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Review of Mette Bryld and Nina Lykke, *Cosmodolphins: Feminist Cultural Studies of Technology, Animals and the Sacred*. London: Zed Books, 2000.

Cosmodolphins is designed to destabilise the ruling narrative and its everyday effects, such as the problem many eurocentric men have relating to those who are unlike themselves. As ecofeminists maintain, this masculine psychological conditioning is heavily implicated in the global ecological crisis and it inflames the major political struggles of our time - classism, racism, sexism, ageism, and speciesism. Thus, in the 21 century, the predicament facing thoughtful middle class white men is:

- How can those who are different from us - workers, women, natives, children, animals, rocks - also be equal to us?
- Is there any way for us to relate to these 'others' beyond controlling their 'wild' natures?

Danish academics Mette Bryld and Nina Lykke have written a delightfully entertaining book, elucidating arguments from two decades of ecofeminist literature with techniques from cultural studies. This is not a new genre: the boundary between ecofeminism and cultural studies, particularly the French psychoanalytic approach known as *écriture féminine*, has always been permeable. The French feminists, they draw on are Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva. They name Merchant, Adams, Warren, and others among their ecofeminist antecedents and Haraway's feminist reflections on science are a major influence, though sitting uneasily alongside the ecofeminist substance of the book.

In pursuing their project of 'de-naturalising otherness', Bryld and Lykke focus on 'the network of meanings circulating between Technology-Science-Modernity-Whiteness-Masculinity' (p.198). In particular, they trace the ways in which these hegemonic markers regulate the discourses of rocket science, dolphin studies, and astrology. Their research material ranges from interviews with practitioners in the three 'iconic' fields to texts, particularly phallogocentric sci-fi novels. Their data gathering takes them to both the US and former USSR - and the rise of astrology during the demise of the Soviet state is an interesting side theme of the book. The authors find a common metonymic substitution occurs in the discourses of rocket science, dolphin studies, and astrology. The function of this displacement is to provide modern men with subconscious libidinal relief from acknowledgment of the

mother's body and its fundamental role in producing the species. In Bryld's and Lykke's words: each discourse supplies 'disembodied origin stories that veil, fake and lie about the active role of matter and (female) bodies' (p.219). In this way, the discourses protect the masculine sense of mastery from what is apparently a very threatening aspect of the originary 'other'.

Traditionally, the Judaeo-Christian religion served this need, compensating men for their marginal role in species creation by installing them as stewards of nature with women as their chattels. The postindustrial command-control paradigm perpetuates these masculine self enhancement strategies. But the field of command, environmental and domestic, operates by means of a confused amalgam of meanings. Just as women have been either sacralised as Madonna or sexually cannibalised as Whore, so too, green nature and watery ocean wombs are by turn, romanticised and resourced. The authors do not acknowledge Dodson Gray's Green Paradise Lost (1979), a pioneering ecofeminist reading of the Judaeo-Christian Great Chain of Being ideology. However, their study of parallels between, racism, sexism, and speciesism in scientific research amplifies her original diagnosis of the eurocentric hierarchy of white men over women, natives, children, animals, and other 'natural resources'.

The anthropo-centric assumption that fish are 'deaf and dumb' has its andro-centric (gendered) parallels too. Perhaps, the story of neurobiologist Lilly's 1960s dolphin laboratory research into interspecies communication offers a parable here? First the dolphin is anaesthetised and a carpenter's hammer used 'to knock a sleeve guide (a kind of hollow needle), about 30 millimetres into the animal's head... electrodes were placed into the brain...' to allow 'push button control of specific emotions' (p.193). Lilly then selects a woman research assistant to 'mediate nature', while he as scientist remains behind a glass screen, microphone in hand. The first half dozen dolphins die. But even a hardier specimen fails to elicit a deep and meaningful exchange. The assistant (dumb blonde?) in the flooded lab, survives the angry dolphin's razor teeth by pacifying the animal with regular masturbation. Hovering above the action, the scientist embalms his dissociated objectifying gaze in LSD.

Sex, drugs and rock and roll, notwithstanding, New Age astrology, hand in hand with Jungian psychology promises a sort of 'feminine' challenge to the scientific obsession with calculability and control. But the promise of holism and homecoming is hollow, since both astrology and Jungian theory reinforce phallic domination with essentialist or falsely universalised gender roles and unreflexive archetypes like the Cosmic Mother. The dolphins meanwhile, once exploited by both US and Soviet military in death defying labour like underwater mine clearance, are sold off as the Cold War recedes. Now they find themselves employed by New Age therapists to swim with disturbed humans in the profitable business of realigning sick auras.

In moving from theory to literature and back, and in exposing the irrationality of scientific man, Cosmodolphins shares much in common with Griffin's classic ecofeminist text Woman and Nature (1978). But the authors seem unaware of that work, as they are of other ecofeminist writing using the method of écriture féminine (Salleh, 1997). Bryld's and Lykke's non-feminist analytical tools are Propp's theory of the fairy tale; Foucault's notion of bio-power; Bakhtin's grotesque bodies; and Brecht's alienation effect. They note, for example, that following the Bruntland

Commission's definition of space and oceans as global commons, the UN as panopticon begins monitoring the new 'bio-political' order authoritatively from outer space, while its agencies get down to the nitty-gritty of pollution, deforestation, global warming, and population control. In some quarters, there is an assumption that beyond defence, extra terrestrial resourcing of mineral deposits, and 'terraforming' or domestication of other planets will leave at least parts of earth for the pristine enjoyment of tourists.

The high tech brotherhood, avoiding its own complicity in the manufacture of environmental degradation, soon turns to Father sky (the space program), which overtakes Mother sea (oceanography) in terms of academic status and dollars spent. But scientists, including DNA expert Crick waxing enthusiastic about panspermia, continue to feminise the 'grotesque and boundaryless' global body in ancient terms (p.116). Like Aristotle's maternal ovum, earth is merely a pre-biotic soup fertilised from above, if not by God, then at least by extra-terrestrial bacteria. Gravity is discussed as an emblem of the imprisoning mater/matter, while Mother Earth is an unpredictable, hysterical woman. Yet the real hysteria is elsewhere, buried deep in eurocentric masculinity as the Buzz Aldrin story reveals. His moon walk and talk erupts with energetic metaphors of 'big mothers' and 'sagging ones'. Post flight, he is hospitalised for hysterical symptoms (p.121). Over in the USSR, Svetlana Savitskaya arrives for duty on Salyut-7, and is presented with a bunch of flowers and an apron by her comradely male crew (p.111).

Bryld and Lykke describe themselves as 'citizens of a small and unheroic nation ... gazing from the margins' at the postindustrial juggernaut and its 'frontier' complex (p.27). As they see it: 'The deceased utopias of European and American modernity, and the languishing belief in their "civilising" techno-political world-mission, persevere as it were, posthumously, in lending legitimation to cannibalistic acts and new quests for resource-abundant areas of wilderness' (p.22). Yet in the last analysis, the authors themselves confess to being seduced by the fascination with space adventure. So, to voice an unfashionable objection - the reader is left wondering about the authenticity of their critique.

Cosmodolphins is highly successful in showing up the problematic god-trick of techno-science, yet it unwittingly perpetuates that dissociated 'view from nowhere' through its poststructuralist rejection of an existentially grounded standpoint epistemology (p.30). The authors' disciplinary tools are designed to destabilise the world of ideas rather than the long suffering material one which sustains it. And so, however brilliant their deconstruction of the signifying realm, it offers no embodied basis for practical ecofeminist resistance. While Brylde and Lykke celebrate the contribution of écriture féminine, for example, their exclusively cognitive politics is unable to actualise the radical impulse of Irigaray's ironic 'dual strategy'. In related vein, while the authors are right in claiming that New Age futures are as flawed as command-control ones. Their dismissal of the utopian moment per se ends up containing both thought and action inside the closed circle of cultural studies discourse. And whose anxieties does that relieve?

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