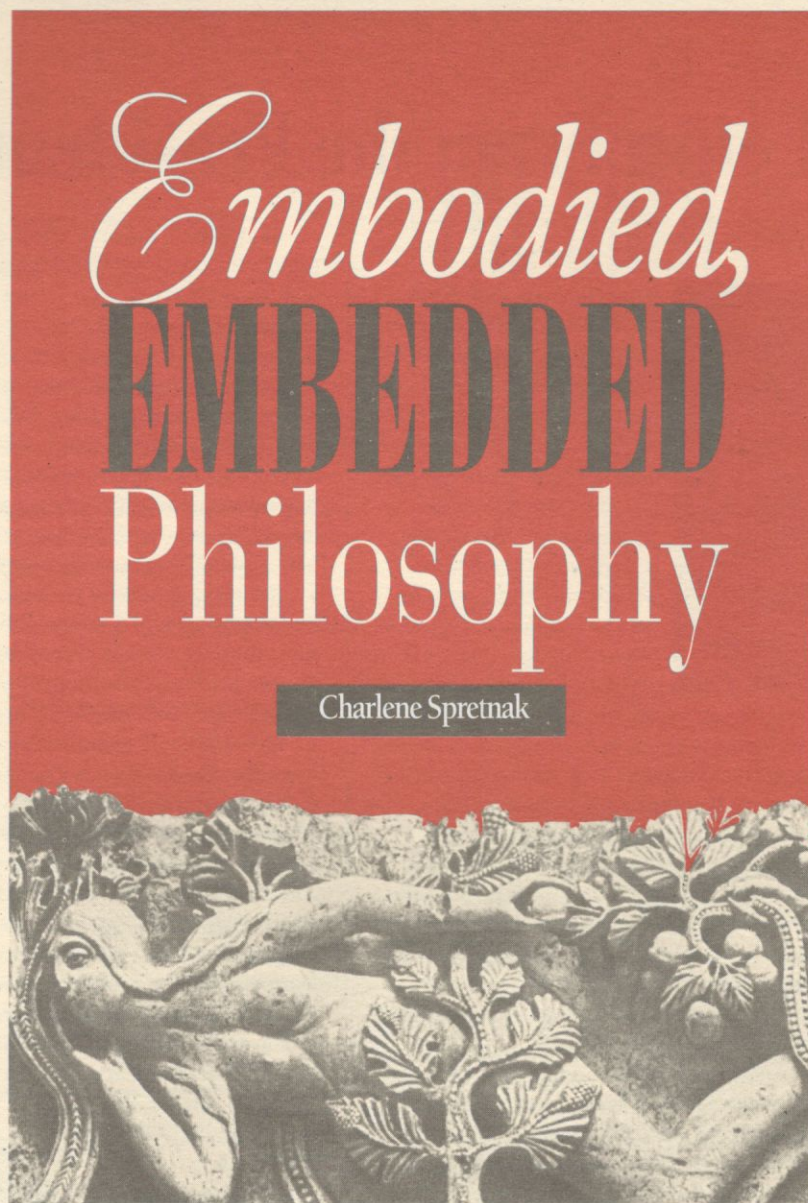


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Modernity has been under assault in intellectual circles for the past twenty years—but largely for the wrong reason. Deconstructive postmodernism (also known as constructionism, constructivism, or post-structuralism) gained a surprisingly large following by declaring that all “metanarratives” (such as Progress, Reason, God, Humanism, or Marxism) and all “discourses” (systems of knowledge such as science, law, psychiatry, or philosophy) are nothing but power plays, ways of shaping and controlling the human experience. Not only are the grand concepts dismissed as modes of control, but the possibility that they partake of truth is also rejected: since all concepts are invented in a certain time and place, meaning is entirely contingent because everything is relative. Truth, then, becomes just one more “social construction.” According to this worldview, we can know nothing about, say, nature or our bodies other than the cultural concepts (including language) that we inherit concerning those subjects.

Although hundreds of thousands of academics and other intellectuals have accepted this line of thought, I am confident that any student in the Philosophy, Cosmology, and Conscious-



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ness concentration, after taking any one course in our curriculum, could identify the fundamental problem with deconstructive postmodernism. To wit, the power dynamics inherent in the structuring of the modern world indeed deserve close attention, but they are enmeshed in a much larger problem: modernity asserted a sharp discontinuity between humans and the rest of the natural world—plus an agnostic stance toward the rest of the Earth community—that is probably singular in the history of human cultures and is deeply pathological. People socialized in the modern worldview emerge as strangers in the cosmos,

profoundly homeless. Modern humans perceive early on in the process of such socialization that they are essentially alone and hence had best be defensive—at all levels of social organization. Consequently, control becomes a core value. That is the root of social construction in modern cultures.

The disembodied, disembedded, hypersubjective, Lone Cowboy posture of constructionism—which claims that all relationships are by nature power-laden and oppressive—constitutes not a radical break in Western philosophy but a tiresome continuation of the brutal and self-destructive divorce from the Earthbody, the female body, and

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the body of the mother in Western patriarchal cultures. The elemental power of all those bodies, sharing in the cosmological rhythm of the moon tides, is now desperately declared to be nothing but social construction! Tsk, tsk. This is not the path to wisdom.

I have proposed a version of postmodernism that seeks transformation beyond the failed assumptions of modernity and focuses attention on the social construction of concepts—but does not make the leap to insisting that there is “nothing but” difference and social construction in human experience. What I call ecological (or

Ecological postmodernism asserts that there is a grounding for social construction and all other human endeavors. The human species does not conceptualize in pure autonomy, masterfully existing on top of nature. Yet even to discuss “grounding” or “autonomy” reveals the poverty of our inherited vocabulary. The “grounding” so central to ecological postmodernism does not refer to a foundational quantum field from which all physicality emerges as derivative manifestations. Rather, the vibratory field of matter/energy does not exist apart from its manifestations of form, which arise and pass away at the quantum

very least, some means of distinguishing between the Lone Cowboy sense of autonomy and the ecological/cosmological sense of uniqueness coupled with intersubjectivity and interbeing. The objectivist, mechanistic, and arrogant framing of a number of core concepts in the Western philosophical tradition inhibits the development of a deeply relational sensibility that is attentive to contextual dynamics of great subtlety.

All branches of Western philosophy are in need of a re-framing that involves attentive engagement with the complex processual grounding of human existence. It is quite possible

We need to shift the emphasis from the Lone Cowboy sense of autonomy to the ecological sense of intersubjectivity.



ecological/cosmological) postmodernism acknowledges both the enormous role of social construction in human experience *and* our constitutive embeddedness in subtle biological, ecological, cosmological, and quantum processes about which contemporary Western society has only an extremely rudimentary level of understanding. When deconstructive postmodernists conclude that there is nothing to life but arbitrary social construction and utter groundlessness, they exacerbate the sense of discontinuity that has roots in certain schools of Greek philosophy but was intensified by Renaissance humanism, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment. These foundational movements of modernity cumulatively framed the human story apart from the larger unfolding story of the Earth community. Deconstructive postmodernists shrink the human story even further, insisting that it is entirely a matter of power plays and language games. What is needed, in addition to exposing the power dynamics inherent in the “metanarratives” of the modern worldview, is to break out of the conceptual box that keeps modern society self-identified apart from nature and to reconnect with a fuller, richer awareness of the human as an integral and dynamic manifestation of the subjectivity of the universe.

level trillions of times per second. The “quantum soup” is not a base, or source, but part of the play of matter/energy. The grounding of human agency and subjectivity lies in a multiplicity of processes, such as one’s genetic inheritance of behavioral predispositions; one’s cognitive functions, which include the continuous resculpting of neuronal groups and pathways near synaptic interactions; the influence of bodily experience on metaphor, by which most conceptual thought is organized; the influences of landscape, weather, and other dynamics of one’s bioregion on imagination and mood; the self-regulating dynamics of the body-mind; the effect of daily exposures to strong and weak electromagnetic fields; and the subtle manifestations of nonlocal causality and other relational dynamics that lace the universe.

If these aspects of human experience are acknowledged, one can accurately speak of the “autonomy” of an individual only by incorporating a sense of the dynamic web of relationships that are constitutive for that being at a given moment. We need new words — or, at the

and even probable that human apprehension of the countless modes of dynamic relation will always be decidedly incomplete. Yet the perceptual habits of absolutist delineation and overbearing reductionism long imbued by dualistic thinking haunt contemporary efforts to move beyond patriarchal, authoritarian, exploitative societies to new possibilities. The ecofeminist critique of the dualism inherent in Western thought needs to be joined not only with an appreciation of pluralism but also with an open-minded consideration of unitive dimensions of being in this *universe*. An ontology based on dynamic and admittedly partial knowledge as well as awe towards the complexity of embodied and embedded existence would contribute substantially to the profound social transformation that is needed. ■

