PROLOGUE

The Voice of Dark Woman

I have been asleep a long, long time – or so it seems. As I begin to speak, I find my voice feels strange, unused to coming up from my throat. It is croaky, gravelly and sounds unfamiliar to my ears. I feel afraid and yet . . . there is a story to tell. I know I must speak – or is it ‘sing’? Fire is dancing and flickering along my arteries and veins – its flow unimpeded. What has happened? Who am I?

As a child it was in the ‘outdoors’ that I was at home. (It seems now an astonishing word-image – humanly created structures with doors - ‘outdoors’ as a name for the living, whole, wondrous Earth.) One could be ‘out’, but ‘in’ was inside, home, belonging – so they said. My home, my belonging, my ‘in’ was in the ‘world-mothering air’¹, stroked by the pouring radiance of the sun, my feet wet with dew in soft greenness of long grass, my eyes delighting in endless changing colours of sky and clouds. I was befriended by the tall and gracious trees, nurtured by bees and fragrant, downy-petalled flowers. This world of the senses, this world where I felt I belonged, this world my home, this world with which I knew my self to be continuous, and of which I was part, this was where I lived. Only here did I know I was alive.

Increasingly all I could do was to sleep. Though I was nourished by the gift of holidays, the holy days, when I could walk the long wild beaches or the forest tracks, the high plains, and the mountains. Able to be immersed again, able to breathe.

The story I was told of a God who created all this, this which called forth such passionate love, this which gave me my being, at first delighted me. But it seemed this world was the stage for something far more important – for humans. And such a world (a stage) was of the category ‘thing’. We were the ones who were reflective of God’s image, endowed with intelligence, capacity to love, to feel. We were also the ones who sinned, especially the woman who tempted the man. So I slept. I was woman. By definition, lesser, bad. I was sensuous, passionate. I was taught to be wary, untrusting. Who I was, was not valued. I slept. But this is not innocent resting – this is fury, rage, unrecognised, unnamed. I am not so much sleeping as numb.

¹ From a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins (Roberts and Amidon 1991:160).
I become a mother. I am distressed that there is no story that holds. I am distressed that I cannot find a way to fulfil my most important task, to teach and nurture the next generation. I give them a respect for questioning, for honesty, I give them love, and share their own delight in the other-than-human world as well as the human. But they inherit and live in the same culture. I have no story to tell that satisfies me. I feel I am failing them.

I do not die. I sleep through many years - theological training, pastoral care, conducting CPE\textsuperscript{2} programs, divorce, children growing up, leaving home. Then something calls. Was I awakening or awakened? Is the cry from within or without? (It is more than an echo from the cliff-face across the water – is this the huge beast pouring with water, who emerges and climbing the steep bank into the wild brush disappears?)\textsuperscript{3} The question comes from a story I am letting go, and perhaps is not all that important. I act. The Earth is, I now see, being mutilated. Some of this is irrevocable. Species come and go in the natural and mysterious unfolding of the Universe. But in our time there is a needless, horrifying and accelerated destruction. It has been happening for decades, centuries. I have been part of a great numbness, a blindness of truly terrifying dimensions, a sleep of inattention, no, a sleep I see now far more sinister, a sleep deliberately and violently maintained by our contemporary culture afraid of letting go its story of progress – dualist, anthropocentric, rationalist and atomistic.

I read and study the writings of Thomas Berry. I go to live at Genesis Farm, in the USA, for three months, undertaking a course based on Thomas Berry’s vision. I am excited – excited by an analysis of being between stories, the old dysfunctional – the new still emerging. I am excited by the connecting of sacred and wild, by a Universe Story that has emerged from scientific endeavour, by attentiveness to ancient wisdoms, by a lived connecting of food and cooking with growing and harvesting, with economics and politics, excited by a critique that challenges all institutional structures, law, education, social sciences, religion, politics, to revision and re-locate themselves. I feel at last a place is possible in the external world. I knew I was alive in the other-than-human world. Now worlds begin to join. Nature and culture part of a whole sacred story.

On returning home I conduct a study of the bioregion where I live. I read geology, geography. I learn about climate patterns, plant and animal life, and human Indigenous and European settlement. I delight in discovering and connecting with the story hidden until now

\textsuperscript{2} Clinical Pastoral Education (internationally accredited training programs for chaplains).

\textsuperscript{3} From a poem by Robert Frost (Roberts and Amidon 1991:276).
in the landscape all about me. I sub-title it ‘Melways⁴ for a new millenium’. I am nourished by the abandoning of the very word ‘landscape’, and its replacement with living presences of the ancient lava flows beneath my feet that formed the volcanic plains stretching westwards from Melbourne, by the knowledge that the grasslands that I love once covered this plain and the land on which ‘my’ house is built, by the remembering of wallabies and yam daisies that once flourished here, by the remnants of River Red Gums, by a re-defining of this place, by the presence of the Merri Creek, the path that water finds as it trickles down from the Great Dividing Range and on into the Yarra River and on into the beloved sea.

My consciousness shifts in recognition that the fence that separates ‘my’ land from the houses next ‘door’, from the footpath, are boundaries of violence, straight lines ruled in the colonial acquisition and apportioning of land. I find my self connected to and loving even more passionately, this land, this living presence, no longer landscape, no longer background. I find myself acknowledging grief and having my grief deepened and sharpened. I am accomplice, implicated – in the degradation of the Merri Creek, in the continuing destruction and pollution of the land, in the almost total invisibility of Wurundjeri people. I see my bioregional study as a political act and experience its power.

But at Genesis Farm a dream started to emerge. Two other Australians (one of whom was my partner) were imagining a centre in Australia, modelled on Genesis Farm, on Thomas Berry’s vision but coming to birth in the uniqueness of the Australian context. The timing is not really right for me, since my first goal is to complete my thesis, but I can see a way for this to provide a more than theoretical component. And when a suitable property is found I fall in love – a soul place, a sustainably designed home nestling below a wooded ridge, a small stream running by, open pastures held womb-like in a valley surrounded by hills, at the edge of a state forest, abundant with birds, wombats and grey kangaroos at dusk.

I agree to sell my home to buy this property to allow this dream to unfold. There seems to be a strong enough network of support, long and thorough groundwork and an advisory committee of energetic, competent, experienced people. It does not survive. I am lost, needing employment, needing a home, grieving. But I am beginning to be lost in other ways as well. This New Story seems bleak in the face of this grief. Maybe everything seems bleak in the face of grief. It is the nature of grief. Slowly, however, I begin to face the reality that something serious is missing. Despair is not what I have been hoping for.

---

⁴ ‘Melways’ is the affectionate name for the Melway Greater Melbourne Street Directory, almost universally used by inhabitants of the city of Melbourne.
Fire is dancing and flickering along my arteries and veins – its flow impeded and sometimes not. Sleeping gives way – but slowly. I need this mysterious fire. Mine - but not mine. Holy Earth fire. Is there a story that holds?
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The land is Wurundjeri land. The place is the Iramoo Plains, once vast, native grasslands, a site of ecological violence and Indigenous dispossession, primarily urban, industrial and agricultural and settler-owned. Remnant grasslands presently account for less than one per cent of the whole.

A kangaroo grass stalk cries out.
Earth cries out.
Global climate cries out.

‘The Israelites . . . cried out’ (Exodus 2:23).

This project is a response to Earth’s cry. Ministry in the prophetic tradition responds to cry and I call ministry that responds to Earth’s cry ‘ecoministry’. The thesis offers a conceptual structure for a process of ecoministry. The structure has three intersecting and mutually informing elements: the critical interdisciplinarity of the ecohumanities, the ministerial model of James and Evelyn Whitehead (1995) which is extrapolated and modified, and the prophetic imagination as described by Walter Brueggemann (2001). A thread that runs through all three is narrative and narrative is always emplaced. Significant narratives include the narratives of the kangaroo grass stalk, of the volcanic plains grasslands, of global warming, of colonisation, of Western culture, of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and of personal human experience.

Place is a category confronting assumptions at the heart of modernity: particular, layered, narrative and is a site of engagement between living beings, human and other-than-human.

Ecoehumanities (‘ecohumanities’) is a new interdisciplinary field that includes ecophilosophy, ecopsychology, ecosocial studies, ecocriticism and ecotheology. This critical approach advocates an alternative paradigm with far-reaching ethical consequences. The

---

5 Biblical references are from the New Revised Standard Version.
6 Earth is given a capital letter and named without the definite article to signify Earth as subject. See, for example, the ecojustice principles developed by the Earth Bible team (Habel 2000:38-53).
ministerial model of Whitehead and Whitehead offers both a model and a method for ministry. The model requires engagement with three interfusing but separable categories of experience, culture and religious tradition. The method is a process of attending and asserting that leads to pastoral action, and is designed for use in a faith community. The prophetic imagination takes up a dimension of religious tradition, which arises in a time of crisis.

Ecohumanities

This thesis explores the concept of ecoministry, that is ministry located within a more-than-human community in this time of ecological imperilment. Before outlining my approach to ministry studies, I map the less familiar terrain of the ecological humanities. Ecohumanities provides an interdisciplinary conceptual framework. The key elements for my project are the critique of the nature/culture divide, the ethics of ecodiscourse, directions particular to the Australian context, global climate change and narrative as ecostrategy.

Ethical ecocritique of the nature/culture divide

Founders of the ecohumanities corner of the journal *Australian Humanities Review*, Deborah Rose and Libby Robin (2004) introduce the radical nature of the intellectual enterprise, the urgency of its scope and its crucial entwining with ethical action.

The ecological humanities works across the great binaries of western thought. We work in a time of rapid social and environmental change, and are committed to cross-cutting the divides that impede our understanding and action. This commitment has a parallel in our work toward social and ecological justice and the future of life (Rose and Robin 2004).

The context of change is twofold. Environmentally there is crisis, with some changes already out of control; the impetus, however, is seen as primarily social and cultural. That is, this situation exists across the nature/culture divide. The divide is accentuated by our structuring of knowledge into science and arts and privileging of the sphere of science. In the twentieth century, however, dramatic new leaps of thought on both sides of the divide opened hitherto unknown possibilities for rapprochement.

Our cultural narratives have until recently placed nature as external to culture. ‘Nature has often been seen to lie outside culture, as an absolute and a given, as a hard, physical, earthy, empirical reality against which culture defines itself’ (Griffiths 2007). Nature has been

---

7 From within this field, I select the work of several Australian women.
simply a stage for the human drama, and in addition is something ‘humans do things to’.
From the perspective of historians, of whom Griffiths is one, ‘nature is changed - made historic – by human action’. This action may be viewed as either ‘improvements’ (a powerful legislative measure of land-use in Australian history) or ‘disturbance’ (a recent ecological term for human presence)’ (Griffiths 2007). Either way, the nature/culture divide remains intact.

Griffiths identifies three major challenges to this vision of reality, which are revolutionary, quantum shifts. The implications reach into every area of life, including the practice of ministry. First, humans, at least since Darwin, have come to be recognised as animal. As evolutionary beings (and mostly water) our family history cannot now be separated from nature, rather it locates us inescapably in nature. Second, concepts of balance and equilibrium and climax have been replaced by disequilibrium, an understanding of disturbance as endemic. ‘Landscape’ is no longer the static backdrop for human historical action: rather, nature has its own history of upheaval and transformation. Third, the world has once again been revealed as ultimately mysterious. The mechanistic and materialistic premises of the Enlightenment and industrial revolution have been discredited. The impossibility of separating the observer from the observed means that past notions of objectivity are illusory. This is a major shift from certainty, to uncertainty. Knowledge then is always historical, situated, partial and contingent. Prediction gives way to probability. ‘[T]he proposition that incomplete knowledge is an obstacle to be overcome’ shifts to ‘the proposition that incomplete knowledge is a condition of any participant in a living system’ (Rose and Robin 2004). The recognition of the presence of unknowing has implications also for consciousness not now viewed from the outside, but as integral to the universe.

In this new context, the ecohumanities emerge as an area of study in which sciences and humanities converge. Cross-cutting the nature/culture binary, the guiding principle is connectivity. Being is relational. The basic premise of ecology is that ‘the unit of survival is not the individual or the species but is the organism-and-its-environment’. Consequently the pressing question for ecohumanities is ‘how we may avoid committing suicide through failure to enact the worldview shattering knowledge that the unit of survival is the organism in recursive and mutually constitutive relationships with its environment’ (Rose and Robin 2004).

Enacting world-shattering knowledge is necessarily a gigantic undertaking. The field of ecohumanities pursues this in a range of ways, necessarily interdisciplinary, with philosophers, historians, poets, anthropologists, literary critics and theologians bringing fresh and
illuminating perspectives. Implications exist for research methods, and green or environmental studies appear now in many teaching curricula at all educational levels. In this project I explore ecoministry as part of this interdisciplinary context.

Ecocritique of the nature/culture divide attends to ways in which humans relate with nature and identifies a central issue in conflicts between different sources of illumination. An early follower of Zen Buddhism describes three stages of illumination.

Before I studied Zen for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains, and waters as waters. When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw mountains are not mountains, and waters are not waters. But now that I have got to its very substance I am at rest. For it’s just that I see mountains once more again as mountains, and waters once again as waters (cited in Coupe 2000:1).

At first, nature is taken for granted. Then comes the discovery that nature is constructed, existing inside his mind and significant and meaningful to the extent that he makes sense of it. Finally, there is a dawning realisation that both these positions are mistaken. To stop at the second stage is to miss the point. He learns to attend to nature, to enter its spirit, allowing it to be. Such a stance requires refraining as much as possible from imposing our view or our assumptions of human superiority.

Since the 1970s, critical theory has been strongly located at the second stage of the Zen Buddhist model quoted (Coupe 2000:1). The common assumption of formalist, psychoanalytic, new historicist and deconstructionist schools of thought is that what we call ‘nature’ exists as a sign within a signifying system, and has no meaning apart from this. The fear is that of committing ‘the referential fallacy’. Failure to acknowledge the crucial role of human language, the significance and slipperiness of signs, has given way to an understandable, but astonishing denial of the non-textual world.

Griffiths names three approaches from humanities research that are relevant to research into sustainability: investigation of ‘seamless phenomena’, science as a subject, and narrative (Griffiths 2007). At the science/humanities interface, differences in time scales come into focus. While scientists are frequently working in either very large or very small time scales, in humanities research methods have developed in human time scales. Constituting science as an object of inquiry enables critique. The use of narrative will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Talloires Declaration composed in 1990 at an international conference in Talloires, France, is the first official statement made by university presidents, rectors and chancellors concerning commitment to environmental sustainability within higher education, and has been signed by over 350 university leaders in over 40 countries. See www.ulsf.org (Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future).
In Coupe’s view this is an error of disastrous proportions which he names as ‘the semiotic fallacy’. It is the nature of the next step that is pivotal: how to avoid a simple return to merely pointing at things, and reducing the complexity of linguistic signs, and yet how to move on. The signs make no sense at all if the reference is denied, and it is a ‘sign of the times, in these times of the sign’ that it is necessary to say so (Coupe 2000:2). But this is no mere academic matter. ‘[I]f we emphasise signification to the exclusion of reference, we may be as guilty of treating the non-human environment with the same contempt as those destructive forces which we may wish to condemn’ (Coupe 2000:2-3). He offers the example of the exquisite music of R. Vaughan Williams “The lark ascending”, and asks whether it matters if the actual referent, the larks, are disappearing, or worse, if they become extinct. The ecohumanities are inescapably concerned with ethics.

Revalued ‘nature’ is frequently invoked as a critical concept, challenging cultural norms. The challenge occurs in two ways. First, invoking nature de-centres the thrust of industrialisation, of development and progress regardless of cost. Second, it radically confronts the assumption of human superiority over other species. The crisis is a critical issue. Coupe is open and direct in his valuation. ‘If green studies does not have an effect on this way of thinking, does not change behaviour, does not encourage resistance to planetary pollution and degradation, it cannot be called fully ‘ecocritical’ (Coupe 2000:4). And the purpose of this change is not even primarily for human well-being. The purpose is to speak and act for nature. ‘[G]reen studies debates ‘Nature’ in order to defend nature’ (Coupe 2000:5).

The challenge of ecohumanities to replace the organism in the environment, to avoid not only the referential fallacy but the semiotic fallacy, to find ways to let nature be (the third stage of the Zen model), raises the question of the relationship between texts and nature, which is the field of ecocriticism.

Cheryll Glotfelty (1996) maps some of the history and scope of ecocriticism.

\[(A)ll\] ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land: as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996:xix).

10 Val Plumwood (2001) makes a similar argument in “Nature as agency and the prospects for a progressive naturalism”.

11 The population of sky-larks in Britain fell by 60% between 1972-1999.
Glotfelty’s context is literary studies, and the motivation for the collection is the perceived discrepancy between issues of public concern, such as oil spills or extinction of species and the preoccupations of the profession. Environmental literary studies explores redrawing the boundaries, in the hope of transforming the profession as a contribution to transforming the world (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996:xxiv). A similar gap in ministry studies is discussed below.

Many of the essays in this collection, for example Christopher Manes’ “Nature and silence” (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996:15-29), discuss ways in which literacy itself has silenced nature, a position that includes biblical interpretation. For people of the Book, this insight has extremely confronting dimensions where, unlike for most Indigenous peoples, the place of sacred scriptures in a religious tradition now needs to be questioned in a new way.

Discussing the relationship between nature and writing in its literary mode, as nature writing, Kate Rigby raises a question pertinent to this project. ‘[T]he question that remains to be addressed here is that of the relationship between such writing and the more-than-human others, places and histories towards which it bids us turn’ (Rigby 2006c). The purposes and limits of nature writing are not my main concern here, but its role in ‘repair of the world’, tikkan olam in the Jewish tradition, (Rigby 2006c) will be taken up in later chapters. The insistent presence of more-than-human others (in the form of the ecological crisis), places and histories suggests that we must now ask whether our interpretations of biblical texts turn us away from or towards the world. What possibilities for change exist? How might places and histories be restored to view, both in established texts, and in learning to attend anew to Earth and sky who have their own stories to tell (Rigby 2006c). Finally, how might the relationship between Earth and sky stories and biblical stories be theorised and how might this contribute to reconceptualising ministry?

Traditionally ministry has drawn on biblical texts, held in relationship with the living Word, as a primary source of illumination. Anne Elvey’s work with biblical texts in an Earth matrix asks ‘What approaches to reading biblical texts are consonant with, and accountable to, a focus on the subjecthood of Earth?’ (Elvey 2005b:5) Attending to Earth as subject, one of the fundamental challenges for ecohumanities discussed above, is a multiple and layered task, where the connection between ‘human and non-human beings as co-subjects tends towards poetry or faith’, and ‘such faith intersects with biblical faith in troubling and exciting ways’

12 Other terms are environmental literature, or her preferred, though not unproblematic, term ‘ecopoetics.’
Holding a focus on the subjecthood of Earth in relation to texts, and the use of the phrases ‘consonant with’ and ‘accountable to’, leave no doubt about the priority of the starting place.

In the context of Earth’s current crisis Elvey’s call is to ‘turn towards Earth’, a turn that requires ‘an attentiveness to a multitude of interconnected others including ourselves as embodied and embedded within a wider Earth community’ (Elvey 2005b:5). The scale of this claim of Earth on our attention holds vast implications and needs a shift to ‘a “stance of unknowing” with respect to both God and Earth’ (Elvey 2005b:5).

Openness to the discovery of other approaches from such a stance is generating a wide range of scholarship in ecological biblical interpretation. Attending to the subjecthood of Earth requires distinguishing between Earth and worlds, which are also related in complex ways: ‘the multiplicity of worlds we construct and inhabit is always exceeded by the plurality of the Earth community’ (Elvey 2005b:7). When engaging with biblical texts, themselves a plurality, ‘we are simultaneously connected to at least three worlds: the world behind the text, the world in the text and the world in front of the text’ (Elvey 2005b:7-9). The world behind the text is the socio-cultural context, the world in the text is the dominant symbolic universe created and communicated by the text, and the world in front of the text is the world of the reading community. In some contextual approaches ecological readings parallel feminist approaches. Revisionist, liberation, and theological reconstructionist (a theological approach that recognises ‘a surplus of meaning’) as well as engendered pluralist are significant directions (Elvey 2005b:10-14).

The major project that has so far been undertaken in ecocritical biblical studies is the Earth Bible project set up under the leadership of Norman Habel. The aims were to acknowledge, before reading the biblical text, that as Western interpreters we are heirs of a long anthropocentric, patriarchal, and androcentric approach to reading the text that has devalued the Earth and that continues to influence the way we read the text; to declare, before reading the text, that we are members of a human community that has exploited, oppressed, and endangered the existence of Earth community; to become progressively more conscious that we are also members of the endangered Earth community in dialogue with ancient texts; to recognize Earth as subject in the text with which we seek to relate empathically rather than as a topic to be analysed rationally; to take up the cause of justice for Earth and to ascertain whether Earth and Earth community are oppressed, silenced, or liberated in the text; and to develop techniques of reading the text to discern and retrieve alternative traditions where the voice of Earth and Earth community has been suppressed (Habel and Trudinger 2008:1-2).
From these aims a set of ecojustice principles have been articulated (Habel 2000:38-53) and the Earth Bible Team continues to be engaged in ongoing critical discussion. The most radical reorientation concerns Earth as subject, and the focus is moving beyond exegesis of texts concerning creation, or nature, or Earth, and beyond Earth as a theme, and ‘ecology and creation’ or ‘ecology and theology’ towards ecological hermeneutics (Habel and Trudinger 2008:3). The basic approach is suspicion, identification and retrieval, well established in feminist practice and taken up with respect to Earth.

Re-reading the first creation story in Genesis (1:1–2:4) with a concern for Earth, Habel found at its heart a ‘geophany’, a ‘manifestation or revelation of Earth’ (Habel 2000:35). The primary subject of the story is not the cosmos as a whole, and not humanity but Earth (eretz). The acts of creation recounted in the story ‘prepare for, depend on or relate to this manifestation’ (Habel 2000:35), and the entry of humans, rather than being the climax, sets up a conflict that remains unresolved. Eretz is gradually unveiled, from being hidden and uninhabited to being summoned into life, illuminated, completed, and then subdued. It remains a question whether this story as Earth story can be redeemed, that is, re-instated in a way that brings justice for Earth.

The Australian context

The defence of nature in the Australian context has a particular edge in the ecological humanities. It arises from a combination of features that involve

. . . our New World mentality and predicament, our history as a modern settler society with a long, strong Indigenous history, our inheritance of a confrontingly different and unique ecology, our inhabitation of an island continent that is also a nation. Australian history is like a giant experiment in ecological crisis and management, sometimes a horrifying concentration of environmental damage and cultural loss, and sometimes a heartening parable of hope and learning. . . . Such a roller-coaster of environmental history makes us think differently and more sharply than the rest of the world on many ecological matters. On such a continent, we can never blithely assume the dominance of culture over nature, nor can we believe in the infinite resilience of the land. We are committed by history and circumstance to an intellectually innovative environmental enquiry (Griffiths 2007).

Our settler presence has led to terrible destruction of both natural and Indigenous worlds, worlds where the extraordinary and fragile ecology of this land was held in a profoundly attuned and enduring relationship of care by Indigenous peoples. Flat, arid and dry (apart

---

13 This reading contrasts with and critiques traditional interpretations such as those of Westermann (1964) and Anderson (1994).
from the coastal fringes), the topography, climate and biotic communities could hardly have been more radically different from the green lands from which the settlers came.\(^{14}\)

Rose and Robin identify four areas in ecohumanities as especially pertinent in the Australian context: changing methods of historical inquiry that are ecologically informed; connections between the (usefully problematic) term ‘nature’ and the category of place; changing understandings of reason; and reappraisal of Indigenous ecological knowledge. Each of these is important for reconceptualising ecoministry in this project.

Recognising organic, lateral and synthetic ways of knowing challenges the scientific focus on ‘the new frontier’, and asks whether frontiers of learning may lie behind us. For example, the impact of pastoralism was known and understood in western NSW in the late 1860s and 1870s. What has happened to this knowledge? Who acted on it? Working on the deficits of knowledge, though important, is not the only path. Understanding why knowledge is not acted upon is crucial. Environmental problems lie at the nature/culture divide, but they are not just salinity, forest degradation, soil acidity problems. They concern human attitudes, behaviours and institutional structures, and their resolution seems to ‘lie beyond the reach of scientific knowledge’ (Griffiths 2007).

**Narrative as ecostrategy**

Story-telling is ‘disciplined magic’ and educationally ‘the most powerful tool we possess’ (Griffiths 2007). Rose and Robin similarly advocate ‘connection as a mode of reason’ (Rose and Robin 2004), and narrative as a powerful form of such a mode. It is a mode that ‘de-centres but does not abandon rationality’ with both linear and non-linear dimensions. ‘The method offers the profound possibility of telling stories that communicate, invoke and invigorate connections’ and lead to commitment (Rose and Robin 2004). Narrative is an approach from the humanities with particular relevance to research into sustainability (Griffiths 2007).

The affirmation of the place of narrative comes with a warning. We do need new stories – we need stories that locate us in the biosphere, stories that enlarge our sense of justice to include the environment, stories of our relationship to place and to Indigenous peoples. But we cannot simply make them up. Rather, the challenge is to discover and attend to the stories

\(^{14}\) The major theorists I have chosen all work at the edge in the Australian context.
already present. We need ‘to expand our capacity to tell . . . true stories’ (Rose and Robin 2004). The question for ecoministry will be which stories are included in the conversation.

This thesis employs narrative as a primary category. The narrative genre is widely recognised as an almost universal means that we as humans use in our attempts to make meaning. Use of the word ‘genre’ however obscures the reality that in our everyday lives we make use of narrative continually. There is no known culture which does not have story as an intrinsic dimension of its life and self-understanding; the delight in, and desire for stories in children occurs very early. The narrating of stories begins in our first sentences and continues throughout our lives. One of the early meanings of narrative (eC18) indeed refers to the garrulousness of the old, ‘the tattling quality of age, which . . . is always narrative’ (Bennett et al 2005:230).

The breadth and all-pervasive nature of narrative is described in the following way by Barthes.

The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man’s [sic] stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances, narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting . . . . stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself (cited in Abbott 2002:1-2).

The need for such a lengthy statement itself attests to the universality, richness and complexity of this category. The etymology of narrative provides another clue to its universality. The ancient Sanskrit root ‘gna’ is to know, and leads to the Latin words gnarus for knowing and narro for telling. Two movements are interrelated here, both the receiving and the expressing. Both are dynamic processes, again a truth we recognise, as we continue to construct, tell and retell stories.

15 It seems insufficient to attribute this to nurture alone.
Narrative can be understood as ‘the imposition of form on life’ (Abbott 2002:3), as we tell stories about ourselves and the world, daydream and fantasise. That dreams are also often narrative in form, suggests that narrative is not only something that occurs in a conscious way, and further indicates the fundamentality of its nature.

A minimalist view of narrative as ‘the representation of an event or series of events’ (Abbott 2002:12) provides a simple foundation. Event is the central component. Without event there may be argument, description, lyric, exposition but not narrative. Other scholars always require more than one event, or the presence of causality. The term representation is also controversial, as is the requirement for a narrator. I will use Abbott’s definition as the most useful for my purposes in that it allows for a wide range of possible transactions in relation to events, audience/receivers/readers/participants/congregation and modes of representation which may be narrator, actor, liturgist, icon writer.

The issue of representation rests on a very helpful distinction between story and narrative discourse. Story is the sequence of events, and narrative discourse the way in which the story is communicated. The story is a mysterious phenomenon. Whilst it is difficult to say where the story is before it is on the page or in the painting, there is a ‘feeling that we often have that the story somehow pre-exists the narrative, even though this may be an illusion’ (Abbott 2002:14). It is the sense of an existing story that requires the term representation, rather than presentation.

Narrative discourse focuses on the role of the giver of the story and concerns mediation of the story and its construction and interpretation. The receiver, also, is active in this process, engaged in a construction of the story from the narrative discourse. Stories can be, and are, adapted and changing, a reality that raises questions concerning how much of a particular story is necessary in order to remain the same story. What events for example constitute the Exodus story, without which it would not be this story? Is a story totally or only partly open to interpretation? Abbott suggests that ‘most stories – if they succeed – that is, if they enjoy an audience or readership – do so because they successfully control the process of story construction’ (Abbott 2002:19).

---

16 As would be expected a range of definitions exists, for example, ‘a story told by a narrator about events, which may be factual, fictional or mythical’ (Bennett et al 2005:230). This draws on early references to narrative as that part of a speech that distinguishes the presentation of ‘the facts’ from the conclusion or moral (Bennett et al 2005:230), a usage still current in courts of law. Later, relationships with categories of fiction and myth intertwine in complex and changing ways, as do the categories themselves.
Narrative can be understood as the way we construct our identities. To respond to the question ‘Who are you?’ we tell our story. That we have a story, that parts of it are hidden, consciously or unconsciously, is well known as the basis of healing therapies. Narratives construct meaning, but they also disguise, deceive and betray. Not all deception is deliberate; indeed repressing or projecting parts of narratives serves an important function in preserving the capacity for a self, or sometimes a culture, to continue to survive. The insight that the plots of our lives, what is remembered as history, are psychic events, provides clues to a hidden world.

Remembering our history (recognising there is a history that is not remembered, and memory that is not historical) is linked with a need for a founding story both longed for and feared.

I need to remember my stories not because I need to find out about myself but because I need to found myself in a story I can hold to be ‘mine’. I also fear these stories because through them I can be found out, my imaginal foundations exposed. Repression is built into each story as the fear of the story itself, the fear of the closeness of the Gods in the myths which found me (Hillman 1983:42).

I am taking one of the founding stories of the Judaeo-Christian tradition (though this is not Hillman’s context) and asking about the stories that construct our sense of self in the face of massive environmental change: that is, in the presence of events that are cracking open previously reliable narratives. We are being confronted with other stories, Earth stories that are dislocating. Parable is a form of narrative that shows the seams and edges of the worlds we have constructed, the fault-lines in a taken-for-granted narrative container (Anderson and Foley 1998:14). The old wineskins (Luke 5:37-38) will not do. The cracks require exposure, they are places of conflict, critique and call for decision: that is the very nature of the prophetic tradition, as I discuss below.

Narrative as a site for negotiation of conflict is a feature of primary importance for this thesis. Narrative negotiation is possible because we share in the larger conflicts of which these narrative conflicts are particular examples (Abbott 2002:161), and because we are moved by the story, engaged by it to become alert to how the conflicts are played out. The conflict (the agon) may be between different narratives or within one particular narrative.

---

17 Mythic and parabolic stories can be placed along a continuum. At the polarities myth is concerned with mediation, reconciliation and stability, and parable with contradiction, ambiguity and change (Anderson and Foley 1998:13-14).
Narrative functions as a container for holding the sometimes powerful emotional dimensions of conflict, by providing some distance on what may be difficult to own. It brings the gift of freedom by functioning in a multivalent way, allowing for identification at different possible places, and stages of development. The power of stories is in their place in the process of change, for stories change the way people act, and the way people use available knowledge (Griffiths 2007).

Narrative distills learning in a language that is commonly available, and its form enables it to be a ‘privileged carrier of truth’, particularly valuable now in that it enacts connectivity. It has a capacity to hold multiplicity and complexity and to honour both linear and non-linear connections. Story-telling is evocative, easily remembered and importantly creates an atmosphere, within which truth is mediated, and which also itself mediates.18

**Narratives of Gaia and God**

Within the field of ecohumanities, ecotheology is taking up its own particular challenges. God narratives are included in the ecocritique of the nature/culture divide and the ethics of ecodiscourse. Rosemary Radford Ruether (1992) states her question in bold terms. ‘Are Gaia, the living and sacred earth, and God, the monotheistic deity of the biblical traditions, on speaking terms with each other?’ (Ruether 1992:1). Earth-healing, a healing of relations between humans and Earth, is the goal, and this requires attention to interconnected systems of domination between men and women, classes, races and nations.

Western cultural traditions including some aspects of Christianity, 'have justified and sacralized these relationships of domination' (Ruether 1992:3). This shaping of our Western consciousness by Christianity now needs to be named as a construction, not ‘the way things are’, not ‘the natural order’ and not ‘the will of God’. In vivid language Ruether describes this process as separating from ‘. . . the toxic waste of sacralized domination’ (Ruether 1992:3). Wittingly or unwittingly we have been participants in ecocide.

The purpose of her work is twofold ‘. . . to access cultural and social roots that have promoted destructive relations between men and women, between ruling and subjugated human groups, and the destruction of the rest of biotic community, of which humans are an interdependent

---

18 Oral story-telling, and the place of ritual (as a form of narrative) are beyond the scope of this work. However they do emerge in this project, and their importance cannot be over-estimated.
part’, and to find from within our Western and Christian cultural heritage ‘usable ideas that might nourish a healed relation to each other and to the earth’ (Ruether 1992:2).

A vantage point or ground for such a task is provided by ecofeminism, and involves both conversion and transformation. The transformation in view is no less than a transformation of consciousness. Inner and outer worlds must both be transformed. Healing calls for ‘a new consciousness, a new symbolic culture and spirituality’, since social structures function in part as symbolic expressions of perceived interrelationships. A simple technological fix will not do. ‘Ecological healing is a theological and psychic-spiritual process’ (Ruether 1992:4).

Ruether explores four primary theological categories; creation, judgement, sin and fallenness, and redemption, examining them for patriarchal, androcentric, and anthropocentric assumptions. My interest lies in the powerful narratives that underpin these theologies. In this thesis I draw on her discussion of narratives under headings of creation, destruction, domination and deceit, and healing, and take up the other dimensions of the task by attending to conversion and transformation.

Attending to our contemporary cosmological narrative re-situates our construction of the divine. For Ruether, the heart of the matter lies in the concept of God. Our human-Earth relationship, now seen to be an ethical issue, is shaped here:

The human capacity for ethical reason is not rootless in the universe, but expresses this deeper source of life ‘beyond’ the biological. Consciousness and altruistic care are qualities that have some reflection in other animals, and indeed are often too poorly developed in our own species. To believe in divine being means to believe that those qualities in ourselves are rooted in and respond to the life power from which the Universe itself arises (Ruether 1992:5).

This is a dense statement, needing considerable exploration. I will simply indicate the basic structure and direction of her thought. Ruether defines Earth as a living system of which humans are a part, highlighting that humans are latecomers in the evolutionary story. Nevertheless we have ‘...constructed our concept of ourselves as humans over against all that is non-human, and thereby constructed our concept of “nature” as both the non-human and the non-divine’ (Ruether 1992:5). This reorientation in relation to cosmology leads to a range of tasks: reinterpreting doctrinal themes to integrate ecological insights, reconceiving ethics to include the biosphere, identifying ecojustice praxis, redefining vocation in the context of the common life, critiquing the tradition’s complicity in secularising nature.\(^{19}\)

\(^{19}\) Some examples include reconceptualising Creator, Christ and Spirit in Johnson’s critique of individualism and anthropocentrism. McFague’s work extends the sacramental and prophetic traditions
The ethical and vocational task is to join the struggle to work for the wellbeing of the Earth community. ‘[T]he pivotal obligation, in every place and pursuit, [is] to express respect and show care for Earth as God’s creation and life’s home, while seeking justice for biodiverse otherkind as well as humankind’ (Hessel and Ruether 2000:xxxiii). This statement\textsuperscript{20} contains key themes of respect and care, justice, creation, home, human and otherkind.\textsuperscript{21}

Theologies and ethics of ecojustice are arising from a fresh melding between ‘sacramental sensibility’ and ‘covenantal commitment’. The plight of Earth and the plight of humans (especially those bearing the impact of ecological abuse) are entwined. Reclaiming oikos, Earth as one household, challenges both a disastrous concentration on human salvation and environmentalisms that ignore socio-economic injustice (Hessel and Ruether 2000:xxxvi). One poignant tension exists between passionate anthropocentric liberation theology and ‘an environmentalism always in danger of overriding the human especially the great blocks of the populous and the poor’ (Keller and Kearns 2007:10). ‘Poignant’ is an understatement here, for these issues are filled with anguish and seemingly unresolvable ethical conflicts.\textsuperscript{22} Beginning with liberation theology holds the danger that the cry of an oppressed Earth is not heard as a cry in its own right, but rather is constructed already as context.\textsuperscript{23}

Nevertheless a strange situation persists. ‘The churches remain quite slow to meet the environmental challenge’ (Hessel and Ruether 2000:xxxviii).\textsuperscript{24} This leads to the question into an eco-Christology. Chryssavagis provides a Greek Orthodox perspective on Spirit and the sacredness of matter as incarnating God.

\textsuperscript{20} The statement is taken from the introduction to the book arising from an ecotheological conference in held in 1998.

\textsuperscript{21} Acknowledging the multiplicity of traditions in Christianity, the contributors were given three tasks. First, to explore problematic themes that have led to ecological neglect or abuse and correlative to search for elements that might lead to ecological healing that might have been suppressed. Second, arising from this, to discuss new emphases needed in theology and ethics, and third to identify praxis implications both for church and society (Hessel and Ruether 2000:xxxiv).

\textsuperscript{22} Examples include the work of Leonardo Boff, Ivone Gebara, Delores Williams and Karen Baker-Fletcher.

\textsuperscript{23} The process theology of John B. Cobb Jr. (1965), early work by Ruether (1972), followed by Cone (1990) affirming justice as ecological interconnectedness, McFague’s (1993) development of Earth as God’s body are just some contributions this discussion.

\textsuperscript{24} Steven Douglas (2007) investigated the response of mainstream religion in Australia, represented by the Catholic, Anglican and Uniting Churches. The primary research method was an Internet-based search for policy and praxis material. The research found that the greening of these denominations is evident. There is ‘a growing wealth of environmentalist sentiment and ecological policy being produced; but little institutional praxis has occurred. Despite the often strong rhetoric, there is no
whether ‘the religious defect regarding the environment (lies) within Christian faith itself or in particular expressions of church life and thought’ (Hessel and Ruether 2000:xxxviii). If, however some religions (including Christianity) are toxic to Earth, or at least destructively acquiescent, then this can be matched by contributing to reformation.

Christian theology played a key role in ecological and cultural malformation by giving impetus to the modern, rational, scientific conquest of nature. Now it can contribute to achieving a sustainable Earth-human relationship by utilizing the relationality paradigm of contemporary physics and ecology and connecting it effectively with the eco-justice sensibility of biblical thought (Hessel and Ruether 2000:xxxix).

These disastrous alliances are not the final word; ecotheology has a contribution to make to environmental challenges. Christianity holds a sensibility and passion for justice that is sorely needed, and the prophetic tradition, in particular, bears such a gift.

The work of ecotheology ‘opens, stimulates and depends on’ a living and shared ground as a matrix of relations from which a future might be claimed. It is an ecumenical spirituality, and a transdisciplinary movement that aims ‘not just at dialogue between disciplines but action beyond them’ (Keller and Kearns 2007:3). While our Western history of ‘Nature’ overwrites this ground (an ongoing discussion throughout this thesis), ecotheology recovers place ‘as an ecology of vibrant, vulnerable interrelation’ (Keller and Kearns 2007:4).

Grounding makes possible a contemporary affirmation of Ecospirit.

[The ancient Hebrew ruach was never an immaterial force but an Earth-breath, at once grounding of and grounded in the creation. Even in supernaturalist Christianity, the Holy Spirit represents divine immanence, if unfortunately subordinated to the transcendent Father. The trope of spirit signifies a field of activity ecumenical, mobile, and polyvalent . . . (Keller and Kearns 2007:13).

The theological symbol of the Spirit is drawn into interrelationship with planet Earth held as sacred trust.25 The struggle and orientation towards ‘grounding of’ and ‘grounding in’ is crucial. Scientific data about global warming is information that we can ‘hardly bear’, and can ‘hardly think’, as well as being ‘oddly undertheorized across the academic disciplines’ (Keller and Kearns 2007:13). The existence (or otherwise) of hope involves the matter of ground, and indeed common ground is the basis of a common terrestrial future, something

---

25 This term appears in the Earth Charter: ‘The protection of earth’s vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.’ (Cited in Keller and Kearns 2007:3)
that has had a ‘hard time mattering in late capitalist culture’. Both a focus on individual wealth and on an other-worldly future lead to indifference to the future of the planet.

The challenge continues. Is it possible to seriously imagine a common future? ‘Does it remain a utopian fancy or a naturalist dream to imagine ourselves, all of us creatures, as a planetary collective? Or . . . the only plausible path to a future humane even for humans? (Keller and Kearns 2007:10). The issue of imagination is, in Brueggemann’s reading, the key to the prophetic tradition, especially when it appears ludicrous. Taking up the notion of difference provides one way forward. ‘Is it possible that by a great ecological stretch of difference – whereby we read human diversity always as an instance and intensification of the dizzying multiplicity of species – we may find the key to human coexistence?’ (Keller and Kearns 2007:11) Rather than compromising human wellbeing, the usual fear when the focus is economic, taking up difference means complexifying, an ‘integrating of diversity into a common life’ (Keller and Kearns 2007:10).

What is blocking such enactment? To take up difference provokes fear.

The often fearful reaction against any such common material ground – as though any discourse of the common must reduce and level, must inflict one group’s agenda on the rest, as though there is not a difference between homogeneity and commonality – begins to appear as itself a symptom of colonization by postmodern capitalism, by what we may call laissez-faire difference. And the economically caused scarcities of jobs, education, food, and water all too vividly expose the indifference of such difference (Keller and Kearns 2007:11).

Yet enactment is what is in view, even if we can barely negotiate differences between groups within our own species. The identifying of such a starting place is a helpful move, and the work of ecotheology is beginning to take up this enormous challenge. 26

Relying on earlier feminist work, Mark Wallace (2005) explores the promise of Christianity ‘as an earth-centred, body-loving religion’ and of Christian faith ‘to heal human beings’ exploitative environmental habits’ (Wallace 2005:6). His hope lies in the capacity of the tradition to nurture a ‘green spirituality’, essential if the ecological crisis is understood as a spiritual crisis. Ecocide, ‘a habit of life and thought that makes war against earth community is a spiritual disease’ (Wallace 2005:30). Wallace does not claim Christianity as the driver of this catastrophe but certainly as restricting and blunting our capacity for relationship with the natural world. It is spiritual because ‘certain distorted Christian teachings have blunted our

ability to experience any significant co-belonging with other life-forms, rendering us unable to alter our self-destructive course and plot a new path toward sustainable living’ (Wallace 2005:30).

Resources do exist and like others he identifies neglected understandings of Spirit, distorted and separated from the Earth community of the biosphere. Taking up Heidegger’s critique of Christianity’s conceptualising of creation as artifact, and drawing on the work of Ricoeur, Wallace calls for Christianity to acknowledge its paganism and presents God as carnal Spirit, as earth Spirit, ‘the compassionate, all-encompassing divine force within the biosphere who inhabits earth community and continually works to maintain the integrity of all forms of life’ (Wallace 2005:6). The implications of such a reconception unfold into an interpretation of ecological sin and a wounded, abused Earth where the ‘Spirit in the Earth, the body of God for us today is being crucified afresh’ (Wallace 2005:24).

Wallace sets his ecotheological research in relation to the problem of humanism and the invitation of postmodernism. This presents a particular set of questions and implications for theological method. If the task of theology is understood as ‘critical reflection upon the sources and nature of religious experience’, then green or biophilic theology investigates ‘the claims to meaning and truth within earth-centred religious experience’ (Wallace 2005:110). Such experience has been denied or sidelined or, at least if included at all, somehow strangely lacking integration.

Sources for green theology he suggests are twofold: the socially mediated reality of the natural world and the biblical tradition. ‘Green theology is nourished and sustained by sinking its roots deep into the fertile soil of the fecund earth, on the one hand, and the rich imagery of the biblical texts, on the other’ (Wallace 2005:111). But what is meant by this sinking into fertile Earth, and how does it differ from attending to a socially constructed mediation of nature?

Such a move departs from much of the Western tradition of theology. Wallace identifies a ‘sea-change’ occurring with particular reference to the historical relationship between metaphysics and theology.27

27 Clarifying the ancient transdisciplinary relationship between theology and philosophy in a new context is one of the challenges of ecotheology. Theology is ‘always dependent on philosophy yet aimed at practice’ (Keller and Kearns 2007:10).
The called-for reliance of theology on metaphysical presuppositions raises a number of questions, however, for a theology that seeks primary fidelity to earth-centred biblical testimony. Should theology seek to ground its proposals on a metaphysical foundation, or should it abandon its quest for such foundations? Even if theology chooses the latter, can it do so? (Wallace 2005:112).

Accepting Heidegger’s critique that ‘the question of Being in theology has saddled Christianity with a philosopher’s God’ he calls for a model of theology that avoids this. ‘In this model God is not the Being known within the horizon of metaphysics but the occasion for fostering new modes of ecologically and scripturally enriched existence’ (Wallace 2005:113). This existence is characterised by a spirituality that is sustainable, green, and a new partnering between humans and the other-than-human (that is the organism-and-its environment).

Such a stance, he claims, can be credible, and avoid the problems of universalism and of tribalism. ‘[G]reen theology emphasises both general intellectual rigour and creative fidelity to the particularities of the texts that ground historical Christian faith’ (Wallace 2005:114). This theological model is further developed by incorporating aspects of social constructivism which enlarges freedom for theology giving importance to situatedness, engagement with culture and rhetoric and imagination (Wallace 2005:115-117).

Attending to narratives of Gaia and God across the nature/culture binary is essential for reconceptualising ministry. Green theology is needed to develop green spirituality that awakens connections and kinship as a route towards sustained commitment to alternative praxis. Naming sources for theology that are truly radical, rooted in the fertile Earth (attending to the continuous flux between natural processes and worldviews and values), and biblical imagination clarify my own departure points. Ecotheology is situated at the intersection of ecohumanities and ministry studies to which I now turn.

**Ministry studies**

Ministry studies is the second element in the conceptual framework of the process that is ecoministry. Ministry concerns transforming praxis and exists in interrelationship with theology, ethics and spirituality. At heart it is inspired by the memories of the ministry of Jesus. A poetic fragment chosen by Luke from the prophetic tradition is generally understood as programmatic.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
    to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release
to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour. (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus here is presented in the synagogue making an open declaration of his mission. The placement of this passage in the larger gospel narrative (whether or not this event in the local synagogue actually occurred in this way), reflects the unmistakeable character of his ministry as remembered in the gospel stories (Nolan 2000:55). For the church, ministry is not only modelled on Jesus’ ministry: it is to be his ministry. Followers are sent as he is sent.

One approach to ministry is through what is known (inadequately) as theological reflection. More accurate terms are contextual theology, experiential theology or praxis theology. While all theology is concerned with experience, the key features are working out of specific contexts rather than generic truths, drawing on lived experience as much as classic texts, and goals of transformed action rather than theoretical ideas (Kinast 2000:1-2).

Kinast (2000) reviews recent developments in this field by grouping them into five styles. Style is understood as being in interplay with form, not as contrasted with substance. Conceptually theological reflection is an attempt to overcome the binaries of form/content, thinking/feeling and theory/practice and holds an aesthetic dimension in place (Kinast 2000:3). ‘The reality of theology, which theological reflection seeks to disclose, is the presence of God in people’s experience, a presence that invites them to encounter God where they are and to participate in the divine life which is offered to them there’ (Kinast 2000:3).

Existing forms do not preclude the emergence of new forms, indeed this is a mark of a living tradition.

Different styles are generally distinguished by the experience in view. Behind the choice of experience may be ‘new, creative, positive events’ or ‘problematic, disruptive, crisis events’. Beginning here means that ‘theological reflection deals with non-rational factors (emotion, intuition, motivation, behaviour) as much as rational factors, making it a more, not less, demanding exercise’ (Kinast 2000:65).

28 These styles are ministerial (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995); spiritual wisdom (Grooome1991; Killen and de Beer 1994); enculturation (Schreiter 1985, 1997); practical (Browning 1991; Tracy 1981). Feminist (Daly 1978, 1985; Ruether 1985, 1992, 1998; Fiorenza 1983, 1993) is discussed as a separate style and acknowledged as present in each.

29 Latin American liberation theology, feminist, Black and Hispanic/Latino theology, catechetrical theology, Clinical Pastoral Education, spiritual renewal and ecumenical dialogue have all contributed to these developments (Kinast 2000:1).
As method, theological reflection correlates lived experience with sources of Christian faith, though correlation here is not to be understood as lacking a critical edge (as, for example, in the use of a hermeneutics of suspicion). The movement is dynamic and spiralling. Theological reflection leads to a decision of faith, to action, to further reflection or changed perception, all as a process of transformation. Praxis, that is, initiates, contextualises and is the culmination of theological reflection.30

The method / model of Whitehead and Whitehead

James and Evelyn Whiteheads’ work offers a basic approach to, or model for, ministry which in this thesis meets at the juncture with ecohumanities as ecoministry. At first sight their approach may appear as the least compatible with the pressing questions situated at the nature/culture divide discussed in the previous section. The impetus was, however, the rapidly increasing complexity of ministry contexts and the consequent need for a more systematic approach.

Their work Method in ministry: theological reflection and Christian ministry (1995), designed for use in a local congregation, has been widely used and has solidified a process characteristic of the life of the church. They situate their contribution on a continuum where theology and ministry overlap reciprocally.31 Extreme positions can be identified at the poles; theology that does not transform action, and action that proceeds without reflection are both familiar dilemmas.32

‘Pastoral insight and decision are not just received in the community but are generated there as well. Theological reflection becomes a responsibility of the community itself, a corporate task’ (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995:xiii). The community envisaged may be a local congregation, a small group or an institution. The Whiteheads’ work organises a complex

30 From here on I use the word ministry, because of its rich penumbra of narrative memories which the more abstract terms praxis, contextual, or experiential theology do not so readily evoke.

31 Tillich, Lonergan, Fiorenza and Tracy are theological conversation partners and Clinical Pastoral Education and the case-study method are sources for the model of ministry.

32 The locus of this method in ministry reflects shifts in ecclesiological understandings, towards the community of faith and away from hierarchical authority vested in individuals.
process in two ways, providing a model of the components and a method for engagement\textsuperscript{33} between them. The model is simple and readily accessible. There are three sources of reflection – religious tradition, experience and culture. The method describes a process for engaging the sources in three stages: attending, asserting and pastoral response.

\textit{The model}\textsuperscript{34}

\textit{Tradition}

In this model the Hebrew and Christian scriptures lie at the core of the tradition, not in any absolute or ahistorical way, but as texts that originate in experience, giving glimpses of a mysterious presence, named as God. These experiences, told and retold as stories, were collected as oral history and later preserved as written texts, and were necessarily shaped by the particularities of their culture. This process survives now as that ‘vast array of insight, grace and bias we inherit as our religious tradition’ (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995:23).

These texts provide clues to a hidden plot, to ‘trustworthy scripts to follow – scripts of generosity and self-sacrifice, of justice and charity – as we seek to make sense of our personal and shared lives’ (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995:7). The situation is, however, one in which ‘privileged metaphors’ exist, which change over time according to shifting cultural contexts and needs. Importantly for this study, this fertile pluriform tradition is recognised as a source not only of grace but also of devastating malpractice. The task requires ‘befriending’ a tradition often experienced as alienating, distant, judgemental, weighty, narrow, ambiguous, or simply irrelevant. To befriend requires tools, both for immersion and for distance and critique.

\textit{Experience}

The inclusion of experience in the model is critical to the conversation. Notoriously a slippery term, experience here describes ‘all those ideas, feelings, biases and insights that persons and communities bring to the reflection. Experience embraces not only life events,

\textsuperscript{33} In their last chapter ‘play’ is the metaphor chosen for this process, play that as for children delightfully takes for granted freedom, spontaneity and the frequent occurrences of falling down and getting up.

\textsuperscript{34} The question of which voices are named in the model, the nature of their authority and the complex relationships between them are themselves ongoing conversations. The model provides a structure for approaching such issues.
but the conviction and apprehensions and hopes carried in these events’ (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995:43). But what experience is in view? The particular experience of the faith community is separated out from the experience common to the culture in which it shares. Theologians commonly identify experience as a single conversation partner, ‘human existence’ (Ogden 1986) or ‘common human experience’ (Tracy 1975). This broad category is separated in this model into two ‘distinct but overlapping sources: experience and culture’ (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995:5).

Experience is both the experience of individual Christians and the collective experience of faith communities.

Most pastoral reflection begins here, triggered by the hopes and confusions of our own lives. And life experience does more than provoke us to reflect; the wisdom carried in our personal and communal histories illumines the reflection as well. These histories are themselves profoundly influenced by both Christian faith and the surrounding culture’ (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995:5).

Our experience, ‘attentively discerned and courageously purified, serves to both confirm and question the adequacy of our common heritage’ (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995:44). Grace, and missteps, blind alleys, and public failures together mark experiences which may become the locus of God’s self-disclosure.

A fundamental consequence of attention to experience is that a reflecting community begins to notice missing voices: for example, the voices of women, or Indigenous voices, the voice of Earth. 35 In the presence of multiple voices the experience that is privileged by the tradition (as in the passage from Luke quoted above) is that of the oppressed, the poor and dispossessed. Exposure to ‘others’ disrupts and calls forth. It is this particular experience that is above all the starting place, and leads towards conversion (Poling in Whitehead and Whitehead 1995:50).

Culture

Engagement with culture forms a major part of this study. The Whiteheads’ model separates culture from experience, making it a focus for explicit attention (though it is neither discrete nor disconnected from the other components). Rather culture shapes both tradition and experience, ‘designating the convictions, values and biases that form the social setting in

35 Elaine Wainwright has developed a multidimensional approach to biblical interpretation that attends to these ‘missing’ voices together (Wainwright 2006:11-23).
which the reflection takes place. Culture in this sense points to the formative symbols and ongoing interpretations that shape our world-view as well as the social roles and political structures that shape social life’ (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995:5).

The task is to identify the world-view, the given, the assumptions outside of awareness - that is, to look at not through the lens. Culture and tradition are also in a relationship of mutual critique where tradition may challenge culture and culture may challenge tradition. Lastly, tradition engages with the resources of culture, with philosophy, social sciences (and now ecological disciplines) in theoretical, analytical and methodological ways. ‘God’s action can be discerned in cultural life as well as in an explicitly religious heritage’ (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995:57).

**The Method**

Whitehead and Whitehead reject the concept of ‘correlation’ as a method of exploring relationships between faith and experience. Finding correlation too rational, and reflective of the assumptions of modernity, they choose instead the metaphor of conversation as ‘more robust and less controllable’, since it is characterised by interruption, disagreement and surprise. Conversation is vital and volatile (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995:44).

Their method describes a way for the conversation to proceed, through a movement from attending, to asserting, to pastoral response. Each of the three conversation partners (tradition, experience and culture) is the subject of careful attending, and then brought together in ‘assertive dialogue’. Such engagement requires both textual and hermeneutical abilities and interpersonal abilities (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995:5). To this I would add personal ‘abilities’, self-understanding, openness to change in narrative identity. Their hope is that the capacity to remain present to tensions and conflicts leads in this process ‘to theological insight and pastoral decision’ (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995:5).

**Attending**

The first, and vital step is attending; if attending is overlooked the whole process is aborted. Attending, however, needs to be learned, and demands a counter-cultural stance, of self-emptying rather than achievement, of seeking rather than possessing truth, of keeping silence

---

in order to hear. In a gathering of other humans in a faith community, attending demands inter-personal skills: learning how to establish trust, honesty, capacity to be vulnerable, ability to suspend premature judgment, listening for the movement of the spirit in other voices and in silences. The role of language in attending is critical. Religious questions may be embedded in non-religious language, the preferred language of the self-understanding of the church keeps changing, and language is already structured, holding its own assumptions.

**Asserting**

Whitehead and Whitehead choose the powerful image of the crucible to evoke this next stage as the voices in the conversation speak to each other. ‘A crucible suggests the transformation that often occurs at this stage - if we handle the volatile components with care’ (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995:15). This striking image holds in place the mystery of fire, associated with spirit, suffering and purifying, and the presence of less than conscious creative energy as different elements fuse, dissolve, recombine or endure. The crucible is ‘dialogical asserting’.

Conflicting voices may generate anxiety and confusion. Failure to establish honest, assertive relationships defeats the conversation. A structure is needed that provides a safe context, a container. The container is a concept of ‘holding’ from psychoanalytic literature, where ‘holding’ is seen as fundamental in therapeutic work. Ministry involves the provision of sufficient crucible-like ‘holding’ for the task in hand. I will discuss additional forms of ‘holding’ in subsequent chapters.

**Pastoral response**

The first two stages of the method, attending and asserting, are more convincingly discussed by Whitehead and Whitehead than the third, namely the transition to what is called ‘pastoral

---

37 This is readily seen in interpersonal conversation where two major problems exist. The person who is non-assertive withdraws and fails to insert into the external world by contrast with the person who aggressively takes control.

38 In the context of a small reflective group within a faith community, this is the role of the leader.

39 The studies of D. W. Winnicott (1958) of small children absorbed in play with the mother working nearby, lead to this concept of ‘being alone in the presence of another’. It is a situation of safety, of sufficient holding within which risks may be taken. In such a context a child may grow and learn to trust experiences both frustrating and surprising.
response’. While the goal of transformed praxis is clear, this requires further attention in theological reflection (Kinast 2000:69). Kinast identifies the conversion of ideas into behaviour, learning to deal with obstacles and questions of strategy (a transition that does not effortlessly flow from insight) and the need to ensure that the action truly expresses the same meaning as the reflection. This last issue is particularly important where the action is to take place in the public sphere (Kinast 2000:69-70).

The Whiteheads’ method is designed in the hope that attending deeply, and negotiating competing claims, will lead to change. This process includes the whole self (rational, emotional, spiritual, body-self) and selves in community. Community builds in continuity and accountability.

Peterson (2000) proposes a relationship between ‘walk’ and ‘talk’ that is simultaneous and dialogical. As an ethicist and environmentalist, she is critical of the assumption of a linear progression from ideas to practice in what has been a prevailing idealist logic, one that she names as ‘uncritical anthropocentrism’ (Peterson 2007:48). The task now in the environmental movement is not the getting of better ideas or values but of how to live the good ideas we already have (Peterson 2007:50). More explicitly, it is ‘clarifying the relationships among ideas (or knowledge), attitudes/feelings, and action’ (Peterson 2007:54).

A ‘practice-based environmental ethic’ acknowledges the contribution of phenomenological attending to experience, takes action rather than knowledge as the first step, and is an attempt to be open to risk and possibility. Attention to Marxist critique counteracts the dangers of subjectivism and individualism in a phenomenological approach. This leads to a position where ‘revolutionary practice, world and thought co-evolve’ (Peterson 2007:61) as a form of genuine praxis. Conditions of life make certain narratives, world-views, and values possible, but these forms of thought and discourse, in turn, shape the world, and seeing, judging, and acting continually transform each other. In this light, the actions we undertake must be open-ended (Peterson 2007:60).

---

40 The term ‘pastoral response’ belongs in the context of the Whiteheads’ orientation towards a local faith community. Given the thesis question, transformed praxis is a stronger and more appropriate term.

41 Kinast’s attempt to overcome the difficulty of beginning with ideas and proceeding to action was through the concept of styles, though the ambiguity of the word ‘style’ is problematic.
I chose the Whiteheads’ method/model because it begins with structures already in place. Local churches still exist, forms of ministry are in place and founding narratives are still shared. Praxis is the goal in view, experience is not excluded and therefore the potentially deep springs of motivation may be engaged (or blocks identified and faced). The inclusion of process (method) of engagement is critical, particularly since the institutional churches have been slow to respond to the environmental challenge in their core praxis,\(^\text{42}\) despite the engagement of environmentally active individuals.

Slowness to meet the challenge comes within the spheres of both pastoral and prophetic ministry. Pastoral ministry traditionally involves intra-personal and interpersonal relationships with particular reference to pastoral identity and vocation. Prophetic ministry is concerned with injustice, structural critique and call to decision. Though the distinction is useful, pastoral and prophetic are inter-connected, the boundaries fluid. In the ministry of Jesus as remembered in the gospels they are seamlessly interwoven. In this thesis I attend to both, using Brueggemann’s interpretation of the prophetic tradition.

Ministry occurs in place. What might it mean to attend to the more-than-human world, the site, the Earth beneath and around, the sky above? What might it mean if community as locus was not only other humans but the other-than-human, that is if we re-place the human \textit{in} nature? Does the theology/ministry continuum need to grow roots downwards? In the overlap of ecumanities with ministry I believe some reconceptualising can take place.

**Prophetic imagination**

In this thesis the religious tradition component of the Whiteheads’ model is represented by the prophetic tradition. Walter Brueggemann’s interpretation (2001) offers a departure point, from which I will explore possibilities for engagement with the ecological crisis. While this necessarily involves critique, his work remains valuable, providing a structure for the thesis as a whole.

The concept of prophetic imagination,\(^\text{43}\) with its affirmation of the poetic, of narrative and critique, is linked with a passionate concern for ministry. Prophetic ministry appears in

\(^{42}\) See reference above.

\(^{43}\) Brueggemann first found his voice in his book \textit{The prophetic imagination} (1978, 2001) which has remained constitutive in his thought (Brueggemann 2001:iX).
perilous times, in tensions between culture and religious tradition. The Exodus (linked with themes of exile) is his core text and provides a narrative structure for an approach to ministry. His interpretation of the prophetic tradition maps places of cry, ‘royal’ or false consciousness, criticism, pathos and grief, and an alternative consciousness characterised by energising and the emergence of amazement. The prophetic imagination is a journey of daring, and the places of the journey are linked as an organic unfolding whole.

The Exodus is a recognisable story, that has continually been represented and re-told over time up to the present. Constructions and interpretations occur in the Bible itself (including instructions on how to remember it). The prophetic tradition unfolds in the New Testament in the formation of Jesus’ self-understanding and ministry, and in the continuing life of the Church where the celebration of the Passover (which remembers the climax of the Exodus story) underlies the sacrament of the Eucharist. However, in this thesis I will hold my focus on one fragment of the Exodus narrative. Brueggemann identifies the moment of the ‘cry’ of the oppressed Hebrew slaves in Egypt as the critical starting place (Brueggemann 2001:11-14).

This is psychologically and pastorally sound. Ministry begins with the sense of something not-right. All else flows from this. In trusting this fragment I take up in a specific way the Whiteheads’ insistence on giving adequate time to the difficult task of attending to experience. The ‘not-right’ is the ecological crisis. I propose a starting place that begins with the experience of attending to Earth’s cry. What is involved in allowing ourselves to be in touch with such devastation? What is needed for us to own and name our responses, emotional, practical, and spiritual?

Such naming, bringing into speech, is a central concept for Brueggemann, and marks the nature of the biblical text. It is speech that ‘leads to reality in the Old Testament . . . and who God turns out to be in Israel depends on the utterance of the Israelites, or derivatively, the utterance of the text’ (Brueggemann 1997:65). The rhetorical enterprise of the text is the means and the place of disclosure - an enterprise that has assumptions, but in Israel they are always open to dispute and revision (Brueggemann 1997:66). Narrative is for Brueggemann

---

44 For example, Exodus 15, Deuteronomy 26:5-9, Joshua 4:5-6, 21-24, 24, Psalms 78, 80, 105, 114, Jeremiah 23:7-8 and in the New Testament in Mark 9, 14. (A particularly interesting example of retelling occurs in Isaiah 19:20-25 where Egyptians are being saved from oppressors.) The Exodus narrative (Exodus 13:3-5, 8-10) pauses to prescribe a ritual for remembering that was to shape Israel’s identity, and continues up to today (Schwartz 1997:148-153).

45 Rhetorical enterprise involves narrative and imagination (as well as metaphor and drama).
the ‘governing genre’ of the Old Testament. Though other genres, such as commandment, song or oracle, are not narrative in form, they are, he suggests, regularly placed in a narrative framework.46

Brueggemann situates his work in the contemporary postmodern interpretative situation (Brueggemann 1997:61-114). Coming at the end of a long generative period of biblical interpretation dominated by historical criticism and its positivist assumptions, this context represents a major breakpoint in Western culture. The exposure of the illusory nature of the assumption of a settled essence behind the text, recognition that no interpretation is interest-free, is congruent with the nature of the Old Testament itself. The ‘history of Israelite religion, shows that Israel’s religion, and thus the texts are incessantly pluralistic’ (Albertz in Brueggemann 1997:64). Every religious question occasions dispute, and we are frequently able to identify several voices in the adjudications in the text.

This recognition of conflicted readings, and the impossibility and indeed undesirability of resolution, is central to his position. The pluralism of the text leads Brueggemann’s attention to rhetoric. Our Western inheritance, that has valued being over speech is being overturned. Where metaphysics holds prior importance ‘[t]he outcome is that issues of God are foreclosed before disputatious utterance rather than in and through disputatious utterance’ (Brueggemann 1997:64, italics mine). While recognising the complexity of this issue of speech, there is for Brueggemann no escape from risk for the interpreter, and no possibility of silencing counter voices.

Narrative is a strategy, the strategy chosen for making available the nature of a world in which YHWH intervened, as ‘actor’ and ‘agent’. These narratives shape Israel’s identity and invite possibilities of other such narratives again. ‘[T]he characteristic things to which Israel testified in its life and its world could be said primarily in narrative because this world has at its centre inexplicable transformations that may be replicated in other times and places . . .’ (Brueggemann 1997:67).

The remaking of narratives of identity, through negotiating contesting narratives in this way is an approach to ministry, as movement towards personal and political change. The Whiteheads’ crucible holds the volatile conversation between experience, tradition and

46 As discussed above the place of texts themselves is an ongoing question in this thesis. Keeping open to dispute and revision is affirmed in these very texts, which therefore beckon as a source of potential wisdom in a time of conflict.
Experience and culture are narrative; biblical narratives invite fresh narratives. Attending to the collision of narratives (Stroup 1981) is a generative place to begin. The emergence of new forms is blessed by a prophetic tradition, and for Brueggemann is the purpose of and justification for his work.  

Narrative holds the human in our embeddedness in a larger place-world. In the rich heritage of biblical literature the place of land for ‘the people of the Book’ is a vast and changing field. A theology of land is being undertaken by a number of scholars (Brett 2003; Habel 1995; Lilburne 1989) drawing connections between the environmental crisis and resources in the tradition (acknowledging the eclipsing of land) through connection with Earth (eretz). Given the importance of place in this thesis I will briefly present Brueggemann’s (2002) review of the main approaches in recent times. Three major remembered histories of the land exist; the ‘history of promise into the land’, the ‘history of management into exile’ and the ‘new history of promise that begins in exile and culminates in kingdom’ (Brueggemann 2002:xxv). Methodologically, Brueggemann describes his work as impressionistic, attentive to ‘the ripple effect of Israel’s imagery about land’. He seeks to keep myth engaged in history, to do what ‘Israel itself did: tell these stories that have happened to Israel and let them influence the consciousness of the community’ (Brueggemann 2002:xxvi).

In this way he hoped to restore the place of land in biblical interpretation. The Old Testament ‘in its theological articulation, was not all about “deeds”, but was concerned with place, specific real estate that was invested with powerful promises and with strategic arrangements for presence in the place as well’ (Brueggemann 2002:xi). Landlessness (wilderness, exile) in Israel is in a dialectical relationship with landedness, ‘either as possession of the land, as anticipation of the land, or as grief about loss of the land’ (Brueggemann 2002:xi).

Some major hermeneutical developments are pertinent to this study. A shift has occurred from an emphasis on history to a renewed attention to creation. The Hebrew term eretz is ambiguous; it can be translated as Earth (as created Earth) and as land (land of promise).

---

47 See chapter 7 on the practice of ministry, and the postscript.

48 Brueggemann (2002 preface) locates his work as in ‘a crisis of categories’ in biblical theological study, arising from a sense of the inadequacy of religious and non-religious categories. These include Freudian, Jungian and Marxist frameworks as well as simplistic dichotomies between scientific and mythical, or Eastern mysticism and Western technology (Brueggemann 2002:xxvi).

Since it is not possible to know which usage is intended in a particular reference, the question arises of whether Israel’s land does ‘stand in for and epitomize all land’ (Brueggemann 2002:xiii). The Pentateuch itself begins with an account of Earth and concludes with the land of promise.

Several lines of interpretation have opened from here. Most significant is the claim that the promised land is ‘not an innocent claim, but is a vigorous, ideological assertion on an important political scale’ (Brueggemann 2002:xiv). The basis of entitlement to land (Genesis 12-36) involved disregard of original inhabitants.

That primary tradition in Genesis, moreover, comes to violent and concrete articulation in the Book of Joshua, whereby the land that is “promised” and “given” in the older narratives is here taken in a brutalizing kind of way, a brutality in which Yahweh is deeply implicated, a violence both theological and political about which the tradition itself expresses no important misgiving (Brueggmann 2002:xiv).

The final form of the text kept both the traditions of land promise and the traditions of land violence, held together in an inseparable way as ‘a belated ideological rationale’ (Brueggemann 2002:xiv).  

The violence of this narrative self-understanding was held in check also by links with Torah obedience, a defining theme in the prophetic tradition as well as in the Deuteronomic (Brueggemann 2002:xv). Land gift, land possession and land loss are linked together as ‘a primary plot in Israel’s self presentation’ (Brueggemann 2002:xvii). While the interpretations of gift and promise and possession are complex it is important for this research that in ancient Israel the ending of the story was loss. ‘Israel forfeits the land and is deported to Babylon to be re-constituted as a community of exiles’ (Brueggemann 2002:xvii). For the Deuteronomist (II Kings 24-25) and for the Chronicler (II Chron 36) the story culminates in loss (with only small hints of what lies beyond).

The exile functioned in a defining way for Israel’s self-understanding, and gave rise to interpretive challenges and creativity. All the three great prophetic traditions, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel proclaim ‘Judah in and through exile to a new horizon of expectation’ (Brueggemann 2002:xviii). Each has a distinctive mode; Isaiah moves in the mode of royal-

---

50 Israeliite origins and the formation of Israeliite identity is the subject of debate. For a discussion of relationships between the worship of YHWH, an exodus story and indigenous culture see Brett (2003).

51 The historicity of the mass deportations and re-settlement of the conquered people of Judah is open to question. See for example, Boadt (1984: 383-386).
Jerusalem imagery, Jeremiah in the covenantal and Torah traditions and Ezekiel in the priestly tradition.

Exile in its expression in diaspora Judaism gives rise to an identity (not necessarily defined by land entitlement) that has been taken up metaphorically by the Christian Church (Said 2000, Brueggemann 1997). Exile imagery evokes a ‘practice of faith that is not (or no longer) supported by dominant cultural-political forces, but relies rather on freedom, courage, and imagination of the community of particularity’ (Brueggemann 2002:xviii). I will explore an interpretation of the exile of humans from Earth.

**Converging fields**

**Earth’s cry and the Bible**

My starting place draws also on the work of Kevin Hart. ‘Unless it responds to contemporary concerns, the Bible will quickly become a relic. . . . The issue we need to keep before us is how forcefully the Bible responds to the pressure of the questions that we put to it’ (Hart 2004:96). That the Bible still holds a place in Western culture is not taken for granted; indeed, for many it has become a meaningless irrelevance, a collapsed authority belonging in a world long gone. Nonetheless it is not yet possible to ignore or discount its continuing potency. ‘No work [is] more deeply embedded in Western culture’ (Hart 2004:87). Historically it was the means of spreading this culture, and is that which orients both Jewish and Christian faith traditions. It is also, he suggests, ‘the most important reference point of literature and visual arts’. Given this it is simply not possible to discount the past. The most it is possible to say is that there may be ‘the first signs of us slipping away from that grip, moving slowly and uncertainly towards something that still cannot be named by us’ (Hart 2004:87).

That there has been a grip is beyond question. The power of this book is one over which people have fought and died. The grip has been one of oppressions, fanaticisms, fundamentalisms. It has also been a grip of mighty strength, a gift of freedom for compassion, love, critique and transformative potency.

Questions that modernity put to the Bible produced what is known as the historical critical school. Source criticism, redaction criticism, form criticism and canonical criticism appeared
and produced valuable insights into composition, authorship, editing and the structure of the Bible as a whole. The Bible emerged as being composed of living texts, with multiple authors and editors and unfolding forms through changing historical periods. These critical movements rested on the assumptions of modernity, and were ‘all cued into the Enlightenment grand narrative’ (Hart 2004:94), where science was believed to be the way to uncover the truth, and the proper stance one of objectivity, a neutrality of non-involvement. Opposition existed from the start, but the discourses of postmodernity make the costs visible in a fresh way. Treating the Bible as object occurred in two ways. First, falsely partitioning it from its living roles, spiritually and liturgically in the lives of believers (awareness of these roles is characteristic of Brueggemann’s work), and second, isolating it from its cultural effects (Hart 2004:94).

Discussion of the inseparability of worlds, of texts and communities constitutes the basic feature of postmodernism. Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) presents Western culture as in a crisis of knowledge, in particular as ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’, a rejection of ‘overarching and totalizing frameworks’ that purport to give us stories of universal significance for our lives (Bennett et al 2005:270). This position involved three major rejections: ‘a rejection of foundations or origins that are held to be given naturally, inevitably or universally’, a rejection of realism, ‘the thesis that language when properly used can tell us about reality’, and the rejection of humanism where the human ‘considered as the subject and object of knowledge, is no longer held sovereign, but is regarded as an effect of desires, or discourses or power systems’ (Hart 2004:15).

Does the Bible fall under this critique of grand narrative? What of anti-essentialism, anti-realism and anti-humanism? For many, the Bible would be the archetypal grand enemy, the master narrative that presents a universal story from creation to apocalypse, total,

---

52 Modernity needs to be distinguished from the context of modernism. In the secular world modernism is associated with cultural phenomena that began appearing in the early decades of the twentieth century. In literature and arts voices such as those of Picasso, Matisse, TS Eliot, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf are key examples. Christian modernism in the thought, for example, of von Hügel, Loisy and Tyrell understands experience as the heart of religion, not reason and doctrine. These movements belong in the wider historical context of modernity whose beginnings are usually located in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Modernity can be more accurately described as modernities, with different dimensions, some of which have proved illusory and some enduring.

53 Postmodernism has a range of meanings, depending on the discourse and context, and may refer to ‘cultural texts, an historical period or a mode of cultural theory’ (Bennett et al 2005:269). Postmodernism (as distinct from postmodernity) is a reflexive movement engaging with modernism and modernity. It can be understood as ‘what occurred to the world when we stopped trusting in modernity, when order and reason, moral progress and enlightenment, ceased to be high values we held in common’ (Hart 2004:17).
transcendent and authoritative. Hart argues that this is an unfounded caricature. The Bible rather is a collection of books, of multiple voices, of history, poetry, wisdom literature, testimony. Many witnesses to transcendence exist, but they differ, change through time and are always particular, ‘inadequate to what they affirm’. What the men and women of these stories did know was that ‘God was intensely involved in their world’ (Hart 2004:93).

Lyotard was exposing master narratives in modern discourses ‘that seek to legitimate themselves by appealing to fables that purport to explain everything and that promise progress’ (Hart 2004:90). The Enlightenment, Capitalism and Marxism can be seen as such fables. Progress is the antithesis of the biblical narratives where change is understood not as the work of humans, but where hope lies rather in the coming of the Messiah, in the kingdom of God. This is not to say that grand narratives do not exist in Christianity, as they clearly do, but Hart distinguishes these as theological or ecclesiological.

For this thesis then the approach I am taking to the Bible is to ask how our readings do respond to the pressure of the ecological question. I recognise the Bible’s place in Western culture, its multiplicity of voices, and its witness to the presence of mystery mediated primarily and powerfully through stories. For ‘[t]he point . . . is not to dismiss the world of the book, were that even possible, but to learn to read it in a new light: the light that is of an unprecedented threat to the flourishing of the more than human life of Creation’ (Rigby 2006a:6).

Is the Exodus story a narrative open to possible re-reading in this new context? I draw on Abbott’s identification of three primary modes of interpretation as intentional, symptomatic and adaptive (Abbott 2004: chapters 9,10). An intentional interpretation is an analysis of meaning culled from the data of the narrative using such tools as repetition (of abstract themes and concrete motifs), gaps and cruxes. A symptomatic interpretation attends to alternative readings which may be at variance with an intentional reading, and looks at the conditions out of which the narrative comes, drawing on paratextual material. Both these modes of interpretation work towards and with material behind as well as within the text.

Contemporary approaches to the Bible question how it responds to new critical approaches to literature: deconstruction, psychoanalytic criticism, rhetorical criticism, feminism, ideological criticism, and now ecocriticism.

Brueggemann’s work includes these two kinds of interpretation.
The third approach, an adaptive reading, however, crosses a line where reception of the work is a creative act and faithfulness to the original is not the first goal in view. Rather, such work rests on the recognition of a work of art having its own ongoing life and is in a sense a ‘deliberate misreading’ (Abbott 2004:101).

The work of the artist attends to ‘the correct setting of the question’ (Chekhov in Abbott 2004:170-171). This study, though not a work of art, is concerned with the question of our human response to the ecological disaster. Does this Exodus fragment assist in framing and articulating a question? Such a task does not assume a goal of closure but quite the reverse. Both Brueggemann and Abbott affirm the place of contesting narratives as crucial in our making of meaning. And uncertainty is inherent in making meaning, for meaning is ‘grounded in a web of difference’, not in an absolute contact with reality (Abbott 2004:172). Narrative can offer the freedom to choose, to put the question, to delineate the context. The purpose of this is not to answer the question (as in the perhaps extreme example of drawing out the moral to the story), but rather to negotiate it sufficiently well, in order to be able to act. Narrative is potentially liberating, enabling us to take up responsibility. Openness in narrative is the basis of any ethics (Abbott 2004:173).

The narrativity of narrative keeps emotion and questioning in an organic relationship and creates freedom for agency through connection in and through its poetic power to protect mystery and depth. These are vital themes for ministry.

**Ecohumanities, ministry studies and a prophetic imagination**

The three elements of ecohumanities, ministry studies and the prophetic imagination overlap and collide.\(^{56}\) They overlap in ways that are mutually illuminating, and collide in provocative ways that call for decision. I construct a conceptual framework for ecoministry from these engagements. Ecoministry also attends to the process of negotiating contesting narratives, and to providing safe holding. Adequate containment creates freedom for change.

Critique is common to all three elements. Ecocritique is foundational in ecohumanities; ‘asserting’ in the Whiteheads’ model is the essential second step and critical analysis of ‘royal’ and alternative consciousness is the heart of a prophetic imagination. Ecohumanities’ critique of the nature/culture divide radically illuminates and confronts the Whiteheads’

---

\(^{56}\) A term used by Stroup (1981).
ministry model. While attending to missing voices is already part of this model, ecoministry attends to replacing culture (and experience) in nature, a task that goes well beyond restoration of a (human) ‘missing voice’.

This move (reuniting organism and environment) leads to a recovery of place. Brueggemann’s description of the prophetic imagination presents place ambiguously, for while the foundational narrative texts are necessarily emplaced, and land is central to Israel’s identity, the full implications of the ecophilosophical critique are yet to be appropriated. The Whiteheads’ work elides the category and reality of place.

Nature exists both as a construction and as a reality beyond and underlying all texts. This tension in discourses about nature challenges traditional approaches to ministry studies. Biblical texts are part of the component of religious tradition in the ministry model, and a prophetic imagination is mediated in part through stories in written texts. Ecocriticism is therefore a key place of overlap.

Ecohumanities, ministry studies and prophetic imagination all concern ethics. Ecohumanities provides a particular clarity by working with an ethics of engagement with place and, in the Australian context, culturally and ecologically in an ethics of decolonisation.

Prophetic imagination sees that grieving is essential in transforming praxis. Critique that identifies silenced cries (including structural silencing) needs to take account of griefs evoked. In the Whiteheads’ model attending to experience will include ecogrief.

Narrative is threaded through each element. The use of narrative is one direction being taken in ecohumanities research. In the ministry studies model, experience, culture and religious tradition can all be approached through narrative. Attending and asserting are ways of listening to and negotiating contesting narratives, in the hope of reauthorising alternatives. The concept of prophetic imagination rests on the Exodus narrative (and other re-tellings linked with exile).

The intersecting of the three elements holds in place an openness – one that draws particularly from the prophetic imagination, critical of a closed view of history, and open to the unexpected. Reconceptualising knowledge as partial, historical, situated and contingent leaves place for mystery (not necessarily named as sacred). Re-imagining materiality as sacred locates a matrix for conceptualising a process of ecoministry. Learning about the
radicality (and domestication)\textsuperscript{57} of ministry in this time of ecological imperilment is the work of this thesis.

\textbf{Structure of thesis}

Chapter two learns from the prophetic tradition to begin with cry as a starting place for ecoministry. I attend to Earth’s cry that is both global and emplaced and ask whether this cry is a sacred cry. In chapter three I undertake the critical work of prophetic ecoministry by engaging with cultural and religious narratives that function to silence Earth’s cry. I explore whether the prophetic tradition’s own narrative memory of historical crises (that called for new forms of repentance and ethics) holds as a container for negotiating this crisis.

Recognizing grief as the core of the prophetic tradition, chapter four attends to the presence of ecogrief, names what may have been unrecognised or arrested, and comes alongside the violence that silences Earth’s cry. Singing, as thinking and being otherwise, is the subject of chapter five. I propose conceptualising ecoministry as the vocation of becoming human, in communion with a more-than-human world. Ecoministry risks open-ended encounter in an unfolding universe of other-than-human and human subjects, and subverts the imagination of closed reality. To begin is to act in response to global warming, to learn to re-inhabit places, taking up the ethical work of decolonisation, receptive to the gifts of Indigenous land-based spirituality, and to dare to join in singing the world into being.

I insert a stalk of kangaroo grass as a jolt to imagination, as a voice for the world beyond the texts in a language other-than-human. It also draws attention to the reality that the thrust of this work remains as much question as argument, since it concerns openness to the deep ecological self being mysteriously called into being. The brief chapter by chapter responses to this stalk, whose being belongs in tussock, in soil, grasslands, in the Australian continent (and is now attached to the materiality of page\textsuperscript{58}) are therefore left as a fragmentary witness to the unknown.

\textsuperscript{57} Domestication of ministry, as a co-optation of our alternative vocation is a key dimension of Brueggemann’s critique of the contemporary church (Brueggemann 2001:3).

\textsuperscript{58} Elvey explores the theme of the materiality of texts (in particular biblical texts) as part of an interagency between human and more-than-human constituents of Earth community. Earth grew the reeds and trees and sustained the humans who transformed them into texts (for example, Elvey 2005b:25).
Kangaroo grass, 
*do you cry out?*

*Are you kin?*
CHAPTER 2

CRY

A prophetic narrative

‘The Israelites . . . cried out’ (Exodus 2:23).

The Exodus from Egypt is (along with the sojourn at Mt Sinai) one of the root experiences in all Jewish tradition. It is a narrative constitutive for the people’s identity and understanding of God. More space is given to the generation of Moses than to any other period in Israel’s history. The Exodus event itself ‘became a model for subsequent experiences of liberation in biblical, Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions. The Exodus is ancient Israel’s national epic, retold throughout its history, with each new narration reflecting the context in which it was rendered’ (Metzger and Coogan 1993:209). What was it that caused the Exodus story to be told and retold? In Brueggemann’s reading there is a decisive moment from which all the rest flows. ‘The Israelites . . . cried out.’ This cry marks a crucial beginning.

As the narrative is told the sons of Israel came to Egypt for grain, that is, there was a food crisis. Four centuries have elapsed since the death of Joseph and in the memory of the tradition the people were ‘fruitful and prolific’, and ‘grew exceedingly strong so the land was filled with them’ (Exodus 1:7). The Egyptians, to ensure the Israelites (already a security risk), did not continue to grow ever more powerful decided ‘to deal shrewdly’ (Exodus 1:10).

Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharoah. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them (Exodus 1:11-14).

After a long time the king of Egypt died; the Israelites hoped in vain that conditions would improve. The new Pharaoh persisted in forced labour construction projects, shifting the
capital from Thebes to the Nile delta, building supply cities as fortification. Along with this the Hebrew midwives were commanded to kill baby boys born to Hebrew women. The midwives disobeyed (Exodus 1:15-22). Here in the narrative, at last, they ‘groaned under their slavery’, ‘the Israelites . . . . cried out’(Exodus 2:23).

Other responses are possible. In the presence of something not right, even when deep and prolonged suffering is involved, perhaps especially when prolonged suffering is involved, muteness, incapacity to speak, fear of speaking, resignation, acquiescence may override any cry. In Brueggemann’s work consciousness that pretends that ‘things are all right’, that lives at a distance from the truth is a false consciousness (Brueggemann 2001:21-37). To cry out is to acknowledge pain, it is to recognise hurt, injustice, oppression and begin to protest. At its core lies a sense however inchoate, of something other. Brueggemann refers to the work of Sölle who describes stages of suffering. The mute, the numb, belongs with powerlessness and helplessness. The cry marks a phase transition evoking and creating possibility.

What is the nature of the cry as it appears in this biblical tradition? The verb ‘cry out’ (za’ak) is ambiguous in that in its wider usage it encompasses a range of human feelings. A ‘cry of misery and wretchedness with some self-pity’, za’ak ‘also functions for the official filing of a legal complaint’ (Brueggemann 2001:11). ‘[I]srael does not voice resignation but instead expresses a militant sense of being wronged with the powerful expectation that it will be heard and answered’ (Brueggemann 2001:11-12).

Crying out in this Exodus narrative permits something. It permits nothing less than the ‘beginning of history’, by which Brueggemann means a totally new, social, political reality that has nothing less than a theological cause (Brueggemann 2001:6). At its core lies the affirmation that forms the identity of the people and of their understanding of God. ‘I have seen their affliction . . . have heard their cry . . . I know their sufferings . . . and I have come

---

59 Historically, there are no direct references to a specific Pharaoh either in the biblical account or in Egyptian records that could provide a dating. Indirect evidence leads most scholars to set this drama in the mid thirteenth century BCE during the reign of Ramses II. This conclusion rests on a convergence of possibilities including the identification of supply cities Ramses and Pithon, and other contextual material such as excavations in the Nile delta (Metzger and Coogan 1993:210).

60 There is a distinction to be made between a raw expression of pain and the articulation of a protest against unjust socially imposed suffering.

61 I note that Sölle puts ‘animal wailing’ along with muteness, since neither in her schema involves rational thought process, or articulation. However the practice of keening (not professional keening) would seem to be equally important as a cry, a voicing, bodily and active as opposed to mute and numb. In addition, the cry of an animal may indeed be a cry of suffering, and far from mute.
down to deliver them’ (Exodus 3:7-8). In the narrative the cry is indisputably linked with response, and the prophetic tradition rests on this connection.

The prophetic task becomes first to find a way to bring the cry, the hurt, to the surface, to public expression. Telling the narrative accomplishes this through its criticism and exposure of the powerlessness of the gods of Egypt who cannot hear, cannot answer. ‘The grieving cry learns to turn away from false listeners and turn toward the one who can help’ (Brueggemann 2001:13). Finally as the narrative tension mounts inexorably, there is a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt ‘such as has never been, or will ever be again’ for the firstborn of every household is found dead (Exodus 11:6).

False constructions of reality are dismantled and a cry of truth uttered. The act of naming truth, however anguished, is an act of great power, a ‘primal scream’ (Brueggemann 2001:11). In this narrative it permitted something new to occur. It is a cry of labour, giving birth to a new community. This root memory leads onwards through the Red Sea, into the huge and still potent history of the Jewish people.

It is impossible to say with any certainty what actually happened. Amongst the multi-layered traditions, sources, revisions and re-interpretations, perhaps several movements down into Egypt have been collapsed into a single event. Maybe the simplest version is that ‘a group of Hebrew slaves escaping on foot was pursued by Egyptian guards, who were forced to give up the chase when their chariots became mired in the swampy region east of the Nile delta’. Astonishingly, this event became formative, for these rebellious slaves ‘acquired an identity that against all odds, they have maintained to today’ (Metzger and Coogan 1993:210-211)

In this chapter I attend simply to the existence of cry. I will ask what happens if the cry from the world in front of the text, the cry of something not right, is the cry of Earth. Taking time to attend, openly and deeply (the first task in Whiteheads’ method) is challenge enough when the experience is human experience. To attend to the more-than-human world raises complex issues, some of which were discussed in chapter one. I will attend to Earth’s cry through voices of ecological scientists, activists and poets. Arising from this I discuss the category of voice and a theological/philosophical reading of cry as call and response. In the final section I draw some preliminary implications for ecoministry.

---

62 Learning to frame a question about response to cry, about ‘being heard’ is one of the objectives of this thesis as a whole.
Hans Jonas sets out the dramatic and totally radical nature of our situation.

It was once religion which told us that we are all sinners, because of original sin. It is now the ecology of our planet which pronounces us all to be sinners because of the excessive exploits of human inventiveness. It was once religion which threatened us with a last judgement at the end of days. It is now our tortured planet which predicts the arrival of such a day without any heavenly intervention. The latest revelation – from no Mount Sinai, from no Mount of the Sermon, from no Bo [tree of Buddha] – is the outcry of mute things themselves that we must heed by curbing our powers over creation, lest we perish together on a wasteland of what was creation (Hans Jonas cited in Troster 2007:352).

Will we hear the outcry of mute things?

**Earth’s cry**

**Global cry**

Ice cores extracted from the Antarctic show that the levels of carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere (these are the two principal greenhouse gases) are now higher than they have been for 650,000 years. Throughout that period, the concentration of these gases has been closely tracked by global temperatures.

Carbon dioxide (CO$_2$) levels have been rising over the past century faster than at any time over the past 20,000 years. The only means by which greenhouse gases could have accumulated so swiftly is human action: carbon dioxide is produced by burning oil, coal and gas and by clearing forests, while methane is released from farms and coal mines and landfill sites.

Both gases let in heat from the sun more readily than they let it out. As their levels in the atmosphere increase, the temperature rises. The concentration of carbon dioxide, the more important of the two, has risen from 280 parts per million parts of air (ppm) in Marlowe’s time$^{64}$ to 380 ppm today. Most of the growth has taken place in the past fifty years. The average global temperature over the past century has climbed, as a result, by 0.6 degrees centigrade (Monbiot 2007:3-4).

---

$^{63}$ This challenge also raises further questions. Are they truly mute? Is it that we do not know how to hear?

$^{64}$ Monbiot engages with Marlowe’s play *The tragical history of Dr Faustus* (1590) though his book, beginning in chapter one with the proposition that our use of fossil fuels is a Faustian pact.
There is no longer any data contradicting the predictions of global warming models. Sea ice in the Arctic and Antarctic has shrunk to the lowest ever recorded levels, almost all the world’s glaciers are now retreating, permafrost in Alaska and Siberia has started to melt, parts of the Amazonian rainforest are turning to savannah, coral reefs in the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific have begun to wilt and the World Health Organization reports that humans are now dying as a result of climate change as diseases spread more quickly. The suffering and dying of other-than-human life as a consequence of these changes is immeasurable.

**Australia’s cry**

Australia’s cry is inextricably interconnected with this global cry. Global warming is the most serious environmental issue confronting us, and it also profoundly exacerbates other environmental problems (Lowe 2005:50). These problems are unlike those in other continents. Our isolation from other land masses for 50 million years, our ancient nutrient-poor soils, our dry climate and flat terrain make this an exceptional country, and one that is highly susceptible to change (Lindemayer 2007:35).

The Australian Climate Group composed of leading experts in the field published a report in 2004 identifying the urgency of the problem as well as proposals for responses for Australia. Carbon dioxide emissions in Australia have risen 3% from 1990 figures and continue to spiral upwards (Lowe 2005:50-51). Rainfall patterns also have changed in dramatic ways, with less rain along most of the eastern coast and increased rain in the Pilbara. Rises in sea-levels (at present by about 10 centimetres), temperature extremes and more frequent and severe droughts, floods and storms indicate significant changes occurring in natural systems.

For Australia, already fragile ecologically, this amounts to great risk for our biological diversity. The world is facing a species extinction crisis. By almost every known measure our biodiversity loss is the worst in modern times, with more that 14 per cent of our vertebrate

---

65 The situation is continually changing and is now graver than even Monbiot states. See the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2007 Fourth Assessment Report (www.ipcc.ch/).

66 A big fix: radical solutions for Australia’s environmental crisis (2005) is the third book in the Public Interest Series. The author, Professor Ian Lowe, is an eminent Australian scientist, reviewer of the United Nations Millennium Assessment Report (2005), and the International Geosphere-Biosphere Program (2004), and a president of the Australian Conservation Foundation.

67 Water shortages are becoming an accepted fact in capital cities of Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide and the situation is critical in Perth.

68 Of the planet’s entire species between 20 and 30 percent are under threat. Rates are 100 to 1000 times higher than ‘background levels’ where species become extinct naturally (Lindemayer 2007:36).
animals and 12 per cent of our plants threatened. Primary causes are land clearing; poor natural resource management; land degradation and salinity; introduced animals and plants; loss of old trees and hollows; sedimentation of aquatic areas and urbanisation. Our population growth is one of the highest per capita in the developed world and we rate in the top five in terms of the heaviness of our ecological footprint (Lindemayer 2007:56).

An overview of the state of Australia’s environment is most readily accessible through commissioned reports. The first national independent report in 1996 and the second in 2002 paint stark and worsening pictures (apart from one exception in an improvement in urban air quality). These findings are corroborated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ *Measures of Australia’s Progress* (2002, 2004, 2005). Along with increasing greenhouse emissions and more threatened species, more land is being cleared, with acute problems of salinity and land degradation and deteriorating river health. The Murray-Darling system and the Great Barrier Reef are two main areas of ecological change appearing in the Australian continent that are of urgent concern. The issues are huge and complex, impacted by short-term, medium-term and long-term pressures, and continually changing.

The conclusion of the 1996 report makes ‘the connections between the way we use our land and the state of the rivers, between rivers and the sea, between cities and the surrounding hinterland. More importantly, it showed how our environmental problems are related to lifestyle choices’ (Lowe 2005:41). Making such connections is a conceptual and perceptual shift (and can be understood as requiring a story shift). If Australia’s cry and human lifestyle choices are related, then surely this conjunction is an inescapable context and concern of ministry.

---

69 Ecological footprint is a measure of the amount of land needed to support the energy and natural resources requirements of each person. In Australia it takes 8.1 hectares of land to support one Australian (Lindemayer 2007:56).

70 Unlike other countries and regions the most serious threats are to temperate lowland woodlands, temperate grasslands, mallee and heath rather than to tropical rainforests or temperate forests (Lindemayer 2007:35).

71 The 2007 IPCC Report - Summary for Policymakers states that:
   By 2020, significant loss of biodiversity is projected to occur in some ecologically rich sites, including the Great Barrier Reef and Queensland Wet Tropics.
   By 2030, water security problems are projected to intensify in southern and eastern Australia . . .
   By 2030, production from agriculture and forestry is projected to decline over much of southern and eastern Australia . . . due to increased drought and fire.
   By 2050, ongoing coastal development and population growth in some areas of Australia . . . are projected to exacerbate risks from sea level rise and increases in the severity and frequency of storms and coastal flooding (www.ipcc.ch/).
While presenting this material in factual, objective terms is necessary, it robs it of its stories. The poet Judith Wright’s response to Australia’s cry is a voice that also must be heard.

Australia 1970

Die, wild country, like the eaglehawk,
dangerous till the last breath’s gone,
clawing and striking. Die
cursing your captor through a raging eye.

Die like the tigersnake
that hisses such pure hatred from its pain
as fills the killer’s dreams
with fear like suicide’s invading stain.

Suffer, wild country, like the ironwood
that gaps the dozer-blade.
I see your living soil ebb with the tree
to naked poverty.

Die like the soldier-ant
mindless and faithful to your million years.
Though we corrupt you with our torturing mind,
stay obstinate; stay blind.

For we are conquerors and self-poisoners
more than scorpion or snake
and dying of the venoms that we make
even while you die of us.

I praise the scoring drought, the flying dust,
the drying creek, the furious animal,
that they oppose us still;
that we are ruined by the thing we kill.

Judith Wright (Wright 1990:152)

Such a fierce, passionate heart recognises Earth’s cry as one of resistance and defiance even in death.
Grasslands’ cry

In Australia, 99 per cent of temperate lowland grasslands have been cleared (Lindemayer 2007:44). A remnant, one per cent, the most vulnerable; a place to start, the place to start. Here I focus on one bioregion, the place where I live, once grasslands. It took research to learn this. Previously I had perceived my place in terms of city, suburb, street, house. Now I know there are stories, geological, geographical stories, stories of creeks, of flora and fauna (and stories of Indigenous presence, of care and anguish beyond my comprehension).

What is the cry of these grasslands? These are volcanic plains grasslands, formed about two million years ago as active volcanoes erupted, disgorging their lava, filling the valleys and depressions of this ancient land. Deep black clays gradually formed on the weathered surfaces of the lava flow, and creeks carved out new courses. In dry weather these soils shrink or crack and in wet weather, swell and retain water, restricting tree growth. But here grasses thrive (Wigney 1994:9-11).

Prior to European invasion, in 1788 these plains were waist-high with kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*) stretching to the horizon, with occasional widely spaced river red gums and drooping sheokes. Between the tussocks tiny jewels of daises, lilies and orchids found shelter. The stubble quail nested, the little whip snake coiled in the sun, bettongs hunted, bandicoots scurried, yellow-winged grasshoppers and ‘radar’ beetles and meadow argus butterflies fluttered and brolgas danced (McLellan and O’Toole 1995:10).

The damage is catastrophic. Considered ideal for grazing, these grasslands were ‘acquired’ by European settlers from the Wurundjeri people in whose care they had flourished for 60,000 years. Sharp-hoofed feet of sheep quickly compacted the soil, trees were cut down, regenerating seedlings eaten by sheep and the introduced herbivore the European rabbit. The Murnong, or yam daisy, once prevalent and a staple food for the Wurundjeri is now a rare species. Factories, suburban ‘development’, environmental weeds, dumping grounds, freeways, transmission lines, degradation of waterways have now wrought their devastation (Wigney 1994:114-15).

---

72 Open forests, 45 per cent cleared; woodland forests, 32 percent cleared; mallee forests 30 percent cleared; rainforests, 25 per cent cleared; coastal wetlands in southern Australia, >60 per cent destroyed.

73 Traded for flour, clothing, knives, scissors and looking glasses. Batman undertook also ‘to pay a “yearly rent of tribute” of these items and to ensure the protection and civilisation of the local people’ (Horton 1994:109-110).

74 Recently, the Threatened Species Scientific Committee reported that “the most serious current threats to the remnant grassland are due to: development pressures from the expansion of greater Melbourne;
To the north of Melbourne there is a tiny site of remnant volcanic plains grasslands, fenced in for protection. My intention in visiting this site was to attend to my experience of cry, using a process provided by David Abram (1997:202). This involves meditative gradients designed to let go of the past and the future and to recapture body awareness in the living present moment (see Appendix). The following reflection starts at the completion of this process.

Wind on my cheeks, blowing my hair. A bird trilling far off to my left. Another answers. The whine of machinery, the distant roaring traffic, a siren, another soft scribble of song. The grasses, the grasses are bowing low and falling back, wind gusting. Clumps of kangaroo grass tuft on every patch of ground. Smaller warblings, a red wattlebird flies upward. Gum leaves rattle, awake, each blade and leaf a staccato as wind passes. A tiny feather frenetically dancing, caught in the wire. Sun on my face. My skin warming.

I am leaning against the trunk of a eucalypt tree, a slight rising grassy knoll to my left and then the sky. Deep blue. Grasses in the foreground shine silver/gold. Clouds piling and gliding past the swaying casuarinas. More birds chittering. Silence closes around me.

Warmth like a live thing radiates down the left side of my body. The soil here just through the wire fence seems to be humming – holding the rocky basalt outcrops, the crouching bushes, and the scattering of trees in a shimmering haze of white-gold grasses. I imagine these grasslands spreading on and on, (though knowing the rise blocks out the view of suburbia, only a few hundred metres away).

But to my right is a muddy path of crushed rock and foreign grasses. Bright green oxalis, with its yellow fluted trumpets, a dandelion about to release its fluffy white seed head – the wind doing its work, for strangers and natives alike. I feel an upsurge of nausea. Where is the legless lizard, the sun orchid, the black-shouldered kite? Where are the songs, and the firesticks? The land is crying. Why do you not cherish me? How is it you have neglected me? I am calling you. I am calling you.

The cry slipping quietly through my normal closed-downness. Are there ears to hear?

---

continued intensification of agriculture through practices such as rock crushing machinery and raised-bed cropping; and lack of knowledge or awareness about how to manage grassland remnants for biodiversity and conservation” (Merri Creek Management Committee August 2008).

75 This takes up a component of experience in the Whiteheads’ model.

76 A sign at the fence provides a colourful painting of grasslands, and explanation of the Indigenous practice of burning that facilitates regeneration of grasses and wildflowers. Provided by the local council and in four languages it is here I had learnt of these three original grassland inhabitants. Though they are not yet extinct in the remnant grasslands, they have all but disappeared from the other 99 per cent (including the land on my right).
A Block

The sweeping swathes of grass have been surveyed, subdivided, overlaid with roads, a rectangular grid, precise and linear. Now there are thousands of adjoining rectangles, blocks. One such block is the site of a church, home-place to a faith community. The frontage is on a major road that leads directly north from the city of Melbourne onto the main route to another capital. Indeed, tellingly, the road is named for this link, Sydney Road. Traffic pours along here in both directions. The church is built of basalt, bluestone quarried locally. The paths at its base are paved with asphalt, its lawn planted with European grasses, though a native paperbark tree provides a welcoming presence on the corner of this block.

I sat one day in this church, remaining behind after a regular, early morning meditation with two or three others. In the silence of the dim church I again attended to my experience of Earth’s cry.

Dust hangs. The air is very still; I myself am hardly breathing. The lines of the timber pews are exact, parallel. Seats. Human anguish, devotion, boredom, betrayal, joy. Many people have sat here – attending. Awareness drops, through leather shoe soles, through the timber floor beneath this building, Earth. Is anything alive down there? Is it dry, dead? Perhaps some seeds laying dormant. Some micro-organisms still in living relationship with their environment. The sounds of early morning traffic, cars streaming towards the city, a tram passing, stopping, brakes grinding, a horn. On and on the roaring, accelerating engines, pumping gears, a motor bike. I hear a bird, a tiny melodious riff. Inside it is silent. I am sitting alone in the empty church. Attending. My eyes rest on the luminous beauty of the colours of the stained glass. Light from the sun streams a diagonal across the space; and the sunlight is mediated through the narratives in the glass – a human/divine cry, as healing, and blessing. Here ‘sheltered from the storm’; but do we need to experience the storm? My body is closed in, contained, a place to be still, to go inwards. Inwards. Or to go outwards, but not only to God, to other humans, but to Earth? Another tram. And the birds - amazingly not subdued.

But Earth’s cry?

---

77 This term is also a colloquial name given to a block of housing in Redfern, Sydney, the controversial site of a project in Aboriginal managed housing.

78 For a powerful discussion of the image and language of the “block” as quintessential in shaping an attitude of bruteness and blindness to a living Earth, see Mathews 2005:15-20.
Cry in ecohumanities

Voice, call and response

It is immediately apparent that to attend to Earth’s cry constitutes, at first sight at least, a category shift, from human to other-than-human. To ask about Earth as the locus of cry is to open a series of questions. This cry is not a human cry. How is it making itself known? The air cannot speak directly, the tussock of kangaroo grass cannot speak directly, an extinct brush-tailed bettong cannot speak at all. The wrecked Murray River system cannot speak nor the lost or remaining rainforest. Yet there is an outcry, the outcry of mute things.

In the previous section I drew on voices of scientists, activists and a poet. How are we to understand the relationship between human voices uttering Earth’s cry and Earth’s cry? This cry is not adequately mediated by factual information, carbon emissions data or species loss statistics. Do we hear this material as cry at all? Does Earth have a voice? Is cry tied to articulate language? If it is the other-than-human who are oppressed and marginalised how do they speak? And if humans are to speak on their behalf what are the dangers of attempting to speak for another? 79

As one approach to these questions I will draw on Kate Rigby’s discussion of a poem. Behind the poem lies a particular place, a particular brook, and the brook’s ‘cry’. The place is the county of Northamptonshire, England, and the brook is a stream of water flowing from an underground spring in a corner of Royce Wood. The course and surrounds of this brook have been drastically altered as a result of the enclosure of Helpston, the poet’s birthplace and hometown. The enclosures, legalised by Act of Parliament in 1809, and driven by wealthy landowners, are identified as a crucial marker of the commencement of the vast social changes of modernity (one consequence of which was the arrival of convicts, and colonisation in the great south land of Australia). Humans cried out and these cries are uttered, and remembered in literature and song. 80

79 Brett discusses the postcolonial problematics of the systemically marginalised Aboriginal voice, and draws a parallel with Earth’s voice. The politics of representation readily get in the way in both instances, and the danger is that of reducing authentic voice to a cipher (Brett 2000:73).

80 For example We of the Never Never (Gunn 1987), For the term of his natural life (Clarke 1979) and in the poetry of Henry Lawson (Olds 2002).
What of Earth’s cry? In Helpston, ‘the brook’s once-verdant banks had been stripped bare and the surrounding pastureland, meadows and moors turned over to the production of cash crops for the profit of private owners’ (Rigby 2004b:58). The poet, English romantic writer John Clare, responds to this in an early poem (circa 1818) “The Lamentations of Round-Oak Waters” (Robinson and Powell 1989:228-234). The question here concerns Earth’s voice. Is the brook mute? The poet speaks. Is there ‘an outcry of mute things’? The seeming contradiction between muteness and cry draws into focus two realities. There is a cry, in the very physicality of the event. Yet the brook by itself is mute in that by itself it is totally vulnerable, it cannot protest. (Or is that a devastating comment on our alienation from an ecological awareness?)

It is helpful to set, as Rigby does, a historical context concerning the fate of place. As discussed in chapter one, the category of place in the history of Western thought has been eclipsed by space and time. The recovery of place at the end of the twentieth century, however, has important and frequently overlooked antecedents in romantic poetry. The choice of an English, nineteenth-century poet may appear as a disjunction here. However, resources within the heritage of settler Australians, close to an indigeneity born of centuries of dwelling in another land are I think of real value, as we learn to attend to the cries of our own land.

“The Lamentations of Round-Oak Waters” initially is a cry about the poverty and isolation of the poet’s miserable social condition; later in the poem we discover another cry called forth by the death of a dear friend. He is “[o]ppressed wi’ grief a double share” (line 1).

What is particularly surprising about this poem, though, is the way that these self-preoccupied reflections are interrupted by the stream on whose banks the poet had been pouring out his sorrow. . . . The bleakness of the poet’s physical environment does not represent a projection of the poet’s state of mind onto the natural world, as we might have previously supposed. It is, rather, an invitation to the reader to consider the plight of place itself, along with the suffering of those, human and otherwise, for whom it had hitherto provided pleasure, shelter, and sustenance. The connotation of the title is thus radically altered: these are not the lamentations of the poet by Round-Oak Waters but rather the lamentations of the brook itself’(Rigby 2004b:57-58).

Ah luckless youth to sorrow born
Shun’d Son of Poverty
The worlds make gamely sport and scorn
And grinning infamy
Unequall’d do thy sorrows seem
The poem recounts the detail of exploitation and despoiling and names the perpetrators, “Ah cruel foes with plenty blest / So ankering after more” (lines 189, 190), “lawless foes” which “clipt-winged Justice can’t oppose” (lines 181, 183). This becomes a protest, a cry of a different order from that of the brook.

‘In Clare’s radical recasting of the pastoral, this rural spot, far from providing consolation for human woes, is itself presented to us as wounded. Clare to be sure anthropomorphises the brook, but he does so to surprisingly ecocentric effect’ (Rigby 2004b:59). The place itself becomes the subject, shifting from landscape, or simply a setting for human cry, to uttering its own cry. And like the deceased friend it is as ‘lost ally and potential mourner’ that the poet is called to speak.

This place, so profoundly nourishing for the poet, calls out to him. Rigby believes this to be a key text for Clare. ‘For it is here that he first articulates his major poetic project of the 1820s and 1830s. In responding to the call of the brook Clare discovers his true calling, giving voice to the suffering of the land and in so doing also to his vocation as a poet’ (Rigby 2004b:59). To give voice to the suffering of the land as a vocation is to respond ecocentrically to its wounds, its oppression at the hands of empire-builders, ruthless as taskmasters. This poem provides an important clarification. To give voice as humans to Earth’s cry is to give voice as an ally, not so much speaking for, but alongside, one of a polyphony of voices, speaking what the brook alone cannot. To speak in human language in a human context and to cry out in protest is congruent with the prophetic tradition, the promise of which is that to cry out is to begin, it is to set something in motion. Here the poet is prophet.

Whose cry is in view as Clare, in his beloved and ravaged Helpston, pours out his poetry - the cry of the brook (Earth’s cry), the cry of human protest and lament, the poet’s cry? The title of Rigby’s work names a further issue. *Topographies of the sacred* asks about the place of the holy. Are these cries, cries of the sacred?

How might this question be approached? One historical narrative in the Western tradition reads like this.
The Christianization of the German people in the eighth century is said to have begun with the felling of a sacred oak tree. It was allegedly with this act of violence, both symbolic and environmental, that the Devonshire-born missionary Saint Boniface sought to demonstrate to the Saxons the delusory nature of their pagan beliefs. According to Freud, who retells this story in the “The Future of an Illusion” (1927) as a triumph of reason over superstition, the bystanders “expected some fearful event to follow upon the sacrilege. But nothing happened and the Saxons accepted baptism.”

And yet, with the felling of the sacred oak, something of profound significance did happen. Indeed, this is Freud’s point: at this moment, in this place, for these people the gods began to take leave of the earth. No longer perceived as participating in the divine through association with the god Wotan, who was said to have been hung and arisen rejuvenated from just such an oak, this tree, and with it all individual entities and localities in the natural world, became redefined as a more or less indifferent part of God’s Creation, subject, as we are assured in Genesis 1.28, to the dominion of humanity. Reconceived as merely material, the once-sacred oak could now be appropriated as an object for use, retaining its aura of inherent value only as a manifestation of God’s handiwork and a mythical trace in the archives of cultural memory (Rigby 2004b:54-55).

Did the gods take leave of the Earth? What are the assumptions inherent in concepts of ‘superstition’ and ‘paganism’? ‘Sacred’ trees, groves and springs were destroyed across Europe as Christianising proceeded. Traces of sacred space, however, did survive, often in a different form. For example, the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris was built over a spring, that was in the pre-Roman era a shrine to a Celtic goddess, and re-consecrated to Christian worship. Oral tradition kept alive stories and songs that remembered mythical creatures of indigenous traditions of place.81

In the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, reconnecting with Greek and Roman classical traditions led to the return of the language of the genius loci, an appreciation of place, its power and the sense of tutelary deities in whose care protection and good fortune resided. These were originally conceived of for home, town and local area but also for the wild places, where it was not human wellbeing that was primary but defence of the wild itself (Rigby 2004b:56).

All this was seen as pagan idolatry from a Christian perspective. It is from this classical tradition that Clare draws when the genius loci of the brook speaks in his poem.

I am the genius of the brook

---

81 Bishop Thomas Percy and James Macpherson in Britain, and Achim von Arnim, Clemens Brentano and the brothers Grimm in Germany recorded and collected indigenous ballads and folktales (Rigby 2004b:55). See also Teaching a stone to talk (Dillard 1982:85-94).
And like to thee I moan
By Naiads and by all forsook
Unheeded and alone.  

(lines 45-48)

Is this language ‘merely’ poetic? What is being spoken here? The clear implication is that nature has agency, addresses the poet, that the action does not all lie with the beholder (a position naturally inherent in Australian Indigenous cultures). The question here concerns the presence or otherwise of the sacred. For if the despoiling of the brook, its moan of forsakenness and aloneness, is a sacred cry then indeed this is a beginning where much is at stake. This is not to argue for a return to pre-Christian, pre-modern times even were it possible, but for attending.

The world disclosed by the romantics is born, as Rigby insists, of dislocation. Contrary to popular understanding, their world not only draws comfort from and celebrates the divinity of nature, but (as in the example of Clare’s poem) it is also ‘discomforting’ (Rigby 2004b:54). Our world too is marked by vast dislocation, for humankind and otherkind. Numbers of refugees (not to mention extinctions) are steadily increasing. Dis-location concerns place and place is the locus of cry. One function of a poetic voice can be understood as creating space for cry to emerge, be attended to, to be experienced at all. The ecological/social crisis of the Exodus narrative also arises out of dislocation, from which cry erupts.

In making the move to place the ‘something not right’ in the stream of the prophetic tradition I am asking also about the nature of the sacred. At the core of this tradition is response to cry. How can such a question be asked about the nature of response in our historical time? Is there something beyond our human responses, or in our human responses, or both in and beyond that is in the realm of the holy? This theological question is the subject of a wide range of contemporary thought, for example, in the philosophical/theological work of Jean-Louis Chrétien (2004) and ecotheology. For now, my purpose, as discussed in chapter one, is to find a setting for the question in narrative, drawing on the prophetic tradition. Learning to ask a question situated within a narrative is to ask not only conceptually but also in a way that raises questions about identity, vocation and ministry.

In the moment of cry response remains unknown. The Israelites cry out without knowing if there will be a response. That is, cry occurs in the narrative before Moses appears, before God acts. Earth now cries out. If we choose to act as allies, also crying out, for and with Earth, what then of response? Do we expect ‘God’ to ‘see’, ‘hear’, ‘know’, ‘come down’ and ‘deliver’ (Exodus 3:7-8)?
To approach this question I draw on the work of Jean-Louis Chrétien (2004). Chrétien’s work concerns the nature of speech (and therefore the nature of cry). He declares we speak for having heard. Speech is a response, a call makes us speak. In setting out the questions he seeks to address, he comments on the impossibility of escaping from historicity and argues the case for including biblical theology in the philosophical conversation.\(^{82}\) No single view is possible, but to formulate the questions is a useful move. The translator, in her preface asks whether Chrétien’s work is ‘a new radicalized phenomenology’ or a ‘seduction’. His primary motif of call and response is a religious structure, in contrast to an epistemological approach of question and answer (Chrétien 2004:vi-vii).

Voice, that which speaks, is for Chrétien inescapably bodily, fleshly. How, he asks ‘must we think this fleshly voice without which the spirit would stand bereft of heirs?’ (Chrétien 2004:1-2) But what is call and response here? ‘How must we think the voice in which, and through which alone both call and response become incarnate?’ And finally ‘if the voice listens the body must listen, through every sense: how are we to think this possibility?’

Chrétien takes beauty (kalon) as the ‘the diagonal’ example. In the Platonic tradition (from antiquity to Renaissance) beauty is a call, a vocation and a provocation. Call is not added on to beauty. Rather ‘we call them beautiful precisely because they call and recall us’ (Chrétien 2004:3). They beckon our gaze and our voice. This call is not a call to a ‘pure transcendental ego but to the whole human being, body and soul’, that is, voice cannot be separated from senses and body. It is body/soul that is called.

There is a critical disparity, a non-correspondence between speech and call for Chrétien. If speech is a response, it is founded on this gap. What does he mean by this? The interrelationships between call and response seem like ‘a tight mutual embrace, through which what responds calls and what calls responds’ (Chrétien 2004:6). Is this a vicious circle or can it be thought differently? Is speaking founded on the possibility or impossibility of corresponding to call? ‘Or does the devastating excess of its blank cry, which alone parts our lips cause the answer to fall short of any possible match, so that this very failure is really what gives us speech – which is to say that speech is indeed its purpose’ (Chrétien 2004:6).

Interestingly (and in harmony with the prophetic tradition) any radical thought of call is really only heard in response. Speech, the response, is a hearing that happens only in an

---

\(^{82}\) His primary philosophical engagement is with phenomenology and he rethinks Heidegger’s relationships between being, dwelling and saying, and is therefore particularly helpful for this project.
incarnational way. Thus in relation to Earth’s call, is it only as we begin to speak, begin to cry out, begin to act, that it can be heard? That withholding this very bodily response arrests the whole movement?

The impossibility of correspondence calls us. The call is never heard in its totality and this is precisely what matters. ‘That which I cannot hear in the call, that which I cannot answer, is what in it cries out and brings us forth’ (Chrétien 2004:31). Any response is partial, always inadequate. It requires many voices: all are needed. The task, as always, is to find one’s own voice, but now in a community of human and other-than-human cries.

The call that recalls us is also a promise that keeps us beholden; it gives us speech only by gripping us by the throat. No hymn will be able to keep it. Yet every hymn, torn and heartrending, must remit itself to this promise for safekeeping, entrust itself to it, give itself to it and lose itself, always already, always more, never enough (Chrétien 2004:32).

What does this mean for Earth’s cry? Earth’s cry requires human mediation. The relationship between human cry and Earth cry, poet and brook, can be interpreted in terms of calling and calling belongs with vocation. And indeed this was the case for Clare. The question of the sacred nature of Earth’s cry has been introduced. The cry, arising from dislocation, plight, oppression calls. Speech concerns being, being called forth as embodied self in the world.

The first vocation is the vocation to be, the first answer, to be there. . . . the cry that calls to being and to be – a “here I am” provoked by a “come here”. Every response and responsibility stem from this summons, and only deploy it under new modes (Chrétien 2004:18).

The experience of non-correspondence is a crucial insight, with profound implications for vocation and therefore for re-imagining and re-conceptualising ministry.

Towards ecoministry

In this chapter I have drawn from ecohumanities, the Whiteheads’ ministerial model and the prophetic imagination to establish a starting place for ecoministry. Ecohumanities’ critique requires re-situating culture in nature, the prophetic imagination begins in cry and ministry concerns response to cry. I attended to Earth’s cry, globally, in Australia, regionally and locally. In terms of the Whiteheads’ model I engaged with religious tradition in the Exodus narratives and culture through ecological scientists, poets, philosophers and activists, who give voice in a prophetic mode (though they may not interpret themselves in such a framework). I have listened to experience (the third category) personally at the site of
remnant grasslands and at a local church built there. In doing this I have enlarged the category of experience by restoring place.

Ecoministry involves both process and conceptualising. Process has several dimensions. Attending lies at the heart of the Whiteheads’ method. Listening deeply to Earth’s cry concerns our experience of this process. Pastoral ministry is concerned with what will hold a truthful non-judgemental naming of experience, without which our deepest selves remain disconnected and the call to being and becoming is aborted.

To be open to attend to Earth’s cry confronts us with immensity, complexity, and for many the strangeness of a new vocabulary. Earth’s cry coming to us primarily through culture is an increasingly constant and insistent reality. Indeed it can feel like a bombardment, an assault and the immensity, complexity and the technicalities of language and ideas can make this extremely unwelcome and unsettling. It may indeed be a very ‘inconvenient truth’. 83

Further, widening or deepening theological and biblical discourses to attend to Earth’s voice unleashes an avalanche of issues also bringing discomfort and radical challenge to taken-for-granted assumptions. 84 Pastoral ministry issues appear as the need for support in dealing with newness, in the difficulty of tolerating uncertainty and conflicts.

To choose to hear Earth’s cry is to become vulnerable to pain. Permitting the pain is a starting place affirmed at the deepest level by the prophetic tradition. If the prophetic task is to find ways to bring pain and hurt to the surface, what does it mean to bring ecological hurt up into consciousness, and into the public domain? The task concerns the discovery of symbols or narratives that hold, that might enable us to hear and bear Earth’s cry. I am suggesting that to ask these questions is a proper beginning place for Earth ministry. Uncertainty about answers or directions is a given, and unavoidable. First, a cry. How will we hear the outcry of ‘mute’ things? How will we hear our own cry?

It is possible that attending to Earth’s cry is extremely difficult for us. We may well have more than enough to bear already. Or we may simply feel nothing at all, except paralysis or numbness. We may feel a disagreeable sense of vague guilt, or fear, or we may feel ‘the misery and wretchedness’, and nothing at all of the Israelites’ impulse of complaint, as of


84 The Earth Bible Team is actively engaging with such challenges.
plaintiff to judge. And we may not know whether or not a ‘primal scream’ lies hidden in our heart.

I have introduced some ways of thinking about interrelationships between Earth’s cry and the need for human voicing, and opened the question concerning the presence of the sacred in Earth’s cry. A reading of cry in terms of call and response, and the inescapable existence of non-correspondence that calls us forth, lead to an articulation of ecoministry as vocation. Is it possible that a kangaroo grass tussock cries out, that it is a sacred cry calling us into a vocation of ecoministry? Ecoministry attends to the presence of a stalk of kangaroo grass, acknowledging that we may not yet know or hear its narratives as sacred, but accepts the place of disturbance as the place to begin. Conflicts, different stories asserting their authority and presence have emerged. (This begins the Whiteheads’ second stage of the process.) In the following chapter I discuss some roots of these conflicts and the silence and violence that accompany them.
Kin?
The newcomers see only land for seizing.
They will bring sheep, ploughs.
They have plans.

(kangaroo grass image)
CHAPTER 3

SILENCE

A prophetic narrative

‘The Israelites . . . cried out’ (Exodus 2:23). Why?

The Israelites’ cry is ‘a cry for help’ (Exodus 2:23). Something is not right. The situation is one of oppression (Exodus 1:11). Some human beings hold power over others, using it in ways that disregard their wellbeing. The taskmasters ‘oppress with forced labour’, are ‘ruthless in imposing tasks’ and ‘make their lives bitter with hard service’ (Exodus 1:11-14). This dynamic, so familiar to us, has existed and continues to exist in most known cultures throughout human history.

The core of the Exodus narrative is a confrontation with this form of power. Power used to enslave, to treat other beings as resources, is called to account. What is the nature of this power? Brueggemann reads oppression in the Exodus narrative in terms of consciousness, which he describes as ‘royal’ or ‘false’. The term ‘royal consciousness’ is used in the context of kingly, monarchical powers. In the Exodus tradition this is the empire of Pharaoh. This consciousness is formed by entwined political, economic and religious realities. Pharaoh uses his power to enslave the Hebrews, and control the wealth, and is god-like in the capacity to command worship and total obedience. Brueggemann contrasts royal consciousness with the radical experience of the embryonic nation of Israel. Yahweh acts freely and subversively in a situation where it appears all power lies with Pharaoh.

85 The ruthlessness is emphasised by the repetition of this statement within these four verses.

86 Brueggemann argues that this revolutionary politico-religious movement beginning with the Mosaic community lasted until approximately 1000 BCE in the reign of King David. And it was in the reign of David’s son Solomon that a collapse occurred (Brueggemann 2001:23). This period was one of extraordinary affluence, combined with oppressive social policy and religious sanction. In particular the building of the temple is linked with the establishment of a controlled, static religion where God is made subservient to kingly power. This period marks a dismantling of the revolutionary energy and freedom of the Exodus tradition.
Attention to later developments in the prophetic tradition offers a deeper understanding of this dynamic of power and oppression. By this time, the master/slave relationship of Pharaoh has been replicated within Israel itself. Royal consciousness becomes numbness, an inability to feel, to suffer, to truly experience experience. It is marked by satiation and boredom. There is a loss of hope and energy, an inability to imagine anything different from the status quo.

“All things are wearisome; more than one can express” (Ecclesiastes 1:8). This poem describes the quality of Israel’s life, within which the prophets developed their critique and a call to return to the one true God. Idolatry, oppression of the poor, misuse of wealth are consistent and inextricably interrelated themes. The condition is apathy, one in which pathos is forbidden. The prophetic task as will be discussed in later chapters is understood precisely as one of penetrating numbness, awakening passion.

‘Royal consciousness’ is also used interchangeably with ‘false consciousness’ where false is a position where truth cannot be spoken. It is where deception and self-deception exist in the dominant form of a culture (Brueggemann 2001:42). Public institutions uphold a perception of denial, exhibit an inability to critique their own life, and lack the capacity to acknowledge failure. The goal is to manage behaviour, as opposed to experience. Numbness, the embargo on ‘cry’, is the desired mindset.

This consciousness characterises those with power, and the condition of those enslaved.

---

87 R.D. Laing (1967) makes a distinction between behaviour and experience - experience being invisible, and what is seen being behaviour. If in our culture our deepest experience is not allowed, if hopelessness or despair is not permitted, or if the fear of approaching despair is too great, then there is at the centre a devastation of experience itself. And ‘if our experience is destroyed our behaviour will be destructive’ (Laing 1967:23-25).

88 The superscription is ‘The words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem’. The editor who would have been responsible for the attribution, is generally now thought to have come from a much later period, around 300 BCE. The spirit of exhaustion interpreted in this passage as vanity is taken by Brueggemann as describing the numbness of royal consciousness.

89 Brueggemann discusses criticisms of this correlation in the preface to the revised edition of The prophetic imagination (Brueggemann 2001:xiii).

90 Lifton and Olsen (1974), Lifton (1967) cited in (Brueggemann 2001:137) describe studies with survivors of Hiroshima, and the presence of ‘psychic numbing’. In addition they link this state with ‘symbolic gap’, proposing that death without adequate symbolisation severs a sense of connectedness. See also Freire (1972, 1992). Cavanaugh (1998) in a study of the activity of the Roman Catholic Church during the years of the Pinochet regime in Chile documents the state’s silencing regime. He analyses the acquiescence of the church in the early years in relation to the accepted theology of the time. Jensen (2000) draws on his experience as an abused child and as an environmentalist to show how we survive violence by refusing to perceive its effects.
Not to cry out, in pain or in protest, the internalising of the oppressor are all part of the web of silences. That is, the consciousness of the oppressor needs to enact a silencing regime. This needs to happen in two directions simultaneously. Those being oppressed need to be kept silent, kept from protesting, from crying out. The oppressors need to silence by denial any criticism of misuse of power. In the Solomonic regime, for example, silence was achieved both by the use of force (see the treatment of Jeroboam in 1 Kings 11:40) and by working to maintain an imperviousness to criticism (Brueggemann 2001:23-33).

How might silencing be understood when the cry being silenced is Earth’s cry?91 In the previous chapter I discussed the existence of Earth’s cry, in the context of prophetic imagination, where ‘cry’ was understood as a starting place, identifying a situation of distress. The Exodus narrative as container for exploring silencing of Earth’s cry seems, however, at first sight to be particularly inappropriate.

Terrible, catastrophic use has been made of the Exodus narrative. A silence of particular enormity exists in an interpretation of a prophetic tradition that fails to recognise a violence present in the texts themselves. In the Exodus tradition Israel’s rescue from slavery, inheritance and possession of land was accomplished only by forcible conquest.92 Readings are not clear-cut, and have been used to justify actions of both oppressor and oppressed and also as a rallying cry for revolt and liberation (Schwartz 1997:55-58). The dynamic seems to hold a particular resilience. Exodus and conquest narrative interpretations co-exist. They are ‘lending our myths of domination the rhetoric of liberation, and giving our myths of liberation the dark side of a fantasy of domination’ (Schwartz 1997:58). The hidden violence here is ‘far too dangerous to continue authorising’ (Schwartz 1997:176).

If the Exodus myth continues to function culturally, and is open to insidious, conflicting interpretations, is its value seriously diminished? I am exploring the use of narrative that concerns this very issue. Contest and conflict enable choice. I am not condoning the use of the Exodus narrative to justify oppression, but I maintain there is real value in a narrative that portrays the violence of silencing. How might such an approach take form, in relation to silencing Earth’s cry?

---

91 One of the aims of the Earth Bible is ‘to ascertain whether Earth and the Earth community are oppressed, silenced or liberated in the biblical text’ (Habel 2000:37).

92 Modern archeological evidence casts doubt on this narrative memory (Ruether 1992:119).
The humanly constructed evidence for this cry indicates it is being heard by some. The question of this chapter is why mainstream culture has been so slow to attend and to act. The magnitude of this slowness relative to what is at stake appears as a bewildering and complex silence to those who have heard the cry. In this chapter I explore the nature of such silence and of acts of silencing. What is the evidence, and how might silence be interpreted? I argue that a range of silences exists, contributing to a complex set of enmeshed systems of oppression silencing Earth voices.

**Silences and silencing in ecohumanities**

Silence exists in the very texture of Western thinking. A number of theorists have sought to analyse this phenomenon. In this section I discuss ecophilosophical, ecopsychological and ecosociological contributions. Silences may be spontaneous or enforced. They may occur in situations where words falter, where a silence is the only possible response in the presence of the numinous, an event of disclosure, an encounter, a connecting. Other silences exist as material unavailable to the conscious self, repressed because too painful, and a protection against memories of trauma potentially too damaging to be recalled. I discuss interpretations of a range of enforced silences, present as a form of the oppression validated by a dominant consciousness, where pre-existing social and psychological structures block legitimate voices.

The very idea that Earth could be considered as having voice contradicts a prevailing view in Western culture that humans are the only ones who speak. The formulation of the question concerning ministry in a more-than-human world itself requires exploration, since it operates in the mode of language, and the language itself mediates forms of power. In Western culture the privileged speakers are humans. Our domination of the conversation creates ‘a vast, eerie silence’ (Manes 1996:16) around us. From within this position, exploitation of Earth occurs. If the language available to us arises from within the heritage of enlightenment how will we articulate a question? We need ‘... a new language free from the directionality of humanism, a language that incorporates a decentred, postmodern, post-humanist perspective’ (Manes 1996:17). Rather than taking up the theme of new language here, however, my

---

93 Hegemonic silencing on the world stage is documented by Monbiot (2007:20-42). In Australia, environmental issues, long suppressed by the previous Howard government, are now constantly in the public debate. However, the recent federal decision setting pitifully low targets for greenhouse gas emissions speaks of still virulent silencing power. At a bioregional level it required research to learn about remnant grasslands. While increasingly voices are being raised in a local faith community that gathers on what was once these grasslands, there remains a mystifying blur of silence and inaction.

94 The third principle articulated by the Earth Bible Team concerns Earth’s voice (Habel 2000:24).
The concern is to acknowledge the capacity of language to mediate values and frameworks, which shape the very asking of the question.

**From ecophilosophy**

**Cosmology**

Silence in Western culture towards the plight of Earth arises initially in the context of cosmology. The realm of cosmology is the conceptualisation of the world as a whole, where world includes material objects, forces, fields, minds, spirits even deities’ (Mathews 1991:11). Anthropological study demonstrates that cultures invariably do seem to need and have a cosmology. Culture lives out a story of origins, a ‘making sense’, that is agreed on and which gives a basis for social and psychological, and indeed religious, integrity. The story guides the culture. ‘[A] cosmology serves to orient a community to its world, in the sense that it defines, for the community in question, the place of human kind in the cosmic scheme of things’ (Mathews 1991:12).

The dominant culture of modernity (characterised by atomism, dualism, anthropocentrism, sexism and androcentrism) can be understood as arising from a paradigm of disconnection. This became visible historically in the emergence of ecophilosophy as a field of inquiry in the early 1970’s, where unexpectedly the presence of two separate and concurrently existing world-views was exposed.

. . . [eco-philosophy] was quickly found to entail far-reaching investigations into the fundamental nature of the world. Indeed it was seen by many as entailing a search for an entirely new ecological paradigm – a worldview organized around a principle of interconnectedness, with transformative implications for metaphysics, epistemology, spirituality and politics, as well as ethics. Moreover, the process of elaborating a new ecological view of the world was found to uncover the contours of an already deeply embedded worldview, organized around a principle of separation or division, underlaying and shaping the traditional streams of modern Western thought (Mathews 1998:197).

These two primary metaphysical archetypes can be described as atomism, or substance pluralism, or ‘world as a set of discrete, logically and ontologically autonomous substances’, and substance monism or ‘world as a single universal substance’ (Mathews 1991:8). Each archetype shapes culture in its own way.

---

95 Cosmology is distinct from, though may overlap, metaphysics which also encompasses abstract, possible or ideal realms which may exist.
The scientific revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries came to be characterised by the Newtonian view that the natural world is composed of discrete, separate particles called atoms. These were thought to exist independently of each other, being held together in a mechanical way by external laws of motion. Movements of parts were thought to occur within a homogenous, inert, featureless space, and were able to be described in mathematical language. In this view the whole is no more than a collection of unit parts.

What then of the nature of mind, subjectivity, meaning and purpose? Descartes attempted to solve the dilemma by the separation of matter from mind. Mind came to be understood as ontologically encapsulated within the human brain, and matter understood as other, dead and inert. These pairs were an attempt to deal with difference. Modernity came to rest on a now familiar series of splits between mind and body, reason and emotion, spirit and matter, subject and object, self and other, person and property, master and servant, human and environment, culture and nature. Further, one of each of these pairs is assigned a lesser value. This all-encompassing set of dualisms, that textures our thinking and language creates powerful silences by a series of dissociations. What is not included in the world-view is simply not seen, or recognised, voices are unheard because not even expected. Normalisation silences; and the major cultural narrative itself becomes a vehicle for domination and death.

Our contemporary situation is one where two paradigms, disconnection and connection, co-exist and function in conflicting ways. Substance pluralism began to function in Western culture as a cosmology and, although Einstein’s revolutionary work demonstrated its fallacy, the Newtonian position still shapes our cultural and personal self-understanding. At the same time there is an evident loss of authority of the paradigm of modernity. This is seen most disturbingly in the appearance of an unexpected dark side of ecological ravaging and destruction. If, then, the ground of Newtonianism is slipping away what is taking its place?

---

96 These views were present in the culture prior to Newton but his formulation lead to a crystallising of its form, a ‘definitive authorisation’ (Mathews 1991:10).

97 The category of space gradually usurped the category of place over the fifteen hundred years prior to Newton’s concept of absolute space. Space here exists prior to creation, and precedes matter itself. It is homogenous, isotropic, infinite, inert, unchanging, immovable, mute and measurable. This position differs radically from the pre-modern classical Greek formulations of Aristotle and Plato. In Plato’s cosmology space is a matrix. For Aristotle, world is a vessel, a place or a set of nested places already differentiated, immanent with geometric shapes necessary for order, with Earth as centre and the heavens as the outer limit (Casey 1996, 1997:133-179).

98 Though Newtonian mechanics works for a particular ‘normal’ (itself a problematic term) range of cases.
We are drifting now into sheer abstraction, a ‘universe’ which is unimaginable, a higher order mathematical phantasm. As a culture we need, as the psychotherapists say, to get ‘grounded’, we need to find our way back into tangible reality. We stand radically in need of cosmological rehabilitation (Mathews 1991:47).

To be without a working cosmology is to live in a state of confusion and dislocation. Tangible reality necessarily includes our Earth-human experience, the world of the senses in which we participate, and yet strangely deny, and therefore implicitly silence.

**Rationalism as silencing**

This abstraction can be understood as a crisis of reason. ‘The crisis is both a crisis of the dominant culture and a crisis of reason, or rather a crisis of the culture of reason, or of what the dominant global culture has made of reason’. Rationalism, is cult of reason in a narrow form, which has gained authoritative status (Plumwood 2002:4-5). Reason here is characterised by the logic of hierarchical dualism, and is a position of confused dependence on, yet disavowal of, its material base. Body (human body and extended Earth body) is externalised, separated and categorised as other (Plumwood 2002:4). In this view a split-off reason functions in Western culture in an arrogant, self-serving mode, situating human life outside and above a manipulable, inferior nature. Without awareness we commodify and colonise what is other-than-human, and do so in the name of reason.

If such self-understanding (or non self-understanding) is functioning culturally in this way, then our very identity as humans is inextricably linked with the destruction of our own world. A ‘hubristic and sado-dispassionate form of economic and scientific reason is in charge’. Plumwood draws an analogy with the story of the Titanic going full steam ahead; an implicit rejection of the data; a catastrophic collision with the iceberg inevitable (Plumwood 2002:1). In an earlier work she writes of shifting tectonic plates (Plumwood 1993:1-2), the clashing edges being places of gigantic upheaval. This is a metaphor for our Western constructions of reality, a refusal of the knowledge of our predicament. Silence takes the form of failing to situate ourselves as humans ecologically, and of failing to situate the other-than-human ethically (Plumwood 2002:1).

Such failure conceals the truth of human dependence on, and participation in nature, and fosters the illusion of human invincibility. The logic enacts a form of denial that is a false

---

99 The ‘logic of colonisation’ or ‘centrism’ are alternative terms for Plumwood.
consciousness. Silences hidden by the normal story must be named. Plumwood argues for change in both concepts and strategies of rationality. Revising concepts of reason is also re-creating culture. In the prophetic tradition, only exposure of the truth provides a secure starting place for change.

Incapacity for action is then unsurprising. ‘The deterioration of the global ecological context of human life demands from our species a clear and adequate response, but we are seemingly immobilised, even though it is clear that at the technological level we already have the means to accomplish the changes needed to live sustainably on and with the earth’ (Plumwood 2002:3). While there have been momentous shifts in cultural awareness since Plumwood made this analysis, gigantic blocks continue to thwart serious action on behalf of Earth’s silenced voices.

**Anthropocentrism / anthroparchy**

Anthropocentrism, a key concept in ecological discourse, and in particular in Deep Ecology, further illuminates the phenomenon of silence in relation to Earth’s cry. It is fundamental in the analyses of both Mathews and Plumwood, and combines with the narrow form of rationalism in damaging ways.

The privileging of the human in the separation between human and other-than-human locates humans at the site of meaning, value and purpose (at the pinnacle of a hierarchy of being). This move entrenched an existing orientation. Anthropocentrism was present in Western thought in the Judaeo-Christian, classical Greek and Roman traditions of the pre-modern era (Mathews 1998:198). This valuing of the human over the other-than-human effectively silences all voices other than our own. ‘Nature is silent in our culture . . . in the sense that the status of being a speaking subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative’ (Manes 1996:15).

Anthropocentrism however can be understood as referring to a range of positions. Scholars identify both strong and weak forms of anthropocentrism. A strong human-instrumental

---

100 Such is the magnitude and control of power that Plumwood uses the word ‘traitor’ to designate the stance required in opposition.

101 See, for example, Brennan (2000).

attitude to nature can be contrasted with a weaker simply humanly-oriented or human-centred approach. Erika Cudworth introduces the particularly useful term of anthroparchy, referring to ‘a complex system of relations in which the non-human living environment . . . is dominated by human beings as a species’ (Cudworth 2005:8). The boundaries are extended beyond cultures to species, thus naming the existence of a vast silencing of other-than-human voices. This strong anthropocentrism has also been described as ‘human racism’ (Eckersley in Rigby 2004a:427).

Weaker forms of anthropocentrism exist because it is clear that the presence of the human is unavoidable. Our human experience and knowledge of reality is never from the outside, the bird’s eye view, but always from within. There is ‘no way of conceiving our relations to it [nature], other than through the mediation of ideas about ourselves’ (Soper 1995:13). At the same time, qualities of ‘beingness, agency, and becoming’ lie beyond our human capacity to understand and control.

The distinction between strong and weak forms of anthropocentrism is further clarified by Cudworth’s identification of three forms or levels of domination. The issue concerns the use of power in systemic ways. Identification of destructive power is made when a ‘limiting of life chances’ or an ‘inhibiting [of] the potential of an individual organism’ is occurring. (Cudworth 2005:7). Oppression, exploitation and marginalisation constitute harsh to less harsh forms of domination; oppression is species specific, exploitation entails the use of something as resource for the user, and marginalisation describes a casting into relative insignificance (Cudworth 2005:7). Anthroparchy may be functioning in any of these multiple ways, and creating structures of silence.

Anthroparchy refers to a system of relations. Cudworth’s work draws on systems theory to explore the presence of overlapping systems that potentiate forms of domination. Her work illuminates social dimensions of silence in relation to Earth. What is a system? Reality can be understood as a complexity where systemic, structural material is brought together with the discursive, narrative and ideological. Systems create patterns with qualities that are dynamic, interactive and also ambiguous. Cudworth describes the importance of careful exploration of the linkages and divergences between multiple systems. The image is that of strands and netting. Her approach accepts and defends the metaphor of the web that is ‘necessarily a tangle of ideas, an interweaving of many threads’ (Cudworth 2005:2). Some of the threads and ideas have taken form around the need to deal with difference. Different systems have different boundaries, as do concepts themselves. Anthroparchy then is a term for our symbolic construction of difference between human and other-than-human, in which we as
humans act in a mode of domination. This is a way of thinking about structures and systems as patterns of relations where ‘complexity of difference maps onto relationships of dominating power’ (Cudworth 2005:13).

Feminist and ecofeminist analyses provide fertile grounds not only for reclaiming and recontextualising and for identifying interstices, but also, importantly for this chapter, for identifying silences. Silencing of women has been linked in second wave feminism with silencing of Earth. Women, traditional carers of body, were recognised as a vast group of silenced humans. Systems overlap in complex ways here, interlocking with a silencing of Earth’s body. The dominations are not only in the intra-human realms of class, gender and race, but these ideological structures are also mapped onto realms of the other-than-human/human.

Systems, however, are not fixed in form. They are dynamic. ‘More like a snowflake than a web, various social systems crystallise in particular times and locations in shifting matrices in which distinct forms of domination, based on the hierarchical structuring of a diversity of differences (species, race, gender, class, dis/ability etc.) interpenetrate’ (Rigby 2007a:129). The silencing resulting from domination will also coalesce and re-form in the particularity of multiple matrices.

‘Techne’, ‘standing reserve’ and ‘enframing’

Heidegger’s analysis of modernity is made using the conceptual categories of techne, ‘standing reserve’ and ‘enframing’. Techne is a term describing a bringing forth. This ‘bringing forth’ is a poetic kind of making. That from which this bringing forth occurs is the stuff of the ‘material ’world. The term is particularly useful because it holds together an earlier, positive meaning with a later and negative development. Techne thus provides a context for approaching the technological world of modernity, with more subtle and complex narratives than a simple anti-or-pro technology reading.

103 Heidegger’s connections with Nazism are well-known and controversial. In this work I draw on a critical re-working of some of Heidegger’s key concepts. In particular, his critique of technology does not arise from a concern for Earth, but for human crippling. Humans can only be fully human in relationship with the other-than-human. This anthropocentric position, however, can readily be re-interpreted in a more ecologically oriented way.

104 ‘Material’ here is itself a term holding an implicit disconnecting and silencing from its definition as one side of a dualism.
Modern technology does not bring forth in this sense, rather it ‘challenges’ and in so doing ‘enframes’. The hydro-electric power plant on the Rhine (or that on the Snowy River) challenges by forcing an unreasonable demand, and flows on then in the form of energy for further unreasonable demands (Rigby 2004a:429). ‘Unreasonable’ here is the demand for ‘constant presence’, for incessant availability. Ironically, such an imagining of the world is one of unremitting silence. ‘Enframing’ then is a term for conceptualising our modern approach to matter.

*Techne* in its negative and silencing form is linked with the idea of ‘standing reserve’.

‘Standing reserve’ constitutes a domination of nature by human culture. This is a forestry term which views ‘materials’ as commodities. Trees are seen solely as resources, useful to the extent that they provide timber, for building, for wood chips. The designation of ‘standing reserve’ is a particular construction of the world.

Reduction of the ‘material’ world to its usefulness to humans, extends to the storage and manipulation of genetic material itself (Rigby 2004a:429-230). At its most intimate we have taken control over ‘bringing forth’. In Australia uranium mining for use in generating nuclear power forces the materiality of Earth into exclusively human dominated purposes. Sweeping grasslands viewed by white settlers arriving newly to this land were seen as ideal pasture for grazing and crops. The self-revealing potential, primarily unseen, has been trampled by hooves, re-sown with crops of our choosing.

Distinguishing positive from negative forms of *techne* is clarified by reference to two other concepts, *phasis* and *poiesis*, in Heidegger’s thought. *Phasis* is a term describing the self-disclosure of an entity or being, a freeing into its own presencing (Rigby 2004a, Foltz 1995). *Poiesis* concerns the activity of crafting, which allows for this phenomenon of self-disclosure in the crafted work (not in the work of crafting).

*Techne* in an earlier form was a form of the poetic. *Poiesis* as a making ‘is a drawing forth into unconcealment which simultaneously allows things their own being’ (Rigby 2004a:431). The raw material, for example, of a basalt plain may well be drawn forth into bluestone blocks for the building of roads, prison, church. It is thus poietic to the extent that the architecture of the building discloses the quality of the stone itself – its density, greyness and hardness. Ultimately *poiesis* is a bringing forth that can comprehend crafting as a way of life. Technology in its modern form dominates and effectively silences both *phasis* and *poiesis*.

---

105 This is a key term for Heidegger and will be discussed below.
Silencing of matter

In her book *For love of matter* (2003) Mathews takes up this silence in relation to matter itself. While much philosophical work is being done in terms of re-working dualisms, particularly the mind/body dualism, Mathews examines the ‘rarely contested premise’ concerning the nature of matter it(!)self.\(^{106}\) To make such a move is, she recognises, to challenge the bedrock of Western civilisation (Mathews 2003:26-7).

Intuitively, our experience of objects, like shimmering white-gold native grasses in the sunlight, is that there is an ‘interiority inherent in matter per se’ (Mathews 2003:26). Yet, to find language to describe this is problematic. The poetic splits away from the scientific, the seemingly rational. For most Westerners there seems to be a denial of experience, certainly a dissociation. Clearly our construction is one of mind separate from matter; mind being the place of interiority, matter the place of externality.

Few philosophers or scientists would now assent to this dualism, and yet it is Mathews’ contention that it does actually persist, in a particular form. Matter is conceived of as ‘existing independently of mind’; mental processes are not in any way essential or intrinsic to matter (Mathews 2003:26). The normal frameworks of materialism and idealism, she argues, both participate in an ongoing dualism and both are therefore problematic. The materialist position leads to an instrumentalism where Earth is simply an inert lump. The idealist position by-passes the world as of no practical consequence – a mere backdrop or even a mirage.

This view of reality undergirds our approaches to knowledge, ethics, psychology, spirituality, politics and economics, and as such is foundational to the ecological crisis. The extent of our embeddedness in a world of silent matter is evidenced in the dramatic, revolutionary impact of Einsteinian physics.

From the viewpoint of modern Western thought in general the idea of a world alive with meanings of its own appeared atavistic, a throwback to a primitive anthropomorphic realism that had been superseded and invalidated by scientific culture and by the epistemological insights of modern philosophy (Mathews 2003:3).

\(^{106}\) Using the neuter form of the reflexive pronoun it(!)self for ‘matter’ confronted me with the hitherto taken-for-granted assumptions inherent in the structure of language.
Mathews undertakes a philosophical exploration of a re-animated world, reclaiming the term panpsychism, and setting out a philosophical defence. Such a world is no longer viewed, in the manner of classical science, as a piece of cosmic hardware, fashioned out of the inherently blind matter of classical physics, but is rather viewed as a subjectival matrix, within the eddies and currents of whose dynamics we and other finite creatures stake out our relative identities (Mathews 2003:4).

Is matter itself being silenced? Matter, reconceived as a subjectival matrix, exposes a profound dimension of Western thought, functioning to silence Earth. If this is so, then a bedrock indeed shifts.

In summary, in this section I have argued that a dysfunctional cosmology characterises Western culture, with paradigms of both disconnection and connection present concurrently. The disconnection of atomism is the bedrock of modernity and as such is a fundamental context of silences. In addition anthropocentrism actively silences Earth and privileges the human. This takes a strong form in anthroparchy, existing alongside the weaker and unavoidable form arising from the inherent limits to our perceptual abilities. Ideas take form in systems, and multiple and overlapping systems now exist which potentiate a ravaging of Earth. One primary system is the predominance of exploitative and damaging technologies. Heidegger’s analysis of Western culture in terms of techne, standing reserve and enframing does not condemn all forms of technology but provides a critique from within which the possibility of a new horizon emerges. Finally, our conceptualising of matter is a dimension of our dominant consciousness underpinning our oppression of Earth.

Pharaoh’s taskmasters imposed ruthless demands on other beings. Humans and Earth were treated as resources. An insatiable demand for production requires that the slaves remain voiceless. Who are we? Are we taskmasters who insist on maintaining a paradigm of disconnectedness, who hold to the narrative of mastery over Earth, who are part of the complex, shifting overlapping systems that keep all this in place, enframing, demanding constant availability, reducing Earth to ‘standing reserve’, silencing matter (it)self?

**From ecopsychology**

Such questions require more theoretical depth and breadth. Ecocritique has psychological as well as philosophical aspects. Cultural cosmological narratives shape the construction of the self. In this section I discuss silence from the ‘inside’ (acknowledging the problematic nature of this term), drawing on analyses of the self as ‘ontologically crippled’ and as ‘unawoken
and anaesthetised’. This section is thus not neatly divided from the previous one but is overlapping, part of the shifting web.

The paradigm of disconnection, discussed above, arose from Newtonianism. Cultural assimilation of Newtonianism took place over time (Mathews 1991:20-23). De-assimilation is also a process. Although atomism, the archetypal form of Newtonianism has long been discredited, cultural embodiments have not disappeared, but continue in systems, structures, institutions and forms of consciousness.

A cosmology orienting us as humans involves ethics, norms, and expectations, and may be hostile to human interests or hospitable to them. Further, cosmologies cannot simply be dreamed up, don’t appear out of a vacuum but arise from within a complex web of historical, environmental, technological, psychological and social factors (Mathews 1991:12-13). Matter conceived of as blind particles in motion translates into a cosmology with consequences for our relation to nature, and for the construction of the self and social relations.

Nature can give no reasons, is simply facts, empty of meaning and purpose, indifferent to our interests. If it is construed as other, then it is not of concern, if separate then my human identity is not equal to its identity, my self-interest not its self-interest. As dead it has no rights, is open to be exploited and possessed. An aggregate of particles, blind and dead, robs us of our respect. We as humans are caught in the dualism of body/mind, valuing mind while repressing body, and above all are cast as spectators in a vast mechanical, mathematical system, disconnected from our experience.

The state of cosmological uncertainty is one of conflicting realities where finally our experience of self and world remains split, confusing and robbing us of agency. The Newtonian void is an empty silence enculturating us from birth.

107 The ‘spectacular success’ and assimilation of Newtonianism is the subject of a vast discussion, involving its use by political and religious movements to validate an emerging new social order. Its ‘immense authority’, ‘vast currency’ and ‘simplicity of principles’ lead to it being deeply entrenched in our commonsense way of understanding the world particularly in its social forms underpinning the ideology of free enterprise (Mathews 1991:19-29).

108 Ruether’s analysis of the Creation cosmologies of Genesis is one illuminating example, from within the Judaeco-Christian tradition (Ruether 1994).

109 This position concerning the ‘other’ differs from a view of ethics where it is the other that is accorded priority, as seen for example in the work of Levinas.
In the shadow of this chilling experience our culture again splits its realities: we cannot but act as if the world of colour and sound and redolent with fragrance is real for it is from this world that we extract our values, and our values are integral to our sanity. But our faith in this world is simultaneously negated, nullified by the cosmology to which we are harnessed (Mathews 1991:38).

The anxiety, isolation, cynicism that accompanies the modern condition needs no more than naming. Here, Newtonianism is not science, but is, ironically, functioning as a mythology itself.\(^\text{110}\) Within this desolate landscape the self of Newtonianism is divided as well as disconnected,\(^\text{111}\) and functioning in ways that silence Earth’s cry.

For conventional psychology as Hillman, a post-Jungian, sees it, the ‘only core issue’ concerns the ‘me’. Psychology assumed that a cut always had to be made, between the ‘me’ and the ‘not me’, and this cut defined the boundaries of the field. The important issue is ‘the recognition of uncertainty about making the cut at all’ (Hillman in 1995:xvii-xxiii). Ecopsychology breaks out of the distortion that occurred when the subjectivity of the human individual set the limits to the field. The environment was always present in psychology, or psychology was always ‘implicated in the wider world of nature’.

The separate self is also a crippled self.\(^\text{112}\) Shepard identifies a profound silence in Western culture as arrested development. Response to the world is possible only within the limits of the stage reached. Shepard (1995:21-40), an ecologist and psychologist, frames his question thus: ‘Why does society persist in destroying its habitat?’ He offers a reading of the roots, persistence and quality of silence in contemporary Western culture, and clearly names this silence as violent.

‘Something uncanny seems to block the collective will . . .’ (Shepard 1995:23). He rejects as inadequate interpretations such as lack of information, faulty techniques or insensibility, and is not contented with greed, arrogance or fear. Understandings of culture based on the embodiment of ideas or values are insufficient. ‘Technology does not simply act out scientific theory or daily life flesh out ideas of progress, Biblical dogma or Renaissance humanism’ (Shepard 1995:23).

\(^{110}\) See also the novel *Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn (1992).

\(^{111}\) The construction of a separate self has been analysed in detail as foundational in Western culture (Sartre, de Beauvoir, Hegel, Adorno, Horkheimer).

\(^{112}\) The Prologue to this thesis can be read as an example.
Like others, for example Fromm and Freud, Shepard analyses a sick society but sets his analysis against a picture of the ‘normal’ provided by evolutionary development. He argues that the long period of ontogenesis from foetal life to adulthood was accomplished by Indigenous peoples in ways far more healthy than our own. If seen as a standard from which we have deviated it is possible to gain some ground from which to view our own psychopathology.

The features of this pattern of life hold in view an intimate Earth-human relationship that is also sacred. These developmental stages, distinct for us, are inextricably interwoven and cannot, he argues, simply be ignored or side-stepped without catastrophic consequences. The evolutionary process moves too slowly to have accommodated to a change of only five to ten thousand years. The way of life of Indigenous peoples

is the one to which our ontogeny has been fitted by natural selection fostering cooperation, leadership, a calendar of mental growth, and the study of a mysterious and beautiful world where the clues to the meaning of life were embodied in natural things, where everyday life was inextricable from spiritual significance and encounter, and where the members of the group celebrated individual stages and passages as ritual participation in the first creation (Shepard 1995:26).

Our own origins as Indigenous peoples (though for settler Australians obviously not Indigenous to this land) are properly restored to view in such an extended time scale. Here Shepard insists that loss of our connection with the natural world understood in terms of the maturation of the self is the crux of the matter. This loss is a silence. The separate self is an arrested self. Where such a situation characterises a whole culture the implications are profound.

One implication concerns the ‘ritual basis of order-making’ which he discusses in relation to disappearance of initiation rituals, a matter that intimately entwines with cultural story.

We, in Western civilisation he suggests

have largely abandoned the ceremonies of adolescent initiation that affirm the metaphoric, mysterious and poetic quality of nature, reducing them to aesthetics and amenities. But our human developmental program requires external models of order – if not a community of plants and animals, then words in a book, the

113 In this thesis I draw primarily on Rose’s work to explore ways in which some issues raised by Shepard’s analysis might be taken up

114 One way of expressing the interwoven nature of ritual and story given by Anderson and Foley. ‘Storytelling is itself a particular kind of ritualizing, and human rituals have a narrative core’ (Anderson and Foley 1998:37).
ranks and professions of society, or the machine. If the ritual basis of the order-making metaphor is inadequate, the world can rigidify at the most literal level of juvenile understanding and so become a boring place, which the adult will ignore as repetitive or exploit as mere substance (Shepard 1995:30).

Our cultural legacy in the long march away from nature is due he argues, to ‘prolonged tinkering with ontogenesis’. We need to understand ourselves in terms of ‘flimsy identity structures’ (Shepard 1995:35).

Being stuck in infantile or juvenile stages of development becomes increasingly problematic when it continues in a culture into adulthood. As the culture’s elders themselves nurture the young then these traits begin to become adaptive in themselves. An idealising of youth, the stunting of authority figures and models, little guidance from elders in negotiating a passage into adulthood, and the perpetuation of adolescent desire to make over the world, resistance to and denial of aging, all find a place in Shepard’s analysis.

Adolescent dreams and hopes become twisted and amputated according to the hostilities, fears, or fantasies required by society. Retarded in the unfolding of his inner calendar, the individual is silently engineered to domesticate his integrity and share the collective dream of mastery. Changing the world becomes an unconscious, desperate substitute for changing the self (Shepard 1995:32).

Mastery silences. If making over the world is an avoidance of the task of making the self then silencing has profound depths. Loss of inner integrity and allegiance to a false dream robs us of our identity and purpose. To change, to be able to participate in a world beyond the self, requires participation in the maturation of the self.

The costs of this appear in our culture in a variety of forms but ‘perhaps worst of all in a readiness to strike back at a natural world we dimly perceive as having failed us’ (Shepard 1995:35). That is, Shepard regards this violence as retaliatory rage borne of the loss of our birthright. Our birthright is our evolutionary heritage, our own narrative in which we are embedded, in relation to which we know ourselves, the mysterious, fearful beauty of the natural world we are part of, which is home. In this sense such rage is rational, appropriate and proper. It is a response to a profound violation. It is hard to imagine a more serious

115 While beyond the scope of this thesis, I note that projective identification (a process where something that is too painful or dangerous is split off from the psyche) necessarily creates a silence. The advantage of this is that it gains a way of survival for the organism and preserves the means of healing (Klein 1957).

116 In nurturing my own children I was acutely aware of this loss, though unable to articulate it clearly at the time.
offence than ‘ontological crippling’. This is an offence against being. The energy of such rage is in proportion to the experience of loss.

Learning about and trusting our developmental needs are for Shepard the starting place. There is within each of us ‘a secret person undamaged’ (Shepard 1995:39) and this self knows the conditions necessary for growth. When they are put back in place, our abusive rage will wither by itself.

We have not lost, and cannot lose, the genuine impulse. It awaits only an authentic expression. The task is not to start by recapturing the theme of a reconciliation with the earth in all of its metaphysical subtlety, but with something much more direct and simple that will yield its own healing metaphysics (Shepard 1995:40).

The rage is an important clue. In a sense it is a cry – inarticulate, blind, lost, and needs to be entered, neither denied, nor judged but given the attention it deserves. The place of oppression is the place to begin. 117

Mathews also offers an analysis of the development of the self. She elaborates further the historical, philosophical analysis of silent and reanimated matter, in her poetic and critical re-reading (and re-naming) of the narrative of Psyche and Eros. Our condition as moderns, like that of Psyche, is that despite our sophistication, we are, remarkably, in a state as yet unawoken. She argues that encounter with Eros, and the presence of Pan are both crucial conditions of our awakening. Such an awakening is critical for the development of selfhood and therefore a capacity to respond to the world. What is unawoken will not cry out. Silence here is a state of absence. We are unresponsive to overtures from an animated world. Matter, by definition, is not communicating with us. Psychologically we are closed off against encounter.

Our cultural silencing of nature is dramatically visible in the marginalising of the role of Pan in the narrative, a view Mathews wants to transform and she suggests a renaming as Pan, Eros and Psyche. ‘Nature wants to evolve from the blind connectivity of Pan to the deeper psychically awakened connectivity of Eros, but cannot do so without the co-operation of beings such as ourselves’(Mathews 2003:143).

This movement can be seen to involve three forms of consciousness. A model of development from un(self)consciousness, to self-consciousness to an open, dialogical

117 Beginning with something ‘direct and simple’ may be sitting beside a tussock of kangaroo grass, attending, allowing healing and the seeds of vocation to germinate.
engagement is significant for the individual and for whole cultures. In the context of the myth of Pan, Eros and Psyche, Mathews re-sets the focus on desire. The state of un(self)consciousness is one of blind appetite in a limited externalised mode often involving unthinking violence. Self-consciousness, the second level, is read as a stage where culturally mediated identity is formed, but marked by the repression of desire, and rational modes of control. In the third stage, these bindings are loosed and the self is freed into ‘an awakened reaching out, a deep desire that results in the vitalization, the absolute potentiation, that flows from intersubjective contact with all that is’ (Mathews 2003:150).

Differentiation between stages may not be always clear cut, and more than one level may frequently be in play at one time. The organisation of Western culture around the second level is seen as arrested development (Mathews 2003:150). ‘[T]he entire epistemological and instrumentalist profile of our culture reflects this arrest.’ The epistemological issue concerns the priority of knowledge over encounter.118 When subjectivity is granted to the material world, then our Western pursuit of knowledge, separated from encounter becomes an act of violation (Mathews 2003:77). Knowledge is a term for ‘explanatory hypotheses resulting from non-communicate empirico-rational investigation’. By contrast, an epistemology of encounter with all that is, invoked in experiences of mutuality, preserves mystery and the erotic (Mathews 2003:78).

Confusion often exists between the first and third levels. A distinction exists between a magical, manipulation of sorcery and the ‘practice of engaging in dialogue with the world, either simply for the sake of communion and hope of response (grace), or for the purpose of receiving insight and guidance in meeting the existential challenges of life’ (Mathews 2003:151).

Ecocritique of structures of the self (and those of Western culture as a whole) makes an important contribution to conceptualising a process of ecoministry. Analyses of ontological crippling and unawoken and arrested development offer insight into silencing Earth’s cry. The silencing of Earth, of nature leaves us in a state of silence. A self that does not yet exist cannot act. Participating in sacred calling of selves into being has always been the work of ministry. The critique creates a space for taking this up in an ecological context.

118 An epistemology of encounter is developed by Mathews as a major implication of panpsychism.
Silence in the Australian context

An ecosocial analysis of colonisation

In this section I attend to the category of place, which is an essential category for any conceptualising of a process of ecoministry. Its absence is another form of silence. This category is not a general term like nature or other-than-human, but particular. This place, Australia, is a site of specific silences. These exist as a direct consequence of our presence as settler people. It is clear that initially both Indigenous peoples and ecologies were to be replaced. We live in this land only through acts of genocide and ecocide (Rose 2004:35).

The extent of the devastation is well beyond the grasp of settler peoples. It encompasses the loss of around 90 percent of the original Aboriginal population, the loss of all but a small number of Aboriginal languages, and the loss of earlier cultural coherence of the continent through Aboriginal networks of cultural exchange. It includes the loss of large numbers of plant and animal species, including the highest rate of mammalian extinctions in the contemporary world (Rose 2004:35).

The simple act of quoting this information about such terrible events feels like a further violence. Silences exist at a most profound and fundamental level simply because those voices cannot speak. They are no more. Silences, gigantic silences are present in Australian/euro-Australian culture.

To begin to see requires a shift in stance from centre to edges. Rose’s work with Aboriginal people of the Yarralin, Lingara and Pigeon Hole communities in the Northern Territory has emerged from this vantage point. It yields material, questions and contours not otherwise accessible. ‘Their insights have particular value because these people, situated at the margins of the nation and yet also bearing the brunt of a particular type of colonisation, speak from perspectives that are almost invisible from the centre’ (Rose 2004:1).

Ecological and social impacts can and need to be understood as a single process. The Aboriginal term for this process is, tellingly, ‘wildness’ (Rose 2004:3-5). Unlike our more usual settler use of the term ‘wild’, for some Aboriginal peoples ‘wild’ denotes the uncared for, or the knowingly injured or destroyed. Captain Cook, as the archetypal coloniser is incorporated into memory as the wild one.

Wild people (colonisers) make wild country (degrading, failing). Colonisation and the wild form a matrix: settler societies and their violence. We cannot avoid the knowledge that conquest requires death and dispossession. Indeed, in many ways we
fetishise the violence, glamorising the frontier and erecting hegemonic silences around facts that are taken to be too demanding or too demeaning. (Rose 2004:4)

Demanding and demeaning are powerful descriptions and hold quite specific challenges to our usual thinking. While the reversal of the use of the term ‘wild’ is in itself a valuable discussion, the main point here concerns the clarity with which the presence of violence is named. Violence, already implicitly present in the discussion of forms of domination is unavoidable here. Rose argues that one way we, as settler Australians, deal with the immense difficulty of this knowledge is by cultural construction of silences. How is it that we do this?

Silencing in Australia occurs in two primary forms, one as monologue and the second as a concept of history and time that creates an artificial closure, superimposed onto the past. Monologue, the control of discourse, holds a massive silencing power in Australian culture. Voices that remember are ridiculed or outlawed (Rose 2004:14). Monological historical narrative told from the perspective of the victor is power to ‘not hear’ the voice of the other. History is contested, and no single definitive telling exists. However, silencing is an active, intentional ‘forgetting’ of acute devastating moral import. ‘From a situated perspective, what lies between us are these terrible histories: the invasions, the dominations, the deaths and exclusions. Violence, both legal and extra-legal, wars, disposessions, extinctions and invisibilities also lies between us’ (Rose 2004:22). Yet for those who control the narrative, violence is finished.

Violence, a colonisation of both peoples and nature continues in the name of progress. Our assent to this situation is an assent to the protection of power, a power which ‘attacks our moral presence in the world’ (Rose 2004:23). The outcome of this is a vast apathy, callousness, a desire for comfort, which in Rose’s analysis, is a longing for immunity. The word attack focuses the nature of this horror and the need not to blur, underestimate or retreat from the violence being enacted. Silencing is a moral issue. Rose’s concern is with an ‘ethics of decolonisation’ characterised by encounter, responsibility and witness, a practice of engagement (with the past in the present) that includes the natural world. Separation from our sense of the ethical, through silencing, means that we fall into further cycles of immorality. For now, naming these forces is the preliminary and essential move.

119 Reynolds in A whispering in our hearts (1998) suggests that the silence has within it a whisper of violence that cannot be completely silenced.

120 The work of Reynolds, for example, exposes the white settlers’ telling of ‘history’ in which the Aboriginal inhabitants were expunged from the account (Reynolds 1989).
The concept of progress rests on a particular concept of time. The operative time is future, always ahead. The present is devalued as a place of human, moral agency. Rose traces antecedents in concepts of time in medieval Christian Europe. Fixed ontological moments of the Christ event and the end of history are linked by an unfolding progression of linear time. The present is shrunken to a transitive moment, which reappears in secular form in the ideals of the enlightenment. The effect is a silencing and displacement of ethics from a valued present.

The nature of violence and its catastrophic effects are analysed by Rose further in terms of the phenomenon of ‘doubling up’ (Rose 2004:7). Here not only does the initial violence occur, but there is a subsequent disabling of systems of self-repair. This is a darkly shadowed form of silencing near the edges of what is possible to believe or imagine. The naming of it requires a particular, burden-carrying capacity. In systems terms ‘doubling’ is an amplifying mode. The outcome is that death-dealing processes begin to outweigh life processes in a truly terrifying way.121

The natural world, however, is not a homogenous reality. It contains sites of particular wounding and pain. Rose speaks of wounded space, ‘geographical space that has been torn and fractured by violence and exile, and that is pitted with sites where life has been irretrievably killed’ (Rose 2004:34). Unawareness of such sites, failure to search them out, is a further form of complicity in silence.122

**Has Christianity contributed to silencing Earth’s cry?**

Many thinkers have discussed the power of the Genesis creation stories in relation to the environmental crisis, arguing that the Christian tradition is partly or even primarily culpable (Ruether 1992; Johnson 1993; Keller 1986, 2000; McFague 1997). Ruether’s review of our textual inheritance shows that Christianity, as a major expression of Western cultural traditions has ‘justified’ and ‘sacralised’ a set of relationships of domination (Ruether 2004:45). Ruether also highlights that the biblical narrative of creation and redemption has been used to justify the exploitation of the natural world and the subjugation of non-human beings. This has led to a failure to acknowledge the intrinsic value of all forms of life.

121 On a personal level, the same amplifications operate in the form of directionless, repetitive reproductions of denial.

122 It needs to be recognised that an encouraging shift of consciousness seems to be occurring in Australia under the leadership of a new government, with the long, long overdue public apology to Indigenous peoples, and an accepting of our history and responsibility as settler people. Rose’s work provides some concepts and directions sorely needed in translating this new beginning into the challenges of political, social and ecological change. Since the issues profoundly concern ethical responsibility any re-conceptualising of ministry must respond to the challenge of such engagement.
1992:3). The creation stories provide a narrative underpinning for this domination. Three classical creation stories have shaped the biblical/Christian tradition: Babylonian, Hebrew and Greek (Platonic). These stories, as creation stories, accomplish two purposes. They articulate our relationship as humans to the ‘physical’ world and provide instruction and guidance for society.

Creation stories not only reflect current science, that is the assumptions about the nature of the world, physical processes, and their relationships; but they are also blueprints for society. They reflect the assumptions about how the divine and the mortal, the mental and the physical, humans and other humans, male and female, humans, plants, animals, land, waters and stars are related to each other. They both reflect the worldview of the culture and mandate that worldview to its ongoing heirs (Ruether 1992:15).

The formation of cosmological narratives in the Hebrew and then in the Christian tradition is crucial in understanding silencing. The three stories all functioned to transmit social messages within their cultural context. From these a Christian cosmological synthesis emerged leaving serious and unresolved ambiguities in place.

The context of each of the three stories is that of patriarchal, slave-holding and early urban civilisation in the eastern Mediterranean, during the first and second millennia BCE. In the Babylonian story of Tiamat and Marduk the urban world was still not yet securely established, and the world of the Great Mother was still remembered as an earlier beginning. This Great Mother creates by gestating. All things, gods and cosmic beings come forth from the ‘mingled waters of her womb’ (Ruether 1992:25). The Babylonian story dramatically confirms her demotion to secondary consort, and authorises a new form of making. ‘Marduk extinguishes the life from Tiamat’s body, reducing it to dead “stuff” from which he then fashions the cosmos’ (Ruether 1992:18). This shift from Mother to artisan is a momentous alteration of consciousness. Matter now understood as dead can be ‘made’ into artefacts, which are the possession of their ‘creators’ (Ruether 1992:18).

The story also authorises slavery as a central social institution. ‘Slaves are the human tools by whom wealth is extracted through exploited labor, allowing aristocratic leisure to the rulers. Leisure versus work, rule versus servitude, are the primary metaphors for the divine-human relation’ (Ruether 1992:25). The Hebrew story also inhabits this world, but remembers its nomadic roots and modifies the Babylonian story. It rejects the work/leisure

123 The relationship between place and creation stories is a fascinating study beyond the scope of this work, but it raises critical questions concerning consciousness, local bioregion and what happens when creation stories are loosed from their original connections with place.

124 This story is an earlier form of the myth of Pan, Psyche and Eros.
division (which characterises the master/slave and therefore divine/human relationship) making God to work *and* rest. Humans become part of the covenant and, though presented as servants of God, they bear God’s image and are not then slaves.

Plato’s creation story, the *Timaeus*, is less mythic and more abstract than the previous stories, form reflecting content. Reality is divided into mind (consciousness) and body, and the story validates a social order of male domination, class hierarchy and the inferior nature of animals. In addition it mandates a fundamental alienation from body and Earth.

The earth itself is seen as the lowest level of a cosmic hierarchy of planetary spheres that mount above it. . . . Earth and body, once dominated and made inferior, are now fled from altogether in the quest of the male mind to free itself from the “contamination” of mortality and to secure immortal life (Ruether 1992:26).

This is the core of the silencing that continues in the Christian tradition, that is a cosmological synthesis of Hebrew, Greek and Christian ideas. Western Christianity accepted Genesis 1 as its official story of the relationship between God and the cosmos, read through the lens of Plato. The result is a view not strictly present in the Hebrew text and which holds intrinsic problems.

These problems create confusion concerning Earth’s cry. A God who pre-exists the cosmos and a God who also creates the cosmos leads to a philosophical dilemma. God’s sovereignty is seemingly under threat where the possibility exists of an eternal co-existence of matter parallel with God (Ruether 1992:27). The ontological ambiguity about the status of matter (the stuff of the cosmos) led to centuries of debate and a range of attempts at resolution.

Further, the development of the male monotheistic God into a Trinity sought to hold together both immanence (divine presence *in* creation) and transcendence (the divine *outside* creation). Again the debate indicates a real difficulty in wanting ‘to span two concepts of the divine-cosmos relation’ (Ruether 1992:27). In attempts to synthesise Platonic and Hebrew understandings of soul, there arises ‘an unexplained division between equality of souls in relation to God, and yet inequality of bodies and status in society across gender and class hierarchy’ (Ruether 1992:28). The view of Earth as originally a paradise adds to this uncertainty.

---

125 The God here, one who calls things into being through a divine fiat of ‘let there be’, is modelled on the ‘intellectual power of the priestly class who calls all things into being through ritual naming’ (Ruether 1992:20).
Thus the Christian world picture remains ambiguous, unable to close the loop between its vision of original goodness as a paradisiacal state without rapaciousness or death, its sharp division between animals and plants, who lack “by nature” the capacity for immortality, and humans, who transcend this mortal fate. This imbues Christianity with two oddly conflicting stances toward the rest of life (Ruether 1992:30).

We as humans are guilty for the loss of goodness in nature, the result of sin. At the same time we can act without ultimate responsibility, for since animals and plants have no intrinsic personhood we can exploit them as resources for our own purposes. Uncertainty about the relationship between the cosmos and the divine is no ground for passionate environmental thought and action. The silence here is a silence of inaction.

Lynn White Jr., a historian and self-declared churchman, argues that the ecologic effects of science and technology are out of control, and that these changes can only be understood by looking at presuppositions as they emerged historically (White 1996:3-14). This history, particularly in the medieval period locates religion, a source of beliefs about nature and destiny, as culpable. Interpretations of the creation stories in Genesis taught explicitly that those made in God’s image were privileged and given dominion over the rest of creation. Christianity underpins the notion of progress (White 1996:9), endorsing indifference to, contempt for and instrumentalising of the natural world. Science, technology and natural theology joined hands as masters. Such an argument, he believes, remains important even in a post-Christian age, in which, without an appropriate alternative, secularised variants of the Christian concept of dominion still hold power.

Belief systems concerning nature need to be understood contextually not only in relation to culture but to changes in praxis. In the pre-medieval period the invention of a new kind of plough occurred. In the Near East and Mediterranean the soils were light and ploughed using a scratch, criss-cross method. However, in Northern Europe the soil was dense, sticky and wetter, and by the end of the seventh century a new plough had been created. This plough

---

126 Multiple uses of the word ‘nature’ in the Christian tradition are indicative of the confusion. Ruether identifies four such uses. Nature is that which is ‘essential’ to being, nature is the sum total of physical reality including humans, nature is the sum total of physical reality excluding humans, and nature is the ‘created’ world apart from God and divine grace (Ruether 1992:5).

127 This famous essay "The historical roots of our ecologic crisis” ignited strong debate and led to increased environmental awareness in the Christian church.

128 A result of this, he argues, has been that Christian theology was responsible for a gigantic silencing resulting from the destruction of pagan animism.

129 For example, contemporary ‘resource management’ discourse can be understood as a form of the injunction of Genesis 1:28.
cut, sliced, and turned over the sod, in violent attack (White 1996:8). Further, such a plough required eight oxen rather than one. This changed patterns of land use and responsibility. ‘Thus, distribution of land was based no longer on the needs of a family but on the capacity of a power machine to till the earth. . . . Formerly man [sic] had been part of nature; now he was the exploiter of nature’ (White 1996:8).\(^{130}\) This analysis recognises Earth as a player, ‘no longer a passive recipient of human interventions and projections but an active participant in the formation and transformation of human culture and society’ (Rigby 2002:158).

Keller (2003) deconstructs the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* exposing a domination that silences both conceptually and poetically. This doctrine was not present in the first one and a half centuries of the common era, developing only slowly into the form we inherit. Creation from nothing, arises over against a creation from formlessness. ‘And the earth was *tohu vabohu*, and darkness was upon the face of *tehom* . . .’ (Genesis 1:2).\(^{131}\) There is a common theme between the content of this theological doctrine and its effect. Creation from nothing makes nothingness where no-thingness describes the rendering silent of the second verse of the Bible.\(^{132}\)

This tiny wisp of text holds crucial material that is ‘culturally potent’, and which can be ignored, but never erased (Keller 2003:5). The presence of chaos, and its shifting interpretations and valuations and devaluations is a complex field. Trajectories traced by Keller uncover a steady demonising movement. In the Hebrew, *tehom* retains its feminine gender and occurs without the normal definite article, indicating the continued presence of mythic person. It comes without negative associations, simply creation from formless something. Later *tehom* acquired a penumbra of meanings ‘dark, profound or fluid with a revolting chaos, an evil to be mastered, a nothing to be ignored’ (Keller 2003:6). The final victory is in the ‘no more sea’ of the book of Revelation. These themes continue in contemporary theology; for example, in Moltmann’s work the themes of creation, new...

\(^{130}\) White’s argument is that agricultural practice is connected to belief systems. ‘What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them’ (White 1996:9). There is a shift of ground from materialistic to idealistic which is indicative of “the tricky question of causality” (Rigby 2002:156).

\(^{131}\) Justin Martyr overlays this biblical text on to the story of Plato’s *Timaeus*. By the time of Augustine the doctrine of *ex nihilo* had assumed its current formulation. The difficulty lies in the fact that it ignores the second verse of the Genesis account. Augustine ‘obsesses lovingly’ over this problem, and resorts to assertion of dogma (Keller 2003:16).

\(^{132}\) Beneath this argument lies the question of the authority of biblical text and its place in contemporary theological reflective practice.
creation and resurrection are affirmed as external works of God over against chaos, nothingness and death. ‘God creates from nothing; and not from within the divine self’ (Keller 2003:18-19).

The puzzling nature of this persistence suggests deeper currents at work. Reclaiming chaos, since chaos is linked with femininity, means that Keller’s project is unavoidably feminist. The doctrine of creation ex nihilo is in part a divinised maleness (Keller 2003:xvii). Keller, like Ruether, sees the issue in the theological imagination of God’s power. ‘The prevenient chaos cramped the growing Christian imaginary of mastery – what we may call its dominology, its logos of lordship’ (Keller 2003:xvii). Creation implies a Creator, and in Christian thought the Creator has been identified with father power, with world appearing from empty void, and linked with an anthropology of mankind, made in this image, and given rule over the world (Keller 2003:5).

The tehom, over against which this position is held is, however, present as tehomophobia, a term for more than fear. The messy feminine, chaotic disorder, when subjected to erasure in a systemic way, recurs, but recurs with growing tenacity.133 ‘Such a manoeuvre . . . was always doomed to a vicious circle: the nothingness invariably returns with the face of the feared chaos – to be nihilated all the more violently’ (Keller 2003:xvi). If this is the case, it can be so only in the face of enormous cost.

What then is being lost? What is robbed of presence, silenced? Keller’s position is that it is depth that is lost. And depth is matrix-like. ‘This depth insinuates not an undifferentiated chaos, but a chaos from which difference unfolds a cosmos’ (Keller 2003:xviii). Possibilities arise from within that have been expunged through mastery.

Deep will appear on the face or not at all. But the relation to the face, always most intensely focussed in the interhuman, now demands of us planetary practices which find “face” across the width of the world. These stretch us thin; our strategies can run shallow. . . . [T]he ethical remains high, dry, and perilously utopic, if not accompanied by a messier therapy: the healing of the systemic repression . . . tehomophobia. Theology can perpetuate the illness or it can capacitate the cure (Keller 2003:7).

Depth and width and the feminine coalesce here. Identifying the power of this silence as a systematic repression present in the Christian tradition is a powerful move. Recovering the immense poetic power of the mythological deep within the biblical creation story brings into

133 A similar idea was discussed above as ‘doubling’ (Rose 2004).
focus a complex silence within the classical Christian tradition. It identifies experience, clarifying perhaps Mathews’ and Shepard’s analyses in a Christian mythological form.

Creation from chaos,\textsuperscript{134} rather than from nothing is a concern not only for reflective theology but is a ‘strong socio-spiritual practice’ (Keller 2003:5). An alternative beginning appears that recognises the nature of chaos, the face of the deep, and affirms a process of becoming. A theology of becoming that restores agency in a matrix of possibilities will be taken up in chapter five.

The analysis of our contemporary ecological crisis provided by Wallace (2005), introduced in chapter one, firmly locates Christianity as a cause\textsuperscript{135} (and potentially a place of cure). The diagnosis of our crisis is one of ecocide, a self-destructive momentum of ravaging the Earth on which we totally depend. In his view it is a disease, an addictive\textsuperscript{136} behaviour whose source is deeply spiritual. Self-destruction is, at the very least, a situation where we ‘have lost our primordial sense of belonging to the unified lifeweb that our kind and otherkind need for daily sustenance’ (Wallace 2005:28). Though we do have understanding about what is needed we lack ‘heartfelt commitment’. As a matter then of the heart, the crisis is a spiritual crisis.

The ‘ecological crisis is fundamentally a spiritual crisis because certain distorted Christian teachings have blunted our ability to experience any significant co-belonging with other life-forms . . .’ (Wallace 2005:30). Interpretations of the Genesis creation story, dualistic spirit/flesh opposition and a certain ghostly non-bodiliness associated with Spirit (though for Wallace biblical evidence does not support this view) are de-sensitising, problematic biblical teachings.\textsuperscript{137} The tradition needs a ‘major overhaul’ (Wallace 2005:7).

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{134} On the other hand, creation from chaos can also be problematic. It too can set “nature” as subject to the command of God (see Mark 4:35-41).

\textsuperscript{135} In his analysis it is economics, ‘an unwillingness to change our consumption-intensive habits’ (Wallace 2005:27) and not Christianity that is the primary driver.

\textsuperscript{136} Addiction here is to toxic attitudes and habits from which we seem unable to escape (Wallace 2005:30), and is an example, in Wallace’s view, of ‘bondage of the will’ (Augustine, Luther).

\textsuperscript{137} Other difficulties are the notion of a sky God, an understanding of incarnation limited to Jesus. Deeply rooted fears concerning Earth connections exist and spectres of heathenism, idolatry and paganism also lurk powerfully as blocks preventing an openness to the elemental, carnal, Earth nature of our human existence.
\end{flushright}
Where are the silences? Why do they exist? What do they yield? The trinity, and in particular the Holy Spirit is a central focus. Traditionally, the Spirit is concerned with interrelationships. The Spirit is the power of reciprocity, communion, mutuality, oneness and unity (Wallace 2005:40). With reference to Basil and Augustine he understands the tradition as upholding the Spirit of God rather than the Spirit of Creation. In practice the emphasis lies on the Spirit of God, love and mutuality in the Godhead. What is downplayed, in a way that effects and constitutes a form of silencing, is Spirit ‘as cosmic nurturer of all creation’, that is the spirit’s green identity (Wallace 2005:45).

Juxtaposing green and spirit raises the question of symbol systems and their referents. Unblocking the male/divine symbol system (already discussed) is one move. However, Wallace is not only discussing symbol systems. He draws on the methodological approach of Luce Irigarary who takes the embeddedness of everyday life rather than abstract thought as a departure point. Water, wind, fire, earth are the context of our human lives. They are symbols of the Spirit, but also and crucially not disincarnate. It is these elements in their wholeness with which we are kin, to which we belong and in whose substance we have our own being. Thus hovering, brooding, birthing and nurturing are not only events in the inner, spiritual worlds, but are movements of rivers, creeks, volcanic eruptions, basalt plains grasslands. We have, it seems, emptied the biosphere of God’s presence (Wallace 2005:29). Above all it is here that nature has been silenced.

This fundamental silence has been analysed by Heidegger in his critique of creation construed as artefact. ‘[T]he onto-theological notion of creation has, along with modern science, decisively “de-natured” nature, that is, severed it from its innermost mode of being as phusis’ (Foltz 1995:146). This assertion is a major critique. ‘Nature’ as creation is seen as a distortion in Foltz’s reading of Heidegger’s deconstruction of ‘nature’. The metaphysical sense of nature as creation derives from its groundedness in ‘constant presence’. In medieval

---

138 Wallace’s method, discussed in chapter one, begins with deconstructing with a view to discovering clues to existing retrievable elements of the tradition.

139 See chapter one.

140 Unblocking, for example, by retrieving feminine symbols such as ‘mothering bird’ and ‘nurturing parent’ (Wallace 2005:55) clarifies the presence of silences. Wallace is working towards a liberation of a new (and also ancient) model of God ‘as an enfleshed, winged Earth God promising life and renewal for all members of our planet home’ (Wallace 2005:55).

141 A further question concerns what happens when the integrity of a symbol system is compromised.

142 Heidegger’s criticism is aimed ‘not at Christian doctrine as such but at the admixture of Christian theology and Greek metaphysics’ (Foltz 1995:152, footnote 99).
metaphysics ‘every entity is a created entity (omne ens est ens creatum), and thus nature too is seen as a product already made . . . by means of its unchanging prototypes in the divine understanding. . . . God . . . becomes understood as the self-making maker, causa sui’. In its later modern form nature becomes ‘a divinely constructed, self-operative mechanism that is entirely explicable by the natural sciences’ (Foltz 1995:145-146). The inherent ‘severing’ silences the voice of a nature understood as phusis.

This domination present in the Western conception of Creation is illuminated by Rigby drawing on Goethe’s version of the ancient myth of Prometheus (Rigby 2007b). The rebellion against the gods takes potent form in Goethe’s work penned at the dawn of modernity. Man the maker, master of fire, the element of transformation is a ‘new species of earthling, homo faber’ (Rigby 2007b:238). Constructivism is one primary path flowing historically from here. The tension between the place and priority of the given in relation to the constructed is complex. However it has everything to do with silencing.

[I]s the human condition, or more dynamically, are the possibilities of human becoming, predominantly self-made, determined in the main by social relations, cultural conventions and (as some would insist) the very words that compose our mental world? Or is not human life, for all its ramifying complexity of diverse languages, cultures and societies, crucially dependent upon and powerfully shaped by that which is other than human, from microscopic organisms through to planetary systems and ultimately (as some would insist) a divine creative agency beyond and/or within the created order (Rigby 2007b:233-234).

The given may be construed as God or as our Earth home (oikos), but either way serious challenges exist.

Is there a relationship between the theological formulation of creation and the silencing of Earth? In what way is the Creator in the Creation/Creator relationship now seen to be involved?

[W]ithin the dominant Western conception of Creation, nature was always already construed as a work of techne rather than as a manifestation of physis, to the extent that it was held to have been conjured out of nothingness by magisterial decree. . . . The mechanistic reduction of matter to mute malleability was dependent upon nature’s prior de-animation within mainstream Christianity, whereby it was “stripped of any property that permits man to identify himself with the ancient harmony of natural ‘becoming’”. From this perspective, it becomes evident that the Promethean model of man as homo faber is flawed precisely insofar as it replicates, in a secular key, what Catherine Keller in Face of the Deep, terms the “dominological model” of God within the theology of creatio ex nihilo. Playing God, that is to say, is particularly problematic if God is taken to be the sovereign One, for whom precisely nothing is taken as given (Rigby 2007b:243).
Thus the very image of a theocentric order beyond the human itself functions to keep silent a nature that needs to be reconceived. Creation has been de-natured, robbed of agency and mastered in the name of a God interpreted as master-maker. The silencing of Earth is accomplished as man assumes the role of Creator.

Towards ecoministry

The concern of this chapter is critique, an essential component of the ecohumanities, the Whiteheads’ model and the prophetic imagination. The setting of the Exodus narrative is one of oppression, of silenced cries, interpreted in terms of ‘royal’ or false consciousness embodied in economic, political and religious structures. ‘Royal’ consciousness, in the narrative embodied by Pharaoh, concerns the use of power as domination (without justice) and is associated with numbness and incapacity to face the truth of experience. Analyses of silence from the ecohumanities revealed silences in the very texture of modernity, in a persisting paradigm of disconnection, in complex atomistic, dualistic, anthropocentric and anthroparchic forms, and the silencing of matter itself. The self as unawoken, anaesthetised and ontologically crippled contribute to silencing, in ways that differ from conscious oppression. Attending to ecocritique exposed a silencing of place, and in Australia the silences are violent and continuing.

Religious as well as cultural narratives exert silencing power. Deconstruction of the creation narrative in Genesis 1 exposed a silencing in major streams of interpretation. A Christian cosmological synthesis, dominological and Earth-denying, the doctrine of creation ex nihilo, a downplaying of the Spirit, disincarnate and abstracted from the biosphere, the formulation of Creation as artefact and God as maker, indicated a persistent and complex silencing.

A prophetic imagination asks whether we are functioning as new taskmasters, enacting our logic of domination in the face of Earth’s cry, and explores the Exodus narrative as container for negotiating this question. The ministry task is to engage with the critique, allowing time for the engagement with competing claims, between culture, religion and experience (both personal and communal). Ecoministry recognises that it is very difficult for us to hear about Earth’s continuing and worsening crisis (the cry), and equally difficult to own our complicity in its silencing. If the analysis that some of the difficulty involves ontological crippling, violence and trauma in the powerful matrices of silence discussed, then what could possibly enable us to move? Inability to imagine otherwise, choosing the comfort of self-deception, was the situation which the prophets faced. The prophetic tradition is a call to dare to abandon this position. To take up Brueggemann’s question in this new context, is to ask what
will penetrate numbness? The prophetic tradition provides an unexpected model, to be taken up in the following chapter.
Kangaroo grass,
you are almost gone,
with the yam daisies, the emus,
the dancing and the singing.
There are different grasses now.
But is there grief?
CHAPTER 4

GRIEF

A prophetic narrative

‘The Israelites . . . cried out’ (Exodus 2: 23).

My joy is gone, grief is upon me,
my heart is sick.
Hark, the cry of my poor people
from far and wide in the land:
. . . . .

For the hurt of my poor people
I am hurt,
I mourn, and dismay has taken
hold of me (Jeremiah 8: 18, 19, 21).

Cry begins the prophetic tradition. It occurs in the presence of something not right. In the Exodus narrative the cry breaks open the numbing silence of Egyptian oppression. Recognition and analysis of oppressive power is a crucial move in a prophetic stance concerned with socio-political critique. Critique discloses the existence of loss. This chapter concerns grief, which for Brueggemann is an essential dimension of prophetic ministry. The grief is the grief of the prophet. The clearest model is the prophet Jeremiah (Brueggemann 2001:46).

It is increasingly agreed by scholars that the Old Testament in its final form is the product of, and a response to, the Babylonian exile (Brueggemann 1997:74). The Exodus narrative thus is open to a double reading (Brueggemann 1997:75). The story of the original crisis must be held together with a reading from the crisis of exile. The use by compilers of other, older texts in this process is complex, detailed and nuanced. As discussed in chapter one my interest is not primarily in this critical discussion but in the rhetorical power of the narrative. Jeremiah (or the person or persons who appear as the figure of Jeremiah) lived a life dominated by the horror of impending and actual exile. The presence of anguish and grief
poured out often in poetic form is a feature of the book of Jeremiah, and in Brueggemann’s interpretation, the heart of Jeremiah’s ministry (Brueggemann 2001:47-57).

I take the passage quoted above as one example. What has brought about such pain? The superscription presents Jeremiah as the son of a priest, from a small town called Anathoth, two or three miles north-east of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 1:1). His ministry began in 627 BCE (alternatively this could be the date of his birth), and he lived during the reigns of the last three kings of Judah (Jeremiah 1:2,5). The Babylonian exile, beginning in 598 BCE, and the Fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE were events of shattering change and grief.

Jeremiah confronts a situation of denial, a state of self-deception in which the serious questions are avoided (Brueggemann 1991:47). Judah refuses knowledge that might expose failure, require an ending, or recognise the need for death (of a lifestyle or of a system of power relations). The people, the king, the priests, the false prophets, simply did not want to know, proclaiming peace where there was no peace, trusting in the overlay of lies rather than facing reality (Jeremiah 8:1-15). This form of crisis is a-pathetic, blind and numb. The appearance of heart-rending grief in the midst of long oracles of judgement is striking. This grief is not, as in the caricature of Jeremiah, that of a grudge-bearing doomsday prophet of gloom. Jeremiah’s grief arises from passion. Jeremiah cares about his people (and knows that God cares). Further, another layer of grief exists, for these, his people, are not listening. It is not self-pity, it is his clear recognition of a ‘skewed perceptual field’ (Brueggemann 2001:48). Isaiah’s anticipation had been realised:

   Make the heart of this people fat,
    and their ears heavy,
    and shut their eyes:
   lest they see with their eyes,
    and hear with their ears,
    and understand with their hearts,
    and turn and be healed (Isaiah 6:10).

‘He need not have worried. To turn and be healed they will not. So in his anguish over what is happening, and in his greater anguish over the wholesale denial, Jeremiah presents his poetry’ (Brueggemann 2001:48).

Jeremiah’s is a ministry of ‘articulated grief’ (Brueggemann 1991:48). Grieving is central to the prophetic task, and is both ‘elemental’ and ‘modest’. It consists of attending to experience, and the potentially terrible dilemma of being unable any longer to experience
one’s own experience (Brueggemann 2001:41). Whose experience is in view here? Jeremiah experiences profound loss – ‘grief is upon me, my heart is sick’ (Jeremiah 8:18).

The people’s experience, largely denial, is not the only possibility. Brueggemann asks how in the prophetic tradition the barriers, the denial may be met. Grief can penetrate numbness, and open access to the underlying experience. This is not a call for change based on rebuke, harsh criticism or judgement, though these form part of Jeremiah’s message. What is crucial to deep and lasting change is the empathic connection. It comes from a position alongside, from the ‘embrace of pathos’. These are my people. ‘Tears break barriers like no harshness or anger’ (Brueggemann 2001:56).

The prophet’s pain exceeds what can be expressed in tears: ‘O that my head were waters, / and my eyes a fountain of tears’ (Jeremiah 9:1). He wants to run from the force of his grief. If only flight were possible: ‘O that I had in the desert / a traveler’s lodging place, / that I might leave my people / and go away from them’ (Jeremiah 9:2). They are not listening and his heart is breaking.

My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain!
Oh, the walls of my heart!
My heart is beating wildly;
I cannot keep silent:
for I hear the sound of the trumpet,
the alarm of war.
Disaster overtakes disaster,
the whole land is laid waste.
Suddenly my tents are destroyed,
my curtains in a moment. (Jeremiah 4:19-20)

War, invasion, the exile and death of his people will be public, visible and a terrible disaster. There is no resolution. Laying waste becomes cosmic in scope, the images evoking the very end of creation.

I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;

---

143 Brueggemann draws on R. D. Laing’s distinction between behaviour and experience. Laing argues that ‘if our experience is destroyed then our behaviour will be destructive’ (Laing 1967:23-25). This is also a starting place for Jensen (2000:1).

144 Oracles against Judah and Jerusalem from the period of the kings Josiah and Jehoiakam (Jeremiah 1:4-20:18), from the time of King Zedekiah (Jeremiah 21:1-25:14) and oracles against foreign nations (Jeremiah 25:15-38; chapters 46-51).

145 Fretheim (2002:103-105) distinguishes suffering with and suffering because (the people have violated their relationship with God).

146 Pathos is a key description for grief for Brueggemann (2001:39-57).
and to the heavens, and they had no light.
I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,
and all the hills moved to and fro.
I looked, and lo, there was no man,
and all the birds of the air had fled.
I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,
and all its cities were laid in ruins,
before YHWH, before his fierce anger. (Jeremiah 4:23-26)

The link between the fierce anger of YHWH and this devastation, between disobedience, faithlessness and punishment is a recurring theme in the oracles of Jeremiah. My focus however, is that the capacity to feel grief is a mark of the prophet and the heart-source of prophetic ministry. Such grief is a mode of radical criticism (Brueggemann 2001:57). Openly recognising and articulating an ending is a starting place from which an alternative can come to birth. But grief must be lived. “Israel must be grieved, and not too soon can there be a word beyond grief” (Brueggemann 2001:55).

The transmission and re-shaping of these materials - the laments, the oracles, the prose, the poems, the autobiographical witness in the struggle with God - is itself a refusal to give in to circumstance, an act of grieving from within the situation of exile. Israelite slaves cry out, breaking the power both external and internalised that subjugated and silenced. Those who hear the cry must deal with grief, and grief in this reading of Jeremiah takes form as rebellion, criticism and a passionate call for change.

What then would it mean to consider the place of grief where the cry is the cry of Earth, and where silencing persists in the form of non-action or inadequate action, or failure to take responsibility (even in the context now of widespread recognition)? In this chapter I ask about the presence of grief in our society in relation to Earth’s cry, how it is being conceptualised in the ecohumanities and how this could shape a praxis of ecoministry.

Grief in ecohumanities

In chapter two I presented evidence for Earth’s cry, and in chapter three evidence for its silencing. What is happening to grief? Is it present, absent or both? Is it possible that hurt or pain, as well as violence, exists beneath the silencing? First, it is helpful to clarify some

---

147 Fretheim (1984:107-137) discusses judgement proclaimed with anguish as a rhetorical strategy for exiles, one in which the suffering of the prophet and the suffering of God are not separable.
current conceptualising of the phenomenon of grief. A range of studies provide material suggesting identifiable patterns and features of grief. Switzer provides a broadly based definition.

The complex interaction of affective, cognitive, physiological and behavioural responses to the loss by any means of a person, place, thing, activity, status, bodily organ etc. with whom (or which) a person has identified, who (or which) has become a significant part of an individual’s own self (Switzer 1997:472).

The crucial concept is loss, and the experience of loss necessarily occurs only in relation to something that once was present. The presence of ‘the something’ is in this definition a significant presence, something with which the person has identified. The identification is such that ‘the something’ has become part of the self. The primary and prior condition of grief is a condition of attachment. A breaking of attachments is experienced as ‘one’s own breaking, the death of significant aspects of one’s own self” (Switzer 1997:472).

Response to such an event is grief, a process rather than a state which has a recognisable structure (Parkes 1972). Theorists describe the stages of grieving in a range of ways, for example Kubler-Ross (1969). Spiegel (1978:59-98) identifies four distinguishable though inextricably connected phases in a grief process. Numbness and denial, typically lasting about seven days; yearning, an experience of up to several weeks; disorganisation and despair that may persist for a year or more; and eventually a place of reorganisation of life, though this may never be completed.

Beverley Raphael writes: ‘Each person must make his [sic] way through life encompassing two important facts. If he loves, there will be the great rewards of human intimacy, in its broadest sense; and yet when he does so, he becomes vulnerable to the exquisite agony of loss’ (Raphael 1984:402). Loss is the correlate of love, a reality so problematic for us that we have developed a vast and complex array of defences against this knowledge. The choice for the individual (and society) is either ‘to learn to bear the pain of loss that must inevitably be faced; to learn . . . compassion’ or to ‘flee’ the pain. (Raphael 1984:405). Jeremiah chose the former path, a core component of the prophetic tradition.

---

148 I draw on material from ministry studies in the field of pastoral care, which interestingly overlaps the prophetic tradition here.

149 The term ‘mourning’ is used for the psychological processes whereby the bereaved gradually undoes the psychological bonds that bound him [sic] to the deceased” (Raphael 1984:33).
Incomplete grieving needs to be distinguished from arrested grief. Of particular interest is the existence of what is called pathological (morbid, atypical, unresolved) grief. In this situation the person does not continue to move towards some resolution, but remains fixated on a particular symptom or stage of a grief process. There is an ‘adoption in a rigid and inflexible manner of one or a small number of the mechanisms and behaviours of that stage’ (Switzer 1997:474). I draw attention in a provisional way to an apparent correlation between anger, silence, numbness and denial, and material presented in the previous chapter. It is, however, clear that grief in relation to Earth will not exist without prior attachment.\textsuperscript{150} Cathexis to the natural world cannot be assumed and this issue will be taken up later in this chapter.\textsuperscript{151}

Implications for grief flow from the analysis of two world-views discussed in chapter three. A paradigm of disconnection (based on atomism) will not be characterised by attachment. (The unit parts are held together, but in an external way without affective or physiological dimensions.) An alternative paradigm of connection upholds attachment at its core. The nature and complexity of the links or bonds is a critical question. Thus, in this transitional context of uncertain cosmology, grief will also be a dislocated phenomenon, an entanglement of confused and conflicting threads.

Rationalism which disavows our materiality denies or shifts sideways our grief for Earth’s body of which we are part. ‘Sado-dispassionate’ constructions of reality obliterate grief. Similarly our anthropocentrism, in privileging the human, takes a position of unconcern not grief. Prophetic ministry concerns the process of owning the critique, of appropriating it within the shifting power structures built on these narratives. Sometimes I am among those who cry out in protest, sometimes I am among those who persist or acquiesce in oppressive silencing structures and sometimes I am among those who grieve. If my identity shifts in these ways, what will facilitate less numbness and more ‘embrace of pathos’? Or is the task to discern that numbness may be in part at least, the first stage of grief, and possibly arrested grief?\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{150} Though not the main line of argument here, prior attachment may indeed exist in a visceral and deeply unconsciousness way, and be all the more potent for that.

\textsuperscript{151} Brueggemann’s choice of grief as the primary concept rather than suffering is consonant with this material. His concern is for ministry as dynamic, not static. Grief too is a process to be lived.

\textsuperscript{152} In the process of writing this chapter I came to a standstill. Attending to my own experience I discovered that this was a manifestation of grief that had become overwhelming and that my own grief for Earth was enmeshed with other griefs. I needed (and found) a form for moving forward in the process.
Mathews’ re-conceptualising of matter brings some clarity. The material split from the ideal, the poetic from the scientific, blocks grief. An inherent togetherness of mind and matter opens a pathway. Re-conceiving ourselves in engagement with a re-animated world provides a place from which to begin to own our experience. In doing this, hidden, long suppressed yearnings and connections begin to appear in their rightful place. A nameless pain can be named at last. It becomes possible to see some of what lies beneath.

The objectification of nature, its casting as mere matter, emerges as itself cause for grief. It is the ‘mere’ that is the problem. In the context of a series of visits over a number of years to a hamlet named Barramunga in the beautiful Otway Ranges in Victoria, Mathews reflects on the pervasiveness of grief in our culture. Even in this setting of pastoral delight (along with the violence of predators and hidden histories) attending to the other-than-human world, the nurturing of rapport is accompanied by sorrow.

Logging trucks come up and trundle down the Falls Road all day. I can hear - always - the familiar whine of the chain saw in the distance. . . . This is surely part of the reason for the sadness that, despite all the changes of mood throughout the day, always seems to linger in the evening smoke here at Barramunga. But if one is to come here at all, indeed if one is simply to live in the present world, one must adjust to this sadness, like people living in a war zone. There is no place in which one can find refuge from it. Everywhere is either ecologically uncertain or in decline. Lands are quietly dying. And the biggest threats are often in the remotest regions. Who could contain this sadness now, or hold it? It is our sky, the air we breathe, the very matrix of our lives. It stares out at us from behind the implacable smiles of our public and private faces, from the eyes that meet ours so intimately in the morning mirror. We are leaking sadness now, like doomed vessels (Mathews 2005:169).

This sense of living in a war zone, of disasters all about us and the attendant milieu of grief is not about to disappear any time soon, as the impact of climate change increases. The question of containment, of what could possibly be large enough to hold such sadness is a huge issue. The prophetic task involves finding symbols adequate or deep enough to hold the pain (Brueggemann 2001:45).

Poets and artists are exemplars of the prophets in our culture, articulating grief. A dominant form of expression of grief for humans is language, and especially poetry. The domination of techne in its modern form locates a place of immense grief. ‘[P]oetry acquires a new significance when the earth and its atmosphere, along with humans themselves, have been

---

153 An alternative pathway mapped by Mathews belongs in the following chapter. However a starting place arises here.
reduced to mere raw material to be technologically manipulated, reconstructed and commodified’ (Rigby 2004a:431). The work of the poet arises from attunement, born of attachment to Earth, from loss inherent in such laying waste. Poetry once in the world creates a place in which to stay awhile (to begin to experience our experience), opening possibilities for disclosure of ‘tones of grief, protest, accusation or exhortation’ (Rigby 2004a:439). For example, in her poem “The Slope” Australian poet Judith Wright (1990) declares ‘the sickness of despair’ as she confronts the horror vision of ourselves at this time as creatures with an instinct for self-destruction. Following like a hound, we are ‘the instrument of this planet’s death’. Her grief ‘[e]ven on the last black slope / among mad images that rave or weep,’ is also an act of defiance and, in accomplishing this herself, so it creates a space for others.

**Ecopsychological perspectives**

In this section I explore how understandings of the structure of the psychic self relate to grief. Interstructuration exists between social domination, psychic repression and the mastery of nature (Rigby 2004b:9). There is a continual flow between inner and outer, that can be imagined as a public-private-public continuum (Keller 1986:248). Maintaining this flow is a dimension of a model of a connected (as opposed to separate) self. I discuss two analyses of the self in relation to our mastery of nature, from within the paradigm of connectedness. Both hold implications for ecogrief.

Setting a model of the self in an evolutionary context, Shepard’s analysis of our culture focuses on ‘ontological crippling’, discussed in the previous chapter. This leads to an interpretation of silence, and violence as retaliatory rage, linked with loss – the loss of connection with the natural world, the ‘loss of birthright’. Our culture exhibits features of arrested development resulting from ‘flimsy identity structures’. Further questions now need to be asked concerning these structures. How will such loss be brought to conscious awareness? What would facilitate movement out of this rigidity? What would it mean to grieve?

Mathews’ (2003) model of the self conceptualised in terms of three levels of consciousness, and presented in the Pan, Psyche and Eros narrative provides a critical insight into the place of suffering and vulnerability in the Western world. Eros, the primal energy that reaches out

---

154 Another approach would be to understand this as coming to more conscious awareness.
to life, is the subject of negotiation between the three levels. The journey is a journey into consciousness, into selfhood. It is Psyche’s journey and begins in an unawoken state: brute, blind, appetitive (and connected to Pan). Movement into self-consciousness is the second stage. In Western culture this is our socialisation, the formation of a culturally mediated identity. A third stage accomplishes a refining of Eros, a self with capacity for intersubjective encounter, connected to, but differentiated from, the surrounding matrix (Mathews 2003:114-152). Mathews’ argument is that selves (and whole cultures) can and do remain arrested at the second stage, with a repression of Eros and confusion and backgrounding in relation to Pan. The question now concerns why?

Clinging to this stage serves a purpose. Mathews argues it is a strategy of control, a means of avoiding the suffering that Eros inevitably brings. The risk of connection is exposure to loss, and the potential for harm is immense. To open ourselves erotically to the world requires a sense of the world as trustworthy, and trust requires implies an assessment of vulnerability to suffering (Mathews 2003:87). Her discussion rests on interpretations of the narratives of the Garden of Eden and the Christ story, which are examined for ‘the light they can shed on the religious imagination of one of the archaic societies in which Western civilization was born’ (Mathews 2003:90). Whilst hers are not the only possible readings, Mathews argues that they have been prevalent in Western culture. The Genesis story offers an ambivalent response to the experience of individuation, by ‘proposing a path of repression and control’, and the Christ story retains a dualistic sense of the world as a realm of exile, but offers an escape through a path of redemption (Mathews 2003:89-112).

These views of the self raise profound questions concerning grief. Does capacity to truly grieve rest on (or even is part of the accomplishment of) movement into the third level of consciousness? Here the self has become awakened, vulnerable, able to live in intersubjective contact and to bear the suffering of such connective power. Or, does the recognition of loss attending grief carry one into it?

What does this mean in relation to grief for Earth? Subsequently, Mathews (2005) draws on the psychoanalytically concept of cathexis to explore our connection with (and disconnection from) the natural world. She begins with a story entitled “A white heron”, in which the

---

155 Global warming is an immense harm; openness to being vulnerable (the third stage of consciousness) an immense risk.

156 Written by nineteenth century American writer, Sarah Orme Jewett.
central conflict is between a ‘shy female wild-child’ and a ‘socialised city boy’ (Mathews 2005:115-118).

It tells of a shy, pale child, Sylvia, who is given up at the age of eight by an impoverished family in an industrial town to be raised by a country grandmother. The grandmother is also poor, but with fresh milk, eggs, and vegetables and freedom to run, the child loses her apathy and at last begins to thrive. Through her close communion with the wild birds and animals of the fields and woods surrounding the house, she finds an unselfconscious fulfilment and feels “as if she never had been alive at all until she came to live at the farm” (Mathews 2005:116).

Cathexis in psychoanalytic theory is ‘the orectic charge that a particular object possesses for a subject’ (Mathews 2005:118). Sylvia reaches out to the wild world, focussing her orectic attention on it and as a consequence becomes psychically involved, connected. The handsome young man who arrives is looking for a rare white heron he has heard lives in the region. He is, it turns out, an ornithologist who is collecting specimens – with his gun. He can be understood as a self whose developmental path is the one with which we are more familiar, where cathexis is made only – if at all - with human others.

The initial psychic reaching out of the infant is a primary cathexis seeking ‘to establish an intersubjective bond with one who is primally present to it’ (Mathews 2005:118). This is typically understood as to the other (or mother figure). Our coming into being as a self, as a subject happens in contact with another. But the issue of to whom the original cathexis is made has massive implications. More than one possibility exists, though contemporary psychoanalytic theory does not normally recognise this. Rather, this theory rests on the ‘unavowed metaphysical premise . . . that the non-human world lacks subjectival dimension’ (Mathews 2005:122), that is, a materialist view. Cathexis is understood as confined to the human subject. Thus the whole question of our identity formation is firmly anchored in processes of socialisation, understood anthropocentrically, in culture separated from nature.

Little or no cathexis to the other-than-human world necessarily means little or no sense of loss at its damage.

---

157 Orexis being ‘a state of desire, where the desire in question may be understood appetitively, socially or spiritually – it is simply longing per se, literally “stretching out for” or “stretching out after”’ (Mathews 2005: 118).

158 The child-mother interrelationship can be understood as the initial mode of interconnection with Earth.

159 An alternative developmental path exists, such as that taken by Indigenous peoples. Cathexis to the natural world is a psychological foundation for re-inhabitation, a praxis of dwelling addressed in chapter five.
There is a further consequence. Mathews discusses the conflict that arises when the object of cathexis is at the same time the primary agent of socialisation. In her analysis it is this overlap that leads to the damage. It is a conflict that intimately involves sexuality and gender with outcomes for ‘our modern (sadistic) attitude to reality’ (Mathews 2005:122).

Exploration is beyond the scope of this thesis. Psychological analysis of the roots of our violence towards our Earth home contributes to understanding rage arising from loss and is important for ecoministry that attends to grief.

In practice, there is not a clear either/or situation between cathexis to human and cathexis to other-than-human worlds. Many of us have childhood memories, often a particular one, in which a connection with the natural world appears as numinous, fully alive. Berry’s (1999:12-20) experience in the meadow is the heart-energy of his work (see also Wallace’s swimming in the Singing River (2005:1-2). Mathews speaks of those one or two images ‘that first open childhood’s heart’ (Mathews 2005:133) and describes the particular delicacy of the pain that may exist.

Loss of a childhood place is a loss that we don’t necessarily easily identify. Writing of a return to her own Braeside childhood home-place Mathews speaks of a ‘nameless pain’. The place that haunts her childhood memories of the little creek, the huge manna gums, riding in the dawn on her Welsh Mountain pony, the almond trees and the chook run, the crane keeping watch, finding the first snowdrops in the dew-wet grass, has been transformed into an horror strip rezoned as heavy industrial, a concrete wasteland, warehouses, a car graveyard, the creek a drain and not a blade of grass (though there is a wisp of grace in the presence of the crane still standing guard). There is ‘an aching love’ for her place – a love for which our modern languages lack words. For this love of place is not like other loves, of people or animals, artefacts, activities, causes. A loved being or thing or idea is held by us, held in our arms, in our imagination; our love casts a glow around it. But a loved place holds us, even if it exists only in memory; it causes everything within it, including ourselves, to glow. A loved place is not encompassed by our love; we are encompassed, loved, breathed into life, by it. There is little recognition or articulation of this kind of relation between self and world in modern Western thought – little attention to categories that express the way the world makes room for us as opposed to the way we act on it, impose ourselves upon it. But many of us sense this accommodation, sense that we are indeed received, and feel a huge but nameless emotion in response. When we witness a place in which the world has made room for us overlaid with cement and tarmac, banded in steel, so that every last breath – the breath it imparted to us – is pressed from it, we feel a nameless pain. Being nameless, we have no option but to treat it as of little consequence, never suspecting how we
are diminished by the violent termination of these holdings, these impartings, that are, in fact foundational to our being. (Mathews 2005:8-9)

The loss here is elusive. It is as if this loss has its roots at the edges of consciousness, almost out of reach. Being unnamed it holds power. The loss is double. The loss of what exists no more, and the loss because language itself falters, does not provide the structures we need for naming. Being left with ‘a nameless emotion’ reduces us, for a part of the self, cathected to a cherished place, remains unavailable to us.

In psychological theory, the essence of the process of grief as response to loss involves giving up what is lost. It is to withdraw investment in the physical reality of the other and eventually renew meaningful relationships and activities without the lost one. Ecoministry, drawing on this understanding requires an intentionality in relation to lost places – first allowing the knowledge of the loss, in the same way that unequivocal acceptance of the real death of a loved human other is the prerequisite for healthy mourning.

Displacement grief, patterns of psychic distress related to place have been extensively documented. ‘Place pathology’ as seen in American Navajo people, for example, has been discussed by Casey (1993:22-39) and similar features experienced by displaced European Americans. Grief from loss of relationship with place appears as a consistent theme in Peter Read’s studies in the Australian context (Read 1996). This grief had been unrecognised both in the wider culture and in the experience of individuals. Attachments, broken in external reality, still needed to be mourned and healed in inner psychic worlds.

Another form of grief is identified by environmental philosopher, activist and advocate Glen Albrecht who conducted research into ecodistress in the Hunter Region of New South Wales. Human health and ecosystem health are recognised as interrelated. People were concerned about the sheer scale of environmental impacts. . . . In their attempts to halt the expansion of open cut coal mining and to control the impact of power station pollution, individuals would ring me at work pleading for help with their cause. Their distress about the threats to their identity and wellbeing, even over the phone, was palpable (Albrecht 2005:41).

---

160 These dynamics of grief can be understood through different theoretical positions. For example, in interpersonal theories grief is related to interactions with the external physical and social environment. In particular the individual infant’s experience of loss in the going away of the primary caregiver can be understood to set the pattern for subsequent losses. Other studies (Bowlby and Parkes 1972) have demonstrated continuity between humans and other animals and describe the phenomenon of imprinting. Broken attachments lead to searching and mourning behaviours linked with the initial imprinting.
The phenomenon is occurring when people are still at home. To be and remain in a situation of high impact constellates many factors that lead to place-based distress. At heart this is a breaking of attachments, a loss of the previously ‘normal’ relationship between identity and home. This research focuses desolation, lack of solace that comes from an intact self-place relationship, and requires a new concept. ‘Solastalgia’ is ‘the pain or sickness caused by loss or lack of solace and the sense of isolation connected to the present state of one’s home or territory’ (Albrecht 2005: 45).

Farming families whose occupation of the valley goes back to the first half of the nineteenth century are being evicted from their properties while others who are not in the direct line of fire are being literally undermined by extractive industries. They are having their lives made intolerable by the wholesale assault on the ecosystem health of the bioregion manifest as toxic air pollution, constant noise, excessive dust and increasing salinisation of the Hunter River. The net result is a community in a stressed landscape where stressed people experience the deep distress of solastalgia while others (the region and the State) profit at their expense (Albrecht 2005:54).

This material focuses on rural and regional Australia and helpfully brings into view lived experience in these areas. While a range of studies have investigated mental illness among farming communities the factor of land degradation itself is not usually present and it is especially poignant when some of this loss is a direct consequence of farmers’ own practices.

Albrecht names positive and negative responses to solastalgia. ‘Sublimating’ or ‘diluting’ leads to a range of social, physical and mental health problems. Positive reactions include involvement in protecting, restoring and rehabilitating the bioregion that is home. Direct action, Land Care groups and resistance to being silenced are ways of investing the energy of grief. That is, grief properly recognised can become the transition into alternatives; this is the subject of the following chapter. People doing this are living ecoprophetically. Grief as radical criticism finds a creative path onwards. The concept of solastalgia usefully names experience, and locates the presence of grief that is place-based and linked with identity.

Capacity to act raises the question of what provides holding or containment for ecogrief. I am exploring in this thesis the holding power of narrative and place. Where connections have

161 This concept holds an allusion to nostalgia. Until the middle of the twentieth century this was a diagnosable psycho-physiological illness, sickness caused by the inability to return home. The word holds together nostos (to return home or native land), and algia (pain or sickness). Though more recent usage lets slip the geographical component and keeps the longing for lost times, Albrecht’s intention is to retain the link with place.

162 Albrecht (2005:49) cites reports of increasing rates of depression and suicide in rural and regional Australia. Deaths through suicide now occur at around double the rate of that of the general Australian male population.
been ‘violently terminated’ in hidden ways it is likely losses have been hugely underestimated. What is needed in order to recognise, name and mourn?

The loss of birthright, which in an evolutionary frame is a relationship with the world (from which we emerged), is in Shepards’s view associated with loss of an adequate metaphor of order-making. The only adequate metaphor deep enough to hold our ‘madness’ and possibilities for healing is the natural world itself. In what sense is this metaphor, and how might it be order-making? Brueggemann is clear that the providing of adequate symbols is one of the key tasks of the prophet, symbols which cannot simply be devised but need to be listened for, and arise from within the deep currents of the crisis itself.

Mathews’ presentation of the ecological crisis symbolically in the Eros and Psyche (and Pan) narrative leads to a similar conclusion. Pan has been excluded and re-inclusion is a way forward. Our loss of erotic connection with the natural world, suppressed in order to avoid suffering, is named by re-interpreting the story. Nevertheless this story is not as widely known in Western culture as the Garden and the Christ stories. Is it possible that one or both of these stories might also be read otherwise, without loss of their identity, in a way that recognises the place of suffering and grief without repression and control and in relation to the natural world?

Holding for loss may be explored in several directions, through re-interpreting some existing cultural narratives and by re-instating the world from which all symbolic constructions arise. Cathexis needs to occur to the particular other-than-human world. Our enframing frames the natural world in such a way that its powers of disclosure are blocked. Re-instating this world involves uncovering its stories, letting ‘language take root once again in the earthen silence of shadow and bone and leaf’ (Abram1997:274) and risking openness to encounter. The natural world is both metaphor and more than metaphor. In functioning as order-making in the presence of loss, the natural world provides its own holding power. Responses to losses, to Earth’s cry, can be blocked or allowed. Adequate symbolising needs to include recognition of the pain of loss, and the blessing of adequate grieving. It is the way an organism moves towards healing, the way ‘the secret person undamaged in each of us’ finds life. As a culture I suspect we are, without our knowing it, as enmeshed in multiple webs of loss (and grief) as we are in the multiple webs of silences.\textsuperscript{163}

\textsuperscript{163} The work of Joanna Macy (1983, 1989, 1998), ecophilosopher, Buddhist, general systems theorist and deep ecologist, is foundational in the field of ecological grieving, and has spread through many countries.
Grief in the Australian context

Socio-political silencing in Australia exists as a response to colonising dispossession and continues in the name of progress, as discussed in the previous chapter. Beneath these multiple silences lie terrible, unimaginable losses. A description of these in summary form is almost another act of violence. The original and continuing violence perpetuates losses that accumulate daily. These are losses for Indigenous peoples, species, ecologies and losses of place. The doubling of violence (Rose 2004:7), to use Rose’s term, at least doubles losses. The even more sinister circumstance where a system is becoming so disabled that it cannot repair itself raises further questions about the nature of the losses, and whether the possibility of healing grief exists. What has happened to these multiple, complex griefs?

The enormity and sensitivity of this situation leave me hesitant to proceed, yet Rose’s analysis and project provides essential material for any conceptualising of ecoministry. Although her primary concern is not grief but ethics, there is an enfolding here that re-shapes and enlarges concepts of grief. Her reading (in way similar to Brueggemann’s) is that silencing, an amnesic cloaking of terrible histories, is a form of callous indifference, a desire for comfort and protection from harshness and violence (Rose 2004:47). Without disputing this, one can ask about the place of grief and what might begin to penetrate such rigid patterns.

The debate in Australia concerning engagement of cultural narratives of the past with the present, the ethical basis of our society, is passionate and conflicted. Some turns on themes of guilt. Rose is clear that this is not her main focus and that she rejects concepts of collective guilt. Rather she takes up a more challenging path. Beginning with recognition of violence in the past, her project is to link this into an ethics of decolonisation. (Rose 2004:1-8). She neither stops at guilt nor avoids the violence. In order to do this she draws on a distinction made by Levinas between guilt and responsibility. Here, guilt is conceptualised as ‘the burden I or the other may carry for our specific actions or comportment’, while responsibility is ‘the burden upon me of the other’s vulnerability to suffering’ (Rose 2004:12). This beautifully expresses in other language the core of the prophetic tradition with which I am working.

Openness to, and acceptance of, responsibility in this sense are the core of this understanding of ethics, and necessarily entails grief. The form of ethics Rose discusses has as its foundation connectedness and relation between all things. In philosophical terms ‘ethics precedes ontology’; in practical terms ‘humans are brought into being already called into
ethics by others’ (Rose 2004:7). While ethics can be understood abstractly, in this understanding ethics are always situated and are never a closed system. This form of ethics is ‘a way of living . . . in openness to the vulnerability of others’ (Rose 2004:8).

Who are the others? To be situated is to acknowledge being inextricably in relationship with bodies, with place and with time. Rose notes the enormous implications of this position for a culture still living out of a cosmology of disconnection and an orientation to the future. ‘Our seeming indifference to the losses that colonisation entails’ is still tragically pervasive (Rose 2004:8). Looked at from the other side ‘the justification . . . of a neighbour’s pain is certainly the source of all immorality’ (Rose, citing Levinas, 2004:7). The use of ‘neighbour’ here has strong links into Christian narratives, which can and need to be interpreted to include Indigenous people’s initial and continuing pain. Further, if genocidal and ecocidal actions are indivisible, neighbour includes the other-than-human world.

Losses, human and other-than-human, appear vividly. Recognition is the first move away from violence, where violence is acting as if one were alone, not in relation, a disconnected, separate self. A path of decolonisation offers a way of taking up responsibility that is inherently (without being the primary goal) a move out of numb silence into the multiple pathways of shared grief. A refusal to move becomes a further violence.

Loss is not only loss borne by humans for other humans. ‘[L]oss is experienced in place’ (Rose 2004:49). Ethics are situated not only in relation to particularity of social, cultural settings but in relation to the natural world. The natural is not adequately represented by the abstracted statistics that characterise our telling of environmental crises. Situatedness calls up the particularity of place. This is important because it is from within place that an openness to vulnerability can begin to be practised, and from within place that the seeds and shapes of paths forward begin to emerge.

Places of loss are places marked by absence, and so are wounded. This is a striking way to imagine a place. In the sweeping context of geomorphology, over millions of years, changes, absences, are not necessarily thought of as wounds. The slow, the gigantic, the sudden, the explosive movements of enormous pressures, rock, water, air and fire are the stuff of the universe. To know ourselves as part of this immensity and to love with respect is in shocking contrast to the violence of short-term disregard that wounds, maims, kills.

---

164 An analysis of time as neither linear nor homogenous is a critical premise for Rose. Continuity and discontinuity in Western cultural constructions of time link with violence. Alternatives, especially in Aboriginal understandings of time, are part of recuperative work (Rose 2004:25-26).
Traumascapes is a term to refer to ‘places that are repetitively bound by violence’ (Rose 2004:49). Histories and memories lie as it were ‘silent in, or addressing us through, the continent’s ground’. The wound of colonisation inevitably appears in any exploration of particular place. Trauma finds voice as we learn attentiveness. Tumarkin writes of ‘the burden of traumascapes’ and our capacity to relieve some of such burdens, in the accepting of responsibility for the memories and histories that lie here (Rose 2004:49).

A major issue exists where the loss of the place is grieved because the place itself no longer exists. In the environmental movement, attending to place, to places one loves, is sometimes simply a powerful act of witness, of witness to loss. Researching the meaning of lost places leads Read to a realisation of the power of place. ‘Let us not underestimate the effect which the loss of dead and dying places has on our own self-identity, mental well-being and sense of belonging’ (Read in Rose 2004:51). And ‘those who witness to the loss of place, especially when place is lost to the colossus of development, take up a moral burden’ (Rose 2004:51), a work that brings the natural world into the sphere of ethics.

The damming of the beautiful mountain Lake Pedder in Tasmania in 1973 is an example offered by Rose; a poignant narrative of witness and loss has been written about it by Kevin Kiernan. The dam was required for the production of hydro-electricity.

Opposition to the plan was vigorous. . . Dodgers, posters, clothing, newsletters, books, poems, public meetings, political parties, committees, films, scientific reports, inquiries, stickers, vigils, depositions and petitions were among the measures employed to halt the inundation. All failed.

Arguments based on reason failed: it was clear that there were perfectly viable alternatives, and at one point the Commonwealth offered to pay for one of them in order to save the lake. Arguments based on science, on poetry, love, and passion also failed. Opposition continued well after the lake had been dammed in the hope that it could be restored (Kiernan; Read in Rose 2004:51).

This experience of ethical action, vulnerability, witness, final failure and brutal loss is a powerful statement concerning the unfolding processes of grief, a stunning, contemporary manifestation of ecoprophetic grief.

One expression of Indigenous grief in the following poem offers a delicate, haunting glimpse of the terrible histories and memories hidden in place, and the grief almost beyond bearing of lost place and time.
We Are Going
For Grannie Coolwell

They came in to the little town
A semi-naked band subdued and silent,
All that remained of their tribe.
They came here to the place of their old bora ground
Where now the many white men hurry about like ants.
Notice of estate agent reads: ‘Rubbish May Be Tipped Here’.
Now it half covers the traces of the old bora ring.
They sit and are confused, they cannot say their thoughts:
‘We are as strangers here now, but the white tribe are the strangers.
We belong here, we are of the old ways.
We are the corroboree and the bora ground,
We are the old sacred ceremonies, the laws of the elders.
We are the wonder tales of Dream Time, the tribal legends told.
We are the past, the hunts and the laughing games, the wandering camp fires.
We are the lightning-bolt over Gaphembah Hill
Quick and terrible,
And the Thunder after him, that loud fellow.
We are the quiet daybreak paling the dark lagoon.
We are the shadow-ghosts creeping back as the camp fires burn low.
We are nature and the past, all the old ways
Gone now and scattered.
The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter.
The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place.
The bora ring is gone.
The corroboree is gone.
And we are going.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker) (Noonuccal 1988:261)

I am one of the many ‘white men’ hurrying about like ants, white ants. I am part of the
almost overwhelming tide of development. I have dealt with estate agents, I ‘own’ (though I
cannot use this word now) land, with a house. My rubbish gets tipped somewhere, indeed I
live at the edge of a site of wounding. Now a park, previously a tip and a tip because there
was a gigantic hole. The hole, a quarry, was left as the basalt rock, heart of this country, was
torn out for building Melbourne.165 What did happen in this place before we came? Do I live
at the edge of what was a bora ring? What memories lie here, not even traces in the ground
because the ground itself has been trucked away. ‘The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the
laughter.’ I have not yet begun to mourn in my place. I can learn from Rose that there is a
pathway forward.

---

165 This imagery is from a poem by John Anderson. Melbourne . . . ‘replaced that native excitement
with / pain / tore the heart out of the stone’ (1995:6).
There is a complex issue of belonging here: who are the strangers, who belongs? ‘We are as strangers here now, but the white tribe are the strangers. / We belong here, we are of the old ways.’ I am stranger, yet increasingly I have a sense of belonging. Settler peoples and belonging also holds the theme of grief calling to be unravelled, quietly, patiently, listening deeply to its confusion, staying when unable to say our thoughts.

This poem, incredibly, gifts us by creating a space for attending to experience. For ecoministry, alternatives arise ‘in the midst’, in the particularity of place, in the here and now. They arise ‘unexpectedly in relationships among people, and between people and place’ (Rose 2004:6). No blueprints exist for this. One place to begin is with the courage to accept the presence of loss and the process of grief.

**How does Christianity contribute to and block grief for Earth?**

The silencing power of the Christian tradition in relation to Earth’s cry was discussed in the previous chapter. To that extent the tradition is necessarily functioning in ways that block ecogrief. This is a situation of enormity commensurate with the magnitude of the silencing. However the tradition also holds memories of blocks cracking or rolling away. The work of ecotheology is uncovering hidden, suppressed elements. Does grief appear?

The ecohumanities project cross-cutting the binaries of Western thought that impede action involves re-situating culture in nature, where ‘nature’ is understood both as a given and as a cultural construction. The challenge then is dual for ecotheology, involving both symbol systems and the methodological issue of including Earth as particular ‘common ground’: that is, how to engage not only with disincarnate symbol systems, but also with incarnate matter. This move re-establishes connections that have always been there. It is an acknowledgement that being is relational, involves attachments, and attachments severed, repressed, denied, slaughtered implicitly carry the event of grief.

Does the divine participate in Earth grief? How are we even to frame this question? I explore this issue first by returning to Ruether’s *Gaia and God* (1992) in search of usable ideas from an analysis of cultural roots that might nurture a healed relationship to Earth and to each other. This approach gives priority to culture and does not attend to the given of ‘nature’. Nevertheless it provides a starting place. The relationship between ideas and narrative is sometimes subtle; I will attend to her assessment of the classical narratives of sin and evil (Ruether 1992:115-142).
The sense that ‘things are not as they should be’ is fundamental in human experience (Ruether 1992:115). The interlocking systems of domination already discussed are also linked with interpretations of the presence of suffering in the world. Clearly this topic is beyond the scope of this work. However, the three traditions examined by Ruether, the Hebrew, the Platonic-Greek and the Pauline-Augustinian, provide a helpful map of the Christian tradition, within which a discussion of ecogrief needs to be situated. Her conclusions highlight the deeply problematic contribution of Christianity to the Western world. Sin, understood as both ‘ethical and metaphysical’, as both ‘disobedience and finitude’, lies at the core. This has led as much to the justification of evil as to repentance from evil; a position where ‘humanity is culpable for its own finitude has laid on Christians an untenable burden of guilt’ (Ruether 1992:139).

Is there grief here too? Certainly confusion exists along with guilt. Mortal life as sin, has led to a spirituality and ethics that neglect, deny and denigrate our common heritage, our common story, our relationship with other-than-human beings, to the neglect of Earth. Such enmeshing of sin, guilt, mortality and death would seem to block the empathic connection required for grief. At the core of the Christian tradition lies a misuse of freedom to exploit other humans and Earth, which violates the basic relations that sustain life. Life is sustained by biotic relationality, in which the whole attains a plentitude through mutual limits in interdependency. When one part of the life community exalts itself at the expense of the other parts, life is diminished for the exploited. Ultimately, exploiters subvert the bases of their own lives as well, generating an expanding cycle of poisonous hostility and violence (Ruether 1992:141). The prophetic imagination breaks this cycle through grief.

For Ruether, recoverable elements in the Hebrew view of evil lie in the prophetic tradition: unjust relations, preferential option for the poor, repentance, advocacy for the oppressed and the need to name the ways we benefit from injustice. Sin and evil are more than the sum of individual choices and take form in powerful systems. In addition, the notion of the divided self from the Pauline-Augustinian tradition names the capacity of the self to act against its own interests (Ruether 1992:142). Moreover, drawing on the book of Amos and the book of Jonah, Ruether recognises a movement towards universalism and concern for all beings of creation over against cultic privilege (Ruether 1992:119-122).

---

166 Rose’s orientation towards responsibility rather than guilt avoids some of this problematic complexity.
In approaching the not-right-ness of Earth-human relations Wallace develops an understanding of the Spirit, not only as enfleshed, winged, nurturing, green, feminine, but also as wounded. He explores possibilities within Christian iconography of divine grief beginning from a Trinitarian theology/model. In an unorthodox yet ‘historically vibrant’ way (Wallace 2005:115), Wallace draws together Spirit and wound. His attention was arrested by a set of four paintings in the Vatican Museum. These paintings were done in the 1990s by the French artist Bernard Buffett. The structure is Trinitarian. These paintings form a group, where The Holy Spirit is placed above The Baptism of Christ, and alongside these The Mystic Lamb is hung above The Crucifixion. They are integrated aesthetically and theologically.

What was striking however was the portrayal of the Holy Spirit not only as a hovering dove, but as a dove bleeding. In the painting the wings are delicately painted as if pinned to a cross, its legs drawn downwards, and the feet as if pinned together, the Spirit’s breast pierced by a dark and red wound. He states he knows of no other visual or textual sources that depict the Spirit as crucified like Jesus (Wallace 2005:123).

The Gospel accounts clearly relate the crucifixion of Jesus, not of the Spirit. Yet, in Buffett’s work the Holy Spirit and the Son of God suffer together. Wallace draws on Christian theological understanding of the Trinity as a legitimating source for holding together what is in tension, neither divided from one another, nor confused with one another. ‘In the Trinity of God’s inner family life, Holy Spirit and Son of God suffer together the world’s sin and degradation in a mutual experience of loss and victimization’ (Wallace 2005:124).

However, there is a second sense in which Wallace understands the presence of loss and grief to belong to Spirit. It is Spirit that ensouls Earth, ‘Spirit as God’s abiding and sustaining presence within nature’. If Spirit and Earth are one, if the Spirit is ‘cosmic nurturer of all creation’ (Wallace 2005:45) then when creation suffers, the Spirit suffers. ‘[W]henever life forms suffer loss and pain, the Spirit suffers loss and pain . . . whenever earth community is laid waste, the Spirit deeply mourns this loss and fragmentation’ (Wallace 2005:124).

---

167 All such discussions are necessarily tentative, as Wallace recognises. Rather than metaphysical assertion, the discussion concerns human imagining of the divine, always tentative, always falling short, as the tradition of negative theology so helpfully affirms.

168 Wallace when walking through the vast riches of the crowded Vatican Museums with his family saw and was profoundly confronted by a particular set of paintings. How is it that out of this vast plethora of riches and distractions it was this particular that work of art ‘spoke’ to him?

169 I have since came across a text by Charles Causley ‘From a Norman Crucifix of 1632’, which includes the line ‘I am the holy dove whom you will slay’ (Causley cited in Moore 1997:preface).
In order to appreciate and hold the difficulty of this dialectic Wallace parallels this emerging position with the work of the Council of Chalcedon in the fifth century. The doctrine known as ‘two natures’ agreed upon at Chalcedon constitutes as analogous instance of union and difference. Divine and human were/are both fully integrated in Jesus. Earth and Spirit can also be understood as one and different in this way. God as Earth Spirit is not known here only, or primarily, conceptually or theologically. In Wallace’s words ‘God as Earth Spirit lives in the ground, and circulates in water and wind, God suffers deeply the loss and abuse of our biological heritage . . .’ (Wallace 2005:128) Wallace’s work with others in retrieving Spirit-Godself opens the way towards a critical understanding of the suffering Earth.

Moltmann’s (1974) work provides a point of departure for Wallace. His context included Nazi atrocities and death camps. He questioned the classical doctrine of an inscrutable, remote deity unaffected by human suffering. If God (otherwise surely monstrous) was affected in what way was this so? ‘[T]he biblical God of love and compassion suffers the pain and loss of the victims insofar as God is really (but mysteriously) present in the lives of the many persons who died in the Shoah. God is not God unless God experiences the unspeakable torment . . .’ (Wallace 2005:130). The death, the crucifixion of Jesus is not a death of God but it is in God, ‘a terrifying event of suffering and destitution within the inner life of Godself’ (Wallace 2005:130).

Wallace’s work extends this position. ‘Jesus’ death on the cross brought death and loss into Godself, so the Spirit’s suffering from persistent environmental trauma engenders chronic agony in the Godhead’ (Wallace 2005:132). Or even more incisively ‘[t]he Spirit, then as the green body of God in the world, has also become in our time the wounded God’(Wallace 2005:134). Such a theological position understands grief to be at the heart of how things are. It is grief in the suffering of not-right-ness, grief in God in the crucifixion of Jesus, grief in God in the suffering of Nazi death camps, and it is grief in God in ecological violence, trauma and death.

For Wallace this latter situation is grounded in an embodied, specific way in the bioregion within which he lives.

Because ecological trauma deeply grieves the Spirit, we can imagine that the Spirit today is pleading with the human community to nurture and protect the fragile bioregions we all share. When we drive high-emission, gas-guzzling automobiles, refuse to recycle our waste, or eat factory-farmed food that causes needless pain to the animals around us, do we not feel the Spirit in our hearts tugging at our conscience and urging us to cause less harm and suffering toward earth community? (Wallace 2005:132)
A Spirit ‘pleading with the human community’ and ‘tugging at our conscience’ are ideas presented here in the form of rhetorical questions. Such choices are not necessarily understood as responses to the Spirit. Such an ecotheology requires appropriation, ‘conversion’ perhaps. The steps involved are momentous. Everything shifts. Foundations shake. Grief, as for Jeremiah, is the heart-source.

Returning to Keller’s work provides a further perspective. In chapter three I discussed her analysis of the silencing power of creation ex nihilo. What is it that is silenced? The presence of the biblical tehom in Genesis 2:1, appears as a ‘wisp’ of text, that is ‘culturally potent’ (Keller 2003:4-5) and holds vast poetic resonances. Tehom, the oceanic deep is later translated into Greek as abyssos, chaos (Keller 2008:49). In this verse, she observes that ‘there is no nothingness, but a whole lot of not-quite-somethingness’ (Keller 2008:48). Her work suggests the Hebrew story may be read as though it intuits our science of chaos theory. This not-quite-somethingness belongs with the tohu va bohu, (translated better in her view as ‘waste and wild’, rather than ‘waste and void’) and with ruah pulsing over the face of the waters. The poetic, rhythmic, wild becomingness could not contrast more with formless, empty, darkness. ‘[P]erhaps the notion of creation from the vibratory field of the tehom, the primal chaos, expresses – precisely as poetic metaphor – a rhythm and truth of the universe itself’ (Keller 2008:51).

If tehomophobia is systemic repression (repression that concerns the complex interlinking of matter, feminine, and the deep), then as repression it necessarily has been blocking grief. Healing will include grieving. Grieving attends to depth and takes us to the edge of chaos, from which a cosmos may unfold into being. Grief, as I have argued, has a structure, and yet the experience is messy, fluid, flowing. Is it possible that grief has been, particularly in its more messy manifestations, dismissed, or undervalued, gone unrecognised or pathologised? From within the Christian tradition, having named the silencing power of creatio ex nihilo, there appears a profound tehomic blessing for trusting the processes and event of grief.

Where this grief concerns violence done to Earth, it too can be trusted. Our attempts to understand problems and find solutions are indispensable, yet also perhaps problematic, if that is all we do. ‘Our strategies can run shallow . . . the ethical . . . high, dry, perilously utopic if not accompanied by a messier therapy’ (Keller 2003:7). Both inner repression and outer

---

170 Cited in chapter three
oppression can be transmuted into alternative forms. This work is properly identified as a dimension of ecoministry.

The Spirit vibrating and pulsing over the face of the waters is a process, and belongs in Ruether’s thought with process theology and chaos theory. Her theology of becoming (genesis) is ecotheopoetics. While she does not directly draw out the implications for grief, the grieving Spirit oscillating in rhythm with the dark tidal flows of grief provides an image of great power. Its place as creation from within (rather than from outside) helpfully positions the flow of chapters in this thesis; a movement from silence to singing through grief. ‘When theology insists upon creation/genesis from a mere void, it can render the embodiment in which we live every moment of our actual lives close to nothingness’ (Keller 2008:52).

Creation here is not that of an artefact from the hands of a divine maker, but an ongoing, open-ended becoming. The Spirit moves over our waters, surging with ambiguity and potentials that have not yet taken form. Grief is part of our becoming. Out of the matrix of thick darkness it is something, not nothing.

I would like to take one further step. Becoming evokes the need to re-imagine vocation, vocation that now needs to be our human vocation in this time of crisis. ‘[T]he opportunity that we might perhaps have been given . . . to discover, or recover, a specifically human potential to enrich, rather than impoverish, the unfolding of life in the dynamic process of continuing creation’ (Rigby 2007b:245). Key aspects of Rigby’s thought here belong in the following chapter. But among her responses to the possibilities she includes anguish and protest and our relationship to death. All of these involve the experience of grief.

The community of life is enriched by the emergence of a being, who is specifically endowed with the capacity to give voice to grief, to make (an) art out of mourning. . . . Does not love now call us to protest that dealing in double death which is today leading to the loss of ever more beings by breaking the chain of their generations for ever? (Rigby 2007b:248)

Which deaths are mourned in our culture? The horror of extinctions is a vast, perhaps the most chilling, matrix of grief. Global warming is unleashing grief as yet perhaps unspeakable. Keller’s theology of becoming out of thick watery darkness opens a new possibility, a rootedness from which the prophetic tradition can unfold in response to Earth’s

---

^171 The Hebrew *mrhpht* is translated as ‘moved’ or ‘hovered’, however it ‘connotes rather a spirit-rhythm as in the beating wings of a sea bird, the oscillation of breath, or the ebb and flow of ocean’ (Keller 2008:49).
cry. Yet the question remains. How will the givenness of Earth as well as our imagination shape our responses?

**Towards ecoministry**

My joy is gone, grief is upon me,  
my heart is sick.  
Hark, the cry of . . . Earth

For the hurt of Earth  
I am hurt,  
I mourn, and dismay has taken  
hold of me.\(^{172}\)

Ecoministry arises from, lives, names, calls forth and holds ecogrief. From a prophetic imagination ministry learns that grief is radical criticism that breaks through numbness. Engagement with ecohumanities brings insight into the structure of grief, as response to loss of significant attachments. All cries involve loss that may exist at personal and structural levels. Loss in relation to the self has implications for identity. Movement into personhood is arrested where control rather than openness to suffering is the dominant narrative. The concept of catheysis helped to identify situations where little or no grief is experienced. I identified a range of cultural griefs: loss of childhood places, dislocation from place, and solastalgia. Perhaps most radically, attending to grief for Earth in Australian culture focused the gigantic losses inflicted by settler peoples on Indigenous and ecological communities. Inclusion of place again is the most challenging task for reconceptualising ministry. Place itself has been wounded. Traumascapes exist. Narratives lie hidden, and require utterance. In a local parish this would mean discovering and attending to stories of the bioregion, to the flora and fauna lost, the ecological systems that were destroyed, to the stories of Indigenous people.\(^{173}\)

Returning to religious tradition I asked about the place of grief in ecotheological discourse. Is there a narrative that might allow our contesting hearts room to move? Ruether’s work, while not addressing grief directly, set a conceptual context. Christianity has bequeathed a set of

---

\(^{172}\) Rereading Jeremiah 8:18, 19, 21, from the opening of this chapter.

\(^{173}\) For example, it is in my bioregion, on the banks of the Merri Creek that the famous (infamous) treaty was signed between Batman and the leaders of the local Indigenous people. Conclusive evidence about the exact site continues to be discussed, but Aboriginal people maintain a site at the confluence of the Yarra River and the Merri.
confusions that are blocking grief. Reconceptualising a Trinitarian theology is beginning in the recognition of Spirit as green, incarnate and wounded. Ecogrief emerges as an aspect of the sacred.

Ministry engages not only with religious tradition and culture but also with experience. Ecoministry therefore attends to ecogrief in its multiple forms, globally and in place. Unacknowledged grief belongs with the loss of capacity for effective action, blocking the passionate, caring heart, overloaded with its own work of self-maintenance. And effective action is above all what is needed now. Ecoministry stands alongside, making a safe place to grieve. Grieving losses participates in the becoming of the universe, moving towards a healing that unfolds into new life in unpredictable ways, creating out of chaos. This is the subject of the next chapter.
Kangaroo grass,
some harvest your seeds in summer,
cherish your life.
Is it futile?
Or do they know what is sacred?
CHAPTER 5

SINGING

A prophetic narrative

‘The Israelites . . . cried out’ (Exodus 2:23).

Get you up to a high mountain,
    O Zion, herald of good tidings;
Lift up your voice with strength,
    O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
    lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
    “Here is your God!” (Isaiah 40:9)

Judah is in exile. Their condition is despair (Brueggemann 2001:63). In this famous oracle they are saying ‘My way is hidden from the LORD, / And my right is disregarded by my God’ (Isaiah 40:27). They perceive themselves to be abandoned, unseen, ignored.

To exemplify the thrust and birth of newness,174 - of something fresh, of an alternative to hopelessness – Brueggemann chooses the prophet Second Isaiah.175 Where Jeremiah’s ministry was to evoke grief, Second Isaiah takes the risk of penetrating despair. This dimension of the prophetic tradition is both alluring and requiring of extremely careful treatment. The need for care appears in Brueggemann’s insistence that Second Isaiah must always be understood and held in the context of exile, and not approached or appropriated too soon.

What has happened? Why are the Jews in exile? In the gap between chapters 39 and 40 the Assyrian superpower has fallen and Babylon has taken its place. This involved ‘the massive

174 Newness, though used by Brueggemann in the sense described, is also deeply problematic in our contemporary consumer society where it is presented as better and more desirable than the old. I will argue strongly against this position.

175 Critical scholarship generally agrees that chapters 1-39 belong with an eighth-century context (and personality), and that a long pause of approximately 160 years exists between the end of chapter 39 and the beginning of chapter 40. Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55) then is literature from the sixth century BCE and reflects a different historical crisis and theological dilemma (Brueggemann 1998:10).
destruction of the entire Jerusalem establishment – city, dynasty, temple – and the complete infrastructure of that social and theological entity’ (Brueggemann 1998:8). Such desolation led to a dispersing of the Jews, a nucleus of whom lived as displaced persons in Babylon.

This geopolitical period ‘is decisive for Judah’s subsequent self-understanding . . . a self understanding that makes exile a governing metaphor for all subsequent Judaism’ (Brueggemann 1998:9). Theologically, in chapters 1-39 these events are understood as YHWH’s judgement. In the face of such overwhelming loss, and into this silence, a voice breaks, penetrating their despair (the construction of a world in which no hidden possibilities exist). Into this scene comes the dramatic announcement: ‘Lift up your voice . . . lift it up, do not fear . . . “Here is your God”’. This is the ‘comfort’ of the opening declaration: ‘Comfort, O comfort my people,/ says your God./ Speak tenderly to Jerusalem . . . ’ (Isaiah 40:1). Comfort is not ‘solace’; it is ‘powerful intervention’ as ‘transformative solidarity’ (Brueggemann 1998:16). Second Isaiah has risked violating the perceptual field of his community and declared a totally different theological moment. 177

In this compelling poetic narrative, YHWH has accomplished the defeat of Babylon and a way opens for exiles to return home: ‘Make straight in the desert a highway’ (Isaiah 40:4). This is an announcement of good tidings, expressed in poetry, and perhaps enacted liturgically, but ‘the actual substance . . . the victory and the defeat, is an “event” to which the exiles have no access’ (Brueggemann 1998:12). Utterance, speech, poetry, and imagination are the agents of a transformation that is yet to occur.

In the prophetic tradition, announcements of good tidings take form in singing. Israel’s memory of the Exodus includes a memory of liberating songs: the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1-18), and the Song of Miriam (Exodus 15:21). The singers ‘focus on the free one

176 Though the need for the concept of solastagia indicates the importance of solace (chapter four).

177 The story line in these chapters is not complex, and, similar to the foundational Exodus narrative, concerns three primary characters: Babylon (the oppressor), Judah (helpless in exile) and YHWH (the unanticipated, hidden presence). The agon concerns ‘the unequal and exploitative relation between Babylon and Judah’, a situation ‘beyond challenge’ (Brueggemann 1998:11). It is the appearance of YHWH (as an active player) that ignites the story which ‘revolves around the contest between YHWH and Babylon, and the passionate bid for Judah to trust YHWH rather than Babylon’ (Brueggemann 1998:11).

178 The violent use of the exodus narrative has been discussed. In this song God is portrayed as the Divine Warrior (Psalm 24:8) and draws on an Ancient Near Eastern image.

179 This couplet may be one of the oldest poetic couplets in the Old Testament, and may have been composed by an eye-witness of the event. (NRSV) It appears as a second and awkward recapitulation coming after the Song of Moses which incorporates these lines as its opening. As a redactive move
and in the act of the song appropriate the freedom of God as their own freedom’ (Brueggemann 2001:16). Singing (the third of the energizing dimensions of the Exodus narrative)\textsuperscript{180} belongs with ‘radical amazement’ and is subversive ‘doxology’ (Brueggemann 2001:16-18).

Free bodies, singing (and dancing)\textsuperscript{181} are beyond the control of Pharaoh. Singing is a bodily activity, requiring ruah, vocal chords quiver and pulse; breath is taken in and flows out transformed. Sounds come into being as something we call music, and music sings what cannot be spoken, and speaks what can be said no other way. The birth narratives in Luke’s gospel remember the Song of Zechariah and the Song of Mary, both steeped in the prophetic tradition. The new beginning is so amazing it is hardly yet able to be articulated and so requires the mode of song (Brueggemann 2001:102-104).\textsuperscript{182}

What are we to make of this? In this thesis so far I have argued that the prophetic tradition honours and transmits a way of being in the world that takes cry seriously. It not only investigates why the cry exists and what prevents its being heard; it not only attends to the grief implicit in such a project, but holds in place the possibility of an alternative. Such possibility is the subject of this chapter.

To speak of possibility or hope when the cry is Earth’s cry (global and in place) appears ludicrous and naïve. Does the narrative contest between exiles in despair in Babylon and the voice of YHWH simply collapse into irrelevance? Yet the cry is a call, and the prophetic tradition offers a shape for response. If Earth’s cry is a sacred cry, our response is our

\__Phyllis Trible argues it is an example of the self critique of the text. Two traditions exist and the tension between them is allowed to remain. While destroying the power of Pharaoh the Exodus narrative also turns inward to challenge the dominance of Moses (Trible 1989:20).\__

\textsuperscript{180} The other two have already been introduced: the dark is to be trusted as the place where God is on the move, a God alert to realities of cry and a God who is partisan, who does not flinch from taking sides.

\textsuperscript{181} Miriam is accompanied by women with tambourines and dancing (Exodus 15:20).

\textsuperscript{182} The radical and the new ‘cannot be said easily in a language already sedimented and accommodated to a perspective quite different than that taken by the revolutionary. What eventually may be said must first be “sung”. One only gradually learns to hear what sounds forth from the “song” (Idhe cited in Kenny 1995:5-6).
vocation. This vocation is set on the broadest possible foundation, that of being and becoming, and its scope crosses cultural, faith, settler and Indigenous boundaries.

Is it possible to imagine a common terrestrial future? The ecological crisis can be understood as creating enormous pressure for change. Singing trusts in what is yet to be, imagines what is not yet, announces possibility where none seems to exist.

**Ecoministry as alternative praxis**

**Global warming**

‘Do I dare the definitely impossible or do I adapt myself to the unavoidable?’ (Buber 1957:193). For Buber, the prophets lived in and spoke to an actual historical hour, declaring the existence of an alternative in the pregnant moment of crisis. Global warming is a crisis almost beyond thinking. The historical hour requires choice. The possibility of choice can be denied or affirmed, but cannot be solved purely philosophically. Rather it is a question of risk, trust and action.

[D]oes an historical hour ever experience its real limits otherwise than through undertaking to overstep those limits it is familiar with? . . . For this innermost inwardness of our praxis there is no help besides trust itself . . . (Buber 1957:193).

Are there grounds for trust? For Buber, the prophetic tradition is inherently dialogical, returning and turning a mutual corresponding; in Chrétien’s terms, there is a mutual embrace of call and response. The risk is the risk of action, and opposed to despair. Inaction in the face of global warming persists and some of the roots have been discussed in chapter 2.

---

183 See chapter two.

184 Keller reconstructs the silenced wisp of text in Genesis 1:2 as a theology of ‘becoming’.

185 Buber describes two attitudes that exist in polar opposition, apocalyptic and prophecy. Apocalyptic holds everything as predetermined. ‘It knows nothing of an inner transformation of man that precedes the transformation of the world and co-operates with it; knows nothing of prophetic turning’ (Buber 1957: 204).

186 The turning of humans and the divine response are often described using the same verb, (a verb that can mean turn back, and turn away, as well as return, and turn towards). The action of man (sic) and the action of God is ‘not at all a causal but purely dialogical connection’ (Buber 1957:197).
three. The work of raising awareness has largely been accomplished, though denial is quietly being replaced by despair.\textsuperscript{187} Our systems are not designed for this scale of decision making.

Grounds for trust also need to come from science. Scientists have been providing data for decades\textsuperscript{188} and concurrently new technologies are continually being developed. Research is essential both for accurate reporting of the crisis and for solutions. Government targets for reduction of greenhouse gases in Australia and elsewhere are vigorously debated. The scientific evidence, if not ignored, is in seemingly impossible conflict with economic and political realities.

One approach is to frame the crisis as an emergency.\textsuperscript{189} The UN secretary-general Ban Ki-Moon is uncompromising. ‘This is an emergency, and for emergency situations we need emergency action . . . ’ (cited in Spratt and Sutton 2008:1). We cannot continue at the meandering, slow pace dictated by ‘business and politics as usual’, which today stands in the way of necessary change (Spratt and Sutton 2008:7). A rapid transition to a sustainable economy is required and models of emergency, as for example, during the Second World War in Britain, have been demonstrated to be workable, in spite of severe hardship.

The time frame for possible effective action is decreasing rapidly. ‘The evidence . . . has convinced us that we have only one chance to solve the global warming problem’ (Spratt and Sutton 2008:2).\textsuperscript{190} Climate change is not smooth and predictable, but non-linear. Chaotic transitions occur where a small change in energy imbalance can quickly flip a system from one state to another. At the North Pole, a tipping point has now been passed. In September

\textsuperscript{187} At a recent meeting on global warming that I attended, the audience was asked to indicate if they considered that governments would accomplish the task of reducing emissions to the levels and in the time frames the scientific data requires. One person (out of 80-90) raised a hand. This was after a detailed presentation of information and a convincing strategy for the task.

\textsuperscript{188} The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report (2007) states ‘Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global average sea level’ IPCC Summary for Policymakers (www.ipcc.ch/). One of the earliest public statements was issued by the Union of Concerned Scientists in 1992. Signed by 1670 scientists, a majority of the living recipients of the Nobel Laureate, and representing 71 countries, it issued an urgent warning and plea for change.

\textsuperscript{189} ‘A climate emergency could just as easily be called a warming, water, food, or energy emergency. The issues of global warming, water shortages, peak oil, ecosystem destruction, resource depletion, global inequity, and the threat of pandemics intersect and intertwine. Together, these threats and risk constitute a sustainability crisis or emergency’ (Spratt and Sutton 2008:7).

\textsuperscript{190} The meeting of global leaders in November 2009 is in the view of many the last chance for world leaders.
2007 research data revealed that the floating sea-ice in the polar north was disintegrating at frightening speed, and the debate took a radical new turn. The consequences of Arctic warming include the release of vast quantities of methane, a far more potent gas than carbon dioxide, from previously frozen peat bogs in the tundra.\(^{191}\)

A practice of ecoministry accepts the challenge and risks attending to this evidence. For a local faith community to act humanely now might simply mean to commit to the ecojustice journey wherever it is effectively being undertaken. A beginning could be made by using a strategic planning scenario. This is designed for a corporation or community to evaluate the data and imagine alternative futures, in a way that allows ‘people to examine the problems in-depth without prior commitment’ (Spratt and Sutton 2008:257).\(^{192}\)

A faith community is in a dangerous and unique position: it can sanction violence or act in defiance. Grief and action, lamenting and singing, go hand in hand. The midwives refused to kill the children (Exodus 1:17). We can refuse to allow the children (other-than-human as well as human) to be killed. We can choose to assent to, or to defy political inaction in the face of global warming.

**In the Australian context**

Concurrently with action in response to global warming, ecoministry takes up the challenges of living in place, in Australia. This can be understood with reference to the work of Rose as taking up responsibility for an ethics of decolonization, conceptualised as praxis, with no split between theory and practice. Here ethics is understood as vulnerable engagement in the particularity of bodies, time and place, an exploration of alternatives described in terms of counter-modernity, that is a ‘generously responsive’ rather than a reactive anti-modernity (Rose 2004:7).\(^{193}\) In Australia, Aboriginal people have facilitated the flourishing of life, of Country, for about sixty thousand years. To listen with humility is a place to begin. For settler people there exists the danger of appropriation, in a form of consumerism particularly problematic if ‘spirituality’ is divorced from ethical responsibility. Rose (2004) shares some

---

\(^{191}\) Fred Pearce terms this the “doomsday device” in *With speed and violence: why scientists fear tipping points in climate change* (2007b).

\(^{192}\) Updated versions are available at [www.climatecodered.net](http://www.climatecodered.net)

\(^{193}\) In previous chapters I briefly introduced Rose’s analysis of moral engagements with the past in the present. ‘Moral engagements with place in the present’ is the subject of the third section of her book.
gifts of her Aboriginal teachers, gifts offered with a generosity of spirit that I find truly amazing.

To listen to Aboriginal wisdom provides a view from the edge that makes visible some contours for learning a human vocation in the presence of Earth’s cry. Rose listens to one of the ‘great sages of Arnhem Land’, David Burramurra. Burramurra gives three principles, or as he calls them ‘the real human rights’:

- Do the ceremony properly for your homeland and for yourself.
- Understand the land and everything on it so you can manage it properly.
- When you are a bungawa [leader] you will stand up and do the business properly for your homeland and Australia (cited in Rose 2004:179).

Real human rights and ecological rights are mutually embedded, and concern a moral engagement with place. To do ceremony properly holds implications for ecoministry far beyond this thesis, but a beginning is made in attending to the potential enormity and power of such a priority. Understanding the land in order to manage it properly is also a principle that shocks and invites. The last statement implies that these human/ecological rights are relevant to every Australian.

But what might these three signposts/invitations/requests mean? For Rose they are ‘powerfully provocative’, and the provocation involves ‘an urgency for stories’ (Rose 2004:184). Stories offer a path. Some stories ‘would turn us towards expressivity, connection and recuperative action’, and others ‘would sustain our awareness of loss’ (Rose 2004:184). Both sets of stories would engage us with Aboriginal people ‘whose capacity to listen to the world’s expressivity is both local and fine-tuned’ (Rose 2004:189). The presence of two groups of stories affirms the prophetic insight concerning a dynamic relationship between grief and the capacity to act.

Australians can learn the land and practices of care. Such learning can be framed in terms of stories. A commitment to ecological knowledge is a clear outcome and one not traditionally encompassed in understandings of ministry. Ecological, social and spiritual relationships that are held separate for those enculturated into the paradigm of modernity exist for Indigenous

---

194 Burrumarra’s principles are set provocatively in relationship to the Christian tradition. ‘The Bible and the Cross help us to remember Christianity and to believe in God . . . They are like eyeglasses. Without these glasses would we see God in our image (and vice versa) or would God look different? Would he look like the natural world?’ (cited in Rose 2004:179)

195 Provocation is a term from Levinas.
people as a unified field. This is seen in the intersecting of sacred sites with ecological sanctuaries (Rose 1996:49ff).

In many areas the sacred site is protected. No hunting, fishing, gathering or burning can take place within prescribed boundaries. Often the site is a nesting or breeding place. Dreaming sites thus function as refuges – if there is a Dreaming site that is focussed on a nesting or breeding area, and there is prohibition on hunting in that area, there is effectively a refuge in which the particular species, and all the other species who use the area, are safe from human predation (Rose 1996:49)

To learn the stories of place—geological, geographical, stories of waterways, of lagoons, of creeks, of wetlands, to learn about the beings who inhabit the ecosystems that are still intact—is to glimpse what it was like in Australia before settlement/invasion. To seek out Indigenous stories that arise in place, to learn about a holistic system, a dreaming ecology (Rose 1996:49) is to begin the work of decolonisation. Such a beginning is a political act.

The decision to learn the land in this way requires a shift of perception towards understanding ethical engagement in place as dialogical. ‘Dialogue in an ethical mode begins where one is. It acknowledges the legacies that form one’s history and ground, seeking from that grounded position to turn towards others in an attitude that welcomes change’ (Rose 2004:180). What does it mean to learn the legacies, beginning where one is? The presence of dialogical engagement is seen in Country in which life is flourishing, healthy, lawful and beautiful, a ‘matrix of mutual life-giving’ (Rose 2004:168). By contrast with ‘wild’ country, flourishing country is an ancestral track – it shows the care that has been or is sustaining it. Ancestral footprints sustain the living generations (Rose 2004:173). Understanding these tracks is more usually focussed in their expression in ritual and art. Rose draws attention to tracks as ecological systems (where ecological includes humans). The beauty and wholeness of this cultural narrative offers a direction for ecoministry that is profoundly confronting and deeply inviting. It confronts the question of the human, not by separating out wilderness areas, but by locating the human within the larger ecology and by asking then ‘what kind of human action?’

A key theme is resilience, a term used by Rose to refer to the self-organising, self-repairing will to flourish of living systems. Ecologists use the term in a technical way; within Mathews’ Spinozan panpsychism this is named as conatus.196 Resilience does not just happen

196 Conatus is a Latin term used by Spinoza to refer to self-preservation and self-realisation, that ‘endeavour, wherewith everything endeavours to persist in its own being’ (Mathews 2003:48). In Mathews’ use of systems theory, two drives are dialectically entwined aspects: the conative will to self-realisation and the orectic impulse (introduced in chapter four) that desires connection with the other-than-self (Mathews 2003:45-69).
automatically; it is a dynamic process, and cannot be presumed to be in equilibrium. Place is fragile. There is ‘no suggestion that country abandoned by, or sequestered from, people is better able to take care of itself than country in which people are active participants’ (Rose 2004:174).\(^{197}\)

The features of an alternative praxis of decolonisation are gathered up in a set of evocative stories that cluster around, and arise from, the sacred mountain of Gulaga. (Rose 2004:chapter 11). They concern settler and Indigenous Australians: dairy farmers, Yuin elders, New South Wales (NSW) National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Forestry Commission of NSW, local action groups and others as they engage collaboratively and not without conflict, tension and ambiguity, to protect this sacred site on the south coast of NSW.

There is no way to summarise this material without great disservice to the mountain, the stories and the people. Again, there is no answer in the abstract. And this itself provides a central insight into the nature of any ecministry. Engagement with place is with the particular - rich, poetic, conflicted, chaotic, Aussie, awesome, messy, unexpected in its beauty and mystery.\(^{198}\)

ABAalternatives to the status quo not only exist among us, but exist in wounded and contested places such as forests. Such stories show us how to imagine resilience in a recuperative mode, how to imagine alternative futures, and thus how we might work step by step towards decolonisation. (Rose 2004:194).

The stories we need are already here, among us. Resilience in these Gulaga stories appears not only, though amazingly, in the lives of Aboriginal people, not only in the lives of settler people, but most strikingly in the mountain. Humans stand up, nature is self-standing and reconciliation lies here. The mountain drew people in ways that language conveys only unsatisfactorily. It was an active, living presence, calling, self-repairing, and challenging. The place of humans is ambiguous. On one hand the ‘mountain does not need you to organise it’. Yet on the other, as counter-balancing, ‘if you put your body into the place with an attitude of attention, the place will organise you by requiring you to make changes in yourself’ (Rose 2004:208). This is an ethics that arises from dwelling. To put one’s body

\(^{197}\) Evidence from science points to the presence of Aboriginal practices correlating with flourishing country and high levels of biodiversity (Langton 1998; Gammage 2003; cited in Rose 2004:174).

\(^{198}\) The recent documentary The First Australians produced, written and directed by Indigenous filmmakers chronicles stories from 1788 to 1993 (a time of collision of worlds) from the perspective of the first people. See www.sbs.com.au/firstaustralians.
into place in this way is to dwell. It is to attune yourself to the stories that belong here and it is to be drawn into ongoing story-making.

The concept of place that organizes you demands a conversion of thought and perception. We do not live in an ‘empty’, ‘unstoried’ land, but in a land for which other people already have stories. And further,

... the belief that the world is expressly inert does not destroy the world’s expressivity. Modernity may damage our ability to hear, even as our violence damages the world’s ability to communicate, and we become caught up in an amplifying process of reduction: the refusal to hear stifles or destroys living things, thereby reducing the multivocal expressivity of the world. Nevertheless, it is essential that we not mistake an inability to hear for an absence of communication, and not mistake loss for total death (Rose 2004:183).

An alternative is imaginable and possible. Stories can be sought and found, vulnerability can be accepted and ethical action undertaken as a practice of counter-modernity.

What then is the gift of this generous, inclusive praxis of counter-modernity? Clearly, in the situatedness of the Australian context, it provides a seamlessly integrated set of perceptions, concepts, practices and stories. As such it provides an invitation to settler/Indigenous discourse/practice, and an alternative starting place to resource management (Rose 2004:177). It points to a complex set of responsibilities both to the past and to the future, and to the possibility both of following the tracks of the ancestors and participating in an ongoing fluid process which may unfold into new patterns of tracks. To take up the challenge of Rose’s work is a way to begin to re-imagine (and act towards) an alternative human vocation. It is ‘to stand up’ and begin to ‘do business properly’.

**Environmental culture**

Ecoministry in place attends to the structure of culture, not only critically but by imagining alternatives. Plumwood’s analysis of Western culture was discussed in chapter three, but an ecological perspective cannot simply be added on to the existing culture. Rather, change is more radical, requiring nothing less than restructuring as an environmental culture. To return to her metaphor of the Titanic, having failed to set a good course, and failed to find a good captain, it is time now for radical ‘counter-hegemonic piloting’ (Plumwood 2002:3). Given a

---

199 The powerful concepts of shared body, of the continuity of matter, of intersubjectivity and patterns offer guidance for a praxis that is particularly challenging since it includes the dead, ‘the real traditional owners, the ancestors’ (Rose 2004:165-171).
choice, it makes sense to choose concepts and strategies that are not monological, hierarchical and mechanistic but mutual, communicative and responsive. ‘Not only is it rationally possible to choose a richer and more generous framework, it is in the present context of ecological destruction essential to do so – in the interests of ethics, prudence AND reason’ (Plumwood 2002:12). How then does the situating of the other-than-human ethically and the human ecologically translate in specific ways? Plumwood discusses four main areas: reframing animal-human relations, interspecies ethics, a radical socio-political alternative from Deep Ecology and finally a materialist spirituality of place. Each of these offers ways of being differently in the world, teaching respect for the other-than-human and providing guidance for reconceptualising our human vocation.

Reframing animal-human relations

The first area concerns opening the door morally to the other-than-human, and attends to the category of animals. Animal defence and liberation activism oppose the commodification of animals that exists in our culture, for example in factory farming. This form of commodification can be understood as another form of dualism, that of trader/traded. An analysis of the basis of opposition, however, reveals that it can either continue Cartesian dualism, or more radically, break it down. Plumwood is critical of the first position, which she describes as Neo-Cartesian, in that it revises Descartes classification of person to include other higher animals, but keeps the nature/human separation between person with mind and consciousness and the rest. This extends human privilege and retains the objectification and reduction of the excluded group (Plumwood 2002:chapter 7). An alternative choice moves beyond anthropocentrism, enlarging the framework to include non-humans in the ethical field.

Our categories of animals as pets, and animals as meat, are seen to participate in the problematic public/private dualism and require rethinking in a more inclusive way. Powerful taboos exist against acknowledging the subjectivity of meat animals, the implications of which are gigantic but necessarily unavoidable. Interestingly Plumwood uncovers ‘an overgrown but still discernible path’ (Plumwood 2002:166), in which humans have lived with respect among another species. A non-oppressive relationship between a human and non-human has existed historically (including relationship with farm animals), and is recoverable in the present. This has been known as the ‘familiar’. Her own experience with wombats illustrates the possibility of entering into such relationships of ‘familiarity’ - but not ownership – with ‘wild’ animals.
The gap between use and respect, can be understood as a dissociation (Plumwood 2002:160). Use is one way of framing animal-human relations and respect is another, where animals (and indeed plant life) are included as deserving of moral consideration. Describing this hyper-separation as dissociation suggests processes that may not be simply a matter of rational choice. Questions concern what keeps a dissociation in place, and what conditions need to be put in place in order for re-association to occur. Ecoministry can participate in such work.

**Interspecies ethics**

A second area in which an environmental culture needs to be built concerns the development of interspecies ethics. The task is that of decentring the human. The methodology therefore needs to be self-critical, which Plumwood calls ‘studying up’, where ‘up’ is from the position of the subordinate other (used in feminist, postcolonial and Marxist research). Studying up looks for sources of our problems with nature. It is the rationality of ‘othering’ that needs to be critically examined. Plumwood is critical of work that remains in the conceptual area in philosophy without taking up the next step of ethical implications. Standing at the city gates, arguing, is empty if it ‘evades the real moral task of developing an adequate ethical response to the non-human world’ (Plumwood 2002:169). While interspecies discourse exists within the Christian tradition, and rituals such as the blessing of the animals are traditional, integrating interspecies ethics into the practice of ministry remains a challenge.\(^\text{200}\)

A core concept is that of intentionality. A stance of intentional recognition\(^\text{201}\) is one of ‘recognising earth others as fellow agents and narrative subjects [as] crucial for all ethical, collaborative, communicative and mutualistic projects, as well as for place sensitivity’ (Plumwood 2002:175). Such recognition already exists in more ordinary contexts and needs to be re-admitted into philosophical frameworks. Intentional recognition is a choice counter to the position in which humans are central, refusing the monological processes of ‘othering’. Important implications follow from a choice for such an alternative. Nature is re-animated as agent. This opens the door to a potentially communicative other; it activates memory, that part of us that already recognises this reality, and moves toward restoring the ground of

---

\(^{200}\) For a helpful overview of contemporary literature on animals and religion, which addresses animals as theological subjects (including a critical discussion of Plumwood’s philosophical framework) see Elvey (2005a). This could provide a starting place for a process of identifying some implications for praxis.

\(^{201}\) Plumwood finds the term consciousness too narrowly based and human-centred to be useful, whereas the term intentional recognition allows for mind to take a range of radically diverse forms.
enchantment ‘that butterfly wing-dust of wonder that modernity stole from us and replaced with the drive for power’ (Plumwood 2002:176-7).

The concept of intentional recognition has links with panpsychism, which I will discuss in detail in the following section. While a detailed exposition of Plumwood’s argument is well beyond the scope of this thesis, Plumwood’s work, building on feminist approaches to ethics (including relational, contextual and narrative), presents a range of ethical positions. Choices can be made from virtue ethics, care ethics, solidarity and friendship ethics, ecological and food web ethics depending on the particular context. In these approaches value (which is easily co-opted economically) is enlarged to respect, and the process becomes one of listening and encounter. Narrative ethics is an important category in such a stance, providing otherwise inaccessible data about context and identity, and engaging the imagination.

Once engaged in interspecies ethics the need for another form of ethics becomes visible, one that is fundamental for Indigenous peoples, that of communicative ethics. If interspecies communication is not dismissed out of hand, if the possibility of human centrism and arrogance is allowed, then it becomes clear that ethical and political issues are present right at the beginning, in the way we have set things up. Being able to see this setting up is one gift of Plumwood’s work and essential in beginning to conceptualise ecoministry. ‘The real communication challenge at this level of interspecies communication is for we humans to learn to communicate with other species on their terms, in their own languages, or in common terms, if there are any’ (Plumwood 2002:189). A dialogical mode requires at least two forms of communicative ethics. The first is to learn to know how to ask permission to enter the dialogue, and the second to learn to be able to negotiate and participate in the dialogical relationship once entered (Plumwood 2002:188). Communication does not need to be limited to animals or plants but can be extended to include all Earth inhabitants and their particular configurations in place. Culture and ‘nature’ are both being restructured from within.

Radical socio-political alternative from Deep Ecology

202 Encounter as epistemology will be discussed below as an outcome of a rehabilitated panpsychism.

203 Plumwood’s essay Journey to the heart of stone is a beautiful articulation of her own participation in dialogical mode with stones (Plumwood in Gifford and Becket forthcoming).
Deep Ecology provides the departure point for a third area that would contribute to an environmental culture. Critical of the failure in Deep Ecology to distinguish oppressive modes within the project of unity, in particular colonisation both past and continuing, Plumwood offers the concept of solidarity as a basis for what she terms ‘traitorous’ identity. Solidarity is the position of being with rather than being the other. This stance recognises a wide field of difference among interrelated beings and thus provides a basis for multiple positioning.

Undermining the human-nature and human-animal dualism involves taking up an identity of traitor to the dominant cultural narrative, a position at the heart of the prophetic tradition, as exemplified by the midwives and Miriam, as well as Moses and Aaron in the Exodus narrative. This issue brings the self into focus. Such an identity ‘. . . analyses, opposes and actively works against those structures of one’s own culture or group that keep the Other in an oppressed position’ (Plumwood 2002:205). Plumwood comments that these identities do not appear by chance, but are ‘usually considerable political and personal achievements in integrating reason and emotion; they speak of the traitor’s own painful self-reflection as well as of efforts of understanding that have not flinched away from contact with the pain of oppressed others’ (Plumwood 2002:205). This beautiful statement describes exactly the dynamic of prophetic ministry under discussion.

A further implication of the stance of solidarity is an invitation to reimagine private property. This vast field of political theory is well beyond the scope of this thesis, but it requires naming here as a part of the whole fabric of an environmental culture. Capitalist concepts of private property underpin our Western world. To question this is hardly new, as Marxist, socialist and some feminist analyses attest. One trajectory from Deep Ecology is political conservatism, but another more radical alternative is possible. ‘A really deep ecology must rethink private property’ (Plumwood 2002:217).

---

204 This philosophy and movement was an attempt to deepen what was seen as shallow ecology, by addressing questions of our human identity and relationship with the natural world. The push, at least in part, was to access deeper regions of the self in order to engage these energies for change beyond life-style and activism. The work of Arne Naess (see Drengson and Inoue 1995) in proposing identification of humans with nature has been criticised (Plumwood 1993). Reed’s (1989) contribution to this critique turns on difference from nature rather than on sameness or unity. Plumwood exposes both these positions as finally anthropocentric, keeping the human as the centre of value and therefore setting up a false dichotomy.

205 A critique of private property already exists in Christian tradition, for example in the Luke/Acts account of holding everything in common, in liberation theology and in a complex way in the monastic tradition. While the church does own property, it is corporate rather than private, and its use or abuse in an environmental culture is a critical discussion.
that I own’. It institutionalises a double violence, obliterating not only Indigenous peoples, but also other-than-human agency.\textsuperscript{206} The counter project requires mutuality, an engagement between two presences. The collapsing of such pervasive, seemingly all powerful structures external as well as internal appears a wild, laughable fantasy. The urgency and extent of our crisis, however, demands nothing less than this scale of rethinking, a re-plotting of the ship’s current and totally disastrous course.

\textit{A materialist spirituality of place}

Political and ethical dimensions of an environmental culture are insufficient without ‘spirituality’. Spirituality, integral to the self-understanding of a faith community, is however problematic when conceived of in opposition to Earth/material/body.\textsuperscript{207} The concept of a materialist spirituality of place is an emerging contour of ecoministry in this thesis. Plumwood’s contribution is to draw polarities together, connecting the political, ethical, rational and spiritual. ‘A critical engagement with the political and ethical character of specific forms of spirituality is essential; spirituality itself is no substitute for engagement with ecological ethics and politics’ (Plumwood 2002:218). Clearly spirituality can function in subversive or complicit\textsuperscript{208} ways in relation to the hegemonic culture.

Plumwood’s description of the features of an alternate sociality as environmental culture is an outcome of hearing Earth’s cry, of bearing grief and is a ‘voice lifted up’. The brush strokes are broad, but it \textit{is} a response to ‘immobilisation’\textsuperscript{209} of considerable energy and passion, a closely reasoned re-evaluation of reason from one taking up a traitorous identity. Enormously daunting feels like an understatement in the task of reconceptualising ministry/praxis.

\textsuperscript{206} Marxist ecology is recovering ecological roots in Marx’s materialism and rethinking the implications for private property (Foster 2000).

\textsuperscript{207} For example, spiritualities defined by ‘access to and pursuit of meaning, vision, value and deep purpose’, or the category of the sacred, are frequently prey to the set of confusions and ambiguities inherent in dualistic constructions of reality (Plumwood 2002:218-225).

\textsuperscript{208} Brueggemann’s interpretation of the prophetic tradition includes both these options for religion, in the categories of false (royal) and alternative consciousness.

\textsuperscript{209} Plumwood 2002:3
A praxis of dwelling

Living in place requires thinking and being otherwise. A praxis of dwelling provides a contribution to an ecoministry that is called forth by, and in, place. Dwelling in place as a response to Earth’s cry lies at the heart of decolonisation, and constitutes a basis for counter-hegemonic environmental culture, which is political, ethical and spiritual. Mathews (2005) offers an invitation to a praxis of ‘letting the world grow old’ and ‘nativism’ that is place-sensitive. Such praxis replaces the abstract and general (the paradigm of modernity) by the actual and local. Her discussion of love for the world, the awakening of Eros and the importance of identity politics develops themes from chapter four. Construing this praxis as sacred offers a confronting glimpse of a way of being that is fresh and radical.

Mathews’ starting place lies in her analysis of the ecological crisis as a spiritual crisis. For her, its roots lie in loss of love for the world. ‘[L]ove of the world is not only the raison d’etre that sustains us, but a cause that will unite us against the contemporary economic invasion and torching of this sacred ground’ (Mathews 2003:1). Response to the crisis concerns both thinking and being. Thinking otherwise requires an alternative to the complex and disintegrating silences discussed in chapter three, and being requires a praxis which in Mathews’ thought is a singing back to life. Her work arises from a deep, passionate concern for Earth’s plight. She beautifully states her question:

This question is the urgent and utterly compelling one . . . how, in the face of a disintegrating world – a world torn and fraying at the biological seams - are we to recover a healthier relation to reality? How are we to reinstate a metaphysical premise that will provide the basis for cherishing and replenishing the reality we have up to this time abused? How can we sing back to life a world that has been so brutally silenced (Mathews 2003:7-8)?

I will first present briefly the basis of her thought and then discuss two ways in which she suggests singing the world into life.

Mathews (2003, 2005) reclaims the concept of panpsychism as a means towards ‘a recovery of a truly human mode of being in the world’. She understands this mode of being in the world as a recovery of culture itself (as is clear from the subtitle of her second book) where culture is restored to its root meanings of ‘to till or to cherish’ from the Latin colere. By contrast, ‘[m]odern society does not engage with the world but encroaches upon it. It does not

---

210 While a number of ecophilosohers and ecocritics have been exploring dwelling, often with reference to Heideggerian thought (e.g. Krell 1977), within the confines of this thesis I focus on Mathews’ contribution.
tend and cherish the ground of being . . . but blasts and quarries this ground . . .’ (Mathews 2005:23).

The term panpsychism\(^{211}\) is used for ‘any view that unites mentality with materiality’ (Mathews 2003:4). As such it dismantles dualism, foundational in Western thought. The significance of this move is described by Rigby.

> It is Mathews’ contention that Western philosophy was inaugurated by the Greek pre-Socratics precisely in an epochal break with the popular panpsychism of animist myth. To rehabilitate panpsychism, albeit in a new guise, is then in a sense to move beyond philosophy, at least in its dominant Western modality (Rigby 2006b).

Questions concern how this break came about, how legitimate and mandatory it is, and how it is that the idealist and materialist philosophical premises that replaced panpsychism have been so rarely contested. The almost total acceptance of a modern view of reality is made clear by the revolutionary impact of Einstein’s thought and new physics. The dangers and difficulties of the panpsychist position seem initially overwhelming as do the implications for a religious tradition opposed to animism.\(^{212}\)

The heart of panpsychism is a form of love requiring re-envisioning the nature of matter.\(^{213}\) In a world infused with subjectivity the ordinary holds the possibilities of transformation. The quest is to ‘win through to the inner presence, the nurturing luminous, poetic “soul” of reality’

\(^{211}\) Plumwood argues that panpsychism can take strong or weak forms. Strong panpsychism retains an understanding of mind and consciousness that stays close to the Cartesian and in her view does not allow for the heterogeneity found in nature. Weak panpsychism, where ‘elements of mind (or mind-like qualities) are widespread in nature and are not confined to the human sphere or form’ (Plumwood 2002:178) is congruent with her concept of intentional recognition.

\(^{212}\) Objections are dealt with in detail in Mathews’ book, and beyond the scope of this brief overview. For example, Mathews is not saying that all physical entities communicate with us in equal or intentional ways. But given a state of receptivity some selves may become aware of symbolic meanings in the other-than-human realm ‘which from a panpsychist perspective is not merely a matter of projection, but might rather bear a message for me from the world beyond myself’ (Rigby 2006b).

\(^{213}\) Mathews provides a philosophical defence of panpsychism (Mathews 2003:25-69) by arguing that conceptual realism requires a reanimated conception of matter. She elaborates the panpsychist hypothesis through ‘The Way of the One and the Many’, where ‘The Way’ closely resembles the Chinese notion of the Tao. In this view the universe is a cosmic self, within which secondary selves, the Many, are formed and interrelated. In systems theory terms, systems (or selves) in mutual relationships with their environment, can be understood in terms of an ontological matrix. If physics is a science where the observing is from without, in the panpsychist view this occurs from within. The world appears here then ‘not merely or principally as a series of causal relations, but rather as a nexus of communication, in which the One perpetually reaches out and signals to the Many . . .’ (Rigby 2006b).
The task is to awaken Eros, and the realm of communication is the poetic order.

The relationship between love and metaphysics in Mathews’ work both highlights the role and limits of the rational, and is an example of an enfolding of the poetic and the rational. Given a starting point of love ‘Mathews justifies her project as a quest, not so much for truth per se, but for a metaphysical framework within which the human capacity to fall in love, not only with an individual human other, but with the physical world itself, might be affirmed and fostered’ (Rigby 2006b). The nature of the quest is succinctly stated. For the panpsychist the aim is not to theorize the world but to relate to it, ’not to explain the world but to sing it’ (Mathews 2003:88).

The epistemological implication of the panpsychist position is developed by Mathews in terms of encounter. Encounter is a form of knowing. It has priority over knowledge gained by violence, exposure or stripping back and rather preserves mystery and gift. The panpsychist affirms the given, and as given the other elicits respect. This affirmation includes the capacity of the world to be in communicative exchange, and requires particularity for dialogue to be possible. The abstract and the general give way to the actual and the local. These dimensions are complementary and form the basis for Mathews’ two modes of praxis. The first is described as ‘letting the world grow old’ and the second and the more active, ‘becoming native’.

Using Mathews’ work raises questions concerning the place of metaphysics. Rigby comments that ‘Mathews wears her metaphysics with a degree of ‘epistemological modesty’, and sees her metaphysics as a metaphysics of causality, not of presence, the enemy for Heidegger and post-Heideggerian critique. We might rather think of her work as onto-story, as thought experiment, still in process.

. . . [T]hose who have learnt to view the truth claims of metaphysicians with suspicion might prefer to think favourably of Mathews’ panpsychist philosophy, not as a new metaphysics as such, but more humbly perhaps as an “onto-story” a new tale about being, and one that bears great ethical significance (Rigby 2006b).

Story, ethics, ontology, materiality and the sacred coalesce in a quest that offers much to a project of ecoministry involving recovery of a truly human mode of being in the world.
Letting the world grow old

Mathews’ method is to begin by looking for intimations of panpsychism in contemporary Western culture. She finds this among ecophilosophies that encourage living with rather than against the grain of nature (Mathews 2005:26). However, she observes that

[w]hat ecophiophers and eco-activists in fact usually seem to have in mind in their references to nature, is elements or aspects of the world that have not been created or unduly modified by human agency. Implied in this definition is a categorical contrast between the artefactual and the natural’ (Mathews 2005:27).

A re-amination of this nature is clearly not equivalent to that envisaged by the panpsychist, for it holds in place a split between the natural and the artefactual which finally becomes a ‘reinstating of dualistic fault lines in the terrain of modern thought and practice, despite its best intentions’ (Mathews 2005:27).

A different distinction is proposed from that between nature and artifice, a distinction between letting things unfold in their own way, and intervening in such unfolding ‘under the direction of abstract thought’ (Mathews 2005:27). The term artifice is used to denote the results of such interventions. Living with the grain is then a mode of cherishing that lets things unfold in their own way.

This basic position requires careful explication and some cautions. Unfolding is in an obvious sense simply the physical, chemical, biological and instinctual processes governing animate and non-animate things. For the panpsychist, unfolding is part of a coherent ongoing process, whereas for the materialist, no such trust is in place. In a universe imbued with its own conatus the unfolding of matter is the unfolding of life, and occurs at different levels in systems; the universe as a whole, animate, inanimate, organisms, other living systems and individuals. ‘Left to themselves . . . things unfold in ways that by and large assure their own actualisation and the further unfolding of the greater systems in which they are enmeshed’ (Mathews 2005:28).

Intervention, cooptation is possible anywhere in these processes. Civilization itself can be understood as such an intervention, with the development of abstract thought, the power to imagine otherwise and to remake the world ‘in accordance with variable human interests, values, dreams, and conceits’ (Mathews 2005:29). As Mathews and others (for example, Berry 1988) point out this involves a refusal to accept and love the ecologically given, a refusal, the consequences of which are now visible in the form of the ecological crisis.
To “return to nature” is not to restore a set of lost things or attributes, but rather to allow a certain process to begin anew. This is the process that takes over when we step back, when we cease intervening and making things over in accordance with our own - decontextualized – designs. Such a process can recommence anywhere, any time. It is not logically tied to those aspects of the world that we mistakenly reify as nature – the forests, swamps, instincts, and bodily functions – but can start to unfold again the midst of the most intensively urbanized and industrialized environments on earth and in the most controlled and civilised of persons (Mathews 2005:31).

Different scenarios exist for such a practice: for example, urbanised worlds, existing ecosystems, ecosystems already modified, situations where custodianship is already underway. The process of letting be is, however, not to be confused with letting die (Mathews 2005:33). Rather there needs to be a balance between responsibility and protection and letting be. In practice, it becomes clear that commitment to letting things endure engenders the growing of a relationship of cherishing, a transition from consumer to custodian (Mathews 2005:32). A custodian keeps safe for the singing of the song.

The immediate and major objection to such a project is that of political quietism. Is not this much too passive? How could it possibly be part of the radical environmentalism so urgently needed? Mathews argues to the contrary, it is subversive at every level, albeit in a quiet way, with power ‘to thoroughly disable the economic basis of modernity – particularly as this is exemplified in capitalism - by systematically negating the following values which are definitive of that economic basis’: consumerism, commodification, productivity, progress, efficiency, industry/business, development, profit, property as parts of a system would all be undermined by such practice (Mathews 2005:34-36).

Undermining occurs through a process that is proactive in the sense that a hitch-hiker proactively chooses to join her journey with another. Drawing on the concept of synergistic agency, Mathews suggests letting be as being ‘a metaphysical hitch-hiker’. While sharing the same general direction, she both pursues her own journey and is intentionally open to it being changed.

In synergistic mode, the agent can pursue ends of her own and can even seek to transform the status quo, but not by abstracting from the given and trying to replace it, holus bolus, with an arbitrary design of her own. She does not seek to erase the given, or contradict it, but by joining her own conativity to its she elicits from it a new response, a spontaneous unfolding in a new direction (Mathews 2005:40).
Such a choice may seem to abandon the world in the grip of oppressive ideologies of all kinds. The task, in this view is not to set out to change the world. Rather it is understood as inducing conativities to flow in the direction of increase rather than diminishment, and where this happens the world begins to change itself (Mathews 2005:45).

Mathews’ chooses votivity as descriptive of the heart of this practice. A votive culture takes many forms, and for us our votivity to the ideal, to the Unseen, needs to be relinquished and openness to a votivity to the Seen, learned and trusted. The trust is a new dedication ‘to that humble, mysterious, protean ground beneath our feet, the all that is’ (Mathews 2005:47).

Such a position is evocative for a reading of a prophetic tradition ‘grounded ‘in a narrative that includes the taking off of shoes. Trusting the actual over the general and ideal begins a praxis that learns to love the world, letting it be and sing.

Nativism

Stepping back is complemented by a related process of engagement. The context remains one of assent to an intrinsic unfolding of the given. Engagement with the world can only take place via particularity, world in its local modality, place. I will discuss a praxis that actively seeks lived connection in place. Mathews uses the term nativism for such practice, and situates it in the field of ecophilosophy as well as in relation to the particularity and poetics of her own life.

‘[E]manations of a potentially communicative and responsive world, . . . require that we engage with them, that we not merely step back but that we invite them into relationship by committing to them and holding them dear’ (Mathews 2005:50). To ‘invite’ and to ‘commit’ are strong gestures and begin where one is, in the midst. Commitment to place requires the condition of continuity, an extended stay in one place. This itself is a value counter to the mobility of our contemporary lifestyles. As such it raises the issue of political injustice concerning housing, property, ownership and the ‘right’ to be able to inhabit a “homeplace”, currently an option only for the economically privileged (Mathews 2005:75). To begin where one is, however, is possible anywhere, and anytime, here and now. Engagement with the

---

214 Clearly letting be is not in view in relation to global warming issues. Mathews draws a distinction between letting be where entities have a base in the corporeal world and letting be in relation to discourses, ideas. Abstractions cannot be left to themselves because they lack conativity. However ideas that are embodied in a society as institutions for example, thus ‘are not merely attenuated abstract entities but ride on the back of actual individual and collective conativities’ (Mathews 2005:44). In these situations letting be does become possible and indeed the strategy of engaging synergistically can be employed.
given, then, is to attend to the things around us, to the house in which one lives, to the people and other beings who also live here, to the entities that make up the neighbourhood, even to place names, and potentially to the place of one’s burial. (Mathews 2005:50-53)

What might it mean to commit to place? Is recovery of nativity possible for non-Indigenous Australians? The term nativism requires recovery from beneath its colonial accretions, both ‘pejorative’ and ‘romantic’ (Mathews 2005:56). Etymologically its roots lie in the Latin natus, which is simply ‘to be born’. Interestingly native, nature, nativity all share this root. But to be native is not only to be born in a place but to belong, to be a self for whom this place shapes identity. 215 The shaping of identity for a native is a process similar to socialisation in a human family group, but in relation to more-than-human presences.

Belonging suggests three dimensions of being as native. First, to assent to the power of place is to acknowledge its power for material self sufficiency. In practical terms it is to learn to eat what is grown locally as far as possible, to draw on resources at hand, to join in exchange. Second, it provides, as Mathews so movingly attests, a ‘mythic inexhaustibility’, a position radically different from the seeming portability of Christian tradition loosed from its original interfusion with place. Finally, it provides vocabulary of a unique particularity and richness, similar to that of a dream world.

A consequence of nativism, from Mathews’ own experience, was the appearing of connectedness; coherence and flow started to emerge in place of the dispersion and fragmentation of the ‘normal’ life patterns of the city dweller. In this sense there is an undercutting of the assumption of life as possession and the enhancing of the sense of life as itself agential and ourselves as participants in the larger whole. Coherence and flow suggest a view of the self that is constituted not by ‘deeds’ but by ‘address’ (Mathews 2005:68), a term that resonates with my earlier discussion of cry/call. This suggests that my story is the story of how I have been addressed, not only by the ‘divine’ (imagined along a divine-human axis), but in place.

In setting nativism in the broader context of ecophilosophy, it becomes evident that it has relationships with Deep Ecology and with bioregionalism, both building on this groundwork

215 For myself, as with most moderns, my life has been one of dislocation. Located in many places, born in East Melbourne (can I reinhabit this place?), having lived in thirteen different neighbourhoods, some overseas, my memories are scattered, my multiple belongings formed in a geographical kaleidoscope. My grandparents are buried in three different cemeteries, my parents’ ashes scattered in yet two more places, and how and where will my own body find its resting place?
and differing in important respects. One issue concerns the nature of the self, and can be approached through identity politics. Mathews observes that in the environmental movement in general there exists a certain malaise, a collapsing into duty, and proneness to burnout which she suggests is a consequence of an absence of a form of identity politics. Self-realization and the urgency and energy that that engenders is not present in ways comparable to other oppositional movements, for example feminism or anti-racism. Nativism reintroduces identity politics with its potential benefits and gifts, in that it is an engagement in which the life of the self is crucially at stake.

The ecological self of Deep Ecology, though it has similarities to the native self, is, Mathews maintains, finally an unlivable ideal. The majority of people live in cities, where ecosystems are rarely intact and usually seriously damaged or modified. The systems that do sustain us, for example, food production, are themselves artificially constructed and organised, so in neither way are ecosystems themselves functioning in ways that can be constitutive for the ecological self. By contrast, nativism provides for a praxis achievable by anyone given some continuity of residence (Mathews 2005:68-72).

The danger of a defining essence is that of becoming the source of further oppression. Nativism, however, is not prey to this danger, Mathews argues, because it concerns concrete self-in-process rather than an abstract reified self. If the self is formed in a direct engagement with the world as other subjects, it avoids homogenising essences. ‘Natives are identified in terms of their relation to the world rather than in terms of informing attributes (such as racial type, other anatomical features, costume, or specific cultural behaviours or practices), which could visibly mark them as a class for subjugation’ (Mathews 2005:72).

Nativism for Mathews is an affirmation of the sacred order. For the panpsychist, matter itself is sacred order.

For while modernity is the process of converting the hitherto sacred order of matter and place into commodities, cash, and property, our affirmation, forgiveness, preservation, and enhancement of the given converts commodities and property back into the sacred order (Mathews 2005:73).

The radical call in becoming native is a call to return to the sacred. Enlarging the category of the sacred, or rather reconceptualising the pervasive spirit-matter dualism of modernity by re-instating a sense of place, is a vital move. Place as a locus of continuity, identity, ecological

---

216 Though it could be objected that nativism as a form of panpsychism is discursively articulated, Mathews argues that it rests on it without being reducible to it (Mathews 2005:61-62).
consciousness, education and restoration of meaning is crucial (Plumwood 2008). Yet dangers and limitations exist. Any singing, any being otherwise will need to attend to increasing numbers of homeless people (and creatures), refugees for whom attachment to place is not possible. Welcoming the stranger is also at the heart of the prophetic tradition, and needs to be invoked in any revisioning of place. An expanding global population beyond Earth’s capacity to support, combined with an intentionality to care for the flourishing of the more-than-human world makes hospitality an extremely complex and important issue.

Further, Plumwood argues that a sense of place can become yet another form of false consciousness. Place attachment and place as a site of intersecting narratives require an analysis of power relations. Affective place, if split from economic place, perpetuates existing dualisms, as a form of dematerialisation. Dematerialisation is a useful term for a ‘process of becoming more and more out of touch with the material conditions (including ecological conditions) that support or enable our lives’ (Plumwood 2008).

Singing up sacred places needs to attend to ‘shadow places’. Learning to accept multiple places as ‘our place’ is to take up a position of ecojustice that works towards decisions based on accountability, exposing the hidden degradation that is the consequence of consumer choices. Living in our place can be reformulated as ‘an injunction to cherish and care for your places, but without in the process destroying or degrading any other places, where ‘other places’ includes other human places, but also other species’ places’ (Plumwood 2008). In such a practice of dwelling, ecoprophetic ministry is at the heart of decisions about housing, food, transport, waste and lifestyle. Indigenous wisdom is a provocative guide for such alternative imagining, where the place that grows you is the place of belonging.

In the prophetic tradition homecoming is announced as a possibility. If our exile is from Earth, what might homecoming mean? Homecoming, the opposing tension to exile in second Isaiah, is reimagined - not now as coming home to a specific holy land, and not as a future or heavenly homeplace. To come home is simply to learn to become native. Mathews’ model offers a challenge to religious thought to see home as anywhere to which you commit yourself with love. It may be ugly or urban but the task is to sing it up, to re-hallow it. Such love is a

---

217 Plumwood suggests reworking bioregionalism as one fruitful direction, where a model of self-sufficiency may be replaced or lived in conjunction with a model of multiplicity (Plumwood 2008).
refined and ethically constrained Eros, passionate for ecojustice and armed with vulnerability, a sacred fire.

**Singing in a faith community**

These are some stories about the endeavours of local communities to put into practice another way of thinking and being; stories that make my heart sing.

**Ceres**

Mathews in an article “CERES: singing up the city” (Mathews 2000) describes an amazing example of re-inhabitation that could become part of an organically expanding dream. CERES (Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies) is the inspired name for a ten acre environment park in East Brunswick, close to the city of Melbourne. The name ‘accurately portended the unique blend of techno-environmentalism and re-enchantment, science and mythology, that was in time going to give rise to the ‘genius loci’ of this now blossoming locus of community activism’ (Mathews 2000:5). The rich complexity and energy, including an annual ritual celebrating the Return of the Sacred Kingfisher in spring, weaves a mythopoetic sense of place with other forms of environmental action in ways that are truly generative. In a footnote Mathews observes that churches as sites may have once served

... to satisfy some older, deeper need of Christian worshippers for the sacramentalization of land, of homeplace. . . . We might speculate that the existence of the churches, as sacred sites, was in fact one of the most powerful underpinnings of Christianity; through these hallowed places, which so often recreated the atmosphere of stone circles and grottoes and other powerful Earth sites, Christianity perhaps maintained continuity – as it did in so many other ways – with pagan traditions it sought to displace, symbolically satisfying the older, deeper need of its followers for a grounding in land and place, even while explicitly repudiating this need in its doctrines (Mathews 2000:14).

Mathews’ comment is in the context of the decline of churches, leaving an unmet longing for grounding and for centres where creed and need are matched. An alternative exists for a local

---

218 In this reading the distinction between Eros and Agape is suspended. Interestingly, Pope Benedict begins his first Papal Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* by discussing these two dimensions of love and the ‘maturing’ of Eros “to attain its authentic grandeur” (www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi).

219 Ceres is the Roman name for Demeter, the Greek goddess of grain or fertility.
church, with the humility to be amazed by what is happening beyond its own walls, to re-imagine itself.  

Re-imagining the block

An alternative consciousness dissolves the boundaries of the block, lifts off the Euclidian grid, and attends to the ground beneath our feet as sacred. For the church block referred to in chapter two, the land runs on, spreads out across the grasslands down to the creek beds, up to the volcanic rise. Loosening the fetters of the block mentality first imaginatively restores the block to its grassland bioregion, then learns the stories and develops a praxis and poetics of re-inhabitation that respects the given.

There is an example of such an alternative in Britain. The Ss Mary & John Churchyard in Oxford had become derelict and overgrown, 120 years on from its original peaceful haven with trees, flowers and shrubs. A local policeman took the initiative to call in recruits to slash the jungle, largely formed by environmental weeds, uncovering the weathered lurching stones. In consultation with the community it was decided to manage the site for wildlife. All the work of designing the management plan, finding volunteers with the necessary expertise and generating funding led seven years later to ‘a wildflower Garden of Remembrance and thanksgiving, a mini-labyrinth as the centrepiece of a “rest space” . . . access to memorials that have artistic and historic value, a variety of habitats for wildlife, in-site interpretation boards . . . and an educational website’ (Hodson and Hodson 2008:131-132). A local and well-known, respected figure in the Christian environmental movement, Ruth Conway is co-ordinator of the project, and the Church is registered as an Eco-congregation221 with the project seen as part of celebrating and caring for God’s creation.

Pilgrimage

A journey of extraordinary significance took place in October 1999, a journey that became a pilgrimage. The lure was a beloved creek, the Merri Creek, also in Brunswick, and the journey was to follow it, starting from the confluence with the Yarra to its source in the foothills of the Great Dividing Range. Freya Mathews, and two companions, Maya Ward and Cinnamon Evans, committed themselves simply,

220 A Uniting Church congregation is now located at CERES.

221 See www.ecocongregation.org
to follow the creek wherever it led – through suburbs and industrial zones and rubbish dumps, under bypasses, beside highways, along the edge of quarries, across bull paddocks and acres of gorse and briar, as well as through any scenes of natural beauty that happened to present themselves. Although the journey was small in scale, and would take us through no wilderness zones nor to any guide-book destinations, it offered the kind of uncertainty that made it feel like a true adventure. For when all frontiers have been tamed and developed, when all exotic tribes and species have been winkled out of their hidden crannies and firmly tagged, where after all can one look for the wild, the unknown? When all natural wonders have been scientifically investigated, and all ancient monuments have become tourist attractions, where can one seek the numinous, the sacred? In a world contracted by motor travel and telecommunications, how can one experience vastness?’ (Mathews 2005:136-7).

The recounting of this quest cannot be summarized - it is laden with mystery and adventure in the midst of the familiar. In a totally unpredictable way, amazing the heart, this became a walking the world into being that truly sings. To look for a true story by walking was to discover many stories, to reforge identity, to experience changed perceptions of city and country. Is this too a way to re-imagine being human? The philosophical and poetic and political significance of such an undertaking opens yet other possibilities for eco-ministry.

Reflecting on the politics of pilgrimage more generally, Rigby, after returning from pilgrimage experiences in Britain, discusses some of the dimensions in the Australian context, especially in relation to Aboriginal and non-Indigenous relationships. She concludes:

where pilgrimage is reconfigured as a journey in which we honour, not only particular cultural mediations of the sacred, but also and especially the underlying order of ecocosmic creativity within which such mediations are enfolded and by which they are sustained, then it might indeed contribute to the rehallowing of the whole Earth, and to a renewed commitment to its continued flourishing. (Rigby 2000:30)

Such a statement is another rich source of reflection, suggesting that pilgrimage could form an important counter-point to place-based ecoprophetic praxis.222

**Transition Towns**

The Transition Towns alternative is an exciting concept and a rapidly proliferating movement223 as a response to global warming and peak oil. Using permaculture principles,

---

222 Habel’s ‘Stations of the cross’ is a form of pilgrimage undertaken through a worshiping community’s local place or region. The focus is on places of the suffering and abuse of the land and may include also places of violence committed against Indigenous people (Habel 2004:226-232).
the psychology of social marketing and inclusive processes, it has begun the work of developing an environmental culture through local communities. The ecological concept of resilience underpins the model which trusts in the ability of a system from individuals to whole economies to function in the face of change that shocks from outside (Hopkins 2006:12).

Rebuilding local agriculture and food production, localising energy production, rethinking healthcare, rediscovering local building materials in the context of zero energy building, rethinking how we manage waste, all build resilience and offer the potential of an extraordinary renaissance – economic, cultural and spiritual (Hopkins 2006:15)

*The Transition Handbook* provides wonderful resources for guiding new initiatives interlaced with stories. The stories reveal a response to Earth’s cry of considerable energy and imagination, and ecoministry could participate in, activate and contribute to this visionary praxis.  

**Conclusion**

This chapter has offered some possible beginnings for ecoministry both in place and globally. Ecoministry imagines, thinks and acts otherwise, at the place where ecohumanities, ministry studies and a prophetic imagination intersect. Conflicting narratives require decisions and hold us as we make them. Ecoministry has roots deep in the fertile soil of the prophetic tradition, and a faith community concurrently needs to attend to Earth’s cry, engage in critique, grieve, and risk thinking and being otherwise.

Replacing culture in nature is a process of discovery and a vocation. The task is to walk into the unknown. Egypt, as presented in the Biblical accounts had structure, shape, predictability, even though it was dark and filled with suffering. Oppressors and oppressed both assent to the misuse of power. An alternative consciousness turns from the closed down, numb despair

---

223 Transition Town Totnes in Devon (population 8,000) began in October 2006. There are now 162 Transition Towns (or cities or parts of cities) currently registered across 14 countries. See www.transitiontowns.org

224 Hodson and Hodson document responses of a faith community with a theocentric self-understanding of caring for God’s Earth. At the individual level lifestyle choices are made as an expression of the Beatitudes in areas of housing, transport, consumerism, food and waste. By significant downsizing, these Christians are light and salt in the world, making a beginning, preparing the way when others may not change until forced to do so. Involvement at a community level rests on community as a strong value for Jesus and re-imagined to include the Gentiles. This is widened further in working out environmental values as part of larger world in an exciting range of ways, for example, with Sage (www.sageoxford.org.uk), a local environmental group (Hodson and Hodson 2008:98-135).
of this royal consciousness. Leaving behind familiar political, economic, social, institutional, philosophical or theological structures, the call is to move, to risk the emptiness (that is not really empty) of the desert wilderness. Earth is warming dangerously. The time for decision is now. Already there is blood on the lintels. We must go.
CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have conceptualised a response to the ecological crisis as a form of ministry which I have called ecoministry. Though the crisis confronts all humans, I have researched possibilities for those whose self-understanding is nurtured by the Judaeo-Christian tradition. My own experiential beginning was a puzzling and seemingly irrational numbness in the face of this threat, interwoven with conflict about cultural and religious stories which were foundering before my eyes, and leaving me bereft of a gift for the generations to come. These stories left my passion for Earth disconnected, and unable to flow into effective action.

The thesis arose from three intersecting elements: the critical interdisciplinarity of the ecohumanities, the ministerial model of James and Evelyn Whitehead (1995), and the prophetic imagination as interpreted by Walter Brueggemann (2001). The ecophilosophical critique of the nature/culture divide holds radical implications: in essence it requires resituating culture in nature. ‘Nature’ is both a construction and a reality beyond and underlying all texts. Understanding this tension in discourses about nature challenges traditional approaches to religious tradition and leads to a recovery of place. Brueggemann’s interpretation of the prophetic imagination presented place ambiguously, and it was elided in the Whiteheads’ model. A thread that runs through all three is narrative, however, and narrative is always emplaced.

The ecological crisis can be conceptualised as Earth’s cry, a cry that is global, emplaced and sacred. The prophetic tradition is a response to cry. The critical work of prophetic ecoministry required engagement with the cultural and religious narratives that function to silence Earth’s cry. Recognizing grief as the core of the prophetic tradition, I argued that ecogrief needs to be named and lived, and holds power to penetrate the violence that silences Earth’s cry. The final challenge of this tradition is the process of the birth of an alternative praxis.

I have proposed conceptualising this praxis of ecoministry as the vocation of becoming human, in communion with a more-than-human world. Ecoministry risks open-ended encounter in an unfolding universe of other-than-human and human subjects, and subverts the imagination of closed reality. To begin is to act in response to global warming and environmental degradation, to learn to re-inhabit places, taking up the ethical work of
decolonisation, receptive to the gifts of Indigenous land-based spirituality, and to dare to join in singing the world into being.

The thrust of this work remains as much question as argument, since it concerns openness to encounter between interconnected subjects, and the mysterious calling into being of the deep ecological self. In this thesis I inserted a stalk of kangaroo grass as a voice for one of these subjects, for the world beyond the text in a language other-than-human. In this I attended to place in the narratives of Victorian Volcanic Plains grasslands as a way of recognizing the materiality that must now be taken into account as sacred. The brief chapter by chapter responses to this stalk, whose being belongs in tussock, in soil, grasslands, in the Australian continent were left as a fragmentary witness to the unknown.

The significance

I have retold an ancient story in a new time. The cry now is the cry of Earth, a category shift from human to other-than-human. The project was to search for roots deep enough to hold in a time when the unthinkable threatens to overwhelm us. There is nothing original in this work other than finding an ancient truth that still holds. The church exists, not for her own sake, but for the sake of the world, a world ‘so loved’, and in expectation of a world of justice and compassion. The category of world was revisioned, setting the human in the biosphere, a world of creative power, agency and resilience. The prophetic moments of cry, silence/critique, grief and alternative/singing offer a narrative structure for taking up this challenge.

My primary contribution to knowledge lies in reconceptualising ministry praxis. Other responses to the ecological crisis in ecohumanities, including ecotheology, environmental ethics and statements of the churches also have this as an ultimate goal. I have listened to a critique of Western culture, and taken seriously the category of place as an outcome of this critique. Using the Whiteheads’ model and method I identified some starting places, processes and resources for local faith communities and I have given indications of these throughout the thesis.

In relation to ecoministry as process, in chapter two I argued for the need to begin by taking time to attend to our experience of Earth’s cry, and to the pastoral dimensions of this process that evoke uncertainty and conflict. Chapter three engages with the roots of these difficulties, holding open a space for critique, and explores the use of narrative as a container for negotiation. Identifying losses in relation to places, to Earth, to colonisation, recognising
traumascapes, asking which deaths are mourned, are major tasks discussed in chapter four. A praxis of dwelling (already incipient in all communities) required more radical conceptualising. Stories of place, ecological, Indigenous and settler stories require gathering together in order to discover forms for ecoministry. Dwelling learns accountability in place, owns shadow places, offers hospitality to strangers, takes up alternative life-style choices not out of duty but from love, a love of matter, a love of place, an ethically constrained Eros, freed from un-lived grief.

In relation to the ecological crisis a major stumbling block is political will. In the environmental movement, not a great deal of attention has been paid to the conditions needed for change. Ecoministry provides a means of approaching blocks, identifying and owning oppression and initiating alternatives and offers a resilient practice that enables sustained commitment. To find resources within one’s own tradition is to find courage to act and join with others of whatever faith (or none) in the task of caring for Earth. Practices are already emerging in many places. I found that the prophetic tradition’s own narrative memory of historical crises, that called for new forms of repentance and ethics, held as a container for negotiating this crisis.

Action is born from hope. The prophetic narratives enable Earth’s cry to be heard, and affirm a capacity for self-critique without a fall into paralysing despair. Responding to global warming, shaping an environmental culture, taking up an ethics of decolonization and dwelling in place require tough decisions. My contribution is to offer a context for hope that is neither false nor easy, is held in relationship with grief, belongs with resilience and connectedness, and can be interpreted theologically as Ecospirit. The human organism-in-the-environment can act otherwise, daring what seems at best unlikely if not impossible. There is no final answer: there is trusting the process, putting your body in place, beginning to act.

Further research

A paradigm shift opens a multitude of possibilities. All areas of ministry await further research – mission, worship, pastoral care, prayer and meditation, youth ministry, property management and finance, and in the wider church, theological education. Much is already being done. I will select four areas that arise from this study.

---

225 The research of Hunter (2003) in Supervised Field Education (using the Whiteheads’ work) provides a congruent starting place.
Given the need for action now, I would argue that research would need to be action-based methodologically. New forms arise in the particularity of place and time. The Whitehead’s method and model as modified in this thesis could be used for research in a particular faith community (or small group within a community). My priority would be to investigate responses to global warming. Qualitative and narrative based research methods would be appropriate for the phenomenological category of experience, and the conceptual material could be developed and critiqued.

Animism has been a recurring theme in this thesis. As a label it is problematic in that it refers to a wide range of phenomena. A comprehensive map of this territory and the shift from derogatory to critical uses of the term has been done (Harvey 2006). Research into a new animism, drawing on this work and pursuing inquiry into the relationships between Indigenous animism and panpsychism introduced in the thesis, could further enrich ecoministry praxis.

In terms of the process of transformative change I have discussed the presence of ecogrief, some of it hidden. Many people have made beginnings, particularly in music, poetry, prayer, and liturgy. There is still much to learn in translating our understanding of grief in other spheres, in discovering and creating structures for attending to ecogrief, and for living with the knowledge that it will never be resolved. This would be a fruitful area of research into ministry praxis.

Protest lies at the heart of the prophetic tradition. Models of ecoministry as political change need to be researched. Gandhi’s method of non-violence used in the civil rights movement in Montgomery, Albany and Birmingham were effective strategies for protest. In the African-American marches and sit-ins Christian organizations and churches played a critical role, and the Exodus narrative underpinned their hope and vision. Rethinking non-violent protest is a consequence of living a prophetic tradition that calls us to confront violence, to acknowledge ourselves as oppressors, to take up a traitorous identity and choose to act alongside a marginalised Earth.

226 At the pivotal moment when Martin Luther King felt he was ‘standing at the center of all that my life had brought me to be’ he thinks of the twenty million black people who dream that some day they might be able to cross the Red Sea of injustice and find their way to the promised land of integration and freedom’ (King 1963:71).
An exercise . . . to keep myself from falling completely into the civilized oblivion of linear time.

. . .

I locate myself in a relatively open space – a low hill is particularly good or a wide field. I relax a bit, take a few breaths, gaze around. Then I close my eyes, and let myself begin to feel the whole bulk of my past – the whole mass of events leading up to this very moment. And I call into awareness, as well, my whole future – all those projects and possibilities that lie waiting to be realized. I imagine this past and this future as two vast balloons of time, separated from each other like the bulbs of an hourglass, yet linked together at the single moment where I stand pondering them. And then, very slowly, I allow both of these immense bulbs of time to begin leaking their substance into this minute moment between them, into the present. Slowly, imperceptibly at first, the present moment begins to grow. Nourished by the leakage from the past and the future, the present moment swells in proportion as those other dimensions shrink. Soon it is very large; and the past and future have dwindled down to mere knots on the edge of this huge expanse. At this point I let past and the future dissolve entirely. And I open my eyes . . . (Abram 1997:202).