Where Psyche Meets Gaia

THEODORE ROSZAK

The Personal and the Planetary

When we think of environmentalism, we call to mind a vast, worldwide movement that deals in imponderably complex social and economic issues on the largest conceivable scale. The environmental movement holds its place in history as the largest political cause ever undertaken by the human race. It includes everybody, because there is nobody the movement can afford *not* to talk to. Its constituency even reaches beyond our own species to include the flora and fauna, the rivers and mountains. Whenever I turn to an environmental issue, I find myself intensely aware that other, nonhuman eyes are upon me: our companion creatures looking on, hoping that their bewildering human cousins will see the error of their ways.

On the other hand, when we think of psychotherapy, we think of human relations on the smallest and most personal scale: one-to-one or in intimate groups. Therapy is private and introspective; it deals in the hidden life—fears, desires, guilty secrets perhaps too deeply buried to be known even to the individual.

What can these two levels of cultural activity possibly have in common? What link can there be between the personal and the planetary?

One thought comes to mind at once: the scale on which both environmentalism and therapy are pursued diverges radically from political business as usual. Neither ecological nor psychotherapeutic problems can be fully solved, if at all, within the boundaries defended by the nation-state, the free-trade zone, the military alliance, or the multina-

tional corporation. The one transcends even the largest of these awkwardly improvised human structures; the other eludes their insensitive grasp. Perhaps this is in itself an ecological fact of the highest importance. We are living in a time when both the Earth and the human species seem to be crying out for a radical readjustment in the scale of our political thought. Is it possible that in this sense the personal and the planetary are pointing the way toward some new basis for sustainable economic and emotional life, a society of good environmental citizenship that can ally the intimately emotional and the vastly biospheric?

Until just a few years ago, possibilities like this would have gone unrecognized by both environmentalists and therapists. The environmental movement went about its work of organizing, educating, and agitating with little regard for the fragile psychological complexities of the public whose hearts and minds it sought to win. As intensely aware as environmentalists may be of the complexity of the natural habitat, when it came to human behavior their guiding image was simplistic in the extreme. They worked from a narrow range of strategies and motivations: the statistics of impending disaster, the coercive emotional force of fear and guilt. As an environmental writer and speaker, I know how easily one reaches for scare tactics and guilt trips; they come so conveniently to hand. After all, there is a great deal to be afraid of and a great deal to be ashamed of in our environmental habits. Even though many environmentalists act out of a passionate joy in the magnificence of wild things, few except the artists—the photographers, the filmmakers, the landscape painters, and the poets—address the public with any conviction that human beings can be trusted to behave as if they were the living planet's children.

As for the psychologists and therapists, their understanding of human sanity has always stopped at the city limits. The creation of urban intellect, and intended to heal urban angst, modern psychotherapy has never seen fit to reach beyond family and society to address the nonhuman habitat that so massively engulfs the tiny psychic island Freud called "civilization and its discontents." For example, in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, the American Psychiatric Association's canonical listing of every form of neurosis for which an insurance company can be billed and which a court of law will accept as authoritative, the state of nature

puts in only a single appearance; one finds it hidden away there as "seasonal affective disorder," a depressive mood swing occasioned by gloomy weather—unless, that is, the depression is correlated with seasonal unemployment. The economic factor then takes precedence over the natural phenomenon.[1]

Now there are signs that this is beginning to change from both directions. A new generation of psychotherapists is seeking ways in which professional psychology can play a role in the environmental crisis of our time. One indication of that change is this book. Here you will find a sampling of the thinking being done by environmentally conscious psychotherapists, and a report on the techniques they are innovating, in a volume commissioned by the country's leading environmental publisher. Here too you will find the work of environmentalists who display a healthy curiosity about their need to find a more sustainable psychology, one that will appeal to affirmative motivations and the love of nature. It is a timely concern; there is an urgent need to address the amount of anger, negativity, and emotional burnout one finds in the movement. Recently, in a private letter, the Australian rainforest activist John Seed put it this way:

> It is obvious to me that the forests cannot be saved one at a time, nor can the planet be saved one issue at a time: without a profound revolution in human consciousness, all the forests will soon disappear. Psychologists in service to the Earth helping ecologists to gain deeper understanding of how to facilitate profound change in the human heart and mind seems to be *the* key at this point.

Similarly, in cautioning against the emotional toll that results from an exclusive reliance on blaming and shaming, Dave Foreman, one of the country's leading "ecowarriors," wisely reminds his colleagues that the greater goal of all they do is to "open our souls to love this glorious, luxuriant, animated planet." To forget that, he warns, is "damaging to our personal mental health."[2]

1. Earlier editions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* included one other reference to the nonhuman world: zoophilia, having sex with animals. The older, quainter term for this was "bestiality," but something like animal rape might have been better. Oddly enough, "zoophilia" precludes the possibility of a "normal" state that involves loving animals.
2. Dave Foreman, "The New Conservation Movement," *Wild Earth* (Summer 1991), 10–11.

Biophilia and Ecopsychology

There is one more significant current of change that deserves to be mentioned. The biologists have begun to pay attention to the psychological side of human evolution. In a recent work, the Harvard zoologist E. O. Wilson has raised the possibility that humans possess a capacity called "biophilia," defined as "the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms."[3] He sees this as an important force working to defend the endangered biodiversity of the planet. Even an impressionistic survey of folklore and fairy tale and of the religious life of indigenous peoples would surely yield a great deal of support for the idea. Wilson's colleagues have been quick to suggest that the influence of biophilia might be offset in some degree by an equally innate "biophobia," but from the psychologist's viewpoint, both our love and our fear of nature are emotions; both merit study. And both, as they might be translated into devotion, respect, concern, or awe, can be used to rebuild our strained bonds with the natural environment. Those of us who feel trapped in an increasingly ecocidal urban, industrial society need all the help we can find in overcoming our alienation from the more-than-human world on which we depend for every breath we breathe. Is there, indeed, any more urgent measure of our alienation than the fact that we must speak of our emotional continuity with that world as no more than a "hypothesis"? Nevertheless, in the form of a hypothesis, biophilia has at least begun to generate the sort of behavioral research that passes muster in the academic world as scientific proof. In a sense, ecopsychology might be seen as a commitment by psychologists and therapists to the hope that the biophilia hypothesis will prove true and so become an integral part of what we take mental health to be.

"Ecopsychology" is the name most often used for this emerging synthesis of the psychological (here intended to embrace the psychotherapeutic and the psychiatric) and the ecological. Several other terms have been suggested: psychoecology, ecotherapy, global therapy, green therapy, Earth-centered therapy, reearthing, nature-based psychotherapy, shamanic counseling, even sylvan therapy. Such neologisms never sound euphonious; nor, for that matter, did "psychoanalysis" in its day. But by

3. E. O. Wilson and Stephen R. Kellert, eds., *The Biophilia Hypothesis* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press/Shearwater Books, 1993).

whatever name, the underlying assumption is the same: *ecology needs psychology, psychology needs ecology*. The context for defining sanity in our time has reached planetary magnitude.

Like all forms of psychology, ecopsychology concerns itself with the foundations of human nature and behavior. Unlike other mainstream schools of psychology that limit themselves to the intrapsychic mechanisms or to a narrow social range that may not look beyond the family, ecopsychology proceeds from the assumption that at its deepest level the psyche remains sympathetically bonded to the Earth that mothered us into existence. Ecopsychology suggests that we can read our transactions with the natural environment—the way we use or abuse the planet—as projections of unconscious needs and desires, in much the same way we can read dreams and hallucinations to learn about our deep motivations, fears, hatreds. In fact, our wishful, willful imprint upon the natural environment may reveal our collective state of soul more tellingly than the dreams we wake from and shake off, knowing them to be unreal. Far more consequential are the dreams that we take with us out into the world each day and maniacally set about making "real"—in steel and concrete, in flesh and blood, out of resources torn from the substance of the planet. Precisely because we have acquired the power to work our will upon the environment, the planet has become like that blank psychiatric screen on which the neurotic unconscious projects its fantasies. Toxic wastes, the depletion of resources, the annihilation of our fellow species; all these speak to us, if we would hear, of our deep self. Hence, James Hillman has urged us to bring "asbestos and food additives, acid rain and tampons, insecticides and pharmaceuticals, car exhausts and sweeteners, televisions and ions" within the province of therapeutic analysis. "Psychology always advances its consciousness by means of pathologized revelations, through the underworld of our anxiety. Our ecological fears announce that *things* are where the soul now claims psychological attention."[4]

Learning from Stone Age Psychiatry

I have been calling ecopsychology "new," but in fact its sources are old enough to be called aboriginal. Once upon a time all psychology was

4. James Hillman, *The Thought of the Heart and the Soul of the World* (Dallas, Tex.: Spring Publications, 1981), p. 111.

"ecopsychology." No special word was needed. The oldest healers in the world, the people our society once called "witch doctors," knew no other way to heal than to work within the context of environmental reciprocity. Some are quick to see elements of sentimentality or romanticism in our growing appreciation of the sacred ecologies that guide traditional societies. This is mistaken. There is nothing "mystical" or "transcendent" about the matter as we might understand these words. It is homely common sense that human beings must live in a state of respectful give-and-take with the flora and fauna, the rivers and hills, the sky and soil on which we depend for physical sustenance and practical instruction.[5] "The country knows," a Koyukon elder warns. "If you do wrong to it, the whole country knows. It feels what is happening to it. I guess everything is connected together somehow under the ground."

We acknowledge our lingering connection with that earlier stage of psychotherapeutic practice whenever we flippantly refer to psychiatrists as "shrinks." We recognize that our supposedly enlightened psychiatric science contains a good deal of mumbo jumbo. But might it not also be the case that something of value can be found in the supposedly superstitious practice of witch doctoring? The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins once studied the surviving hunting and gathering cultures with a view to reconstructing a "Stone Age economics." Is there a "Stone Age psychiatry" waiting to be mined for similarly heuristic insights?

I raise this point with the full and concerned awareness that there are uninvited New Age enthusiasts who are already ransacking and freely borrowing remnants of traditional and aboriginal cultures, often with little study or respectful preparation. In this volume, we have tried to make clear that ecopsychologists are acutely cognizant of how difficult it will be to bridge the gap between the dominant society and the surviving, often fragile and marginal primary cultures of the world. In generalizing about the sanity and madness of the modern world, ecopsychologists have learned to use the word "we" with the utmost discrimination. They recognize that the "we" that runs the industrial world is psychically estranged from the "we" that holds out in the rainforests,

5. For some recent studies of the ecological sensibility of traditional cultures, see David Suzuki and Peter Knudtson, *Wisdom of the Elders: Honoring Sacred Native Visions of Nature* (New York: Bantam, 1992); Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991); Helena Norberg-Hodge, *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991).

outbacks, and reservations by a distance that has to be calculated in light-years. And the unit of measurement is power: wealth, property, brute force, media, managerial control.

Even apart from issues of justice, some will see an immediate psychological obstacle to such a dialogue between the traditional and the modern. It has to do with the contrasting worldviews that divide the psychotherapy of industrial society from the original headshrinkers. Theirs was an animistic vision of the world, a sensibility that both Judeo-Christian doctrine and scientific objectivity have censored. In our culture, listening for the voices of the Earth as if the nonhuman world felt, heard, spoke would seem the essence of madness to most people. Is it possible that by asserting that very conception of madness, psychotherapy itself may be defending the deepest of all our repressions, the form of psychic mutilation that is most crucial to the advance of industrial civilization, namely, the assumption that the land is a dead and servile thing that has no feeling, no memory, no intention of its own? With the full authority of modern science, conventional sanity cuts us off from using Stone Age psychiatry as a therapeutic resource. Those who believe that this condition can be easily remedied, say by spending a few hours in a sweat lodge, are simply not in touch with the true dimensions of their own alienation.

But history, the mirror of our unfolding needs and aspirations, has its way with the most tenaciously rooted orthodoxies. Even in a dominant and domineering culture, both religion and science are subject to that sort of major transformation we have come to call a shift of paradigms. In the mainstream Christian churches today, there are environmental ministries that are encouraging an active discussion of planetary stewardship and creation spirituality; some even seek to undo the long-standing prejudice against "pagan" culture and its insights. A new Earth and Spirit movement is exploring the possibility of a religiously based biophilia.[6]

6. See, for example, the "creation spirituality" of Matthew Fox, especially *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of the Mother Earth* (Boston: Shambhala, 1988); Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988). James A. Nash offers a critical survey of these and other efforts to develop an environmentally relevant theology in *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991). Also see the journal *Earth Letter*, published by the Episcopalian Earth Ministry of Seattle, 1305 NE 47th St., Seattle, Wash., 98105, and the work of the environmental ministry at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York: 1047 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, N.Y., 10025.

Meanwhile, at least along the fringes of modern science, we are witnessing the birth of a new cosmology grounded in an ever-deepening vision of ordered complexity on the Earth and in the universe at large. Scientists may remain reluctant to spell out the revolutionary philosophical implications of this emergent worldview, but the lineaments of the new cosmos are becoming unmistakably clear: it is no longer a matter of scientific necessity for us to regard ourselves as "strangers and afraid in a world we never made." We now know that the periodic table of elements, as it moves from heavy to light, from simple to complex, is the language of our evolving collective autobiography. It is in its own right a creation story. Hydrogen, as one astronomer has put it, is "a light, odorless gas that, given enough time, turns into people."

The Vision of an Ecological Universe

In contrast to the atomistic materialism of nineteenth-century physics, ecology is the study of connectedness. It began its intellectual history as the holistic study of the myriad niches and crannies in which life has taken hold on this planet, but its destiny was to be much greater. It has eventually come to see the entire Earth as a remarkable cosmic "niche" intricately connected with the grand hierarchy of systems we call "the universe." As nature around us unfolds to reveal level upon level of structured complexity, we are coming to see that we inhabit a densely connected ecological universe where nothing is "nothing but" a simple, disconnected, or isolated thing. Nor is anything accidental. Life and mind, once regarded as such anomalous exceptions to the law of entropy, are rooted by their physiochemical structures, all the way back to the initial conditions that followed the Big Bang.

We now know that the elemental stuff of which we are made was forged in the fiery core of ancient stars. In a very real sense, the ecologist's web of life now spreads out to embrace the most distant galaxies. This magnificent cosmology has led us to the greatest turning point in our understanding of the human place in nature since our ancestors first looked skyward to ponder the wheeling stars. It may yet become our cooler, more analytical version of the animistic world on which our ancestors drew for their sense of companionship with all the more-than-human. Surely even the most rigorously skeptical mind must be hard pressed to escape the wonder of that possibility.

Developments like these take us a long distance from the way the founders of modern science and psychiatry viewed the human condition. It is not beside the point that modern psychiatric theory was created with the unshakable intention of being "scientific" in an era when the dominant scientific model of the universe allowed no natural place for the human psyche. For Sigmund Freud, a typically doctrinaire materialist, life and mind were freakish events in an infinite and alien void that was tyrannically ruled by the second law of thermodynamics. In such a cosmos, death was more "natural" than life.

> The attributes of life [Freud reasoned] were at some time evoked in inanimate matter by the action of a force of whose nature we can form no conception. . . . The tension which then arose in what had hitherto been an inanimate substance endeavored to cancel itself out. In this way the first instinct came into being: the instinct to return to the inanimate state.[7]

At the turn of the century, when the foundations of modern psychiatry were being laid, the newly discovered law of entropy had achieved cult status as the final answer to the riddle of the universe. For many *fin de siècle* intellectuals, thermodynamic doom became irrefutable proof for the futility of life. Human consciousness was a transient accident destined for annihilation; ultimately, every chemical process in the universe would succumb to the great and final "heat death." After that, for all eternity, there would be nothing, nothing, nothing at all except the measureless waste of space sparsely littered with the wandering cinders of long-expired stars. Firmly under the spell of the inexorable second law, early twentieth-century humanists could see no better destiny for life than merciful extinction.

I realize full well that there is very little left in Freud's body of thought that has not been revised or reviled, disowned or deconstructed. Over the past century, many schools of psychological and therapeutic thought have arisen to challenge the old psychoanalytical orthodoxies. But one remnant of Freud survives significantly, if subliminally. His decision—and that of the behaviorists of his day—to model the study of the human mind on the objective stance of the "hard" sciences has left a lasting imprint on mainstream psychological theory. That imprint remains, even

7. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Bantam, 1959), p. 70.

though it is based on a scientific paradigm that is now as antiquated as many of Freud's ideas about history, anthropology, and sociology.

Freud, therefore, provides an instructive baseline for measuring how far we have traveled from that era of preecological science. There is, for example, no hint in his work that evolution unfolds as a tiered series of ecosystems, or of the role that life itself may play in orchestrating the complexity of these mutually supportive patterns. Instead we have the state of nature presented as a "naturally" lifeless arena in which a grim and meaningless struggle for existence plays itself out, and where beauty, nobility, and cooperation are nowhere in sight. Thanatos, the most conservative of instincts, lies at the foundations of the psyche, summoning consciousness back to the peace of "the inanimate state." Freud was not alone in seeing the world that way. Out of a misguided commitment to a sort of village-atheist godlessness, the finest minds of the early twentieth century subscribed to the same bleak vision.

The Boundaries of the Self

The preecological science of Freud's day that became embedded in modern psychological thought preferred hard edges, clear boundaries, and atomistic particularity. It was predicated on the astonishing assumption that the structure of the universe had simply fallen into place by accident in the course of eternity. Accordingly, the psychiatry of the early twentieth century based its image of sanity on that model. The normally functioning ego was an isolated atom of self-regarding consciousness that had no relational continuity with the physical world around it. As late as 1930, well after the Newtonian worldview had been significantly modified and the very concept of atomic matter had been radically revised, Freud, still a respected authority, could write in one of his most influential theoretical papers,

> Normally, there is nothing of which we are more certain than the feeling of our self, of our own ego. This ego appears as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else. . . . One comes to learn a procedure by which, through a deliberate direction of one's sensory activities and through suitable muscular action, one can differentiate between what is internal—what belongs to the ego—and what is external—what emanates from the outer world. In this way one takes the first step towards the introduction of the reality principle which is to dominate future development.[8]

"One comes to learn a procedure. . . ." These are among the most fateful words Freud ever wrote. Whatever else has changed in mainstream psychological thought, the role Freud assigned to psychotherapy, that of patrolling the "boundary lines between the ego and the external world," remained unquestioned in the psychiatric mainstream until the last generation. Moreover, his conviction that the "external world" begins at the surface of the skin continues to pass as common sense in every major school of modern psychology. The "procedure" we teach children for seeing the world this way is the permissible repression of cosmic empathy, a psychic numbing we have labeled "normal." Even schools of psychotherapy as divergent as humanistic psychology could only think of "self-actualization" as a breakthrough to nothing more than heightened personal awareness. As for the existential therapists, they were prepared to make alienation from the universe the very core of our authentic being.

Linked together, a would-be "scientific" psychiatry and a metaphysically naive science had no difficulty obliterating any practical connection between psychotherapy and the natural environment. "Nature," Freud was convinced, "is eternally remote. She destroys us—coldly, cruelly, relentlessly."

What does the caring therapist do with ideas as cheerless as these? Distressed clients arrive bearing the wounds of unresolved infantile fears and longings, grinding insecurity, debilitating anxieties. Does their physician then drown them in the existential void? Even Freud's maverick student Carl Jung balked at endorsing his mentor's biomedical reductionism when it led to such a desolate conclusion. In search of a therapy that edified and inspired, Jung refused to join Freud in his disconsolate surrender to "the omnipotence of matter." But as a consequence, he soon found himself departing farther and farther from the scientific mainstream, until there was little left of physical nature in his psychology. At least in its most prominent interpretation, Jung's collective unconscious

8. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), p. 14.

belongs wholly to the cultural realm; it is filled, not with the tracks of beasts and the vegetative energies, but with high religious symbols and ethereal archetypes. It is a conception that has more to do with Plato than with Darwin.

For Freud and most of his followers, the "reality principle" had to be the scientist's reality; it was the world "out there" as experienced by physicists and biologists from whose ideally objective sensibilities every last trace of emotional bonding, even with one's own body, had been purged. Even so, at one point in his theoretical ruminations, Freud admitted, with the sadly candid stoicism that colored all his thinking, that "our present ego-feeling is only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive, indeed, an all-embracing, feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it."

Now this is an interesting concession. It might be seen as the remote origin of ecopsychology, defined as a refusal to settle for that "shrunken residue." Rather, ecopsychology is an effort to salvage the "more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it" as the raw material of a new reality principle.

Psychology as if the Whole Earth Mattered

In 1990, a conference entitled "Psychology as if the Whole Earth Mattered" was held at the Harvard-based Center for Psychology and Social Change. There a gathering of ecopsychologists concluded that "if the self is expanded to include the natural world, behavior leading to destruction of this world will be experienced as self-destruction." In one conference paper, Walter Christie, assistant chief of psychiatry at the Maine Medical Center, observed,

> The illusion of separateness we create in order to utter the words "I am" is part of our problem in the modern world. We have always been far more a part of great patterns on the globe than our fearful egos can tolerate knowing. . . . To preserve nature is to preserve the matrix through which we can experience our souls and the soul of the planet Earth.

Sarah Conn, a Cambridge clinical psychologist who had helped initiate a form of "ecotherapy," put it more dramatically. She contended that "the world is sick; it needs healing; it is speaking through us; and it speaks the loudest through the most sensitive of us."[9]

The environmental philosopher Paul Shepard has invoked this same psychology in speaking of "the self with a permeable boundary . . . constantly drawing on and influencing its surroundings, whose skin and behavior are soft zones contacting the world instead of excluding it. . . . Ecological thinking registers a kind of vision across boundaries."

In their effort to dignify the "soft zones" of the psyche as a new standard of sanity, most ecopsychologists draw in one way or another upon the evocative, though highly controversial, Gaia hypothesis. Developed by biochemist James Lovelock and microbiologist Lynn Margulis in the mid-1970s, the Gaia hypothesis began its career as a biochemical explanation for the long-term homeostasis of the planetary atmosphere. Lovelock and Margulis postulated that the biota, oceans, atmosphere, and soils are a self-regulating system that plays an active role in preserving the conditions that guarantee the survival of life on Earth. If their theory had been given a conventional scientific name (like Biocybernetic Universal System Tendency or BUST, as Lovelock once facetiously suggested) it might have passed quickly and quietly into the professional literature as a mildly interesting speculative exercise. But Lovelock wanted something more colorful. Struck by the fact that the biomass, in its long-term self-regulation, exhibits "the behavior of a single organism, even a living creature," he called the hypothesis "Gaia," borrowing the name of the ancient Greek Earth mother.[10]

The name at once lent the idea an astonishing popular appeal far beyond anything Lovelock and Margulis had wanted. Their brainchild soon became a major talking point among the Deep Ecologists, some of whom saw it as a compelling statement of the vital connectedness of all living things. While some Deep Ecologists express concern that the global perspective of the hypothesis—the image of the Earth as a single superorganism adrift in space—may undercut a sensuous experience of place, others find in it the basis for a quasi-mystical biocentric ethic.

9. Report in the *Center Review*, Center for Psychology and Social Change, an affiliate of the Harvard Medical School, Fall 1990.
10. James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

Some ecofeminists have gone even farther. For them, Gaia represents scientific validation for a legendary "goddess culture" where, once upon a time, the more ecologically sensitive qualities that would later be assigned to women governed the lives of both sexes.

In its search for a theoretical foundation, ecopsychology need not go so far. Gaia, taken simply as a dramatic image of ecological interdependence, might be seen as the evolutionary heritage that bonds all living things genetically and behaviorally to the biosphere. Just that much is enough to reverse the scientific worldview and all psychology based upon it. In place of the inevitable heat death, we have the deeply ordered complexity of natural systems holding out indefinitely against entropic exhaustion. In place of cosmic alienation, we have life and mind as fully at home in the universe as any of the countless systems from which they evolve. More hypothetically, we have the possibility that the self-regulating biosphere "speaks" through the human unconscious, making its voice heard even within the framework of modern urban human culture.

In Search of the Ecological Unconscious

This is the line of thought I have pursued, suggesting that an "ecological unconscious" lies at the core of the psyche, there to be drawn upon as a resource for restoring us to environmental harmony.[11] The idea is speculative, though no more so than Jung's collective unconscious, Rank's birth trauma, Winnicott's pre-Oedipal mother, or Freud's fantasies about the primal horde. For that matter, even the behaviorists' description of the brain as a "meat machine" is no better than a shaky metaphor that obscures more truths than it reveals. Psychology, understood as the deep study of human nature, is inherently speculative; it has no choice but to work from hunches, inspired guesses, and intuition. It can never "prove," only persuade.

In psychology, theories are best seen as commitments to understanding people in certain ways. Whether one accepts or rejects the concept of an ecological unconscious, ecopsychology as a field of inquiry commits itself to understanding people as actors on a planetary stage who

11. Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology* (New York: Touchstone, 1993).

shape and are shaped by the biospheric system. Even if that commitment never qualifies as more than a hypothesis, it can make a significant political difference. By assuming a deep, abiding connection between psyche and Gaia, ecopsychology could produce a timely reappraisal of the environmental movement's political strategy. It might generate a new, legally actionable, environmentally based criterion of mental health that could take on prodigious legal and policy-making implications. To suggest with the full weight of professional psychological authority that people are bonded emotionally to the Earth reads a powerful new meaning into our understanding of "sanity," a meaning that might even achieve the same legal and policy-making force that now attaches to physical hazards like toxic waste.

At the same time, exploring the psychological dimensions of our planetary ecology also gives environmentalists a compassionate new role to play other than that of "grieving greenies" out to scare and shame the public. It makes them allies of the Earth in a noble and affirmative project: that of returning the troubled human soul to the harmony and joy that are the only solid basis for an environmentally sustainable standard of living. It makes them healers rather than hecklers.

The time is clearly at hand to draw up a psychological impact statement for the environmental movement. In its task of saving life on Earth, does this movement believe it has anything more to draw upon than the ethical resolution of a small group of overworked, increasingly frustrated activists who feel they must assume more and more coercive legislative control over the conduct of daily life? Do we believe there is an ecological dimension to the human personality that is both "natural" and universal?

Ecopsychology suggests that the environmental movement has other means to draw upon besides shocking and shaming the public it wishes to win over. Every political movement is grounded in a vision of human nature. What do people need, what do they fear, what do they want? What makes them do what they do: reason or passion, altruism or selfishness? Above all, *what do they love?* The question of motivation sets the tone and shapes the tactics of every political program. Start from the assumption that people are greedy brutes, and the tone of all you say will be one of contempt. Assume that people are self-destructively stupid, and your tactics are apt to become overbearing at best, dictatorial at worst. As for those on the receiving end of the assumption, shame has

always been among the most unpredictable motivations in politics; it too easily slides into resentment. Call someone's entire way of life into question, and what you are apt to produce is defensive rigidity. It is elementary psychology that those who wish to change the world for the better should not begin by vilifying the public they seek to persuade, or by confronting it with a task that appears impossible.

Ecopsychology holds that there is a greater ecological intelligence as deeply rooted in the foundations of the psyche as the sexual and aggressive instincts Freud found there. Or rather, to rephrase an obviously inadequate spatial metaphor, the psyche is rooted *inside* a greater intelligence once known as the *anima mundi*, the psyche of the Earth herself that has been nurturing life in the cosmos for billions of years through its drama of heightening complexification. The "greening of psychology" begins with matters as familiar to all of us as the empathic rapport with the natural world that is reborn in every child and which survives in the work of nature poets and landscape painters. Where this sense of shared identity is experienced as we most often experience it, person to person, we call it "love." More coolly and distantly felt between the human and not-human, it is (at least) that sympathetic bonding we call "compassion." In either case, the result is spontaneous loyalty.

Let me return one last time to old Father Freud, who, for all his failings, remains among the richest theoretical talents modern psychotherapy has produced. In his otherwise tough-minded analysis of the inner life, Freud at last felt compelled to grant that our infantile sense of oneness with the world plays one major role in adult life. From it, he believed, arise the fires of Eros: the emotional force that binds the self to others. In its normal, sane relations with the world "outside," he observed,

> The ego seems to maintain clear and sharp lines of demarcation. There is only one state—admittedly an unusual state, but not one that can be stigmatized as pathological—in which it does not do this. At the height of being in love, the boundary between ego and object threatens to melt away. Against all the evidence of the senses, a man who is in love declares that "I" and "you" are one, and is prepared to behave as if it were a fact.[12]

12. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 13.

Freud's language lacks the poetry his insight demands, but his concession is touched with a persuasive honesty. This is a tribute to the wisdom of the heart by one of the great stoical philosophers. *A man who is in love declares that "I" and "you" are one, and is prepared to behave as if it were a fact.*

But now enlarge that insight; let it reach beyond our social relations to embrace all we have learned of the intricate bond that exists between ourselves and the biosphere that gives us life. Let the "you" become the Earth and all our fellow creatures upon it. Only follow where ecological science leads in its honest effort to understand the uncanny intricacy that links us to our planetary habitat. Somewhere within this emerging vision of biospheric wholeness lies a new, ecologically based conception of the psyche. Freud, who borrowed so much from the poets, might have done well to read one poet more, in whose imagination the ecological unconscious was taking shape. His name was Walt Whitman:

> Was somebody asking to see the soul?
> See your own shape and countenance, persons, substances, beasts, the trees, the running rivers, the rocks and sands.