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Ecopsychology Revisited

Jorge Conesa-Sevilla

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Ecopsychology Revisited

For Whom Do The “Nature” Bells Toll?

Jorge Conesa-Sevilla

Humboldt State University Press

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“In any case, the scientist’s good reputation has been assured for quite some time now. Nature can no longer reveal itself in any sort of human form and every step forward in science has effaced from nature an anthropomorphic trait.”

(Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Discussion of the Objective Value of the Experience, 1999: 69)

Acknowledgements

For My Family

(I am very grateful to Kyle Morgan,
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FOREWORD

I discovered Alan Drengson and his “The Trumpeter: A Journal of Ecosophy” during its 2nd year of publication. Shortly after I became a Reviewer and then Contributing Editor. Two decades later I found myself unexpectedly accepting the position of Editor-in-Chief. Deciding then to re-visit one of my favorite writers, I sent out a call-for-papers for two Special Issues of the journal dedicated to Paul Shepard.

One of the first papers submitted delighted me so much that I emailed the author to request a chat by phone. He acquiesced and that is how Dr. Jorge Conesa-Sevilla and I became friends and colleagues.

Bill Devall was Dr. Conesa-Sevilla’s mentor at Humboldt State University and mine during my first few attempts at editing *The Trumpeter*. Dr. Conesa-Sevilla and I are both taken by Paul Shepard’s work and have become friends of his wife Flo Shepard. Alan Drengson has been influential in our doing, thinking and writing.

Dr. Conesa-Sevilla has kindly sent me excerpts and papers over the years and I have been delighted to read them. As a Managing Editor of the *Trumpeter* for several years he and I often discussed submissions from folks both eminent and of lesser renown. That we seemed to be in agreement most of the time, is I think, a testament to our shared knowledge and values.

As Dr. Conesa-Sevilla has mentioned in Chapter Four, he has been sitting Zazen for many years. I have been playing Taijiquan, Qigong and Zhan Zhuang for 35 years. With our mutual friend, Terry Keenan (Keenan Roshi), we have published a small book of poetry: “The Way of Stubbed Toes and Bruised Knees”. All this from a chance meeting (but aren’t all meetings by chance?)

Dr. Conesa-Sevilla’s interests in semiotics, deep ecology and ecosophy have informed his thinking and writing for decades. He has developed a command of these areas second to none and is respected globally for his insight. He is a foundering member of the European Ecopsychology Society. His voice is one that

all people concerned about ecosophy and sustainability ought to know and understand.

In personal communication, Dr. Conesa-Sevilla's told me some of his reasons for this text. There are, obviously, additional reasons but in my opinion, these are fundamental:

1. Revisit the history and changing definitions "ecopsychology"
2. Introduce students to thoughtful examinations and de-constructions of terms commonly used in deep ecology, "ecopsychology," and ecosophy
3. To develop "a more scholarly approach to the study of 'nature affiliations'"

Has Dr. Conesa-Sevilla achieved his aims? Certainly, from my perspective he has, exceptionally. As a text for both researchers and students it is "chock full" of historical information and detailed analyses. It will be a standard reference text for some time.

*Years ago, I stumbled upon a new friend and
We walked together along unfamiliar paths.
Deepening our budding relationship.*

*Some years later, my special friend and I
Continued our journey on now familiar paths
Appreciating our flowering association.*

*Now my cherished friend and I have found new paths
To stroll and new byways to explore, at leisure.
As we explore moments of mutual awareness.*

Michael T. Caley, PhD
Edmonton, Alberta June 2017

PREFACE

“Signification has [...] two references, one to the thing indicated, and the other to the response, to the instance and to the meaning of the idea. It denotes and connotes. When the symbol is used for the one, it is a name. When it is used for the other, it is a concept.” (G. H. Mead)

The first draft for this work was completed in June of 2013. Since then, and while exchanging notes with colleagues around the world, major edits were done to do justice and service to many perspectives and conversations. Despite the seeming plurality of these points of view, usually, the conversations fell into two groups. One spoke from a transpersonal perspective and the other from more philosophical and even scientific bases.

Missing from these voices, it seemed to me at the time and even today, was a willingness to deal with the question of self in nature (eigen-umwelt) from a deconstructive or beginner’s perspective. That is, various individuals speaking from these perspectives seemed to be sold on a particular idea or committed to a point of view that was satisfactory to them and that justified their careers and endeavors. Repeatedly, I observed the usual tactic of beginning a discussion at the self-nature (eigen-umwelt) level of discourse in order to justify and argue for a preferred and ultimately idiosyncratic eigen-mitwelt (self-society) formulation (e.g. there were no academic disciplines—science—in the time of our ancestors, therefore, children do not need schooling).

Generally speaking, conversations about “ecopsychology” wound up avoiding basic questions that most social scientists, philosophers, or natural scientists would have addressed as a matter of interest, discipline and as an obligation to the noble enterprise of foundational inquiry.

From June of 2013 to May of 2015, and during my spare time and academic breaks since, I have endeavored to capture and distill the essence of these conversations. However, it occurred to me that new ways of thinking and looking at these problems were needed. Thus, this work as a whole is doing two things:

addressing, revising, and updating the content of these conversations while formulating new idea structures that can help us revisit what we all think we understand when we use the tag “ecopsychology.”

What is “Ecopsychology”?

Generally defined, “ecopsychology” is an interest area in psychology and other disciplines. Unlike many officially sanctioned and recognized fields such as Cognitive Psychology or Psychoanalysis, “ecopsychology” is a collection of viewpoints and stances aiming to elucidate the relationship between human health and wellbeing, and natural processes (i.e., ‘nature’). “Ecopsychology” goes one step further by intending to say something ‘normative’ about these relationships. Whether its deontology is based on actual scientific findings (evolutionary science, human ecology, ecology) or on humanistic grounds (transpersonal psychology, narrative psychology, humanistic psychology), the intent is to define “nature connection” as a basic synergy toward authentic being.

The above (permeable) classification is an advantage, for “ecopsychological” inquiry and practice can be an important focus in any other field.

Despite the present critique, I agree that some reiteration of thoughtful, evidence-based, and scholarly serious approaches to “ecopsychological problems” can be very useful when these ideas are implemented as “therapies.” I believe that this endeavor is sorely needed as we face almost intractable global problems of our own making. Furthermore, I think that to the extent that mainstream psychology has neglected basic formulations of *eigen-mit-umwelten* (self-society-nature) in favor of, in an anthropocentric manner, *eigen-mitwelten* (self-society) relations, it has done a great disservice to a more inclusive understanding of what it is to be a human being. Any psychologist who agrees with the latter criticism is already or is on her way to being an “ecopsychologist.”

One of the problems, however, with the tag “ecopsychology” is that it implies, confounds, or reiterates both new and old

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meanings. The old, and without the tag, pertains to contrasts and descriptions as old as civilization, or more precisely, as long as there has been an obvious cultural schism between “the countryside” and “the city”—resulting in psychologically different modes of perception, social organizations, and health. By any other name “ecopsychology” has been and continues to be a collection of observations--a critique--that amassing hordes of people inside citadels is not the best way to experience life—to derive its fullest and most authentic meanings. This criticism, then and today, elevates country living, the pastoral, and even “wildness” to an idealistic qualitatively higher status; never mind that human psychology can never hide its shortcomings and inadequacies. Specific ideas (philosophies and interventions) on how to address and correct the deficiencies caused by the schism, the countryside-the city, have sprung up since long before Lao Tzu walked away from humanity, Epicurus founded his garden, and Diogenes ran around naked.

Whether framed in negative terms, terms of “deficiency,” expressed as nostalgia for simpler times, or as folk psychological and cultural wisdom, some of the “ecopsychological insights” or proposals derived from more careful observations are:

1. The countryside (The Pastoral) is intrinsically virtuous.
2. “Happiness” is to be found in these simpler and more frugal interactions (times, recollections, activities).
3. Alienation and estrangement from “nature” (The Pastoral) may result in illness and unhappiness (morbidly, cynicism, fetishism, “dysfunctions”).
4. A return to the countryside (to “wildness,” to “nature”) reestablishes a genuine “connection”—bestows or renews virtue.
5. Undue social complexity and urban development carry costs, foreseen and unforeseen, where fewer individuals stand to benefit, albeit usually in meaningless and unfulfilling ways, while many others sacrifice much more and receive much less.

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6. Neglect or carelessness of deeper, actual or potential, relational meanings and affections (nature affiliations) inherent in self-nature gestalts can be read as non-biophilic tendencies and even psychological dysfunction.

The above list can be extended to include particular cases and ethereal arguments, regional idyll poetry exalting the virtues and wisdom of “a place” or of “a people” and of “its ways.” When we include all of the above, “ecopsychology’s” meaning and aims alternate between “consciousness raising,” changing behaviors, changing attitudes, changing lifestyles, changing discourse, changing language, changing culture and changing societies—revisiting “nature connection” norms.

So, in all the senses that matter, “ecopsychology,” new and old, stands for a symptom, or a collection of symptoms, of some larger combination of problems that bear down on a troubled population, on the very core of who we are as natural beings. To the extent that the most recent reiterations of ecopsychological sentiments emerged during the 1960s and progressed in tandem with other green movements, it is too a symptom and a nascent awareness of the implications of existing in a new context of urban and suburban life, the pernicious presence and consequences of an industrial, corporate, militarized ethos, and the constant pressures to consume at an impractical and unjustified pace—the degeneration of good and simple values.

On the other hand, for any frugal group of humans who lives closely to natural processes and organizes activities around natural cycles, “ecopsychology” is a way of life taken for granted, its implications clear, a construct that needs no definition or scholarly affirmation.

Meanings

In our desperation, eagerness, ignorance, and necessity to “live meaningful lives,” and with the specific aim to deduce what each of us understands by “nature” or “connection,” to discover it for ourselves, “ecopsychology” is newly represented by a plethora of ideas and presenters whose claims and proposals

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are neither new, original, nor completely tested in their efficacy to close the almost incommensurable gulf that exists for most people, between “modern, neurotic life” and “idyllic country living.”

At the heart of the inability of professional nature apologizers or enthusiasts to “sell nature” is a lack of rigor when it comes to adopting or defining terms. A good number of self-appointed and self-defined “ecopsychologists” simply adopt some idealized version of “indigenous wisdom,” some version of “sustainability,” some “mindful practice,” some social or behavioral platform particular to their interests and personal peeves (e.g., eco-feminism, environmental justice, healthy food, animal rights), and produce their unique version of “ecopsychology.”

Meanwhile, and more importantly, few of these proposals and idiosyncratic admixtures ever question the validity or actual usefulness of coopting very specific indigenous or traditional practices or deconstruct in a convincing and rigorous manner what the terms “nature,” “connection,” “spiritual ecology,” “spirit,” “mind,” or “consciousness” mean.

That is, to the extent that terms and/or constructs such as “mind,” “soul,” “consciousness,” and/or “spirit” are used interchangeably, on purpose, with the intention to obfuscate, inadvertently and in ignorance, or out of laziness, the enterprises collectively referred to as “ecopsychology” diminish in their discourse value to persuade a host of social and behavioral scientists, the more discerning public, and policy makers that “nature matters,” that our personal and collective relationships to “nature” are central to well-being.

Much of this book is an exercise in the deconstruction of terminology that is often employed in “green circles” and is assumed to have universal meanings. These criticisms can be seen as a general failure of misunderstanding and misusing metaphors as concrete and untested meanings. For example, when a cognitive scientist employs the word “mind,” one assumes that s/he means brain processes and not “spirit.” When the same group of professionals employ the word “consciousness,” one also assumes that they mean some sort of brain

module (or collection of circuitry) whose function is to collate a seemingly unified experience (s) into qualia—that it has survival value. I do not assume that they mean that “consciousness” is “the human soul.”

Non-experts, who employ the above tags interchangeably, do so for reasons that could, generally and specifically, be described as non-scientific. This book would end right here if we were to claim that all “ecopsychologists” are disinterested in matters of science. In this case, the claim “I feel connected to nature and believe that nature has agency—a thing that has consciousness—and will heal me if I only behave in a ceremonious sort of way,” is the beginning and the closing argument for “ecopsychology.”

Similarly, the claim “I feel connected to a god-head (a grand spirit) and believe that this being has agency—a thing that has consciousness—and will heal me if I only behave in a ceremonious sort of way,” could be, equally, the beginning and the closing argument about the “nature of things.”

However, to the extent that many people “live off the land” (cultivate, hunt, or fish), seek out recreation in natural or wild places, study nature dynamics and processes with avid affection and curiosity, or generally enjoy the immersion of self in nature, that is, otherwise experience deeply felt and authentic “connections” but do not give a hoot about “spirit,” then one must question whether “nature” or “connection” means the same thing to everybody.

Therefore, and for the most part, the phrase “nature connections” will be substituted with, “nature affiliations,” to suggest, throughout this book, long term, deeply psychological, and more integral ways of thinking about self-nature gestalts.

Generally speaking, “ecopsychology” is an important enterprise to the extent that some people may feel very strongly that preparing for or averting the environmental wows that are sure to visit us (that are now occurring because of human-caused activities) involves all people, regardless of how we engage in/with natural spaces. To put it simply, either “ecopsychology” is a continuation and transliteration of nature spiritual practices applied to modern problems, or a systemic enterprise that seeks

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to resolve what “nature” and “connection” mean in light of the complexities of modern life. Proponents of Integral Ecology may balk at this dichotomous presentation, but on the other hand, a bumblebee flies on gossamer magical wings and fairy dust, and that is why it flies, or the aerodynamics of its uniquely shaped wings beating against air at a certain speed keep it alight. One of these proposals is falsifiable and thus scientific, the other is not. One describes, makes specific predictions, and improves our understanding of the natural world, the other does not.

In the above context, the term “greenwashing” can also be used to describe the dumbing down of complex, scientific ecological ideas (e.g., human ecology, environmental philosophy, anthropological ecology, evolutionary science) into a facile, perfunctory, and/or idiosyncratic set of slogans that individuals themselves habitually employ. As in the case of companies attempting to do the same with profit in mind, “ecopsychology” can take this propaganda form.

Organization of this book

This book will make specific arguments and raise questions with regard to the dubious practical usefulness of coopting failed “magical” solutions to attempt to solve very complex problems. Green movements in the humanities, social and behavioral sciences seemed very hopeful at first and made specific promises with regard to a shift toward “green consciousness” which never materialized at a scale that made a difference. Their failure to do so is examined here.

The arguments and questions unfold across eight chapters, as follows:

Chapter One: For whom do the “nature” bells toll? Various forms of “identification in/with nature” are explored, including individual and collective projections onto “nature.” Historical and cross-cultural modes of “nature connection” are examined from psychological and anthropological perspectives which suggest and predict that no single approach or perspective in ecopsychology has primacy over others.

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Chapter Two: Ten Misconceptions About Ecopsychology Taken-for-granted notions of what “ecopsychology” is or what its practitioners do are revisited while employing a ‘misconceptions’ framework. From this perspective, “ecopsychology” endeavors are shown to be potentially interdisciplinary and even open-ended.

Chapter Three: Nature Affiliations: Self-Nature Gestalts The phrase ‘nature connections’ is substituted with another, ‘nature affiliations’ to suggest and inquire about deeper Self-Nature Gestalt ‘connections.’ Different psychological approaches are revisited and modified so they can be employed, as social scientific models, to describe and assess various types and processes here defined as ‘nature affiliations.’

Chapter Four: Deconstructing Origins The recent history of “ecopsychology” has been multi-claimed and/or coopted by various groups attempting to legitimize their own origins and practices. A critical examination of these claims is undertaken based on archival data.

Chapter Five: Psycho-Phenology: Applications of Ecological Panarchy to Psycho-Ecological Systems A dynamic and systems approach, Panarchy, to psycho-ecological thinking is introduced. Ideas of sustainability and resilience across several association levels are revisited as natural cycles of all systems that can be said to be “ecological.”

Chapter Six: Nature as Madness A recurring theme in the ecopsychology literature is that a certain proxy agency, “nature,” is directly responsible for healing, transpersonal processes, and other transformational events. In this sense, nature is understood as having produced or played a role in maintaining a sort of “madness.” In the context of this work, the word “madness” signifies the free flow of accommodations necessary in order to survive an environment constantly in flux.

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Chapter Seven: We Know What We Know and Make Up the Rest Some factions within ecopsychology have overplayed the “spirit in nature” slogan or metaphor—and made money from it. At the same time, these factions are rejecting scientific methodologies and data that would be valuable to anyone who is concerned with the importance of sound scientific designs put to the service of human health and planetary stability. They are the nature mysterians (Dennett, 1995).

Chapter Eight: The Murmuration of Transfixitive “Wants” The value of ecopsychological discourse is undeniable if its proposals are consistent with established and testable paradigms (evolutionary science). When ecopsychological discourse is too idiosyncratic, extant from evaluative norms and processes, then it runs the risk of misrepresenting “nature” and “nature connections” entirely.

Epilogue: Feathers, Crystals, and Plenty of Whiskey--in the Apocalypse Surely, we have never before stood teetering between rapidly evolving technologies whose use and effects cannot be duly vetted, a culture of universal glut, and the deterioration and corruption of so many natural systems, at once, without the benefit of past generations—recent memories—to advise and dissuade us of our folly, if it is simply folly. Appendix I: Marg and Précis. Appendix II: Illustrates applications of formulations presented in Chapter Five.

Throughout this work, the words ecopsychology, nature, and connection, as well as others, often appear in quotations. This is to signify, in all cases, that personal and idiosyncratic ideas of what these terms mean, vary greatly. It is assumed that, presently, no definitive semiotic rendition can satisfactorily summarize all the meanings implied by these complex and confounded constructs or interactions. When these terms appear without quotes, they refer to specific applications, kinds, views, descriptions, reiterations, or classes with specific signification that is apparent in context.

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As far as science can inform us, never has humanity been universally threatened by its own actions this perversely, nor been so “efficient” at altering so many Earth systems at once without the hope of rectifying the consequences of its own actions. As far as history can inform us, never has humanity been so universally acculturated into gluttonous patterns of consumption that defy the logic of sustainably obtaining sufficient necessities that make an individual healthy and secure.

With most of pre-history and history having been populated by humans who one supposes lived in more sustainable relationships with their natural surroundings, albeit in existentially precarious and frugal conditions, disturbingly, none of their collective “wisdom” was able to offset the quick-and-dirty precipitation of “bad culture.” It seems highly questionable, then, that coopted and “greenwashed” wisdom, incomplete in form and content and lacking scientific methodologies, will succeed as a credible cantilever against these multi-determined forces.

For all these reasons, a self-critiquing, evolving, and scientifically based reiteration of “ecopsychology” is needed and will be needed for generations to come. If nothing else, it is necessary to understand why humans are this self-deceptive in particular and general ways to the point of collective self-destruction and imminent oblivion. Equally, and across psychological work, it is necessary to understand why humans persist in delusion or wishful thinking as part of self-deception during times of collective self-destruction and imminent oblivion.

Finally, *throughout this book, the principal argument, in various forms and under several guises, is the exploration of a fundamental contradiction: to the extent that “ecopsychological” perspectives and similar approaches contain a high degree of humanism, they fail to fully have trust in and live up to the phrase and deep ecological sentiment, “the intrinsic value of nature.”* That is to say, when “ecopsychological” perspectives and similar approaches replace the open-ended enigma that is “nature” with yet another absolutist and recognizable form of anthropocentric and idiosyncratic thinking, they fail at the very task of promoting the opposite ideal: *an inclusive but humbling*

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description of humanity, scaled way down to the inhabitation of an almost insignificant portion of time and place within a vast and unknowable cosmos which is utterly indifferent to our needs or desires. To signify “human” as more than that, without scientific evidence and on the basis of preferred over-simplifications, is to fall into the trap of anthropocentrism.

* * *

CHAPTER ONE

For Whom do the “Nature” Bells Toll?

“It has become fashionable to describe myths as though they were entirely about the psychic life of humans. The cosmos is exhausted as the projection of the unconscious life ... Myths may illuminate unconscious processes, but the context in which that inner world came into being is ecological.” (Paul Shepard)

As introduced earlier, “Ecopsychology” is a generic term that encompasses the work of several disciplines and perspectives. What they have in common is the following: As theory, science, or practice, “eco-psychology” assumes that there are ideal (optimal) natural parameters that give rise to and maintain physical and psychological health and sustainable communities. To be “whole,” in a sense that matters, in a sense that directly impacts our understanding of “human nature,” means to be an integral part of the natural world.

The closer these existential parameters resemble evolutionary, ancient, and traditional-sustainable modes of “being,” the more likely it is that humans will be “whole”—physically and psychologically healthy.

In this context, to be an integral human being has always meant having hourly or daily access to natural spaces—being physical—a deep understanding of these natural environments, and an authentic identification with various aspects of nature and relations within small-scale human communities in a way such that they were all one and the same (integral).

By logical extension, nature alienation implies a breakage or rupture—a disorganization—of the integrity of these evolutionary, ancient, and traditional interrelations. However, “ecopsychological” questions, approaches and practices examine both the causes of the human-nature rupture and also the means of reconciling these factors and forces toward optimal wellbeing, including failures to make truly integral affiliations.

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Because “ecopsychological” questions, approaches and practices are diverse and come from multiple areas of interest, these examinations also include, for some professionals, questions about spirituality, the integration of both male and female roles (principles), and sensual or intimate modes of human nature interactions.

These diverse approaches are worth studying to the extent that an “identification with nature” is a psychological projection, and individuals will interpret this identification in ways that are personally meaningful and thus satisfying.

When it comes to studying “human-nature-connections” from both ecologically and psychologically credible (i.e., useful, evidence-based, pragmatic, scientific) perspectives, it pays to ask the question: “Who interprets ‘nature’ and for what reason(s)?” For the poet, a hunter, an ecologist, a pagan, a hiker, or a miner, “nature” may be very different things.

From both a psychological and an ecological perspective, asking the question “Who interprets ‘nature’ and for what reason(s)?”, leads one into a study of motivations (goals & objectives), behaviors, and thinking—a study of Psyche-Natur.

As a self-reflective tool or process, the same question is likely to deepen our affiliation potential when immersed in natural environments. As foundational questions go, it is the disciplined query that sustains reflection, that reduces the probability of hubris, and that ultimately enumerates and elucidates basic psychological commodities regarding nature affiliation.

Without this basic deconstructive groundwork, we are left with muddled, confusing, and even contradictory proposals.

Attributions

Our many direct ancestors and those of closely related species, some of whom are now known to have contributed to our human genome (e.g. Neanderthal), faced the daily challenges of survival and opportunities for thriving, and equally, from time to time, catastrophic situations that brought some of those species to the brink of extinction. Some died out completely. Their collective wisdom, their “magic,” their exquisite knowledge of

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flora, fauna, and atmospherics did not prevent the cyclical or surprising lethality of natural disasters and accelerated modernization.

That is, their collective wisdom, their “magic,” their inclusive knowledge of flora, fauna, and atmospherics was applicable and effective as long as the conditions of their existence did not vary widely outside a limited set of critical functional and adaptive parameters. Most of their collective wisdom and “magic” has been lost to us and even when reinterpreted, it is very doubtful that it could address the complexities of the deterioration and spoilage of so many systems at once. To believe otherwise is pure fantasy. They themselves did not or could not prevent—or were themselves directly responsible for—the extinction of so many species they depended on. Verily, wisdom and shortsightedness are oftentimes traveling companions on the same road.

With close to seven billion people on this planet and millions already facing various degrees or forms of apocalyptic doom—these large numbers acting as a buffer against complete extinction--and facing dramatic changes that are already happening and surely will worsen by the end of this century, and even while employing simple math, this could translate into many more unknown millions suffering starvation and death. To be “happy” in these troubled times brings up an immediate sense of guilt if one cares even a little bit. To be affluent in these troubled times seems more like a desperate acceptance and last gluttonous act before dystopia fully settles in. It is already dystopia for millions of human-animals and non-human animals.

One of the many ways green psychological practices are carried out (thought about) is through various forms of identification in/with “nature,” with specific elements, entities or aspects of nature, or with actual organisms. Whether these exercises (interventions) are self-directed, mediated by somebody else, or undertaken with others, they all have one thing in common: they are projections of “self” (insecurities, certainties, questions, hopes, vague assumptions), onto “nature,” however dimly understood or defined. To the extent that these exercises are part of personal growth practices, and every now and then, they do

provide some insight into “self” or “nature,” and nobody gets hurt badly, then they are innocuous enough and sometimes a little helpful.

We could ask, “An ecopsychology that is innocuous enough and sometimes a little helpful cannot be bad, right?” When globally shared environmental problems are as grave as they are and our sense of alienation is this acute, “innocuous and sometimes a little helpful” may not be enough. At worst, the “feel good” moments do not squarely address the darker depths and truths that now define human relations in the ambit of ongoing destabilizing natural systems.

That is, some aspects of “ecopsychology” do not seem serious enough, adult enough, informed enough, and resemble more the stuff that children would engage in when playing ‘house’ or ‘doctor’ or ‘fort in the forest’--‘tis infantile, and if some of these less mature aspects of “ecopsychology” are indeed, clinically infantile, they are significant in their own right as a reflection of the psychology that drives these behaviors and well-wishing.

In addition to channeling “animal spirits” while wearing cardboard masks, there is no question that a chance meeting with an actual wild creature in its own habitat could be an unforgettable experience. Some folks might even describe these encounters as “magical.” Even a fleeting glimpse of a fox’s glyph-eye and sinuous red body is likely to endure as a significant memory, salient above many others. Such excitement is understandable, and its energizing potential, its impressionistic value for making us more aware of grander ecologies, of our humble place in their habitats, cannot be underestimated.

Conversely, if one has little experience with wild animals, understanding their behaviors and their ecological function, these moments could also be exalted above and beyond their basic reality experience. Meaning is added that makes this not simply an encounter between two organisms in the forest, but much more— depending on the semiotic interpreting agent. Swimming with dolphins and all sorts of incidents or accidents of “connection” become manufactured spirituality. By manu-

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factured spirituality, I mean the almost instinctive impulse to describe any odd moment, however prosaic, as possessing an otherworldly meaning. That is, any odd experience that the observer sees/feels fit converges on the singular explanation “miracle.” Attempting to understand why humans tend to do this and, in particular, why they do this at all when interacting with natural environments, is a question of interest for a scientifically-oriented “ecopsychology.”

The flight of the bumblebee is said to be “sacred” because the person decides that it is, or somebody else decides for her, that it is so. But is that all there is to a fox’s glyph-eye or a bumblebee’s flight? The all-explaining moment, the all-inclusive explanation that it is magical and it made someone feel good-special, seems like a poor cousin to the myriad things we could understand about foxes, or about foxes in forests— anatomy, physiology, ecology--while gaining with this knowledge, more, not less appreciation, sympathy, and even love for these creatures. Although a rare, “special,” or unique experience can be translated (designated or interpreted) as “spiritual” by an observer, on a whim, it does not make it so if standards of objectivity and rationality are applied.

In this chapter, we are also addressing a problem of “false equivalence.” False equivalence occurs when there seems to be a need to devote equal time to competing ideas, voices, ideologies, and constructs. Democratic societies with truly independent media tend to accommodate “opposing views” even when, clearly, one side of the debate has rationality, experience, and science on its side. The persistence of wanting to devote “equal time” to debate the known against the unknown, data against wishful thinking, began when modern so-called democratic societies came into existence, when the scientific method did not exist and citizens depended on their “opinions” to make arguments, to express their points of view.

Truly, most scientists and the educated public do not think there is a “debate” between evolution and creationism with respect to their power to explain natural phenomena. Fallacies of false equivalence aside, most scientists and the educated

public do not think there is still a “debate” to be had between the reality of human-caused climate change and a corporate effort to continue making profits from dirty energy sources.

The list of “false debates” can be extended to plate tectonics, the age of our planet, the similar genomes between humans and bonobos, and the demise of thousands of species due to habitat loss. No amount of equal time will erase the fact that genome data, agreed to by most scientists across disciplines, describe bonobos as primate kin. Scientists themselves constantly vet, weigh, and judge the merits of new data and decide if these are compelling, worthwhile, or not. They are the experts.

Interestingly, in mundane practical life, most of the time, we do not think we know more than the plumber, an architect, an electrician, an auto mechanic, our butcher, or our medical doctor, when it comes to their knowledge, expertise, and ability to solve the problems they are experts at addressing. In other words, everybody would agree that, except in rare circumstances, our opinions are not on equal footing, do not count the same or more, as those of experts. Experts deserve that designation because of their demonstrable understanding, what they can do and accomplish. Said differently, skills and knowledge matter most, uninformed opinions and wishful thinking, less or not at all.

When an “ecopsychologist” passes h/herself as an expert, and the so-called expertise is ephemerally built upon well-wishes and bad science, do we need to trust them at all?

Swimming with Dolphins and All Sorts of “Magical” Incidents

Many years ago, while swimming with my brother and cousin in the frigid Pacific Ocean waters near Seal Beach, California, a most amazing event occurred, at least to us. All of a sudden we were surrounded by a pod of a dozen or so of what we later learned were common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*). I have encountered and handled wildlife before and since, but this experience was then and continues today to be very unique. Many elements came together to make it also special. It was

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sudden, we were swimming beyond our normal range and comfort zone, it was a confirmable throng experience, and we also felt extremely vulnerable and grateful that none of these wild animals took any interest in us. They briefly surrounded us and swam away with gracious porpoising speed. California surfers experience what I just described routinely. To some of them, these encounters are part of the excitement of being in the water. Both, at least momentarily, share an out-of-the-ordinary space and moment: two species regard one another and allow each other to pass or engage one another in play.

Some people pay good money to swim with dolphins. They report a similar sense of awe when they encounter an alien intelligence, animal “otherness,” so removed from our own, in such an intimate and precarious situation.

Some people would (but I did not then, nor today) describe similar experiences as “magical.” I am not sure if they are using that word metaphorically, hoping even that magic was happening, that is, imperfectly expressing in one word simultaneous emotions and sentiments too new and extant to express otherwise. Others might be inspired to become marine biologists after similar encounters. Another group might come to believe that these dolphins were there for them, as part of some cosmic dance and communication that is delightfully mysterious and will be, forever, enigmatic and beyond scientific understanding. Finally, still others may exploit this sense of wonderment and awe and make it into a profession where as “nature gurus” they mediate and facilitate forces assumed also to be beyond scientific understanding: They speak “for dolphin.”

It is a fair observation that a good number of ecopsychologists seek out this diverse platform as a means to express and broadcast already deeply felt convictions--beliefs. Oftentimes, ecopsychologists are coming from a transpersonal (humanistic) psychology perspective already saturated with unknowns and the giddiness of “mystery”: “spirit,” “Gaia consciousness,” “collective unconsciousness,” and other gossamer winged fantastic ideas. The transliteration from these collective beliefs (this ‘text’) and their extension into “nature” and human-nature

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interactions come ready-made-affected by similar conclusions, their transliteration made in very easy and confident steps without questioning the underlying principles.

And therein lies the Achilles heel of most of what passes for “ecopsychology”: the uncritical acceptance of one sort of psychology under a new, green guise. Thus, it becomes a question for detached, professional historians to inquire and describe how this process came to be. Perhaps humanistic psychology was already in decline at a moment when the green movement provided a useful conduit-tonic for reiterating unscientific but emotionally evocative and attractive dogma. Perhaps scientific training or science in general were suspect to begin with. Perhaps, individually and collectively, they are disillusioned with “mainstream psychology,” the colder facts of evolutionary science and human ecology, a harsher text of graphs, numbers, and figuring they do not understand.

To be fair, one very good argument for transpersonal (humanistic) psychology (or for other forms of religious counseling) is that most people believe in something already, anyway, thus it pays, would be the claim, to start therapy, counseling, or clinical work at the mind-place where they are already, even if we do not subscribe, really, as professional psychologists, to the notion of “souls.” However, judging by the cross over humanistic-ecopsychology literature, their Jungian insinuations and elaborations, it is clear that more than detached (measured) sympathy for clients is going on here. As attested to by specific approaches and claims in the literary records, their “nature spirituality” seems genuinely sought and imparted--proselytizing.

The problem, for it is a problem, I have outlined above spills over into or originates from other spheres of public discourse where “mysterians,” folks who prefer easy but enigmatic answers to a protracted and disciplined study of natural phenomena, insist on having “equal time” for their ideas—their beliefs. Unfortunately, if influential enough or obedient to others, they are involved in public policy making with potentially unhelpful or even harmful consequences.

Adoring Idols

To reiterate, understanding, dispassionately and with a degree of scientific skepticism, why some people have the need for hugging trees; petting rocks; making offerings to mountains and rivers; sincerely (hoping that it will have an effect) placing flowers at the effigy-feet of the patron saint of tigers; that is, for understanding why some people attribute agency to inanimate objects, should be an object of study for Ecopsychologists.

Of interest also, is what makes some people generate, internalize, or manage strong emotions and feelings that they interpret as originating in a “spiritual realm.” Understanding the reasons, scientifically so, why any person would believe, feel, and behave as though they have a personal and particular “connection” with spiritual aspects of an entity they personify as real, Gaia, should be a focal interest for those who deal, directly, with constructs of “nature connection.”

The significance of the belief that nature-at-large, or that particular elements and organisms in it, have singled any one of us out so that certain subtle “transcendental” truths can be shared and that no other form of understanding is on parity with it, cannot be underrated or underestimated. To the extent that these relational tendencies are persisting and common across time and cultures, and across domains within cultures, says a lot about how the human mind evolved. These relational tendencies, if common during early stages of human development but less so as we age and mature, also say something about the intricacies of a developing brain and its cognition.

To walk in the cool shadows of sycamore trees, by a noisy creek, and feel part of an ecological ensemble of experiences—dynamics and meanings potentially graspable—is very human. To believe that the night wind and the unseen “chattering” leaves are delivering a personal message to us is also human, but equally in need of addressing if we are to understand something about our fantasy-prone minds. This is an important scholarly task because a comparable or even larger number of fantasy-prone minds come to very different conclusions, some of which are antagonistic to a sense of “nature connection,” or

interpret these as mediated by “some unfathomable otherness” who decides our fate, including the apocalyptic demise of our planet. The latter are the nefarious mysterians.

As far as philosophy and scientific psychology are concerned, neither group should be let off the hook.

Persevering in believing in something, an idea or feeling, that cannot be confirmed by logical argumentation or scientific analysis seems irrational to most educated people. The repeated rebuttal of these arbitrary notions would seem to be central to the practice of a scientifically oriented psychology. Yet, even within psychology departments, debates flare up over what, in the guise of “equality” or “diversity,” are more likely to be false equivalencies—unwarranted lassitude.

For example, the right of a student to skip a Saturday class because of religious beliefs, the expectation that special provisions must be made for a student to retake a test or receive lecture notes that other students who attended actually endeavored to compile, seems like the fair thing to do. The irony might be that this very student might be taking a course in psychology while studying cognitive errors of reasoning. Except in specialized courses, no one ever questions whether there is something fundamentally unhelpful with carrying on with such beliefs. The slippery slope might continue if one day the instructor is asked to devote equal time to the presentation of this student’s religious beliefs as some sort of psychology. Unless this was a class (psychology of beliefs, psychology of religion) devoted to the skeptical examination (thoughtful inquiry) of why it is that humans believe “in something” no matter how farfetched and irrational it may be, there seems to be, at first glance, passive acceptance, tolerance, and/or the active sustaining, of what seems to be, religious entitlements.

A recent example may be in order. While teaching a history and systems of psychology course, a student complained that although h/she wanted nothing more than to become a “psychologist,” ‘everything’ h/she read in our textbook was ‘toxic’ to h/her religious beliefs. Seeing this as a teaching moment, I asked politely and compassionately whether the student felt that the

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authors of the textbook were overtly and decidedly anti-religion (to share the page numbers where these ‘toxic’ claims were made) or whether certain facts, stated clearly and dispassionately were only interpreted to be ‘toxic.’

It turned out that anything at all in the text (concepts, theories) that conflicted with h/her established notion of “mind-spirit” was interpreted as a personal affront to h/her beliefs. Through the years, and while teaching other courses and covering many different topics, nursing students and future teachers, for example, openly declared that they had to “learn all this stuff” to do well on tests, to pass the course, but that once they became nurses or teachers they were going to practice their professions according to the directives of their pastors, beliefs, and religion. I do not know what percentage of the student population they represented or, today, represent. It is disturbing for me to consider that almost nothing of the best that scientific psychology could offer to these students would ever again be applied in the actual practice of their professions.

If ignorance passes for and poses as knowledge, and scientific psychology cannot make gains in key professions where its findings could change society, the questions raised in this book are not trivial. These questions are part of a wider inquiry, made more poignant and downright scary during our recent and perverse political discourse. The questions are the same: Does ‘reason’ matter? Do independently verified and objectively derived facts matter? Does ignorance pay? Do we accept only the bits and pieces of ‘science’ that are convenient to us or should we apply its principles across the board?

The summary point here is that schools (psychology courses) are meant to challenge, correct, and provide additional information—methods for critical thinking—in order to prepare citizens to evaluate the increasingly complex and scientific information and to be better at self-examination. How useful can a citizen be in a real “debate”? How prepared can this person really be where scientific information challenges the very foundations that make up h/her “beliefs”? If the idol “rules,” and “that is that,” what’s the point of an education?

In this context, substituting one idol for another is neither progressive nor constructive. At worst, substituting “spirit” for “Gaia,” or “soul” for “Earth consciousness” is either bad psychology, bad theology, or both. If ecopsychology is merely a transliteration from one idol to the next, how is it advancing the cause of psychology, that is, of a psychology that purports to be a process for thoughtful inquiry?

For Whom do the “Nature” Bells Toll?

The psychological answer to the question, who interprets or seeks to interpret a voice, vague feeling, or clearer insight that they perceive as divine (or feels divinely inspired), applies to all religious experiences, anywhere. Both question and answer can be further explored via other inquiries that deal with the specific constructs of identification, transference, projection, commitment, attribution, attachment, conformity, reasoning, and many other useful means of triangulating why and how and in what context a person believes or came to “believe that ‘P’.”

That is, vague and amorphous categories such as “god” or “nature” necessitate a grounding of meaning and experiences in order for them to be useful—intimate and personally satisfying. In this sense, it is easier to see how the transliteration “god” > “nature” > “waterfall that makes me feel holy” becomes a common formula in ecopsychological exercises. However, more neurocognitively precise questions could be asked about the basis of “credulity” itself. To the extent that different areas of the human brain are more resilient than others to the onslaught of questionable information (propaganda), all kinds of psychologists should be jumping at the opportunity to follow in the research and verification steps of scientists who are already contributing to these efforts (Asp et al., 2005; Gilbert, 1991; Gilbert, 1993). This type of work, has potentially, greater social value: to address the ineffectual propensities of “credulity” and the negative consequences of people’s credulous natures--their continued dysfunctional effects across cultures and time.

The “nature” bells toll for everyone even though their tones might be distinctly and differentially heard. The chaparral

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ecologist, upon discovering a dry vernal pool, almost sees the future of true fairy shrimps and frogs dormant in cysts or burrowed in tunnels when most of us only see cracked dirt. He almost smells flowers that only bloom after rains. The casual dog walker worries in the same terrain about snakes, other dogs and people. The true hiker counts meters of altitude and miles to go to the next signpost announcing many more meters ahead, other trails splitting on their way to other signs.

The ceremonial walker is off-trail picking up a rock here and a quail feather there, pausing to smell the scent of *Artemisia*, praying to many gods past and newly invented. The horseback rider and her ensemble of equine enthusiasts wonder why walkers do not yield her right of way to a six-legged monster that barely fits between precipice and peñascos. The mountain bikers, riding faster than anyone around, wonder the same. There is no one “nature.” There never has been. What there seems to be is many psychological profiles identifying with parts of “nature” and projecting some parts of themselves onto “nature.” As with any relationship, two partners, one passive or imagined, the other active, one conscious and the other oblivious, share bits and pieces of themselves as best they can. To the extent that no single entity “nature” has been shown to exist, then, furthermore, it seems that only one itty-bitty mind does most of the identification-projective sharing; the complexity of natural processes being so vast and interconnected for most human minds to grasp in one lifetime.

While being generous and inclusive of all dispositions and manners of walking the earth, the question remains, if one is deeply invested in helping clients through some type of “nature therapy”: Who shall we hear “nature” interpreted through? Which one of those interpretations is “true-er”? If the authentic semiosis is the interpretation of forces that shape natural spaces themselves, their phenology and ancient history, their food and medicinal applications, why not go directly to these forces to learn? Why should mediating “nature” take the diminished forms of “spirits,” “trails,” “treaded rubber,” or “horseshoes”? Why only that or only so little? And if the ancient inhabitants

are definitely gone and only their forgetful and conflicted descendants are left to share only partial “stories,” who is the true-er “keeper of stories”?

Privileging, Confusion, and Confabulation

The next chapter addresses ten common assumptions, referred to here as “misconceptions,” to the extent that when one, with critical eyes, reexamines the historical antecedents of ecopsychology and deep ecology, for example, disentangling them from each other, and from humanistic psychology (and other narrow and privileged interpretations of “Buddhism”) one can begin to appreciate how tags “nature,” “connection,” or “nature connection,” in the ambit of green psychological counseling and therapy (“ecopsychology”), are vague and unhelpful at best.

Practitioners and clients hold both idiosyncratically specific and/or overly simplistic ideas of what these tags may mean. The lack of social scientific and behavioral rigor with respect to these assumptions may be a real obstacle to whatever benefits might be derived from “green counseling.” It is proposed that concepts of alienation and estrangement (a negative definition of “connection”) allow for a testable continuum along which sentiments or statements that pertain to “nature connections” may be judged and classified (Stokols, 1975).

This could be the case provided that specific ideas and definitions of what “nature” means to each individual (client) can also be fixed, since a plurality of “natures” is more likely to exert testable influences than any singular and oversimplified notion (an abstraction) of the complexity of natural processes and their potential effects on psychological well-being (Kull, 1998). For example, Kalevi Kull’s semiotic distinction between Zero, First, Second, and Third natures pays due service to most of the relational possibilities implied in the phrase “nature connection” but how many ecopsychologists are so nuanced and rigorous in their understanding?

It matters less what a given subject defines as “nature,” “connection,” or “nature connection,” as long as these sentiments, concepts, and/or statements can be correctly (relevantly)

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discerned and evaluated during psychological work if one is serious about codifying and normalizing—scientizing— “ecopsychology.”

Therefore, a high degree of introspection and self-reflection is required to avoid falling in the trap of anthropocentrism. As previously noted, to the extent that “ecopsychological” perspectives and similar approaches contain a high degree of humanism, they fail to fully have trust in and live up to the phrase and deep ecological sentiment, “the intrinsic value of nature.” That is to say, when “ecopsychological” perspectives and similar approaches replace the open-ended enigma that is “nature,” with yet another absolutist and recognizable form of anthropocentric and idiosyncratic thinking, they fail at the very task of promoting the opposite ideal.

Proxy humanism (e.g. gods in the sky, water spirits, forest hades, Gaia) is still anthropocentric humanism (i.e. proxy agency). Animism and artificialism are still aspects of magical thinking. Propping up various types of titanic exo-humanity of our own fabrication while asserting that they are really at the center of our universe and existence are, on closer examination, variations and reiterations of antiquated philosophical bait-and-switch arguments—justifications for things we wish to believe in or things we want to do; or things we are told to believe in and do.

A human walks in the forest. A branch crackles and then intrusively breaks the inner silence and contemplation of a forest wanderer. Raven is surprised and loudly protests. Further down the canyon, another responds while the maiden veils fall in thunderous acclamation. For whom do the nature bells toll?

* * *

CHAPTER TWO

Ten Misconceptions About Ecopsychology

“...nature is the negative figure at the heart of our making. Nature is complexity in simplicity. Nature is a god in ruins. Nature is a rightness of self. Nature is constant regeneration. Nature lets us speak. (Poetry is its excess.)” (Jeffrey Yang)

In 2005, surrounded by the Italian Alps and during the first foundational meeting of the then European Ecopsychology Society (EES), it took a group of seven eager and passionate professionals almost two days to arrive at a more or less acceptable definition of “ecopsychology.” Most of us were well versed in so-called American ecopsychological literature such as it was at the time. To boot, we also distilled and quoted various writings from Italian environmentalists and nature poets (Barron & Re, 2005. *Italian Environmental Literature: An Anthology*).

Twelve years after its foundation, with EES morphing into the International Ecopsychology Society (IES), the number of definitions or qualifications to that original descriptor have multiplied without necessarily bringing definitional clarity to this tag.

As in the opening quote to this chapter by Yang, to the extent that constructs such as ‘nature,’ ‘self,’ or ‘connection’ mean something different to different people, there might never be a completely satisfying or inclusive definition of “ecopsychology.” Short of this goal, if it is even a goal, an effort to define something in its negative form rather than trying to settle on restrictive and possibly ambiguous definitions may be a more fruitful enterprise.

In this light, the following ten misconceptions of ecopsychology are meant to negate all-too-easy definitions that may be too narrow or idiosyncratic in favor of an affirmation of the complexity that this tag, “ecopsychology,” entails or implies.

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1. The Various Approaches Termed “Ecopsychology” are New

One might assume that as long as humans and closely related species were able to determine (via affective, behavioral, and cognitive means) that a thriving and sustainable affinity to natural processes made them feel well (contributed to their well-being), helped their families flourish, and challenged them to discover new means of maintaining these sustainable parameters, there has always been an “ecopsychology.” With the advent of enclosed, highly moralized spaces--city states--and the privations that these exerted on optimal development, personal freedoms and all around “thriving,” there have also been critics who spoke of civilized decadence and dysfunctionality (e.g. Lao-Tzu, Diogenes, Epicurus). In this sense, “ecopsychology” is a study and critique of life and social systems and in particular of umwelt-mitwelt-eigenwelt systemics. Any form of significant alienation or degradation from evolutionarily tested parameters can potentially lead to dysfunctional outcomes.

2. “Ecopsychology” is Inherently “Religious” (“Should Be”)

To the extent that a religious perspective (e.g. Shinto, Taoism) embraces and philosophically yokes a sensitivity for “nature,” then, and only in this sense, can “ecopsychology” be said to be religious. However, the appreciation of natural processes for their own sake, the scientific exploration of natural processes, and the personal and secular enjoyment of the “outdoors” can also foster positive emotions, encourage physical activities, or lead to new knowledge or insights and can be described as inherently “ecopsychological.” To the extent that ‘a person apart,’ that is, that individuals without ties to social structures are able to thrive in natural settings, then “ecopsychology” is independent of religion. Moreover, “nature” and “nature connection” have been proposed (e.g. Rousseau) as critiques of religion and, in particular, of dysfunctional aspects (e.g. fundamentalist, anti-science) of religion.

3. *“Ecopsychology” is Inherently “Spiritual” (“Should Be”)*

Any form of significant alienation or degradation from evolutionarily tested parameters could lead to suboptimal outcomes, some of these dysfunctional. To the extent that many species possess behavioral-affective-cognitive systems devoted to gauge a homeostasis of well-being, then, one suspects, feelings associated with optimal thriving might be emotionally confabulated with “a spiritual sense.” Equally--an inverse relation--an awareness of dysfunctionality, different types of morbid perturbances, personal failings and needs, may all serve as signs of umwelt-mitwelt-eigenwelt dissociations that need correcting. Only in these senses can it be said that “ecopsychology” is “inherently spiritual.”

A caveat: statements or positions that, in idiosyncratic fashion, force (“should be”) a diversity of personal nature affiliation styles and dispositions (e.g. introverts—extroverts) into a reduction of human-nature relational possibilities are suspect. In the final analysis, the onus is on those who make ‘spiritual’ claims for “ecopsychology” to demonstrate, via evidence-based approaches, that their positions are ontologically real.

4. *Little of “Ecopsychology” is “Scientific”*

To the extent that “ecopsychology” is the study and critique of life and social systems and, in particular, of umwelt-mitwelt-eigenwelt systemics, then any empirical method (scientific) that sheds light on the etiological dynamics of the problem “Significant alienation or degradation from evolutionarily tested parameters can potentially lead to dysfunctional outcomes” is scientific. Admittedly, like other sciences (e.g. astronomy, psychology, physics), the speculative, free-form, and projective qualities of the word “ecopsychology” open the door for unproven, uncritical, and personally satisfying notions that are ultimately non- or pseudo-scientific preferences (e.g. astrology, new-age psychology, pseudo-physics). The complex-

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ities of umwelt-mitwelt-eigenwelt systemics demand more, not less, science.

5. *Serious Academic Preparation in Psychology and Ecology is not Needed in Order to be a Professional “Ecopsychologist”*

This statement implies (begs for) an empirical examination and procedures which aim at determining a correlation, at least, between the degree to which any professional has been thoroughly educated in these fields and other related areas (e.g. biology, sociology, statistics, human ecology, physical anthropology, resilience studies) and the quality and seriousness of what passes for “ecopsychology.” Means and ends (preparation and outcomes) are indicative of the measure of the professional referring to her/himself as an “ecopsychologist.”

6. *Everyone Knows What the Word “Nature” Means*

Like most tags containing highly projective value, “nature” is a construct similar to other vague, potentially ambiguous, and universal constructs: god, happiness, love, freedom, personality, or intelligence. Although everyone may have a sense or even a personally satisfying definition of “nature,” that is not to say that they understand what the word “nature” means, inclusively, or what it refers to. The word “nature” is not a clearly descriptive map. “Nature” is, at best, an incomprehensible vast territory. Our immediate (physical, cognitive, affective) relations to this territory define, in small part and dynamic fashion, the vastness that is (are) “nature.” One ought to be a bit suspicious of any claims that singularly answer the question, “What is nature?” with, for example, simplistic tautologies: Nature is love—god, consciousness, the ethereal realm.

7. *Everyone Knows What the Phrase “Nature Connection” Means*

The complexities implied in umwelt-mitwelt-eigenwelt systemics, via personally and culturally diverse (affective, behavioral, and cognitive) vectors, suggest that the phrase

“nature connection” is a multi-determined and multi-variate construct, not easily defined for every person, every time, or by any one person for another. However, deviations of basic and evolutionarily thriving and sustainable affinities to natural processes could be a starting point for identifying the causes of “disconnection.” The very phrase “nature connection” seems limited when contrasted with other phrases such as a “nature affiliation,” the preferred usage in this book, which implies a greater complexity and depth of “relations.” However, even this latter and more preferred phrase and sense needs to be vetted with a precise science of “relations.”

8. *“Ecopsychology” Implies “Diversity”*

Many proposals exist under the tag “ecopsychology,” with some individuals justifying the value of any idiosyncratic idea by conjuring the word “diversity.” Although a necessary deconstruction (critical, evidence-based) and questioning of the function of male-dominated, militaristic, tyrannical, and destructive tendencies and their concomitant results in the denudement of once thriving and diverse ecosystems, is an example of serious scholarly work that enhances and expands (diversity) the scope of “ecopsychology,” other enterprises may not be as useful or relevant. To the extent that “anything goes ecopsychology” borrows a continuing *laissez faire* from “anything goes psychology,” then bad habits and misinterpretations of serious and diverse approaches could become an obstacle to fruitful ecopsychological inquiry. Bad ideas, when they are demonstrably bad, need not be protected under the hubris and lax heuristics, “diversity.”

As stated under #5, means and ends (preparation and outcomes) are indicative of the measure of the professional referring to her/himself as an “ecopsychologist.”

9. *“Earth” is a “She”*

A feminist voice in green psychology might be emancipatory in nature. That is, “ecopsychology,” for example, can become yet another vehicle from which to erect a given platform,

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“feminism,” sadly, without due criticism of what we all mean or understand by “feminism” or “nature.” Ideological stances and spiritual beliefs aside, a critical and interesting question for “ecopsychology” (continuing from mainstream psychology) is why individuals feel strongly about attributing “humanness” to abstractions (“nature”) or to various elements in/of “nature” (thunder, water, fire, tree, lion, lamb).

Earlier, we referred to these psychological dynamics as self-nature gestalts—of various kinds. Uncritical feminism, as emancipation, while rediscovering traditional ways of relating to earth processes, without delving deeply into the psychological reasons for these identifications, is in danger of becoming not only lazy psychology and bad science but may also amount to novo-spirituality. The need for spirituality itself is a psychological question that must be addressed no matter its reappearance under new guises—“ecopsychology,” feminine spirituality.

Is “Earth” a mother, a father, a snake, twins separated at birth, a raven, a lion, an egg, or a butterfly? What all these designations have in common is a real human need to reduce complexity to simpler and more graspable ideas. (By the way, the previous question is of the same type as: Is “God” a bearded man, a woman, the devil, the sun, the moon, all of the stars—raven?). Genderizing the ghost does not make it more real; it only makes the delusion more familiar.

The socio-cultural and psychological mechanisms by which the genderization of “nature” or natural forces, as male or female processes, takes place might be the same as those occurring as part of the arbitrary designations and functions during any psychological projection or identification. The abstract-complex and engulfing qualities of the natural world cry out for oversimplification. The genderization of nature is only one more example of these oversimplification tendencies. People “humanize” anything—cars, rocks, smart phones.

Feminine aspects and qualities projected onto nature are not intrinsic at all. Thus, the re-appropriation and re-application of feminine principles as part of “feminist perspectives” that deal with “nature” and reduce it to an entity (e.g. Mother Nature) do

not erase the psychological question: Why do women and men read gender in anything natural to begin with?

10. "Indigenous Wisdom" is Superior to Other Approaches

In certain cases, it is entirely appropriate to view the misappropriation and misapplication of "indigenous wisdom" as another case of "green washing," particularly if some person, group, or organization employs marketing approaches in order to sell "products."

As part of this marketing ploy, idiosyncratically selected aspects of indigenous lore, beliefs, diets, artifacts, or "ceremonies" are packaged and sold for profit.

In addition to financial gains, there is an assumption that ancient European wisdom, for example, is faulty or lacks provenance to be relevant. At this very moment, thousands of villages across Europe, the Middle East, and Asia continue on a path of sustainability that was established long before humans crossed The Bering Strait.

In contrast, if feathers, dots, crystals, incense, didgeridoos, or bones are not part of the "magical mix," then it isn't "indigenous" enough. That is, for reasons that have more to do with exoticism and strangeness (as if tobacco, chiles, and cocoa weren't enough) some new world indigenous practices are exalted as being superior forms of "spiritual enlightenment."

The fact that at least three species of ancient humans coexisted in Europe and Asia long before the appropriated and preferred new world cultures came into being, successfully adapted and lived sustainably for tens of thousands of years, is mostly overlooked. Even so, these peoples, their geography, and fauna are gone. We can only infer what their "ecopsychological attunement" was like.

In this light, a serious "ecopsychological" science should inquire into the reasons and motivations (psychopharmacological, consumerist, behavioral necessities, boredom, rationalizations, etc.) for the allure offered by exotic and strange practices and beliefs. The desire for novelty itself or nostalgia might explain quite a bit. In an age of rampant consumerism and

easily replaceable and disposable goods, these very talismans, feathers and crystals, stand for ages, peoples, practices, and ways of life no longer accessible or replicable to well-intended practitioners.

Moreover, one presumes that local wisdom is partly an expression of a unique set of survival strategies which developed in specific geographical regions, ecological circumstances, historical contexts, and as cultural expressions originating from unique ethnic identification necessities.

To the extent that only a limited subset of these practices and attitudes are universally transferable, and that only locally do they represent pragmatic arrangements for successfully navigating evolutionary challenges, then one must conclude that focusing on one or more of these approaches outside their autochthonous terroir and place has more to do with personal preferences than with the notion of “indigenous wisdom” as an absolute and universal epistemology.

If and when the white “ecopsychologist” trades in “indigenous wisdom,” and h/she is not an authentic representative of those traditions, one is right in suspecting “green washing” at the very least. The fraudulent potential of misrepresenting, misappropriating, and repackaging “indigenous wisdom” for profit should give the overly eager neophyte some pause before investing monies in sure bet psychological fixes and fetishes.

Nevertheless, the truly desperate or the credulous will always pay good money for the “right” talisman.

The Empty Egg Shell

When “ecopsychology” is thus viewed, it opens up the constructs of “connection” and “disconnection” to many more and diverse interpretations of nature affiliations, not less. The advantage of this is its inclusiveness. If one sort of “ecopsychologist” were to claim, for example, that “ecopsychology” relates uniquely and exclusively to the religious or spiritual experiences of the Yanomami people, and furthermore, insists that not partaking of these specific experiences suggests a being-deficit with respect to nature affiliations, then a good number

Chapter 2

of folks who are avid gardeners, who feel connected to this labor and don't give a hoot about jungles, magic or ghosts may be incorrectly "diagnosed" as having a diminished sense of "nature connection."

Of course, the same "agnostic" gardeners may not give a hoot anyhow, for their degree of intimacy to soil, sweat, toil, and land (nature affiliations) is ample and sufficient recompense. The obsession, at times, with prejudging the great richness and varieties of the nature of "nature connections" and restricting unknowable parameters to a few inches of a moralistic measuring tape seems elitist.

Agnostic or atheist kayak woman, hunting Joe, scientist Lucy, and sea diver Kathy, experience as deeply a range of emotions and insights that are, on the one hand, incomparable to other experiences of "nature," and equally one and the same.

To the "ecopsychologist," professionally defined, goes the burden of making ever deeper and more inclusive inquiries of what it is to be human in natural spaces and explaining how and why, sometimes, a human apart from natural processes seems to behave in dysfunctional ways (e.g. a relational science of nature affiliations). This type of deep inquiry suggests more scientific and philosophical training, not less.

Ironically perhaps, the diversity of "nature connections" demands a refinement and an exactness of methodologies that aim at studying the multi-variate nature of nature affiliations.

Conjuring up any old notion that satisfies a given individual and making it into some sort of "ecotherapy" may only work for a short while. Afterwards, many more folks wise up. Even placebo effects make more sense when studied in the well-structured context of science.

* * *

CHAPTER THREE

Nature Affiliation: Self-Nature Gestalts

“The Passenger Pigeon’s adaptations, the strengths that allowed it to be the commonest bird on Earth, were also its weaknesses when we disrupted its habitat.” (Mark Avery)

One of the many ways to connect “ecopsychology” to the dual discipline and etymological roots of its tag and to many enterprises that seem to operate under its name is to look for and utilize recognizable psychological and even social scientific methodologies from which to develop structural, functional, and meaning (semiotic) theories.

The author has proposed two, both revised and original, approaches (Conesa-Sevilla, 2006; Conesa-Sevilla, 2016) with which to understand “nature connections” (Self-Nature Gestalts SNGs) and as a way of empirically assessing the therapy value (judge the effectiveness) of so called ecotherapy systems and exercises (Integral-Experiential Nature Affiliation Dimensions). Both ideas and this present effort are an attempt at formulating a science of relations-in-nature affiliations.

Self-Nature Gestalts

A self-nature gestalt, SNG (see Figure 1), represents a dynamic and holistic organization, that is, an organism’s inclusive interpretative coda and behavioral plans in correspondence and interplay with its environment. SNGs as inclusive experiential representations, although varying and changing from moment to moment, can be used to describe or predict an organism’s degree of affinity and affiliation with its original and natural evolved-in environment.

Ecopsychology Revisited

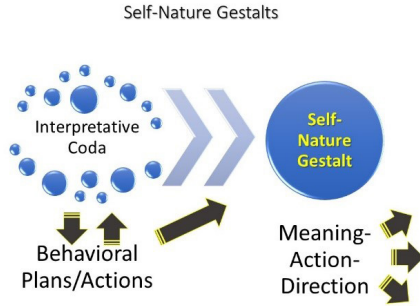


Figure 1

In short, an interpretative coda (biosemiotics) and its complex (conscious and unconscious) meaning interactions with inclusive aspects of ‘self,’ ‘culture,’ and ‘nature,’ are manifested in behavioral plans and actions toward some personality cluster of self-nature gestalt. At any point during personal growth or therapy experiences, there is the potential for new accommodations of meaning-action-direction vectors toward new self-nature gestalt configurations (a Psyche-Natur ‘personality’ ensemble).

Ideally, if they are to be adaptive, SNGs are moment-to-moment evaluations with accommodations which are normally in complex psychodynamic and ecological states of flux. Simply put, new interpretations and habits can change the meaning-action-direction of agency (in the social scientific sense of this word).

As Figure 1 suggests, a SNG includes, structurally speaking:

- Cognition 1 (Meaning): interpretative codas (semiosis),
- Behaviors (Actions): plans and actions,
- Cognition 2 (Intention/Motivation Vectors): the potential of new opportunities and accommodations--meaning-action-direction vectors.

Factor Cognition 1 is best described as “past experiences and their present meanings.” In contrast, Cognition 2 is analogous to J. Piaget’s description of learning as accommodation where new information challenges and reshapes cognitive structures and schemas. To reiterate, given past behaviors (X) and their

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meanings (Y), new stimuli (S), and new circumstances (Cs), any organism has the potential of redirecting its agentic purpose.

In the ambit of ecotherapy, to the extent that nature alienation is assumed to be pervasive and that it runs deeper than any person might suspect (at an unconscious level), consequently, it shares important elements or features with trauma that must be similarly addressed.

Its dynamic description suggests that the totality and the integrity of an organism's relation to its environment (a species 'goodness of fit') rests on its ability to make use of past and useful experiences (both innate and learned), and judge these to be in accordance with present, ongoing circumstances, and should major anomalies occur, the very integrity (existential momentum) of a SNG would prompt new interpretations and evaluations, thus driving adaptive behaviors.

Just as it is impossible to think of a bone-tendon-muscle-skin gestalt configuration existing outside integral bodies, nutritional requirements, rest, and a supportive environment, so, too, it is impossible to think of unintegrated 'self,' 'culture,' 'nature' (self-nature) gestalts without imagining that their disconnection may have something to do with health or well-being. When individual self-nature gestalts are studied in a larger context of societal upheavals and dysfunctions, it becomes clear, as it was to writers such as E. Fromm and K. Jaspers, that a semiotic description of all these interacting life spaces becomes necessary if one is to begin a serious study of social and nature alienation, as illustrated in Figure 1b.

This fashion of tracking "nature affiliations" and alienation has the benefit of incorporating and synthesizing ideas from the social and behavioral sciences, biosemiotics, and evolutionary science.

As "ecopsychology" approaches go, the notion of SNGs is too abstract to be useful to many "ecotherapists." The presumed dynamics of SNGs can be, nevertheless, a theoretical language with which to discuss, in general terms, nature affiliations. Therefore, a more practical evaluative tool is needed to directly assess the quality of these affiliations.

To this practical end, it may be more useful to precisely describe the nature of distinguishable (testable) sets and processes of Nature Experiential Affiliation Dimensions (NEADs).

Integral-Experiential Dimensions:

Nature Affiliation Features

When describing practices that make use of “nature” as a whole, the outdoors, or (some) natural elements, it pays to differentiate between various degrees of “connection” across several nature experiential and affiliation dimensions. The following four Nature Experiential Affiliation Dimensions (NEADs) can then be used to judge whether the intentionality, possible outcomes, and actual eco-therapeutic practices are producing greater or lesser integrity—whether they are “integral” or not:

1. MEANING--A Biosemiotic Dimension: Nature itself and by itself or human mediated (designed) therapies and approaches
2. ORIGIN--An Ontological Dimension: Accepted (agreed upon) human needs (origins) or idiosyncratic and psychologically ideological
3. TIME--Time Dimension: Long term or short term
4. GOALS--Purpose Dimension (Aims and Goals): Inclusive and integral-authentic relations or “activities,” “tasks,” or “experiences”

Even though Table 1 lists all four NEADs in terms of functional polarities, one suspects that measurable continua exist between them. For the purposes of this presentation it is easier to introduce them as either-or dualities.

Table 1 also suggests a way of applying these dimensions during a comparison, and ultimately an evaluation of what might come closer to integral nature affiliations. To the extent that a given practice or approach can be best described as having most or all of the components listed under column A, one can be confident in saying that there is a higher probability of achieving more integral nature affiliations.

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Given its ecopsychological emphasis, and for the purposes of the present work, the phrase “integral nature affiliations” is both an evaluation and a classification applied to organisms in relation to their natural, sustainable environments.

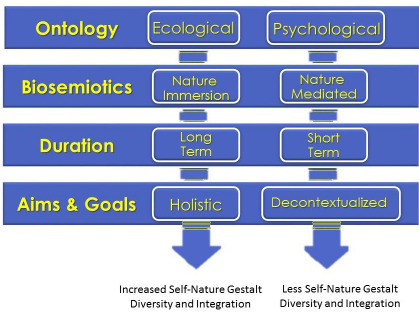


Table 1

On the other hand, if a given “ecotherapy” (or ‘way of life’) shares most of the dimensional components listed under column B, one can be fairly confident that it is, by definition and speaking in relative terms, less integral. Congested urban life, passing and short-term diversions (parks and recreation), and weekend therapies might all share features of Column B.

To be fair, it is important to note that although meaning-action vectors (progressions) that culminate in more diversely integrated self-nature gestalts represent an ideal of human nature connections, realistically speaking and in practice, the typical urbanite wishing to embark on these projects of self-discovery for personal growth or therapy reasons may not ever fully accomplish this.

Notwithstanding this realistic limitation, any person is sure to gain something of significance even when involved in practices that lead to less integral nature affiliations, hence their therapeutic value.

Also, some elements that are important to some practitioners may not be as valuable to others. Referring back to the list of ten misconceptions about ecopsychology, to the extent that any given nature therapy (approach) has a spiritual or religious

component, then it needs to be weighed against the practical value (pragmatic outcome) of belief itself as part of an integral self-nature gestalt.

In some cases the spiritual or religious component is a null factor, that is, it adds little or nothing fundamental to the self-nature gestalt—'tis “window dressing.” In other cases, the spiritual or religious component might be in opposition or contradictory (a real obstacle) to a progression toward more integral self-nature gestalts.

Finally, if a person is already spiritually inclined and finds comfort in religious associations, it is very likely that they shall seek “nature therapies” that fulfill this personal need.

Toward Better Informed Constructs of “Nature Connection”

It is proposed that concepts of alienation and estrangement (both negative definitions of “connection” understood in terms of “affiliation”) allow for a testable continuum along which sentiments or statements that pertain to “nature connections” may be judged and classified (Stokols, 1975; Conesa-Sevilla, 2006). This could be the case provided that specific ideas and definitions of what “nature” means to each individual (clients and therapists) can also be fixed, since a plurality of “natures” is more likely to exert testable influences than any singular and oversimplified notion (an idiosyncratic abstraction) of the complexity of natural processes and their potential effects on psychological well-being (Kull, 1998).

For example, Kull’s semiotic distinction between Zero, First, Second, and Third natures pays due service to the complexity of most relational possibilities implied in the phrase “nature connection.” Although in casual and personal engagements with the natural world it matters less what a given subject defines as “nature,” “connection,” or “nature connection,” when it comes to therapeutic, clinical and counseling claims these sentiments, concepts, and/or statements should be correctly (relevantly) discerned and evaluated during serious (evidence-based) psychological work.

However, if constructs such as “nature,” “connection,” or “nature connection,” are incorrectly discerned and evaluated during psychological work, then actual practices in wilderness therapy or in so-called “ecopsychology” are bound to be “false.” That is, if natural processes are imperfectly understood, psychological and physiological responses misinterpreted, and conclusions drawn that assume a certain “connection” has taken place, then, one may suspect that these conclusions are idiosyncratically and/or even “desperately” confabulated.

So, for example, despite apparent “success,” being clueless (uninformed and naïve), both clients and facilitators (therapists) may feel superficially and temporarily “good,” and take euphoria (*terpsis*, *euthumia*) and tranquility (*ataraxia*) to mean “connection” or an actual “communion” with “nature.”

On the other hand, if the same constructs are correctly discerned and evaluated during psychological work, actual practices in wilderness therapy (in “ecopsychology”) are bound to be “true.” This would be the case if natural processes are studied critically (e.g. ecology), psychological and physiological responses anticipated and known, and conclusions drawn about their likely interactions, empirically tested and confirmed. In this context, and ironically, with a measure of practical knowhow and expert knowledge, both clients and facilitators (therapists) may feel horrible in the wilderness, their mind-body systems tested by sharp rocks and freezing rain, and take the constructs “connection,” or “communion” with “nature” to be entirely different processes/experiences, yet still have a transformative experience.

The Implication of Self-Nature Gestalts

Every experience involves elements of projection (top-down) and reactions to ‘the real’ (bottom-up). Even though it is next to impossible not to project “culture” onto “nature,” natural processes provide the most authentic semiosis in situations of “nature connection.” We evoke, raw “nature” does not.

Thus, “falsely” interpreting “nature” via an idiosyncratically arbitrary or intentionally deceiving therapeutic lens, “the guru”

may bring about temporary changes and some momentary joy (terpsis, euthumia), but is it lasting (credible) therapy?

If semiosis (communication, interpretation) is significantly modified from “nature-as-it-is” to “what-the-guru-says-it-is,” we have us religion, not psychology. If so, and as in other areas of psychology, some clients and therapists may purposely and as a matter of personal need erase the line between evidence-based psychology and religion. In such cases, “ecopsychology” becomes yet another instance and vehicle for finding solace and meaning, an extension and continuation of previous (or found anew) religious pursuits.

To add confounding circumstances, any number of outdoor activities which do make people physically fit, healthy, and “happy” could be co-opted and disguised, through other activities, as “ecopsychology.” If so, are they honestly “pure” and unique forms? For example, if most of these practices share essential components (variables) of fresh air, more intimate social interactions, physical activity, intentional doings, relaxation, solitary wandering, or attention to different visual and auditory dynamics, then it would be easier to build up a science of “ecopsychology” by controlling the function and contribution of these more “prosaic” variables. Even simply walking outdoors produces measurable psychological changes (affect) and measurable cognitive changes without therapeutic interventions (Bratman et al, 2015a; Bratman et al, 2015b).

Furthermore, more intimate and relational attributes (variables) when involved in equine and/or horticultural therapies, for example, could be similarly assessed for their cognitive and physiological underpinnings--value. If so, “horse spirit” and “magical gardens” can be evaluated for their more cognitive, affective, or behavioral qualities. Here, a science emerges that is serious and predictive.

Natural Restorative Arcs

As far as “eco-therapy” goes, there exist long proven therapies (e.g. Morita Therapy; Chang, 1974; Morita, 1998) which seem to have ecological and even evolutionary validity.

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Perhaps universal and ubiquitous in the animal world, recognizable restorative arcs (functions) in/of the “wounded animal,” as illustrated in Figure 2, if and when combined with amenable and congruent “nature therapies,” may speed up recovery because their timing and etiologies are based upon real physiological processes as understood in medical terms.

The healing processes described by the above restorative arc, if understood as a basic therapeutic imperative and sequence, again, ubiquitous in the animal world, may be improved by infused “naturalness” as evidenced by faster patient convalescing recuperation times (Ulrich et al, 2004).

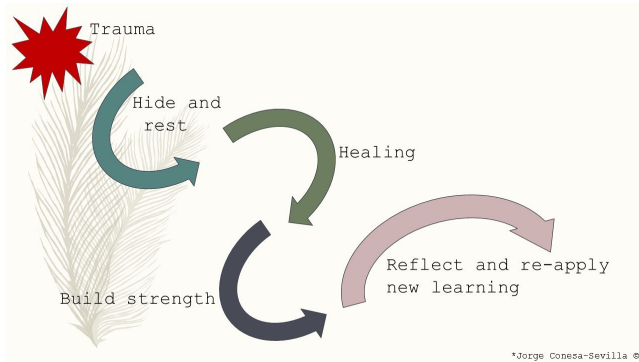


Figure 2

To clarify, at every turn in this evolutionarily sensible therapeutic sequence, some sort of “ecopsychology” may be an ideal form of intervention if only we understood what sort of animal we were at each curative phase (e.g. Morita Therapy; Chang, 1974; Morita, 1998). And if ideas of alienation or estrangement are theoretically and empirically useful, how does agency, for example, change during the curative process with or without the assistance of “naturalness”?

A basic and psychological understanding of alienation and/or estrangement, applied to the vague phrase “nature disconnection,” seems to be key if psychologists are to have a clear sense

of how their clients come to “nature therapy” or for clients to be informed with respect to who carries out these practices. The work of Daniel Stokolos (1975) is still relevant today and could provide this needed foundation. If nature is “proxy agency,” “welcoming” all and “allowing” for any projection, would it be useful to know how “agency” operates? Who are the agents and the structures in these interactions?

At a minimum, if human-nature relations are understood in terms of “love,” then Robert Sternberg’s Triangular Theory of Love (Sternberg, 1997), to name another approach and example, could also be a foundational work from which to begin assessing affect and “connection” from theoretically sound and empirical grounds.

“Nature,” “spirits in nature,” or “nature connection,” plus all sorts of other words and catchy phrases, when vaguely understood or purposely misleading, may seem attractive panaceas for desperate people (both clients and therapists). In light of the above assumptions about restorative arcs, the following are all understandable, credible, and valid pursuits: understanding that organismic and reflexive human needs exist to seek solace in nature, to make its forces catalysts for psychological change, to ease pain and accelerate healing, and to find respite in the midst of overwhelming and unjustifiable social complexity.

Walking in the woods remains, without fuss, occultism, ulterior motives, or adornment, the “talking cure” of feet and minds. There is an effective “agent” there partaking of the oldest “structure” that there is—or ever was. Confounding this intimacy with less rigor than it takes to walk one or two miles seems suspect.

* * *

CHAPTER FOUR

Deconstructing Origins

"The seagulls are always starving. That's why they follow the boats." (Carlo Cassola)

It is neither an accident of human affectation nor disingenuous to think of particular places as "homes," or of an entire planet as our home. An excerpt from the Uruguayan poet Mario Benedetti, entitled "Ésta es mi casa" (This is my home), is very telling about the ease for cognitively transliterating the concrete to the abstract and from the abstract to the concrete (home><self):

Without a doubt, this is my house. Here I happen, here I deceive myself, immensely. This is my house held in time. (No cabe duda. Ésta es mi casa aquí sucedo, aquí me engaño inmensamente. Ésta es mi casa detenida en el tiempo.)

The poem, an apt and profound psychological study in its own right, is very telling of our human capacities to locate and live within the material confines of a special place with whom we identify; the processes of psychological becoming in the ambit of a chosen or significant place; the forces and opportunities, the potential for self-deception, that exist when we have decided to inhabit a personalized space; and, as in Benedetti's poem, the time-bending possibilities that might aid, distort, or stand in the way of the very processes of becoming.

As an extension of our own psyche, a home is a projection of our faults, our present realities, our potential, and of our most farfetched dreams. But even when incorrectly or imperfectly signified, "our home," is cherished and valued as a sanctuary. Both the positive and pernicious nature of these identifications, self > home, may be useful metaphors and analogical vehicles from which to understand the plethora of attributions made about places, identity, and the otherworldly phenomena humans associate with natural spaces. Plain "space" being a daunting

abstraction, is transformed into a familiar location and intimate space. In this chapter I will focus on how and why people who are known writers, scholars, and otherwise perceived to be intelligent individuals betray deep seated wishes, fantasies, and insecurities by the very public process of misappropriating, distorting, misunderstanding, and sharing their own interpretations about the tags, “nature,” “connection,” or “nature connection.”

What follows is an honest attempt at reviewing and critiquing publicly accessible material that tries to make sense of our sense of place, and of our sense of self in places. This is a summary of at least three aspects and effects that deep ecology, in particular, seems to propose or have as philosophy, how it energizes “feelings” or sentiments—insight—into righteous activism, or as a scholarly product and its influence on “ecopsychology.”

Some Anomalies are Introduced

Deep ecological themes introduced in this chapter include explorations of: 1) the assumption that Self-realization (Goldstein, 1939; Naess, 1979; Devall & Sessions, 1985)—a still ambiguous term that the author shall address first—and “intuitions” should have epistemological primacy or equal footing as a counterweight to other ways of knowing “nature” (“shallow ecology”), 2) the still relevant reiteration of traditional ways of “knowing” or understanding “nature,” and 3) the contradictions and even logical impasses that DE as philosophy creates when its original proposal (and particularly Arne Naess’ Ecosophy T) is misunderstood and/or misapplied. These themes are approached and treated with a critical eye, humorously, and even with face-value acceptance, to a degree, but also with a humbling and proverbial “grain of salt” caveat that no person who feels “deeply connected with nature” really needs to justify the intensity and phenomenological veracity of these sentiments and feelings with some sort of eco-philosophy or “ecopsychology.”

The author’s basic position throughout this chapter and book is that, verily, neither a day in the woods needs to be justified nor the sentiments that might ensue from a sylvan insight need to be applied, as “principles.” Notwithstanding my own personal

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sentiment of “interactions in/with nature,” and in keeping with Alan Drengson’s continued and important reminder that authors, for clarity’s sake, keep an unambiguous distinction between the DE platform and fundamental principles (Drengson, 1995, and personal 4 communication; Glasser, 1995), I too shall be mindful to keep these distinctions clear, including my own personal interpretations of DE. In the words of Drengson (1995):

Supporters of the principles have a diversity of ultimate beliefs. "Ultimate beliefs" here refers to their own metaphysical and religious, basic grounds for their values, actions and support for the deep ecology movement. Different people and cultures have different mythologies and stories. Nonetheless, they can support the platform and work for solutions to the environmental crisis. A diversity of practices is emerging, but the overlap is considerable as can be seen in hundreds of environmental conflicts all over the world. (p.3)

However, and despite, Glasser’s (1995) warning that one could mistake Naess’ own sense of “Self-realization” as “singular fundamental norms of deep ecology,” in practical actuality, some readers do not see or perhaps even care about this distinction and continue to interpret Naess’ DE as the “go to” DE—or however they wish to interpret it. That is, readers persist in conflating, understandably, conveniently or inconveniently, the messenger with the message, even despite DE’s own founder’s clarifications (Naess, 1984).

Consider this, on the surface, sensible-sounding statement from Naess (quoted by Drengson and Inoue, 1998, p.8): “By an ecosophy I mean a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium.” Particularly when bold-typed and highlighted in the fertile imagination of an “ecopsychologist,” this statement begs for deconstruction on several grounds, and ecologically principally, to the extent that system models like Panarchy would assert as physically impossible to conceive that a central feature of ecological “well-being” could be described and qualified as—privileged as—teleologically harmonious or in equilibrium.

Extending this description further, into human physiology and psychology as ecologies, then the very notion that either can be described as ‘harmonious’ or in ‘equilibrium’, specifically, that both tend toward a definite ontological teleology, suggests little understanding of development, developing, being, and becoming as what they truly are: shearing and destabilizing processes—change as a norm—in growth (Holling, 1973; Gunderson & Holling, 2002).

Even when unintended as such, a static and idealistic view of nature (ecology and/or human nature) has the danger of quickly disintegrating into greater horrors. In the words of mathematician Marco Janssen (2002):

The utopia-dystopia approach can be used to explore a variety of images of the world’s future...However this approach is static in the sense that an emerging dystopia does not include adaptive behavior. If the system collapses, the agents do not respond. Hence, the scenario outcomes are rather implausible, both for utopias and dystopias, [...] Surprises are an essential and certain element of the future. In exploring possible pathways of the future, surprises should be explicitly taken into account. (pp.250, 260)

Another case in point: my first introduction to both DE and “ecopsychology” was through William (Bill) Devall. His textbook for our class at Humboldt State University (circa 1987) was *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Devall and Sessions, 1985; & Naess, 1973). On one hand, the amorphous and idiosyncratic presentation of so many concepts (“ecopsychology,” eco-feminism, spiritual wisdom, the poetry of Gary Snyder, and DE) in a saltatory, quizzical, and ingenious format, was the ideal introduction, for a sophomore, to how these ideas might be interrelated—useful and important.

On the other hand, and after years of reading the original sources of those very entries, more questions have arisen that were not obvious or evident in the mind of an eager young student with Bill Devall as his teacher and, later, mentor. Mostly,

these inquiries generally arrive at the question of whether it is practically possible to disengage DE from its metaphysical roots or the persons we associate it with: both the initial theoretical contributions of its founder, Arne Naess, and the subsequent and expanded spiritual ideology of its beat poets, and Buddhist co-founders (e.g. Robert Aitken, William Devall, Joanna Macy and Gary Snyder).

That these foci or emphases might be the first and lasting introductions of Naess' ideas cannot be ignored and it might explain why it is perhaps difficult to separate a core (and secular) Naess Environmental Philosophy and ethics from his own personal philosophy and that of others. For better or worse, these works dominate the field of ideas about DE and are the most frequently quoted sources.

The legacy of DE in toto is then perceived as rich and multilayered and as a branching out and hybridizing force merging with other movements (e.g. "ecopsychology"). This state of affairs may make some grumpy, others very happy; however, in this work this situation is treated and stated as a matter of fact, as the way things really are. This excising, this splicing (selecting) from the spiritual to the secular, from the sacred to the profane, if it is even possible, may only be useful or even a scholarly necessity to those who seek to align DE with other proposals within environmental ethics and who are still suspicious that DE's platform and foundations are irrevocably connected (Cone-sa-Sevilla, 2006).

Experiences are Experiences—Feelings and Sentiments and "Other Things"

Before continuing this discussion, it might be useful to anticipate the tenor that holds together these sections and discussions by utilizing and explaining a quote by William James which illustrates a common theme across these sections and work:

Apart from anything acutely religious, we all have moments when the universal life seems to wrap us round with friendliness. In youth and health, in summer, in the woods or on

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the mountains, there come days when the weather seems all whispering with peace, hours when the goodness and beauty of existence enfold us like a dry, warm climate, or chime through us as if our inner ears were subtly ringing with the world's security. (1902)

Captured by James' eloquent and still relevant description, we read, yet another iteration, in a long history of quotes and observations that could be taken to mean two confusable and/or confounding experiences. One is secular or profane, purely psychological, and the other sacred with a "spiritual" basis. James is careful to leave his description open to a secular (even profane), personal interpretation and appreciation of the sentiment and feelings associated with "being one, happy, in/with nature." Under this guise, there is a sense of democratization about the accessibility of these experiences by anyone, irrespective of an absence of a particular religious orientation or learned interpretation. That is, "nature," potentially, is the source of seemingly endless but also, ironically, psychologically convergent familiar (recognizable) experiences, that when coming together in a precisely poignant moment and manner, or quite by accident, could trigger a collection of sentiments and feelings common—recognizable—to all people. If not common to all people, these experiences (sentiments and feelings) are at least common (and recognizable) to enough people (writers, sages, outdoor enthusiasts, forest dwellers or wanderers etc.) that they, over the span of human history, feel strongly that their sentiments and affectations be known and understood.

Whether we are talking about experiences particular to individuals in large or small groups, the fact that these experiences are, to be sure, psychologically convergent, do not make them, necessarily, objectively (irrevocably) metaphysical.

In the same statement (James') there is also an obvious opportunity for projecting the sense of a source-force that presupposes a designing and ordering intelligence (generally benign and in charge of "harmony," "equilibrium," or "balance"). This tendency is shared by some "deep ecologists"

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(and “ecopsychologists”)—see later in the text—who adhere to, purposely infuse, or even force a particular or personal religious view while interpreting their experiences in “nature,” as of the certain-luminous-otherworldly type (i.e. Numinous). It is at least a psychological curiosity to wish to study why certain people make one sort of projection or another onto “nature” and under what circumstances, and then, ascertain how they go about justifying their experiences as beliefs (i.e. a psychology of religion).

To be clear, the author sees continuing value in DE as an important intellectual contribution to environmental ethics but does not subscribe to that certain-luminous-otherworldly sense (Numinous) of “connection with nature.”

Ironically to some, even confusing, the author is also a regular zazen “sitter” who has experienced “things,” both in nature or inside a zendo, but nevertheless adheres to early Zen-Taoists traditions and suggestions that dissuade one from further speculation about what these experiences might mean or be about. With this disclaimer aside, the author shall attempt to explain why some of these exclusively spiritual presentations of DE might be erroneous and confabulated with other notions, mainly, coming from psychology and/or “ecopsychology.”

From a neuroscientific perspective alone, a reasonable assumption such as a specific fallen apple came from a specific apple seed, tree, and soil, to use a metaphor, might have something in common with the equal presumption that feelings and sentiments are products of a particular brain/mind system—no more and no less. In the words of neuroscientist David Linden (2011):

...most experiences in our lives that we find transcendent—whether illicit vices or socially sanctioned ritual practices as diverse as exercise, meditative prayer, or even charitable giving—activate an anatomically and biochemically defined pleasure circuit in the brain...They all evoke neural signals that converge on a small group of interconnected brain areas called the medial forebrain pleasure circuit. (p.3)

That, more and more, a neuroscientific perspective seems to be a testable and reasonable “middle way,” as far as our growing understanding of “transcendence” goes, then it pays to examine these fruits with equal interest and earnest. To merely keep repeating that this set of experiences is of a “transpersonal” or “transcendental” sort, and let’s leave it at that, sounds a lot like saying the apple fell for me alone; let’s leave it at that.

I have adopted three narrative approaches for describing ideas, aptly I think, from a movement that runs from the philosophical to the poetic. The next section adheres more or less to a scholarly narrative. The second employs a first-person perspective with relevant and personal examples. Lastly, the conclusion of this chapter exploits poesis, impressionistic elements found in some of the presentations of DE in order to more appropriately consider “living with” some of the contradictions inherent in DE.

Ultimate Norms: Self-Realization

Naess’ choice of the term Self-realization (Naess, 1979, 1984), one could claim, the one sense that most readers starting a discovery of DE ideas might encounter, is used to indicate both an ontological origin (a metaphysics) and the subsequent logical primacy of evaluations about “nature” based on personal insight and affiliation—confirmation thereof. As affiliation (and even teleology), it describes an innate connection and participation with planetary and even universal consciousness—their possibility. In this sense, Naess’ “self-realization” is in keeping with contemporary (his) uses of that term, for example, found in the Indian religion and philosophy of Paramahansa Yogananda who introduced the term in the United States in 1920. Coincidentally, Yogananda knew and admired Mahatma Gandhi, whose principle of non-violence and social activism Naess himself also admired and later emulated.

Interestingly, in one way or another, the precepts of Yogananda’s Self-Realization Fellowship Order (SRF) (Yogananda, 1972, 1997) of “meditation and prayer, service, spiritual study and introspection, exercise and recreation, and

time for solitude and silence” can be seen as the antecedents and/or prescriptions of many forms of deep ecology by various authors (Devall & Sessions, 1985).

In a circular discursive form and manner, not uncommon to the traditional privileging of philosophical terms whose aims are to add authority to certain arguments (Rorty, 1979), it is perhaps by borrowing and creating both a metaphysical teleology and a phenomenological ontology that Naess is able to argue that personal insights of this kind have equal (or even superior) value and authority with respect to scientific discoveries and knowledge. Without this metaphysical scaffold, it comes down to, basically, his “insights” against scientific proposals of ecology—to “insight” versus “science.” Now, it is important to stress that Naess did not wish to do away with “shallow ecology.” However, as part of any convincing argument or dialectics, he needed “a decent leg to stand on.” He chose metaphysics, thusly the dice was thrown.

In psychology, this very term, Self-realization, in a very restricted and secular sense, is first proposed by the German psychologist Kurt Goldstein (1939) to suggest human, latent and untapped resources from which to achieve greater vocational heights and psychological potential. Goldstein (1956) is very adamant that the very steps/levels that Maslow later reintroduces in his own hierarchy of needs, do not have to be sequential or hierarchical toward “Self-actualization.”

In Goldstein’s (1956) words: “It seems to me doubtful whether it is really possible to assume a fixed hierarchy of needs.” This was not only the case of Maslow changing Goldstein’s little “s” to big or capital “S,” but also, deciding that human “drives” should be arranged in hierarchical fashion. One can also understand Goldstein’s common sense caveat from a Zen Buddhist perspective: When hungry, eat; if you need to do zazen, do it; when thirsty, drink; when you need to go to the bathroom, by all means, go! Nothing divides these actions as being any less “sacred” or important—all “profane” is equally “sacred.” All so-called “drives” (the skills and functions expressed by these drives—e.g. eating) are in this sense equipotential in their possibility to serve self-realization.

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Even from a neuroscientific perspective, let alone Goldstein's caveats or my own "zen" argument, such a hierarchy of needs is questionable to the extent that brain circuitry is close-ended and finite with respect to satisfying them—perhaps even tightly recursive in managing both mundane (profane) and serious (sacred) experiences by a limited set of or even the exact same circuitry. According to Linden (2011):

[...] some people, acting on their religious principles [i.e. as Self-actualization or Individuation], can forego sexual activity in service to what they perceive as a more important goal. Likewise, the politically or spiritually motivated hunger-striker is activating her pleasure/reward center by furthering her own ideas, even when this requires acting in precise opposition to one of our most basic and ancient drives. (p. 169)

Perhaps not Self-actualization per se but Self-Transcendence, a final rung that supposedly Maslow introduced toward the end of his life (Cloninger et al, 1993; Koltko-Rivera, 2006), and when it is assumed to be an actual spiritual path, is also judged in parity or concordant with another spiritual model of human psychology, C. G. Jung's (1967, 1972) notion of Individuation: "The Self ("For the self alone embraces the ego and the non-ego, the infernal regions, the viscera, the imagines et lares, and the heavens,..." p. 125).

Less appropriately perhaps, but even the parity between Maslow's Self-Actualization and Individuation comes in the form of analogies during teaching or in casual conversations, and even more explicitly, while presenting these ideas in introduction to psychology textbooks (Gross, 2009). In the words of Gross:

"The self: This is the central archetype ('the archetype of archetypes'), which unites the personality, giving it a sense of 'oneness' and firmness. The ultimate aim of every personality is to achieve a state of selfhood and individuation (similar to self-actualisation). (p.753)

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Furthermore, it is worth noting that although Devall and Sessions (1985) make a distinction between Naess' sense of self-realization and its psychological use or sense in the work of Maslow:

It is also crucial to remember that this top norm or ultimate norm, Self-realization, is meant not in the sense of narrow ego realization nor in the sense often used by Abraham Maslow and other Western humanistic psychologists, but in the sense of universal self as described in the perennial philosophy; a self with capital "S"[...] (p.227)

Obvious contradictions aside, this distinction may not be accepted by run-of-the-mill transpersonal psychologists who take it at face value that Maslow is talking about self with a capital "S" and really assume a "hierarchy of needs" with S-A at the apex, and really assume that some sort of "spiritual enterprise" is afoot.

The writings of A. Maslow, C. Rogers, and K. Goldstein are to be found, together, in Clark E. Moustakas book (Ed., 1956), the very work that launches Humanistic Psychology. Moustakas himself (1956) "plays with" and summarizes these nascent ideas of Humanistic Psychology in ways that can be adopted into a philosophy and psychology that could be termed "deep":

The organism has different potentialities, and because it has them it has a need to actualize or realize them. The fulfillment of these needs represents the self-actualization of the organism, a constant emerging of self, of one's "nature" in the world. Failure to actualize essential capacities is equivalent to not being...Intrinsic nature, being, and becoming are involved in every true experience. (p.273)

Again, these words, from a psychologist writing almost twenty years before Naess introduces DE, can be just as easily adopted as a psychology and a philosophy of "intrinsic value," and further, cemented in some sort of ethics that seeks (even

demands) the protection of any organism's "intrinsic right" toward self-realization.

In either case, or in all cases, whatever the case may be, coming from ultimate premises or even platform principles, one should be cautious of not committing an Is-Ought Fallacy. In the particular case of Naess' Ecosophy T, a definition of Self-realization ("Is") that is metaphysically obtained from thin air, and then pushed as "intrinsic value" ethics ("Ought") warrants further scrutiny. In short, that the profane easily becomes the sacred, or that the secular the spiritual, may suggest—profoundly for psychology—that as part of human nature some individuals are willing to go further, with language and actions, to differently evaluate and value (Conesa-Sevilla, 2006), perhaps an identical set of sentiments and feelings, as being ontologically more mysterious and hierarchically of greater standing or significance given an as yet, unidentified by science, identical set of neurochemical "happenings" such as in the phenomenology that William James described or what Dr. Linden alluded to earlier (2011).

Not to be glib, that is to say that where some folks see cherubs in their bread toast and immediately have a profound mystical experience (the perceptual projection called pareidolia) with/about this object (Gantman & Babel, 2014), others continue spreading butter and jam and proceed to devour it with great satisfaction—without a second thought.

A DE/"Ecopsychology" Exotic Cocktail

By proposing, describing, and finally juxtaposing self-realization as a fundamental ontology with ensuing "ultimate norms," in retrospect, and in light of what the term self-realization (self-actualization and self-transcendence) has come to mean in DE and in psychology, some aspects and presentations of DE waded in murky waters from the start. In a sense, it is not a very surprising cocktail of familiar—relatable—ideas. Some may read these distinctions as having a fight inside a thimble while a flood is coming—irrelevant or unimportant. I would agree. There are real environmental and environmental-psychological challenges ahead, the likes of which humanity has

not seen before—even adapted to. However, again, it is hard to ignore that coincidental and historically contemporaneous with the ideas generated and proposed by Naess, there already existed a pre- or supra-scientific ethos around the very term Self-realization that then becomes central in a distinction between “deep” (intuitive, self-affirming with nature-cosmic interrelations in mind) versus a “shallow” (scientific, mechanistic, academic, technical) ecologies.

In the same breath, none of us who have a soft bone or two for DE should ignore that these distinctions matter to many who still perceive DE as a product of religion, and its close cousin “ecopsychology,” as its virgin priestess. The following passage (Noel, 1998) illustrates, for example, an “ecopsychologizing” of Jung, and then the regilionazing of “ecopsychology.” This is a rather lengthy quote but necessary in order to establish the ease with which some authors weave a tale from one specific sort of psychology to another and then to religion in a few sentences. To anticipate, Noel’s argument goes something like this: a) Let’s make way too much of a tiny percentage of what Jung ever wrote that even remotely resembles “ecopsychology,” b) Then, as it is customary when talking positively about Jung, let’s deemphasize the merits of “psychoanalysis,”—the “other guy,” c) Conveniently, let’s also forget that many, many schools of psychology exist that could have a scientific crack at “ecopsychology,” and d) Let’s do a “bait-and-switch” quick maneuver and, somehow, make this sort of “ecopsychology” a “Nature Religion”:

Let me begin by quoting words I take to be both exemplary for the tradition in question and pertinent to our discussion of "nature religion":[Jung] Yet there is so much that fills me: plants, animals, clouds, day and night, and the eternal in man. The more uncertain I have felt about myself, the more there has grown up in me a feeling of kinship with all things. In fact it seems to me as if that alienation which so long separated me from the world has become transferred into my own inner world, and has revealed to me an unexpected

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unfamiliarity with myself.[...] Beyond modest if valuable ecopsychological efforts to psychoanalyze attitudes toward environmentalism or to use diagnostic categories to assess the mental causes of our historical divorce from nature, psychology's sense of the boundaries of the self will need to expand, so that the individual psyche, losing its familiar isolation, might become an "eco-psyche," participating in the subjectivity of the more-than-human as well as human realms. [...] To reiterate, a post-Jungian ecopsychology, collective as well as individual, emotional as well as intellectual, does not have to succeed politically at present for it to be of value to those of us seeking to understand "nature religion" as a theoretical construct. (One Page)

Once again, for me, it is difficult to even decide where to begin a critical evaluation of these exaggerated and confounded claims except to consider the source and context, be generous, and leave it at that. We could then find some comfort in saying something like, "This could be another case where, in matters of "religion," anything goes." But critically speaking, by unduly focusing on a (possible) failure of a certain brand of "psychoanalysis" to more fully explicate "nature connections," myopically so, this author seems to prematurely disregard the entire potentiality of all sorts of "psychologies" (cognitive, evolutionary, developmental, psychobiological, etc.) to have some scientific say in matters "ecopsychological." Whoever said or decided that "ecopsychology" must be a single flavor enterprise? Mr. Noel did in this case.

More problematic yet, take some of the actual "ecopsychological" work, for example, of recognizable figures like John Seed, Joanna Macy, and Molly Young Brown. Here is a description, in Macy's words (1998), about how the Council of All Beings, a now popular "ecopsychology" workshop, was originally conceived:

One day after a weekend workshop, John Seed, founder of the Rainforest Information Center, took me to one of the last vestiges of his continent's primordial forests, saved from the

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timber companies by blockades mounted by John and other local protesters. On that excursion John and I discovered that we shared a passionate interest in deep ecology and the writings of Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess about the "ecological self." As Buddhists, we both resonated with these concepts, finding them close to the Buddha's core teaching on the interdependence of all life. John expressed the wish that my workshops include a "deep ecological" group experience to directly challenge the anthropocentrism of industrial society. So together, that day, we invented the Council of All Beings. It was introduced shortly afterwards, in the course of the weeklong training that culminated my workshop tour. At a camp north of Sydney, on huge flat rocks by a waterfall, some forty people took part. And soon they were taking the ritual back with them to their local communities. Within a year, by word of mouth--and through John's and my travels--the Council of All Beings spread to North America, Western Europe, and Japan. From the Grand Canyon to the banks of the Rhine, in redwood groves and classrooms and church basements, people were gathering to shed their personae as humans and give voice to the plight of the Earth. They spoke as whale and wolf and wind, aspen and marsh and any other nonhuman they felt called to represent. [...] I like to begin the proceedings by inviting the beings to identify themselves in turn, a kind of roll call: Wolf is here, I speak for all wolves. I am Wild Goose; I speak for all migratory birds. [...]

No doubt, the strange but equally creative idiosyncratic amalgamation of interpretations of some brand of "deep ecology" and some brand of Buddhism, in a metaprocess of interpersonal authentication and mutual affirmation, turned into some kind of "ecopsychology," is likely to be well-received by folks who are desperately seeking immediate and impressionistic (emotionally satisfying) explanations to reconnect, at some emotional level with "nature, but is this work also critical of DE, Zen Buddhism, or "ecopsychology"? What ensues is almost foretold in the Rune Stones: very sincere folks, so-called "ecotherapists," run for the

hills, replicate “the workshop,” dawn paper masks, speak for some sort of “otherness,” without any one critic (a scholarly examination) voicing an opinion about the validity of these “forest experiments” with respect to their purported theoretical foundations or psychotherapeutic benefits or outcomes.

To the extent that these exercises are labeled “deep ecology,” Buddhism, and/or “ecopsychology,” by their creators, they encompass most all of the wishful-thinking (also real emotional needs) that is present (or latent) out there by sincere folks who are seeking remedies for their own existential woes, angst-eco-anxiety or work as professionals--as planet-attuned mediators. Not surprisingly, “shallow” ecologists, environmental scientists or philosophers are quite justified—who can blame them—after witnessing this Sylvan drama, in their suspicion of the whole of DE-thing—guilty by association, once again. Then, when and if we wonder why DE is not an overriding paradigm in environmental philosophy—at least—forty years later, we have to consider that if one is already perceived as being “guilty by association,” espousing some form of Eastern religion and/or Humanistic Psychology, then not much will happen afterwards—DE’s critics will point this out (Marshall, 1988). Ironically, DE has been described in some cases as not being radical enough or not being self-consistent (Bookchim, 1987).

However, and to be fair to all these “cocktail” ideas, in the final analysis, little of this matters, really, if one is not a philosopher or social scientist and “simply” needs an impressionistic “value” structure and/or frame of reference from which to justify certain actions or express deep and genuine feelings of “connection.” In fact, I doubt that any person who has felt the feelings/sentiments described in the quote by James, and/or has gone onto making them a regular aspect of their lifestyle and psyche as some sort of “ecopsychology,” and/or has used them as a justification for righteous—in their view—activism, ever needed DE principles to begin with, in Naessian or other forms.

There is, no doubt, something “true,” something enchanting, something valuable, something even delirious about the rediscovery that humans are organisms like any other and are

forever locked into an interconnectedness “dance” with the whole of “nature.” We are all beautiful forms.

Beautiful Forms

There is much about DE that is instantly recognizable to those readers who delve in ecosophy, ecopsychology, Buddhism and ecofeminism, particularly in the work of Devall and Sessions (1985). Their continued connections with and elaborations of DE as when presenting Paul Shepard’s Human Ecology and ecopsychology, or the work of Dolores LaChapelle and Theodore Roszak, poets like beat-Buddhist Gary Snyder, and Zen Buddhism proper (Robert Aitken) made me giddy and validated my own feelings and sentiments: these people were all right—good eggs. My own heart had fellow tree-kissing comrades. For that matter, any reader of DE just as easily, and for similar reasons, may study and embrace Whitehead’s and Cobb’s (Whitehead, 1919; ix Cobb Jr., 1972/1995) derivations from metaphysics to ecology preceding DE, or merging these as instances as a similar family of insights: ecological interrelatedness is inescapable in “god’s” (or “Gaia’s”) ecology.

To disclose again, I have been a student of, sat in meditation with, and gone hiking with Bill Devall. I destroyed the invasive lupine plants he ordered me to eradicate—for no extra credit. For four years, I lived in a small ohana that Robert Aitken built with his wife as their first Hawaiian zendo (Haiku, HI). Most of the present work was written there. These are not empty abstractions. To this very moment these experiences are felt like cool tropical rain and hot spicy tea. For years I have been nourished by beat poetry and my South American Animus has been fortified by eco-feminist works, in particular. Their combined language and messages are about beautiful forms constantly emerging and ever sustaining. Above all, they balance, then and now, my tendency to measure and tally—which is as strong. At some point though, I “grew up” and without parting with their wisdom I delved deeper into why DE owes much to Eastern philosophical traditions, for example, but equally important, I learned why DE cannot make certain claims with respect to the traditions that

color and contribute to its very real and contagious fluorescence, without receiving due and healthy criticism.

Before sitting in zazen and many years since I have had experiences that can poorly be described as “profoundly ordinary.” This is the language that Alan Watts translates and shares to characterize, in essence, some of the experiences that have been passed down to us from the early Chan Taoist monks as “insight” or “satori” (1957). And the next section will perhaps not sit very well with many individuals who profess some kind of spirituality, and in particular, a nature spirituality.

The Spell of Sensuous Ordinarity

Whether my experiences (“zen moments”) occurred outdoors or indoors, whether they happened early in my life or later, one thing was common to all: there was never a specific sense that “nature” existed apart from my own experience. More importantly, at least to me, there was no specific sense of “nature,” period, distinct from a broken bit of glass, a dirty shoe, a house, another person, etc., from the whole collection of perceived objects and happenings that I describe as my “reality.” That is, in these states, no distinctions were relevant, useful, or meaningful. A sense of ever-present “ordinarity” (the thing was the thing, no more no less) pervaded my psychespace of experience. Only afterwards, and with great difficulty, while employing poor analogies, I could have declared any or all of the following without ever saying anything pertinent and while being pertinent:

I am one-third with the world I am several natures depending on the weather...Love is life, life is blood...Some teeth are sharper than others...The tea smells of gardenias and smiles of ginger... Look at my left shoe; it needs new laces...I do not exist, but co-exist with lots and lots of bacteria— Lots!...I really love pecans, especially when swimming in a pie—not me, the pecans!... That bit of green glass, it’s sure pretty...I am as ordinary as any other thing can be, but today, now, more so...All is beautiful, beautiful forms are all... All is ugly, ugly forms are all... All or none of above is quite extraordinary!

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Perhaps, in this context, some readers would appreciate my own sense of confusion when some of the literature of DE, or of “ecopsychology,” or new age psycho-edifying treatises, combine almost willy-nilly, spirits, voices, different measures of religious traditions, profound water fall fairy revelations, ayahuasca wisdom, secret and intimate encounters with bears, sex with dolphins, in short, an amorphous glob of super-naturality as aim and purpose of, or final destination for “natural connections.”

So, in the end, the questions are both philosophical and psychological: *1) Whose set of experiences--whose epistemology-do we hold as the “gold standard” for evaluating and valuating the authenticity of some experience we call “nature connection”?* and assuming that this could be done—I doubt it—*2) What sort of ethics ensues from these experiences, intuitions, feelings, or sentiments?*

Interestingly, the very, recalcitrant at times, traditional literature coming from Chinese and Japanese Zen traditions and texts (Watts, 1957), upon which many of the ideas or extensions of DE applications are based, over and over, explicitly or implicitly, warn against easy classification-with-words about these very experiences. Apropos, for a Chan-Zen master, acts of “compassion” involved actually chopping bodily limbs in order to diminish self-centeredness, in order to “transcend” a petty ego. This is not the flower-in-the-vase variety of compassion but acts that are so extant and removed from their historical and experiential context that their reification by selecting some exclusive subset of “acts of compassion” do little to elucidate the tradition from which these emerged. In particular, and according to the great Chan masters (Watts, 1957), there is no reason to exclusively or directly link profound “ordinary” experiences with “nature” per se. So, how does one go from, DE enthusiast to the non-metaphysics of “say-no-thing” and “no categories exist,” to very precise and exclusive formulations of “compassion” ethics or intrinsic value?

And should DE ideas be expressed while employing Zen Buddhist terminology, contradictions arise anew if one stays

with primary sources and/or personal experience, centrally, the very notion of “self.” In the words of Alan Watts, “Zen points out that our precious ‘self’ is just an idea, useful and legitimate enough if seen for what it is, but disastrous if identified with our real nature” (p.120,121).

Here is the problem, perhaps only my problem. Going back to that phrase Self-realization as a central motif in Naess’ DE, empirically speaking, there is no testable/credible justification in assuming that merely from experiencing personal feeling or sentiment “A” we can generate principle “B,” that is, going even further and formulating, specifically, an intrinsic value system that makes our “connection with nature” some sort of ethics. That is, there is no testable/credible justification in affirming that some sort of Self-realization(self-transcendence) process exists—a universal principle—and that as a consequence, all forms, beautiful and ugly are irreducibly engaged in “this business,” and therefore, everything shares in this value, Becoming. If so, it can be said that DE never needed to, nor needs today, to make value statements consistent with otherworldly metaphysics, or with sentiments and feelings based on insights--formulate a code of ethics based on these hard to measure ontologisms or make unlikely statements such as in (my own characterization) “the self-realization potential of this tree is as important as mine.”

More importantly, as far as anybody knows, the strange experience of overriding “ordinariness” or other feelings, sensations, and sentiments that ensue thereafter as part of a “Zen experience” are a unique condition and predisposition of a human brain/mind system without psychological correlates or any profound and objectively significant relations with the rest of the natural world and universe—a very un-Batesonian statement to make. Simply, and in James’ words, the “days when the weather seems all whispering with peace, hours when the goodness and beauty of existence enfold us like a dry, warm climate, or chime through us as if our inner ears were subtly ringing with the world’s security,” is nothing but, and exists only in our brain/mind imagination-as far as we know. If so, “we save the planet” because we decide we must, because we want to and

not necessarily because that tree or this lion has an “intrinsic value or right to exist.” Ethics—morality—is, if sufficiently inspected, self-serving even in the face of apparently noble and impartial motives.

But, that’s OK! Lions and trees are saved nevertheless, because without them WE WOULD BE LONELY (Shepard, 1996). Building canoes by hand, manipulating simple tools pleasant to the fingers, being impressed and ennobled by the behaviors of animal otherness (Shepard, 1996), deriving satisfaction from the wabi sabi ordinariness of an old wooden bench or a tree trunk—our many enchantments or obsessions with all their beautiful forms—reside, until or unless proven otherwise, inside human brains/minds and only there. These feelings and sentiments are intrinsic to the human brain/mind system and this seems to be quite enough. “I want to save lions because they are beautiful and powerful animals” seems to me as good a reason as any, without having to invent questionable metaphysical predicates to justify my actions and wishes—to direct my behaviors. We can go further and codify this very sentiment and henceforth make new laws that declare: “Lions must be saved because they are (have) beautiful forms and powerful animals.” But laws are arbitrary.

Paradoxically Perplexing Songs

There is no one “Gold Standard” for “an appreciation of ‘nature’.” Instead, there are many golden means, many ways of relating to “nature,” many ways of justifying what we do “there,” as many, in fact, as there are eyes and brains, hands, wings, or paws. Our individual-intimate ways of “becoming one with nature” or simply enjoying and appreciating all the beautiful forms, all the strange places, require no authority—philosophical or “ecopsychological” predicates.

Therefore, there could be many ethical proposals invented to justify all these actions. Much like grammar is an afterthought of fluid and natural speech, of language, our intimations with/ in “nature” may be followed through by capitalizing on one or another formal system of inquiry which “simply” rationalizes

intuitions, insights, sentiments and feelings after the fact. In that spirit...I have thought long and hard about this. The feral hens I feed every day make paradoxically perplexing sounds, sometimes even songs if they are in the mood. They sound satisfied, testy, frustrated, angry, perturbed, or scared. None of their songs seem to say: "Jorge has intrinsic value." That is, I am either there for them or not, and if I went away tomorrow they would, I suspect, still make the same chicken chatter.

I look deep and far into the starry night sky and not a single corpuscle of light knows my name, much less says: "There, over there, Jorge exists and he has intrinsic value." I can make something up, like, Hoku-ke'ax protects me, but I know in my Haole heart of Haole hearts and in my Catalan head of Catalan heads that it ain't true.

I take DE to mean what it can say or mean, but no more and no further than the night starry sky that I can see can say. All their voices are linked to mine but none speaks louder or clearer than the other:

Father Naess: There is a profoundly beautiful Norwegian "chatter" about mountains—climbing them—silence, and what could happen if this beauty or silence were to disappear just because some other human thought that building a chalet and ski resort was a pretty darn good way of making a living.

Fathers Devall and Drengson: There was a Zen climber in Northern California or an avid walker in BC Canada who, both, moved mountains and they in turn were moved by mountains.

Father Snyder: There is a testy, crafty, and crusty beat poet that still sings paradoxically perplexing verses so that the rest of us can smell what he sees. There was an old veteran who became a lay zen "monk" and founded a zendo in a tropical paradise even though he himself suffered the pain of the world.

Myself in Haiku, at this very moment: There is an invasive diurnal mongoose that lives near my hut, which can never quite catch a circadian-antipodal bunch of succulent and furry nocturnal rats. By light of day, he steals eggs for a living and is quite content, or so it appears. The rats seem relieved and go on stealing our bananas.

When my body allows it me, I run on a long stretch of beach. Crabs and stilts scamper away. The green and rugged hills to the west, sometimes the moon setting in the early morning hours, the dry or brackish salty marshes, turtles, dolphins and whales, every now and then, appear and then disappear, filling me with wonder and appreciation. I am put in my place and humbled. Awestruck is the very word I want to use to describe all these happenings. We are all doing our business, I on two older legs, they on faster and strange ones. DE makes sense HERE on these occasions. Who or what can deny any other “who” or “what” the privilege of appearing and disappearing, running, scampering, posing majestically, or taking turns at eye-spying? Also, any who or what, can and does deny any other thing or process its flow in our almost daily life-and-death “plays,” oftentimes, for reasons I shall never know.

Really, that certain and that simple: Who or what can deny any other who or what the privilege of appearing and disappearing, running, scampering—being-both, an extraordinary and also a very ordinary multitude of comings and goings, living and dying beautiful forms?

Some Paradoxically Perplexing “Things”

We affirm with terror, love or care, We negate in joy, at leisure, or in jest, We carelessly take more than any one thing could eat or hoard, We exist as unfettered imagination and in minute, lucid moments, We are invasive species and are too ravaged by the intrusion of many-a-foe, We enact laws that no deer or wolves obey, but their rules always seem to matter more, Mountain-slides raze towns and kill infants without a thought in mountain or of child, We see and not see, want and not want, wish and stop wishing, And yet, “nature” does not care, we do, Above all--and here is the paradoxically perplexing thing—we live inside ourselves every second, and every second that counts, we live outside ourselves and become the beautiful forms we affirm with terror, love, and care.

If nothing else, because of all of this, one needs a deep ecology or some kind of “ecopsychology” to help us begin to sort out our

existentially inescapable relations to the natural world, and us too, as part of this naturalness-ness. But these paths begin in the middle. They are neither the trailhead nor a destination. No person has yet invented a microscope that peers into the paradox that is life and death with clarity. Most likely, even if such a device existed, we would be instantly and precisely perplexed, when the silly scope magnifies absolutely nothing of worth, nothing worth being perplexed about. From an “ecopsychological” perspective, if nothing else, we need some kind of DE when we realize we have gone too far--when we have killed too many things and heaped too many bones and then wish to atone for these sins—wish to amend our transgressions. In short, DE can be seen as an epistemological structure that facilitates not only catharsis, a necessary social and psychological need, but equally, suggests meaningful-to-the-person positive behavioral outlets, activism, even though, at its core, it is metaphysically questionable.

Mostly, we need some sort of DE and/or some sort of “ecopsychology” in order to, again, have faith in ourselves. Perhaps, no other justification is needed for wearing a cardboard bear mask and pretending to be a bear (speak for bear). Similarly, the existential psychologist Otto Rank (1956) remarked:

The patient needs a world view and will always need it, because man always needs belief, and this so much more, the more increasing self-consciousness brings him to doubt. Psychotherapy does not need to be ashamed of its philosophic character, if only it is in a position to give to the sufferer the philosophy that he needs, namely, faith in himself. (p.75)

There is “ecological” and even “ecopsychological” wisdom that has been passed down to us from long ago ages and thinkers. In a nutshell, this wisdom is a continued exultation of the virtue-habits of frugality, simplicity, non-attachment, and humility. Epicurus, Buddha, St. Francis are notable and salient voices espousing the connection between a simple life and nimble or unburdened psychology.

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That these voices and wisdom often originate in the context of a religious tradition, does not make “ecopsychology” a religion any more than medical cures, architecture, animal husbandry, or agriculture are “religious” when these sciences too emerge in the context of a dominant cultural paradigm. Religious and spiritual overtones are not intrinsic to any of these pursuits unless a person, idiosyncratically so, forces or needs this connection.

* * *

CHAPTER FIVE

Psycho-Phenology: Applications of Ecological Panarchy to Psycho-Ecological Systems

“...the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots & tyrants. It is it's [sic] natural manure.”
(Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to Williams Stephens Smith, Paris, Nov. 13, 1787)

The above quote by Jefferson might give uncomfortable pause to any sensible and socially stable person. One suspects a “positive psychologist” may balk at this notion on some sort of personal or empirical ground. Nevertheless, the unsettling declaration speaks to the recurring dilemma, a historically corroborable fact, that the human psyche negotiates from time to time (must, according to Jefferson), the quality of its human standing and health vis a vis unfavorable, diminishing, or crumbling social and natural structures. More often than not the “negotiations” with an established order are bloody and disrupting. On the other hand, a Taoist or Buddhist monk might not be at all surprised or perturbed by the factual nature of this claim.

Given the fluidity and projective potential inherent in the words “ecology” and “psychology,” it is not surprising that there could also be multiple approaches that attempt to justify their relational dynamics. Chapter Four reviewed several approaches that make use of existing systems (e.g. Buddhism) with which to make these terms seem amenable and congruent to each other. Some of these proposals run the gamut from simply paying lip service to these tags, that is, they are through and through non-scientific idiosyncratic proposals, to, in mainstream psychology, attempting to understand some deeper connections within and between various *eigenwelt*, *mitwelt* and *umwelt* systems.

With respect to the latter, this is the case, for example, when J. J. Gibson presents us with a dynamic understanding of perception in context (Gibson, 1986) or when seen in U. Bron-

fenbrenner's complex and truly ecological approach to human development (Bronfenbrenner).

The position taken here is that it is clear that both tags determine, from the start, a scholarly conversation about systems and systemics. Throughout this work, it has been emphasized that "ecopsychology" seems to be addressing or readdressing *eigenwelt-mitwelt-umwelt* relations with an eye toward understanding the degree to which nature affiliations could be described as optimal for an individual, groups of individuals, and/or societies. The same approach might produce descriptions of sub-optimal and even dysfunctional affiliations (nature estrangement and nature alienation).

An aspect of the relationship that exists between these two types of descriptions, optimal and sub-optimal, includes the revisiting of ecological proposals that look at the challenges of sustainability and resilience from psychological perspectives. Paul Shepard's work, *Nature and Madness*, does so comprehensibly well, but it is not a work that was intended to develop a precise science of nature affiliations. His work orients us in the right direction and begins to ask fundamental questions about the possible arcs of human development vis a vis changing socio-cultural structural and normative dynamics.

In ecological terms, humans have burned savannah and prairie alike in order to ensure constant and renewed grazing by large herbivores to make for easier hunting. Particularly vulnerable megafauna (e.g. on islands, flightless birds, slow reproducing) have been hunted to extinction by humans (Stuart, 1991; Holdaway and Jacomb, 2000; Brook and Johnson, 2006; Metcalf, et al, 2016). Humans are ecological mega-disruptors on an order comparable to natural catastrophes (Zalasiewicz, 2010; and Revkin, 2011) with no abating in sight.

Moreover, and culturally speaking, any of the key terms to be presented (destruction, organization, reorganization, resilience, sustainability) equally apply to a hero's monomyth (Campbell, 1949), here to be taken as an important (realistic) psychological model from which to abstract and value psychological becoming and to draw analogies from.

As psycho-ecologically intuitive as these connections are, the generally accepted goals of psychological functionality and sustainability are insisted upon with a therapeutic goal toward sometimes vacuous or even noxious social contexts.

Neither the therapist nor the “client” nor society (Conesa-Sevilla, 2006; Fromm, 1955) seem to “get it together,” despite the well-wishes, admonitions, theories, and the many interventions that are meant to catalyze psychological wellness. Another unsettling reality: The best that psychology has posited and now offers seems to be a pale benefit when compared to the global scope and scale of a variety of woes that the whole of humanity and other planetary systems face. During a global epidemic of existential discord and dissonance, a few vaccinations for a handful of affluent patients simply won’t do.

The nature of ontological psychological dynamics, its stability continually tested and upturned by developmental and historical events, was not lost on psychologists like Erik Erikson (1950) and Erich Fromm (1955), both writing in the context of WWII and the incipient rising of the “throw away” society.

Psycho-Phenology

The term Psycho-Phenology is here coined in order to continue bringing greater parity to ecology and psychology (Conesa-Sevilla, 2005; Conesa-Sevilla, 2006; Conesa-Sevilla, 2013). The grand master of phenology, Aldo Leopold (Leopold & Jones, 1947), saw the relevance of understanding the cycles and seasons in a given environment as a way to comprehend the totality of a terroir and make predictions of its likely and further development. Psycho-phenology can be considered a sub-perspective under a scientifically rigorous and grander “ecopsychology.”

The term psycho-phenology also implies the study of a “sense of place.” In essence it is an intimate understanding and account of the cyclical nature of an organism-in-context. Its basic assumption is that the dynamics of change is as much a value of ecology as apparent constancy and sustainability.

Psychologists are also de facto phenologists if they make the following assumptions: 1) The human mind-body system is first and foremost an ecological system; 2) The ecology of the human mind-body system constantly interacts with diverse aspects and multiple kinds and levels (respectively, *eigenwelt*, *mitwelt*, and *umwelt*; and micro, meso, and macro) of many other ecological systems; 3) Change, disruptions, and turbulence are key transformative elements of any ecology; 4) Apparent stability (sustainability) is a limited and partial measure in time (Cone-sa-Sevilla, 2005); 5) All ecological systems fail, or are designed to fail, provided some compensatory maneuvers are also in place. Vulnerability to “failure,” in ecological terms, is seen as an opportunity for reorganization and transformation; and 6) Natural selection, among other mechanisms of evolution, is the grand paradigm under which ecology makes the most sense—it is a most useful tool for making fruitful predictions and testable hypotheses.

In this light, Psycho-Phenology is a reconciliation with ecology that human beings, without and within, are ecological systems, and because they are “systems” they are governed by laws that transcend their perceived and actual “infinite cultural status.” That is, human culture, for most individuals, presents an illusory sense of permanence in that it might psychologically be assumed to be a sustainable culture, even though signs of great change stir on its historical horizon.

Although stability and certainty are desirable conditions for humanity under which to succeed, realistically speaking and across many of the organizational systems envisioned and practiced by humans (political, religious, economic), change and uncertainty are equally the norm. To make idiosyncratic-human exemptions, to ignore the volatility that is “life,” or to fail to take into account variables that shape all circumstances, actual and potential, is to negate (as in denial) a basic constitution of existence. As an example, and in the words of Steven Stoll (2016), “Economic growth partakes in this magical thinking: the capacity of the environment remains constant at infinity.”

Chapter 5

Human nature (habits, preferences, likes, and dislikes) tends toward stability even though its own biological understrata and larger ecological contexts are in states of constant dynamics. This mismatch between the ecological ideal and the actual leads to underestimating change itself, the rate of change, the direction of change, and the repercussion that change might have on resilience and sustainability.

Viewed from an ecological perspective, boom and bust, happiness and sorrow, health and disease, interest and boredom, elation and depression, hedonistic and suicidal tendencies are one whole cloth of the human experience. They all suggest that actual life is subject to the whims, moods, and cycles of real events and that no one person can make these onslaughts stand still. Siddhartha's father tried sheltering his son from sorrow and harm only to contribute to making him one of the most remarkable examples of the rejection of human psychological stability-permanence. In short, to fathom human-nature cycles, to beware of their temporary and superficial constancy, ironically, their apparent "dependability" as harbingers of the potentially chaotic situation they might become, is the domain of Psycho-Phenology.

In this context, and with a full understanding of psycho-phenological facts and dynamics, one can better appreciate and incorporate the disciplines of frugality and non-attachment as an ideal being-form; as optimal psychology. If so, and in this light, some of the wisdom of Epicurus, Buddha, or St. Francis is recognizably "ecological" and even "ecopsychological."

Thus, although one might favor the mostly predictable plot of a Bildungsroman novel--youth, step by step learning his or her way in society and eventually achieving maturity--this developmental arc is teleologically speaking all too ideal. On the other hand, and not surprisingly, the assuredly laborious and potentially lethal arc of the monomyth (Campbell, 1949) has been the most enduring, and ironically, the most realistic myth across human cultures and time. Life is suffering and conquering with moments of respite--in a person's life, in a group's time, in the history of any nation, and further back into prehistory.

Ecological Panarchy

Gunderson et al (1995), Holling et al (2002a), and Holling et al (2002c), modified traditional frameworks for understanding ecological dynamics. Their work added to an already existing phenology, a more realistic emphasis on processes of destruction and organization in addition to the traditional ecological foci on growth and conservation. Their framework adds two additional functions, release and reorganization, with which one can also understand the inter-medial mutability of ecological systems—their inter-phasic dynamics. Within the limitations of the panarchy model (Gotts, 2007), there is much that is already relevant to an understanding of human systems (see Appendix II).

Figure 3, adapted from Gunderson and Holling (2002), minus the added references to its original (in red), depicts the dynamics of Ecological Panarchy. At first look, panarchy, at least implicitly, tracks the systemic historical changes that some systems are likely to revisit. Panarchy can be made congruent with other descriptions that emphasize the dynamics of all organisms and systems with regard to life's basic components and interactions of Energy, Safety, and Possibility (Conesa-Sevilla, 2005).

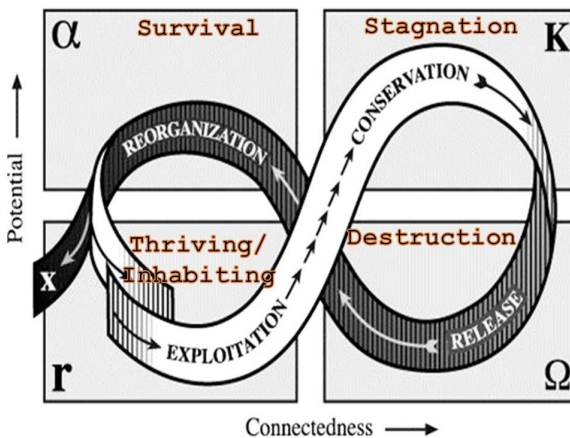


Figure 3

Questions of resilience and sustainability arise when the establishment and diversity, “functionality,” are understood and also tracked as part of the dynamics that panarchy aims to elucidate. In the words of Holling and Gunderson (2002b), resilience can be seen as “the magnitude of disturbance that can be absorbed before the system changes its structure by changing the variables and processes that control behavior.” If so, then the psychological concept of “coping” suggests a direct analogy to ecological resilience, where an increase of coping and varied strategies implies greater resilience—“the magnitude of disturbance that can be absorbed.”

All ecological systems, including human psychology, fail eventually, or are so developmentally dynamic that they are inherently unstable—a virtue of adaptability. A Freudian perspective allows for the notion that human psychology, itself dynamically changing, while embedded in changing social systems, necessitates innate ego-defense mechanisms in order to accomplish the goals of basic survival. Thus reinterpreted, a non-teleological view of human development, for starters, suggests that psychological failure and collapse are proximal and expected in order to learn new strategies for coping (Cone-sa-Sevilla, 2013).

In this light, detachment, physical toughness, stoic endurance, civility, selfishness, perseverance, cooperation, politeness, generosity, negotiation, or plain stubbornness can all be equally effective coping strategies depending on the nature of the social or nature-environmental change. In this context, psycho-phenology deals with psychology in real historical and contemporary contexts, focusing on “what is” rather than on idealized conceptions of “happiness” (Seligman, 1991). The happy-go-lucky optimist may be the first casualty of the Anthropocene.

The Resiliency Cycle Revisited

Figure 3 and Table 2 (a & b) introduce and juxtapose four ways of identifying the psycho-ecological passage from ruin to riches. It also serves as an anthropological format (nonnorma-

tive, value-free) of mapping different models of psychological well-being. For example, idealized notions of human prosperity (Seligman, 1991) can be defined by the “thriving/inhabiting” and even the “stagnation” phases (shown in Figure 3 and described in Tables 2a and 2b).

Whenever chaos or new possibilities for growth are the existential status quo, then, respectively, “destruction” and “survival” modalities will be the norm. In ecological terms, coping strategies that may work during the “thriving/inhabiting” phase may be useless or unwarranted during the “destruction” and “survival” phases. During times of plenty, a predilection for certain foods, and specifically the religious adherence to eating kosher foods, for example, may no longer be sustainable without noticeable risk of decreasing the chances of survival. These forced changes in the procuring of basic nourishment may also lead to new dietary discoveries that themselves shape the very direction of evolution (eating more meat, cooking meat, or preserving meat; ingesting hallucinogens and fermented brews).

Survival (Reorganization phase <i>ú</i>)		Thriving/Inhabiting (Exploitation Phase <i>r</i>)	
Emergency	Disguise	Solace	Disclosure
Remedy	Hiding/Displacement	Wellness	Inhabiting
Short-term	Procurement	Long-term	Planting/Harvesting
Open-ended (O-E)	Location	Less O-E, more close ended	Place
Disorientation	Map	Oriented	Territory
Make-shift	Strangers	Enduring/durable	Companions
Un-planned	Dissociation	Planned	Association
No sense of place	Estrangement	Sense of place	Familiarity
Basic Needs	Disconnection	Amenities	Connection
Vigilance	Respite	Monitoring	Rest/Recreation
Pernoctation	Necessity	Habitation	Luxury
Trauma/Healing	Temporary	Strengthening	Enduring
Flight/flee	Otherness	Stand ground	Oneness

Table 2-a

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Stagnation (Conservation Phase K)		Destruction (Release Phase Ω)	
Saturation	Secrecy	Breakage	Paranoia
Sedentary	Owning	Displacement	Trading
Transgenerational	Managing	Individual/Masses	Hoarding
Closed-ended	Homeland	Chaotic	Locations
Domicile	Cartography/Platted space	On the move	Distances/Time
Entrenched	Neighbors	Volatile	Competitors
Traditions	Identification	Uncharted	Alienation
Fatherland	Dependency	No-man's land	Loneliness
Luxuries	Yolking	Bartering	Separation
Surveillance	Industry	Look-out	Adaptation
Residence	Inheritance	Shelter	Useful
Capitulation	Legacy	Hunted	Passing
Persevere	Is-ness	On the move	It-ness

Table 2-b

Table 2 (a & b), in addition to encapsulating the functionalities of survival, thriving/inhabiting, stagnation, and destruction, presents another perspective, albeit in very broad strokes, in understanding the psychology of place, or a sense of place. The intertwining of psychology and place in psycho-phenological approaches is an indispensable and naturally ecological association without which human psychology cannot, on the whole, be understood. People live in places, they sleep in bedrooms, they identify with a town or a city with specific streets and neighborhoods; that is, they thrive or struggle in places. People create sanctuaries (temples, natural parks, recreational sites) to seek solace, to cope, or to maximize already present potentialities.

When studying psychology from a humanistic or teleological perspective, scholars may tend to emphasize human potentialities as idealized forms (make them normative) and run the risk of ignoring other adaptable human capabilities. Psychoanalysis emerges in the context of anti-Semitic struggles and humanistic psychology after the horrors of WWII, for example. In both, there are implicit and explicit (Fromm, 1955) acknowledgements that

human nature is subject to both social and natural environmental circumstances, most of the time unavoidable. Whatever intrinsic coping strategies may be at hand, whatever new adaptations to changing circumstances may be learned, no single standard of “adaptability” may be warranted.

Panarchy’s Resilience Cycle has been modified (Figure 3 and Table 2) in order to illustrate an organic interpretation of change as it impacts human psychology. There is no singular “change” but a series of phases and differing sets of strategies for maximizing “survival.” The likelihood that the human organism might capably and successfully navigate the contingencies of and transitions between each phase demands that the notion of resilience be defined as a multitude and variety of behavioral and mental accommodations predicated on individual or collective definitions of “a sense of place.” “Place” is not a transcendental realm but the site where real events are unfolding and when any organism is forced to figure out what set of strategies will best suit the moment and the location. The passage of time in an actual “place” where events happen or are self-actuated makes psychology a phenology of the psyche in a real, ecological sense.

(See Appendix II for additional applications of Panarchy.)

* * *

CHAPTER SIX

Nature as Madness

"But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself and, by heavens I tell you, it had gone mad."
(Joseph Conrad)

In the west, at least, the praising and exaltation of nature (or properties and elements in nature) in contemporary movements, in a relatively recent historical romantic past, or as part of more ancient approaches of worship and veneration, are just a handful of projective emphases to a comparable if not equal evaluation of nature as hostile wilderness (Nash) or as the source of madness: nature as madness or becoming mad in nature. The word "madness" is employed in order to add a degree of uncertainty and unreality (psychic flux) to self-nature gestalts. Madness in this sense adds a factor of fluidity, which in its best sense could be akin to the Taoist notion of free-flow. This idea bears inclusion in a serious discussion and inquiry of self-nature gestalts, to the extent that nature too changes, unpredictably, and new psychic accommodations to its processes demand the formulation of new meanings.

That is, for almost every description of nature as benign, holy, motherly, serene, comprehensible, harmonious, peaceful, etc., there are as many corresponding descriptors (evil, promiscuous, whore, turbulent, incomprehensible, chaotic, lethal, etc.) which suggests that no absolute or fixed ontology of nature is readily discernable, but more likely that a humanly projected and shifting taxonomy, individually, collectively, and/or historically voiced, drives these perceptions and representations. Even within the same historical and cultural zeitgeist, both perspectives could be ambivalently perceived and expressed. This contradictory or oppositional range of perceptions and attributes say more about human psychology than about nature. They also express a sort of madness in the sense used earlier.

As Roderick Nash writes in *Wilderness and the American Experience*, unkept, distant, and territorially unknown natural spaces present a challenge to understanding, and also to cognitive coherence and legibility (to use Kaplan's terms). In this sense, nature represents madness or the potential for madness. Later we shall see that this is not necessarily a negative description, particularly if human existence must choose between different types of madness: depersonalization caused by city states, the alienation of living in densely populated cities, working in factories, or confronting the incessant propaganda to participate in senseless consumerism. This description, nature as madness, allows for free play and opportunities where nature, even though at first perceived and evaluated as a place of madness, may be redeemable in the long run, understood and thus accepted as a realm, if not wholly rational, then at least supportive of reason.

While employing Patrick Fuery's definition of madness (Madness and Cinema: Psychoanalysis, Spectatorship, and Culture) in his semiotic treatment of the relation between the cinema, spectators, and madness, the following characteristics make the case that defining nature as madness allows us to understand many other approaches of relatedness across a humanly diverse spectrum of "nature connection" and disconnection--sentiments and processes.

Thus, borrowing and adapting from Fuery, the phrases, mine, 'in nature madness,' 'nature is madness,' 'madness in nature' can be supported by the following alternating and complementary propositions:

Madness/nature...

- Is excess
- Has an order of meaning and knowledge within itself
- Is mutable
- Represents what cannot be done—the impossible/impossibility
- Is knowledge's (certainty's) 'other'
- Is resistance
- Is impossible to represent

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- Isn't any-one-thing, but everything
- Is disorder
- Resists translation, interpretation, and stability
- Risks meaning in order to be heard

(Adapted from Fuery 2004: 1-31)

I have merely added the word “nature” next to the original text where he defines madness. I encourage the reader to look further into Fuery’s work and be gifted with many more connections that could be made between his text and mine. For now, we have enough to work with. Presenting this thesis of “nature as madness” is key to understanding a basic human necessity to experience a type of madness, or at least for flirting with madness when life is perceived to be incomprehensible across other dimensions or when it is absolutely predictable and unfulfilling.

A Sextet of Madness

In order to simplify the complexity of relatedness with respect to nature and the built-up “civilized” environment, as well as psychic life and a need for challenging easy and familiar psycho-social dynamics, it might be useful to think of a set of relations (affiliations) as illustrated in Figure 4.

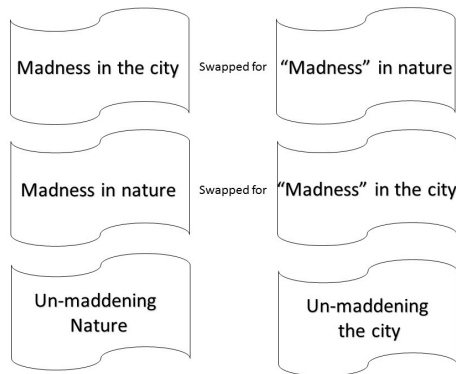


Figure 4

Additional modes or relationships of understanding, relating, or affiliating to nature as both a solace from madness or as madness itself, are possible. The above set of relationships, tropisms, and dynamics, allows us, for example, to situate and evaluate—to categorize--the influential work of Paul Shepard (*Nature and Madness*) and the romantic writings found in Rousseau, Goethe, Emerson, Thoreau, and Muir. More importantly, and as Fuery defines “madness,” it frees up the concept from its narrow medical definition, and it includes all the important and relevant senses in which one can speak of “madness” across various disciplines.

Many times I have been witness to “city folk” making their way into “the wilderness,” in order to seek out recreational activities that included fishing, hunting, boating, or snowmobiling, which also involved equal parts drinking, partying, rowdiness, and letting off steam (madness as excess and disorder). For these folks at least, it seems that “going mad” in nature was essential to maintaining well-being or offsetting the results of the daily toils of living in another setting for madness (city living) or trying to beat very mundane and predictable existences. It is as if a psychological and social construction of nature had already occurred, that nature was madness itself, or that nature allowed for the expression of a temporary madness. The thousands of broken beer and liquor bottles found in pristine natural settings are a testament to this psychologically necessary, so it would seem, on the surface, debauchery.

The above set also allows for opportunities to judge when nature seems comprehensible—legible and coherent—if and when thoughtful and inquisitive approaches are followed. Going back to Fuery’s definitions, once something is known, or is potentially knowable, it ceases to be the source of/for madness. The more nature is made legible and coherent, the more we understand that its apparent complexities often yield to practical, wondrous, and apprehensible realities--its madness diminishes—or we have entered its madness so deeply and profoundly that its madness is also our own.

Fuery lists additional dimensions of madness associated with cinema viewing which can be easily extended as descriptors of madness in nature. Slipping into animality, passion, and fear are all expressions of madness. In this light, authentic totemic identification with a power animal (understanding its anatomy, ecological function, and real natural attributes) could be the means to enter the madness of nature to a degree of psychological functionality that successfully mediates between the realms rational and fantastic.

Imagined or sought-after experiences such as transcendence, bliss, aesthetic eroticism, and many other states (the “divine” itself as madness) can also be euphemisms for madness. To the extent that there is a semiotic transposition (Fuery) between what these states and their function might mean for each of us and their readily available cultural descriptors or correspondences, and a closely delineated path of their discovery in nature, then the phrase “madness in nature” is no longer capricious or overstated.

To reiterate, the ambivalence of nature as representing madness or being madness itself, and wilderness as the place where conventional morality ends and animality, passion, and fear take over, or of nature as a place of solace, tranquility, and healing from other forms of madness, points to many natures and to many psychologies—nature connection becoming an incomplete phrase with which to capture this richness.

Panopticism and Human Nature

Humans differ, temperamentally and at a basic biological level, in their degree of tolerance to crowding and social complexity. Hence our individual motivations for preserving and partaking of natural spaces, when they derive from these or similar basic psychobiological propensities, become an important and necessary ecopsychological study.

That is, being observed, and our psychological reactions to social observation and judgment, elicits predictable responses and accommodations along known temperamental continua,

extreme introversion and extraversion being the most obvious contrast.

To reiterate earlier assertions, rather than assuming that one sort of “nature” exists for all, even casual observations indicate that many psychologies interpret, adjust to, and transact with highly selected aspects of “nature” in an idiosyncratic manner with various degrees of “success” (psychological functionality).

Therefore, it is no accident that the need for individual privacy, our intolerance of the mundane and the noisy, or a needed respite from social casual observation and judgment are achieved, in a significant portion of the human population, in solace and the very notion of sanctuary. Fences, cubby-hole niches, cars with tinted windows, and sunglasses are all proxies after the same need.

The physical and almost absolute manifestation of wrap around surveillance is the panopticon. In Paul Rabinow’s interpretation of Michel Foucault’s ideas:

The panopticon consists of a large courtyard, with a tower in the center, surrounded by a series of buildings divided into levels and cells. In each cell there are two windows: one brings in light and the other faces the tower, where large observatory windows allow for the surveillance of cells. The cells become “small theaters, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible.” The inmate is not simply visible to the supervisor; he is visible to the supervisor alone—cut off from any contact. This new power is continuous and anonymous.

Recently, one of many prisons built around the world and styled after the original panopticon design by the English philosopher and jurist, Jeremy Bentham, in Harleem, the Netherlands, is to be converted into a mall, essentially another panopticon.

Before we judge Bentham too harshly, it needs to be said that he was also one of the first philosophers to advocate for animal rights. Even those who implemented his utilitarian and efficient design as a practical way of controlling large populations of

inmates were perhaps merely innovating on well-established means of managing the masses.

Communal living that results in panoptic architectural arrangements (tepees, Yanomami and Viking halls, wigwams, and churches) is very ancient indeed. Essentially, *the panoptic arrangement, new and old, is equally the inward and inescapable public gaze looking for signs of troubled psychology and a forum for seeking and reaching consensus. The family unit and the psychological and material restrictions of its dynamics is perhaps the first panoptic circle.*

An adolescent's rebellion is an affront to this first communal panopticon and part of a necessary "cry for freedom" that has long lasting consequences to society as a whole. As Paul Shepard observed, wherever youth has "nature" at its disposal, empty spaces can be a liberating canvass on which to explore an emerging identity free of unnecessary prohibitions.

But youth is running out of places to explore. In its more recent panoptic reiterations, as intensely scrutinized and behaviorally tracked shopping malls (e.g. Mall of America, Bloomington, MN), airports, and libraries, monitoring the behavior (and intentions) of large numbers of people necessitates specialized architectural plans—many variations of cells.

However, several features distinguish older from newer panoptic designs, most importantly, the notion of having a vote toward the formulation of a consensus. Another important feature is that after exiting a tepee or a Yanomami central hall, open nature, and not a serial continuation of socially panopti-sized spaces, awaits exploration with minimal social judgment.

Granting as a testable hypothesis that a significant percentage of the human population is biologically designed to better thrive in smaller and more private dwelling spaces, needing as well daily access to open prairie, sea, mountains or forests, then an inclusive ethics of social accommodation and planning ought to respect these psychological imperatives—make accommodations for its exigencies, for the good of all.

Even gregarious types, every now and then, may have a need to seek out the inwardness of nature, finding true solace only there.

Eyes in the Forest

A fair and balanced exploration of panopticism, both its manifestation in communal life and perverse psychological effects, in an attempt to understand “madness,” starts with nature itself as the primordial backdrop exemplifying observation and judgment.

What about “nature” is panoptic? From a biosemiotic perspective the answer is everything, depending on the psychological orientation of the subject, or most everything, but in different ways. Panopticism is, in this biosemiotic sense, in nested and multiple levels of existence (*eigen-mit-umwelten*), by virtue of constant and inescapable reiterative interpretation, an inescapable ingredient of “human nature.”

Cries for “freedom” and the romantic and absolute vision of “free will” may very well be protestations against this inescapable reality. The “gods,” an ultimate expression of panoptic existence, watching and judging our every action, thought, and emotion, seem to be a proxy extension of a cognitive and “virtual” projection of the ever present inquisitive and judgmental social hub.

Even in “nature” we cannot completely escape unwanted rumination or the consequences of our actions. In biblical mythology, Cain cannot escape or hide from god’s eye and judgment:

And Cain said to Abel his brother, "Let us go out to the field," and when they were in the field Cain rose against Abel his brother and killed him. And the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother? And he said, "I do not know: am I my brother's keeper?" And He said, "What have you done? Listen! your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil. And so, cursed shall you be by the soil that gaped with its mouth to take your brother's blood from your hand. If you till the soil, it will no longer give you strength. A restless wanderer shall you be on the earth."

The “restless wanderer” can never truly escape from many other instances of perceived and projected panoptic observation and

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judgment from “nature”--the tepee, the great hall, a cave, a cubby-niche becoming only temporary refuge. Eventually, even these safe spaces can become yet another microscopic investigation of self, a micro-panoptic cell (e.g. a vision quest).

One explanation for this never ending biosemiotic reiteration, and its likely etiology as “madness,” is based on the inescapable situation that even casual social observation could, at any time, turn into jealousy, judgment, retribution and punishment.

For example, in interpretative terms, when several parties are existentially engaged and interdependent, it may very well be that the easiest way to interpret any sort of discomfort and pain is as punishment to the extent that, usually, some sort of punishment follows judgment. This is an assumption that Michel Foucault makes as well when he wrote about panopticism in the grander context of “the great confinement.” In his own words:

Confinement, that massive phenomenon, the signs of which are found all across the eighteenth-century Europe, is a “police” matter. Police in the precise sense that the classical epoch gave to it--that is, the totality of measures which make work possible and necessary for all who could not live without it [...]

In this context, and assuming that the situation has worsened since the 1700s, even eyes-with-minds in the forest following our every move might be an acceptable “natural panopticism” (as seen in Figure 4, swapping Madness in the city for “Madness” in nature) considering the societal alternative of wrap-around scrutiny, surveillance, and “security” in places such as the Mall of America.

Other minds sense our presence. This is obvious to anyone who has existed within or in the vicinity of wild spaces. Again, from a biosemiotic perspective, little occurs in the forest that is not noticed (interpreted) by some creature. Natural surveillance is everywhere. In this context, camouflage, concealment, mimicry and subterfuge can be seen as anti-panoptic tactics and strategies both in nature and in society.

In this sense, the full acceptance and immersion of “self” in nature, as the grand or original panoptic realm--living by its panoptic rules and conditions--may be as close as one gets to the existential condition: Un-maddening Nature (see Figure 4).

Trickster as a Mad Comedian

One sure sign that madness and nature go together is that humor is equally a salient coping strategy for madness, its expression, or its resistance (Fuery). The exploits and antics of Hermes, coyote or raven are psychological lessons, told in mythological terms, exemplifying the often-contradictory nature of our individual and collective self-nature gestalts. Coyote and raven often stand for our own human incapacities to understand the often-incommensurable nature of these relations. What a chicken is to coyote, is not the same chicken to another chicken, or to another coyote.

While facing the fluidity of natural forms and processes a human being must realize acts and produce modes of thinking that can be quite extant from civilized, social reality. Coyote and raven, as our role models, are norm breakers out of necessity and because human societies, left to their own tendencies and inertia, might not keep pace with nature itself.

The tension between conservatism and progressive trends is one example of this ancient dialectics.

In the midst of collective “madness,” the gurus, tailor made for a problem, emerge as charlatans. In their efforts, often sincere, to make a person whole again, if that is even or ever possible, they can become as strict as any conservative—as any fundamentalist.

From a serious (critical, falsifiable) “ecopsychological” perspective, it may not be quite fair to attribute, to claim, that certain popular writers, for example, are consciously taking advantage of basic human credulity and gullibility by muddling and oversimplifying the complexities of physics and consciousness. The more basic fact might be simply that their own credulity and gullibility coupled with the real study-complexities of areas such as quantum physics and consciousness studies

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(cognitive science and the philosophy of science) made more mud than clear water.

The writings of authors like Fritjof Capra, Gary Zukav, and Deepak Chopra (Respectively, 1975, 1979, & 1983) to name just one esoteric trio, might have represented, at least initially, a genuine effort on their part to make sense of and synthesize personal areas of interest, for sure, but equally to address or appease some deeply personal yearnings—more art and literature than physics or psychology.

Assuming that additional (vetted, peer-reviewed) studies on quantum physics, consciousness, human-“mind,” “evolution,” health, and their purported intersection, have not yet produced the types of syntheses the above authors were (are) proposing, we are then, for the time being, classifying their work as “art and literature.” Their work, to be fair, is imaginative, creative, and inspiring to some, but is realistically short of truly tantalizing, if by that word we mean that their collective insights have opened up new frontiers in the above-mentioned sciences or produced testable hypotheses. On the other hand, if any of their work, past and present, is sold as “spirituality,” then we must take it at its presented face value: inspirational opinion.

In the above context, it is usually an important psychological question in the study of art and literature, and in “the history of science,” to inquire into the basic motivations that drive any author to commit certain ideas to ink and pages.

In parsing any author’s thoughts and words (ideas) we might come to understand much about his/her need to give free reign to h/his imagination in the context of, let’s assume, genuine psycho-social explorations—personal quests and necessities, and other perturbations.

Genuinely so, they seem to be making sense of their own madness as well as critiquing the madness they witness around them. There are psychological needs for writers to write and for readers to read, and then to almost-believe, and then to make believe. At the end of this creative process, and in new age circles, the chicken ceases to be a featherless, legless carcass on a butcher’s table and comes to resemble painted disembodied

feathers wildly dancing in a Brazilian Carnaval, which like many other similar festivities, allows for the free reign of “madness” as culturally sanctioned rituals of psychological cleansing.

The manner in which a person or a society deals day to day with the slippery nature of “madness” is ultimately their choice. Any sort of formula exists or has been tried from the extremes of few freedoms with many rules, to fewer rules and many more freedoms; from the extremes of arbitrary socialness to becoming a hermit. However, to do so in a natural historical vacuum where no consideration is taken, no thought given, to the role that natural spaces, wildness, and natural processes play in the equation *eigenwelt*—*mitwelt*, is to exist, it seems, outside normal parameters.

Although “madness” may be a necessary function of our original self-nature gestalt formulations, the madness that Paul Shepard and Erich Fromm speak of, on the other hand, is of a different class and magnitude. To the extent that madness is equally rejection, acceptance, questioning, disruption, accommodation, transformation, and destruction, then it dances, feet with feet, with anthropocentric wishes or with a universe of natural things.

There may be no rhyme or reason (no teleology) for natural selection, but what it has left behind is true and tested madness of the sort that humans very much need. To step aside and invent our own separate dance seems, at the very least, rude and selfish.

* * *

CHAPTER SEVEN

We Know What We Know and Make Up the Rest

“He who wishes to find his way to the origin of the crisis must pass through the lost domain of truth, in order to revise it possessively; must traverse the domain of perplexity, to reach decision concerning himself; must strip off the trappings of the masquerade, in order to disclose the genuine that lies beneath.”
(Karl Jaspers)

In *Man in the Modern Age*, the German philosopher Karl Jaspers (1931/1957) wrote about the explosion of information (earth and social scientific discoveries) and the necessary and ensuing dialectics in the sciences as a means for maintaining a more or less credible and sustainable professional communication enterprise of checks and balances: a falsifiability process for disconfirming and confirming arguments in the face of recurring and new evidence.

One of the dangers of the proliferation of scientific information, for Jaspers (1957, p.151), included the likelihood of distorted and cacophonous interpretations and competition by parties ancillary and secondary to the main and more orthodox scientific enterprise:

A faith in science that has degenerated into superstition is closely akin to humbug. Anti-scientific superstition, in its turn, will masquerade as science, proclaiming ‘a true science which has superseded the science of the doctrinaires’. The mentality of our generation has been clouded by astrology, Christian Science, theosophy, spiritualism, clairvoyance, occultism, and the like. Anti-science stalks abroad to-day amid all parties and sects and manifests its influence among persons of the most diversified outlooks, pulverizing the very substance of rational human existence.

The almost universal ubiquity of the internet and of its seemingly endless possibilities for authorship only make Jasper's observation in 1931 that more poignant today.

Cognitively speaking, an individual's need for keeping up with and making sense of an ever-expanding information horizon almost guarantees that misunderstanding, oversimplification, and misapplication—pseudoscience—will be a common accidental and even strategic occurrence. In a different but related context, neuroscientist Peter Brugger (2001) wrote about the psychological phenomenon of apophenia, or our human tendency to naturally seek connections, to make sense, and derive deeper meanings from data. Although scientists share these natural human leanings toward elucidation and interpretation, the scientific method and the very public process of verification of results and methodology both act as proxy rationality and objectivity—a “critique” in the words of Michel Foucault (2010).

Oftentimes, pseudoscientific arguments are expressed as a “Texas sharpshooter fallacy,” or the over eagerness to utilize and manipulate a privileged subset of data while ignoring the entire (unknown) data set. In astrology, for example, a limited set of properties (birth times, locations, and trajectories), from an arbitrarily chosen planetary system (Earth's solar) and target planet (Earth), are taken to be causal determinants of human personality.

In this sense, then, pseudoscience is not only the diminished experience of rationality, but could take a more insidious role as a usurper of the centrality that it is to be a “human being.” This is the case because so-called rational processes (cognitive and proxy) are harder to teach and train, sustain in the long run, and then recuperate from in their absence or neglect. Their diminishing subtracts from human noetic potentiality. An astronomer and an astrologer are, no pun intended, worlds apart.

This work began as a study of meaning in the context of humanity's consideration and interpretation of feelings and other ways of knowing that attempt to clarify our place in “nature.” Whether orderly, chaotic, ministered to, utilitarian, or seen as

adversarial, different individuals and cultures throughout history define and redefine the rules and relational modes of “being” in “nature” or of “becoming” in “nature.”

The continued discourse human-nature, and its exegesis in various forms of “relationship” or “connection,” has been at the center of human becoming for most of human pre-historical and historical existence as an assumed logic and dynamic of being in the world. As part of these interpretations, geography is transformed into something else. In the words of Yi-Fu Tuan:

Certain human environments have figured prominently in humanity’s dreams of the ideal world: they are the forest, the seashore, the valley, and the island. The furnishing of an ideal world is a matter of removing the defects of the real one.

The last sentence of the above excerpt, and particularly its use of the words “defects” and “ideal,” sum up both, oftentimes contradictory, tendencies of a Super-Ego dutifully at work with its dual task of sanctioning and praising--cajoling us toward the next best thing, whether it was a figment of our imagination and thus an impossibility, or a basic fact of survival.

It is not surprising then, that we get it wrong so often, and by that I mean that our conflicted responses and manners of “becoming” end up canceling each other out while in the questioning of “nature” within and without. Our carrot-and-stick psyche approaches profoundly miss multiple chances at integration and reconciliation. One supposes that this psyche duality is profoundly fixed in genes as a quick and dirty motivational force propelling the human organism forward, most of the time, whatever “ahead” means for individuals or groups. Another explanation for this disjunction is that we are forever removed by virtue of language and self-awareness from “nature.” There is some relation between the two because it is through language that we classify and judge—idealize and misinterpret.

In a manner similar to a pre-linguistic babe, encoding and relating to “nature” should be easy until, as Heinz Werner (Werner and Kaplan, 1963) might have observed, we babble our

first words and make proximity distant and the feeding breast a long-forgotten conjecture and fetish of sexual pleasure. With language and self-awareness, even our most sincere, deeply felt and expressed missives go on unanswered. Nature, as it turns out, is mostly deaf to our Logos: one can shout at trees and rocks for days and expect no answer. Wild fox and raven flee in response to our approximation whether we shout or not. They too keep their thoughts to themselves.

Parceling psyche into selves and nature into capital venture, plots to be sold or traded, soon follows. We are left then with only fragments and a few clues about how to assemble these into a thing of beauty, constant and nourishing, if we are so lucky.

A few of these fragments we call 'rationality,' 'common sense,' 'reason,' or 'explanations'. But even these, as psychological science reports, are not sure bets. As David Dunning and Justin Kruger summarized (1999):

People tend to hold overly favorable views of their abilities in many social and intellectual domains. The authors suggest that this overestimation occurs, in part, because people who are unskilled in these domains suffer a dual burden: Not only do these people reach erroneous conclusions and make unfortunate choices, but their incompetence robs them of the metacognitive ability to realize it.

The Dunning-Kruger Effect, as it is now referred to, provides a basic psychologically verifiable principle that cuts across several important issues and could answer the questions:

1. Why do a significant number of people underestimate the reality (scientific, clear, and present) and impending inevitability of anthropogenically caused environmental mayhem?
2. Why do a significant number of politicians, who have access to the science of climate change, underestimate the reality and impending inevitability of anthropogenically caused environmental mayhem?

3. Why do a significant number of leaders of large corporations underestimate the reality (scientific, clear, and present) and impending inevitability of anthropogenically caused environmental mayhem?
4. Why do a significant number of people OVERESTIMATE the potential benefit of signifying “nature” as “spiritual,” as a realistic means or correcting path to address the impending inevitability of anthropogenically caused environmental mayhem?

If “nature” can’t read, write, or do arithmetic, how are prayers and wishful thinking a more useful Logos?

Another way of thinking about the potential and real incommensurability that could divide inner biology, shaped in natural spaces, and our interpretation and transfiguration of “geography” into increasingly artificially modified environs, is expressed by Charles Lewis:

We live in two worlds. Within the envelope of our skin is a biological entity which, through evolution, has been fine tuned for survival in natural environments. Around us lies not the green world in which we learned to survive and carry forward our species, but rather a world of our own creation, built of inert materials. The juxtaposition of our ancient biological selves with contemporary settings creates a conflict which is increasingly becoming the concern of environmentalists and psychologists... Problems arise because of discontinuities between the two worlds. Not only is there a physical difference between flesh and stone, but also a difference in rate of change for each.

Flesh and stone, and more specifically, the weakness of flesh (greed) when faced with the seemingly timeless substances of the world that yield bounties without protesting, together with the personal urgency of making a dent in the world, in a mere generation, vis-à-vis the timeless but ever-present features of the natural world, often pits “want” against “needs.”

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Saudi Arabians drained ancient aquifers under their desert in order to grow hay fields and feed cattle. Presently, Saudi Arabian companies are buying desert land in Arizona, digging into equally ancient American aquifers and doing the same, to then export hay around the world—"virtual water."

That a new moral code has not been established that prevents thoughtless greed from causing these sorts of calamities is disheartening. That there is no sense of outrage, that we are so jaded and accepting of these and so many other greedy practices is a really bad sign. This is another case of the shortsightedness of flesh and bones trying to out-think timeless substances.

Denial

Most rational people of a factual-humanistic and progressive bent are rightfully irritated, frustrated, and even angered by "deniers." One suspects that getting our collective "goat" is both fun and a principle motivation for deniers—just because they can. But surely, at some point, even flat-Earth believers, climate science deniers, and many others who act from implausible epistemologies, know better. But admitting it to our faces, giving us the satisfaction of the facts being what they are—facts—and accepting the loss of profit that this would entail, or risking the mere appearance of diminished power, are not options. Instead of facts and rectification, their arguments are chosen on the merits of their Sophist's rhetorical brute force. Old vendettas and the continuance of bullying might explain the rest.

Verily, there is nothing new under the sun. Reason vs lust, sensibility vs pride, common-sense vs bloated affluence, equality vs privilege, humility vs hubris, reform vs dynastic glut--these forces and many more have led us into social conflict, war, and carnage before.

The unthinkable has happened. Sophist-deniers now hold the reins of power and are bent on retribution. For many indignities suffered, for every argument lost on the merits of "the weight of the evidence," there stands a sophist-denier ready to dismantle the very edifice of reason. At the moment, this is the only

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psychology that could explain what has already transpired and what is likely to unfold.

Once again, human dignity, freedom from ignorance, tolerance and reverence, as well as a commitment to sustaining natural processes, are on the chopping block. Despair is, however, not an option.

That this continues to be the case in the 21st century makes most rational people frustrated and even angry. Writing for the New York Times, Curt Stager (2017) reviewed a recently published propaganda booklet published by the conservative think tank, The Heartland Institute, dubiously titled “Why Scientists Disagree About Global Warming.” Stager wonders about the potential impact of disinformation when it comes to a significant percentage of American teachers who are themselves doubtful about global warming:

The cover letter inside, however, made the book’s premise clear. “Claims of a ‘scientific consensus’” on climate change, it read, “rest on two college student papers, the writings of a wacky Australian blogger, and a non-peer-reviewed essay by a socialist historian.” In fact, multiple surveys of the scientific literature show that well over 90 percent of published climate scientists have concluded that recent global warming is both real and mostly the result of human activity.

Despite the widespread availability of scientific and public data reports that make global warming itself and its consequences on planetary stability a reality to be faced by present and future generations of humans and accompanying animal brethren, Stager wondered about the likely impact that disinformation may have on just a small percentage of teachers and the students they teach (Plutzer, et al, 2016):

Judging from the responses of educators I know who have received “Why Scientists Disagree About Global Warming” in recent weeks, most copies of it are likely to be ignored or discarded. But if only a small percentage of teachers use it as

intended, they could still mislead tens of thousands of students with it year after year.

Reiterating previous positions, critical thinking in general matters if we are going to raise future generations of conscientious and educated citizens. Democratic principles themselves are at risk. Democracy, being fundamentally an agreement around verifiable facts, crumbles when information is deviant or when credible, reputable experts are silenced.

The Presumption of a “Rational Agent”

Friedrich Engels used the phrase “false consciousness” to explain and signify the complex collusive dynamics (intended or unconscious) between ideological thinking, its material reality, and the structuring of societies (its people) around value systems (economic-political-religious).

The assumption that people are basically rational beings and that with enough information they can be trusted to make the right choices is an aspect of false consciousness. That is, the ideal of a free and empowered person is also an aspect of the propaganda, “the rational agent,” when the agent has no clue of the major forces creating his/her reality.

An overhaul of human consciousness, at times an impish endeavor within new age circles, quickly crashes “head on” with the realities of the perversity of a diverse human lot, each head/heart going its own way. The devilish fantasy is that with enough wise shepherders and coyote-tricksters around, humanity will follow in the direction of infinite possibilities, or at least, toward happy marigolds and forever sparkling waters. Genghis Khan, who was not so keen, we are told, on docile conversions—gentle persuasions--slaughtered thousands for naught; long walls still came down and the Chinese forgot how to hunt for food and pray to their dragon and monkey gods.

The market forces (and its political propaganda) that drive consumers to make seemingly “rational” choices are an orchestrated masquerade of self-interested motives on the part of people who wish to make a profit and a public who believes their

limited range of “choices” matter. In this context, I have adopted and expanded Engels’ semiotics in an attempt to elucidate how entrenched are the thinking and behaviors that undermine sustainable approaches.

I favor the voice and text of Paul Shepard (1998) because his own synthesis takes us further in diagnosing the problem of “false consciousness” vis a vis the impotency of making sustainable approaches work for all of us:

In the face of predominant anthropocentric values, the vision of “natural” human kind seems eccentric, regressive, even perverse. Our idea of ourselves embedded in the context of the shibboleth of growth places us at odds with the notion of kinship with nature. When we grasp fully that the best expressions of our humanity were not invented by civilization but by cultures that preceded it, that the natural world is not only a set of constraints but of context within which we can more fully realize our dreams, we will be on the way to a long overdue reconciliation between opposites that are of our own making. The tools we have invented for communicating our ideas and carrying information have actually impaired our memories. We must begin by remembering beyond history.

The analogy semiosis : psychology :: biosemiosis : eco-psychology describes anthropocentrism as a form of “false consciousness” in light of a revision of these values and in the context of a healthy ecological standard where “mind” is returned to authentic “natural” existential evolutionary theaters. It is not an argument (never was) to revert to an essential primitivism, but a “recuperation,” a rescuing of a whole set of sustainable and resilience values that makes for a more agreeable psychology. That ideal balance it seems, if ever reached at all, is the “ecopsychological” as the main text (ecosemiotics).

This ideal might take the form of a revolutionary imperative for some, or for others a day to day healing that incorporates, little by little, a few and important features that make for “better living.” Halfway between these two approaches are the small

scale Epicurean communal ideals when a handful of friends, a chicken coop, and art lessons come together into a simpler and more real life—economies with “being” values.

Thinking with Fairies

It is perhaps not a coincidence that the Victorian and Edwardian eras coincided with the revival of and renewed interest in fairy lore (Silver, 1999). This was mostly an urban preoccupation when, at the same time, people lost their “knowledge of the woods.” For an urbanite returning to the dark woods, barely able to distinguish between hedgehog and robin tracks, most signs might have appeared as a fairy afoot. In the 1960s, with the help of “mind-manifesting” drugs, re-channeling fairies, extraterrestrials, and other energies, Findhorn was founded. A benign microclimate and good manure, not “devas,” reasonably speaking, accounted for the size of the vegetables.

A scientific oriented “ecopsychology” should inquire about the psycho-social and historical interactions that give rise to all sorts of magical thinking. If it is “psychology,” fairies are symptoms, not ontological-objective certainties. If “ecopsychology” has anything to do with “ecology,” then autecological and synecological approaches should provide a definitive description of fairy population distributions and relationships therein.

If it can be shown that a good portion of an individual’s thinking is, in fact, based on erroneous, fanciful, or habitually preferred assumptions, and furthermore that h/her psychology derives from a fictional core, idiosyncratic or collectively shared, then easily identifiable and catalogued ideological and magical thinking (wishful thinking) of any type is either fictionalized psychology, or psychologized fiction. This would be the case in claims pertaining to transpersonalization processes that overreach (conjure up) into preferred transcendental formulas that, when sufficiently analyzed, are all-too-familiar-fantastic—a literature of the mind.

The fact that human minds are naturally prone to fictionalizing psychology or nature, or to naturalizing and psychologizing

fiction, is deeply interesting in its own right. These observations are of some relevance, particularly when studying the many ways in which humans have fictionalized “nature” and adapted these fictions to psychological “ways of connecting.”

An Alternative Hypothesis: The Idiotsphere

In contrast to a “Noosphere,” or as a logical consequence of this idea, it is proposed that recent and past events suggest that humanity is mostly uncaring, selfish, self-centered, and self-serving and, therefore, that in the aggregate, should “planetary consciousness” be considered a factual force, lack of thoughtfulness will spread faster and wider than rational thinking. Therefore, thoughtlessness, like faster weed propagation, will outpace the growth of Kumbaya presumed contravening forces that aim at a “rise of consciousness.”

Unknown at this point is whether negative or positive feedback loops are involved in this process. If the former, extreme thoughtlessness selects itself out of natural adaptive processes to acceptable (tolerable) levels. If the latter, consciousness reaches levels of instability where it might be hard to tell what’s unhelpful-deviant or thoughtless, and what isn’t.

Last year, the Pew Research Center conducted a poll on attitudes and information about climate change among adult Americans (“The Politics of Climate,” May 10-June 6, P.R.C., 2016a). Some of the results were as follows:

- 48% believed that global climate change was due to human activity
- 31% assumed these changes were due to natural causes
- 20% said that there was no evidence of global climate change

That is, more than half of the Americans sampled were clueless about the realities of global climate changes as publicized by reliable scientific information sources. As one might suspect, political ideology matters when it comes to interpreting and accepting scientific evidence:

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- Conservative Republicans: 15% human activity; 48% natural patterns; & 36% “There is no solid evidence”
- Liberal Democrats: 79% human activity; 14% natural patterns; & 7% “There is no solid evidence”

The above two extremes and ends of a normal distribution are somewhat ‘balanced’ by intermediate or more moderate ideological identifications with response patterns that are nevertheless not very reassuring:

- Moderate/Liberal Republicans: 34% human activity; 46% natural patterns; % 27% “There is no solid evidence”
- Moderate/Conservative Democrats: 63% human activity; 22% natural patterns; % 15% “There is no solid evidence”

In the same poll, means for addressing global climate changes were split into two camps:

- 61% believed that major changes (attitudes and behaviors) within the next fifty years would address climate change
- 55% believed that technological advances would address climate change

The above data suffice as a preliminary a means to inquire into the possible psycho-social causes driving these almost polar opposite trends. In general terms, it could be said that a continued utilitarian interpretation of “nature,” a neglect of the unconsciousness of “mind,” a persistent and collective denial that prevents concerted and collaborative actions—sustainable behaviors--are important factors in understanding our present inability to effectively address global environmental challenges (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith, 2008).

In many ways that matter, personal denial, unconscious and conscious collusion, the inability or unwillingness to openly and honestly examine unconscious motivations, and a dependency on the goods that “nature” provides in order to maintain a perceived

“high standard” of living, could be sound starting points from which to begin a Psychology of the Anthropocene.

From a psycho-social perspective, the question is: What other mainstream social scientific ideas, constructs, or factors could be employed or investigated in order to shed light on these complex and dire challenges? The above main factors [1. Personal denial--unconscious and conscious collusion; 2. The inability or unwillingness to openly and honestly examine unconscious motivations and processes; and 3. A dependency (continued exploitation of) on the goods that “nature provides” in order to appease unsustainable life styles] could be broken down into and expanded to include at least ten socio-psychological, cognitive, and affective tendencies (dispositional and situational) which, in tandem, do not bode well for a timely resolution of these pressing challenges.

En toto, and provisionally, these may be named and categorized as a Collusive Credulity Complex Construct (CCCC) to signify their social effects of both ill-action and inaction. They are:

1. Self-serving propensities (self-serving and confirmation biases)
2. Self-deception (Dunning-Kruger Effect)
3. Subservience (conformity, compliance, and obedience)
4. Wishful, magical or fantasy thinking
5. Impulsivity and reactivity (unreasonableness)
6. Misunderstanding or misapplication of in-group traditional knowledge
7. Decontextualized (ineffective, irrelevant, or antagonistic) “spirituality”
8. Shallow (‘green-washed,’ decontextualized) tribalism
9. Adult but immature over-identification (‘persona’ cults)
10. Lower levels of education and scientific literacy

Extreme ideological group identification alone could account for factors 1-4. Level of education might account for factors 5-10. There is also a significant overlap between factors 1-4 and 5-10.

We Live in Interesting Times

In 2016, a significant number of U.S. voters elected a new president who, presently and swiftly, has acted on rationalizations or base impulses that a serious and thoughtful person could characterize as potentially injurious to vulnerable people and to life on this planet. As social experiments go, Americans will be the first subjects to be exposed to the results of these rationalizations and impulses, with seemingly very little power to prevent many questionable policies from being enacted.

Sound psycho-social theory and research, originating from accepted areas such as the Psychology of Religion, have already provided theories, models, perspectives, and data from which to make testable inferences and inquire about our collective inability to act upon a basic and necessary understanding of the exigencies of global climate threats. For example, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1769), writing almost 250 years ago, described the pervasive overlap and effects of religious dogma in civil society, referring to it as “civil religion.” Other authors have written about the psycho-sociological effects of this overlap, specifically when describing the U.S. main societal orientation as being a “civil religion” (Bellah, 1967; Greely, 1972; Wilcox 1996; Wilson, 2000; and Green, 2000).

The proposed ten dimensions of the Collusive Credulity Complex Construct introduced herein could be applied to the study of other and seemingly benign, alternative lifestyles and belief systems that are equally fundamentalist in their attitudes and actions (e.g. so-called “New Age” movements). That is, to the extent that an aversion to scientific inquiries (the scientific method and scientists) and the embracing of pseudo-science make for a reduction of rational and systematic approaches to information (less information literacy and critical thinking), “a diminution of being” might be suspected (Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Dunning, Johnson, Ehrlinger, & Kruger, 2003; Cone-sa-Sevilla, 2017).

There are some reasons for cautious optimism. Since the bulk of the aforementioned research began (circa 1960s), generational shifts have caused significant deviations in social trends.

Although millennials worldwide are less likely to participate in politics than voters from the baby-boom and X generations, they, nevertheless, across several core social identification dimensions (national customs/traditions, traditional religion, or nationalism), seem to be less attached to ideology (P.R.C., 2016b).

Ignoring the socio-historical roots of multiple, complex, and interacting global crises or the many and ever-increasing ramifications of our collective, conscious and unconscious denudement of nature (Wendling, 2009) comes at a high price.

Although the scientific method is, by a long and painstaking historical process, a product of Greco-Roman-Islamic-European thinkers, its fruits and promises pale in comparison to the pernicious anti-science and pseudo-science tendencies here described as the Collusive Credulity Complex.

We are now faced with different situations and increasing occurrences and volumes of world population displacements with concomitant erosion of individual and collective (environmental) resilience. At best, our efforts seem reactionary and reflexive. To the extent that we have a responsibility as scientists and individuals to address these problems, an emergent paradigmatic nexus begs for new forms of intervention (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith, 2008).

The psycho-historical investigation of the reasons behind the systematic destruction of entire ecosystems, starting with the Mediterranean basin (Hughes, 1975; Ehrlich, et al., 1978), coupled with similar and concerted efforts by other areas in psychology, point to a new direction and paradigm with an urgent mission-focus: Psychology in the Anthropocene.

* * *

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Murmuration of Transfixitive Wants

“Culture now signifies something which never acquires a form, but is to emerge with extraordinary intensity out of a vacancy into which there is a speedy return. The associated estimates of value are typical. Men are quickly satiated with what they have heard, and are therefore ever on the search for novelties since nothing else tickles their fancy. Novelties are acclaimed as the primal knowledge of which people are in search; but they are whistled down the wind a moment after, since all that is wanted is sensation.” (Karl Jaspers)

Global warming is only one example of human-caused environmental problems. To the extent that these problems reflect the paw-tracks of intentions, activities, and behaviors of human beings, they are, more accurately defined, psychological problems with underlying social, economic, and political forces. In this sense and context, “ecopsychology” is also the examination of the interface between thinking, affect, and behavior and the perception and interpretation of “nature” for whatever human means or ends. Under one description, the study of the interactive effects of ‘thinking, affect, and behavior’ is also the study of “personality,” and in this work, of a unique sense of that construct: Psyche-Natur. These efforts continue to be an extension or continuation of mainstream psychological studies, or deserving of their own emphasis or perspective, given the fundamental importance of the aforementioned construct.

In this sense and context, human-caused environmental problems signify problematic (shortsighted, avaricious, ignorant, etc.) or even dysfunctional psychology.

At an existential level, the eternal and psychic reality of a world coming together into new forms, syntithenai (construction), and also being pulled apart into components, analyein

(destruction), are foundational assumptions and formulations in the sciences and in their derivative poetic, other artistic, and/or bastard intuitive liturgies.

Recently, the Italian towns of Amatrice, Accumoli, Arquata and Pescara del Tronto were hardest hit by an earthquake. The human horror and confusion in the aftermath of natural catastrophes such as this is beyond words. It is terrible! We say to ourselves, “I hope I never experience their suffering.” In the media, phrases such as “acts of god,” “terrible nature,” or “mother Earth’s doing” are imperfect forms (childish, uninformed, or tentative) for acknowledging the geological and “brute” reality of a changing planet.

But no virgin sacrifice or heartfelt prayer ever stopped Pele or Chimborazo from erupting. There might be comfort in these actions, however, earthquakes and lava eruptions are physical-natural processes, not beings—deaf, blind, and unfeeling to our desires or supplications.

The native populations of Amatrice, Accumoli, Arquata and Pescara del Tronto, and countless visiting tourists, took these picturesque surroundings for granted—took their daily toils, small and grand pleasures, one suspects, as a steady-state and given existence.

Heraclitus observed (ποταμοῖσι τοῖσιν αὐτοῖσιν ἐμβαίνουσιν, ἕτερα καὶ ἕτερα ὕδατα ἐπιρρεῖ), “Ever-newer waters flow on those who step into the same rivers,” and (τὰ ὄντα ἰέναι τε πάντα καὶ μένειν οὐδέν) “All entities move and nothing remains still.” An inclusive science of “ecopsychology” has to be accepting, or at least aware, that the world, nay, the universe, coming together into new forms, *syntithenai*, and also being pulled apart into components, *analein*, are foundational and ongoing processes without exceptions. Earlier, we presented the idea and reality of a world in flux in panarchic ecological terms.

That is, psychology and ecology, as sciences, operate under the assumption that there is potential suffering and chaos-transcendence--in destruction (*analein*) as well as in creation (*syntithenai*). The transitional, steady-state forms (e.g. “happiness”) are a mere short-lived illusion. The artist too takes

this fluidity and dynamics to heart. This foundational interplay is, after all, what we term “art.”

Biophilia and Other Euphemisms of Nature Affiliation

A sign of our desperate times and perhaps misplaced optimism is the exclusive and absolutist sense in which people, even professionals, overuse and, eventually, semantically calcify favored tags. It is of particular interest when self-identified “ecopsychologists” latch onto terms such as biophilia and make them into some sort of hopeful mantra that attempts to explain everything. In general, this happens for many words that are judged to carry great psychological import (“god,” “justice,” “nature,” “heaven,” “sustainability,” etc.).

Tags come and go, thus one suspects that next year they’ll be onto something else—or not.

That the very term biophilia has a rich and complex history (E. Fromm, E. O. Wilson) and that its meaning is nuanced toward several possible but precise aims is oftentimes lost to some folks who lean in the direction of senseless mantra chanting. In the context of Howard Gardner’s proposal of multiple intelligences, biophilic tendencies are exemplified in his “naturalistic intelligence.” Because this is a bona fide intelligence, one suspects that it is not so widespread, pure, or manifested in its fullest capacity equally in every person. For if every person expressed naturalistic intelligence with concomitant biophilic tendencies in full form and function, our planet would be a very different place.

Another argument is that like all the other intelligences (linguistic, interpersonal, logical, etc.), some aspects of naturalistic intelligence can be taught. When this argument is made, it is usually in the form of efforts to ensure that important concepts of environmental education are taught early on. Another way of making this argument is that this is part of a greater effort for raising planetary, “green consciousness.” It is not clear, however, if proponents of these (latter) efforts privilege “consciousness raising” as some specialized personal transformation toward oceanic enlightenment. If so, this seems an exclusive enough

journey not to matter, in critical short and practical terms, for expediently “saving the planet.”

Furthermore, and as presented in the previous chapter, if this notion of “consciousness raising” implies the hope that a “noosphere” of sorts is teleologically progressing toward ultimate perfection, then we have us another sort of religion with little to show in the form of evidence. Present and past circumstances, however, point to the very opposite of this claim, and in fact suggests that we live in an ever spiraling downwards “idiotsphere.”

Proof of this horrible descent is that major and minor religions and countless nature “cults,” past and present, have failed to achieve these or similar goals or to prevent our probable apocalyptic demise. This is evidence that there are significant psychological limitations to personal growth and transpersonal enterprises—that these efforts were always limited to a handful of conscientious people. Thus novo-Druid approaches and corresponding sentimentalities seem to be of psychological importance to a few mistletoe collectors but useless when it comes to the science of planetary intervention. It seems as though “primitivism” will not be a universally accepted model for collective transformation any time soon—unless a truly horrific and dystopian future befalls us.

Moreover, the semantic calcification of terms like biophilia into polarized overly optimistic goals obscures the fact that gardeners, for example, kill for a living. That is, naturalistic intelligence with its supposedly concomitant biophilic tendencies make room for processes of death and decay (destruction even) as integral to “life.” To loudly and continuously cheer for “love” and “life” without accounting for the natural reality of death processes is tantamount to neuroticism. It has always been a psychologically important reality that the repressed and unconscious anxiety of death and decay is suppressed, displaced, denied, or sublimated.

That most people can and do experience a rich variety of deeply felt sentiments, emotions, insights, images, and other mental experiences, in nature or elsewhere, does not necessarily

imply a credible-solid (unquestionable) and confirmable metaphysics. A failure to recognize that complex nervous systems, for reasons of evolutionary adaptation, are bent on forced semiosis, leads some to privileging subjective experience as a channel-effect of ‘marvelous and mysterious forces.’ Be that as it may, it takes some effort to begin accepting the profound inadequacy of metaphors. Even when these are oftentimes apt approximations of internal, subjective experience, they may say nothing about stand-alone metaphysics.

Some philosophers (and the average speaker) have taken for granted that familiar words are more than metaphors which describe existing ontologies, when in fact they could be instances of catachresis, or using words in the wrong, reality context. For example, according to Jacques Derrida, the founding concepts of metaphysics (e.g. logos, happiness, natura) are instances of catachresis and not actual (demi-causal) metaphors. No matter how fervently and religiously a person claims to have had a “magnificent nature connection,” no one truly knows what this experience is about, and even if we could know, it would more likely be a descriptor of subjectively bound or contained experiences.

The giddy jump from “I feel this” to “fairy dust” is both a disturbing and telling aspect of human psychological semiosis. To the extent that, early on in development, we begin to associate certain feelings with less than certain metaphors, words and their meanings come to be feared and are also comforting. Like comfort foods, comforting words manage, as placebos do, to reduce anxiety taking us into the familiar. Words, their meaning valences, are the actual currency irrespective of their implied, or hoped-for metaphysics or ontology. This fundamental acknowledgement ought to be the beginning of scientifically serious psychological discussions—a first premise.

In this sense, the phrase “nature connection” is a case of compounded catachresis. That is, it reveals next to nothing about the intricacies of “nature” or what is meant by “connection.” Intuition is usually in the eye of the beholder.

Our Many Disabilities

To the extent that “ecopsychological” scientific research is minimal at best and testable constructs need to be newly invented and vetted, there are some analogical approaches that could inform the general public about the “raison d’être” for pursuing such work.

The term “disability” could be easily applied to most forms of extreme nature alienation where body, mind, affect, and social relations are distant and extant from natural adaptations and from tested and enduring social organizations. That is, one could identify artificial umwelts as being antagonistic to or only prosthetically supportive of numerous human interactions today.

For example, and in this very sense, the over consumption of fats and sweets, their resulting effects on greater lipid mass and on the onset of earlier sugar metabolic diseases; the physical changes made to furniture in order to accommodate our more corpulent bodies; the redefinition of space and locomotion (walking); the structural rethinking of buildings and modes of transportation, to include just a few umwelt situations, can be defined in terms of actual disabilities. The term “impairment” would also apply if changes in human genotype and phenotype are detrimental and limiting to the types of activities, survival obligations, and possibilities that humans once enjoyed while still embedded in natural pursuits. The strong argument is that most people who live in developed countries are dependent on artificial modes of transportation, live in urban situations where social estrangement or alienation are the norm, and generally consume in excess of their genomic and phenotypical needs, are in fact disabled and impaired in fundamental and testable ways.

To reiterate, to the extent that so-called indigenous cultures and their accumulated wisdom, too, fell victim to candy and burgers, not only was transmitted culture a poor defender of unhealthy trends but one cannot even rely, like Jungians do, on the notion that some unknown ‘genetic’ force will come to their (and our) rescue.

To wit, the terms “ancestral,” “genetic,” or “racial,” when used in the context of the construct “memory,” are sometimes

used interchangeably, usually to imply or directly signify a Jungian form of “collective unconscious,” still operating and directing seemingly innate psychological tendencies.

That “collective unconscious” was ambiguous and misinformed to begin with does not deter Jungian followers from continuing to make incredible claims, mostly in order to justify any number of outlandish beliefs that might include (a short list): reincarnation, autistic giftedness, and the continuation of “esoteric wisdom” that might be tapped into via, for example, hallucinogenic admixtures, trance states, or mindfulness practices, that is, “anything-goes psychology.”

Presumably, and in a Jungian sense, the human mind can “tune into” the ancestral memories of indigenous cultures who had an inside track and affinity with “nature,” “channeling” these insights in order to solve present-day woes, from infertility to midwifing “planetary consciousness.”

Of psychological interest is the characterization of Freud’s approaches as “male-centered” (animus) and those of Jung’s, particularly the late Jung, as being less so (anima). The former seriously embraced evolutionary ideas as a step toward understanding the human psyche. The latter opted for actually religious, pseudo-religious and mythical interpretations of culturally available symbols in order to account for the biology and the cognitive science he did not understand—which developed after his death. It is an empirical question whether modern-day “Jungian lovers” are drawn to his psychology as a type of anima projection—as a need to feminize the psyche.

A Whole World of Good (Better) Science Has Come after Jung

As a matter of historical fact, at the time of C. G. Jung’s death, June 1961, the gene-centered view of the then modern evolutionary synthesis was just being formulated by W. D. Hamilton, George C. Williams, and John Maynard Smith (early and mid-1960s); thus Jung’s knowledge of genetics, if he had any intellectual sophistication at all in these sciences when he was alive, was lacking in fundamentals—what was to come.

Equally, when it comes to cognitive advances in understanding memory, Jung's death in 1961 precedes the important foundational work of Atkinson and Shrifin (1968) and of Craik and Lockhart (1972).

Without the above foundational work in the biological and the cognitive sciences, which comes after the Jungian "era," it is next to impossible to grant Jung a deeper, informed understanding implied in the tags "genetic" and "memory."

Additionally, most present-day scientifically credible definitions of "memory" emphasize three basic processes: encoding, storage, and retrieval. Moreover, dividing "memory" into implicit and explicit, or into procedural and semantic---modular systems---allows for the neurocognitive empirical testing of actual (in present and real time) neuronal pathways and cerebral modules.

Given this present-day scientific literature, there is no iota of support for continuing to justify the ambiguous use of these terms (e.g. "ancestral," "genetic," or "racial") as if they relate to anything important and known about neuroscience and neurobiology. Specifically, Karl S. Lashley looked for engrams everywhere in the brain only to discover that memory is widely "distributed." No ancestral memories have been found in the human brain.

It seems only appropriate then to talk about "ancestral memories" in metaphorical and literary terms. That is, in this sense, orally transmitted stories and biblical or Buddhist texts, for example, that are written, become, with time, "ancestral memories."

The fact that they were written does not imply, however, that they are free of factual errors or that the "wisdom" they espouse is actually relevant to solving the unprecedented and multi-dimensional problems modern humans face today.

It takes arduous scientific and statistical training, thinking and skills to understand the implications of the gene-centered and neurocognitive revolutions which a non-sensical and empty phrase such as "the collective unconscious" (genetic, ancestral, or racial memories), cannot even begin to "gloss over."

Feathers and Drum Medicines

Placebo effects (Dunlop, et al, 2012) are, assuredly, the hopeful and tenacious workings of a complex “mind” fulfilling and reaching out to desired outcomes—prompted by the appropriate context. The motivation to “get well,” when properly channeled, is the companion co-variant benefit of the placebo effect. That a percentage of humans, through expectation and hope, can temporarily or routinely alleviate physical pain, on their own, suggests that a previously unreached ceiling of latent psychosomatic capacities has been broken.

As useful and important as these findings are (Dunlop, et al, 2012), no one should magically conflagrate the body’s previously unrecognized (underestimated by medical science) aptitude for natural self-healing. The healing successes attributed to any shaman depend on it, for without the expectation of this normal distribution of natural or spontaneous recuperation in the population, medical interventions would seem less miraculous or scientifically prognosticable.

More prosaically, then, “nature” is a “healer” only to the extent that we wish it to be, that we allow it to be. Now, to turn the knowable upside down, it is equally likely to assume that feathers and drums, and a few choice incantations, are the cause behind a placebo effect—the independent variables and determinants. More often than not, though, one suspects a feather is just a feather, and a beating drum and continuous chanting no more than repetitive noise, where the patient simply wants to escape it all as soon as possible.

So-called “authentic shamans” tend to be, after all, rather frightening, shabby, and squalid characters. And therein lies the other third of their “powers.” Appeasing and pleasing the shaman are as much an outcome of “wellness” as nimble feet and harder stools.

To wit, much of so-called “magic” is both verbal and behavioral polysemy. Polysemy refers to a multitude of meanings that a given word could convey in different contexts. The word Venus, for example, might refer to a planet, a mythical figure, or a famous tennis player.

Ecopsychology Revisited

For Dick Hebdige polysemy means that “Each text is seen to generate a potentially infinite range of meanings,” making, according to Richard Middleton, “Any homology, out of the most heterogeneous materials, possible. The idea of signifying practice — texts not as communicating or expressing a preexisting meaning but as ‘positioning subjects’ within a process of semiosis — changes the whole basis of creating social meaning.”

The following are examples of Polysemy that can be extended toward an understanding of the ease with which humans make arbitrary labels to mean much more than meaning object/idea:

Venus

1. A planet; 2. A goddess (mythology); 3. A famous tennis player

Crane

1. A bird; 2. A type of construction equipment; 3. To strain out one's neck

Examples of “nature” as a Polysemy:

1. a thing (female or male, good or evil); 2. a cause (prima causa); 3. an effect; 4. absolutely nothing; 5. a psychological tendency; 6. a propensity; 7. a process; 8. a force; 9. a deity; 10. recreational space; 11. a TV show; 12. a girl I used to know

Grammarians (Strunk & White, 1979) recognize the confusability and arbitrariness of language with respect to our use of the word “nature”:

Nature should be avoided in such vague expressions as 'a lover of nature,' 'poems about nature.' Unless more specific statements follow, the reader cannot tell whether the poems have to do with natural scenery, rural life, the sunset, the untouched wilderness, or the habits of squirrels.

(Strunk & White, "The Elements of Style," 3rd ed., 1979)

The above fairly innocent and innocuous linguistic habits demonstrate that it is fairly easy to be careless with the words we use, particularly the most important one of all, “nature.” In addition to remediable ignorance, there is also deliberate confusability that makes, as with any aspect of magic, the chicken entrails appear as if they were human parts extracted under the auspices of a “medicine man.”

Polysemy in language reflects our thinking. When left to our undisciplined devices, a sort of murmuration of transfixitive wants runs amok in mind and language. We say things we want to believe in, we believe the things we say or want to say, and we keep saying them: “nature” is a bird, my mother ...

If disciplined discernment matters, then like Alice in Wonderland, we are always called to a questioning of discourse at a basic level despite bizarre and uncanny challenges. The following exchange, revised to make a final point, is one we might face when arguing with a proverbial stoned caterpillar who seems too sure that no rules apply to a valid and critical inquiry.

Another “Nice Knock-Down Argument”:

Alice-Earth Egg Revisited

- “I don't know what you mean by ‘nature,’” Alice said.
- Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course, you don't-till I tell you. I meant ‘there's a nice knock-down argument for you!’”
- “But ‘nature doesn't mean ‘a nice knock-down argument,’” Alice objected.
- “When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean-neither more nor less.”
- “The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”
- “The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master, that's all.”

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- Alice was too much puzzled to say anything; so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. "They've a temper some of them- particularly verbs: they're the proudest-adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs-however, I can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability! That's what I say!"

(Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass, Ch. VI)

* * *

EPILOGUE

Feathers, Crystals, and Plenty of Whiskey--in the Apocalypse

"It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen." (George Orwell)

Undeniably so, a good number of environmental problems are human-caused, impacting both local and global ecology and climate. These include: deforestation, extinction of multiple and once abundant species, emission of greenhouse gases, overpopulation, industrial use and scale of pesticides and fertilizers, among many others. There is no "Planet B," there are no second chances, and no foreseeable rescue missions coming from "out there." Mars is a dead planet where Angel's Falls do not majestically tumble from tepuis.

Humanity and fellow species have seldom experienced an intrusion of this magnitude and duration to the whole of life—on a planetwide level of assault. The severity (quantity and quality) of these problems has intensified in the last three hundred years, even though humans have been altering their environments and causing significant environmental changes (the loss of mega fauna around the world) since *Homo erectus*.

This new order of magnitude of abuse and destruction has direct consequences to human psychology as well as to the way societies organize themselves. It is very difficult at times to know what interventions are more important. The genesis and continuation of these major disruptions took time, so, equally, correcting and normalizing them (merely stabilizing these trends) will also take time.

The psychological dynamics contributing to and exacerbating the above situations are themselves complex and require sophisticated methodologies--serious science. Words like "sustainability," "harmony," or "co-existence" mean very little if we do not understand how these relate to actual ecological and/or psychological science.

Ecopsychology Revisited

In one way or another, and while employing diverse approaches, “ecopsychologists” around the world begin their work under the assumptions depicted in the following illustration (Figure 5).

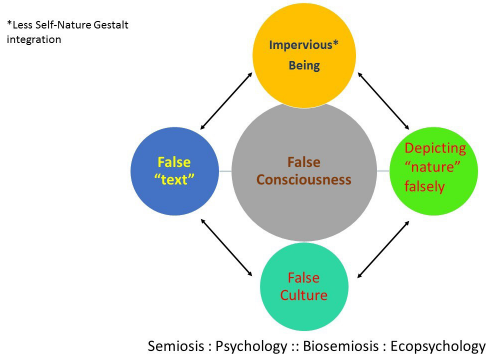


Figure 5

The ecopsychological vicious circle here produced is a systems’ view of cause-and-effect dynamics and interactions illustrating the folly of expecting easy or quick fixes to these intricate and complex challenges. In view of this, “ecopsychologists” are in for the long haul.

Two major challenges for future reiterations of “ecopsychology,” for it to be taken more seriously by mainstream ecology and psychology, follow:

1. An increased implementation of evidence-based approaches that can shed light on the specific and varied ways in which humans interpret ‘self,’ ‘nature,’ and ‘connection’ (Self-Gestalt Nature Affiliations).
2. Increased collaboration between professionals in other areas within psychology and across other social and behavioral sciences in order to put forth and validate constructs of “nature connection” (Nature Affiliations).

Since the beginning of “civilized” life, and through almost uncountable cycles of psychological, social, and ecological

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upheavals, there has never been a greater need to capitalize on the insights of “ecopsychology.”

To the extent that “ecopsychology” is both an evaluation of an existing self-gestalt ‘circumstance,’ and a means toward new accommodations of meaning-action-directions (toward new self-nature gestalt configurations), it promises and fulfills an important function in the whole of psychology.

More importantly, ecopsychology fills in an essential knowledge niche as part of a new set of psychological survival and resilience skills now sorely needed if we are to survive on this planet beyond the next millennium.

Otherwise, Carry On...

As we have seen, a recurring theme in “ecopsychology,” in its present and inchoate form, is the continuation and extension of “spirit” in juxtaposition with other privileged and/or habitually preferred (perhaps even psychologically needed) practices or causes, such as spirituality-somethings; farcical chemistry or physics; yoga; coopted and partially understood indigenous lore; extreme diets; and a multitude of fetishes. That is, its inchoate form resembles and revisits earlier efforts to make “the soul” a central study of psychology.

That these mostly emotion-laden, unreasoned, and/or idiosyncratic amalgamations are prevalent says more about the psychological needs of the persons espousing these sentiments or beliefs than about “nature.” Certainly, it is nothing new that humans project their hopes, desperation, and wish-fulfillment thinking onto the shifting and accepting canvas, “nature.” No new “ecopsychology” is needed to state the obvious. Devotion toward a particular aspect of or force in nature and our many votive offerings are, after all, the staple of archeology.

Devotion, however, no matter how deeply felt or practiced, does not a real god make, nor do rumors and whispers of “spirit” a real spirit make. But when these intentions and projections come with psychology degrees and names, they are also wrapped and presented in an aura of imprimatur credibility. Then, it is a question of great interest and value to inquire further whether

these unreasoned expressions of “nature connection” are themselves the byproducts or even the very symptoms of “eco-anxiety” or aspects of other more fundamental psychological work that needs tending to. To be fair, that an aspiration toward a communal, planetary praxis centered around spiritual motifs (votives) is seen as desirable therapeutics is understandable.

It is also understandable that these idiosyncratic amalgamations could be an attempt to bring greater coherence and meaning into our psychological lives. However, the fact that mostly well-meaning therapists are themselves the origin and sustenance of these ideas could blind us to more central (psychological) questions: Is the “spiritual” in “nature,” or do we bring “it” (invent it) there? Does this even matter if while in this psychologically confabulated process we end up saving “Mother Earth”?

What’s Next?

The 2016 American election crystalized the significant divide existing between groups of people who have, one presumes, always co-existed, everywhere. The list of differences that divide these groups seems to fall into the categories shown on Table 3.

There are, of course, many more attributional aspects and differentiators to these divides which social scientists will continue to tease out while formulating a grand explanation of how and why these divisions emerged in pointed form during these past elections.

Assuming that we trust the different polls, then at least 40% of the American electorate fall, in one way or another, under the attributions listed under “A.” These percentages have not varied for the last four elections, suggesting that entrenched ideology, impermeable-foreclosure identifications, absolute ethnic-gender divisions, various social ills, and lack of educational opportunities have fixed these numbers for some time to come.

According to the best scientific evidence (often negated by those in List A), time is running out with respect to the concerted

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and collective measures that must be undertaken in order to mitigate and rectify the onslaught of human-caused local and global environmental disasters.

<u>List A</u>	<u>List B</u>
Nativism	Globalism
Fear	Hope
Ignorance	Education
Animus	Anima
Complacency	Proactivity
Rudeness	Assertiveness
Insular	Outward
Absolute	Relative
Extrinsically/Motivated	Intrinsically/Motivated
Literalist	Interpretive
Grievance	Reconciliation
Propaganda	Data-driven
Pubescent	Mature
Apocalyptic	Progressive

Table 3

The conundrum is that working toward an apocalyptic resolution precisely validates the ideologies of members in List A. In this light, the hopeful claims that some folks in List B make with respect to a peaceful and rational resolution (e.g. via “consciousness raising,” “indigenous wisdom,” magical interventions) seem to be misguided and naïve.

Answering the question “What’s next?” under the governance of those in List “B” should include addressing the underlying causes of these deep ideological divisions. That seems unlikely to occur in the next four-year cycle. That is, things are likely to get much worse before they get any better. At least in the near future, the probable answers to the question “What’s next?” are mostly terrifying or unanswerable.

Pre-Apocalyptic Realism

In this unhopeful context, a reasonable position to take, let's call it pre-apocalyptic realism, steers "ecopsychological" discussions (including debates in conservation and environmental activism) toward the following axiom points:

1. Humans are self-serving (or justify self-serving under the guise of political or religious affiliation). With increases in human population, diversity of views, and a continued appetite for creating for-profit-in-a-vacuum enterprises, humanity is unlikely to reach a timely consensus that would seriously alleviate environmental stressors. It is the Tragedy of the Commons (Hardin, 1968) multiplied to levels never seen before. My family and sheep first.
2. Humans are ignorant or self-deceptive. Because of unfair circumstances or by design, most humans lack the educational level, the scientific sophistication, the deconstructive sagacity, actual experiences, or the open-mindedness to closely study the central and branching environmental issues (global warming, to name just one environmental stressor) that are now deciding the fate of "LIFE" on planet Earth.
3. Humans are fantasy-prone. When it comes to making choices between scientifically based arguments and their preferred ingroup, political or religious positions, devoted ideologues deny, undermine, sabotage, or misunderstand evidence-based findings. The institutionalization of a clear and legally consistent line between "church" and "state" continues to be challenged by persons or groups who oppose objective-neutral means for establishing "truth." 'Believing in something' trumps 'facing something.'
4. Humans are followers. Political courage and enforcement of sensible "commons" laws that protect basic necessities (clean water, clean air, and diverse wild environments) are often lacking, or when demonstrated, are diluted as part of slow, "democratic" compromises that are unlikely

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to reach a timely consensus to seriously alleviate environmental stressors. Humans follow charismatic ‘leaders’ with fan-full ardor and zeal—to the end.

5. Humans are reactive. Only under situations where extreme changes in weather demand proactive measures (extreme climate and latitudes), or where geography and geology dictate that humans organize into capable working collectives does one see efforts to “think ahead” and take necessary measures for dealing with potential disasters and unfavorable or taxing circumstances. Otherwise, most humans are “loafers,” waiting to see what the next door neighbor might do.
6. Traditional “wisdom” is misapplied. This point harks back to one of the misconceptions about “ecopsychology” presented in Chapter Two. When human communities were small in number and history was passed on as part of a necessary drive for survival, proactive, sensible, or practical behaviors and attitudes were more or less easily shaped into respected laws that most members in a community could test, if needed, by empirical means. However, oftentimes, “traditional” or “ancient wisdom,” when offered out of context (ancient vs modern) and misapplied (small scale vs large scale) to solve more complex problems (indigenous communities vs global communities) fails to deliver its once true-and-tested sustainability formulae. At other times the tags “traditional” or “wisdom” appear as idiosyncratic and very personal descriptions by individuals who have little knowledge of the authentic cultural and geographical contexts within which these behaviors and attitudes evolved.
7. Humans are “tribalists.” In the worst sense of this tendency humans display an innate need to belong and define themselves in superficial and irrelevant ways as they join preferred groups and clicks (“cat person,” “tattooed person,” “dog person,” “Ferrari driver,” “gun owner,” “snowmobiler,” etc.). Tribalism can be a relevant force for social cohesion toward conservation, for example, if

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it does not focus solely (or mostly) on the acquisition, maintenance, or ownership of “things.” Frugality is seldom seen as the principle and virtue of most hobby dabblers.

To the extent that, according to the most recent physical environmental evidence, we have already passed the point at which a concerted and serious global effort might have diverted or mitigated the most grievous of these effects (human-caused environmental problems: overpopulation, rampant consumerism, pristine habitat destruction, greenhouse gases levels, species extinctions, etc.), then preparations that matter should now be undertaken under this new existential priority: pre-apocalyptic realism.

The psychological (“ecopsychological”) dimensions implied in pre-apocalyptic realism both foreshadow and harken back to eras of depravation or forward looking sustainability with an emphasis on resilience, gratitude, frugality, temperance, equanimity, and pragmatic know-how.

One cause for optimism is that the scientific method has proven its worth and it is too systemically engrained for it to be easily abandoned when its methodologies may be the only means for bridging salvageable patches of integral nature still present with a sustainable and verdant future.

The most challenging accommodations and uncharted transitions remain ahead for our children and grandchildren. Like it or not, seven generations henceforward, scientific practicality and magical thinking are likely to be companions on the same road.

Regardless, from this point in time and perspective, it looks like more feathers, crystals, and plenty of whiskey--in the Apocalypse.

* * *

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APPENDIX I: “ECOPSYCHOLOGY” AS EUPRAXSOPHY: MARG AND PRÉCIS

“Nothing is enough for the man to whom enough is too little.”

-Epicurus

Introduction: “Ecopsychology” as Eupraxsophy

After reading the preceding chapters, two reviewers suggested that I summarize most of the content of this book into a literary form more amenable to today’s competing demands for time and reading. To that end, I borrowed and reinterpreted the forms *marg* and *précis*, an abridged delineation and boundary of what in this book is presented as the eupraxsophy of “ecopsychology.” The following entries may be read independently from the main book and text.

Throughout this book, I have made Epicurean arguments of practical living that exalt ideas of community, simplicity, frugality, creativity, and non-dogmatism. In the 20th century, Paul Kurtz coined the term eupraxsophy to describe a similar mode of being (thinking and acting) which values living an ethical, rational and exuberant life (biophilic). Admittedly, many of us fall short of consistently living up to all three. Nevertheless, they are noble and ennobling endeavors worth pursuing—thinking about. In the context of a diverse and oftentimes cacophonous field of ecopsychological trends and ideas, I argue that they are also necessary—an Occam’s razor.

This perspective will deter some readers from reading these pages, no doubt. For others, who wish to delve deeper and explore further the implications of what might mean to be a natural human being, a signifying and emergent organism in a natural world, I offer a non-dogmatic (i.e., it assumes that no supernatural forces or destiny shape our existence) narrative that is deconstructive, in the general sense of that word, of close-ended

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and idiosyncratically preferred self-nature assumptions. In so doing, it is my hope that “Ecopsychology,” as eupraxsophy, is understood as a serious effort at distilling basic notions and explorations about “being in the natural world” without resorting to supernatural (unproven) or unwarranted (unjustifiable) esoteric arguments.

MARG AND PRÉCIS

1. There is no one “self.” There is no one “nature.” “Self” is not he-she. “Nature” is not he-she. “Self” or “nature” are neither nouns nor pronouns. They are verbs—processes—dynamic.
2. Singularizing “self” does not make it more understandable or accessible. Singularizing “nature” does not make it more understandable or accessible. A noun is never the process it singularizes. Although words can and do shape subjective reality, they are not, reality.
3. A singular “self” seeking “communion” with singular “nature” is already bound to find projections—confirm expectations.
4. If there is no singular “self” and no singular “nature,” what “connection” do we speak of?
5. “Nature” is not a singular sentient entity, thus needs no defending—seeking, worshiping, idealizing as such.
6. From S. Freud we inherited the semiotic lens with which to begin examining eigenwelt—mitwelt—umwelt processes as they give rise to the emergents “self” and “nature.” Alas, this foundation, important as it still is, emphasized (and others overemphasized) eigenwelt-mitwelt interactions and dynamics, oftentimes, at the expense of eigenwelt—mitwelt—umwelt integral processes. That is, and analogically speaking, he and others paid attention to psychology-semiosis interactions without formulating an equally robust ecopsychological biosemiotics (and ecosemiotics).
7. Without taking away from an understanding of psychological semiosis, nevertheless, the shift we propose is as follows:

psychology : semiosis :: ecopsychology : biosemiotics*

The right side of the above analogy represents truly integral approaches whereas the left is derivative.

*(In certain cases one can replace biosemiotics with ecosemiotics and still retain the meaning of the intended shift.)

8. The implications of the preferred (right) side of the above analogy is the study of self-society-nature systems or “ecopsychology.” This study is an intricate and complex endeavor demanding philosophical, mathematical, and scientific training.
9. Lest one should think the above studies are only open to idiosyncratic and/or overly discrete formulations (low brow humanistics), a more fruitful (evidence-based) approach is to begin describing the above analogy in mathematical terms. That is, the elements “self,” “society,” “nature” (and subcategories thereof) are amenable to manipulation via differential equations (ordinary or partial). The complex-intricate nature of these interactions, at all levels, demands sobering mathematical expertise and follow-up experimental testing (e.g., the Lotka-Volterra equations as they are applied to human overconsumption in the context of limited resources).
10. Naming a cloud does not essentially (scientifically) explain “cloud.” However, it is quite acceptable that “cloud” becomes the informed shorthand tag after a thorough and essential (scientific) knowledge of multiple processes involving water vapor dynamics in the atmosphere (e.g., a water cycle).
11. An emotion-driven “self” seeking answers in “nature” is bound to find (invent) cyclops, mermaids, fairies, nymphs and many other projected magical or turbulent forms. Oh, the gods! They behave so human-like.
12. Rather than “connection,” “self-nature” affiliatory processes, should one persist in using these terms singularly, are supported by multiple processes deserving in-depth examination. In this sense a “self” consists of both transient and deeply entrenched interpretative codas, behavioral plans and actions, both creating additional meanings and redirecting the organism toward or away from new definitions and assessments of its situation in any given environment—time. This dynamic organization is ever-changing and can be described as self-nature gestalts. With a full understanding that these modalities are fluid, only then can one be safe in using the terms “self” or “nature.” This

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organismic fluidity is to be expected in a curious and creative fission-fusion species.

13. Natural processes, outside self-aware consciousness, do not bargain, cajole, trick, deceive, supplicate, or demand tribute.
14. Equally, the truly monstrous, that is, the inability of human reason to understand or change basic instincts as these defy and foil our sublimated and/or idealized human propensities, originate in “nature.”
15. The attitude, expressed in the statement “anything goes in ‘nature’,” is not scientific. It is more likely a psychological projection fueled by subjective and idiosyncratic expectations or desires. The above statement is an example of trivialism, or the assumption that every statement is true [**VpTp; Trivialism** (the opposite of skepticism): *Given any proposition, it is a true proposition*]. It is true that natural processes are diverse and varied; however, these processes are governed, for example, by observable and measurable (testable) physical and biochemical constraints. A diversity of forms and mechanisms of natural existence, with the above restraints in mind (and in place), is not a proposition for supposing that *anything is possible*, including very intelligent but diminutive fairies.
16. The human animal seeks kinship with, is inspired by, and depends for survival on non-human animals. This is understandable. Humans also mistreat and torture non-human animals. This is reproachable and disturbing. Humans also keep non-human animals as pets. This is also understandable. When humans are tamed by civilization and they become but comical or disturbed shadows of ancestors who were self-sufficient, frugal, brave, resilient, and practical, their pets too become farcical creatures. This makes psychological sense. Then, the descent to petness on both sides, becomes a special interest study within “ecopsychology.”
17. Many species of animals, including humans, replace their own kin with token or fetish trans-species or object relation-

ships. It is psychologically important to study and understand why and how it happens that the favorite poodle becomes a “child.”

18. Humans do the darndest things in search of “love” and affection, including hugging trees and/or snowmobiles. Nobody knows what the tree or a machine understands by this, if anything.
19. A dog is never a person. However, it could very well be that a farcical human being indulges in, expects and induces farcical behaviors from h/her preferred companions. To confuse this (descent to petness on both sides) with true humanity or original animality deserves a thorough psychological analysis.
20. Earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, and fires kill people without intention. Without sentience and motive, these naturally occurring events cannot be “brutal,” “vicious,” or “out to get us.” On the other hand, the “brutality” of “nature” seems all-too-human. Furthermore, to say that they are “acts of god” is suggestive that the equivalency “nature” = “god” is a human psychological feature or characteristic.
21. Humans can be very destructive, vengeful, spiteful, and petty—dogmatic, misinformed, and psychologically unstable. In contrast, humans can also be constructive, kind, forgiving, and enlightened—well-informed, curious-smart, and psychologically stable; with mixes in-between. This is a sobering realization for anyone who thinks that magical formulas (e.g., “changes in consciousness,” converting to the ‘right’ religion, practicing yoga) are likely to be time-ly-effective universal engines toward a more enlightened future that makes natural ecological stability and global human mental health more prevalent.
22. For anyone who has a scholarly and skeptical bent for asking basic questions and doing due diligence when it comes to the historicity of any movement, “ecopsychology,” like many other conveniently confusable trends, seems to have blended an array of incongruous ideas by selectively appropriating an assortment of religious concepts, social movements, and

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personal preferences into quirky catechisms. This is understandable to the extent that the compound terms “ecology” and “psychology” are altogether negated, bypassed, or reinvented to mean just about anything, or everything.

23. The dogcatcher sees the reality, every day, of infantile or dysfunctional humans projecting the best and worst of their humanity and inhumanity onto otherwise innocent and trusting non-human animals.
24. The environmental consequences of keeping pets, farcical or otherwise, are demonstrably (quantifiably) shocking and equal or surpass any other forms or sources of environmental degradation. It is fair to say that keeping pets is another human-caused environmental stress veering into catastrophe whose prompt solution will be stubbornly resisted—for psychological (and economical) reasons.
25. There is usually hope in a hunting camp that the rain, grasses, and game, will return. That trust, as hope, is warranted to the extent that ecological viability and predictable climatic recurrences endure.
26. Nature becomes what we ascribe and describe. Long-running myths preserved and interpreted anew in a variety of narratives, both accurate and false, partially define our relationship with “reality.” Take away actual sweating and bleeding bodies, wild gathering and hunting, the fragility of human existence and certain death, and replace it all with four-square meals and traffic lights. What form of existing, evolved long ago, and imprinted deep in our mind and marrow, saw THIS coming?
27. It likely that earth systems will fall back into old cycles--that many life forms will survive—or that new ones will be established after global disintegration occurs. It is also likely that pockets of humanity will survive. However, lest anyone believe this end to be destined or heroic, we would have committed, collectively, a sin for which there is no redemption or atonement.
28. I have witnessed unseemly packs of stray dogs and cats, from Milan to Hawai’i. They survive, barely, in dark, damp,

and liminal spaces. In some cities they are also found with the human homeless or the vicious; all manner of human socially discarded forms, desperate, powerless, and hopeless, living day-to-day. In a different time or place they would all, I fantasize, be thriving. Dogs would hunt in packs, wild. Cats would crouch in tall grass, their roaming distances appropriate to their temperament. Humans, would know how to scavenge or hunt away from refuse and unjustifiable “civilized” complexity.

29. Children say the darndest things, like, “I want to go outside and play in the rain.”
30. Parents teach children how to pray, but to what end?
31. Harking back to the ecosemiotic presentation of self-nature gestalts, it is not surprising that a diversity of subjective concoctions of meaning-interpretation (“thinking”), the cultural or natural context of “reality,” behaviors, and motivations would produce almost any sort of psychological profile. In this vein, a person who dabbles in Buddhism, pseudo-mysticism, animal totemism, drives a car without guilt, thinks their three dogs are children and should be treated as such, spends hours indoors, and seldom gets h/ her feet wet or dirty, is inertia-prone to continue interpreting “reality” in a vacuum.
32. How does a Deepak Chopra-type steal your “consciousness”? Are you that needy? How does one detect and reject pseudo-profound bullshit?
33. There are no shortcuts to saving our planet (from ourselves).
34. Any form of ideology, by definition, is close-ended. Ideological thinking rarely produces, true (fair, well-informed, honorable) discourse. Ideology survives through propaganda. A central aim of propaganda is to suppress competing (factual) sources of information. Therefore, when ideologs speak of task-oriented problem-solving approaches, they are speaking in oxymorons.
35. It is almost certain that coyotes do not give a fig about humans except when we threaten their livelihood and their lives.

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36. “Old school ‘ecopsychology’” and “new school ‘ecopsychology’” should have environmental history as their inquiry foundation and bridge. To assume that environmental problems are new and/or that our psychosocial accommodations (or failures) to changing situations represent a new turn of human consciousness is, to say the least, myopic.
37. Americans (other peoples as well) inherited the gambles, excesses, and tradeoffs of our grandparents. Our children and grandchildren will inherit ours.
38. Even the best-intended and orchestrated parenting befuddles children. This is because children are, on the whole, observant and smart. Eventually, they catch up to our lies, contradictions, hypocrisies, insecurities, and faults. It is better to tell them the truth (fact-supported and corroborable) early on. For example, no child older than eight should believe in Santa Claus, fairies, or that the Earth is six thousand years old and flat. The latter is, at least, farcical and, at worst, dangerous.
39. Nowadays, it seems to me, youth believe and look forward to dystopias more often than dream about creating edifying utopias. The pastoral has been substituted for a bloody end-of-days mythology. This is very troubling. It is understandable that youth, while forging an identity, hanker for recognizable heroes. It is also understandable that heroes inhabit both dystopias and utopias. But why “go there,” the dystopia, and waste so much emerging talent, when there is, still, some time to correct our collective demise-course?
40. I urge all youth to learn how to grow gardens, butcher game, recognize bird song, and vacate the empty spaces of Facebook. Your selfie is only one among seven billion.
41. What is “compassion”? Indeed! The old Zen masters would tell us that compassion hurts—‘tis a sharp sword cutting off the unfeeling, useless limb.
42. Little Leagues are major ego boosters for parents. Oh well, at least they are all outdoors.
43. The stock market dropped a thousand points today. Now, tell me something real.

44. Colleagues (and whole departments) seem to have forgotten what “psychology” (evidence-based) is all about. There is no other way to describe what passes for higher education these days. (The cracker-hardtack psychologist is born.)
45. What is “tolerance”? One answer is: Enduring the same old druid-turned-expert pretending to be “a scientist.”
46. The real environment is, sometimes, missing from “ecopsychology.”
47. To collude with the credulous for fear that one might hurt their feelings is not good psychology—not even compassionate.
48. Bears are not “into” you. They are into grubs and honey. They are only “into you” if you take away their grubs and honey.
49. Alice traveled from one panoptic reality to the next—the latter she confused, at first, with anarchy. That is why the mirror-metaphor-transference works very well. Verily, true delinquency varies in a linear function with “civilization.” That is, more rules and increased surveillance, aimed to keep us on “the straight and narrow path,” beget disobedience and natural hostility—and neurosis. Eventually, even Alice recognized this game cannot be played with rubber-necked flamingoes.
50. Humans’ ambivalence to ‘nature,’ from a semiotic perspective, admits both enslaving and liberating meanings. When operating as a grand symbol, *intrapsychically* and externally, it borrows from and conjures up a multitude of associated archaic symbols: mother-father, womb-fighting arena, home-jail. Not surprisingly, our individual and collective responses to whatever we think ‘nature’ is are bound to be complex and contradictory. A serious psychological analysis (psychological semiosis) begins with the premise that ‘nature’ comprises the minotaur’s past, his mind, the labyrinth, a surrounding island, the open sea, and the stars beyond; all these spheres semiotically intertwined.

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ENDNOTES FOR APPENDIX I

“Communication, defined as a sign process which involves a sender and a receiver, occurs not only among humans, but also between all other organisms throughout the whole biosphere. Not only cultural semiotics, but also bio- and zoosemiotics are hence concerned with processes of communication. Signification, by contrast, which concerns sign processes without a sender, predominates in ecosemiotics, where organisms interact with a natural environment that does not function as the intentional emitter of messages to the interpreting organism.” Nöth (2001)

“When it comes to our own species, there is no doubt that, by nature, we form fission–fusion societies. And nor is this merely a reflection of our current, highly mobile lifestyle within industrialized settings. More than 99% of human history was spent in a hunter-gatherer existence, characterized by dynamically shifting social groupings at multiple levels. At the highest tier in hunter-gatherer societies is the ethno-linguistic group or ‘tribe’, formed by several local ‘bands’ that fuse together when resources like water are clustered during dry seasons. Bands themselves, which are made up of around 30 individuals, break up into smaller foraging parties during daily forays out from a base camp.” Couzin and Laidre (2009)

“The model population consists of individuals with no inherently altruistic attributes, just self-centered attributes, namely an aggressive will to dominate and a bitter resentment against being dominated. We show that when language skills reach a critical level at which gossip becomes the primary means of reinforcing social ties, the egalitarian transition occurs spontaneously as a phase transition. At this critical point, individuals who resent being dominated become capable of forming and sustaining coalitions that make the individual alpha position progressively unstable, ultimately motivating its avoidance by all members of the population due to retaliation (or fear of retaliation) by a stronger anti-dominance coalition.” Calmetes and Weiss (2017)

“Magical beliefs involve an acceptance of mysterious or supernatural forces to explain phenomena, and where the use of prescribed rites of precisely defined actions (often verbal) are believed to produce mysterious effects. This may involve the manifestation of mystical forces to cause a specific effect, or ritualistic acts that are believed to produce results elsewhere. Magical thinking is the cognitive process that embodies such beliefs.” Garrett and Cutting (2017)

“[...] ...it takes 0.84 hectares [2.07 acres] of land to keep a medium-sized dog fed. In contrast, running a 4.6-litre Toyota Land Cruiser, including the energy required to construct the thing and drive it 10,000km a year, requires 0.41 hectares. Dogs are not the only environmental sinners. The eco-footprint of a cat equates to that of a Volkswagen Golf. If that's troubling, there is an even more shocking comparison. In 2004, the average citizen of Vietnam had an ecological footprint of 0.76 hectares. For an Ethiopian, it was just 0.67 hectares. In a world where scarce resources are already hogged by the rich, can we really justify keeping pets that take more than some people?” Vale and Vale (2009).

“[...] ...given the rise of communication technology and the associated increase in the availability of information from a variety of sources, both expert and otherwise, bullshit may be more pervasive than ever before. Despite these seemingly commonplace observations, we know of no psychological research on bullshit. Are people able to detect blatant bullshit? Who is most likely to fall prey to bullshit and why?” Pennycook et al (2015)

“The histories of coyotes and humans have many parallels, but one difference is that across our own evolutionary history, we humans have created thousands of philosophies of meaning we call religions, while coyotes, so far as we can tell, embrace no religious tradition beyond being alive, sacred existence.” Flores (2016)

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“Environmental historians have given attention to these contemporary problems, but they also realize that the relationship between humans and the environment has had a formative role in every period of history, from ancient times onward.” Hughes (2006)

“~Buffalo Dusk~ The buffaloes are gone.//And those who saw the buffaloes are gone.//Those who saw the buffaloes by thousands and how they pawed/the prairie sod into dusk with their hoofs, their great heads down/pawing on in a great pageant of dusk,/Those who saw the buffaloes are gone.//And the buffaloes are gone.” Carl Sandburg

“Environment can be understood to include the Earth with its soil and mineral resources; with its water, both fresh and salt; with its atmosphere, climates, and weather; with its living things, animals and plants from the simplest to the most complex; and with the energy received ultimately from the Sun.” Hughes (2006)

Excerpt from ~The Bear and the Garden-Lover~ One time as the gardener had forgot himself in a dream/And a single fly had his nose at its mercy,/The poor indignant bear who had fought it vainly,/Growled: “I’ll crush that trespasser; I have evolved a scheme.”/Killing flies was his chore, so as good as his word,/The bear hurled a cobble and made sure it was hurdled hard,/Crushing a friend’s head to rid him of a pest./With bad logic, fair aim disgraces us more;/He’d murdered someone dear, to guarantee his friend rest.//Intimates should be feared who lack perspicacity;/Choose wisdom, even in an enemy.” Marianne Moore (1982)

* * *

APPENDIX II: SEMIOTIC MATRIX THEORY (SMT): APPLICATIONS TO PANARCHY

(To insure continuity and exact reiteration, some text repeats
from Chapter 5)

Semiotic Matrix Theory (SMT) is an evaluative model (Conesa-Sevilla, 2005) with which to gauge the relative and dynamic systemic contributions of Possibility (P), Energy (E), and Safety (S) constraints (elements, factors, or variables). Its applications are widespread across most disciplines and include the theoretical and practical evaluations of the validity of ecologically valid systems-based assumptions. As a predictive tool, it makes allowances for a diversity of interpretations (factor inputs) about P, E, and/or S. SMT is particularly useful in ecological theory, research and practice. To this end, SMT was employed to model the assumptions that Panarchy makes with respect to stability and change. Panarchy's adaptive cycle is confirmed by SMT modeling.

To continue and reiterate from Chapter Five, Ecological Panarchy, as described by Gunderson et al (1995), Holling et al (2002a), and Holling et al (2002b), builds up on and extends traditional frameworks for understanding ecological dynamics. It adds to phenology a more realistic emphasis on processes of destruction and organization in addition to the traditional ecological foci on growth and conservation. Their framework adds two additional functions, release and reorganization. Ecological Panarchy is theoretically malleable and can be applied to questions in economics and sociology, to name just two areas, while focusing on problems of resilience and sustainability.

Within the limitations of the panarchy model (Gotts, 2007) there is much that is already relevant to an understanding of human systems.

Figure A-1, also adapted from Gunderson and Holling (2002), depicts the dynamics of Ecological Panarchy. At first look, panarchy, at least implicitly, tracks the systemic historical changes (catastrophic and phenological) that some systems are likely to endure anew or revisit (Leopold, 1949; Menzel et al, 2006). At first glance, Panarchy can be made congruent with other descriptions that emphasize the dynamics of all organisms and systems with regard to life's basic components and interactions of Energy, Safety, and Possibility (Conesa-Sevilla, 1999, 2001, 2005a, and 2005b). A first attempt at finding such congruency is the main aim of this work. (Figure A-1 follows.)

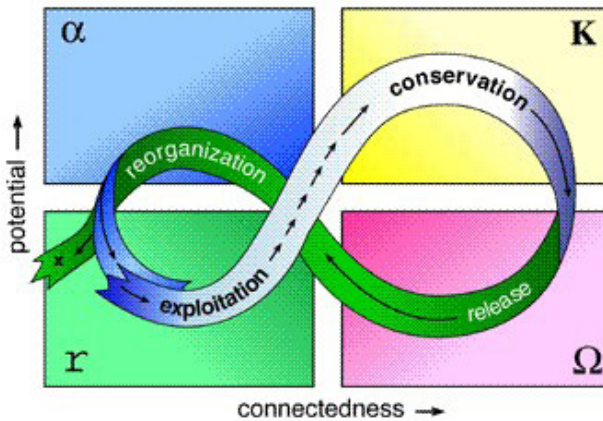


Figure A-1

Questions of resilience and sustainability arise when the establishment and diversity, “functionality,” are understood and also tracked as part of the dynamics that panarchy aims to elucidate. In the words of Holling and Gunderson (2002b), resilience can be seen as “the magnitude of disturbance that can be absorbed before the system changes its structure by changing the variables and processes that control behavior.”

As an example of the potential interdisciplinary versatility of Panarchy, the psychological concept of “coping” suggests a direct analogy to ecological resilience, where an increase of

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coping strategies implies greater resilience—“the magnitude of disturbance that can be absorbed.”

Semiotic Matrix Theory (SMT)

Semiotic Matrix Theory (SMT) was originally conceived and applied as a means of assessing the frequency and regularity of text terms across time, styles, and literary genre (Conesa-Sevilla, 1999). Specifically, frequency of words related to (synonym and antonym comparisons) the Alpha categories of Possibility (P), Energy (E), and Safety (S) were studied via text analyses (Conesa-Sevilla, 2001a). Early modeling was promising and suggestive of its potential application to the assessment of ecological models, vis-a-vis psychological theories.

Subsequent revisions of mathematical relations led to further applications (and confirmation) which extended to the study of territoriality across species (Conesa, 2001b). Interactions of Alpha categories gave rise to multiple levels, increasing the probability for more accurate predictions (Beta level: Power (Pp) Control(C), Generativity (G), Nurturing (N)). Furthermore, interactions between levels and conditions (e.g., P+C) made it possible to model a greater number of existential conditions.

The simpler and original (and later derivatives) mathematical relation described a “matrix,” as any “organism” that exhibited (could be described as, internalized or was sensitive to) the actual and/or analogous conditions of growth, maturation, emergence, and survivability, as follows:

$$M = \frac{P+E}{S}$$

“M” denotes a “matrix” (or matricial conditions in larger systems: buildings, cities, colonies); “P” represents possibility (opportunity, information, intelligence), which includes the presumption of information growth and its intelligent maturation. “E” expresses energy requirements for birth, growth, and sustainability of any organism or systems that behave as

“organisms.” Finally, “S” stands for the safety requirements (ambient assessment, internal homeostatic sub-systems, repair, and defense) necessary for survival and beyond, thriving.

Since its original conception, the above and straightforward model has been mathematically expanded and adapted to evaluate and model more nuanced relationships (events and states), including time, random (stochastic) “luck,” and more determined (non-stochastic) conditions (e.g., Wiener process).

$$M = \frac{P + E(t)}{S}$$

This work made use of SMT theoretical assumptions while evaluating the four phases of ecological panarchy as seen in Figure A-1.

Before proceeding to the methodology and analysis an obvious caveat needs to be mentioned. It is safe to say that most natural processes, under the influence of entropic forces, undergo cycles of “birth,” “growth,” “ultimate maturation,” deterioration, “death,” and decay. However, the terms sustainability or resilience are anthropocentric descriptions of these cycles. Stars, galaxies, ecological systems, the universe itself, are not at all perturbed (as systems), nor do they “bother” to examine the conditions of their existence. Only self-aware “matrices” are capable of tracking these cycles: prepare for them, avoid unsavory consequences, attempt to change them. Notwithstanding these efforts, death will visit us all.

We should be mindful of the limitations and misapplications of the above cycles outside observable and confirmable scenarios lest we, unduly so, imbue the cosmos with consciousness (e.g., Gaia; a teleological “progressing” universe) willy-nilly.

Both metaphorical (symbolic) and confirmable (real) matricial descriptions are possible (the notion of “god” or currency as “matrices”) and useful, but one must keep in mind their ontological origin and distinction (Conesa-Sevilla, 1999; 2001a; and 2005).

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Methods

Excel modeling features and capabilities were applied under these assumptions:

1. P, S, and E values were arbitrarily set on a 1-5 scale. Higher numbers on the P and E columns correspond with a Positive (+) ascendancy of their attributes whereas lower numbers under the S column suggest that homeostatic controls have achieved a great degree of stability. A higher number indicates a stress in the system and the deployment of increasing survival modalities (Conesa-Sevilla, 2016).
2. Prior to modeling, and based on ecological theoretical assumptions, Panarchy cycles were evaluated to exhibit the following “matricial status”:

	P	S	E
K-Phase (Conservation)	3	2	3
Ω -Phase (Release)	1	5	5
α -Phase (Reorganization)	5	4	4
r-Phase	4	3	4

These ranges, although originating from an arbitrarily designed scale, are nevertheless theoretically descriptive and summarize, for example, the ecological progression and regression of the life and death history of a forest (a recognized and defined integral ecology).

The K-Phase represents, for example, a forest (“organism”) at its peak diversity and ecological functionality (stable, sustainable). Even at the peak of maturity and sustainability P, S, and E values are not fully expressed (at their highest values) to the extent that other phases in the cycle are more dramatically identified (scientifically described) with rampant growth, habitat reallocation, and competition by species (1st, 2nd, ...N order colonizers).

The Ω -Phase is characterized by dramatic (unforeseen catastrophic and/or phenological and expected) events that

threaten the sustainability achieved in the K-Phase. Under these conditions diversity is greatly reduced or non-existent (P value at 1) and the struggle to survive is at its maximum (S value set at 5).

The α -Phase represents in our example of a once forested and sustainable environment a few weeks, months, and years after a devastating fire. These conditions of colonization, intense competition, increased diversification, and meager stability are represented by the numerical profile above described of: P=5, S=4, and E=4.

Finally, the r-Phase represents and portends the promise of a sustainable ecological system on its way to stable diversification—filling in the final blanks. Higher expression of Possibility and continuing dependence on outside sources of Energy prevent this phase from being fully (long-term) sustainable.

Matricial values are to be read as follows: Higher scores approaching 5 describe a fully functional, highly diverse, stable, and sustainable “organism” or system (K-Phase). Under its natural and unperturbed conditions this is the very best the system is capable of. Scores close to 1 suggest that the system is being challenged by internal or external influences (Ω -Phase). A relative and comparative evaluation will describe reorganization and exploitation phases as being medial or interim to the other two.

Results

Predicted scaling of four phases of ecological Panarchy yielded the following matricial values:

Matricial Values for:	
K-Phase (Conservation)	3
Ω -Phase (Release)	1.2
α -Phase (Reorganization)	2.25
r-Phase (Exploitation)	2.67

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Matricial values logically align themselves with the four Panarchy phases. Higher matricial values denote ecological stability, whereas lower values denote ecological turmoil.

Consistent with Panarchy descriptions, as predicted earlier, and to reiterate, higher scores approaching 5 describe a fully functional, highly diverse, stable, and sustainable “organism” or system (3 for the K-Phase). These higher scores represent peak and stable performance. Scores close to 1 suggest that the system is being challenged and in a rapid state of deterioration (1.2 for Ω -Phase). The values for the reorganization and exploitation phases show an expected progression and interim development between the Ω and the K Phases.

At first glance, it is understandable to suspect that some tautology is at play between both models (SMT and Panarchy). Two observations make this acceptable. First, SMT was first developed and applied independently, without the knowledge of Panarchy principles, to other problems (semiotics, biosemiotics, ecological psychology). Second, although arbitrary, the scales employed above must possess construct validity with respect to real ecological events and states. One would expect theoretical convergence to the extent that both SMT and Panarchy describe observable ecological scenarios.

That is, instead of tautologies there appears to be an almost forced theoretical convergence to the extent that both models are true to and explicit about the functional prerequisites of “systems” (Parsons and Turner, 1951/1991; Conesa-Sevilla 1999).

Sullivan’s dictum (1896) comes to mind: “Form ever follows function.” A fundamental description of existence, its form and function, must abide by clearly recognizable and testable principles. From a single cell to a sentient organism, from clay burrows to loftier cities, from concrete to abstract, “form ever follows function”:

Whether it be the sweeping eagle in his flight, or the open apple-blossom, the toiling work-horse, the blithe swan, the

branching oak, the winding stream at its base, the drifting clouds, over all the coursing sun, form ever follows function, and this is the law. Where function does not change, form does not change. The granite rocks, the ever-brooding hills, remain for ages; the lightning lives, comes into shape, and dies, in a twinkling.”

Discussion and Conclusion

The original formulation of SMT (Conesa-Sevilla, 1999) extended Parsons’ and Turner’s (1951/1991) idea of functional prerequisites beyond their sociologically exclusive application to encompass and be applied to questions of evolutionary psychology and ecology. In this context, SMT’s interpretation of functional prerequisites are, depending on the reader’s perspective, on a higher order or more fundamental: consistent with a vertical and horizontal integration of physical, life, and behavioral sciences.

Whatever formulation is preferred, matricial dynamics are the fundamental and abstracted explanatory substrate of existential dynamics (or classification therein) that sentient beings project onto objects and symbols.

Although limiting their theoretically attributable functional interactions and integrations to social structures, Parsons’ and Turner’s notions of functional prerequisites, as originally stated, were challenges initially encountered in the formulation of SMT:

The problem of functional prerequisites is a protean problem because of the variety of different levels on which it may be approached. What we propose here is to start on the most general and therefore formal level of action theory and proceed to introduce specifications step by step. It should be possible to do this in a sufficiently orderly fashion. (P. 17:1991)

SMT got around this seemingly apparent “protean” impasse by making assumptions which were concordant with physical, life, and behavioral systems. Although incommensurable in the details, physical, life, and behavioral systems operate “com-

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measurably” as a whole cloth. The connections with Panarchic thinking were anticipated but not fully applied outside the social context by Parsons and Turner:

Thus a social system in the present sense is not possible without language, and without certain other minimum patterns of culture, such as empirical knowledge necessary to cope with situational exigencies, and sufficiently integrated patterns of expressive symbolism and of value orientation. A social system which leads to too drastic disruption of its culture, for example through blocking the processes of its acquisition, would be exposed to social as well as cultural disintegration. (P. 21:1991)

SMT incorporates the semiotic emphasis given to the role of language and applies it, as biosemiotics, to an understanding of systems toward a fuller, integral interpretation (the vertical and horizontal integration of physical, life, and behavioral realms). That is to say that, in this context, the Panarchic ecological cycle incorporates the transformation, transfer, and transmutation of “meaning,” restating the basic existential forms Possibility, Safety, and Energy (and Beta elements: Power (Pp), Control(C), Generativity (G), Nurturing (N)).

In consubstantial fashion, the health of a “matrix,” as form, follows matricial functions. According to matricial constraints, one would never expect, ordinarily, a quadruped running blind and backwards, or a hut built upside down, or a hammock hung from “sky hooks” (Dennett, 1995), or happiness “forever after.”

The health of any matrix is expected to undergo changes, some internally produced (with purpose), some of stochastic nature and unforeseen. A forest as a matrix; a city as a matrix; a society as a matrix; the value of a dollar as a matrix; the idea of god as a matrix; or an individual, as the most recognizable matrix, all, are subject to fundamental and irrevocable existential parameters both cyclical and stable. Although much more work needs to follow in order to fully understand and apply the simplest of matricial relationships,

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$$M = \frac{P + E}{S}$$

it is both hopeful and tantalizing that consilience and commensurability are possible scenarios of future or different reiterations of SMT. Panarchy itself, as it has been shown, has at least a very robust heuristic value.

APPENDIX II (CONT.):
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Ecopsychology Revisited is a critique of and deconstructive approach to several trends termed “ecopsychology.”

This work attempts to bring light to some of the misconceptions that have hardened as “ecopsychology,” as these ideas have been reinterpreted and sometimes oversimplified by the general public and some professionals outside mainstream psychology. Part of the confusion arose when “ecopsychology” became inadequately amalgamated with other ideas. Nevertheless, within the social and behavioral sciences, at least, there is great value in devising and applying evidence-based strategies that track the normative ramifications dealing with cognition, emotion and behavior, exploring how or why humans relate to natural processes in a wide range of ways.



Dr. Jorge Conesa-Sevilla obtained his BA from Humboldt State University in 1989, during which, he was introduced to Deep Ecology and Ecopsychology by his mentor, Dr. Bill Devall. After working for the California Department of Fish and Game, Conesa-Sevilla earned his MA and PhD in experimental psychology from the University of

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