HIERARCHY, DOMINATION, NATURE

Considering Bookchin's Critical Social Theory

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The work of Murray Bookchin stands as one of the most ambitious attempts in recent times to produce a post-Marxist critical social theory that places ecological concerns at its core. This article argues that this richly elaborated theory has highlighted the distinct limitations of "high modernist" formulations of historical materialism and liberalism. However, it is also maintained that Bookchin's "organic society" thesis and his theorising about social hierarchy, social domination, and the domination of nature ultimately suffer from significant theoretical and empirical inconsistencies. Bringing Bookchin's more valuable insights into dialogue with the recent interface between "historical-geographical materialism" and poststructuralism, a dynamic, discontinuous view of eco-social relations is recommended that recognises that human societies are always involved in the production, reproduction, and enframing of disruptive, active, and generative natures. How forms of social domination relate to these processes is viewed as complex, contingent, and spatially and historically varied.

Keywords: *Bookchin; social ecology; production of nature; David Harvey; historical geographical materialism*

BOOKCHIN AND CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

The work of Murray Bookchin has stimulated a series of wide-ranging debates over the past two decades. From environmental ethics (Albrecht, 1998; Eckersley, 1989, 1992; Fox, 1989; Light, 1993) to debates in democratic and utopian theory (Clark, 1986, 1998; Gundersen, 1998; Luke, 1999) and from concerns about the future of libertarian thought (Marshall, 1992; Watson, 1996) to debates about the relationship between ecological thought and feminism (Cochrane, 1998; Salleh, 1996, 1997), Bookchin's provocative interventions have inspired a variety of critical assessments. With a few notable exceptions (see Best, 1998; Light, 1993; Mellor, 1992; Rudy, 1998), however, surprisingly little detailed attention has been given to Bookchin's overall effectiveness as a social theorist. There are good reasons to believe that this constitutes an oversight that needs to be corrected.

Bookchin pioneered a form of "urban-ecological" critique that reoriented critical social theory to place at centre stage the reified and dehumanized forms of modern urbanism (see Bookchin, 1965, 1974, 1987) and the environmentally hazardous dynamics of a "grow or die" capitalist economy (see Bookchin, 1962, 1971a, 1980c, 1982). It is little exaggeration to say that perhaps more than any other postwar thinker, these prescient demands anticipated the central agenda of contempo-

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rary eco-leftist social theory. Perhaps the most interesting and provocative aspect of his work is the series of conceptual and explanatory revisions he has sought to make to critical social theory. Significantly anticipating recent feminist and "post-Marxist" critiques of economic reductionism (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977; Fraser, 1997; Giddens, 1981; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), Bookchin has maintained a focus on the emergence and consolidation of social hierarchy and social domination that gives rise to a far more profound explanation of humanity's estrangement from itself and from the natural world than that offered by historical materialism. His work has gone on from this to pose a further challenge to what William Leiss (1972) has identified as one of the most crucial concepts in the intellectual biology of the modern West— the idea of the mastery or domination of nature (p. 12). Via a bold sequential reordering of the Frankfurt school's engagement with this issue, Bookchin has contested the view that the antagonism between society and nature is historically inevitable. Rather, it is maintained that the very idea that humanity must dominate nature has its roots in an earlier moment of social domination itself (Bookchin, 1965a, 1982, 1990b).

There is no doubt that the result of this inquiry is that Bookchin offers a bold and impressive example of historically informed grand social theorising. Richly elaborated, subtly executed, and containing numerous stimulating digressions, we are presented with a narrative of epic proportions and considerable ambition. But does the end result hang together?

The aim of this article is to grapple with this question. We begin by demonstrating how Bookchin's theory of social ecology develops through a critique of Marxism and liberalism. Bookchin's reconstructed position is then outlined and critically interrogated.[1]

Although the virtues of Bookchin's social theory are noted, I argue that problems immediately emerge with his crucial thesis of the "organic society." The consistency of Bookchin's depiction of early humanity found in *The Ecology of Freedom* (Bookchin, 1991) and *Remaking Society* (Bookchin, 1990b), the extent to which it is adequately backed up by anthropological evidence, and the broader coherence of his arguments are critically scrutinized. I also examine whether Bookchin's "social hierarchy" thesis is theoretically coherent. In the final part of the article, I argue that Bookchin's more salvageable insights, particularly his more qualified position developed in recent works, need to be drawn into dialogue with the increasingly rich dialogue that has opened up of late between "historical-geographical-materialism" and poststructuralism (Braun & Castree, 1998; Castree, 1995, 2002; Harvey, 1996, 2000; Lefebvre, 1991; Peet & Watts, 1996; Smith, 1984, 1996, 1998; Soja, 1989, Swyngedouw, 1999).

As such, the central contribution this article seeks to make to current scholarship on Bookchin is threefold. It seeks to advance a discussion of his work that moves beyond the rather personalised and vitriolic assessments that have come to predominate of late. Second, it argues for a critical social theory of the environment that pays as much attention to space and geographical variations as to time and historical change. Finally, this article seeks to move discussions of social ecology beyond the increasingly problematic terrain of radical ecology. As a result, this article contributes to an ongoing revisionist project that is attempting to think the contours of a critical social theory of the environment beyond radical ecologism (see White, 2002, in press).

Marxism and Bourgeois Sociology

In many respects, Bookchin's social theory has developed through a critical engagement with liberalism and Marxism. Although Bookchin emerged out of a Marxist tradition (see Bookchin, 1999) and his work has persistently maintained sympathies with Marx's analysis of capitalism, from the mid-1960s onwards, his writings nevertheless take a distinctly critical turn away from the mainstream of Marxist theory. The task identified though is "not to abandon Marxism or annul it but to transcend it dialectically" (Bookchin, 1971b, p. 199).

Bookchin's earlier essays from the 1960s are particularly concerned with the sociological and political limitations of Marxism-Leninism (e.g., Bookchin, 1971a, 1971b).[2] Yet they are still informed by an underlying commitment to the "seminal insights" (Bookchin, 1971b, p. 232) of historical materialism. It is only in later essays (Bookchin, 1980a, 1980c, 1982, 1990b) that we can find a more fundamental critique being posed against Marx's own thinking and the Marxist tradition more broadly for absorbing some "of the most questionable tenets of Enlightenment thought" (Bookchin, 1980a, p. 195).

Three key moments in Bookchin's Frankfurt style critique of Marx (and historical materialism more generally) can be isolated (Bookchin, 1980a, 1980b, 1982). First, Bookchin argues that a central failing of Marx is the manner in which he converges with Enlightenment thought in adopting a scientistic conception of social reality. What follows from this is that Marx "objectifies" the revolutionary project, divesting it of all ethical goals and content. Social reality and its trajectory are explained in terms that remove human visions, cultural influences, and ethical issues from the social process as the focus turns to objective "laws" acting behind human wills (Bookchin, 1980a, p. 198). According to Bookchin, in sidelining normative issues, Marx is left without a credible normative criterion to judge historical development.

A second related moment of reduction is identified with the conceptualisation of "man" as *homo faber*. Distinguishing man from other animals simply to the extent that human beings work on nature to produce their means of subsistence is seen as ensuring that Marx essentially ends up dealing with man as a "force" in the productive process. Citing Marx's declaration in *The German Ideology* that men are "what they produce and how they produce" (Bookchin, 1980a, p. 203), Bookchin suggests that this provides a stunningly impoverished view of humanity. Rather than view humanity in classic Aristotelian terms as *zoon politikon*, a being possessed of volition and ethical purpose that attains fulfillment in the *polis*, for Marx, men are merely the personification of economic categories, the bearers of particular class interests. Humanity is thus reduced to an "instrument of production" (Bookchin, 1980a, p. 203). More generally, this adherence to a metaphysics of labour simply ensures that Marx's social theory provides a technologically and economically reductionist view that is blind to the importance of culture, ideology, and other realms of human experience beyond the production processes.

Perhaps the central and most damning criticism that Bookchin has made of historical materialism, though, is the suggestion that Marx ultimately reduces domination to the status of a natural fact. It is the "conquest" of a "stingy" nature that Marx celebrates (and later that Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, lamented) that is nevertheless viewed as the central and unavoidable feature of historical development. Noting the remarkable convergence that can be found here between Marxism and liberal ideology, Bookchin (1980a) argues that domination is "annexed to libera-

tion as a precondition for social emancipation" (p. 200). Bookchin claims that Marx sees nature as "simply an object for mankind, purely a matter of utility" (p. 202), and "progress" is simply reduced to the maximisation of the forces of production.

According to Bookchin (1980a), the consequence of this "incredibly reductionist framework" (p. 203) is a determinist and Eurocentric view of historic change in historical materialism. For Marx, class society remains "unavoidable" as long as the mode of production fails to provide the material abundance necessary for human emancipation. Consequently, Bookchin (1982, citing Horkheimer in *The Eclipse of Reason*) notes that socialism now involves not only the subjugation of external nature (human and nonhuman) but internal human nature as well. Revealing "Victorian arrogance at its worst" (p. 87), Bookchin argues we can also find in Marx a complete disregard for the non-European and a patent neglect "of the vital 'pre-history' that the non-Western world had elaborated over millennia of development" (p. 87). Thus, the anomaly emerges of capitalism's greatest critic in *The Grundrisse*, heralding the "great civilising influence of capital" (p. 202) as it spreads elsewhere around the world.[3] It is the underlying idea, though, that "society must dominate nature," an ideology that is seen as embraced by Marx and the liberal political economists but found as far back as Aristotle's "seeming conflict" between the "realm of necessity" and the "realm of freedom," that is seen as needing serious scrutiny: Bookchin argues that this idea has "been used ideologically to justify domination in virtually every aspect of life" (p. 10).

From Social Classes and the State to Social Hierarchy and Social Domination

It is in *The Ecology of Freedom* (Bookchin, 1982, 1991) in which we can find the most comprehensive elaboration of Bookchin's alternative position. Here, breaking from both Marxist and anarchist orthodoxies, and denoting Bookchin's debt to Weber, it is argued that the analytic primacy of both "social class" and "the state" now needs to be superseded in critical social theory by the concepts of social hierarchy and social domination. The concept of hierarchy is introduced by Bookchin (1982) as "cultural, traditional and psychological systems of obedience and command, not merely . . . economic or political systems" (p. 4).

Bookchin argues that the concept of "social hierarchy" includes Marx's definition of class but goes beyond it. In addressing complex systems of command and obedience in which elites enjoy varying degrees of control over their subordinates—without necessarily exploiting them in an economic fashion—these categories are seen as expanding our critical horizons. Bookchin (1982) argues that this is the case insofar as they aspire to address some fairly fundamental failings of Marxism and critical theory, notably the failure to recognise that hierarchy and domination could easily continue to exist in a "classless" or "stateless" society:

> I refer to the domination of the young by the old, of women by men, of one ethnic group by another, of masses by bureaucrats who profess to speak in their "higher social interest," of countryside by town, and in a more subtle psychological sense, of body by mind, of spirit by a shallow instrumental rationality and of nature by society and technology. (p. 4)

More broadly, such categories are seen as important for historical inquiry because it is argued there are good reasons to believe that forms of social hierarchy and domination preceded class societies. A credible exploration of the roots of the

idea that "humanity must dominate nature" must explore the very roots of domination. Yet to do this, we need to go well beyond the horizons and understanding offered by *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979). Returning to the historical roots of these pathologies in early human society will reveal that the very concept that humanity must dominate nature has its origins in the domination of human by human.

Bookchin's (1982) essential historical thesis then, articulated in *The Ecology of Freedom*, can be summarised in the following fashion. The notion that humanity is "destined" to dominate nature is by no means a universal feature of human culture. Indeed, if anything, "this notion is almost completely alien to the outlook of so-called primitive or pre-literate societies" (p. 43). As Bookchin states,

> I cannot emphasise too strongly that the concept emerged very gradually from a broader social development: the increased domination of human by human. The breakdown of primordial equality into hierarchical systems of inequality, the disintegration of early kinship groups in social classes, the dissolution of tribal communities into the city, and finally the usurpation of social administration by the state—not only altered social life but the attitude of people towards each other, humanity's vision of itself, and ultimately its attitude to the natural world. (p. 43)

The abstract philosophical thesis of the domination of nature that can be found in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979) is rendered concrete and inverted by Bookchin. And so, to consolidate this maneuver, we are provided with a counternarrative of historical development, which provides us with an alternative account of humanity at the dawn of civilisation.

The Outlook of Organic Society

Organic society is a term used by Bookchin (1982) to refer to "a spontaneously formed, non-coercive and egalitarian society—a natural society in the very definite sense that it emerged from innate human needs for consociation, interdependence and care" (p. 5). The term is used in *The Ecology of Freedom*, and later in *Remaking Society* (Bookchin, 1990b), to refer to his own alternative account of early human communities. In a fashion similar to the concept of "primitive communism" found in Engels's work, it is argued that we can point to a moment in the development of preliterate humanity, in which human relations were marked by "intense social solidarity internally and with the natural world" (p. 44). The greater evidence we find is of an outlook toward life "that visualised people, things and relations in terms of their uniqueness rather than their 'superiority' or 'inferiority' " (p. 44).

In basic structural terms, *organic society* is presented in *The Ecology of Freedom* as existing in a fairly integrated and unified form and based on kinship ties, age groups, and a sexual division of labour. Complete parity, a high sense of internal unity, and an egalitarian outlook mark social relations. Certain defining social practises are also seen as characteristic of this form of society, notably the practise of usufruct (the freedom of individuals to appropriate resources by virtue of the fact they are using them), "the irreducible minimum" (the unalienable right of each member of the community to food, shelter, and accommodation), and the "equality of unequals" (equal treatment despite unequal abilities). We also find here an avoidance of cohesion in dealing with intercommunity affairs and a commitment to an "ethics of complementarity" rather than one of command and obedience. Thus, despite the physical limitations of organic society, Bookchin (1982) argues that it

nevertheless "functioned unconsciously with an implicit commitment to freedom" (p. 143).

Regarding the relationship between organic society and the natural world, we are told "their outlook was distinctly ecological" (Bookchin, 1982, p. 5). Because "people in pre-literate cultures viewed themselves not as 'the lords of creation' . . . but as part of the natural world. They were neither above nature nor below it but *within* it" (Bookchin, 1982, p. 5).

A view of interhuman relations as devoid of hierarchy and a view of humanity's relationship with nature as being marked by a "deeply embedded co-operative spirit" (Bookchin, 1982, p. 48) pervade *The Ecology of Freedom*. This richly articulated "unity in diversity" is seen as shattering, though with the incipient emergence of social hierarchies.

The Emergence of Hierarchy

The breakdown of the "primal unity" of organic society, and the emergence of social hierarchy and social domination, unfolds at two levels in *The Ecology of Freedom*—at the material and the subjective. Materially, it is argued that the institutions of organic society are gradually shattered and then reworked as we see the emergence of gerontocracies, patriocentric relations, priest castes, and warrior societies. It is these developments that provide the raw material for the later emergence of class relations and city and state formations.

The Ecology of Freedom eschews a strictly linear account of this development. Rather, we are provided with a highly elaborate dialectical and processual account that explores this development from numerous standpoints, returning to build on these overlapping pictures.

Moments of incipient hierarchy surface and then shade back into the egalitarian framework of organic society. In dealing with initial points of tension, whether identified as emerging from the sexual division of labour, the elders, the rise of the warrior, or the emergence of surplus, it is argued that early organic society persistently reworked its institutions to ensure the maintenance of a "unity in difference." Nevertheless, it is to "basic biological facts," and the differences that emerge from these, that Bookchin turns to, to locate the origins of social hierarchy.

Incipient, potentially hierarchical elites gradually evolve through gerontocracy and the emergence of patriarchal values. Each phase of their evolution shades into the succeeding one, until the first firm shoots of hierarchy emerge and consolidate. As bands begin to increase in size and number, as they differentiate into clans and tribes and make war, a third moment of incipient hierarchy is identified as young warriors begin to enjoy a sociopolitical eminence. The warrior slowly emerges as the "big man" of the community, sharing civil power with the elders and shaman. And so the primordial balance that assigned complementary economic functions to both sexes on the basis of parity slowly tips "towards the male, favouring his social pre-eminence" (Bookchin, 1982, p. 78).

The "subjective" level of Bookchin's (1982) account of historical development pays considerable attention to what he refers to as the emergence of epistemologies of rule. This is understood as the shift from animism—which is viewed as typical of organic society—to "the emergence of a repressive sensibility and body of values which allows the whole realm of experience to be understood along lines of command and obedience" (p. 90). This development presents a crucial element in fostering patriarchal, class, and antiecological relations and a psychic apparatus rooted in guilt, renunciation, and a repressive rationality.

The move away from an animistic sensibility (which conceptualises external nature at the very outset as a "mutualistic community" and is informed by an epistemology that tends to unify rather than divide) (Bookchin, 1982, pp. 98-99) is identified as a critical moment. As a communicative and participatory relationship to nature is increasingly ceded to manipulative reason, we see the emergence of a particular form of generalisation and classification, which are used "not to achieve wholeness but to produce a diverse antagonism in the objective and subjective realms" (Bookchin, 1982, p. 112). Although Bookchin (1982) recognises that the emergence of such processes may have been necessary to allow the individual to discover his or her uniqueness and identity, it is argued we should not assume that it had to manifest itself in "the socially explosive form" that it did (p. 97). Other possibilities and epistemologies "may have favoured a more 'relaxed' opening of the self . . . have been ignored in favour of 'values centred on mastery and control' " (p. 112).

Thus, reason appears in human societies—but in an "involuted and contradictory form" (Bookchin, 1982, p. 100). It is argued though that this (initially) fictive manipulation of nature has its roots in the real manipulation of humanity though shaman and priest cults. It is not the discipline of work but the discipline of rule that is seen as demanding the repression of internal nature. This "repression then extends outward to external nature as a mere object of rule and later of exploitation" (Bookchin, 1982, p. 8).

So, a legacy of domination emerges through the manipulation of primordial institutions and sensibilities. This is supplemented with a hierarchical mentality that justifies toil, guilt, and sacrifice. For Bookchin (1982), this ensures "the vision of social and natural diversity was altered from an organismic sensibility that sees different phenomena as unity in diversity into a hierarchical mentality that ranks the most minuscule phenomena into mutually antagonistic pyramids of 'inferior' and 'superior' " (p. 8).

A "Legacy of Domination" and a "Legacy of Freedom"

It is this curse of domination then—a curse that ever since its inception has profoundly infused virtually every human achievement, from art to technics, social institutions to the most intimate aspect of our daily lives, that is seen as needing to be exposed.

Bookchin's critical message, however, is not simply to reiterate Weber's, Adorno's, or Horkheimer's gloomy analysis of the extent to which domination has seeped into the human project. Rather, drawing inspiration from Kropotkin (1986) and Mumford (1961), it is argued we need to recover the countermovement to this development, the subterranean "legacy of freedom" that can be unearthed from the grim rise of social hierarchy.[4] As hierarchy institutionalises subjugation, the ambiguity of "civilisation" emerges—yet this very development is itself presented as ever pregnant with alternative possibilities and potentialities.

The recovery of this legacy of freedom could be seen as the defining feature of Bookchin's historical writings. In *The Ecology of Freedom*, this legacy is again traced at the material and subjective levels. Within the realm of ideas, numerous points are seen as marking significant eruptions from the dominant path. Bookchin argues that with the rise of the city and most notably the polis, for a moment the disappearance of the blood group is ceded to the potentiality of a fuller development, as we see the emerging idea of the citizen. With the spread of Roman law, we see the

emerging idea of a universal *humanitas* developing (even if this may well have remained little more than a political strategy developed for fiscal and ideological reasons). In peasant and folk utopias, we see the preservation of images of a bounteous nature, an image that will survive through medieval times to informing the early communist utopias. It is Christian historicism, with its promise of an early utopistic future, that is given a central place in informing radical messianic activism and demands for the immediate establishment of a heavenly city on Earth. This, in turn, is seen as feeding into the great chiliastic movements that are to sweep through the medieval world in the 14th century.

Instances of libertarian resistance to the legacy of domination are found throughout human history—from the earliest slave rebellions of the ancient alluvial civilisations, up to the incipient currents of Quakers, Seekers, Anabaptists, and others that are to play such a vital role, giving rise to the dawn of the revolutionary era. In Bookchin's other historical writings, however, we can see this legacy of freedom being explored from other vantage points and a similar resistance emerging toward overly economistic historical explanations. *The Limits of the City* (Bookchin, 1974) and *From Urbanization to Cities* (Bookchin, 1995a), following Weberian and Polanyian themes, suggest (contra Marxian orthodoxy) that early cities may well have formed to meet "cultural rather than strictly economic or defensive needs" (Bookchin, 1995a, p. 32). Moreover, it is argued, we can point to moments in which the relationship between town and countryside was not marked by domination but a certain ecological and social balance and a thriving civic sphere. Focusing here on the critical role of the Athenian polis with the emergence of politics, and the survival of the civic virtues and notions of active citizenship in the Renaissance city-states, it is argued such historical forms (although imperfect) nevertheless suggest alternative possibilities existed. Although the dominant path of European development may have been marked by the degeneration of politics to statecraft, and the development of centralised oligarchic institutions, we can recover civic republican, confederalist, and municipalist moments and identify numerous grassroots forces that attempted to resist centralisation, marketisation, and the legacy of domination. Such alternatives may well have opened up new possibilities if allowed to flourish.[5]

CRITIQUE OF BOOKCHIN'S CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

Considering Bookchin's Historical Social Theory

To break into this historical narrative at the dawn of capitalism and modernity, it needs to be asked is this account of historical development compelling? Does Bookchin provide us with a deeper insight into the historical roots of our contemporary social and environmental dislocations?

Although Bookchin has over recent times demonstrated some awareness of the pitfalls of constructing metanarratives, in a period marked by a substantial degree of incredulity toward all "grand narratives" or the project of writing universal "history" (e.g., Lyotard, 1984), the project he defends has become deeply unfashionable.[6] What could be the minimal conditions necessary to convince us that this project had some plausibility?

It would seem that at the very least, a viable historical social theory aspiring to this degree of historical sweep would need to be intellectually and logically coherent, theoretically sound, and richly steeped in the empirical and qualitative litera-

ture to even begin to convince. Does Bookchin's historical social theory as formu-
lated in the "keynote" texts of social ecology acquit itself here?

One immediate reaction to this historical social theory could well begin by sim-
ply declaring the starting point to be inadequate. Thus, critics could well argue that
his reading of Marx is insubstantial and essentially polemical, that it deals with the
broader tradition in a far too generic fashion.

There is no doubt that the question of Bookchin's relationship to Marx's own
work and to Marxism more generally is a complex matter. Although I have noted
earlier that Bookchin has never sought to hide his debt to Marx, and indeed essays
such as "Listen Marxist!" (Bookchin, 1971b) at times use Marx against Marxism,
Bookchin has a tendency nevertheless to read Marx simply as a mixture of "scien-
tific" structuralist and technological determinist. In essays such as "Marxism as
Bourgeois Sociology" (Bookchin, 1980a), this clearly does ensure that insights that
could emerge from a more sympathetic engagement are perhaps unnecessarily
foreclosed. Insights offered by the younger humanist Marx of the *Manuscripts* are
clearly dismissed far too quickly.[7] Moreover, the weight of detailed historical
scholarship on Marx that has sought to recover his ecological credentials through
attention to the 1844 *Manuscripts* (Benton, 1993) and the theory of metabolic rift
(Burkett, 1999; Foster, 1999, 2000; Foster & Burkett, 2000) at the very least sug-
gests a more rounded reading of Marx on this issue is perhaps overdue. Interest-
ingly enough, Bookchin's (1999, pp. 243-298) more recent work denotes a distinct
softening of his attitude to Marx at least.[8]

It would seem equally important to recognise that many elements of Bookchin's
critique of Marxism (more generally) are enlightening. They do touch on weak-
nesses that have run through many formulations of historical materialism (particu-
larly of the more orthodox or vulgar kind) as well as the disastrous political practice
of political Marxism. His observations are remarkably prescient of recent debates.
For example, a concern with the potential for reductionism involved in conceptual-
ising the human subject principally as homo faber, and the lack of clarity and con-
cern with normative issues that has defined many currents of Marxism, can hardly
be dismissed as entirely misconceived. Bookchin's highlighting of the
Eurocentricism of historical materialism clearly raises a vexatious issue that con-
temporary critical social theory has hardly begun to address.[9] The long-standing
issue of the role that culture, ideas, and the causal efficacy of non-class-based forms
of social domination have played on historical development would seem as salient a
discussion as ever.[10] Perhaps most striking, though, is how contemporary debates
on the relations between Marxism and environmental questions have centred on the
very issues Bookchin drew into focus nearly four decades ago—the role of
instrumentalism, technological optimism/determinism, and "the conquest of
nature" (see Benton, 1989, 1992, 1996; Burkett, 1999; Eckersley, 1992; Foster,
1999, 2000; Grundmann, 1991a, 1991b; Harvey, 1996; Salleh, 1997). It is interest-
ing to note, for example, that Bookchin's general assertion of a rather bizarre mirror
image that can be found between the vulgar Marxist view of history and liberal ide-
ology has been noted most recently by Harvey (1996, p. 13).

A glib dismissal of Bookchin's social theory then informed by some notion of
the infallibility of historical materialism would seem entirely inadequate. Yet is his
own resolution of the difficult issues that he raises convincing? To consider this
issue further, it is perhaps useful to begin by returning to the whole issue of organic
society.

Organic Society 1: Vagaries and Inconsistencies

Speculation over the "nature" of early humanity has clearly played a central role in the history of social and political theory and in the development of Western thought. Raising critical questions regarding the origins and "naturalness" of inequality, gender division, and the state, even in the 20th century, this topic has preoccupied numerous Marxist, feminist, and libertarian philosophers, social theorists, and social anthropologists. Over more recent decades, critical political issues relating to the rights of "indigenous" peoples and reevaluations of the relative merits of contemporary Western lifestyles, perspectives, and ideologies have given these debates a renewed edge.

It would also have to be recognised, however, that significant shifts in social anthropology over recent decades (mirroring the broader critique of philosophical humanism that has emerged in social theory) have equally raised doubts about the viability of this whole enterprise. Whether due to increasing awareness of the doubtful evidence that informed many 19th-century Eurocentric speculations about "the primitive," poststructuralist suspicions that historical anthropological enquiry rarely surmounts an "orientalist gaze" or doubts about the possibility of saying anything credible about a composite human subject over such vast time frames, the notion that we can begin our discussion in social theory in this fashion has equally become highly contentious. Yet if we bracket for the moment such metatheoretical issues, even within its own terms of reference, problems can be found with Bookchin's organic society thesis.

One immediate problem that arises is that it is difficult to avoid being struck by the sheer vagueness and imprecision that seem to linger around this whole enterprise. So although "organic society" is not presented as a hypothetical "state of nature" but postulated as a historical actuality, as Mary Mellor (1992, p. 124) has noted, it is never made very clear by Bookchin when or where this early form of human association actually existed. At points in *The Ecology of Freedom*, one can find references to an "early Neolithic" village society and get the impression that organic society consequently can be located at a crossover moment when hunter-gatherers first began to settle down into a horticultural society. Elsewhere, in other writings, one can gain the distinct impression that this society stretched well up to the emergence of the early cities.[11]

Bookchin's narrative does seem further problematic by the manner in which his exposition swings rather dramatically between a "reflexive voice," which appears to accept he is embarking on a highly speculative exercise, to a much more confident tone, which at times seems to virtually claim a God's eye view. Thus, one encounters persistent examples of a carefully qualified and tentative insight being quickly reworked into a substantive proposition a few sentences later, where a speculation on "preliterate" practises, values, or institutions is then suddenly transformed into an implausibly detailed account of "how things really were back then."[12] Given the time scales that are being dealt with here, and the manner in which these speculations are often unsupported by evidence or supported by one or two case studies, it is difficult to avoid an immediate sense that a certain creative embellishing is going on.

Additional problems emerge when it becomes evident that Bookchin's own understanding of what he has demonstrated does, at times, seem at odds with the actual narrative he provides. For example, as we have seen, one of the boldest

claims that Bookchin makes of his account of historical development is that it "radically reverses" central features of historical materialism. Thus, Marx and Engels, Adorno and Horkheimer, are all chastised for their Victorian image of "stingy nature" and the view that freedom from material want necessitated the "domination of nature." Indeed, at various points, Bookchin (1990b) has emphatically rejected the view "that forms of domination . . . have their sources in economic conditions and needs" (p. 45). On the contrary, we are told the idea of domination initially arose from within societies as part of the development of social hierarchies, "which are not necessarily economically motivated at all" (p. 46). However, an implicit recognition of the role that material factors played in the development of hierarchy, and even a certain sense that the development of hierarchy is inevitable, can also be unearthed from Bookchin's work.

For example, to return to the emergence of social hierarchy, it is argued at one point that that its roots are found in the tensions and ambiguities produced by age. So we are told, "Physically the old were the most infirm, dependent and often the most vulnerable members of the community in periods of difficulty. It is they who were expected to give up their lives in times of want" (Bookchin, 1990b, p. 53). In the tension between vulnerability and being the repositories of a community's wisdom, the elderly "may have been more disposed to enhance their status" (Bookchin, 1990b, p. 53). Elsewhere, we are told in a matter of fact manner

> that age-hierarchies would appear is often merely a matter of time; the socialisation process, with its need for careful instruction, growing knowledge, and an increasing reservoir of experience virtually guarantees that elders would earn a justifiable degree of respect and, in precarious situations, seek a certain amount of social power. (Bookchin, 1990b, p. 60)

This account does have certain plausibility to it (if we accept the prior assumption of a preexisting egalitarian era). What is striking, though, is that (despite protestation to the contrary) material factors (i.e., "times of want" and the emergence of "precarious situations") would nevertheless appear to play a decisive role in the emergence of hierarchy.

Moreover, although Bookchin complains about determinist features of historical materialism, we can also find elements of his own position that come close to "naturalising" hierarchy. For example, at certain points hierarchy is seen as worked out of "basic biological facts." Such a claim clearly sails close to determinism if interpreted crudely. To give Bookchin his due, his narrative here is usually more subtle and complex, stressing openness, change, and contingency. At other times, though, it appears that hierarchy is almost postulated as a part of the human condition. Thus, we are told, "The violation of organic society is latent within organic society itself. The primal unity of the early community, both internally and with nature, is weakened merely by the elaboration of the community's social life—its ecological differentiation" (Bookchin, 1982, p. 80). And here it would appear that the rise of social hierarchy is almost a product of the natural development of social life.

Indeed, if we review Bookchin's writings as a whole, we can indeed find a persistent vacillation over the question of whether the initial emergence of social hierarchy was inevitable. When critiquing Marxism, Bookchin stresses the open-ended possibilities of historical development. Thus, in *The Ecology of Freedom*, when considering whether our ascent into civilisation necessitated the domination of human by human as a precondition for the domination of human by nature, it is

argued, "History might well have followed quite different paths of development" (Bookchin, 1982, p. 66). At other times, though, and particularly in later writings, we are told the exact opposite:

> Paradoxically, in its emergence out of barbarism—indeed, out of simply animality—humanity may have had to depend upon priests, chieftains, and perhaps state-like formations to overcome parochialism, lack of individuality, kinship bonds, gerontocracies, and patriarchies. The groundwork for making a civilizatory process possible . . . may have required what we would regard today as unacceptable institutions of social control but that at an earlier time may have been important in launching a rational social development. (Bookchin, 1995b, pp. xvi-xvii)

As a provisional judgment, then, it could well be argued that Bookchin's account of historical development is perhaps not as radical a reversal of Marx and Engel's position as first appears. Nor does it appear as consistent as he would have us believe.[13]

Organic Society 2: Methodological Issues

More substantial difficulties with organic society can be found at the methodological level. One central problem here would seem to be that evidence for Bookchin's speculations is not drawn in the main from paleo-anthropological research but rather from 20th-century ethnographic studies of tribal societies and historical accounts of European encounters with the non-European. Thus, his speculation on gender differentiation in organic society is informed by Elizabeth Thomas's studies of the Bantu. Discussions of animism make reference to Edward B. Tylor's observation of the practises of Native Americans. Various other accounts of the ecological embeddedness of humanity at the dawn of civilisation draw from Dorothy Lee's studies of the Hopi and Wintu tribes.

Now, this practise is justified in *The Ecology of Freedom* on the basis that

> the cultural facts of dress, technics, and environment that link prehistoric peoples with existing "primitives" is so striking that it is difficult to believe that Siberian mammoth hunters of yesteryear . . . were so dissimilar from the Arctic seal hunters of de Poncin's day. (Bookchin, 1982, p. 57)

Yet reservations could immediately be voiced here given that the implicit (and highly questionable) assumption underlying this is that tribal people have lived in a permanently static state, without change or social development. Given the growing recognition among social anthropologists that many supposedly isolated small-scale societies have been part of wider, often global systems of exchange for many millennia, such an approach would seem to be increasingly problematic (see Ellen, 1986, p. 9). More generally, establishing the exact nature of human-nature relations among tribal people would seem further complicated by the fact that as the historical geographer Ian Simmons (1996) has noted, "The ethnographic picture is rather spotty on this particular topic so it does not seem possible to give a complete picture for all groups even for near-recent times, let alone the past" (p. 66).

Indeed, if we turn to the anthropological record, problems with Bookchin's account of organic society would seem to become even more entrenched. Notably, there would now seem to be growing paleo-anthropological evidence that early humans were involved in substantive reshaping of their natural environment, even to the point where they produced substantive environmental degradation.[14] Thus,

although Bookchin (1982) in *The Ecology of Freedom* may claim that "Neolithic artefacts seem to reflect a communion of humanity and nature that patently expressed the communion of humans with each other: a solidarity of the community with the world of life that articulated an intense solidarity within the community itself" (p. 61), elsewhere we can find substantive evidence that points directly to the contrary.[15]

It could also be noted that even if we accepted the notion that anthropological data on more recent "tribal societies" provide a legitimate basis for speculation about early humanity, these studies would similarly seem to suggest that the development of early human societies was probably marked by much more complex and variable social patterns, practises, and institutions than are found in the composite account provided in *The Ecology of Freedom*. Thus, concerning Bookchin's (1982) claim that relations in organic society were "distinctly ecological" (p. 5), it could simply be noted here that the anthropological evidence on "tribal" people and hunter-gatherers hardly lends unqualified support to such a generalisation.[16] The claim that organic society was "strikingly non-domineering not only in its institutionalised structure but in its very language" (Bookchin, 1990b, p. 47) similarly could meet any number of contrary examples from small-scale societies,[17] as could the related claim of an egalitarian sexual division of labour,[18] and so on.

There would seem to be substantive reasons, then, to doubt the whole account of organic society found in *The Ecology of Freedom* and *Remaking Society*. By the early 1990s, it increasingly appeared that Bookchin himself had become less and less comfortable with many aspects of this period of his work. Initially responding to certain currents in deep ecology, committed to what Bookchin (1991) now saw as "atavistic celebrations of a mythic Neolithic and Pleistocene" (p. xxx),[19] the second edition of *The Ecology of Freedom* provided a new introduction that qualified and revised many earlier commitments. Now ceding to the anthropological evidence that early humanity's relations with the natural world may well have been much less harmonious than previously presumed and warning against romanticising early humanity's interconnectedness with nature, one can find an uncomfortable attempt to hang on to certain elements of his own organic society thesis. Thus, we are told, "as humanity began to emerge from first nature, possibly in the Pleistocene and certainly in the Palaeolithic, their relations to animals as other was largely complementary" (p. xlvii).

By the mid to late 1990s, however (Bookchin, 1995c, 1995d, 1999), it was no longer clear that even these revised commitments were still held. Appalled by the growth of avowed "primitivist" and even "anti-civilisationalist" currents in American anarchist circles, Bookchin (1995c) appeared increasingly concerned simply to refute those who would seek "to substitute mythic notions of a pristine and primitive past that probably never existed" (p. 122).[20] Although never actually renouncing his own past then, it has become increasingly difficult to ascertain what exactly is left of Bookchin's theory of organic society.

After Ecological Romanticism

Perhaps it is time here to put this search for "the primitive," once again, in a historical perspective.

By the late 19th century, Adam Kuper had noted that within European anthropology, the broad characteristics of primeval human communities had been settled with a remarkable degree of agreement. Thus, it was widely believed that "primitive society" was an organic whole, ordered on the basis of kinship relations that

then split into exogamous, corporate descent groups. The original religion was widely believed to be animism, and it was further thought that primeval social forms were preserved in the languages and in the ceremonies of contemporary "primitive" peoples. Remarking on the contemporary relevance of this series of assumptions, Kuper (1988) has argued, "Hardly any anthropologist today would accept that this classic account of primitive society can be sustained" (p. 8). Indeed, we are told,

> On the contrary, the orthodox modern view is that there never was such a thing as "primitive society." Certainly, no such thing can be reconstructed now. There is not even a sensible way in which one can specify what a "primitive society" is. The term implies some historic point of reference. It presumably defines a type of society ancestral to more advanced forms, on the analogy of an evolutionary history of some natural species. *But human societies cannot be traced back to a single point of origin, and there is no way of reconstituting prehistoric social forms, classifying them, and aligning them in a true time series. There are no fossils of social organisation. Even if some very ancient social order could be reconstructed, one could not generalise it.* If it is useful to apply evolutionary theory to social history, then *it must direct attention to variation, to adaptation, to all sorts of local circumstances and so to diversification. And it does seem likely that early human societies were indeed rather diverse.* Surviving hunter-gatherers certainly do not conform to a single organisational type. Since ecological variations constrain social organisation, especially where technology is simple, there must have been considerable differences in social structure between the earliest human societies. (p. 8)

Part of the problem with Bookchin's position (and indeed his more recent eco-anarchist critics, e.g., Watson, 1996) is that the attempt to locate a moment of ecological harmony in the distant past (no matter how qualified or nuanced) would seem to simply entail a degree of excessive universalism or singularity that cannot be supported by the highly variegated and ultimately patchy anthropological record (Philips & Mighall, 2000). More broadly, a basic problem with the attempt to define certain societies or social practises as more "organic" than others in social ecology is that this inevitably entails a slide toward naturalistic reductionism. Indeed, the term *organic society* by definition constitutes a failure to recognise, as Benton (1994) has emphasised, that "human beings simply do not have a 'natural mode' of relations to nature. We have no single instinctive prescribed mode of life but a range of indefinitely variable 'material cultures' " (p. 43). As Kuper (1988) has noted, surrounding this whole debate, "not to put too fine a point upon it, the history of primitive society is the history of an illusion. It is our phlogiston, our ether" (p. 8).

Social Hierarchy/Social Domination

To move on from the organic society issue then, how plausible is the rest of Bookchin's social hierarchy thesis? The concept of social hierarchy clearly denotes the most striking and interesting conceptual innovation that can be found in social ecology, delineating Bookchin's position from the preoccupations of classical critical theory. If we consider this issue at the synchronic level for the moment, one considerable advantage of this demand to place "hierarchy" at the centre of critical social theory is that it clearly opens up the possibility of examining multilayered forms of domination, exclusion, and silencing that are not simply reducible to epiphenomena of class relations. Moreover, Bookchin's claim that it is likely forms of social hierarchy based on generontocracies, patriarchies, priest cults, and warrior

groups probably provided the precursors to the latter development of class and proto-state structures would seem reasonably uncontroversial (see Giddens, 1981; Mann, 1986). An issue that does need further examination though is that it is not clear that the complexities that play out in the relationships between social hierarchy and social domination are fully theorised by Bookchin.

For example, as numerous critics have observed (Eckersley, 1992; Fox, 1989; Kovel, 1998), there is clearly a range of social relations that are in certain senses hierarchical yet do not self-evidently contribute to social domination. Temporary quasi-hierarchical relations based on the acceptance of certain forms of authority such as parent-child relations (Kovel, 1998) can be socially enabling. Student-teacher relationships (Eckersley, 1992) also invariably contain elements of hierarchy and if freely chosen can be enabling. Indeed, one could think of a range of socially stratified relations that are emergent from functionally differentiated social roles and that are hierarchical in a certain sense but that also alleviate social domination. In this latter category, it could well be argued that any socially complex and politically pluralistic society seeking to avail itself of the gains of high technology is going to be marked by certain forms of social stratification through task differentiation. As long as these "hierarchies" are open and subject to democratic recruitment, rotation, and control, and influence in one sphere of social life is not allowed to cumulate in other spheres (Waltzer, 1985), it is simply not given that such relations necessarily contribute to social domination. Indeed, contra certain currents of libertarianism, it clearly needs to be recognised that certain democratically controlled representative structures or socially differentiated roles might actually relieve social domination. Conversely, one could imagine certain nonhierarchical societies (perhaps most strikingly the kind of neo-primitivist fantasies advocated by some eco-anarchists) that would surely exacerbate social domination of humans by nature and perhaps through the "tyranny of structurelessness" (Freeman, 1970) further facilitate domination of some humans by others.

It would seem important, then, for a credible critical social theory to be able to distinguish more carefully between coercive and oppressive social-stratified social relations and representative political forms—which clearly give rise to social domination—and such relations based on "legitimate authority" or "democratic authority," which perhaps do not.[21] What can we make though of the further diachronic link that Bookchin has sought to forge: between social hierarchy, social domination, and the "idea" of dominating nature?

Social Hierarchy, Social Domination, and the Idea of the Dominating of Nature by Humans

Any credible modern critical social theory is going to address the links between the domination of humans and the domination of nature. It should be remembered, though, that Bookchin formulates this relationship in a very specific manner. In primarily seeking to explain the root causes of the division between nature and society, Bookchin elaborates these links not in a general fashion but rather as a historical thesis. As Bookchin (1990b) himself has been keen to stress,

> As a historical statement it declares in no uncertain terms, that the domination of human by human *preceded* the notion of dominating nature. Indeed, human domination of human gave rise to the very *idea* of dominating nature. In emphasising that human domination precedes the notion of dominating nature, I have carefully avoided the use of a slippery verb that is very much in use today: namely that the

> domination of nature "involves" the domination of humans by humans. I find the use of this verb particularly repellent because it confuses the order in which domination emerged in the world and hence, the extent to which it must be eliminated if we are to achieve a free society. Men did not think of dominating nature until they had already begun to dominate the young, women and eventually each other. (p. 44)

It would seem evident, though, that the historical sequence Bookchin (1995b) defends is simply not very convincing. Bookchin's starting point here that "the domination of nature first arose within *society* as part of its *institutionalisation* into gerontocracies . . . not in any endeavour to control nature or natural forces" (p. 142) would appear completely untenable. The whole strength of this claim is clearly dependent on the rosy image of a singular organic society that we can find in his earlier work. Now, given (a) the criticisms of this that have been offered above, (b) the cautionary words offered by Kuper about recognising the huge spatial variation that was very likely a central feature of the relationship between human societies and their natures, and (c) the manner in which Bookchin himself later retreats from this position, this claim would seem to fall apart. Indeed, if we follow the view of the later Bookchin (1995c), who states, "In the band and tribe societies of pre-history, humanity was *almost completely at the mercy of uncontrollable natural forces*" (p. 122), such an assertion would seem to suggest that if anything, central elements of the basic Marxian thesis are more convincing as an existential statement of the human condition. That is, as Marx argues in Volume 3 of *Capital*, "the associated producers" need to

> rationally regulate their interchanges with nature, bring it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and most worthy of, their human nature. (as cited in Smith, 1996, pp. 48-49)

Bookchin's ecocentric critics have flagged a second line of argument that needs to be considered here. Fox (1989, p. 15) and Eckersley (1992) have argued that Bookchin does not fully recognise that there is not a straightforward relationship between hierarchical forms of social organisation and the actual domination of nature. Thus, Fox has argued that historical examples can be offered of hierarchical societies (e.g., ancient Egypt) that had relatively benign relations with nature. Equally, Eckersley has argued that it is possible to conceptualise a relatively nonhierarchical society that is nevertheless extremely exploitative ecologically.[22]

These arguments do suggest that great care clearly does need to be taken in attempts to discern simple one-to-one formulations of the relationship between hierarchical social forms and environmentally hazardous outcomes (formulations incidentally that Bookchin, 1990a, has denied he ever makes). Bookchin (1990a) has responded to this critique though by arguing that it ignores

> the fact that my writings focus on the idea of dominating nature not on the actual domination of nature. . . . I am not concerned exclusively with whether a given society (be it hierarchical or egalitarian) actually damages the eco-community in which it is located; I am also concerned with whether it ideologically identified human progress with the idea of dominating nature. (p. 202)

This response is interesting because it does actually highlight a further difficulty that emerges from adopting this theoretical approach.

Dominant Ideologies and Actual Relations With Nature

A significant problem with the overwhelming attention given in social ecology to the "idea" that human beings must dominate nature is that it is assumed that in uncovering this moment, the "ultimate roots" of the society/nature division are laid bare. Having rooted the emergence of the idea that humans must dominate nature in the emergence of social hierarchy, Bookchin's narrative essentially concentrates on outlining the rise of various social hierarchies and countermovements of resistance to this. Along the way, attention is paid to the emergence of epistemologies of rule and various ideological currents that offer either a benign or malign view of nature (see Bookchin, 1982, 1987, 1990b, 1995a). One positive aspect of this endeavour is that Bookchin's historical writings provide us with an impressive intellectual history of ideas and a social history of resistance. As an attempt to construct a libertarian historical narrative to counter crudely determinist forms of historical materialism, Bookchin's work is certainly rousing and suggestive that things could have been other.[23] However, as for providing historical insight into social-ecological processes, the discussion tends to remain trapped at the cognitive level.

Insufficient attempt is made to integrate theoretical reflection with what is known about the historical geography and environmental history of material practices (cf. Harvey, 1996, p. 183). And very little consideration is given to the fact that concentrating on ideologies and cosmologies of nature alone can provide only a partial guide to understanding the actuality of socioenvironmental dynamics (Samways, 1996).

Part of the problem with the approach adopted in Bookchin's social ecology is that it remains far from clear that exploring the genealogy of an idea through various classic texts and religious/ideological currents establishes that people or social institutions actually acted on such dominant ideologies. As Roy Ellen (1986) has noted, "Ideologies often diverge markedly from what actually happens in practise" (p. 10). Also, as Anderson (1969) noted, although religion and beliefs may stress harmonious relations with nature, this does not prevent people from being involved in "wholesale ecosystem damage due to pure economic necessity, in explicit, self admitted violation of their norms and knowledge of final effects." Bookchin's social theory is limited in that he provides very few examples of how the historical growth of the ideology that "humanity must dominate nature" actually affected material practices. This relationship is never really demonstrated with reference to studies of historical societies and their environmental conditions and contexts. Indeed, beyond organic society and its "fall," one can find a marked tendency in Bookchin's subsequent writings to present the key points in historical development that he subsequently lingers on: ancient Greece and Rome, the city-state period of the Middle Ages, and an early agrarian capitalist period, as basically environmentally benign. Often using the term *organic societies* to refer to these societies as well, it is modern capitalism that is basically presented as the great source of ecological evil (Bookchin, 1982, 1987, 1990b, 1995a).

Now, it would be difficult to deny that the emergence and spread of capitalism and modernity have marked a quantitative and qualitative change in the scope and depth of human transformations of the natural world (Harvey, 2000; McNeil, 2000; Moore, 2000). However, what Bookchin's historical social theory fails to fully integrate is the substantive evidence that has emerged over recent decades that suggests that beyond small-scale societies, precapitalist societies were also involved in substantive nature-transforming practises. For example, the modern disciplines of his-

torical geography and environmental history now provide copious examples of precapitalist societies—sometimes marked by the espousal of benign ideologies of nature—that have nevertheless experienced substantive self-generated ecological problems (see Bilsky, 1980; Crumley, 1993; Goudie, 1986; Harvey, 1996; Hughes, 2002; Hughes & Thirgood, 1983; Philips & Mighall, 2000; Samways, 1996; Turner et al., 1990; Worster, 1988).

Thus, Hughes and Thirgood (1983) made a powerful case for suggesting that environmental deterioration was at least one contributing factor in the decline of classical Greek and Roman civilisations. This was despite the fact that "their traditional religions taught them to stand in awe of nature and interfere as little as possible in natural processes" (p. 206). Rather than stressing ideological factors producing this occurrence, though, stress is simply placed on their lack of ecological insight that "due to the advance of research in modern times, we take for granted" (p. 207). On similar lines, Bilsky (1980) and more recently Hoffman (2001) in a review of recent literature on social ecological relations in medieval Europe argued that "medieval Europeans did cause large scale ecological change and environmental destruction, sometimes with intent, sometimes unaware" (Hoffman, 2001, p. 148). Elsewhere, David Harvey (1996) has noted of Chinese civilisation,

> The Chinese may have ecologically sensitive traditions of Tao, Buddhism, and Confucianism (traditions of thought which have played an important role in promoting an "ecological consciousness" in the west) but the historical geography of deforestation, land degradation, river erosion, and flooding in China contains not a few environmental events which would be regarded as catastrophes by modern-day standards. (p. 188; but also see Perdue, 1987).

Indeed, Samways (1996), surveying a range of precapitalist social formations, has argued that it is plausible to see many of the difficulties experienced by many precapitalist societies as having more to do with the unintended consequences of action, which probably plagued such societies, than with the pernicious effects of the "idea" that human beings must dominate nature.

Now, none of these examples necessarily undermines the validity or indeed the importance of attempts to investigate relations between social domination, ideologies, and socially and ecologically problematic transformations of nature through history. Harvey (1996), Worster (1985, 1988), Cronon (1983, 1991), O'Connor (1998), and Davis (1998), for example, have all made important strides in developing this idea. Moreover, Harvey's assertion that societies tend "to create ecological conditions and environmental niches for themselves which are not only conducive to their own survival but [are] also manifestations and instanciations 'in nature' of their particular social relations" (p. 183) provides an especially suggestive development of this line of thought. As Harvey notes, a particular set of social relations (and forms of social domination) can purposefully affect ecological transformations that then require the reproduction of these social relations to sustain them. He offers Donald Worster's (1985) *Rivers of Empire*, which demonstrates how large-scale corporate interests sought to ensure their own reproduction through the construction of megadams irrigating the American West in the late 19th century, thereby sidelining plans for more decentralised, communitarian irrigation schemes. Harvey's analysis also suggests that contradictions in social relations can create social contradictions in the land and within ecosystem projects themselves. This approach offers an important means of exploring the links between social domina-

tion and environmentally problematic outcomes. Such ideas converge with recent research projects by Benton (1989), Davis (1998), Fitzsimmons and Goodman (1998), and Foster (2000), who have all demonstrated how particular social relations produce specific natures that can generate crisis tendencies in the agricultural practises and agro-food networks they produce. Nor does this literature necessarily undermine the view that (all things considered) societies defined by purely instrumental and antagonistic views of social ecological processes are perhaps more likely to embark on short-sighted, hubristic, or reckless socioenvironmental transformation.

What this literature does suggest, however, is that given the huge historical time frames we are dealing with and the variety of socioecological relations that have existed in different societies, eco-social theory should demonstrate a certain wariness to the kind of absolutist "plenary claims," teleological formulae, or superhistorical generalisations that are something of a defining feature of Bookchin's work. Moreover, this literature also suggests that some of the problems that emerge in his social theory are not incidental but a product of broader problems in the theoretical framework he deploys.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Social Histories and Social Ecologies

Three weaknesses can be identified as central to Bookchin's critical social theory as presently formulated. First, although Bookchin provides a valuable critique of determinist versions of historical materialism, his own radical humanist reconstruction bends the stick too far in a voluntarist direction. Human beings make "history" in Bookchin's historical social theory, and "history" is an all-embracing process. There is little sense, though, in his historical writings in that they do so not in conditions of their own choosing. In short, in social ecology there is too much agency, too little structure. Too little attention is paid in social ecology to the sedimented social-structural forms that merge around and embed human action, creating a complex series of constraints and enablements that resolve themselves in complex and discontinuous ways.

Second, although Bookchin's social theory offers a well-grounded critique of economic reductionism and productive forces determinism, in shifting attention so radically away from how human societies work on nature through labour to survive to processes of social institutionalisation and the ideologies that emerge thereof, insufficient attention is paid to the continued material dynamics between society and nature. Weber is indeed an important figure for critical social theory. Yet the embrace of Weber as an antidote to vulgar materialism results in a degree of idealism in Bookchin's theory that (ironically) fails to present nature "itself" as an active, continuous "agent" or "presence" in historical development (Worster, 1988; but also see Cronon, 1991; Haraway, 1991; Latour, 1993; O'Connor, 1998).[24]

Third (and relatedly), the radical historicism that underpins social ecology does tend to ensure that the importance of geography and spatial variation in historical development is ignored. As Harvey (1996) and Soja (1989, 1996) have complained of critical theory more generally, the temporal is not only prioritised but utterly subsumes the spatial in social ecology. Consequently, despite Bookchin's (1982, 1995b) evident interest in dialectics in nature, in his actual social theory, the dialec-

tical interplay between human societies and equally active material conditions distributed in space, time, and culture (what Soja referred to as the "geo-historical dialectic") remains undeveloped.

Domination, Liberation, and the Production, Reproduction, and Enframing of Active Nature(s)

So, where does this leave us? Perhaps a central theme that emerges from this critical review is that there are major problems for critical social theorists who attempt to understand the complex relationships that have occurred between human societies, social ideologies, and their natures using a linear, social evolutionary, grand narrative. In many respects, the direction of the argument developed here leans to the conclusion that the quest between Bookchin and the Frankfurt school to establish the foundational moment for "which came first," social domination or the idea of dominating nature, is basically an unhelpful way to think about this issue.

If we reject that the whole of human history can be squeezed into a tale of either "Eden and the fall" or its Hobbesian reversal and accept the likelihood that eco-social relations among early human societies were probably highly diverse (yet also concede that within this diversity, as Marx and the later Bookchin (1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1995d) argue, that it is reasonable to assume that all human societies have had to bring their relations with their natures under conscious, rational control to survive), this locating of the origins "where it all went wrong" seems problematic given that it seems unlikely there was ever a moment when "it all went right." Theoretical reflection informed by recent developments in social anthropology, historical geography, and environmental history suggests the need to recognise dynamism, discontinuity, and diversity in eco-social relations and that in all likelihood, "all societies have had their share of ecologically based difficulties" (Harvey, 1996, p. 189).

As a broad organising rubric for thinking about the metabolism between human societies and the ecological conditions of their existence, an approach that recognises that human societies have always been involved (at one spatial scale or another) in the social production and reproduction of their natures (to use Neil Smith's [1984, 1996, 1998] helpful phrase) has much to commend it. Following this, Benton's (1989) suggestion provides a useful supplement to this observation:

> What is required is the recognition that each form of social/economic life has its own specific mode and dynamics of interrelations with its own specific contextual conditions, resource materials, energy sources and naturally mediated unintended consequences (forms of "waste," "pollution :etc." (p. 77)

Combining the insights of historical geographical materialists such as Smith, Benton, Harvey, and Castree with recent developments in environmental history and historical geography allows us to recognise that human societies have always had a dynamic relationship to their natures organised through labour and technology (a point that resonates with the work of the later Bookchin, 1999). This relationship has taken on spatially-temporally specific forms in specific societies. This "dynamic discontinuous" view of eco-social relations clearly could usefully draw further insights from select aspects of social ecology. That is, it would seem vital to consider how multiple forms of social domination (e.g., class, race, gender, sexuality, bureaucratic power) as well as possibilities for emancipation flow through these

practises in complex and often continent fashions. However, contra social ecology, a discontinuous view would also have to stress that human intervention in nature cannot be labeled more or less "organic" in any ideal sense. A critique of current processes of production, reproduction, and enframing of nature cannot take as its starting point a more "natural" or "organic" relationship to the environment from which capitalism is viewed as a departure, as social ecology has sought to argue. Rather, as Braun and Castree (1998, p. 36) contended, it would seem increasingly evident that such a critique can only proceed relationally, considering "the different socio-economic and cultural logics organising nature's production and the social and ecological effects these give rise to" (Castree & Braun, 2001, p. 36). Following this, the critical question that should preoccupy critical social theory is not how can we "save" a singular, undifferentiated, universal nature, but how are plural natures being transformed, by which actors, for whose benefit, and with what social and ecological consequences (Castree & Braun, 2001; Katz, 1998; Smith, 1998)?

Is a focus simply on the metabolism of society with nature sufficient for explanatory social theory? It is here that Bookchin's warnings of how a one-sided materialism can underplay the more cognitive, cultural, and symbolic aspects of socioenvironmental relations equally deserve to be heeded. Rather than get stuck in a historicist concern with locating the source of the idea that human beings should dominate nature, a framework that pays attention to how complex forms of domination flow through the symbolic ordering or enframing of society and nature would seem more useful.[25] Such an emphasis highlights how it is not simply an instrumentalist framing of nature that can contribute to social domination. In certain contexts, it would seem increasingly evident that the attempt by some social groups to impose their own specifically articulated noninstrumental view of "nature" on other groups can equally result in forms of social domination.[26] Recent work influenced by poststructuralist concerns with the significatory realm can usefully supplement historical geographical materialist insights here. McNaughten and Urry (1998), Darier (1999), and Braun and Castree (1998), for example, have brought home the importance of attending to the processes that ensure that "particular natures" triumph over others, of how the "tourist gaze" of particular social groups can ensure that whole landscapes of others are reshaped and transformed—sometimes in socially and environmentally problematic ways. More basically still, Haraway (1991) has noted how a further source of social domination that emerges in human societies arises from the capacity to define what is nature and what is unnatural.

Finally, a credible critical social theory clearly needs to abandon the idealist view of nature as simply an inert background to the human story. Nature may well be discursively enframed and symbolically represented. The division between the social and the natural may well be drawn and redrawn at different points in time (Haraway, 1991; Latour, 1993; Swyngedouw, 1999).[27] However, as both environmental historians such as Donald Worster (1988) and actor network theorists such as Bruno Latour (1993) have sought to argue of late, the various "natures" in which human societies are constantly producing, reproducing, and enframing have agency of their own (Worster, 1988). They are possessed of their own causal powers and processes (Benton, 1989; Soper, 1995). That is, human societies are always involved with "disruptive, active and generative" natures (Massey, Allen, & Sarre, 1999, p. 287) that are always in a state of dynamic change and transformation (Botkin, 1990). These systems can resist, problematise, and sometimes surprise us (Haraway, 1991; Latour, 1993).[28]

Deconstructing the Domination of Nature Thesis

What though of the deeper, normative questions that clearly lurk behind this whole discussion? Are we just left embracing a more nuanced version of the domination of nature thesis?

Bookchin's social theory may have many faults, but he surely is correct to argue that in the more bold interpretations of the domination of nature thesis (for example, when filtered through Leninist, Stalinist, or modern-day contrarian or neo-liberal ideologies), one can find a breathtaking reductionism, a utilitarian logic of instrumentalism, and a commitment to quasi-thesis statements in which the role of God has now been simply ceded to that of "man." Horkheimer's warning that the domination of nature pursued as an actual project can simply ensure a "dialectical reversal" whereby "man makes himself a tool of the very same nature he subjugates" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, p. 91) is apposite. Ecofeminists (e.g., Merchant, 1980; Plumwood, 1993; Salleh, 1997) have convincingly argued that certain high-enlightenment articulations of this project that viewed nature as feminine or as woman simply entrenched patriarchal ideologies. Abundant evidence has also been offered of how domination of nature "as other," entangled with imperialist discourses, has proved a useful ideological tool to support projects to dominate groups that European societies viewed as "more natural" (Gilroy, 2001; Haraway, 1991; Harvey, 1996; Merchant, 1980).

These are all important insights. Yet if a critique of the domination of nature thesis is not advanced in highly nuanced terms, it can simply collapse into a series of countergeneralisations about the value of enlightenment, modernity, and the idea of "progress" more generally. They are every bit as sweeping and problematic as their targets and every bit as capable of collapsing into a regressive ideology as the ideas they oppose.

Part of the problem here would seem to lie once again with the particular interpretation given to the domination of nature thesis in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *The Ecology of Freedom*. In replacing a focus on the capitalist production of nature with the domination of nature understood as a broader existential struggle between humanity and nature, there are good reasons for feeling that despite all their insights, both Adorno and Horkheimer (1979) and Bookchin (1982) end up with a social theory that becomes superhistorical in its sweep. It loses any sense of the historical specificity, complexity, and ambiguity of the domination of nature thesis. A tendency to view the domination of nature in monolithic terms from the perspective of the present ignores "its changing concrete role in action during different periods" (Leiss, 1972, p. 176). For example, as William Leiss (1972) has observed,

> Beginning in the seventeenth century the idea of the mastery of nature spurred an attack upon outmoded scientific and philosophical dogma and help to initiate a qualitative change both in the understanding of nature and in the possibilities for the satisfaction of human needs: this was its specific ideological function at the time. The lasting positive aspect of its service was (as formulated so well by Bacon) to break the tyrannical hold of despair over the consciousness of human technological possibilities and to encourage the conviction that man could fundamentally alter the material conditions of existence. Its negative dimensions—so well disguised by Bacon—were its exclusive focus on modern science and technology as the designated instruments for the mastery of nature and its ability to mask the connections between their development on the one hand and the persistence of social conflict and political domination on the other. (p. 177)

Failings of gender aside, this quotation clearly does draw out the historical ambiguities of the domination of nature thesis. In the 20th century, such an ideology funneled through postwar corporate-military-industrial capitalism in the West or Stalinism in the East (and more recently still, contemporary neo-liberalism); ideologies of the domination of nature have taken on far more hubristic and aggressive forms. Frequently, they have been transformed into "sterile, mystifying dogma" (Leiss, 1972, p. 178). Yet it is surely correct that we must, once again, preserve positive elements within the outlines of a new formulation (Leiss, 1972, p. 193). It is interesting to note that Bookchin's later work (notably, Bookchin, 1995c, p. 214) seems much closer to Leiss's view, yet the tensions between his earlier and later positions remain unresolved.

We need to move beyond the domination of nature debate, then, but without collapsing into ecological romanticism. One way forward here may well be to develop Henri Lefebvre's (1991) distinction between domination and appropriation. To insist (contra ecological romanticism) that all human societies have been involved in the dynamic appropriation of their natures (that is, in bringing their relations with nature into conscious rational control to survive) and that human societies appropriate nature through processes of production, reproduction, and symbolic enframing is quite a different proposition from being committed to the theistic[29] and superhistorical ideology that it is the destiny of human beings to "dominate nature" per se. Although these two notions have often been collapsed together by a number of thinkers, there are grounds for feeling that they now need to be clearly disaggregated and that we need to think of social-ecological relations in their full historical and geographical complexity. Recognising this (and thinking of the society-nature metabolism as a processes of co-constitution) allows us to recognise that changes in social relations could possibly result in qualitatively different modes of producing, reproducing, and enframing nature. That is, it raises hope that perhaps at some point in the future we could fashion modes of appropriation without domination. And here, through all the twists and turns, we are perhaps not so far away from the underlying intent of Bookchin's social ecology.

NOTES

1. Bookchin's writings, developed over the course of some five decades, are indeed voluminous. The criteria for selection used in this article follow Bookchin's own assessment of his most important texts. Thus, I give central attention to the exposition of his social theory that can be found in *The Ecology of Freedom*, the work described by Bookchin (1991) as his "keystone" text (p. xvi). Attention is also given though to further works such as *Urbanization Without Cities*, *Remaking Society*, and *The Philosophy of Social Ecology* that he has maintained are necessary supplements for gaining "a comprehensive statement of social ecology" (Bookchin, 1991, p. xvi) and that provide the most systematic accounts of his social theory. Finally, though attention is given to a series of recent texts, notably, *Re-Enchanting Humanity* and *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future of the Left*, these are marked by a remarkable autocritique of his previous work.

2. Perhaps most notable of these writings is "Listen Marxist!" (Bookchin, 1971b). This essay initially emerged as a pamphlet directed at critiquing the growing influence of various currents of Marxism, particularly Marxist-Leninist currents such as the Progressive Labour Party on Students for a Democratic Society. In political intention then, this engagement clearly is orientated to strengthening the claims of an alternative left-libertarian position. Despite these specific conditions of production, though, one can find a brilliant critique of the sociological weaknesses of vulgar Marxism in this text and a sharp critique of the political failings of Leninism. Among other things, "Listen Marxist!" significantly predates the

latter work of Gorz, Laclau, and Mouffe in critiquing the fetishisation of "the proletariat" in an era when the working class no longer constitute a majority of the population and have seen their strategic position being eroded by new technologies. The broader inability of the Marxist left during this period to grapple with the profound processes of "social decomposition" affecting class relations, the patriarchal family, and issues surrounding race, sexuality, and ecology (Bookchin, 1971b, p. 209) is also examined. In addition, there is also an enduring critique of Leninist forms of political organisation. The revolutionary party for Bookchin (1971b) is an entity that structures itself "along the very hierarchical lines . . . [of] the society it professes to oppose" (p. 196); reduces its members to "poker-faced, programmed automata"; and adopts an utterly instrumental and manipulative engagement with politics.

3. For example, attention is drawn to Marx's *The Future Results of British Rule in India*, which Bookchin (1982) suggests virtually celebrates the utter destruction of all Indian ways of life under the Raj as unquestioningly progressive.

4. This whole account of human history as a legacy of freedom versus a legacy of domination would seem to been in debt to Kropotkin's observation that "throughout the whole history of civilisation two opposed tendencies have been in conflict; the Roman tradition and the republican; the imperial tradition and the federalist tradition; the authoritarian and the libertarian" (as cited in Macauley, 1995, p. 23, footnote 51).

5. As Bookchin (1995a) notes,

> Whether the European continent "necessarily" would have been changed from a loose confederation of towns, cities, baronies, duchies, and the all presiding, if ineffectual. Holy Roman Empire into a clearly articulated group of nation-states is a problem in divination, not in social analysis. How Europe could have developed—whether towards confederal communities or towards highly centralised nation-states—is an open question. One can single out many reasonable alternatives. European towns and cities might have followed that were no less possible than the one that became prevalent in fairly recent times. No single course of development was "inevitable" or "predetermined" by the economic, social and political forces. (p. 118)

6. Bookchin (1993) indicates awareness of the problem. For example, he has stated, "In *The Ecology of Freedom*, I played two 'legacies' against each other: 'The Legacy of Domination' and 'the legacy of Freedom,' partly to remove any myth that history has been a grand narrative of progress pure and simple" (p. 105).

7. See Marx (1844/1977). Bookchin (1980c) has been largely dismissive of this side of Marx, as he observes,

> Even if one views Marx's ethical proclivities as authentic, they are marginal to the core of his writings. The attempt to redeem Marx and fragments of his writings from the logic of his thought and work becomes ideological because it obfuscates a thorough exploration of Marxism as practise. (pp. 207-208)

There is no doubt that Bookchin's very complex relations to Marx and Marxism need much further development than can be given in this study. For a hostile polemical assessment, see Joel Kovel's *Negating Bookchin* (Light, 1998). Elsewhere, John Clark (1986) captured these complexities quite nicely when he noted of Bookchin's work,

> On the other hand, Marx is recognised [by Bookchin] to be one of the few great theorists of human liberation and one of the towering figures of human consciousness. . . . It is easy to allow Bookchin's critique of Marx and the Marxists (a critique which sometimes rises and falls, depending on your point of view, to the level of invective) to the degree he shares their problematic. (p. 212)

8. Although this does not extend as far as to seek a rapprochement with contemporary currents of eco-Marxism, as Bookchin (1999) noted,

> I still think when I say Marx was not an ecologist, even in the sense of genuine stewardship. I'm far more accurate than the eco-Marxists, who, even today, are

still going through Marx's works and trying to snip out statements here and there that they can piece together to stimulate an ecological world view. (p. 269)

9. See, for example, Wallerstein (1997) and the later exchange with Gregor McLennan (1998). Wallerstein's work is certainly not unproblematic as McLennan perceptively noted. However, the reading of historical development he has recently defended does bear remarkable similarities to the position Bookchin defends in the *The Ecology of Freedom*. This is notably the case when Wallerstein argued,

The fact that capitalism had this kind of breakthrough in the European arena, and then expanded to cover the globe does not however mean that this was inevitable, or desirable, or in any sense progressive. In my view, it was none of these. And an anti-Eurocentric point of view must start by asserting this. (p. 105)

Somewhat ironically, by *Re-Enchanting Humanity*, Bookchin (1995c, pp. 249-257) had significantly rethought his position and appeared close to reneging on his critique of Eurocentricism to return to a defence of the progressive features of European historical development. It is interesting to note that the "globalisation debate," for example, has re-ignited the whole question of whether the spread of global capitalism should be seen as "historically progressive" (cf. Wallerstein, 1997, with Hardt & Negri, 2001).

10. For example, Nancy Fraser's (1997) recent work brings into sharp focus the sheer complexities that face critical social theory in simultaneously addressing struggles of redistribution and recognition, the cultural and economic in a synchronic analysis, let alone dealing with the complexities raised by diachronic analysis.

11. In *Urbanisation Without Cities*, we are told, "I would like to emphasise that the earliest cities were largely ideological creations of highly complex, strongly affiliated, and intensely mutualist communities of kin groups, ecological in outlook and essentially egalitarian and non domineering in character" (Bookchin, 1995a, p. 35).

12. For example, at certain points in *The Ecology of Freedom*, there is a somewhat reluctant admission that any account of human communities at the dawn of civilisation will tend toward the speculative. We are told at one point, with an uncharacteristic degree of uncertainty,

how close the early neo-lithic world may have been to that of the early Pueblo Indians . . . may never be know. Yet the thought lingers, at the dawn of history a village society had emerged in which life . . . [had] a procreative relationship to the natural world. (Bookchin, 1982, p. 61)

This tentative defence of his thesis contrasts rather strongly with accounts found elsewhere, which do tend to be much more strident and formulaic and less nuanced (see Bookchin, 1990b, pp. 46-54).

13. It could be further noted that what is often striking about Bookchin's rejection of Engels's "primitive communism" is the extent to which it is based on normative grounds. That is, we are told a central problem with primitive communism is that "the more critical substrate of usufruct, reciprocity, and the irreducible minimum is papered over *by a less fundamental* critique; the critique of private property, of injustice in the means of life and an unfair return for labour" (Bookchin, 1982, p. 87). Thus, it would appear primitive communism is inadequate as an account of early humanity in that it leans toward justifying Marxian collectivism as opposed to anarchist mutualism.

14. For useful general overviews of this area, see Simmons (1996, pp. 36-86), and for a more critical engagement, see Lewis (1992, pp. 43-81), Samways (1996, pp. 177-196), and Rambo (1985).

15. There is now a very large literature that has significantly undermined eco-romantic accounts of early humanity. In considering the early environmental history of the British Isles, for example, Oliver Rackham (1987) has argued that Neolithic people had quite an extraordinary impact on the countryside (pp. 71-73). Prior to the early Iron Age, Rackham argued, the British Isles were largely covered by deciduous woodland. However, with the spread of Neolithic communities, quite quickly almost half of England ceased to be wild

wood. Commenting on this development, David Samways (1996) has suggested that this "probably represents the greatest single ecological change in the British Isles since the last Ice Age" (p. 60) and that, moreover, "by modern standards, these people were extremely wasteful of the trees they felled" (p. 90). Earlier still, significant debate in paleo-anthropology has also been generated by the "Pleistocene overkill" hypothesis. Asserted most rigorously by Martin and Klein (1984; but also see Lewis, 1992, pp. 59-63; Samways, 1996, pp. 187-190; Simmons, 1996, pp. 71-77), it has been argued that between the last phases of the Pleistocene and the early Holicene, two thirds of the mammals and fauna disappeared in North America due to the activity of early humans. Martin's "blitzkrieg" position is admittedly controversial, and other advocates can indeed be found keen to place considerably more emphasis on climatic factors. The debate would still seem to be characterised by considerable fluidity. As Martin noted, it is characterised by "no solution and no consensus" (Martin & Klein, 1984, p. 785). Yet it would appear that the majority of specialists are keen to emphasise that early humanity had some influence on these events. Indeed, evidence from the settling of islands (such as New Zealand, Madagascar, Easter Island, and the Hawaiian Islands) that remained isolated from humanity until 1,000 to 2,000 years ago would suggest that when humans did arrive, mass extinction of large animals and even substantial deforestation subsequently followed. See R. Cassell ("Fauna Extinction and Prehistoric Man in New Zealand and the Pacific Islands"), who noted that the disappearance of the Moa occurred within a few hundred years of human beings occupying the island; S. L. Olson and H. F. James ("The Role of Polynesians in the Extinction of the Hawaiian Islands") similarly suggested that Polynesian settlers may have been responsible for the extinction of more than half of the endemic bird population (both of these studies can be found in Martin & Klein, 1984). Elsewhere it has been suggest that Easter Island settlers contributed to substantive deforestation (see Bahn & Flenley, 1992).

16. Perhaps most notorious here among the historical studies is Robert Brightman's study of the Rock Kree of North America's Boreal forest, which suggests that this group not only lacked a conservation ethos but evidently had a "proclivity to kill animals indiscriminately in numbers well beyond what was needed for exchange or domestic use" (McKay & Acherson, 1987, p. 123). Elsewhere, Rambo's (1985) recent study of the Semang Orang Asli of Peninsular Malysia, which stresses that "they achieve respectable pollution levels in terms of the immediate life space of the individual and the household," is interesting (p. 79). More vividly regarding the relations between certain tribes and their indifference to the suffering of animals, see Turnbull (1961).

17. For an example on the role of violence in small-scale societies, see Knauft (1987, pp. 457-500).

18. See Mellor (1992, pp. 130-150) for an interesting and much more skeptical reading of the "nonhierarchical" nature of gender relations in clan societies and Lewis (1992, p. 72) for examples of the mixed gender relations that can be found in small-scale agriculture societies.

19. See Bookchin (1991, p. xxx). Perhaps the most extreme advocate of the merits of the Pleistocene emerging from deep ecology circles is Manes (1990). For those who would quickly dismiss Bookchin's critique of deep ecology, Manes's text deserves serious scrutiny.

20. See Bookchin (1995c, p. 122) for an account of the dispute between Bookchin and his anarcho-primitivist and neo-Luddite/antiauthoritarian critics; see Bookchin (1995d) and the furious responses by Watson (1996) and Black (1997).

21. The point of making these distinctions of course should in no way be viewed as a defence of existing hierarchical forms of parenting/teaching/the advanced division of labour. It may well be the case that we could reconfigure these roles in qualitatively different ways. Bookchin, moreover, is surely correct to say that a fundamental failing of much of the Marxist tradition was its insufficient scrutiny of relations based on command and obedience. However, the Chinese cultural revolution coupled with the more infantile aspects of the counterculture (or even the more absurd celebration of "social free for all" that some postmodern currents have gone in for) should equally serve as a warning that a critical theory informed by

an indiscriminate and undifferentiated denouncement of social hierarchy in all its forms could well exacerbate the sum total of social domination in a society.

22. Eckersley (1992) proposed that Marx's communist utopia could be viewed as an example of a society that is nonhierarchical but ecologically destructive. Such an example focusing on Marx's own work is to say the least contentious, particularly if we consider the contribution of more recent scholarship on Marx (Benton, 1996; Burkett, 1999; Foster, 1999, 2000). Her general point is valuable though. Perhaps a better example of a nonhierarchical but ecologically destructive society can be found in the utopias premised on productive forces determinism aspired to by vulgar Marxists and Stalinists.

23. This general nondeterminist position that Bookchin defends, moreover, is not without supporters. For a fascinating study that claims that more decentralised and democratic alternatives existed to mass production in the late 19th century, see Piore and Sabel (1984).

24. Max Weber rarely receives a direct mention in Bookchin's writings, although he is acknowledged at the beginning of *The Ecology of Freedom*. Weber's emphasis on the importance of ideas and cultural factors shaping historical development clearly has had a significant influence on Bookchin's thinking. It is interesting to note that although Bookchin used Weber to escape Marx's perceived reductionism and antiecological orientation, within environmental history, it is Marx and the broad tenants of historical materialism that prove most influential over the past few decades. Cronon and Worster, for example, both made (selective) use of concepts from historical materialism but did not take anything drawn from Weber. For one of the few authors who have recognised the similarities between Bookchin and Weber, see Murphy (1994).

25. See Lee (1998) for an interesting attempt to draw out a theory of cultural domination from Foucault and Bourdieu that is not unsympathetic to critical theory more generally.

26. Dehistoricised and Eurocentric attempts to protect "pristine nature" of Africa by some currents of northern environmentalism provide a useful example here of this issue. And such themes once again are compatible with Bookchin's critically underestimated critique of deep ecology.

27. This deeply nondualistic assumption that "the social" and "the natural" are themselves at root merely ways of organising and framing materiality that change over time has been brilliantly captured by Haraway (1991) and Latour (1993). Such currents have been drawn together most effectively through a Lefebvrian-Latourian historical-geographical materialism by Swyngedouw (1999). As he insightfully noted,

> We must insist on the need to transcend the binary formulations of nature and society and develop a new language that maintains the dialectic unity of the process of change as embodied in the thing itself. "Things" are hybrid or quasi objects (subjects and objects, material and discursive, natural and social) from the very beginning. By this I mean that the world is a process of perpetual metabolism in which social and natural processes combine in a historical-geographical production process of socio-nature, whose outcome (historical nature) embodies chemical, physical, social, economic, political and cultural processes in highly contradictory but inseparable manners. (p. 447)

Attention then needs to be given to how the intertwined transformations of society and nature are "both medium and expressive of shifting power positions" that become materialised in new socio-natures.

28. As such then, I am arguing here against the view that a critical social theory of the environment needs to choose between realism and constructionism. On the contrary, a dynamic agental materialism needs to embark on the difficult task of combining the insights of both. For one of the most interesting attempts to pursue this project over recent times and to which this project is considerably indebted, the work of Castree (1995, 2002) is important.

29. Leiss (1972) was surely correct to note here that "the Baconian formulation of idea of human domination of nature, which became the leitmotif of subsequent thought down to the present, is internally consistent only in a religious context" (p. 188).

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