

The Spiritual Rift

A Deep Ecological Approach to Marx' Concept of Alienation

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Abstract

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Inom den moderna vetenskapen finns inget utrymme för emotionella argument eller yttranden. Vetenskapen byggs på den kalla rationella tanken; humanekologen blandar inte in subjektiva förhållningsätt eller erfarenheter i sin vetenskap. Detta reflekteras i det moderna samhället där det specialiserade arbetet alienerar människan då hon bara producerar ensidigt istället för allsidigt och därmed förlorar sig själv i arbetsprocessen. Den Kartesianska vetenskapen behandlar naturen som en resurs, ett medel för kapitalackumulation till vilket människan förhåller sig som ett subjekt förhåller sig till ett objekt. Människans alienation från sig själv som en del av naturen och sig själv som kännande varelse skapar en oförmåga att relatera till naturen vilket medför ett destruktivt förhållande då människan inte inser att skadan hon vållar naturen drabbar även henne själv. Marx alienationskoncept och den Djupekologiska rörelsen ger insikt om de helheter människan tillhör och den helhet människan själv är och bör erkänna för ett hållbart förhållande till sig själv och naturen.

Nyckelord: Marxism, Hegel, Alienation, Djupekologi, Dualism, Subjektivitet, Känslor, Andlig Reva

“How wonderful it would be if everyone who saw an old forest right away understood how valuable it was. Yes, it can seem silly to come dragging with a lichen ... But does the journalist know a better way? If anyone says that clear-cuts uglify Sweden he gets the answer that it is an emotional argument. The forest companies think they are beautiful ... How should you judge? And who should you listen to, the ones who scream the loudest or the ones who are saddest? The only way to get any attention for anything is through numbers and charts. Sure it's sad. Undignified maybe. But the carpenter doesn't have to love his hammer, it's his instrument. And I have no better tool than the endangered species. They are unquestionable, quantifiable, an objective fact that cannot be questioned. It is my way of taking responsibility. I might've wanted to do it in another way. But I have no choice. Beauty doesn't do well in charts.” [my translation] (*Dagens Nyheter* 13/5 2012)

- Biologist Mats Karström in the Swedish daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* in a coverage about the Swedish forests by Maciej Zaremba.

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Introduction

In my pursuit of insight into the world of global environmental degradation and the “solutions” needed for a truly sustainable and environmentally friendly society I have gone through the many stages of an idealistic environmentalist youth. The first stage was “let's change the system with the system!” followed by a quite radical and back-to-the-land naivety in my hurry to get the message of self-sustainability and community out to the masses. After that came the anarcho-primitive stage where one must forget that modernity ever existed and live again like “savages” in our true nature without any sort of imposing structural society. Then finally, after a year and a half of studies in human ecology, the idealism faded and my last resort was evoking the spiritual for some meaning in this struggle to make the world of humans a bearable place to live and raise children in. And as cliché as it may sound, the universe agreed and showed me there is no meaning in life without emotion, something I felt was being completely left out of the human ecological discourse. In science, there can be no mixing in of emotions as a basis for action or societal development. And as bitterness about this completely unreal division of life worlds was throat-high, I found my salvation in Marx' concept of alienation.

In this essay I aim to examine a philosophical approach to the discourse of environmental problems that *include* nature as opposed to talking about it as a separate being or object. In doing this I wish to stress the emotional aspects of Being, something that often seems overlooked within the human ecology discourse, especially when addressing the severe environmental problems at hand in today's globalized society. To gain credibility or to seem serious many scholars chose the strict scientific way of presenting their thoughts about nature, as to not be discarded by the rational mass. This I feel is doing more harm than good, which is why I see a need to fill a spiritual void in the academic discussion. I will use Marx' concept of alienation as a tool for a greater understanding of the modern persons relationship with nature and how it effects society. I will also use alienation as a tool to determine whether or not emotion and science can coexist within the realm of social and natural sciences preoccupation with environmental problems. The following questions will need to be answered:

Who is the person in the human ecological triangle and how is she to relate to nature and society?

What does the spiritual rift between person and nature mean for our ability and sense of immediacy to act when facing environmental degradation?

The first question will be answered through a philosophical discussion about Being and what it means to be within science, with a focus on human ecology. What is being a human ecologist? The second question I will aim to answer through a dialogue between Marxist thinkers and deep ecologists, urging them to meet instead of opposing each other. My hope is that both of these questions will be illuminated by applying Marx' concept of alienation.

This essay is divided into three parts. In the first part I begin with explaining and exploring Marx' concept of alienation and how it could be important in understanding our relationship with nature. The second part explains the meaning of deep ecology and

why its philosophical and more spiritually inclined direction is vital to any attempts at understanding ourselves and the world we create. In the third conclusive part I will join the seams of Marxism with deep ecology, using alienation as a thread.

It is important to note that within the Marxist tradition there is a division in his work between “early Marx and older Marx”. The early Marx was the young idealist philosopher, still quite keen on Hegel, whose work was incomplete and not published with the same consistency as his later works and is therefore dismissed by many Marxists who claim there is no trace of his early works in the later and therefore cannot be seen as a part of his basis of theory. I strongly disagree as I see a consistency in Marx’ thoughts but a change of focus and expression. I will develop this in the essay but wish to point out here that the concept of alienation is from his early work, mainly the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* from 1844 which is my main material in the first chapter.

I also wish to point out that the focus on only western perspectives is completely intentional.

Method

This essay is a theoretical discussion between Marx, deep ecologists and I. I will use Hegel and Marx' concept of alienation as a starting point from the so called “rational science” to end up on the emotional and spiritual side of the ontological spectrum in deep ecology and finally at my own conclusion about the Spiritual Rift that will be explained in the last chapter. I prefer not to mention any already custom-made theoretical basis on which this essay will rest, as I feel that an open mind is key to any sort of understanding and exploration. But I do restrict myself to a set of ideas ranging from Hegelian-Marxism to deep ecology. I feel both these fields are inadequate when viewed in isolation but compensate one another in a way that might be beneficial for a broader understanding of our relationship with nature, both personal and societal. Where Marxist thinkers conclude reason, deep ecologists conclude emotion. It is in this central difference that I wish to merge the two approaches towards emancipation.

Part I: Alienation

The Concept of Alienation

The concept of alienation begins in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in which Hegel explains the world as a manifestation of a universal spirit or consciousness that in its quest for self-realization has created the world as a materialization and objectification of itself. But the spirit does not recognize itself in this materialization but is instead fragmented into smaller and smaller pieces. In the form of a human being, for example, the spirit does not recognize itself in another human being who instead feels like a stranger, a separate being as opposed to a part of its all-encompassing self. The spirit is alienated from itself since it cannot recognize itself in its own creation (Hegel 1977:263-264, Rae 2012).

Marx took this concept but excluded the universal spirit and focused on the human alienation, where the human being is the creating force who is manifested in her own creation. Marx evolved a line of thought from Feuerbach, who meant that humans had created God, not vice versa, and that in creating God we projected all our good qualities on him and lost them in ourselves, therefore God as a creation is destructive to human kind (Andersson 1997:28-29). Same goes for Marx' theory, but instead of God as the creation the labor process is what alienates us. Marx believed that the human species differentiated itself from other animals in its ability to create universally. Whereas an animal only creates for itself and its needs, humans can create not only for her need and other species needs but also out of sheer creativity and will. Humans can create out of vision and in that creative process we realize ourselves. Marx saw the ability to create out of will and creativity as a human need, although separated from the basic human needs like food, shelter and reproduction it is equally essential as it gives us aware creatures a sense of purpose and meaning (Marx 1965:66-67, Andersson 1997:70-72). The manifestation of ourselves is thereby connected to some sort of work; we have a vision or a will to make something happen or materialize and for the realization of the idea we perform some kind of work. The word *work* may to the reader be understood as a physical endeavor performed on a daily basis within a certain time frame, but this is not what Marx means with the word work, but any sort of action with a purpose is to be thought of as work.

Specialization

What the reader might be thinking of when seeing the word work is the labor process. Laboring is not the same as working as any mental or physical action can be filed under work, labour is a specific event taking place under specific circumstances. Under capitalism the labor process means that the worker creates not universally but monotonously and not out of her own need to create but out of the capitalist vision of monetary surplus (Marx 1965:53-55). Both the worker and the capitalist are alienated when their creative processes are reduced to the never-ending quest for surplus; they can never reach self-realization since the self is being denied in the labor process. And since the end of the labor process is money, an abstract symbol with which they acquire

their basic sustenance and meet their basic needs, the alienation is complete within both the worker and the capitalist. The capitalist only works on a mental level forming the ideas which the worker later carries out in actual work, this passive stance alienates the capitalist although the general conception seems to be that intellectuals realize themselves *through* the workers and thereby fulfill themselves and feel a greater purpose. But it is the transformation of the material world in itself that is the active part of self-realization (Andersson 1997:55-56, Marx 1965:63). For the worker it is not his self that is manifested in his physical work, it is the vision and idea of the capitalist, the two steps of self-realization has then been divided between worker and capitalist.

The next step in alienation is when the creation gains power over the creator, for Feuerbach we gave God power over us while for Marx we give the power over to the market. The more the worker wears himself out in the production process, the more powerful becomes the alienated world of objects that he creates in his labor. The labor process becomes an alienating factor in that the worker no longer belongs to himself since what he produces is not an extension of himself, a manifestation of his inner visions, but products to be sold on a market that has little to do with him and his basic needs as a human being (Marx 1965:62-64). This clearly leads to a life devoid of meaning and spirituality, the worker becomes more of a pawn in the production process and is by Marx likened to a machine who simply follows up on the one or few tasks handed to him or even less, as he puts it in the *Communist Manifest*; the worker becomes an “appendage to the machine” (Marx 1965:187). In this process the worker also loses any chances of a wider range of skills which in itself leads to a dependency on the capitalist and specialized system; man can neither perform work out of his own will nor to meet his own basic needs directly.

The Alienation Triangle

The human ecological triangle is a symbol for the field of human ecology and shows the interrelatedness of nature, person and society. It is a way to escape dualism and instead see how these fields are connected and never can be viewed as separate from one another. Nature is not simply nature without any impact from society as society has not been formed without nature (Hornborg 2001:193-194). The same can be said of the self, but this triangle is in my opinion as alienating as the dualism that instead expands to a trinity as the self becomes a relatable agent, the subject of the triangle, as opposed to a part of a whole. Looking at Marx’ view on the self and nature clarifies my opinion.

In green Marxist writings there is one quote in particular that is being used to explain and emphasize Marx’ conception of nature: “nature is man's inorganic body” (eg Dickens 1996:57, Benton (1989), Foster et al. 2010:278). This short sentence tells us a lot about what nature Marx is talking about when referring to it in the context of alienation: man and nature are one and the same, inseparable and interdependent. Forever connected. But there is more to follow:

“Nature is man's *inorganic body*, namely that part of nature that is not human bodies. That man lives of nature means: Nature is her *body* and she must remain in constant contact with it not to die. That man's physical and spiritual life is connected to nature has no other meaning than that nature is connected to itself, for man is a part of nature” [my translation] (Marx 1965:65-66)

Although this segment ends with the words “man is a *part* of nature” it is quite clear that what Marx is saying is that man *is* nature. So if man is alienated from nature, this must only mean that nature is alienated from itself and that man is also alienated from himself, as he does not recognize himself as nature.

Though Marx does not dwell on the subject of nature he does establish that our relationship with nature is equally affected by alienation brought on by capitalism as our relationship with ourselves and other human beings (Marx 1965:66-68). Thus, this must be inherent in the concept of alienation since nature is a part of the extended self. If we in our everyday quest for money as a means to both survive and create lose ourselves in a fog of abstractions it is most likely that we will lose our connection to one another and even more likely that we will lose our connection to nature (Harvey 1996:197). It is in this sentiment that the concept of alienation withholds the human ecological triangle, but as opposed to just linking the three corners of person, society and nature the triangle can be seen as the self, divided and scattered as it has become under the capitalist system. To clarify it is important to know what Marx thought of the self - what is a person and what is a society? Nature we know is man's inorganic body, it is the extension of the person's being. The person according to Marx is not simply a product of its current society nor is it a separate unit who in its isolation reaches self-realization but an actor of free will who both creates and is created by society that change over time (Marx 1965:120-121). The important Marxist aspect I wish to bring with me to the deep ecological side of the spectrum is that someone is dictating the conditions of society within which the person is being created and creates. This someone was in Marx view the capitalist who through the division of labor has enslaved both nature and man (Marx 1965:57-58). With this essay I wish to point out that the scientific tradition to which Marx himself belonged holds a big responsibility in the dictation of contemporary society and the creation of the alienated man, where the person is a unit who interacts with society and nature as opposed to being an intrinsic part of everything.

Transforming Nature through Society

According to Marx our sense of beauty is essential to our species-being, but this sense is being lost in the alienated labor process and the objectification of nature as a resource. In capitalist society nature is fragmented and reduced to components of products, the transformation and work afflicted on nature then becomes dictated by the abstract market, whose “will” is being carried out by the alienated worker. Instead of creating his own shelter or cultivating his own food with regard to the natural beauty and the aesthetics of his work, the worker simply follows instructions passed on in an economical chain of command where the worker is the last link to nature. In industrial society, capitalist or not, the machine is the last link, with the worker as the appendage (Dickens 1996:57-58).

But the problem is that the worker no longer recognizes nature as nature, it is now the object of his alienated work out of which his wage will grant him a continued existence. He cannot grasp the harm he is doing to himself when he is doing harm to nature by treating it as merely a resource waiting to be put through the production process. The end product, in which the worker has put so much of himself, has gained so much power over him that he does not find it counterproductive to deplete the soil, extract

fossil fuels or cut down forests as it will get him to the goal of his work, his self-fulfillment that is his paycheck. He is blinded by this goal to the extent that he does not realize the position he is in but starts appreciating the money he gets from his alienated work. The worker might even feel grateful when receiving his paycheck, he can now build up his own capital and become wealthy himself, one step at a time. The capitalist illusion hinders the worker from realizing its oppression, as Marx puts it: “with the transformation of the slave as a *free worker*, meaning a wage-laborer, the landowner has become a master of industry...” [my translation] (Marx 1965:56-57, 76, 98-99)

The slave was before the invention of machinery and the wage-labor system the most effective resource in the transformation of nature into society. With slavery the master could not only run intense monocultures at home but could also exploit land overseas, turning wilderness to imported goods for the upper class of rich nations (Moore 2003). Today it is not as simple as we are tangled in complex webs of global interactions, where the slaves now get paid, form unions and have “equal opportunity” to play the economist zero-sum game that is as natural to us as breathing. Now the global citizen is a part of its own oppression as it “freely” becomes a slave to the capitalist system (Dickens 1996:109)

Furthermore we are building society at *the expense of* nature, it is therefore in the common good to destroy eco-systems as it benefits everyone, the national-economists leads us to believe through the assumption that the man-made rules of economics in fact are natural laws existing beyond and above us mortals (Marx 1965:60). Here the economic system takes on god-like proportions and has gained an incredible power over us, making it extremely destructive since we are no longer in control of it as a human concept. In today’s globalized society everyone is a part of the willing oppression of the west, the economic system is the one true system reigning over all of us and is affecting everyone’s lives, making the entire human race alienated when it does not recognize its own creation as human.

The Human Ecologist as a Worker

The middle class seems to be a class of innocence, exempt as it is from both the physical work of minding machines and the conductive play of the market from corporate offices. It is within the middle class that the academic world is housed, it is where Marx himself featured and it is a noble and educated place to be within society. It is comfortable too, to be able to explain the lower class and the upper while being the neutral observer of the collective psyches of the two. But what is the academic role in the alienation brought on by the capitalist system? Marx himself saw it as his duty to uplift the workers from there pitiful place on the bottom of society through the help of rational science (Manson 1993:24-25). And most Marxists seem to agree; it is reason that will defeat the irrationality of capitalism and achieve justice (Dickens 1996:204-205, Harvey 1996:61). What does this mean for the lower classes for which justice is most desperately needed? And what does it mean for the human ecologist?

We do not think of the human ecologist as a worker, in modern society very few are considered workers, at least this is the case in the richer countries that have exported most of their labor intensive production to poorer countries or onto machines, but what

is the human ecologist if not just another wage-laborer? The critique against the Cartesian rule over science is abundant within the human ecological discourse, and yet here I am writing an essay based on the very same premises as an economist for whom the Cartesian science is the most natural and logical in the history of man (Foster et al. 2010:22-24). The human ecologist¹ produces research that is coherent with the currents of modern science, the very same modern science that is often under attack. Instead of through their own production completely change the rules of the game and impose it on other fields of science that deal with issues relating to nature and society, the human ecologist finds herself with a rational approach where injustices and environmental degradation is measured in numbers, all in accordance with the Cartesian way of splitting reality into pieces and dividing them up and counting them in the pursuit of proof. This act of playing into the hands of modern reductionist science is alienation at its finest, since the biggest reason for doing this is of course capital (Naess 1980:19-20, 24, 27).

The academy is completely and in every aspect run by capital, a researcher is dependent on grants, the university wants productive scientists who will generate more capital and the market needs scientist who will approve and endorse new products and new technologies (Harvei 2000). Everyone needs a job, a paycheck at the end of the month to survive, just like the workers in nineteenth century England had to become machinelike creatures with no will of their own and no power over their bodies, suppressing every inch of themselves in monotonous procedures, the human ecologist puts on academic robes and becomes a mental worker (Dickens 1996:105, Plumwood 2002:41). Just as much a cog in the wheel of capitalism as the worker, only with a more comfortable life and a slight sense of power and achievement. How is the human ecologist to realize herself if the purpose of her product in the end is to satisfy the whims of modern science?

¹ The human ecologist in this text represents the actor in the academic discourse who identifies with the title human ecologist and has great knowledge about the deterioration of human-environmental relationships.

Part II: Deep Ecology - Listen to the wind

Nature as the All-encompassing Subject

Deep ecology is in my opinion a misunderstood branch of philosophy (especially among the Marxist's who seem to forget that Marx himself was a philosopher) that does not take the Cartesian reality for granted in its discussion about our relationship with nature. Instead its focus is on the ecosystem that is the world and which we all are an intrinsic part of. The mistake many make when dismissing deep ecology is to refer to its eco-centrism as anti-human and fascist (Bookchin 1987, Foster et al. 2010:315). This opinion can only come from a Cartesian mindset that sees the ecosystem as something separate from the human system and thereby feels that to talk about the world as only nature is to completely disregard the human reality and even work against it. This misconception derives from the deep ecological focus on the survival and upkeep of nature for nature's sake as opposed to the survival of human society or the survival of parts of nature for the sake of human survival, a provoking thought for any anthropocentric mind. Another misunderstanding is that the philosophical approach is otherworldly and out of touch with contemporary society and its hierarchical structures, which is understandable since the philosophic tone of the deep ecologist is quite different from the western rationalist vision of fragmented reality that is usually represented by the so called "shallow environmentalists" against whom the deep ecologists have positioned themselves (Evernden 1993:27, Foster et al. 2010:258-261).

The deep ecologist rather provocatively points out the mainstream environmentalists as shallow because of their way of relating to the environment they are sent out to save from human aggression. The relating is on a subject-object level where the environment is something out there, separate and speechless and the environmentalist its spokesperson on the societal arena. The shallowness stems from the dealing with the issue of nature as any other object is dealt with within modern society; nature is measured, valued and put to use to satisfy human "needs" without having to make any fundamental structural changes (Drengson et al. 2011, Hornborg 2001:210, Naess 1989:28, 2005). In the modern world, eating strawberries in winter and communicating through flat portable screens is apparently a need so strong that we sacrifice our future wellbeing. The environmentalist has instead of remaining an opposition to the insanity of modern society become a means of restoring it. The environmentalist vocabulary is used daily in any political or economic context, not because we live in a better world of enlightened leaders but because the peril has become a cash-cow for politicians and corporations alike. Even the acknowledgement of the change in climate is, instead of bringing people down or taking the threat of our western life-style seriously, a problem solved by more ego-boosting consumption and the illusion of making a difference through small changes in everyday life (Hornborg 2001:207). Everybody wins; the global economic system remain uncompromised, the environmentalist get a sense of achievement and the average western citizen gets to consume their way out of the pickle we have all consumed ourselves into. The environmentalist has been bought by bicycle highways and the measuring of ecological footprints instead of calling the bluff of the

powerful and challenging them yet again, with a more fundamental understanding of the meaning of sustainable relationships.

The Deep Self

The shallow environmentalist can be likened to the human ecologist, who in her attempt to understand and explain the relations between society, nature and person, is swallowed up by the reductionist paradigm and becomes an agent of the very same. Reductionism resorts to, as the word implies, reducing wholes into fragments of observable objects that we can use in different ways (Shiva 1994:23-24). The human ecologist/environmentalist herself is reduced to a means in this shattered world of scientific and capitalist rule. She becomes a one-trick pony in her specialized field of the environmental discourse, meaning she acts only as an agent of her assigned specialized task and is in this process lost as a whole. She is not to subjectively assert herself to her task; emotion is not to be mixed in with her objectifying of the world. I can feel overwhelmed by nature or in despair about our treatment of it, but I do so in my spare time (Evernden 1996:20-21). This entails a fragmentation of the self; the human ecologist is not only alienated but split into different utterings of the self *within* herself. Here the deep part of deep ecology shows itself as it pursues the question of what it is, and means to be.

Another German philosopher enters the stage, namely Heidegger, who has influenced deep ecological thinking as much as Hegel has influenced Marxist thinking. It is not surprising then, to find the two quite compatible in their abstract views of existence, two kindred spirits of philosophy (Ferrer 2003). Heidegger's notion of the self is from a deep ecological aspect extremely helpful in our quest for better understanding of our relationship with nature. He sees the self as a field of care, or *dasein* – meaning being here in German – a word also used by Hegel when speaking of existence. *Dasein* does not translate into man but explains our way of being in the world; our being is not simply a presence of our thought but a presence in a place, in a here. And being here, in the world is according to Heidegger expressed through care of the place in which we are, our environment, meaning caring about our own being is caring about our environment. The self is therefore an intrinsic part of the environment and the environment is an extension of the self (Evernden 1993:63-64, Naess 1989:56).

Speaking of the self then, as an agent of its thoughts, is in complete accordance with the Cartesian conclusion “I think therefore I am” by which the human ecologist apparently abides. She thinks and so her existence is confirmed and uttered in her academic work, but what happens in her spare time when she is allowed to be emotional and feel?

The Subjective Self

What emotion is exactly, is as mysterious as it is essential to our being in the world. And the fact that it so hard to grasp, so hard to explain and impossible to observe, means that it is completely disregarded within the realm of thought processes called science (Naess 1989:63-64). There is observation of emotion of course, within psychology, sociology and anthropology, but then it is not the scholar herself who withholds emotion it is her “subjects” that become objects in the process of linking their emotional worlds with the research the scholar is conducting. Anthropologists have rightly been accused of objectifying indigenous people in their search for insights in the human psyche, an illustrative example as the anthropologist research is based on “being there”, meaning somewhere else than here, meaning outside herself and her life world. Surely the study of other cultures sense of world hood and animism is of the highest importance when needing to prove promoters of western values wrong in their simplified take on the world as a set of fragments, but by showing us how “they” live requires a definition of who “we” are and again we are tangled up in dualism. Furthermore the anthropologist turned human ecologist releases herself of any emotion and lets the people she study be the spokesperson and the manifestation of a way of being she herself is deprived of. This emotional displacement leads to further estrangement from the self; her work is alienating her (Plumwood 2002:42-43).

Within deep ecology, the scholar is not only allowed to be emotional, creative and philosophical but is even encouraged to be so. *The Dark Mountain Project*, a new environmentalist movement, is a sensuous exploration of being in the world, a subjective response to shallow environmentalist systemized thinking, found very provocative by many. Marxist human ecologists Andreas Malm and Rikard Warlenius are outraged by the irrationality in leaving the “fight”, to “give up and go up some mountain to listen to the wind speak to the soul” (*Aftonbladet* 25/5 2012). This agitated response to former Marxist environmentalist Paul Kingsnorth’s personal manifest about leaving environmental activism to begin a cultural journey to reconnect with nature, (see Kingsnorth 2010) is not only a result of classic socialist antagonism merged into environmentalism but a Cartesian and completely western disregard for the emotional aspect of being. But why is wanting to reach a better understanding of our emotional ties to the earth so provocative? Whatever happened to culture?

Culture of Place

In modern western society it is difficult to speak of cultures in the sense of social behavior and norms implicit in a specific place, practiced by a certain group of people. Globalization of the high consumer “culture” has swept away most cultural characteristics of local society and replaced them by the endless need to make and spend money, leaving some cultural trademarks to hold on to when needing to identify oneself (Harvey 1996:245-246, Hornborg 2001:171). This void of cultural place-belonging has led to an increased fascism and nationalism, that is reflected in the politics of Europe where xenophobic parties are gaining more and more ground on this very basis; we have lost our culture. The thirst for a culture is then reflected in the success of these

parties that promise to unite “us” all and crush any further attempts of the multicultural blandness that threaten our world. Just like the deep ecologists, the nationalists have an issue with the loss of identity and sense of belonging that globalization has brought, and under this pretense they gain voters by appealing to a sense of place to which “we” are connected. The “we” refers to the ethnicity originally belonging to the place that has been constructed as a nation.

It is easy to mistake or connect the deep ecologist drive to localize societies and reconnect to the environment by a sense of belonging and identification with nationalism and even more so when combining it with the population issue, in which some deep ecologists take a radical stand and wish to see humans almost extinct (Bookchin 1987, Naess 1989:140-141, 144, Plumwood 2002:208). But the importance of the immediate experience of a place cannot be ignored, neither by Marxists nor deep ecologists or any environmentalist, as modern society through the miracle that is internet and technology allows us to be everywhere all at once not only is completely unsustainable and fickle but extremely alienating (Naess 1989:61-62). The fact that nationalist take advantage of the situation to promote their own hateful interests cannot be a reason not to pursue local communities with a sense of place and cultural identity.

The loss of culture is a loss of understanding of ourselves and our society, therefore the subjective perspective must have a place in public discourse (Hornborg 2001:195, Plumwood 2002:54). The place that art had when romantics roamed the earth to remind us of the beauty of nature and the magic of experiencing it has been taken by the fascination of communicating in a virtual reality and playing games about agriculture online. Romanticism has since long been discarded as dreamy and unreal, which is the whole point of it. But in a rational society there is no looking like a fool among the reasonable and clear headed. The escapist agricultural games in social media are extremely pragmatic; working the soil, feeding the cattle and harvesting the crops are now such ancient activities that they have become a part of human history in which we take pleasure to relive online. So far has the alienation gone that we in our spare time pretend to live of the land.

So what are we left with, culture-wise? In western society not much, the Dark Mountain initiative to reclaim the experience of place and share it through art is for me and most deep ecologist a most welcome one. It is needed as a guiding light in the darkness of rational reasoning and a step away from alienation and towards reconnection to nature.

Experiencing Philosophy

The romantics were not so much interested in explaining or understanding the world as showing it from their own subjective experience without claiming any entitlement to truth, this in order to evoke emotion or reaction from the person relating to it. Nowadays it is misinterpreted as a beautification of reality, an embellishment of a place and time. Like the pastures of the Arcadian tradition, symbolizing the simple life of harmony and beauty, it was an unrealistic depiction of the world as a beautiful place (Evernden 1993:30, 33-34). It was unrealistic as a great deal of the world’s population lived in polluted cities, struggling disharmoniously on the treadmill. But reality is not black and white, either or, it is a complex web of perceptions and actors and the relations between them. Romanticism wanted to explore this and had more than just beauty and daydreams to convey; it was a reaction to the industrialization of society and nature and

emphasized the interconnectedness of nature and our part in it through a phenomenological perspective (Evernden 1993:29, 31). It was a holistic response reproduced through artistic expression but also in, for example Hegel's thoughts on organic nature.

As the Dark Mountain movement revives romanticism, deep ecologists revive philosophy as a part of the discourse of contemporary society. The founder of the deep ecology movement Arne Naess introduced an ecological philosophy that he called ecosophy, where the subjective experience plays a big part in the ontological discussion of "what there is" (Naess 1989:35). What there is is always changing, philosophy allows us to change with it, ponder upon it and theorize around it, without having to make a frameset of ideas to desperately clasp to through thick and thin (Naess 1989:36-37). To have one's own philosophy as opposed to adhering to one universal philosophy is to me a big part of self-realization; an identification of one's own mental creation through experience.

A Holistic Paradigm

The core of deep ecology is not only its eco-centric world view and its controversial approach to the population issue, but it is the focus on fundamental and deep change (Drengson et al 2011). Within deep ecology, the concept of alienation is frequently referred to, not as a Marxian concept but as a characteristic ailment of modern society. In Naess' deep ecological manifest *Ecology, Community and lifestyle* (1989) he speaks of alienation in much the same way as our young Marx did, the difference being the outspoken holism that in Marx' writings is only implied. The holism in deep ecology expresses the need to take the wholes into consideration as opposed to viewing things in isolation (Naess 1989:79). This is also a trait of systems theory that to me is an extension of Marx concept of alienation. Naess writes:

"There is no completely isolatable I, no isolatable unit. To distance oneself from 'nature' is to distance oneself from a part of that which the 'I' is built up of. Its 'identity', 'what the individual I is' and thereby sense of self and self-respect are broken down. Some milieu factors, e.g. mother, father, family, one's first companions, play a central role in the development of an I, but so do home and the surroundings of home" (Naess 1989:164).

This conception of the self as being built by the interaction with others and the environment is identical to Marx thoughts of how the self is constructed. The separation from the building blocks of the self is then destructive as "the sense of self and self-respect are broken down". This is where alienation plays its role as the identifier of the separating factor which according to Marx is the production process; we produce ourselves as means.

Reconnecting

Deep ecologist Joanna Macy has through her philosophy inspired by Buddhism identified our inability to grasp the magnitude of the global environmental degradation

as a matter of the heart and not the mind. Our inability to relate to the vastness of it all is not because it is impossible to comprehend with our minds but quite the contrary; it is the mind that through reason blocks any reaction on an emotional level. The reasoning being “it is too much for me to bear” or “what can I do about it all?”. Reason lets us off the hook, pleading that it is impossible to feel any of it as allowing it to enter our emotional sphere would only lead to despair. Joanna Macy objects to this reasoning of despair as something harmful, when the outcome of this reasoning is what really is hurting us: apathy (Macy & Brown 1998:26).

To spare ourselves of pain of any sort is a western concept, not a natural one. We are to be spared from any discomfort, even the discomfort of physical labor and there is a pill for every uncomfortable condition both physical and mental. But pain is not a destructive force, pain is part of the healing process and without it, there is no healing. It is therefore vital that we acknowledge the pain we feel for the state of our world as a sign of health and force of action and healing (Macy & Brown 1998:27). But how do we ignore reason and make room in our lives for the strong emotion that a human crisis like the one we are in is likely to evoke?

Surely, this blockage and repression of emotion is not an individual problem and it is not to be solved within each and every one of us in isolation through mind and body separating psychiatry. This is a societal issue as society teaches us to not be emotional and leaves no space or time for it, as we scurry along the treadmill trying to make a life for ourselves. But the power over our lives lies with what Macy calls “The Industrial Growth Society” in which we are taught that more growth means more happiness. We who “benefit” from this society cannot be ungrateful and accept the guilt of the fact the it relies on the oppression of other human beings and other life-forms (Macy & Brown 1998:31, 33) The reason for our emotional detachment from one another, the world and our own lives is an act of self-preservation, as we feel we would collapse if we allowed ourselves to *feel* the distress and despair living in this world in this age entails.

Macy points out that we have every reason to be in despair but that we need to be, in order to change our perception of reality which is what is needed for a continued existence of our and other species. For the human ecologist, the missing link between reaction and action is the emotional deadlock in not being able to grieve and express this grief to the public that she is meant to serve, as it is not allowed within the scientific discourse. This is why many students of human ecology find themselves disillusioned and depressed after a few semesters of waking up to the reality of our dire situation that seems to have no answer or any prospects of improvement but on the contrary is worsening every day (Macy and Brown 1998:36-37). This leaves the student with an immense sense of powerlessness as this situation is a global one and the powers of the world are humungous and too far away, the student either leaves human ecological studies for a more hopeful approach or become a human ecologist, reproducing the account of horrors that have worsened since last. Instead of stopping at the grief and the repression of it the work begins there. Joanna Macy takes on a hopeful approach in “The Work that reconnects”, illustrated in a spiral in figure 1.

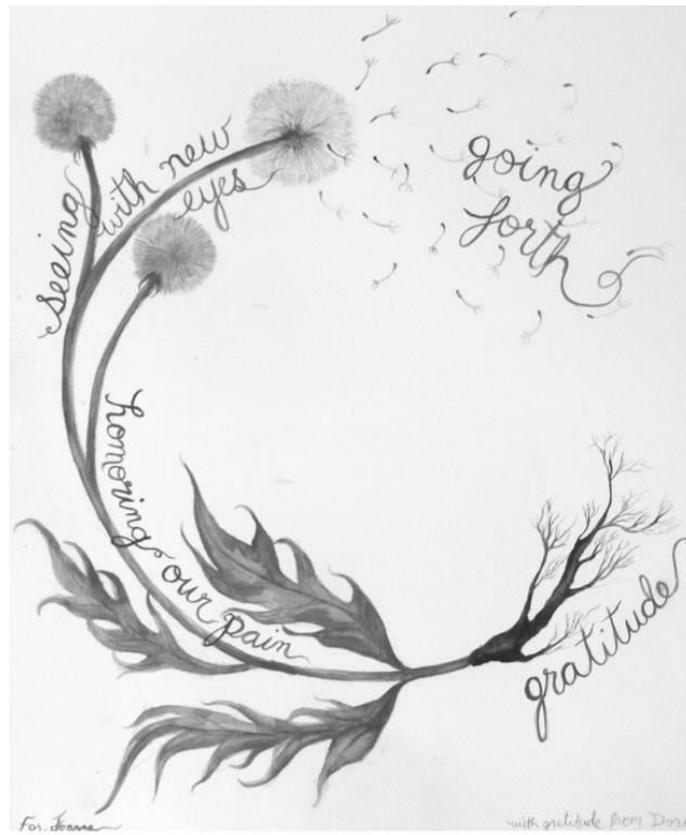


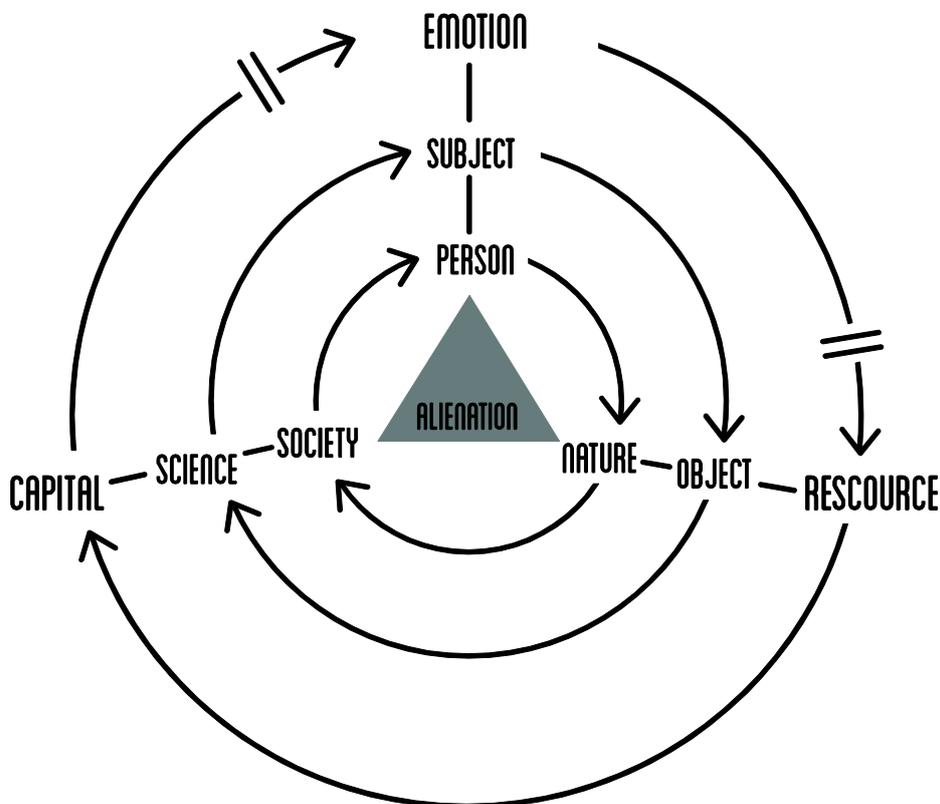
Figure 1: The Work That Reconnects Spiral by Dori Midnight

The first step is to come from a place of gratitude, a fortifying stance to take in order to be able to take the next step and own and honor our pain for the world. When having unblocked the pain we have suppressed we will see our situation with new eyes and thus we can go forth, hopefully having mended the spiritual rift between ourselves and nature.

Part III: The Spiritual Rift

With the help of the spiritual inclination of deep ecology and the dialectic materialism of Marxism I have come up with an illustration of one of the fundamental flaws with our relationship with nature; the spiritual rift. The spiritual rift is a play on the Marxian concept of metabolic rift, a concept explaining our unsustainable relationship with nature through our industrial agriculture and industry. We take from the soil but we give nothing back, neither compost nor our own manure which in turns leads to a depletion of the soil and a rift in the metabolism with nature (Foster 1999, Foster et al. 2010: 346-352, 354-358, 404-406). The same can be said of our spiritual and cultural metabolism; we take from nature but give no recognition of it as a part of our Self, back, and thereby we take too much. Joanna Macy speaks of a feedback loop that is interrupted by the distraction of the deadening life in the Industrial Growth Society, making us unable to comprehend the vastness of our destruction of the planet and thereby also making it hard to react and thereby act (Macy & Brown 1998:42-43). I concur but wish to add science as a factor in the making of the rift between our emotions and nature as shown in fig 2.

Fig 2: The Spiritual Rift



Here the human ecological triangle is shown as an alienation triangle where every corner relates to another in one way or other, even with greater alienation as the ripples of the circles represent. But when society is represented by capital and nature becomes a resource the ability to relate emotionally is reduced if not entirely eliminated. The concept however is fully within our grasp, capital is the strongest symbolism of modern times and a pertinent part of society, but we cannot emotionally relate to its meaning as it is obscure and abstract (Hornborg 2001:171). It is a fiction with no real meaning. Resource is just a means of gaining capital making it even more meaningless than capital. Nature has then through the alienation of the person from herself and her society become a means of production lesser than herself. Therefore there is a relationship between person and nature but it is not one of relatedness and connectedness but that of a worker and her tools.

Returning to Marx inorganic body, the materialist aspect of the spiritual rift, we can conclude that the person in her alienated state cannot recognize nature as its sustenance, its life-support on which she depends. The production process is in the way, making the production more important than the source of sustenance, which in turn blinds the person of the unsustainability of boundless extracting of resources in a world of limits. The production has, as a part of the capitalist system seemingly no limits, as it is a game of numbers and they are indeed infinite. The person is unaware and unconscious of her destruction of herself through the destruction of nature, separated as she has become, on a conscious level, from her inorganic body (Evernden 1996:76, Naess 1989:174-175).

But apparently it is not enough to acknowledge that nature is our inorganic body, this the shallow environmentalist upkeep of current social structures in the first world has shown. The fact that the shallow environmentalist can through numbers and charts point out improvement and deterioration in the first world's management of natural resources, carbon emissions and pollution, does not make it any more relatable as this only registers on an intellectual level. When faced with charts and numbers, our emotion very rarely kicks in and make us react, and even less so act, so to disregard emotion is to disregard our species-being and our *need* to relate. Since the attempt through shallow environmentalism and science to understand our dire situation using only our mind has failed, a more appealing and direct way of relating needs to be realized for us to conduct real and fundamental change (Evernden 1996:99, Naess 1989:48).

The Marxist Dichotomy

The young idealist Marx was a romantic and this is reflected in his early work where the world is a place of interconnectedness and creativity. But as he grew older he became more and more scientific in proving why capitalism was an unjust and destructive system. His last and most extensive work *The Capital* is a huge collection of proof where the capitalist system is systematically dismembered and although traces of the concept of alienation is to be found in the notion of fetishism, there is not much of his young philosophical self left. This seem to be a sort of ritual of the academia; you enter it enthusiastically with big ideas and a big heart and you come out of it as an abstractionist with a great mind with no connection to neither the body nor the heart. The difference between today's disillusioned human ecologist and Marx was that Marx

always offered a solution, as he saw that it was his duty as a scholar to not only explain the world but also change it.

A lot of Marxists discard the early work of Marx because they see no consistency between Marx the philosopher and Marx the economist, a perfect display of the scientific need to split everything into fragments and separate one aspect from the other. For me Marx was the same man until the end of his days, with the same ideas but with a stronger urge to convince his contemporaries of the alienation of the worker in a capitalist world. This he could not do while speaking of inorganic bodies and the creative force of our species-being but instead approached the subject as an economist. I believe that his fight for the rights of the worker was not only a fight for justice and material wellbeing but also a fight for a society where self-realization through the manifestation of free will and creativity is possible. A society where we could produce universally and not monotonously for the sake of gaining capital, a society where mind would not be separated from body and heart, where person would not be separated from fellow human beings. I think his success in evoking the spirit of the people lied in the prospect of being free, emancipated from the separation of specialized work dictated by the capitalist and in this the people saw the possibility of a meaningful life. The Marxists of the communist states had forbidden any teachings of the concept of alienation as Marx thought that a production monopolized by the state would only lead to further alienation (Marx 1965:96).

In the communist society, alienation did indeed increase as the worker became even more of a means of production than before. I feel that the image of Marx' worker as a proud factory worker is a misunderstanding of what Marx was trying to convey. In Hegel's theory of alienation he states that the alienation of the world spirit is a part of the spirits self-fulfillment (Rae 2012). Marx saw it the same way; that we need to go through capitalism *and* communism in order to reach an emancipated state of complete freedom (Marx 1965:96). It may sound fatalist but to me it sounds hopeful; we need to be alienated from ourselves and nature to understand who we really are and how we are to live interconnected and meaningful lives.

Joining the Seams

In contrast to Marx' humanism, deep ecology reminds us of the spiritual aspect of existence. Spirituality can have many meanings, and most people probably think of religion and personal philosophies. To me spirituality is the part of existence that is not material, like emotional and mental processes, but this too is a dualistic view (Plumwood 2002:221). There is no denying that Marx was an anthropocentric thinker and although he could see the wholes, his main purpose was to uplift the human spirit through liberation, while other life-forms are not mentioned at all (Harvey 1996:126). The deep ecologist however, sees the intrinsic value in all life and wishes to abolish classes not only within human society but within natural societies as well; there can be no hierarchy in nature. In order to do this, one must first reevaluate life on a spiritual level (Naess 1989:173). This one does not do in the seclusion of one's own mind, this is done by experiencing life on both a physical and mental level. This is where I find the concept of alienation as a guide: self-realization is reached through work dictated by no other than the person conducting the work. Purposeful work is done with reflection and stimulates premeditation, the experience of nature through this type of work will most

likely not be destructive as there is room for relating and seeing the wholes (Naess 1989:63, 176, 181)

As shown by the Spiritual Rift, one must think in broader terms than just nature, person and society to understand what has happened to our relationships over time. One must assume a form of “material spirituality”, where one recognizes that the world is finite but the connections are infinite (Plumwood 2002:222) And one must understand what has happened to the person, not only to nature, as the person too has been objectified and split into many pieces as the concept of alienation shows clearly.

The Un-reversible Future

Both deep ecologists and Marxists are often accused of wanting to go back in time; deep ecologists to before the industrial revolution and Marxists to the glorious days of industry. But the accusation is a mindless one, another way of saying “there is nothing to do but to go forward”. Of course, nobody thinks otherwise, but does going forward imply going forward on the same path? Is it too late to change paths? My human ecological experience has been one of there is no solution; we cannot go back and if we go forward we walk right into the abyss of destruction. This hopeless stance of seeing no way around the technocratic and capitalist system can only be the stance of an alienated human ecologist. My conclusion is that the problem lies not so much within the system as the alienation the system has brought. Someone could tell you that nature is an object but would you believe it if you experienced it as a part of yourself? The system has deprived us of the *experience* of nature, and thereby also the experience of ourselves, so we do not only believe that this objectifying person is right, we experience it (Harvey 1996:198-199).

Alienation is a product of hundreds of years of fragmented abstract thinking, ranging from Galileo’s depiction of reality as only numbers to the Cartesian exercise of separation. As fundamentally wrong this depiction is/was for many cultures and people around the world it is still the one reigning science, and it is so without challengers (Evernden 1996:53, Macy & Brown 1998:40, Naess 1989:52)! Now more than ever it has seeped into every fiber of our secular and cultureless society and is completely taken for granted as the one true knowledge on which our lives are based. This cannot be because abstract knowledge is the most tenable and believable explanation of reality, but it has been imposed through harsh indoctrination by men with interests. As Marx stated, someone is dictating the conditions of society in which we are created and create, if we as human ecologists are aware of that, how can we keep creating under these very conditions?

My writing this essay shows that human ecology is not doing much in the way of acting as opposing force; the so called interdisciplinary approach is not enough as long as it works within the same realm and abides by the same rules as the reductionist science. To really challenge it, we must completely eradicate any dichotomy, not only the nature/culture one but also the emotion/reason and body/mind dichotomies. To work simply as an agent of thought is to alienate oneself from the rest of ones being and to fall in line with the Cartesian world view.

Leaving Alienation

In this essay I have discussed and explained why Marx' concept of alienation and the deep ecological reasoning around subjective experience and philosophy are important to understand our relationship with nature. I have concluded that as alienated persons we are as fragmented as the way we view the world and as long as this is the case we cannot do anything about our current crisis. This I have illustrated through the Spiritual Rift, that shows the human ecological triangle as an alienation triangle, where each corner is a testament of alienation that goes further and further with every objectification, making it hard or impossible for the person turned subject to relate to nature turned object. When the quality of the subject, emotion, is to relate to the quality of the object, resource, there is no connection as the object is lesser than the subject. Destroying the object for the apparent gain of the subject does not register emotionally. This leads to apathy towards our treatment of nature as we are unable to see, feel and relate to nature as a part of our inorganic body, our livelihood and our extended selves. To eliminate alienation we must recuperate ourselves as wholes and dissolve all person-related dichotomies and free ourselves from specialization. This is not to be done by appealing to mental processes, since that would be an upkeep of the body/mind dichotomy, but to realize ourselves through our actions and experiences. For Arne Naess this is done through *friluftsliv*, for me it is done by reconnecting to nature by working the land and appreciating its bountiful beauty and thus allowing oneself to be more than just a means.

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