

Corea argues that before the reproductive technologies, a woman could at some point come to terms with her infertility and go on with her life. Now, there's no easy way off the medical treadmill. As long as the technology is there, the infertile woman can tell herself, "Just one more time." Private clinics, which have no incentive to limit the number of times a woman goes through the procedure, sometimes encourage this attitude. In the waiting room of one IVF clinic in Norfolk, Virginia, is a picture of a soaring bird with the message "you never fail until you stop trying."

In my own research, while I was producing a radio documentary for CBC's *Ideas*, I spoke to a number of infertile women who admitted to wishing that the programs didn't exist. One woman in her fourth attempt at IVF told me of the emotional ups and downs women suffer, and how they feel they're on a roller coaster of heightened expectations and dashed hopes. Hopes are raised when a woman is accepted into the program, dashed when the doctor can't get an egg. Raised again when he gets an egg, dashed when it doesn't fertilize or cleave properly. Raised again when he gets an embryo and transplants it into her uterus, dashed when it doesn't implant or she miscarries.

In the process, women are reduced to passive receptacles as doctors manipulate their reproductive cycles through a stunning array of drugs, hormones, blood tests, ultra sound readings and surgical procedures. In fact, women are made so passive through the process that it is extraordinarily difficult to find women in the programs who were willing to speak publicly about their experiences. They are told by their nurses and doctors not to talk to the media, and by and large, they comply. They're dependent on the good will of their doctors to make them pregnant, and they fear that expressing any kind of problem will jeopardize their chances.

Of course, for the women who do give birth, the reproductive technologies are indeed a boon. But Corea argues that the priorities of a medical system that focusses on heroic medical treatments rather than the prevention of infertility are seriously skewed.

The incidence of infertility has more than doubled in North America in the last twenty years. Yet the causes of infertility have never been thoroughly investigated. Researchers know that the IUD, certain drugs and venereal disease have all contributed to the rising rates of infertility in women. They also suspect that environmental and workplace hazards have contributed to infertility in both sexes, but to date, no good epidemiological studies have been done to verify this, and little action has been taken to remedy the situation.

To Corea, this is no surprise. She makes clear the medicine is neither neutral nor benign, but reflects the patriarchal culture that produces it. As a consequence, she believes that reproductive technology increases already strong tendencies in medicine to objectify and dominate women. "The technology is male generated," she writes, "and buttresses male power over women."

Moreover, she argues that in the interests of patriarchy, the technology reduces women to matter. "Just as the patriarchal state finds it acceptable to market parts of a woman's body (breasts, vagina, buttocks) for sexual purposes in prostitution and the larger sex industry, so it will soon find it reasonable to market other parts of women (womb, ovaries, and eggs) for reproductive purposes." Already, the reproductive industry is offering wombs for rent, and fresh and frozen embryos for sale.

Corea's words are strong and uncompromising, and her stance has raised the backs of her critics. Advocates of the new technologies argue that they do bring women new options and choice, but for Corea, choice is invalidated in a society where serious differences in power and authority exist between the sexes.

Besides, those who put their trust in reproductive technology seem to be suffering from a form of amnesia. The new reproductive technologies are an extension of the same medical system that brought women DES, the pill, IUDs, unnecessary hysterectomies and cesarian sections. In the light of this history, there is no reason to believe that reproductive technology is any more benign or woman-centered than earlier technologies.

*The Mother Machine* is a brave and bold book--well written and well researched. It is especially important at a time when reproductive technology and its commercial exploitation are proceeding more rapidly than our moral, legal and ethical frameworks for dealing with it. If there is a weakness in *The Mother Machine*, it is in its failure to stand back from the issue of women and technology, and examine the nature of science itself. The attempts to reduce woman to her component parts, and to control her reproductive system are a natural outgrowth of a reductionist science which attempts to control and dominate all of nature. At some point we have to ask whether this sort of reductionism doesn't reduce the value of life itself--for both women and men.

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**Deep Ecology**  
 by Bill Devall and George Sessions  
 Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith Inc.,  
 1985.

**The Natural Alien: Humankind and Environment**  
 by Neil Evernden  
 Toronto: University of Toronto  
 Press, 1985.

**Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching**  
 by Dave Foreman  
 Tucson: Earth First! Books, 1985.

**Deep Ecology**  
 Edited by Michael Tobias  
 San Diego: Avant Books, 1985.

I know it's wrong, but I tend to judge a book by its cover, or at least by the blurbs. I read the author's bio first, to see what they say about themselves, and then the acknowledgements, to see who their friends are. I confess, therefore, to a certain bias, having read that Dave Foreman is a "river runner, backpacker, birdwatcher and bowhunter". Michael Tobias, "writer/mountaineer/filmmaker" with credits like *After Eden* and *History, Ecology & Conscience*, and that Messrs Devall and Sessions are avid backpackers, rock climbers and students of eastern and aboriginal philosophies.

There is of course nothing wrong in these laudable undertakings. Environmentalism is everything you'd expect from a lively political movement: earnest, unkempt and evangelical, pretentious and portentous, in turn silly, sentimental and serious. But it's been around for quite a while. It is time for deeper consideration of the issues. Another set of readings on the environment, another plea to save this or that, another attack on the evils of industrialism just won't do. We've heard it all before and truth to tell it's becoming a bore.

Neil Evernden is the odd one out in this crowd and not simply because he's a quiet Canadian. He presents a clear, cogent line of reasoning. His is not an easy book, but the cumulative effect is dramatic and immediate. After reading *The Natural Alien*, you understand as well as appreciate the contradiction in wanting to preserve nature while shooting at it with arrows and lenses, or touting wilderness while tromping all over it. This book is a must for any serious student of environmental issues.

It's not that I don't like or appreciate the other offerings. Who hasn't felt the frustrations of environmentalism in recent years? It's more a sense that they are leading nowhere and in the process antagonizing those whose support they seek.

Dave Foreman has written an entertaining handbook for "ecoteurs" that offers an assortment of tactics for disrupting the enemies of the environment. We all damn the developers from time to time. On the other hand one cannot but have reservations when, along with hollow disclaimers about these detailed tactics being "for entertainment purposes only", the author announces that "two good friends--Mr. Smith and Mr. Wesson--are our security agents." Had he read his Evernden, Mr. Foreman might have thought twice about subtitled his handbook "monkey" wrenching.

The two offerings on deep ecology are equally unsettling. Part of it is the subject itself. There is no generally accepted or precise definition of deep ecology. It really amounts to a more philosophical treatment of the issue, concerned with preservation rather than conservation. To the extent that it is possible at all, deep ecologists are committed to developing a non-anthropo-homocentric approach to the environment.

Definitions aside, I confess to some bias against the incoherence of cafeteria collection of essays. And it doesn't help much when Michael Tobias starts off with a silly sentence asserting that "There was never a time when human beings did not appraise the natural world, painfully aware of their own paradoxical position within it." That's simply wrong. There are some good essays in the collection, but they don't add up to anything. I would rather read the better writers at greater length than struggle to figure out what is deeply ecological about this particular grouping that's all over the map, geographically, philosophically and emotionally.

Devall's and Sessions' book *Deep Ecology* is also fragmentary and frustrating. It's hard to disagree with the desire to improve the quality of life rather than raise the material standard of living, but what does this mean or imply? When the authors state that "present ideology tends to value things because they are scarce and because they have a commodity value" or later that "one cannot quantify adequately what is important for the quality of life, and there is no need to do so," the reader is left wondering what to do next.

The trouble is too much generalizing about an issue that cries out for deeper reflection. This is what deep ecology is all about. Environmental issues have become part of the plurality of political contention. Political parties, public interest groups and government ministries promote protection of the environment, but against whom and for what ends? There is a restlessness abroad among those most committed to the movement. There is a sense of deep unease, of unresolved issues that go beyond conventional criticism of the industrial imperative or capitalist acquisitiveness. It is precisely this nagging feeling about environmentalism that Evernden addresses.

*The Natural Alien* is both analysis and allegory. It's best read as poetry and preferably in one sitting. The book is an appeal to "the perversity of truth instead of the complicity of agreement," a plea for the reality of experience over the certainty of ideology.

Evernden's world is populated by subjects. "The loss of intimacy and immediacy entailed in our achievement of objectivity," he says, "could with some justification be cited as the major motivation for the environmental movement throughout its long history." He rejects conventional industrial imagery that sees life as an amalgam of problems and solutions, a series of obstacles to be overcome or questions to be resolved.

It is not subjects and objects that constitute the world, but relationships. We have become prisoners of "detail perception" at the expense of "meaning perception." We have forgotten or ignored the fact that subjects do not "have" a world view--they are a world view. "Individualism is the religion of solitude," says Evernden. "It is easier to live alone than to learn the constraints and obligations of community life... Only the presence of eternal strangers, whom shame cannot restrain, makes possible the unbroken reign of objectivity in which we pride ourselves."

We are able to manipulate and desecrate nature by objectification, by creating an "us-it" relationship with everything non-human. Nature as object has no intrinsic value. Without value it has no meaning. As with nature, so with humanity. Evernden's plea to re-assert subjectiveness is an appeal to be there, to celebrate the interaction of subjects, to comply and communicate. As such, it has much more in common with aboriginal than industrial society.

*The Natural Alien* avoids simplistic solutions. The oft-touted need for a new "environmental ethic" is itself a technical fix, "a cultural corrective to congenital deformity." We are the story we create for ourselves. We cannot easily write a new one, but we can listen--and there is always "the possibility that we can become fertile ground for a new start, a new story, and a redefining of our place in the world."

That place is a community of subjects, a place of some familiarity, however fleeting. "In daily interaction there must be a mood of compliance if there is to be a social unity, and some means of communicating mood between members of the community." The context of our lives is the set of relationships to which we are committed. Without relationship, without community, all that happens is a litany of disconnected, meaningless events.

Deep ecology is a search for value and meaning. Resistance to absurdity and atrocity are essential, wherever they reveal themselves. But resistance alone is never enough. The objectification of nature and of each other is the philosophical basis for the ills that motivate environmentalism. A critique of this philosophy and creative alternatives are essential if environmentalism is to have any lasting impact. That is why *The Natural Alien* is by far the most important of these offerings.

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