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The Birth of an Eco-Mom

Cancer, Feminism and the Environment

This paper explores the author's journey as a cancer survivor, cancer orphan, mother and English and Women's Studies professor, and how these experiences led to the development of her current scholarship and teaching on ecofeminism and mothering. Hutner describes how by the age of 34, she lost both parents to and from cancer, and how at 35 she was diagnosed with cancer—Hodgkin's Disease. Cancer radically shifted Hutner's worldview, but it was when she became a mother (post-cancer) that her environmental concerns most profoundly deepened and sharpened. With her pregnancy, Hutner became driven by a concern for the environmental health of her baby and all babies and children, as well as the health of all living beings, and she then began to study the links between toxics, hazardous wastes, radiation, and other forms of pollution and human disease. As a result of this "maternal ecological awakening," Hutner shifted her life work to environmental studies, and she now writes and teaches about ecofeminism, mothering, environmental literature and film, and activism. Hutner's essay explores her construction of a theoretical framework that she refers to as an, "ecological, feminist and mothering awareness." The paper also offers a brief overview of several important ecofeminist concepts, methods, and texts (theoretical, historical, and literary).

> The most alarming of all man's assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials.…
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> —Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

> Every time I look at you, I think, Now I cannot die.
>
> —Sandra Steingraber, *Having Faith*

The cancer memoir is well known: Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals*, Sandra Steingraber's *Living Downstream*, Zillah Eisenstein's *Manmade Breast Cancers*, Susanne Antonetta's *Body Toxic*, and Terry Tempest Williams' *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* are important examples of personal and feminist accounts of cancer, death and environmental degradation. These authors expose their histories as their bodies were exposed to the politics of a patriarchal world (medical, political, pharmaceutical, global, racist, heterosexist, technological). Each of these stories links cancer, feminism and disease with the degradation of the environment.

The awakening of my eco-feminist consciousness occurs in the conjoining of my cancer and mothering experiences. When I became pregnant, my concern about my own and my family's cancer history propelled me into paralytic fear. How could I protect my fetus from my own history, from my genes? In time, I began to think my cancer might be related to environmental degradation, and that my daughter's future and the future of all children would be (and is) imperiled and violated by toxic pollution. This shift from cancer orphan, to cancer patient, to mother, to environmental scholar, writer, teacher, and activist took place over many years. My story takes place both inside and outside of the body, family, academia, nature, and the culture at large. The history of these assorted rivulets and tributaries all ultimately conjoin in an ocean of what I call an "ecological, feminist, and mothering awareness."

I went back to college at age 25, after living for many years in New York City as a struggling actress and singer. The pleasure I found in reading, writing and research was immense. I had been a voracious reader and active personal journal writer throughout my life up until this time, yet studying in a focused and scholarly way was new to me. My beloved professors and mentors guided and encouraged me to go to graduate school and become an English professor. I flew through and completed my undergraduate English degree, and then immediately entered the graduate program in English at the University of Washington.

In Seattle, I loved the multiple bodies of fresh water, the tall evergreens, the blossoming trees in spring (like snow), the mossy stone gardens, the flowers, the bike and walking paths, the many bookstores, the strong coffee, and the snow-peaked Mt. Rainier that emerged periodically above Red Square. The grey sultry days suited me just fine. My time at the University of Washington was intellectually intense, rigorous, and productive. My apartment was small and had little furniture—a futon, a few pillows, a desk, table and a few chairs. I read, wrote, and studied all day and night seven days a week—taking breaks only to teach my own classes, attend graduate seminars, or go for a jog around Greenlake. In my first year at least (before cancer hit my family with a vengeance), it was an exquisitely disciplined life—simple, focused, clear. It was a

sublime balance of books, writing, and nature. Compared to living, studying and working in Manhattan (where I lived in a four flight walk up, worked two jobs, and struggled to make ends meet, all the while studying for my BA), graduate school in the emerald city was a vacation. I couldn't believe they were paying me to read and write and teach, and to live in such beauty!

In graduate school I found a "niche" in eighteenth-century studies, with a focus on women writers, colonial discourse, and race. I began publishing before completing my dissertation—editing and contributing to a collection called *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory and Criticism*, and writing articles on other women writers and race of this time period. Soon after the completion of my doctorate, I landed a tenure-track teaching position at Stony Brook University. My (academic) life appeared to be a great success.

However, several personal tragedies occurred during those years. At the end of my first year of graduate school, when I was 29, my father died from metastatic brain cancer related to two earlier Melanoma diagnoses. One month after my father's death, my (then) father-in-law passed away from colon cancer. A year or so later, my mother was diagnosed with lymphoma; she also had emphysema (from smoking), heart disease, and was frequently hospitalized for pneumonia. Five years after my father's death, my mother died from complications post-open heart surgery. Each of these deaths was traumatic beyond words. I had never known anyone close to me die before this time, and to lose both of my parents at such a young age was devastating. Illness and death consumed my life and altered the way I would view the world forever.

Yet another blow came with my own cancer diagnosis one year after my mother's passing. My illness came at the tail end of my second round of job interviews and fly-backs for college teaching positions. The only benefit of the cancer diagnosis was that it allowed me to quiet my life: to slow down and, quite literally, rest. I crawled underground into a chemotherapy cave to rest, vomit and writhe from the pain of the chemicals in my bloodstream.

Somewhere in between my father and mother's deaths, I married. It was strange not to have my father at the wedding, and my mother wandered alone during the party—she was lost without my dad. In the early years of my marriage I wanted to have children immediately, but my (then) husband was unsure about having children and he wanted to wait. My desire to be a mother consumed me. I did not need to hear the cultural, medical, and anti-feminist messages about the biological clock ticking. I heard the bell clanging loudly in my head every minute of the day. I was the kind of childless woman who passed a pregnant woman, baby carriage, or toddler, and wept. When friends became pregnant (everyone seemed to be getting pregnant), I would cry inconsolably. All of my life, I volunteered to baby sit and I doted on babies and kids. At social gatherings, I was the girl holding the little ones—the one who

wanted five kids when she grew up. Now, time was passing and I was in my mid-30s. Losing my parents only made things worse—I wanted and needed to build my own family.

So, at 35, when I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Disease, the prospect of my never becoming pregnant hit me very hard—more so than the prospect of dying. The treatment for the cancer was chemotherapy, which meant there was a good chance I would become infertile. There was no time to extract eggs, or freeze embryos. I was in the late stages of my disease and I had to begin treatment immediately. I made my husband promise that when the treatment was over, if I survived, we would have a baby. He agreed. I then went through six months of a grueling and debilitating chemotherapy treatment. It was, to put it mildly and succinctly, hell. I had 12 rounds of ABVD every two weeks. The chemo knocked me out, and just as my body would begin to recover, the next cycle came around again. With each cycle, my body became weaker, more susceptible to the chemicals, and by the last month, I was barely able to walk. In the last few months of treatment, I also had to live with the possibility that the chemotherapy might continue beyond six months, and that I might need radiation as well, as my catscans showed that the tumors were not shrinking. I don't know what scared me more—death or more chemo. Fortunately, my six-month catscan showed the cancer was gone. It was now time to heal. I would continue with testing every three months for the foreseeable future, but the chemotherapy treatment was over for now.

A little over a year after my cancer diagnosis, the plan was for me to go back to work. I had accepted a tenure-track faculty position at SUNY Stony Brook (strangely, my diagnosis and job offer came simultaneously). Returning to the highly charged and competitive world of academia was scary after all I had been through. I was afraid to tell my new employers that I had been sick, for fear they would view me as unworthy or damaged. I associated my illness with the intensity and enormous demands of graduate school, publishing and the job search. Teaching graduate seminars and large undergraduate courses for the first time would be challenging under any circumstances, but doing this so soon post-cancer was especially challenging for me. I was physically and emotionally frail. Yet, there was the practical issue of money and work, and I had forged a profession for myself. I could not imagine throwing all of that away.

Two years into my job at Stony Brook, at long last, I became pregnant. I hid the pregnancy from my colleagues and students until the very last minute. I feared their disapproval of my "motherhood"—as with the cancer, it seemed like anything corporeal would, in their eyes, deem me less scholarly and lacking in commitment to "the profession." Like many women in the (academic) workplace, I feared that motherhood would diminish or mar my reputation.[1] The general recommendation was to "wait until you get tenure" to have a baby.

I could not wait. I was old. I was a damaged cancer survivor.

Susan Griffin writes, "When we awaken, there is a child given to us. We are mothers. We feel a pain where the vulva has been cut. We are mothers. We feel the skin of the child is soft. The face to us in sleep is beautiful. The small body lying against our body is vulnerable. The cries move us…. We love this body, because we are a part of this body. We are mothers" (74). Now she was inside of me: a little fish swimming in my salty sea. Yet with that pleasure came fear about her future. I worried greatly, at first, about the genes she carried. All of her grandparents had had cancer, and only one lived through it (her paternal grandmother). Her mother was a cancer survivor. I felt guilty. What right did I have to give birth with my body, a polluted body, a damaged body that had coursed with chemicals? What right did I to give birth to a child, when my life span was so unpredictable, when I might die at any moment? What right did I to give birth to a child when I would pass along cancer genes?

How could I protect my fetus?

This question sat heavily with me. At first, the only protection I could think of was my own diet during pregnancy and while nursing. So I ate only organic food, took loads of vitamins, and cut out anything processed or refined. This was not hard to do as I had changed my diet completely when I was diagnosed with cancer.

My mode of protecting my fetus through a healthy "diet" was of course, a good one, but it was rooted (in part) in an ideology I now have trouble with.[2] This belief system is one I came away with from New Age cancer healing approaches I had learned about from my father. My father believed that we bring cancer upon ourselves and that we hold the power to heal ourselves from any illness, be it physical or emotional. His philosophy was based in the self-healing models advocated by Louise Hay, Dr. Gerald Jampolsky, Dr. Bernard Siegal, and Norman Cousins. In the "I caused my cancer" and "I can fix my cancer" by "healing myself" movement, cancer functions as a private, individualized and personal issue. My problem with this ideology is that it often divides and isolates the patient and the illness from larger socio-political, economic, and environmental contexts, and lays the blame for cancer on the victim. Obviously, there are benefits to these self-help philosophies (better immediate health and well being for those who can afford these suggestions), but the part I worry about is the narrowness of this discourse and how it diverts our attention away from the politics of environmental degradation. The laying of the responsibility for cancer (both getting and curing it) on the victim, shifts the focus away from what more and more evidence shows us to be the likely cause of our cancer epidemic: toxics, chemicals, radiation, and other forms of pollution. In the view of many environmental cancer activists and scientists, human health (and the health of all living beings) is compromised because our

environment is poisoned. Our environment is poisoned because of a capitalist and patriarchal system based on economic greed, domination and exploitation. The blaming the cancer victim movement also "white-washes" the politics of cancer; as environmental justice studies show us, those of lower socio-economic status and oppressed racial groups bear a much greater burden from environmental degradation and, not surprisingly, they have less access to the costly fresh organic and health foods, alternative healing methods, and self-help programs that New Age advocates as well other neo-liberalists promote (including the *President's Cancer Panel Report* (National Cancer Institute), and many well- intentioned environmental groups).[3] While organic food, the use of non-toxic products, and "healthy living" are great ideals to promote on the one hand, many of those who work and live in some of the most environmentally degraded and polluted conditions are, significantly, the very folks who cannot afford the high cost of New Age prescriptions for better health, or the diets and lifestyle practices encouraged by its advocates.

In my own case, the New Age self-help cancer philosophies caused me to feel guilty and isolated. Cancer was my fault. In my father's case, it made him feel empowered. He took it on as a challenge: he could fix the problem himself, he could save himself, and no one could have tried harder. He did yoga twice a day, meditated, ate a strictly macrobiotic diet, worked less, ran his own cancer workshop, said healing affirmations multiple times throughout the day, and made amends to my mother and treated her kindly. These were major changes for a stereotypical, cigar-smoking, meat-eating, angry businessman and patriarchal husband. Suddenly, he became a serene yoga macrobiotic guru who not only changed his own life, but worked to help others as well. Perhaps, these "self-healing" approaches gave him a few extra years. He did seem happier and more content with his life. Eventually, however, the cancer caught up with and killed him.

At some point, an alarm went off during my pregnancy, and something substantially shifted in my thinking about cancer and human health. I began to see the disease less as my own personal cross to bear and solve (something I could simply eat away), and more as a larger socio-political and ecological problem. This awakening happened one night while I was reading the book *A Civil Action* by Jonathan Harr. What could be more terrifying to a pregnant woman and a cancer survivor, than a story about a childhood leukemia cluster in a town with contaminated water? At first I became terrified for my own unborn child: what if I lived in a cancer cluster like Woburn? What if, no matter now much organic broccoli I ate, the air, the soil, the water were so contaminated that this poison would enter my body anyway? Long Island (where I live) has very high cancer rates. I had heard that the water in the aquifer near Brookhaven, not far from where I teach, had been contaminated

with radioactive tritium from the Brookhaven Lab nuclear power plant (the lab knew of this leak and let it persist for 12 years before the information went public and the plant was shut down). What other leaks and spills might be in the water and soil that remained hidden from public knowledge?

My mind raced to my corporeal environmental history—what had I been exposed to during my life? Maybe my own cancer had been caused by toxic pollution? Was it the insecticides in the strawberry fields adjacent to my house in South Miami, Florida where I was born and lived as a small child? Was it the chemicals sprayed by the exterminator I led around in my loft building in Soho to suppress the roach infestation? Was it the toxic smog I inhaled as I rode my bike up, down, and across Manhattan, or the asbestos laden air in the Twin Towers where I had worked for two years? Was it radioactive isotopes from nuclear bomb fallout and reactor leaks throughout the U.S. (and elsewhere) that traveled up the food chain and into my body?

I then read everything I could get my hands on at the time about toxics and cancer—*Silent Spring* (Carson), *Living Downstream* (Steingraber 1988), and *Our Stolen Future* (Colborn, Dumanoski and Myers). All of these books show the links between toxic pollution, disease and death in humans and all living creatures. Later, after my daughter was born, Sandra Steingraber, also a cancer survivor, and whose first child is about the same age as mine, published *Having Faith* (2001). Steingraber's book traces what happens to the fetus as it develops in the womb, when the mother's body is assaulted with environmental toxins and these toxins cross the placenta, and later pass from breast milk to the baby and child. *Having Faith* confirmed my worst fears: the book explains how the placenta is a conduit (not a barrier) for the multitude of toxic chemicals around us and how sensitive the embryo, fetus, baby, and child are to toxics at each stage of growth. Steingraber's work lead me to look at other studies of toxics and prenatal development that have been done over the past 20 years.[4] It is clear that much more research needs to be done for absolutely definitive and conclusive scientific answers, but we know that even prior to conception, mother's bodies (and father's) are filled with a multitude of toxic chemicals. We know that mother's wombs are filled with toxics as well. Studies so far indicate that early toxic exposures (including those prior to conception) are harmful to children, and these exposures may cause cancer and other serious disease, developmental disorders, infertility, and death.

In addition to Steingraber and Carson, I read ecofeminist theory by Starhawk, Greta Gaard, Val Plumwood, Karen Warren, and many others, and women's environmental history, such as Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature*. I came to understand that the exploitation of nature and the domination of women are overlapping and "twin oppressions" (Warren "What Are Ecofeminists Saying": x).[5] Ecofeminist philosophers, theorists and historians helped me to see that

cancer and other disease, and the degradation of the environment are integrally linked and that throughout our lives, even before we are fused as sperm and ova into embryos and fetuses, we are assaulted with toxics, chemicals, pollutants and radiation. Our bodies, all living bodies, are linked with the earth's ecosystem, and this ecosystem is polluted. There is, therefore, no separation between the earth's now-polluted body and the human body.

In the end, the awakening of my eco-mother feminist consciousness led, not surprisingly, to a major shift in focus in my scholarship, writing, and teaching. I first experimented with the study of ecology and feminism in the college classroom. My syllabi include readings on ecofeminist theory, environmental history, literature, and viewings of film. My approach also includes taking my students beyond the confines of traditional academic literary studies (the library, computer, and classroom space of four walls and a blackboard), to the out of doors—walking, hiking, gardening, boating, birding, and participating in environmental activism. One notable accomplishment of my classes is the creation of Stony Brook University's first organic garden. We are not a West Coast environmentally savvy campus community by any stretch of the imagination (we might as well be on another planet from a Berkeley, Santa Cruz, or Portland), yet this makes my investment in these classes and students all the more urgent.

A meaningful part of my ecofeminist approach to teaching is the 'personal' or what we might call 'traditionally maternal' aspect of it. I share my own cancer stories with my students. I explain, as I do in this essay, the history and roots of my environmental passion. Throughout the semester, as students learn more about the dangers of pollution and toxics, and the links to disease, and other environmental crises, they share their own fears and stories as well. This brings the material we are studying to life. After one of my first ecofeminism classes, a student asked to speak with me privately. We sat outside under a blooming cherry blossom tree and, with her hands shaking, she held out a well-worn photograph. The student tearfully explained that this was a picture of her mother who died many years ago from cancer: "I grew up in Brookhaven, right near the nuclear reactor you told us about. Before this class, I had no idea about that tritium leak. None of us did. I couldn't understand why my mom died at such a young age, why so many of our neighbors died from cancer." My own eyes filled with tears as she spoke. I ached for her loss—it is a loss I knew and know only too well. Then, with sad resignation, she said, "Now, I understand." These personal moments with my students are part of my ecofeminist and mothering project. An ethic of environmental responsibility and care must begin right here, at home, in our own small social spheres. In my work, then, I strive to create a community within and without the classroom. Caring for the earth means reducing consumption and waste, recycling, curbing our carbon

footprint, fighting pesticide use, saving the whales and polar bears, and so on, but it also means listening to, getting to know, and supporting those whom we encounter in our own immediate lives (including nonhuman biotic life).

Environmental and maternal pedagogy is the most exciting kind of teaching I have ever done. Students bring what we have learned about food, toxic products, consumption, carbon footprint, and environmental action into their homes and personal lives and they share our readings and research with friends and family. Many rethink how they live. These changes can be small and large. Entire classes have vowed to stop buying disposable water bottles, for example. Large numbers of students have shifted to green, vegetarian and organic diets. Urban kids related to nature in new ways. Many have convinced their parents to stop using toxic cleaning products in their homes, as well as pesticides on their lawns and gardens. Many read *Skin Deep Cosmetics Database* and buy their body products after researching the potentially harmful contents.[6] A number of my students have switched their career plans to include some form of environmentalist activism or work in law, education, psychology, medicine, and more. As Wangari Maathi, the founder of the *Green Belt Movement* shows us, every seed and every tree planted makes a difference. Maathi plants trees in the earth. I plant seeds in students.

Finally, in my ecofeminist and mothering journey I work to raise awareness through writing, public speaking, social networking, and activism. I am part of an ever-expanding movement of what are now referred to as Eco-moms, as well as feminist and environmental justice activists and writers. Over the past four years or so, I see increased moments of "awakening" in environmental awareness in the U.S.—from the ever-growing availability of organic and locally-grown food (our hope is that with the greater demand, the prices will decrease), to the development of community gardens in poor urban neighborhoods, to the parents' movement for green nutrition in public schools, to the passing of laws in some states to keep toxics out of public schools and other public buildings, to the legal fight to eliminate the production and use of hormone disrupting chemicals in body products, toys, and more, to increased climate change, anti-hydro-fracking, and anti-nuclear activism. We definitely have a very long way to go to stem the tide of the many environmental crises before us—but I believe there is hope.

Significantly, in this environmental battle, Eco-moms are a powerful force.[7] In particular, I attribute a large part of the growing concern for toxics to the work of women and mothers, and to organizations that are female, feminist and/or mother-focused.[8] An important current project of *Momsrising* (a mother activist group) for example, as well as the *Environmental Working Group* (which has a very significant "mothering" component to its program), is their campaign for the *Safe Chemicals Act*, introduced by Senator Frank

Lautenberg. This campaign seeks to eliminate the "[m]ajor loopholes in U.S. federal law [that] allow the $50 billion cosmetics industry to put unlimited amounts of chemicals into personal care products with no required testing, no monitoring of health effects and inadequate labeling requirements" *(Skin Deep Cosmetics Database*). As a whole, there seems to be a growing cultural awareness of what we have lost on this earth—and there is a new sustainable mood afoot. We'll need more than posturing and a green attitude, that is for sure, but the general cultural concern for our many environmental problems is clearly on the rise.

Ecofeminism is for *Everybody* (to borrow from bell hooks) and a few closing words: The problem with calling oneself an ecological feminist is that, to begin with, a lot of people do not like the word feminist. They find "feminism" to be irrelevant, offensive, or at the very least they do not understand the meaning of the word. In addition, many people do not understand the linking of enviromentalism with feminism. Nevertheless, I stand by the principles that eco-feminism represents. To me, feminism means complete gender equality and the end of all forms of domination and oppression—racism, ageism, sexism, classicism, and so on. Feminism seeks to do away with subject/object dualisms, so it makes perfect sense that feminism belongs with ecological activism and the fight to end environmental degradation. The day has come for us to realize that no human individual or group has the right to dominate and exploit the other; similarly, the day has also come for us to realize the no human individual or group has the right to dominate and exploit nonhuman life. Such oppression of one group over another is immoral and self-destructive. In the case of the exploitation of nature, it is leading to our own human and planetary demise. Ecofeminists (and others) such as Carolyn Merchant explains in her work *Reinventing Eden*, offer an alternative ethical model of living based on partnership, interrelatedness, equity and care. The partnership ethic brings to the table the concerns, needs, and voices of the entire world community (human and nonhuman biotic). Ecofeminist utopian novels such as Jean Hegland's *Into the Forest*, Starhawk's *Fifth Sacred Thing,* and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, as well as real-life eco-communities scattered throughout the U.S. and the world, show us how to put such a partnership into practice. It is time. As I have been arguing throughout this essay, "piss in every corner of your playground" as Barbara Kingsolver writes in *Animal Dreams*, and there will be nowhere left to go. I suppose that makes me the mom on duty in the playground telling her children to knock it off.

A mother's womb is the earth's womb.

Cancer was the end of innocence for me, the end of safety or trust in my body, nature, life, and family. It was my exile from Eden, so to speak. My

pregnancy was a moment of great change. I was happy, I was filled with life, but I was afraid: another being lived inside me. My death would be her death, and my illness would be her pain and suffering. A polluted earth would and does harm both of us, all of us. I must care not just for my own biological child, but for all children and all people, and all living creatures. How could I protect my fetus? My womb is the earth's womb. My child is every child. These questions led me here. This problem drives me in my research, teaching, writing, and in my life. I want to be part of the "waking up" from this fugue state of ecological unconsciousness. I know that we must act to halt the destruction.

So I ache and write and act on behalf of children who are cancer orphans, or cancer victims, for the many children and young people who suffer through torturous and barbaric medical treatments, for the fish and the birds in the poisoned Gulf and waters everywhere, for the decapitated mountain tops, for the dolphins, for the sky, for the trees, for my friends Carl and Cathy with terminal lung cancer, for my many friends with breast cancer, for the whales, for the wolves, for the panthers, for Molly—a child friend—in remission from leukemia, for my lost parents, for the irradiated Japan and Chernobyl, for the soldiers poisoned with Depleted Uranium, for the Polar Bears, for the blind horses, for the poisoned "creatures" born with monstrous bodies, for the rising tides and wild storms, for the holes in our sky, and for our blue, blue planet. May we forestall this unnecessary suffering and massacre, may we halt the annihilation of our earth.

A different version of this essay (with a focus on pedagogy) is included in Maternal Pedagogies, *Deborah Byrd and Fiona Green, eds. (Toronto: Demeter, 2011).*

[1]Two interesting new books on the topic of mothers and academia are *Mama Ph.D.: Women Write About Motherhood and Academic Life,* edited by Erina Evans and Caroline Grant and *Mothers on the Fast Track,* by Mary Ann Mason and Eve.

[2]The American Cancer Society promotes a diet high in fiber and fresh vegetables and fruits, but still does not recommend organic food as a cancer preventative. However, the recent *President's Cancer Panel Report 2009* (National Cancer Institute), argues that children, in particular, are susceptible to toxins and recommends feeding children organic food free from chemical pollutants and hormone disrupters. The report also warns against children's exposure to a variety of toxic chemicals such as those found in toys, cosmetics, and more. This report is remarkable—it is the first U.S. governmental report of its kind. For more on this, see Hutner, "A Personal Response to the

President's Cancer Panel Report," at Enviroblog: Environmental Working Group (July 22, 2010).

[3]As an academic, white, Jewish, female, U.S. citizen, I acknowledge that I am privileged to be able to access and purchase organic food, to drink (relatively) clean water, as well as alternative forms of healing and high quality traditional western medicine. The cancer "victimization" discussed in this essay, told from and about my personal experience is, admittedly, limited in critical scope—particularly in terms of race and class. This classicism is common within discussions of New Age cancer healing and the alternative health movement, and is an important topic that I will take up in my forthcoming book on mothering and ecofeminism. Unfortunately, I do not have the space in this short piece to adequately situate cancer, mothering, and ecofeminist theory within environmental justice critical contexts. For important work on environmental justice criticism and health see, for example, Bullard; Adamson, Evans and Stein; Agyeman; Agyeman, Bullard and Evans; and Slocum.

[4]The subject of toxics, cancer, and prenatal development (the safety of the mother's womb) has grown increasingly popular in mainstream media over the few years (post-*Having Faith* [Steingraber 2001]). There are countless numbers of mommy blogs, women's health and science organizations, as well as mainstream media sources that report on it. Over the past 20 years, scientific studies on prenatal development and toxics have been conducted by the EPA. Still, as Steingraber points out throughout her work, much more research needs to be done on the links between toxics and cancer—in all age groups.

[5]For two excellent definitions of ecofeminism and ecofeminist theory, see Karen J. Warren's *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, especially the chapter, "What are Ecofeminists Saying?" and Carolyn Merchant's chapter, "Ecofeminism," in *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*. Also, see a terrific early collection of essays on ecofeminism: *Reweaving The World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (Diamond and Orenstein). My list here of the canon of important ecofeminist critics and their full body of work is deliberately limited in this paper, as my narrative is intended to be more personal than "scholarly".

[6]*Skin Deep Cosmetics Database* may be found at the *Environmental Working Group* website. It lists the contents of all body and hair products on the market, and lists each product's contents—including the potentially carcinogenic and toxic chemicals.

[7]See, for example, "For 'Ecomoms', Saving Earth Begins at Home," by Patricia Leigh Brown, and "Rising Power of Eco Moms," by Dominique Browning.

[8]There is a noteworthy gender divide in the environmental movement; anti-toxics and cancer activism (sometimes referred to as "soft" environmentalism) tends to be dominated by female and/or mother activists, while Climate

Change is heavily male dominated. Anti-nuclear activism is more complicated and includes both genders (there is a long history of mothers as anti-nuclear peace activists; see *Women Strike For Peace* [Swerdlow]). I discuss these gender (and some racial) divisions within environmental activism in depth in my forthcoming book on ecofeminism and mothering.

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