimerical disembedding of human from nonhuman natures (Polanyi 2001; Latour 1993) and an unleashing of accumulated stocks into flows that escape prior societal codifications (Buchanan and Thoburn 2008:25). In this reading, it is an intensified breaking of inhibiting codes that makes possible current value-accumulating circulations of newly commodified stocks and flows of abstracted nature, and whose recoding as “natural capital” and “ecosystem services” assists this instrumentalisation perfectly.

I seek, then, to destabilise and refract these deadening and dis-embodying assumptions by calling on ethnographic and historical records that clarify different possibilities for conceptualising and enact-

15 In invoking ‘place’ and ‘emplacement here,’ I follow Ingold’s (2005:507) conception that ‘places are not static nodes but are constituted in movement’: in comings and goings and through embodied actions and perceptions, all of which necessitate movement in conjunction with an always moving *milieu* of nonhuman presences (also Abram 1996:65).

16 This is not to say, of course, that times of disagreement, bloodshed, warfare and competition do not occur in these circumstances, cf. Taussig 1987; Rival 1996.

ing human-with-nature existence. I focus on varied *animist* ontologies from different geographical and temporal contexts (cf. Ingold 2006). Modernity's "nature-as-mute-and-stilled-object" is an empowered but particular cultural fetish (or "factish," cf. Latour 2010a, and footnote 7 above) permitting instrumentalising abstractions that are proving problematic in their socio-ecological effects (cf. Latour 2004; Hornborg 2006). Nature's conceptual pacification has been made possible precisely through denial and purification of the animist ontologies that both constitute modernity's necessary Other, and that pose(d) danger to the transcendent coherence of modern (b)orders (Franke 2012a; cf. Douglas 1966). As the Nobel Laureate and molecular biologist Jacques Monod wrote in the 1970s, science necessarily "subverts everyone of the mythical ontogenies upon which the animist tradition... has based morality," so as to establish "the objectivity principle" as the value that defines "objective knowledge itself" (1972:160-4, quoted in Midgley 2011:4). My intention thus is to refocus attention on the eco-ethical effects that may be associated with bringing nature "back to life": via a re-activation of animist relational onto-epistemologies concerned with maintaining good relations between all entities/actants in each moment, rather than conserving-via-capitalising specific objectified and thus transcendent natures (cf. Harvey 2005; Ingold 2006; Bird-David and Naveh 2008; Sullivan 2010; Curry 2011; Stengers 2012).

In doing so I hope to speak to Bruno Latour's (2010b) call, in his recent "Compositionist Manifesto," for movements beyond critique, and towards curiosity and support for subversive everyday (re)compositions of human-with-nature ecologies. Latour encourages us to broach and brave, as well as to re-member, a very different collection of concepts, concerns and practices. In this vein, relevant work regarding diverse and (re)embodying insertions of nature and materiality in society is being productively conducted in a range of social science and humanities genres, including critical geography, science and technology studies, religious studies, feminism, environmental philosophy, political theory and art (see, for example, Castree and Braun 2001; Harvey 2005; Plumwood 2006; Curry 2008, 2011; Haraway 2008; Bennett

2010; Coole and Frost 2010; Lorimer 2010, 2011; Panelli 2010; Yusoff 2012; and the contributions in the volume of *efflux* edited by Franke 2012b). But the possibilities are greater still for "enlivening" nonhuman realms and the *ecosocius* in ways that refract the deadening abstractions of Nature required for its financialised circulations. Anthropology and cross-cultural ethnographic work can offer much here by way of bringing into the frame markedly differently embodied culture-nature ontologies and associated effects (cf. Descola and Pálsson 1996; Ingold 2000, 2006; 2011; Posey 2002; Hornborg 2006; Neves 2006, 2009; Berkes 2008; Moeller 2010).

I explore a few contributions here, all of which have a key commonality. This is of an amodern assumption of the alive sentience of "other-than-human natures" as animate and relational subjects, rather than inanimate and atomised objects. An effect is to enliven both nonhuman natures and understandings of what it means to be human in intimate, moving and maintaining improvisations with other-than-human worlds. "Animism" is the term used to describe this orientation. This is a descriptor that enfolds Edward Tylor's "mistaken primitives," positioned prior to the attainment of Enlightenment rationality in his theory of religion (Tylor 1913); also Gilmore 1919), with postmodern "eco-pagans" of the industrial west, for whom animism is a contemporary eco-ethical "concern with knowing how to behave appropriately towards persons, not all of whom are human" (Harvey 2005:xi; also Plows 1998; Letcher 2003; Harris 2008). As such "animism" is both "a knowledge construct of the West" (Garuba 2012:7), and a universalising term acknowledging a "primacy of relationality" (cf. Bird-David 1999; Ingold 2006) and a set of affirmative practices that "resist objectification" by privileging an expansionary intersubjectivity (Franke 2012a:4, 7). Animist onto-epistemologies in varied circumstances seem to have tended towards ordinary praxes of living with eco-ethical effects that enhance(d) ecocultural diversity and poetic meaning. As such, they are worthy of (re)countenancing.

Counter-Culturenature Ontologies

Countenance n. 5 bearing or expression that offers approval or sanction : moral support. v. to extend approval or toleration to : sanction.¹⁷

An established ethnographic literature destabilises some of the seemingly intractable dichotomies and categories infusing the growth- and commodity-oriented political economies of modernity and postmodernity. In this, the culture/nature dualism and accompanying assumptions of either environmental determinism (over cultural activity), or of a passive Nature as background to cultural dominion, make way for “ethnoepistemologies” that challenge these modern ways of organising what it is possible to know (Descola and Pálsson 1996; Hornborg 2006). Key here is a plethora of possibilities in which humans are envisaged as sharing ontological social space with the beings that “western human ontology” (cf. Glynos 2012) frames as “nonhuman.” This seems entwined with a sense that what exists is brought into being through ongoing participation in relationship by all entities (Ingold 2006). Agency, while differentiated, thus is present everywhere, such that all activity is simultaneously imbued with a moral, if frequently ambiguous, dimension (Ingold 2000). Arguably, such different culturenature ontologies have actualised lively embodied ecologies that favour the maintenance of biological and other diversities. As such, they warrant engagement and “re-animation” (Ingold 2006:19) even in contexts more attuned to modern technological and economic discourses regarding policy solutions in biodiversity conservation (and perhaps especially in such contexts).¹⁸ In what follows I draw on a selection of ethnographic study to foreground elements of the “animist” socio-ecologies associated with several contemporary and historical circumstances. These emphasize what seems to be an uncynical ontology that knows all dimensions of existence to embody and enact agency in inter-relationship, as well as to be animated and alive with

sacred and connective meaning. I return to the latter theme in the epilogue that completes this paper.

My first exploration is a 1992 paper by anthropologist Nurit Bird-David, whose ethnographic work on “animism” has been critical for establishing key parameters in this subfield. In this early paper she develops Marshall Sahlins’ (1974) conception of “the original affluent society” through considering so-called hunter-gatherer conceptions of the provisioning roles of other-than-human natures in such economies. Her ethnographies are of Nayaka of South India (also see Bird-David and Naveh 2008), Batek of Malaysia and Mbuti of Zaire. Their orientations to “nonhuman natures” are understood in terms of assuming “the environment” *to give to* humans in a profound “economy of sharing” that mediates human-with-human and nature-with-human provisioning. “Nonhuman” natures are “humanised” such that they are known as kin and as ancestral embodiments, as communicative agencies, and as friends. Landscape entities as well as non-human animal species are attributed with life and consciousness. An *order of goodness*, while at times ambivalent, in general is assumed. Such knowledges find expression in value practices oriented towards sung, spoken and danced communication and multi-way gift-giving with nonhuman natures that are equivalently expressive. All of these situate human persons as agents continually doing their part to maintain a moral and dynamically generative socio-ecological order of trust that implicitly is assumed to be both abundant and good. This assumption of abundance and the associated “full-subject” (Glynos 2012:2379), mitigates against a need for excessive consumption or hoarding of possessions.

Specific cultural innovations assist with the maintenance of this sense and assumption of abundance. Ongoing work by anthropologist Jerome Lewis (2008a, 2008b) with Mbendjele Yaka of Congo thus emphasises the importance of appropriate sharing through the guiding concept of *ekila*. As Lewis (2008b:13) states, “for Yaka, people should be successful in their activities because nature is abundant. If they are not, it is because they, or somebody else, has ruined their *ekila* by sharing inappropriately.” Significantly, “*ekila* regulates Yaka environmental

¹⁷ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/countenance>, accessed 3 January 2013

¹⁸ On which, see the special issue of the *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* on ‘Indigenous nature reverence and nature conservation,’ introduced and edited by Snodgrass and Tiedje (2008), and the Biocultural Community Protocol Toolkit at <http://www.community-protocols.org/toolkit>, Accessed 24 April 2012.

relations by defining what constitutes proper sharing” (Lewis 2008b:13). *Ekila* is ruined by such actions as not sharing hunted meat, being excessively successful and thus engendering envy, by inappropriately sharing sexuality, or by sharing laughter in such a way that the forest will not rejoice. By regulating potency through appropriate sharing, dynamic abundance is maintained for all. As Lewis (2008b:13) writes, such culture-nature ontologies and associated value practices have established a relationship with “resources” that has meant that Yaka people have “experienced the forest as a place of abundance for the entirety of their cultural memory.” This, again, is in rather stark contrast with modern discourses of resource scarcity and the associated competitive urgency to capture “values” in both extractive industry and conservation activity.¹⁹

Working in a different context again, anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2004) speaks of the similar *multinatural* “perspectivism” of cosmologies associated with peoples of the Amazon: a concept that currently is much celebrated by Bruno Latour (2004, 2010b). Viveiros de Castro posits perspectivism as the understanding that all beings share culture, kinship, and reciprocal relationships, their perspectives differing due to being seated in different bodily affects (or “natures”). Key aspects of this proposition are as follows: of an original culture that is disaggregated into different embodied perspectives; of all animals and plants being conceived as subjects/persons sharing a spirited hypostases cloaked in different embodied perspectives; and of all embodiments as sentient, alive and able to act with intentionality. Ecological relations thus are social relations, with all persons able to share and exchange knowledge. Communication and even transformation between such different embodied perspectives thus is an intrinsic possibility, existing in contradistinction to the naturalism of modernity, which proposes a shared universal Nature from which human culture and Reason rises and becomes progressively separate (see critique in Gray 2002). Indeed, science becomes

scientific when the world is de-cluttered of intentionality (Viveiros de Castro interviewed in Melitopoulos and Lazzarato 2012b:4), such that the life sciences, on which modern conservation policy depends, propose a radically emptied encounter with nonhuman life. The “Amerindian” conception instead is that, “having been people [in the mythological past] animals and other species continue to be people behind their everyday appearance,” endowed with the soul or spirit that personifies them (Viveiros de Castro 2004:467). As such, “nonhumans,” including ancestors and spirits, are attributed with “the capacities of conscious intentionality and social agency” (Viveiros de Castro 2004:467). They are understood as subjects with empathically knowable and communicable subject positions that complexify possibilities for social and moral action.

Cognate culture-nature orientations have been confirmed for me through ethnographic fieldwork since 1992 with people associated with the names Damara / ≠Nū Khoen²⁰ and dwelling in north-west Namibia (also see Biesele 1993; Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2004; Low 2008). I have written on this in the journal *New Formations* (Sullivan 2010) and I paraphrase some of this material here. This is a context where a rain shaman dances into trance, and in this state of consciousness is able to climb a rope of light into a different but no less real world inhabited by the spirited beings that shape and form the life force(s) of daily embodied existence. Here he negotiates with the rain goddess |Nanus, seducing her to permit him to retrieve life-giving rain, which is then brought back to the everyday world with apparently real and celebrated effect (||Khumub et al. 2007). It is where people can shapeshift into lions and other animals, and be witnessed doing so, iterating the “reality of becoming-animal, even though one does not in reality become animal” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:273). And where giant snakes, sometimes with antelope horns on their heads and quartz or lights in their foreheads, roam the landscape, filling it with intense generative potency (Hoff 1997; Schmidt 1998; Low and Sullivan 2013). It is where the most all-knowing deity is known in part

¹⁹ A situation that is increasingly compounded by a global movement in which the offsetting of impacts from economic development enhances the scarcity and thus the financialisable ‘value’ of conservation, e.g. see Seagle 2012, Sullivan 2012; 2013c.

²⁰ The symbols used here reflect the standard orthography for Khoesān languages used to denote click consonants.

through the material form of an insect – the praying mantis – that in mythical and symbolic realms capriciously shapeshifts into and shares kin relations with many other animals, thus iterating the dynamic ambiguity of life itself as a force to be moved with in ways that maintain, rather than still, this movement (personal field notes; Biesele 1993). And where illness is carried and caused by wind, smell and energetic arrows, with healing accomplished by the manipulation and alignment of energetic forms called *lgais* so that they stand up straight in the body (Low 2008). Culturenature assemblages of potency thus enfold human and nonhuman domains into endlessly dynamic connectivities: establishing mysteriously mutable relationships between what occidental ontologies know as distinct and different orders of being (Biesele 1993; Power and Watts 1997; Low 2008). All of these phenomena, spoken of in contemporary times (personal fieldnotes), sit within and affirm an old and broad KhoeSan conceptual world that speaks suggestively through the layers of rock art imagery that is enormously prolific in southern Africa (discussed further in Sullivan and Low 2013).

My final example embraces a quite different cultural context and is detailed in a 1986 paper by Esther Cohen called “Law, folklore and animal lore,”²¹ from which I will quote extensively. Cohen describes the practice of “the criminal prosecution and execution of animals” in both secular and ecclesiastical courts of Western Europe in the later middle ages and the early modern period. She draws on legal anthropology and associated cross-cultural methodologies to assist with understanding the mutual social obligations that normatively bind animals and humans in these trials. Animal trials are first mentioned during the thirteenth century in Northern and Eastern France, from where they spread to the Low Countries, Germany and Italy. They are documented in court records from the 13th to 18th century, “reaching their peak of frequency and geographical scope during the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” (Cohen 1986:17). In them, sentences “were passed and executed in properly constituted courts of law

by fully qualified magistrates, according to generally accepted laws,” at the same time as being “an integral part of customary law” and owing “their continued existence partially to popular traditions and influences” (Cohen 1986:10). They generally followed two distinct procedures, secular and ecclesiastical. Secular procedures, for example, were “used to penalize domestic beasts that had mortally injured a human being,” while ecclesiastical procedures were “employed to rid the population of natural pests that could not individually be punished” (Cohen 1986:10). Frequently sentences were passed only after “ponderous debates and trials years long” (Cohen 1986:16). Here I provide some detail from a description of one of these, a trial of domestic animals in a secular court. My intention is to illustrate the seriousness with which nonhuman animals in these relatively recent European cases were attributed with subjectivity, intentionality, and personhood, leading to their treatment as legal persons in the processes surrounding their trial and sentencing. They “differed as little as possible from human trials,” usually involving appointment of an advocate for the defence of the accused non-human animal(s) (Cohen 1986:13).

Drawing on references from archival research, Cohen writes:

In December 1457 the sow of Jehan Bailly of Savigny and her six piglets were caught in the act of killing the five-year-old Jehan Martin. All seven pigs were imprisoned for murder and brought to trial a month later before the seigneurial justice of Savigny. Besides the judge, the protocol recorded the presence at the trial of one lawyer (function unspecified), two prosecutors (one of them a lawyer and a councillor of the duke of Burgundy), eight witnesses by name, “and several other witnesses summoned and requested for this cause.” Though the owner was formally the defendant, it is clear from the proceedings that he stood accused only of negligence and was in no danger of any personal punishment. Moreover he was allowed to argue in court “concerning the punishment and just execution that should be inflicted upon the said sow”, if he could give any reason why the sow should be spared. The owner having waived this right, the prosecutor requested a death sentence. The

²¹ Thank you to Martin Pedersen for drawing my attention to this paper.

judge, having heard all the relevant testimony and consulted with wise men knowledgeable in local law, ruled, according to the custom of Burgundy, that the sow should be forfeit to the justice of Savigny for the purpose of hanging by her hind legs on a suitable tree. The piglets created a more difficult problem as there was no proof that they had actually bitten the child, though they were found bloodstained. They were therefore remanded to the custody of their owner, who was required to vouch for their future behaviour and produce them for trial, should new evidence come to light. When the latter refused to give such a guarantee, the piglets were declared forfeit to the local lord's justice, though they suffered no further punishment. The court brought from Chalon-sur-Saône a professional hangman who carried out the execution according to the judge's specific instructions. [Cohen 1986:10-11]

Cohen (1986:11) explains that “the case of the sow of Savigny is typical in many respects of most secular animal trials. In the first place, it was held in Burgundy, one of the earliest areas to record such cases.” In addition, “the defendant's porcine nature also recurred in a great many trials. Pigs, who seem to have accounted for the deaths of many unattended infants, were the most common culprits, but such trials also occurred throughout this time for homicidal pigs, oxen, cows, horses and dogs” (Cohen 1986:11). What is particularly relevant here is that:

the trial is typical in its painstaking insistence upon the observance of legal custom and proper judicial procedure. This was neither a vindictive lynching nor the extermination of a dangerous beast. Other records mention, in addition to pre-trial imprisonment, the granting of remissions to wrongly accused beasts, the burning in effigy of a “contumacious” [i.e. wilfully disobedient] animal, and the public display of an executed cow's head.” [Cohen 1986:11]

And further, “where the hangman's bills are extant, they closely resemble those presented for the execution of humans” (Cohen 1986:12).

In analysis, Cohen notes that “the very existence of animal trials in Europe poses severe problems for the historian of Western culture” *because* “the practice

runs counter to all commonly accepted conceptions of justice, humanity and the animal kingdom; and yet it survived and flourished for centuries” (Cohen 1986:15). She writes that it is apparent that there are no clear distinctions between these domains in “the minds of medieval legists” (Cohen 1986:19). This is an ontological disposition that overlapped significantly with an emerging and elite modern rationalism regarding “the immutable categories of nature” and associated universal hierarchies (Cohen 1986:23-24), as well as with the radically different Cartesian notion that “animals are automata possessing neither sense nor feelings” (Cohen 1986:16).²² For the medieval and early modern mind, the difference between “man and beast” instead “was functional, not causal: pigs or locusts who harmed man must alike stand trial in the interest of universal justice” (Cohen 1986:19). In parallel with the ethnographies of non-western cultures discussed above, European animal trials thus seem to have “expressed a perception of law that held sway over the entire universe” for people who “viewed justice as a universal attribute, applicable to all nature” and in which “animals were neither insensate nor lacking in intent” (Cohen 1986:35-36).

In summary, these examples gesture towards an *amodern* “onto-epistemology”²³ generating experi-

22 In *Discourse 5* of Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1968:75-76) writes of animals that ‘... they do not have a mind, and ... it is nature which acts in them according to the disposition of their organs, as one sees that a clock, which is made up of only wheels and springs, can count the hours and measure time more exactly than we can with all our art.’ Other authors argue against the thesis that Descartes considered animals to be incapable of feeling, whilst affirming his insistence on animals as automata, possessing neither thought or self-consciousness (Harrison 1992:219-220). It is telling that the emerging Cartesian vivisectionists ‘felt compelled to sever the vocal chords of the dogs whose living anatomy they explored,’ thus performing ‘their modernist task’ only after having literally silenced their subjects in the endeavour of transforming them into objects of study (Hornborg 2006:24 after Evernden 1985:16-17).

23 **By this I mean reasoned knowledge flowing from particular cultural and historically situated assumptions regarding the nature of reality and the methods through which, given these assumptions, it is possible to know this.** I derive the term ‘onto-epistemology’ from Jones (1999). On the connected understanding of *episteme* as the cultural and historical fabric that shapes and determines what it is possible to know, see Foucault (1970). Foucault uses the term *episteme* to describe the assumed or *a priori* knowledge of reality – the knowledge that is taken as given – that infuses and permits sense-making to occur in all discursive interactions flowing from and reinforcing a historical period or epoch. This is similar to an understanding of ‘culture’ as the shared norms and values that infuse and produce community in all spheres of praxis and language. An *episteme* thus guides and influences the social production of discourses – or empowered knowledge frames – that

ences of, and dealings with, “nonhuman natures” that depart radically from those empowered in the modern era. They do more than simply suggesting that nonhuman natures and objects are animate(d) actants producing effects and affects. Key additional themes emerge to stabilise the grid of this amodern episteme. “Nonhuman” entities are understood to embody variously different perspectives in a shared moral community of “persons,” all of whom possess and enact intentionality that is communicable and knowable. The “social character” of relations between humans and nonhumans tend towards multi-way economies of gifts, exchanges, sharings and transformations between all persons (cf. Sullivan 2009; Haber 2012), and to mitigate against a commodity economy based on the creation and production of disembedded, pacified things (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 481-482). In addition, an array of “counter existential,” but actually common-place, experiences and ontological configurations permit transversal movements into other experiential domains, populated by beings known and related with through millennia of dynamic biocultural concerns and desires.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987:309) write that what is valued in this “amodernity” is the ability and skill to improvise well with “what already is musical in nature.”²⁴ Ontologically, this seems quite distinct from a modern imaginary that fixes nature and nature knowledge through surveys, measurements, maps, numerical models and metrics (as discussed in Robertson 2011; Hannis and Sullivan 2012), and whose expert readers and constructors can be ordained to know their silenced constituents in advance (Castree 2006:161). Improvising-with instead confers what Guattari (2000:21) refers to as the “significance of human interventions,” in a context of an always and potently communicative non-human world that also is sentient, mind-full and asserts responsive agency. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987:258) state, “the plane of composition, the plane of Nature, is precisely for participations of this kind.”

at the same time iteratively reproduce what epistemologically is, and becomes, shared as self-evident about the nature of reality.

24 For more on improvisation as a dynamically sustaining praxis see Gilbert (2004) and the edited volume by Ingold and Hallam (2007).

Becoming-Animist?

People call the soil mineral matter, but some one hundred million bacteria, yeasts, molds, diatoms, and other microbes live in just one gram of ordinary topsoil. Far from being dead and inanimate, the soil is teeming with life. These microorganisms do not exist without reason. Each lives for a purpose, struggling, cooperating, and carrying on the cycles of nature. (Masanobu Fukuoka quoted in Buhner 2002:154)

The disenchantment of the world is the extirpation of animism. (Adorno and Horkheimer 1986:5, quoted in Wheeler 2010:48)

Today, it seems interesting to me to go back to what I would call an animist conception of subjectivity... (Félix Guattari quoted in Melitopoulos and Lazzarato 2012b:1)

The understandings suggested in the contributions above propose cogent “counter-logics” and praxes regarding nature/culture relationships that open the black box of mute nature proposed by modernity’s great divide (cf. Latour 2004), the circulating abstractions of which infuse the current conceptual and policy paradox of “green growth.” Such counter-culture nature ontologies may indeed be among the social forces that can be mobilised and affirmed today in (re)configuring, (re)composing (re)embodying culture nature relationships that are enlivened in support of the flourishing of life’s diversity (cf. Sullivan 2010), thus curtailing the modernist project of severed relationships (cf. Hornborg 2006). Animist moral economies propose conceptual and eco-ethical space for the dynamic sustenance of relationships between diverse entities, with all acting to play a part in this maintaining “sustainability” (cf. Descola and Pálsson 1996:14; Harvey 2005; Bird-David and Naveh 2008; Schwartzman 2010:322). It is this “power-effect” that makes animist culture nature ontologies worthy of engagement, given the Anthropocenic juncture at which collectively we find ourselves.

But it can be difficult to speak of such animist counter-logics and ontologies within academia and other modern institutional contexts. This is

due both to the necessary systemic “epistemological purification” of such amodern knowledges for the consolidation of modern categories (Descola and Pálsson 1996:8); and the mirror of falling prey to ““archaic illusion”, where moderns ... nourish their fantasies about the primitive other, mysterious communications, mimetic contagions, spirits, enchanted nature, and so forth” (Franke 2012a:21, after Taussig 1987). Anthropologists are specifically hampered by a charge that in speaking of animist culture nature counter-logics we might iterate a romantic and nostalgic construction of indigenous peoples as living in some sort of unreachable and ahistorical harmony with a spirited nature. Kuper (1993), for example, argues that such a romanticism, and a delineating of “indigenous peoples” and affective relationships with “the environment” more generally, effects a problematic “return of the native” in anthropology. He suggests that this echoes earlier colonial characterisations that served to denote and demote the “other,” and that made possible the displacements and violences enabling the reconstitution of people and nature as labour and property.

There is a danger here of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, however (cf. Sullivan 2006a). Of implying that it is only legitimate to understand relationships between culture and nature from the perspective of the ontological bifurcation between them – via which “nature” can be peered at from the culture side of the fence, and any refraction of this divide, in terms of where subjectivity, agency and intentionality might be located, becomes subject to dismissal. It also imputes a valorisation of essentialised identities, as opposed to a curiosity regarding different culture nature praxes and their productive effects. In other words, it is not that the animist culture nature conceptions, experiences and value practices explored above are interesting because they might be those learned from indigenous peoples (the European example from Cohen (1986) in any case destabilises this pattern here). It is because the conceptions and praxes themselves might have effects that are relevant for coming to terms with being human in the Anthropocene, as well as for

making choices regarding subjectivity that might be better calibrated with life’s diversity.²⁵

Indeed, the current global socio-ecological cul-de-sac in which collectively we find ourselves suggests that continued dismissal of such different culture nature ontologies is a luxury we can ill afford. As ecologist Richard Norgaard (2010) describes, in shoe-horning our understandings of nature such that the only valid terms and concepts are contemplated, objectified and monetary ones (whether metaphorical or as newly devised and tradable commodities), a foundational contraction of possibilities is occurring. Options for different socio-ecological praxes are being foreclosed, even as a new frontier for capital investment in nature conservation is composing new “socio nature” and “world-ecology” possibilities.²⁶

This, then, is a proposal for a positive and refracting dialectics (cf. Ruddick 2008; Latour 2010b; Gibson-Graham 2011) that is inspired by animist onto-epistemologies so as “to undo the very “alienation” that capitalist modernity induces” (Franke 2012a:21). For engagements that mobilise knowledge of the cultural and historical particularities that have silenced “nonhuman nature” and diverse ecocultural knowledges, so as to resuscitate and affirm immanent “counter-logics” and praxes that might bring socio nature “back to life.” Bennett (2010:14) affirms that “the starting point of ethics is... the recognition of human participation in a shared, vital materiality” (also Goldstein 2012). The culture nature ontologies of other(ed) cultural perspectives offer much for the guiding of such recognition. At the same time, their (re)countenancing requires both considerable decolonisation of the orders of knowledge sustaining modernity, and a turning to face the systemic violences with which these orders have been established

25 cf. Guattari’s (2000:19-20) differentiated and multiplicitous ‘ecosophy’ as ‘an ethico-political articulation...’ between the three ecological registers of ‘the environment, social relations and human subjectivity’ that re-embeds relationships between interior (subjective) and exterior (social and environmental) potencies.

26 The term ‘socio nature’ is borrowed from Swyngeudouw (1999) and ‘world-ecology’ from Moore (2010). It seems hard to find a term in English that unclumsily expresses connectivity between human and ‘other-than-human’ worlds. It seems important to do so, however, so as to keep affirming connections and correspondences between these worlds. After all, no individuals of any species including our own are actually able to exist in a state of disentanglement from other species (cf. Ingold 2010).

and maintained. Nonetheless, and to invoke a hopeful Foucault (1998), since the strategic relationships, practices and discourses that become empowered also always contain their own “gaps” – their own possibilities for breakdown, subversion, and reconstitution – a corresponding potential exists for interventions that exploit these contradictions and ambivalences.

In moving from critique towards insertions that may refract and reconstitute, however, “we” also need to have something different to say. In the spirit of “ambitious naiveté” (Bennett 2010:19), I hope here to have brought in some suggestions for ways in which culture-nature relationships might be thought and practiced differently; and that thereby might provide elements of something different to say and do.

Postscript: Ethical Gestures Towards a Transcendental Immanence

The transcendental field is defined by a plane of immanence, and the plane of immanence by a life... Transcendence is always a product of immanence. (Deleuze 2001:28, 31)

The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy!
The nose is holy! The tongue and cock and hand
and asshole holy!
Everything is holy! everybody's holy! everywhere is
holy! ...
Holy the supernatural extra brilliant intelligent
kindness of the soul! (Ginsberg 1956)

Nature never became a toy to a wise spirit. (Emerson 1985:4)

Even the difference between transcendence and immanence seemed to be beyond them. (Latour 2010a:34)

On closing this essay, I realised I had made an omission. I had overlooked making any gesture towards considering and locating “the sacred” and its significance in the animist culture-nature ontologies engaged with above. This is curious, since my sense is that animist tendencies, combined with a healthy force of humour (Willerslev 2012), centralise the sacred in conceptions and constitutions of culture-nature, with potent eco-ethical effects. Arguably, in the animist propositions outlined above the sacred is everywhere

present: as the soul connecting relational entities of different form (Buhner 2002; Harvey 2005); as a sanctioning of the gaps in knowing generated by the experience of mystery that thereby emerges (Wheeler 2010:44); and as the lived relationships via which each being in “the cosmic community of beings... is bred, grows, reproduces and dies” (Haber 2012:5).²⁷

Reflecting on why this omission occurred brings to mind a series of constraining and silencing trajectories. Of a millennia-old capture of the sacred by priestly castes tasked with mediating between a sanctified heavenly realm inhabited by a distant, individualised and judging God, and a populace of lesser mortals denied legitimate experience of “the divine” (Young 2011). Of the similarly transcendent expert knowledge and religious fervours (Wheeler 2010:37) of priestly castes of scientists, entrepreneurs, and politicians, whose choices are elevated in Man's continuing dominion over Nature. And of a simultaneous historical and contemporary denial of sacred presence in the ordinary natures of everyday life; combined with the occlusion of common sense knowledges and practices of those experiencing as well as instrumentalising this immanent presence (Federici 2004). Through this nexus of circumstances the sacred is set apart from the earthly and fleshly germinative plane of immanence, such that participation in, and engagement with, earth and body is devalued. The sacred as transcendent experience has tended to be seen in contradistinction to the immanent sphere. A transcendent God is both beyond the limitations of the material universe, and beyond knowing by non-specialist humans, not to mention being intrinsically unavailable to creatures deemed made less closely in the image of Him.

But of course, and as expressed by poets, mystics, shamans and critics of all times and cultures, this is not the only way in which the sacred might be conceived and experienced. In his 1836 essay *Nature*, the North American poet and essayist Ralph Waldo

²⁷ On which, it is noticeable that the current government of Bolivia integrates a conception of sacred within its legal framework for ‘Buen Vivir’ (living well), as in Chapter 2, Art. 4(2) of the ‘Framework Law of Mother Earth and Integral Development for Living Well’ which states that “The environmental functions and natural processes of the components and systems of life of Mother Earth are not considered as commodities but as gifts of the sacred Mother Earth.”

Emerson, for example, destabilises this sense of a transcendent sacred realm that is unknowable or unreachable without the mediation of empowered experts, through an exposition that paradoxically became known as “Transcendentalism.” In this, “nature” is deemed poetically knowable by the most innocent of minds, through the attunement of the senses between inner and outer worlds. He speaks of “an occult relation between man [*sic*] and the vegetable” in which “I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them” (Emerson 1985:6). Emerson’s “Transcendentalism” affirms a pantheistic sacred immanence, infused with an “ethical character” that “so penetrates the bone and marrow of nature, as to seem the end for which it was made” (Emerson 1985:28). The sacred, as transcendent and intuitive experience (Wheeler 2010:37), and as entranced state of consciousness (cf. Sullivan 2006b; Fletcher 2007, and references therein), thus is immanent in a nature the generation of which humans and other persons are part (Ingold 2006). Transcendent sacred experience is an ordinary possibility for the human by virtue of being a facet of nature’s immanence, that can also know and open to the other aspects of nature’s diverse embodiment (Bateson and Bateson 2004, discussed in Wheeler 2010). As Hepburn (1984:184, quoted in Curry 2008:64, emphasis added) states, and as echoed later in the quote by Deleuze that opens this section, “there is no wholly-other paradise from which we are excluded: *the only transcendence that can be real to us is an ‘immanent’ one.*” A sense of this commonality perhaps is present in the ethnographic examples above. Viveiros de Castro (2004:464) describes an ontological “state of being where self and other interpenetrate, submerged in the same immanent, presubjective, preobjective milieu” such that the hypostases of embodied difference is an all-pervasive, connecting and communicative vitality. Or an ontological primacy of animacy, as Ingold (2006:10) puts it.

The instrumentalisations of life and landscapes associated with monotheistic doctrine, Enlightenment thought and the rise of modern capitalism instead are effected in conjunction with the enforced denial and systemic disruption of this embodied transcendent immanence (Weber 2001;

Merchant 1989; Federici 2004). This is a constraining gendered dynamic too, in that the subject position of Western transcendental/Enlightenment philosophy – the “Father-*logos*” that “claims to be the overall engenderer compared to mother-nature,” sets up “a transcendence corresponding to a monosexual code” (Irigaray 1997:314). This “Law-making-God-the-Father” equates “to an absolute transcendence only insofar as it is appropriated to male identity”: in the meantime ensuring that “everything that is of the feminine gender is... less valued in this logic because it lacks any possible dimension of transcendence” (Irigaray 1997:314). When this includes a feminised earth, the feminised values of the body and of the (indigenous) natural become devalued, discarded and violated (as documented in brutal detail in Merchant 1989, Taussig (1987) and Federici (2004)). This generates “the ecofeminist insight that there is a relationship between the subordination of women and the exploitation of nature” that is extended to indigenes, configured conceptually as similarly close to nature (Mellor 2000:107). It is associated with a patriarchal circumstance in which “dominant [and modern] men” are “above nature (transcendent),” while “women [and indigenes] are seen as steeped in the natural world of the body (immanent)” (Mellor 2000:111; also Sullivan 2011). Mary Mellor thus urges a conceptualisation of “human envelopment in ‘nature’ as a material relation, an immanent materialism, that is the historical unfolding of the material reality of human embodiment and embeddedness within its ecological and biological context” (Mellor 2000:117).

But perhaps it is the experience of this material immanence as also a transcendent experience of the animate embodied sacred that enhances eco-ethical behaviours. This, then, is an affirmation of the ethical praxes that might be engendered by the notion of a “transcendent immanence”: arising both from the “transcendent experience” of the inviolable sacred as immanent or in-dwelling in all entities and relationships; and from the *a priori* possibility that such experience is part of the immanent “toolkit” of the embodied “human condition” (cf. Spinoza 1996). It is based on the proposition that when sensual and communicative vitality is known as shared by

and pervading all entities it arguably (and hopefully) becomes harder to make choices that violate socio-ecological integrity. As Bennett (2010:14) iterates, “the ethical task at hand here is to cultivate the ability to discern nonhuman vitality, to become perceptually open to it.” In this vein, then, and in solidarity with a growing number of authors (cf. Merchant 1989(1980); Abram 1996; Roszak 2001; Buhner 2002; Harvey 2005; Ingold 2006; Curry 2011), a revitalised experience of living in embodied and sacred relationship with a communicative and animate nature is a necessity if current alienations and violences are to transmute into democratic and vivacious socio-ecological sustainabilities. With Allen Ginsberg in the provocative quote above, it is a reminder that everywhere, everything and *every body* is holy, and can be re-imagined, experienced and treated ethically as such.

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In *Vibrant Matter* Jane Bennett (2010:21) writes that “an actant never really acts alone” - that “agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces.” In the years that this piece has been gestating, I have been sustained by many such inspirations and frictions. My appreciation goes in particular to my partner, environmental philosopher Mike Hannis, and to friends, colleagues and human and “other-than-human” collaborators in the Viva, Nature Inc., Movement Medicine and Kings Hill communities. All errors remain mine alone.

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