

## **PROLOGUE**

*I am more poet than scientist. I am more drawn to the spaces between things than the things themselves. I have the eye of a lone wolf yearning to be part of the pack yet suspicious of the conventions and confinements of belonging. All of these potential blind-spotted tendencies permeate the following pages.*

*This paper is intended as an introduction and as a reference resource.*

*This invitation to walk with me upon the ground of other's ideas tilled with my own, meanders, takes its' time, requests patience. Patience for a fumbling consciousness embarking on an uncertain journey of synthesized ideas and service to our suffering world of wonders.*

*The paper points toward four themes:*

*unborn fins, maple leaves, wings, and hands need us to remember forward;*

*there is no outside: we ARE the poisoned vast oceans and the choking night air and the vanishing topsoil and the unforgiving sun;*

*we tenders of the psyche need now more than ever to extend ears of empathy beyond human-kind to the ecosphere and listen carefully to how the earth is speaking through us and our patients.*

*and we need to talk with each other of these things.*

Anthony Rankin Wilson  
October 2011

# Who IS The Patient?

## Psychoanalysis, Ecopsychology, and The Environmental Crisis: Conceptual and Clinical Implications

### ABSTRACT

*Incorporating my own history of awakening and wondering who IS the patient, this paper attempts to provide definition for the “environmental crisis” and a brief history of the emergence of ecopsychology as a recognized contributor to analytic and psychotherapeutic theory and practice. Following an exploration of the psychology behind why we are participating in the destruction of our ecosystems and what appears as “apathy”, I propose expanding our conceptions of the “self” and the “unconscious”. How intersubjectivity theory may serve the understanding of our relationship to the more-than-human world will be discussed, as will how symptoms of the environmental crisis may be appearing in our session rooms. The role that defenses play in managing knowledge of the crisis will be reviewed. Exploration of what it means to work as an environmentally-minded analyst/psychotherapist and how we may collude with our patients’ dilemmas and anxieties will follow, incorporating case vignettes from my practice as an analytic- relationally oriented psychotherapist, co-influenced by Reichian and archetypal/Jungian psychology. This paper stands on the shoulders of many others who have written in depth of these issues and will serve throughout as a partial literature review. My hope is to start a ball rolling, provoke thought and reflection, and encourage analysts and psychotherapists to bring their heads, hands, hearts, and voices, to the task before us.*

[Patient confidentiality has been protected through name changes and disguised narrative content.]

[Paper presented to The Toronto Society For Contemporary Psychoanalysis, November 5th, 2011.]

[Note: **MTHW** stands in for **more-than-human world** or **MTH** for **more-than-human**.]

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***“What can I say that I have not said before?  
So I’ll say it again.  
The leaf has a song in it.  
Stone is the face of patience.  
Inside the river there is an unfinishable story  
and you are somewhere in it  
and it will never end until all ends.”***

--Mary Oliver, Swan

***“Tell me the story of the river and the valley and the streams and woodlands and wetlands, of shellfish and finfish. A story of where we are and how we got here and the characters and roles that we play. Tell me a story that will be my story as well as the story of everyone and everything about me, the story that brings us together in a valley community, a story that brings together the human community with every living being in the valley, a story that brings us together under the arc of the great blue sky in the day and the starry heavens at night...”***

--Thomas Berry, The Dream of the Earth

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## PART ONE - BACKGROUND

### *Opening*

In June, 2010, the International Association for Relational Psychoanalysis sponsored an online seminar, "Psychology, Psychoanalysis and the Environment: A Dialogue". The goal of this seminar was to generate an international dialogue amongst interested professionals and psychoanalysts to promote thinking "about how the changing environment influences the mind and how the mind is responding to the ever-increasing threat."

In October, 2010, the Institute of Psychoanalysis in London, England, organized a conference, "Engaging With Climate Change: Psychoanalytic Perspectives", where almost two hundred environmental professionals, activists, and analysts gathered to discuss such topics as our "*disavowal of the human dependence on nature...issues of loss and mourning as we face a new relationship with oil, and the psychic complexities of inaction.*"<sup>1</sup>

This paper aspires to carry the above efforts forward, review some past contributions, and continue to open explorations of the intersection between our current environmental crisis and contemporary psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic theory and practice.

Attempting to relate with a breadth of analysis to the environmental crisis and its' psychological effects requires many lenses: geographical; socio-political; cultural; historical; economic; anthropological; religious or spiritual; and, psychological. The psychological has often been absent in environmental and psychotherapeutic discourse and it is not often enough recognized "*that the psychological object field expands far beyond the parental relationship and that this expanded field can also importantly affect psychological behavior.*"<sup>2</sup>

We will focus on what the crisis means in our session rooms, for ourselves, and for our patients. Until recently this too has largely been absent from analytic and psychotherapeutic dialogue.

*It is said that we teach what we need to know. Though this paper has aspirations of informing you, more basic is its' role as invitation to slow down. And in this slowing down it is invitation to experience the currents of your body, apprehend and articulate your intuitions, and become mindful of your thoughts as we contemplate, together, what it means to be analysts and psychotherapists amidst environmental crisis. Writing this paper was one way for me to do just that. Slow down. And allow literature review and reflection to descend from my intellectualizing writers-mind into my sensing-body. The research and writing ordeal, over time, disturbingly penetrated persistent vestiges of denial and increasingly revealed itself to be, above all other intentions, my own attempt to "get it".*

I believe there is an urgent matter before us.

How can we nurture in ourselves and our patients a mind and body that experiences and values its' fundamental embeddedness in the more-than-human-world/MTHW? It doesn't matter whether if, as some believe, it is now too late to avert the catastrophic effects of climate and sea change. It does matter, perhaps in unprecedented ways, that those charged with caretaking the inner worlds and psychological health, the aliveness, of fellow citizens - us psychotherapists and analysts - begin to explore these issues.

The capacity to be curious and disturbed at the same time is vital to our exploration. This paper invites engagement with your own experience and then, hopefully, subsequent conversations about that experience. It is an invitation to explore other angles on truth; fears, and our defenses against those fears; and what matters most to us.

I also hope to provide an overall atmosphere that will be true to the heart and intent of the intersubjective perspective, in other words, "*help lift [your] affective experience [of the more-than-human] to higher levels of organization by facilitating its articulation in verbal symbols.*"<sup>3</sup>

Throughout this paper I will suggest a focus on your body experience along with past memory of MTH experiences. According to current neurological theory, repeated focusing will trigger neural firing in areas of your brain associated with those experiences and given enough repetitive focus over time may begin a cortical renovation. Fostering a link between various domains of experience - body, emotional, representational - "*is the neural equivalent of the psychological integration we hope to facilitate for the patient through a relationship that is more inclusive and collaborative than those that originally shaped him.*"<sup>4</sup>

This paper also utilizes intersubjectivity theory as its' primary relational paradigm given its' systems perspective and value placed on perspectivism and mutuality. I extend this beyond the human realm to include the more-than-human. This emphasizes that not only humans have perspectives. Appreciating this expanded perspectivism may enable us to experience our own immersion in the natural world while better recognizing and understanding the stories and symptoms of distress in ourselves and our patients.

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*I was a cottage owner in the 1980's. My first wife had bought 10 acres of beautifully ravined and forested lakefront Shield land north of Kingston. It was the first semi-wild geography I came to know intimately as an adult. But it was also the site of a chainsaw massacre that still grieves me. My neighbor's brief instructions on how to notch and cut a tree trunk did not prepare me for the sense of power I felt when the saw rumbled in my hands, ready to effect my intent of cutting a view to the lake. Nor did it ready me for my fear of the machine's swift, unforgiving purpose. I was like a madman. I was a madman! I cut tree after tree leaving what was previously alive strewn on the ravine*

*slope. No acknowledgement of the tree's sacrifice to my vague vision. No gratitude for what the tree had already given to life - photosynthetically enabling human life, roots holding the steep slope intact, absorbing rainfall. No acknowledgement of the trees' perspective.*

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*I was born in 1950 on the lip of the 10,000 year old North Saskatchewan River valley. This valley is the city of Edmontons' geologic heart, carved through millennia to its' current flood plain. Glacial waters from the Saskatchewan Glacier in the Rocky Mountains snaked across the plains and carved the silt down to Cretaceous bedrock. The North Saskatchewan River served as a highway for the First Nations and eventually became the major waterway by which settler fur trade penetrated western Canada. This river, its' terraced valley and ravines, and the abundant stands of aspen, willow, and conifers, offered sensual otherness to the imagination of my exploring child-body and mind.*

*The river itself was swift-moving and opaque with silt. Its' waters brown and visually impenetrable. Standing at its' edge would make the hair on my neck stand up and my belly queasy with strange simultaneous urges to run away and jump in. It was terrifying and alluring. I kept my distance and usually retreated to the maternal safety of narrow foot trails rising from the flood plain through the trees and hills of the ravines.*

*Here, my friends and I would build forts out of deadwood, and listening to the wind in the trembling aspens, imagine that immanent danger was hiding behind the rustling of the leaves. We would dig through the topsoil and sand and clay to bury our pinecone and rare garbage treasures, fingernails black with earth. Cultural ecologist and environmental philosopher, David Abram, writes that we do not live on the earth, we live within it.*

*I lived inside this river environment as I had once lived inside the contours of my mothers' body. As my mothers' body did, it shaped my experience of and attitudes toward my own body and the earth, ridges and valleys of brain-tissue becoming the neurological substrate of environmental concern. It is not unreasonable to think that my reciprocal relationship with the North Saskatchewan River and its' valley is as much a part of my desire to express concern through this paper, and engage in conversation with you, as any other relationship I've had, human and more-than-human.*

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And what are your memories of play and communion with the more-than-human-world? Do you have images and body memory of a favored climbing tree? A silent woods that welcomed solitude, tears, and dreaming? Swimming for hours in a sandy-bottomed lake? An experience of wildness that was threatening, awe-inspiring, perhaps terrifying? A

beloved pet? A secret backyard hiding place? Below these memoried landscapes of childhood lie some of the underground wellsprings of concern.

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Analytic psychotherapist and environmental philosopher, Shierry Weber NicholSEN, writes: *“Concern encompasses the emotional complexity of relatedness in separateness. It develops...from our capacity to identify ourselves with what is not us.”*<sup>5</sup> This is the terrain of transitional space where imagination and creative play arise and the child transitions symbolically from the shared mother-world to the wider world of teddy bear and river valley, reinforcing and widening the experience of me/not me. For the human, this sets the stage for empathy and concern, and ideally not just for other humans, but also for the MTHW.

The transitional space of the MTHW has shrunk through the ages along with the boundaries of the self. As profound identification with the otherness of the natural world has been withdrawn, concern for that that is not human has diminished. The *“myth of the isolated mind”*,<sup>6</sup> as Atwood and Stolorow call the outcome of this shrinking, filled this shrunken-self. This has left us gasping for air and seeking relief from the unfortunate burden placed on valuing connection with our own kind to the exclusion of the more-than-human.

It is one of the propositions of this paper that we need to extend the boundaries of the self as traditionally conceived in analytic theory. Others have written of this as the *“extended self”*<sup>7</sup> or *“ecological self”*<sup>8</sup>. This self opens out from primary identification with other humans and through experience begins to include nature’s otherness within its’ identity. We do not live on the earth, we live within it. Nature is not out there. It is in here. It is us. Pollution of our air and waterways can be experienced, and needs to be experienced, as the pollution of our own bodies, which indeed it is. These two uniting elements, air and water, cycling through us with each breath, every drop of water.

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*Ten minutes in a 2001 psychotherapy session opened a fissure in my conceptualizing mind that has remained open, indeed widened, and through which has poured a steady flow of questions and the unsettling feeling that my clinical meaning-making foundations were being eroded, parameters breached.*

*I’d been seeing a 56 year old man, Jack, for about 6 years in twice a week psychotherapy. It was a May afternoon when he proudly and excitedly told me of having just purchased two personal water craft (PWCs), or jet skis, for his recently renovated cottage. His enthusiasm assumed a shared understanding between us that his longstanding fear of play and its’ potential for emotional exposure was giving way to an increased capacity for autonomous self-expression and pleasure.*

*Coincidentally, I'd just read that such water craft were the fastest selling pleasure craft in North America. And, that their two-stroke engines polluted the water and air with surprising amounts of residue. Jet-skis and riders were gaining notoriety, through sound and wave effects, for disturbing wildlife that nested and dwelled near shorelines as their riders exercised the jet skis' particular freedom of mobility.*

*Though I had been reading about environmental concern and psychology since the early 90's when Theodore Roszak published the first depth exploration of ecopsychology, "The Voice of the Earth" (1992), Roszaks' analysis had remained intellectualized. It lay dormant in the session room and within my clinical reflections. Until this 10 minutes of surprising inner conflict.*

*I let the moments pass in the session without apparent disruption of the therapeutic connection, saying nothing of my confusion, anxiety, and earth-first protectiveness, but these moments seeded into fertile internal terrain, took root, and broke ground. This paper, one of the shoots seeking clarity and the energy of daylight, is an attempt to wrestle with the conflict and invite you into exploratory dialogue.*

*What was the conflict?*

*Was this solely transference/countertransference; a collision of subjectivities? Was I envious of his financial prowess and growing capacity for risk-taking? Was there an oedipal wish to undermine him? Knowing something about my socio-political and environmental concerns from waiting room reading and prior exchanges, was there an aggressive, testing edge to his narrative? Was I reacting to that?*

*Where were my allegiances?*

*My clinical priority is obviously embodied presence with Jack. This is my responsibility, my professional task. However, in those alarming conflictual minutes, "priority" was not so clear.*

*As I recall, my thought sequence was something like this:*

*if I am the voice of the earth, why, amidst the current environmental crisis, would this voice remain banished from therapeutic process and rendered mute?;*

*if it is true that, as activist, John Seed, says:*

*"I try to remember that it's not me, John Seed, trying to protect the rain forest. Rather, I am part of the rainforest protecting itself. I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into thinking",<sup>9</sup>*

*then my conflict and passionate urge of allegiance to the earth and the MTHW is understandable and instinctually attuned.*

*But what about the contract - my patient's healing need of me?*

*But then again, in these days of crisis, what of the MTHW's healing need of me?*

*Who IS the patient?*

*Were there two patients, human and MTH?*

*In crisis times, what is my relative responsibility to both?*

*How do I clinically walk this territory of conflicting loyalties and serve both responsibly?*

*It has been 10 years since then. I move slowly!*

*However, in the meantime I've noticed a growing exploratory space in my session room where clients are bringing their environmental concerns, dreams, and experiences in the MTH world. Perhaps my ears are more attuned now, and as well, environmental awareness has grown through those 10 years. Climate change, for example, is no longer a fringe issue. There is frequent media reporting of health issues related to changes in the environment like increasing asthma rates related to air pollution, and skin cancer threats related to the thinning of protective atmospheric layers. The environmental crisis has increasingly penetrated collective consciousness.*

*Maybe as I've grown to feel less internally reactive to these areas of conflict when they arise in a session, it may be intuitively safer for clients to bring themselves and environmentally related themes.*

*I am also hearing differently the significance that the MTH has for my patients. For most of my years as a clinical social worker and psychotherapist, references to the land as place and solace, or relationships and encounters with other creatures, including pets, would not register as significant enough experiences to notice and explore in depth. Such experiences would be subsumed too soon by the patients' human and interpersonal concerns.*

*Following the loss of my first marriage 20 years ago, and the beloved cottage, trilliums, forest, Shield rock, and silky lake-water that went with it, I began to spend more time in the backcountry of Ontario's Algonquin and Massassauga Provincial Parks. My present wife and I spend at least 3 weeks a year canoeing in Massassauga where there are few people and abundant speechless contact with the MTHW. Like my early experience of the North Saskatchewan River and its valley, this intimate prolonged immersion has over the years dissolved the delusion of an "out there". The silence. The rhythms of sunrise and sunset. Ancient rock and cushioning pine needle, brushes of breeze, and mutually aware interspecies contact with snake and turtle all become an outer skin indistinct from my own. And indistinct, as well, from my own interior backcountry of mood and imagination. I am reminded of origins. And I am reminded that however uniquely self-reflective we may be, we are creatures utterly dependent upon the MTHW for our existence. "Mind is not a human property, it's a quality of the earth."<sup>10</sup>*

David Abram says that to speak of the natural world as alive, or possessing forms of consciousness, is dismissed as delusional or animistic in our technological, scientific civilization. Perhaps we must behold our own delusion that it is not.

Abram writes that one of the functions of the magician is to coax "our senses to engage the strangeness of things once again...freeing up our sensing bodies to begin to see and to hear and taste the world creatively..."<sup>11</sup> We perform this function in an embodied analysis or psychotherapy, supporting our patients within the intersubjective field dynamics to engage our mutual otherness, our "strangeness", in order to "hear and taste the world creatively" once again.

Many of this papers' primary themes - an extended or ecological self; the evolutionarily profound intersubjective relationship humans have with the MTHW; and what it means to be an environmentally-minded analyst/psychotherapist - may evoke a strangeness in the reader. Steeped in the psychological and developmental primacy of the human-human relationship, to begin to take seriously the possibility that there is an urgent need to place the human-MTH relationship in the middle of our theory building, and at times, practice, may provoke aversion, and fight or flight from such otherness.

Abram: *"I'm thinking of the truth no longer as a measure of the match, or fit, between my representations and the way the world actually is. I'm suggesting that truth is something entirely different, that language is not at all about representations - that language doesn't represent the world from outside, but rather that our language is itself part of the world, that it bubbles forth in the midst of the world. Hence it can't represent things; it is a way of relating to things.... Truth then...is a right relationship between me and the world around me. Truth is an index, if you will, of the quality of relationship that a particular culture has with the land that it inhabits. If the land is ailing, or is dying, as a result of the lousy way that that culture interacts with the rivers and the soils, then I'd say that culture knows very little about truth - regardless of how many supposed facts it has amassed regarding the measurable aspects of its world."*<sup>12</sup>

Your passionate clinical and social concerns may be different. There are many other issues of critical importance within our complex and stressed planet. Atrocities in the Congo; the Palestinian/Israeli morass; epidemics of diabetes and obesity in post-industrial nations; cultural and linguistic genocides across the globe; widening income disparity; overpopulation: all of these deserve our clinical attention. All of these may have some of their roots in our theme.

However, because of the foundational dimensions of the environmental crisis (without air, water, and soil there would be no awe, there would be no self); and because the crisis still resides largely outside analytic discourse, I believe this particular issue deserves our overdue attention and dialogue. Psychoanalyst Susan Bodnar writes: *"Relational patterns evolve from dyads, families, communities, and cultures - and those interlocking networks of meaning originate in a material and earthly environmental field."*<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps you doubt whether there is an environmental crisis. Or, believe it's a false alarm. The word "crisis" too alarming to be believable and smacking of religious apocalypticism. Perhaps where you dwell shows few obvious signs of change or distress. And if there are signs, you write them off as cyclical manifestations. Or you normalize the changes - "that's just what cities are like."

So, why am I drawn to this issue, and, why have I committed to this belief? Let's now turn to these questions and then attempt to provide definition for the "environmental crisis"?

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## THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

***“We have trod the face of the Moon, touched the nethermost pit of the sea, and can link minds instantaneously across vast distances. But for all that, it’s not so much our technology, but what we believe, that will determine our fate.”***

--Tim Flannery, Here On Earth

### ***The Personal***

*I am attracted to what is not being talked about. Maybe we all are.*

*My psychology was deeply shaped by the secret of my paternal grandfather’s suicide in 1927. My father and I bore his first name as our middle. My father, and his mother who lived with us for many years, kept the secret under a shroud of silence and shame, until my grandfathers’ last living brother wrote of it when I was 25. My father and I were never able to speak about this. I was a child bewilderingly mortified anytime I had to speak or write my middle name. Primed for my choice of profession, it is what is not being said that lures my attention. My emergence from debilitating inexplicable shame and finding my own voice to speak of the “elephant in the room” continues, and no doubt fuels my passionate wish to undress denial of the mounting evidence of crisis.*

*A sense of guilt that I should be doing more; grandiose responsibility for saving us from ourselves and an accompanying underlying passivity; repression of desire; and the renunciation of my own destructive aggression all play a part in my behavior, fantasy, perception, and experience of the environmental crisis. This personal psychology influences whether I react or I respond. Emotional reactivity clouds my thinking. In conversation with you, it will arouse your defensiveness. Though I do not dwell in profound pessimism for long, I have a tendency towards seeing the negative before admitting the positive. Sitting in the garden I will see my dislikes and what is still to be done before I perceive and experience the here-and-now backyard beauty.*

*I also turn to the MTHW for counsel, holding, and retreat. Perhaps I do this more than the average urban-bred baby boomer. The MTHW has often been my place of greatest safety. Though emerging out of childhood with sufficient capacities to be a good-enough parent, form adult friendship attachments, and have intimate partners, I remain cautious in letting my guard down and putting myself in others’ hands. This wariness relaxes in the backcountry, even in challenging circumstances, and while at home in Toronto finds a deeper ease while dwelling in my backyard garden with columbine and cardinal.*

*It is good to know such things about oneself when engaging and awakening to these days of environmental crisis. The earth is best served by a decentered, self-reflective consciousness that softens defenses and withdraws as much as possible the rigid occluding subjectivities of a human psychology. Our patients will be best served by our capacity to see the weave of personal and ecological suffering.*

*Jungian analyst, Jerome Bernstein, writes:*

*“Borderland people personally experience, and must live out, the split from nature on which the western ego, as we know it, has been built. They feel (not feel about) the extinction of species; they feel (not feel about) the plight of animals that are no longer permitted to live by their own instincts...Such people are highly intuitive...deeply feeling...highly sensitive on a bodily level. They experience the rape of the land in their bodies...Often they suffer from “environmental illness.”<sup>14</sup>*

*Bernstein writes that though Borderland people may share some similarities to the Borderline Personality, they are different, and must have their trans or non-rational experiences investigated with respect. These patients’ experiences should not be simply pathologized or passed off “as metaphor for something else on a more abstract level.”<sup>15</sup> Borderlander or not, I increasingly do experience what Bernstein describes - not feeling “about” habitat destruction, but feeling it. And along with these profound identification experiences and the consequent clinical conflicts earlier described, comes the fear, if these are shared, of being labeled, shamed, and dismissed.*

*My environmental concern arises out of some of the above personal history and psychology. Others’, including Bernstein, would say it arises as part of the “Compensatory evolutionary shift wherein the western psyche is in the process of being reconnected to nature from which it began its psychic split over 3,000 years ago.”<sup>16</sup> Be that as it may, I am one of those possessed by a level of concern that does not abate.*

*And, how did I arrive at the belief that indeed we are in unprecedented times?  
Who knows?*

*Perhaps the tipping point was some critical mass of accumulated information gathered from trusted sources mixed in with my mid-life experiences in the backcountry and stirred with the steady march of time towards possible grandchildren. The future became more real as I imagined my two daughters having children. And then, someday, grandchildren perhaps having children themselves. When I began to frequently wonder what kind of world and quality of life I would bequeath them, there was a shift in felt urgency about the crisis.*

*Dare we believe trustworthy sources that speak of this unprecedented-in-scale crisis, catalyzed for the first time by one species? Do we finally accept that indeed we do need to be concerned, not just about the quality of life for future generations, but also about whether our planet will be able to sustain human life if we do not change course? After this ambiguous tipping point and my concerns about what might be in store for the 21st century and beyond, I found myself wondering if it might not be better all round if my daughters did not have children. This thought shocked me. And still does. But I fail in denying it.*

## **The Evidence**

As we walk toward this ground of evidence, pause. Notice your thoughts. And try sensing, however subtly, the shifting of your somatic temperature, your feeling state.

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***“The moment we started agriculture was the moment in which we became active participants in creation. We insisted on having that knowledge. That, to me, was the Fall. But it was an act arising from innocence and a simple desire for more energy-rich carbon and food.”***

--Wes Jackson, The Sun magazine

You may already feel bombarded by the bad news statistics of the environmental crisis and readily employ reflexive defenses of denial - “this isn’t really happening...it’s just another punishment story guilty people tell themselves”; or minimalization/normalization - “yeah, yeah, we’ve done bad things to the earth, but we always have and we’re still here, the earth is resilient, and our intelligence and technology will save the day”; or numbing/splitting - “I know there’s terrible stuff happening to the environment but I don’t want to know it’s true, because if I did know what I know, I’d get overwhelmed, depressed, even despairing, and then what little care-free leisure space I have would be consumed by anxiety.”

It is important to notice these defensive formations. Otherwise, in reading what follows, you will likely remain defended and consequently, untouched.

Our analytic/psychotherapeutic trade is in tracking our thoughts and feelings, being able to reflect on them, and embody responsiveness more than reactivity. This is necessary when conversing about the environmental crisis. This skill is an important part of what we have to offer to “The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future”, as theologian Thomas Berry titled his last opus, describing what must be undertaken in the 21st century.

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We know that environmental mismanagement, or ignorance, played a significant role in the collapse of past societies like the Easter Islanders, the Anasazi, the Maya, and the Greenland Norse. Deforestation was often a major contributor, as was overfishing, the extermination of other species such as large animals or edible plants, and soil damage. These four factors are all increasingly present today, not just locally as in past collapses, but across the globe. As well, *“The Anasazi and Maya were among the past societies to be undone by water problems...today over a billion people lack access to reliable safe water.”*<sup>17</sup>

In addition to deforestation, overfishing, species extinction, water availability, and soil depletion, we are facing a unique, unprecedented threat in sea and climate change. I'm focusing particularly on these two for reasons of brevity and scale. We also know that there are many other inter-related dimensions to the environmental crisis which feed and amplify each other, such as:

declining biodiversity;  
the transfer of species to places where they are not native;  
toxic chemicals and pollution;  
and the rise of human populations who are moving from being low [environmental] impact people to *"high impact people..."*.<sup>18</sup>

However, all of the above dimensions are dwarfed in scale by the over-arching nature of sea and climate change.

### ***Sea and Climate Change***

Human activities produce gases like carbon dioxide and methane that escape into the atmosphere. Increasingly these gases have damaged the protective ozone layer and acted as greenhouse gases that absorb sunlight and thus lead to global warming. Though humans have always produced these gases through burning fires, and wild ruminant animals have always produced methane, the scale of human-related emissions is historically new. The industrial and post-industrial eras' ever increasing burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas; deforestation; and the growth of the life cycle and supply chain of domesticated animals (cows, pigs, and chickens) raised for human consumption, are three of the ways we are increasing the carbon content in the atmosphere and fundamentally altering our planets' balance. As author Bill McKibben writes: *"The idea that humans could fundamentally alter the planet is new."*<sup>19</sup>

Below is a summary climate change calendar that provides a brief glimpse through time of concerned voices and the resistance to hearing their message:

It was first identified as a possible danger by a Swedish chemist in the late 19th century.

In 1988, a NASA scientist, James Hansen, put climate change on the political map when he testified before a U.S Senate Committee that he was virtually certain that recent record temperatures were the result of growing concentrations of carbon dioxide and other atmospheric human-generated pollutants. Though necessary research was to follow, fossil fuel interests mounted counterattacks, *"pressuring governments and creating confusion about the science of climate change."*<sup>20</sup>

In 1992, 1670 of the world's scientists from all fields issued a joint statement, the World Scientist's Warning to Humanity, stating: *"Human beings and the natural world are on a collision course."*<sup>21</sup>

In 1995, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC, a task force of leading climate scientists from 98 countries, issued an unequivocal report that

*“1) warming is happening rapidly; 2) human activity is causing it; 3) the warming is likely to unleash devastating weather disturbances ranging from unnaturally heavy storms and floods to heat waves and droughts; and, 4) it is therefore urgent that carbon emissions be cut sharply all over the world, but particularly in the industrial nations where these emissions are heaviest.”<sup>22</sup>*

In November 2009, emails were hacked from one of the worlds leading climate research units at the University of East Anglia in England with subsequent accusations that data had been manipulated.

This small window of climate change science discreditation was finally closed in May, 2010, when leading scientists, including 11 Nobel laureates, cleared East Anglia of wrong-doing and stated in a letter published in the journal “Science” that:

*“There is compelling, comprehensive and consistent objective evidence that humans are changing the climate in ways that threaten our societies and the ecosystems on which we depend....Society has two choices: we can ignore the science and hide our heads in the sand and hope we are lucky, or we can act in the public interest to reduce the threat of global climate change quickly and substantively.”<sup>23</sup>*

In May, 2011, a report by the International Energy Agency, a Paris-based autonomous policy-advising intergovernmental organization, reputed amongst environmental policy makers as politically motivated and over-confident with an institutional bias towards traditional energy sources, uncharacteristically stated that *“Greenhouse gas emissions increased by a record amount last year (2010), to the highest carbon output in history, putting hopes of holding global warming to safe levels all but out of reach.”<sup>24</sup>* The chief economist of the IEA reportedly said that at present, ironically, *“The significance of climate change in international policy debates is much less pronounced than it was a few years ago.”<sup>25</sup>*

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Environmental journalist, Alanna Mitchell, writes: *“some scientists I have met argue that instead of calling this the age of ‘global climate change’, we should call it the era of ‘global ocean change’ or marine climate change’.”<sup>26</sup>* She provides a compelling argument, based on research and interviews with marine scientists, that *“changes to the atmosphere are serious...but...changes to the ocean are far more so. The ocean is a bigger system. It’s more critical to the life support of the planet. And the changes that once affected only the atmosphere are now big enough to impact the ocean...it is clear that the ocean contains the switch of life. Not land, not the atmosphere. The ocean. And that switch can be flipped off.”<sup>27</sup>*

The ocean is where most of life is and in the ocean are plankton which produce half the oxygen we breathe or *“every second breath we take.”<sup>28</sup>* She suggests we think of these *“microscopic creatures [as] the real lungs of our planet. The ocean controls climate and temperature and the carbon and oxygen cycles of the planet, as well as other chemical systems that give all living creatures life - including us.”<sup>29</sup>*

Through the oceans' absorption of carbon dioxide and heat created by climate change, we are altering *"the ocean's acidity, patterns of saltiness, temperature, volume, ice cover, function within the planet's carbon and oxygen cycles, and possibly the physical structure of the currents as well."*<sup>30</sup>

Overwhelming evidence of environmental crisis is there if we are inclined to search out trustworthy voices who speak of it. Here's a last word from Alanna Mitchell before we turn to the birth of a psychological response to the crisis - ecopsychology.

*"...The brains [of humans and apes] are arranged in a similar way, except that the occipital and frontal lobes in humans are better developed. The occipital lobes give us the gifts of sight and visualization....Even more important to our survival...are the highly developed frontal lobes...which 'serve to maintain the balance between caution or restraint and sustained active pursuit of distant ends...and...the quintessential human power of abstract thought - the ability to see metaphorically. To understand. It is...what makes us human....'Fully human' is to exercise restraint while we pursue far-off goals...In all of humanity's 150,000-year history, it seems to me that this is the moment to harness the human gift of being able to plan."*<sup>31</sup>

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## ECOPSYCHOLOGY

Frontal lobes notwithstanding, we've evolved to be far better at recognizing and responding to short-term immediate threats. However, our environmental crisis, including sea and climate change, presents itself as a uniquely long-range problem. The human tendency to discount the future through our pursuit of short-term goals is confronted by our increasing capacity to predict the long-term cumulative effects of those short-term goals.

Ecopsychology arose, in part, as a response to the increasing scientific and anecdotal evidence of what we are doing to our ecosystems and the implications this has for future generations. Its' aspirations are devoted to this far horizon. It's roots are many.

Some would say ecopsychology is a revival of ancient aboriginal wisdom that acknowledged the land's sacred aliveness and the necessity of knowing, honoring, and living within the limits and cycles of the land.

*"Does it serve the people for seven generations...Is it for the children yet to come?"<sup>32</sup>  
"The country knows. If you do wrong to it, the whole country knows. It feels what is happening to it."<sup>33</sup>*

American naturalist and a grandfather of the environmental movement, Aldo Leopold's land ethic of the 1930's is *"usually taken to be one of the first statements of Deep*

*Ecology...[and] held that no one can fully understand an ecosystem until they try to 'think like a mountain'.*"<sup>34</sup>

Marine biologist Rachel Carson published her landmark book, "Silent Spring", in 1962. Exploring the devastating unintended consequences of the agricultural spraying programs that began in the 1940s, her work is often seen as ushering in post-war ecological consciousness and the environmental movement itself.

In 1972, Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher and co-founder of the Deep Ecology movement, differentiated between shallow ecology (the fight against pollution and resource depletion to benefit the health of developed countries) and deep ecology, which rejects the human-as-separate-from-and-dominator-of-nature image and replaces it with a systemic, relational, human-embedded-within-nature image.

Paul Shepard, pioneer ecopsychologist, environmental philosopher and historian, released "Nature and Madness" in 1982 and *"launched the first searching discussion of the interplay between psychology and humankind's increasingly destructive environmental behavior. He saw our ecocidal habits being rooted in the aberrations of human development and child rearing following the invention of agriculture when human culture began to achieve a 'false sense of separation from the natural habitat.'*"<sup>35</sup>

Eminent cultural historian, priest, and ecological philosopher, Thomas Berry, pointed to the shaping of ecologically destructive Western consciousness by the millennial vision that one day there will be long-promised redemption, peace, and justice. This can be seen in the capitalist vision of trickle-down economics where someday the disadvantaged will be saved from poverty, or in the belief that technology and modern science will save us from ourselves. He believed the millennial vision was based *"on a deep resentment of the human condition, of being born, and of dying. Of being out of control. Of being dependent on the universe in ways that we can never fully understand...this resentment that the millennium has not come...drives our society. This quest for an abiding peace, justice, and abundance."*<sup>36</sup>

Theodore Roszak, author and professor of history, published the influential primer on ecopsychology, "The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology", in 1992. In the book he explored and outlined such ecopsychological principles as:

*"The core of the mind is the ecological unconscious"... and ... "the goal of ecopsychology is to awaken the inherent sense of environmental reciprocity that lies within the ecological unconscious"*<sup>37</sup>;

the ecological unconscious represents *"our sympathetic bond with the natural world... [and] is a defining feature of human nature, the one aspect of consciousness that has been most cruelly repressed by urban-industrial culture"*<sup>38</sup>;

the ecological ego represents a psychological maturation towards *"a sense of ethical responsibility with the planet that is as vividly experienced as our ethical responsibility to other people"*;<sup>39</sup>

and finally, *“there is a synergistic interplay between planetary well-being and personal well-being...the needs of the planet are the needs of the person, the rights of the person are the rights of the planet.”*<sup>40</sup>

Ecopsychology seeks to broaden the field of psychological focus. Ecopsychologist Patricia Hasbach writes that clinical psychological exploration began with the *“mind-bound interplay of ego, id and superego....then the field broadened to take into account interpersonal forces...then it took a huge leap to look at whole families and systems of people...then...social systems...Ecopsychology wants to broaden that field again to look at ecological systems...It wants to take the entire planet into account.”*<sup>41</sup>

It is from this notion of broadening the field that I will later summarize the psychology behind why we are destroying our ecosystem and the timely need to expand our conceptualizations of the self.

Ecopsychology is based on the belief that the planets' ecological health is directly related to the mental health of its human inhabitants. It questions the prevailing notions of sanity in growth, consumer-oriented culture. It would argue that individuals do not think about the effects their consumption practices have on the MTHW because of the historical rift formed between self and earth.

Ecopsychology also points towards healing the underlying addictive motivations of consumer behavior so that a response-able environmental citizenry would trump the unsustainable irresponsible servicing of the growth economy. It takes on as its' mission to determine how to initiate healthy environmental behavior based on a reciprocal respect between humans and the natural environment.

It is also a goal of ecopsychology to shift environmental action away from scare tactics and messages of guilt and shame toward a psychology that will nurture understanding and compassion for ourselves and our environment. Direct contact with the natural world is recognized and encouraged as being vital for mindbody health, as are concepts of well-being that support both ecologically and psychologically sustainable lifestyles.

In his book *“Radical Ecopsychology: Psychology in the Service of Life”*, Andy Fisher explores the links between the relatively recent and increasing psychotherapeutic attention to abuse and trauma and the *“violation we recognize as the ecological crisis...”*<sup>42</sup> He writes that *“ecopsychology takes us to the root cultural, social, and historical arrangements that authorize, legitimate, or give rise to the simultaneous injury of human and nonhuman nature...[it] takes us to the roots of who we are as human beings in a more-than-human world...it can speak relatively directly to how each of us experiences the ecological crisis, how we carry the pervasive mistreatment of nature (both human and nonhuman) in our bodies. In this way it can then also help identify the life-denying aspects of our society (as we experience them) and awaken our genuine hungers for a more life-centered world.”*<sup>43</sup>

To close this section, I offer Roszak's voice and his quotation from Freud's "Civilization and Its Discontents":

*"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."* 44

Roszak then writes: *"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 [Freud's] "you" become the Earth and all our fellow creatures upon it."*45

The next theme, "Ecocide and Apathy", will take us deeper into ecopsychological territory, and following this, in "The Unconscious, Intersubjectivity, and the Self", I attempt to bridge the shores of clinical intersubjectivity theory and ecopsychology. Let's turn now to the first sentence of the Introduction in Paul Shepard's "Nature and Madness", *"why do men persist in destroying their habitat?"*46

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## **Ecocide and Apathy**

***"We're just operating like any other species. Any species will multiply until prevented by other aspects of its' ecosystem....We have no significant predators, so we carry on expanding until the ecosystem falls apart and stops us. It's not nice, but it's natural. The extraordinary thing would be if we did something else; which would involve internalizing ecological constraints."***

--Nick Totton (IARRP web seminar)

***"The full flow of the Western relationship with the natural world could not be seen by so many until we got this power, which means that the Civilization's vulnerable side couldn't be fully seen until we actually have entered the process of killing the planet, and thereby of course ruining ourselves. But now, as we've begun to mature, there are millions of people awakening to this desperate situation. Despite this awakening, it's still very desperate, because we're so caught in this predatory basis of our existence that it's almost unthinkable to seriously diminish it."***47

--Thomas Berry

I don't believe we can kill the planet as Berry says. Earth will regenerate in the long term. It is the "ruining ourselves" that I note. It's not a stretch to say that Earth would do quite well without us at this point. However, we're here. And like any other species we want to remain here. But our behavior says otherwise, or appears to, if one looks at our

self-destructive actions. How did we arrive at this ecocidal attitude towards our earth, air, and water, and consequently, ourselves?

Psychotherapist Mary-Jayne Rust writes of two stories, or myths, that western culture lives by. They get to the point of how we got here from there. She points to this thought of Freud's as representative of the first story, the Myth of Progress:

*"The principle task of civilization, its actual raison d'être, is to defend against nature....But no one is under the illusion that nature has already been vanquished, and few dare hope that she will ever be entirely subjected to man....she brings to our mind once more our weakness and helplessness, which we thought to escape through the work of civilization."*<sup>48</sup>

Progress, in this myth, is associated with the reason-bound mind. And this mind is determined, through the manipulation of the natural world, to escape vulnerability. This attempt to dominate nature created a hierarchy of life upon which humans sit at the top, and the rest of nature is seen as lower, including our own animal nature. Those below us, animate and inanimate, are seen as resources to be used for our betterment.

The shadow side of the myth of progress, Rust suggests, is the Myth of the Fall where Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden for daring to taste the fruit of consciousness and are separated from nature in the process. This myth says there is no way back. Our own sinful nature is the cause of our expulsion and consequent unending guilt and repentance, which according to some, results in backlashes of indulgent, restoratively futile acting out ie.drug and alcohol abuse, pornography, eating disorders, compulsive shopping.

Rust writes that we are currently between stories, or myths, and *"urgently need a myth to live by which is about living with nature, rather than fighting it. We need to rethink where we have fallen, and what it means to progress...Our therapeutic task...in this space of transition, is to understand how these myths still shape our internal worlds, our language, and our defenses against change, as well as to see our own part in the oppression of others."*<sup>49</sup>

Psychologist, Ralph Metzner, has attempted in his writing to trace the historical transitions that resulted in our unusual capacity to distance ourselves from our habitat. He uses the diagnostic metaphors of autism, addiction, amnesia, and dissociation to illuminate his explorations and discern what psychology might underlie our self-destructive behavior.

Metzner begins by referencing "Nature and Madness" where Paul Shepherd proposed that as hunter-gatherer traditions began to develop agricultural domestication about 10,000 years ago, *"humanity began to pervert or lose the developmental practices that had functioned healthily for hundreds of thousands of years"*.<sup>50</sup> Shepherd focused on the resulting changes in the bonding within infant/caregiver relationships and the dilution of adolescent initiation rites. He saw these changes as highly significant in producing

humans increasingly alienated, territorial, and suspicious of the wild which lay progressively outside the fenced-world of domesticated animals, cultivated fields, and village borders. This growing detachment led to increasing practices of control, management, and ultimately, domination.

Metzner then turns to Thomas Berry who proposed that “*Descartes...killed the Earth and all its living beings. For him the natural world was mechanism.*”<sup>51</sup> Out of adopting this Cartesian consciousness he suggests that Western humans gradually became autistic in relation to the MTHW. And like autistic children who appear unaware of and unfeeling towards the others presence, so we appear to be unaware and unfeeling toward our natural habitat.

Metzner proceeds to the transition from agricultural society (sixteenth century) to the capital-accumulating, technological society of the present. He proposes that the consumer and economic growth values of this society nurture addictive behavior. He notes that after years of scientific and anecdotal evidence of environmental distress, “*Our inability to stop our suicidal and ecocidal behavior fits the clinical definition of addiction or compulsion: behavior that continues in spite of the individual knowing that it is destructive to self, family, work, and social relationships.*”<sup>52</sup>

In utilizing the amnesia metaphor, Metzner writes that we seem to have forgotten “*certain attitudes and kinds of perception, an ability to empathize and identify with nonhuman life, respect for the mysterious, and humility in relationship to the infinite complexities of the natural world.*”<sup>53</sup> He refers to Paul Devereux’s book “Earthmind” who writes, “*For a long time now, we have been unable to remember our former closeness with the Earth. Due to this amnesia, the ecological problems now thrust upon us have come as a shock...We notice the amnesia that is really a double forgetting, wherein a culture forgets, and then forgets that it has forgotten how to live in harmony with the planet.*”<sup>54</sup>

Metzner then turns to what he calls the dissociative split between spirit and nature which has been evident from the time of the Protestant reformation. This split dictated that we needed to elevate reason and overcome our “lower” animal instincts in order to be spiritual. Freud’s version was the struggle between the ego and the animal id where the price of civilization was paid within our conflicted relationship with the natural world. Metzner proposes that throughout the history of Western consciousness “*there has been a conception of two selves*”<sup>55</sup> - a natural self, and a spiritual or mental self. The unreconciled conflict between the two selves has led to a growing dissociation from our bodily world of instinct and sensation. This dissociative separation is enacted in the outer world and creates a consequent disconnection between us and the body of the planet. In sharp contrast, for indigenous cultures, “*the natural is the spiritual.*”<sup>56</sup>

Let’s move from this summary of the historical causes and effects of “why...men persist in destroying their habitat” and begin to reflect on “apathy”.

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Apathy, from the Greek root *apathia*, refers commonly to freedom from, and insensitivity to, suffering. This does not do justice to what's really going on in relation to people's behavior in relation to the environmental crisis. Renee Lertzman, in her article "The Myth of Apathy", refers to the American analyst, Harold Searles, who *"strongly believed the environmental movement needed to understand the 'psychic mechanisms' underlying the appearance of apathy. Far from being an absence of pathos, or feeling, inner feelings of anxiety, fear, or powerlessness manifest as a lack of action or a paralysis."*<sup>57</sup>

English psychotherapist Nick Totton wrote about apathy and the underlying cause of overwhelm in several posts during the IARPP online seminar. I agree with his belief that many are deeply affected by the environmental crisis either directly, or indirectly through the now steady flow of information about the various symptoms of the crisis, like climate change. So it seems that apathy is not about not feeling. It is about feeling overwhelmed.

He refers to overwhelm operating at three levels: 1) the scale and complexity of the crisis; 2) personal life ie. *"In advanced capitalist culture nearly all of us are on the edge of being able to cope, to do what we have to do and process what we have to process while also handling our internal emotional states";* and 3) cultural - *"the result of many generations of trauma through war, famine, disease, and abuse."*

Totton wrote insightfully about how we try to *"protect a fragile bubble of personal reality which makes life bearable...[which includes] fun, freedom, status-based identity, and most fundamentally, relaxation...Hence for large numbers of people it is not climate change itself which appears as a threat, but news of climate change, which threatens to break into their fragile bubble of emotional survival...In particular, many people freeze: they use the response reserved for desperate situations where we are completely hopeless and our best option is to turn off, go into trance, and hope to be overlooked...This is what is also called dissociation."*

I close this section with some of Harold Searles' psychoanalytic contributions. Searles began writing in 1960 about the environmental crisis and the absence of references to the MTH environment in developmental and psychoanalytic theory ("The Nonhuman Environment in Normal Development and In Schizophrenia"); and about apathy in "Unconscious Processes in Relation to the Environmental Crisis" from his book "Countertransference and Related Subjects" (1979). He suggests in this chapter that *"analysts are in the grip of this common apathy"*.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps we do fear being diagnosed and judged by colleagues if our felt environmental concerns and reflections are brought to clinical conversations. Perhaps we also fear being ostracized from our human groups by expressing our feelings of grief for other creatures and degraded landscapes.

Searles offers several insights towards understanding apathy. First, that it is based upon unconscious defenses against such universal human anxieties as fear of loss and death; the vulnerability of helplessness and powerlessness; and our own envious and murderous feelings. It may also be an *"unconscious defiant refusal"*<sup>59</sup> of

environmentalisms' perceived moralistic message, as well as a rejection of the stated or implied demand to relinquish *"hard-won genital primacy"*<sup>60</sup> concretized in whatever treasured trappings of success might serve our identities and self-esteem ie. cars, air travel, jet skis.

Searles proposes that: *"our fear, envy, and hatred of formidable oedipal rivals makes us view with large-scale apathy their becoming polluted into extinction...Our unconscious hatred of succeeding generations, of our progeny and of their progeny in turn, our vengeful determination to destroy their birthright through its neglect, in revenge for the deprivations, in whatever developmental era, we suffered at our parents' hands, includes and extends beyond the oedipal conflict."*<sup>61</sup>

Further, Searles wonders whether *"there is something so unfulfilling about the quality of [contemporary] human life that we react, essentially, as though our lives are not worth fighting to save..."*<sup>62</sup> He muses that in the transition from our hunter-gatherer bodies of sensual connectedness to the natural world to our current urbanized technology-dominated environments *"that we have been able to cope with it only by regressing, in our unconscious experience of it, largely to a degraded state of nondifferentiation from it. I suggest...that this "outer" reality is psychologically as much a part of us as its poisonous waste products are part of our physical selves."*<sup>63</sup>

And now, from this review of ecocide and apathy, we move to a reexamination of our concepts of the unconscious and the self in light of intersubjectivity theory and ecopsychology.

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## **The Unconscious, Intersubjectivity, and the Self**

***The others who are none other than myself  
include mountains, rivers and the great earth.***

--Dogen Zenji

***"One could accuse therapeutic psychology's exaggeration of the personal interior, and aggrandizing of its importance, of being a systematic denial of the world out there, a kind of compensation for the true grandness its theory has refused to include and has defended against."***

--James Hillman, Ecopsychology

*I am writing this in the midst of a July heatwave. My experience of the air in my unairconditioned study is like being immersed in body temperature water where the boundaries between skin and liquid disappear. With the steady heating, my body and the surroundings of desk, keyboard, and book seem to melt into each other as we all move towards approximating each others temperature. There is a humid sensuality that*

*draws down my experience of thinking about the self, the unconscious, and intersubjectivity, into a more carnal deliberation of where to start, and what to leave in or out.*

It strikes me as the perfect climate for writing to you about the self: a self that is fundamentally co-extensive with the human and more-than-human environment; a self that is continually co-arising within human relationships, AND, within relationships to the inanimate and animate MTH-other. What follows is an attempt at sketching the psychological and clinical practice map of intersubjectivity with the MTHW included. This map includes the ecological unconscious together with other conceptions of the unconscious.

I eagerly welcomed Atwood and Stolorow's book, "Structures of Subjectivity: Explorations in Psychoanalytic Phenomenology" in 1984, and their subsequent title, "Psychoanalytic Treatment: An Intersubjective Approach". Their ideas encouraged a movement away from the Cartesian underpinnings of my ego psychological framework, opening up new streams of thought and ways to experience the creation and mutuality of the therapeutic alliance.

Several years after the release of their 1992 book, "Contexts of Being: The Intersubjective Foundations of Psychological Life", and subsequent to reading several ecopsychological titles, I was somewhat stunned to come across this passage:

*"...the image of the isolated mind represents modern man's alienation from nature... This distinction diminishes the experience of the inescapable physical embodiment of the human self and thereby attenuates a sense of being wholly subject to the conditions and cycles of biological existence. These conditions include absolute dependence on the physical environment, kinship to other animals, subjection to biological rhythms and needs, and, perhaps most important, man's physical vulnerability and ultimate mortality... Insofar as the being of man is defined and located in mind, existing as an entity apart from the embeddedness of the body in the biological world, an illusion can be maintained that there is a sphere of inner freedom from the constraints of animal existence and mortality."*<sup>64</sup>

Afterwards I said to myself, "hmmm, they didn't take it quite far enough." I felt teased into an epiphany and then left hanging in mid-air. Why not continue to emphasize our "*absolute dependence on the physical environment, kinship to other animals*" and the significance THESE have for the self? As a systems theory, why not stretch out the boundaries of the intersubjective self to include the MTHW?

Intersubjectivity theory focuses on mutual reciprocity. There's hope here, I thought. But the theory, in light of the environmental crisis, now, more-than-ever, needs to reach out to the streams, the oak, and the disappearing amphibians, and not only point to mutual reciprocity between humans, but also between us and all that we depend upon to make and sustain us AS human. Twentieth century science has dispelled the notion of a self that is distinct from the world it observes and acts upon. The uncertainty principle

showed that the self's perceptions are changed by the act of observation. And systems science further broadens the notion of self.

The perspectival realism that Donna Orange and others describe as the primary philosophical stance of intersubjectivity theory attempts to promote a more conducive atmosphere for the experience and recognition of mutuality in analysis and psychotherapy. Analyst and patient each have a subjective self perspective and these interact to create a field experience that will hopefully be mutually beneficial, especially to the patient.

Kindred to intersubjectivity theory's stance of perspectival realism is the ecopsychological perspective, a modern voicing of aboriginal wisdom that says, "wait, the MTHW also has a subjectivity. True, some subjectivities like those of plants and rocks, are quite unlike humans. And some, like those of dolphins and chimpanzees, may not be so unlike. A tree has a perspective. The oak has a form of perspectival awareness.

The tree does not think like a human but it has an innate, wordless knowing of what is enhancing to its' life. This knowing includes the rights to have its biological needs respected and experience human gratitude for its' gifts.

If we can conceive of this, and feel what it's like to think like this, maybe we would ask these more-than-human others some of the questions of regard that we sometimes ask fellow humans, such as:

"how can I be in a mutually enhancing relationship with you?;

"how are we alike and unlike, and how do we intersect?;

"how can I practice acknowledging that my self experience rises and falls through identification and intimate unspoken dialogue with your MTH self?"

Ecopsychological perspectival realism respects that all members of the animate and inanimate world have experiences of something that is perhaps detectable only at the microscopic scale. Members of the MTHW have points of view. They have rights to exist independent of human assumptions. There is much in the ecopsychological literature that addresses such "making sense together" (D. Orange).

For example, David Abram notes:

*"In our culture [post-industrial Western] we speak about nature...Mature cultures speak to nature. They feel the rest of nature speak to them...it would make much more sense for our sciences to study the world from our experienced place within the world -- using our experiments to discern how we might establish a more sustaining relationship with a particular species, or with a particular wetland...rather than trying to just figure out how that species or that wetland works in itself, as though we were somehow not participant in its processes."*<sup>65</sup>

Stolorow writes:

*“we are recasting psychoanalysis as a contextual psychology, which recognizes the constitutive role of relatedness in the making of all experience...Unlike Cartesian isolated minds, experiential worlds, as they form and evolve within a nexus of living, relational systems, are recognized as being exquisitely context sensitive and context dependent...inner and outer are seen to interweave seamlessly.”*<sup>66</sup>

Environmental-mindedness reads “contextual” and “relational systems”, and “context sensitive and context dependent”, and includes the wetland and the frogs that live within it. The MTH world is THE fundamental planetary “context” for humans. We are exquisitely sensitive to the ancient wordless presence of the natural world, both of us ultimately dependent on our egalitarian acknowledgement of each other and what optimizes our well-being.

Let’s turn now to examining the three domains of the unconscious as described by Atwood, Stolorow, and Brandchaft, and how including the notion of an ecological unconscious may further fulfill our current theory building.

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Bernard Brandchafts’ writings attempt to outline Intersubjectivity theory’s three realms of the unconscious and includes in one vignette an informal implicit reference to the ecological unconscious.

His memory of talking to his colleagues Atwood and Stolorow *“on the veranda of my ranch home amidst the live oaks and chaparral overlooking the Pacific north of Santa Barbara”*<sup>67</sup> is a reference to the MTH context of their collaborative conversations. I suggest that it may be more than a poetic device. I imagine that this interesting choice to include a description of the MTH context helps to humanize Brandchaft for the reader who is working towards understanding his theory building. Including the oaks and chaparral and Pacific also may help to locate or embody Brandchaft for the reader. And who knows, these MTH references may also help the reader to ground in oak memories of their own amidst the rarefied air of crafting theory.

The notion of an ecological unconscious, what ecopsychology might call the *“core of the mind”*<sup>68</sup> born of our *“archaic prehuman experience”*,<sup>69</sup> and evidenced in our innate affinity for river and robin, represents a logical progression out of Cartesian dualism. This has been the journey of psychology’s paradigmatic movement from Freud’s intrapsychic framework of interior drives to object relations’ prioritizing the interpersonal world in human development, and then to general systems theory’s inclusion of the family and social systems. The inclusion of the ecological into intersubjectivity theory’s first realm of the unconscious, the *“prereflective unconscious”*,<sup>70</sup> grounds it in the reality of our immersed dependence upon the natural world.

Utilizing Stolorow and Atwood’s analogy of a multi-story building with a basement, the prereflective unconscious is seen as the *“architect’s blueprint”*<sup>71</sup> that operates as a *“set of organizing principles that specify a pattern of relationships between the various parts*

*of the building [self experience]...not specific subjective contents, but...the principles that organize those contents into characteristic patterns.”<sup>72</sup> These organizing principles come to shape our experience unconsciously. As Brandchaft writes: “prereflective unconscious principles organize life as it is experienced, that is, as it is assimilated into a person’s own psychic structures without his being aware of the shaping process taking place.”<sup>73</sup>*

The MTHW is the other holding environment for the human infant and for the mother-child dyad. The child’s bodily experiences of water, air currents, animal fur, and bird song have for millennia shaped her experience of becoming a human self. It appears so obvious, yet the significance of this ecological dimension of the prereflective unconscious has been so diminished in our thinking as to almost disappear. *“At its most reductionistic, analytic theory would trace all experience of oneness, merging, interpenetration, and awe to preverbal experience of the personal mother.”<sup>74</sup>* I suggest that it would be helpful to elevate this realm of the child’s MTHW experience into a prominent location when imagining the prereflective unconscious.

Intersubjectivity’s second realm of unconscious, the dynamic unconscious, also can be helpful in thinking about our experience of the MTHW, particularly in the formative years of childhood. Returning to Stolorow and Atwood’s use of a building analogy with the prereflective unconscious representing the blueprint, the dynamic unconscious

*“appears in the basement of the structure below ground and out of sight. Here lies the contents that are driven out of conscious awareness because of their association with intolerable conflict and subjective danger...”<sup>75</sup> “...central affect states of the child cannot be integrated because they fail to evoke the attuned responsiveness the child needs, these unintegrated affect states become the source of lifelong inner conflict because they are experienced as threats both to the person’s established psychological organization and to the maintenance of vitally needed ties.”<sup>76</sup>*

Example: a mother’s unexamined fear of insects causes her to become anxious whenever her curious child begins to crawl towards the ant that’s been scurrying all morning across the kitchen floor. She hurriedly picks her daughter up and discouragingly scolds. The child’s curiosity about the MTHW is derailed, as is any innate excitement and pleasure for the child at discovering something that autonomously moves and appears so different from the human form. There is conflict between the child’s curiosity and the mother’s fear. There is danger for the child in becoming entangled in an anxious energy field and arousing her mother’s disapproval and perhaps, eventual punishment and physical distancing, or the opposite, protective smothering.

Central affect states involving the MTHW, in this example, the ant, aren’t integrated because they do not evoke a responsiveness that expresses with animated ease, “yes, it’s an ant...look how it moves...it’s small but very strong and look how fast it runs...let’s see if we can catch it and take it outside where it belongs.” The child’s excited vitality affect of curiosity is attuned to and mirrored. This curiosity about the MTHW can then

remain integrated and accessible as a conscious memory that connects the child to her MTH environment. This child's spontaneous expression of "biophilia", or natural affinity for the natural world, does not need to be relegated to the basement of the dynamic unconscious. Expand this out from the ant to include any fear of the outdoors and imagine the impact on children of such failures in attuned responsiveness regarding the natural surround.

The third realm of the unconscious, the unvalidated, may be even more pertinent to our age of nature deficit disorder. In the building analogy, the unvalidated unconscious is *"unused materials left lying around the building and in the basement, materials that were never made part of the construction but that could have been."*<sup>77</sup> Brandchaft writes: *"the child's conscious experience becomes progressively articulated through the validating responsiveness of his early surround...[and]...aspects of the child's experience...are simply excluded from processes of articulation. In systems of pathological accommodation, the unconscious thus potentially becomes the repository for whole sectors of the child's experiential world, sectors the development of which it has surrendered in order to protect the tie it cannot do without."*<sup>78</sup>

Let us return to the ant and "whole sectors of the child's experiential world".

A father may not be overtly phobic but behaves in an ignoring, uninterested way, as though the child's interest in the ant does not warrant a response other than irritation at being distracted from his task. This may reflect the fathers overall attitude towards the outdoors and the MTHW, which in turn reflects the Cartesian cultural perspective that the more-than-human is there to be controlled, dominated, and to serve human desires. Nature is to be tolerated and sometimes enjoyed as a commodity for pleasure. Its' domination a method of denying dependence and a renunciation of the truth that the state of the ecosystem ultimately determines his own state of health.

However, the child's experience of excited interest as she pursues the scurrying ant is more about an innate desire to know, and to know herself in relation to the ant-other. If the father does not share in this excited interest then the ant becomes an object that has no intrinsic value and is robbed of its' potential to arouse curiosity. Unlike the mothers fear, the fathers absence of engagement with the child and the ant, perhaps eventually resulting in an irritated stepping on the ant, says to his daughter, "I do not recognize your experience with the ant as having any value, nor do I acknowledge that my stepping on the ant and your identified antself would effect you. The ant, your antself, and your feelings hold no real importance to me other than my experience of having my superior interests obstructed."

I suggest, together with this imagined child, we have all surrendered whole sectors of our experience of the natural world, not only to accommodate and appease early parental ties, but also to protect links to our Cartesian culture that fails to recognize, and devalues, the role that the MTHW plays in sustaining our engaged humanity. The unvalidated unconscious grows. And with it grows the list of questions about what to do with our garbage!

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Do you have a sense of there being whole sectors of your experience of the more-than-human-world that were, in childhood, and are now, unvalidated and “excluded from processes of articulation”? In occasional moments of reading this paper, are your unarticulated experiences of the MTH somehow becoming articulated and validated? Try pausing on these questions. See what comes.

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The intersubjective analyst/psychotherapist no longer regards the unconscious as having a fixed, intrapsychic boundary. The boundary is *“fluid and context dependent”*<sup>79</sup> and in a statement that applies to our ecopsychological understanding of the unconscious, Brandchaft writes that the analyst *“will grasp more readily that he plays a continuing role in its permeability or impermeability.”*<sup>80</sup> It is how I think about and perceive the MTHW that will determine how I relate to it, and therefore whether I will experience my psychological and physical skin as permeable or impermeable to the various animate and inanimate skins of the MTH.

Further to the issue of boundary, as Brandchaft says, *“the organization of subjectivity determines what is real”*.<sup>81</sup> If the real does not include my extended or ecological self, nor my ecological unconscious, then my skin-encapsulated body that is co-extensive with my ecosystem-encapsulated body is rendered unreal. What becomes most real is self experience emerging from the perspective of the isolated mind. This leads to a prereflectively unconscious experience of alienation and estrangement from the MTHW and a view that only human relationships and artifacts are real. The MTH, if experienced as real at all, is real only to the extent it is in service and subservient to my needs, which, in a twist, makes it unreal at the same time. Such is the co-dependent reenactment of sado-masochism acted out upon the land.

Alternately, if *“reality...crystalizes at the interface of interacting, affectively attuned subjectivities”*<sup>75</sup>, and we acknowledge the complex, sensitively reciprocal web of relationships with the more-than-human, then reality springs from far more than the dissociative myths of the isolated mind. For most of our evolution as a species our formative reality was *“a surround of living plants, rich in texture, smell, and motion. The unfiltered, unpolluted air, the flicker of wild birds, real sunshine and rain, mud to be tasted and tree bark to grasp, the sounds of wind and water, the calls of animals and insects as well as human voices...that which-will-be-swallowed, internalized, incorporated as the self.”*<sup>83</sup>

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*“If we remain open to our own breathing bodies, and to the imaginative life of our bodily senses, then these open us up to everything else. If that door is closed...then we have*

*no way to orient ourselves in the world...to awaken to this awesome beauty we must give up our spectator perspective, and the illusion of control that it gives us...because to renounce control is to notice that we are vulnerable...The wild world to which our senses give us access is an inexhaustibly beautiful realm, but it is hardly safe...”<sup>84</sup>*

Before we move from the above discussion of the unconscious, intersubjectivity, and the self, to our clinical explorations, a brief and necessary mention is needed of the “*mind - body problem*”.<sup>85</sup>

Stolorow and Atwood write of this with much that is relevant to us here. They point to two broad classes of mind-body separation which apply to the human-earth separation we have been discussing. The first is an “*initial failure to achieve the sense of psychosomatic indwelling...that leaves the person vulnerable to states of severe depersonalization and mind-body disintegration...[and secondly]...those reflecting active disidentification with the body in order to protect oneself from dangers and conflicts associated with continuing bodied existence.*”<sup>86</sup>

I suggest that the deficits in early affect attunement to the child’s ecological self, and possible intrusions into the child’s explorations of the natural world, promote not only the failure of psychosomatic indwelling, but as well, a failure, which is proving catastrophic for the ecosphere, in the sense of eco-indwelling. This is the felt experience of living within and belonging to this planet.

And is it too much to suggest that active disidentification with the body may be increasingly the norm in our culture? And perhaps body disidentification becomes more ubiquitous with the growing consciousness of environmental crisis, a crisis that poses a variety of unprecedented threats to our habitats and physical selves.

In **PART ONE** I’ve attempted to provide information and historical context for the crisis, including my own personal reflections on what draws me to these explorations, I’ve introduced you to the basic tenets of Ecopsychology, which as a systems psychology speaks to the fundamental fact of our embeddedness within the ecosystems of Earth; and that our psychologies and their clinical applications, until recently, have largely ignored this. Ecocide and its’ symptom of apathy are consequences of this ignorance. I’ve proposed that freeing the concept of self from the myth of the isolated mind, and opening it up to include Ecopsychology’s ecological self and ecological unconscious, will enable us to re-orient our analytic paradigms towards service to 21st century contemporary clinical practice; and towards service to sustainability’s integrity. I also attempted a beginning articulation of how intersubjectivity theory’s perspectival realism may support the understanding of ecopsychology’s clinical efforts.

And now, in **PART TWO**, let’s look more specifically at some clinical implications of the environmental crisis in session, and what it might mean to practice as an environmentally-minded analyst/psychotherapist.

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Once again...try pausing. And try reflecting on your bodily state in this moment. What feelings, sensations, and thoughts are you aware of? Your breathing? Your internal weather?

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## **PART TWO - FOREGROUND**

### **CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS: THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS IN SESSION**

***“I sometimes think that if psychoanalysis can free people’s repressed or dissociated relationship to the environmental world, it might help people change the current course of civilization. I don’t mean this to sound grandiose. I mean only that unless people feel the earth, its’ creatures and their connection to other forms of life, they will never be motivated to give up excess’s gratification in favor of authenticity’s modesty.”***

--Susan Bodnar, IARPP seminar

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*“Last night I dreamt that global warming was happening sooner than anyone expected, like not 100 years from now. But now. And I felt a kind of passive resignation. That this big thing was happening and I could do nothing about it.”*

--Caroline, psychotherapy patient, 2011

*“When I was 10, after my brothers and sister had left home, my father worked all the time, so when I wasn’t with my mother I spent a lot of time alone. And these were the years that my best friend, honestly, was my dog. I often remember sitting on the curb of our street and talking out loud to her. She was the only one who heard what I was really thinking about and felt. I don’t know what I would’ve done without Sniffy.”*

--Carl, psychotherapy patient, 2009

Today, in these times of environmental crisis, what do we analysts and psychotherapists do with such narratives? How do we and our patients’ make sense together of such content? How does meaning-making relate to our own beliefs and defenses regarding the crisis? How do we merge with our patient’s unconscious organizing principles regarding the MTHW? How do we help our patients relate to material that may include both the personal and the ecological unconscious? How do we collude with our patient’s defenses, or organizing principles, that exclude from the session room memory,

thoughts and feelings about the MTHW and the environmental crisis, thus failing to recognize possible associated symptomatology?

*Returning to Jack (pp. 7-8), the jet ski client. In the paradigm of my 2001 practice there was no possibility for dialogue about what had entered the room between us. Perhaps, contained within my conflictual subjectivities, there was his own unconscious ambivalence about his individual pursuits and their impact on others. His childhood autonomy had been severely restricted within the dynamics of a demanding, anxious mother and a passive father, and he'd emerged as an adult with a decidedly me-first attitude masked by an easy going, you-first demeanor. I saw no way to be true to his treatment, to myself, and to the earth. I didn't know how to hold in mind and body what was becoming increasingly real to me - that an individual's personal psychology not only impinges upon relationship to self and other, but also upon the MTHW.*

We clinicians espouse knowing more than most that personal reality is a subjective matter, dependent upon what shapes our perception of it, and no doubt most of us have experienced the phenomenon that when we are sufficiently decentered to dissolve and expand our points of view in a treatment, our patients may respond in vitalizing, unexpected ways.

*A 45 year old dissociative woman, Sally, had been sexually abused as a child and adolescent by her step-father, and emotionally and physically abandoned repeatedly by a narcissistically cantankerous mother. She'd seen me in psychotherapy for 8 years when she began speaking about the last time she could remember living inside her body and feeling unconflicted pleasure. She had lived her early years on a small horse farm and recalled walking the fields and feeling the tall grass brush her bare legs, the sun on her bare skin, sometimes spinning and falling exhilarated to the ground, then finally lying in stillness while gazing up at the brilliance of the blue sky.*

*Sharing this memory and experiencing curious and sustained interest in her experience of the MTHW, which prior to my environmental awakenings would have gone virtually unnoticed or been overshadowed by the exploration of family dynamics, enabled subsequent memories of felt delight in the land. New and treasured body-memories followed of what it was to sit on a tractor on her beloved non-abusive father's lap before he died when she was 7. In subsequent years of psychotherapy she has often returned to these early memories of communion with sun, grass, and sky to embody and cohere, and has turned what once was the chore of her backyard garden into a source of pleasurable retreat, and a means of introducing her children to the flowers and vegetables.*

Ecopsychologist Sara Harris writes: "As I became more open to the importance of the role of nature in my work, my clients began to respond. I had not fully heard these kinds of stories before. It wasn't that the clients were different, but that my own unconscious filters had kept me from understanding their importance."<sup>87</sup>

Let's have a look at some of the filters we, and our patients, may employ to manage our knowing and our anxiety.

## DEFENSES

First, a socio-cultural eagle-eye over-view reveals that in the early 21st century the Western conventional idea of the self, in eco-philosopher Joanna Macy's analysis, is being undermined by shifts such as *"living systems theory and systems cybernetics...a process view of the self as inseparable from the web of relationships that sustain it..."*<sup>88</sup> Intersubjectivity theory is one psychological representation of this shift, as is ecopsychology. This undermining of the encapsulated ego/isolated mind paradigm is an underlying and continuous stress to our hard-won individualistic structures of self organization, not to mention our culture's economic organizing principles rooted in a Darwinian survival of the fittest ethic.

Second, note that references to such defenses as denial, projection, and acting out (behavioral enactments), though originally explicated by Freud as intrapsychic drive issues and then by ego psychology and the British object relations theorists like Melanie Klein and DW Winnicott as intra/interpersonal dynamics, are considered in this paper primarily from an intersubjective point of view. In other words, defenses and enactments arise within an intersubjective field that provokes patterned reactivity. Alternately, a field with optimal attunement will invite more novel, creative responsiveness and less patterned defensiveness. And...this intersubjective field of human relations arises within the broader intersubjective field of the more-than-human-world.

Let's descend closer now to psychological ground and become like the mouse. From here we examine the smaller details of inner terrain.

### **Loss**

***"You may lose your wife, you may lose your dog, your mother may hate you. None of these things matter. What matters is that you achieve success and become free. Then you can do whatever you like."***

--TV business guru, Kevin O'Leary, *The Globe and Mail*, Sept. 24, 2011

Ecotherapists Sarah Edwards and Linda Buzzell, regarding the environmental crisis, write of the *"waking up syndrome"*.<sup>89</sup> It unfolds in stages like a grief cycle though not necessarily in any order. This reference is to their own awakening as psychotherapists but it is equally relevant to what our patient's may experience.

Denial may be the first defensive reaction to a dawning awareness of the environmental crisis and its' possible implications for economies, societies, and daily lives. One voice of denial expresses an "I don't believe it" stance mixed with a gravitation toward climate-change skepticism. Another may be, "It's not a problem", with concomitant beliefs that nothing more is occurring than the usual cyclical ups and downs of economics and weather. Another defense may be the "someone will fix it" stance where a regressive

child-like attitude dominates the psyche - mommy and daddy know best and won't let anything really bad happen. And last, there's the fatalistic, "It's useless to try to do anything" stance, that may feed what Susan Bodnar writes of as "*obliterative drinking and dissociative materialism*."<sup>90</sup>

Secondly, Edwards and Buzzell write of the semiconsciousness stage where a "*vague sense of anxiety*"<sup>91</sup> is experienced as denial becomes less effective at blocking mounting evidence. This may occur, for example, through directly experienced extreme weather events or through escalating media coverage of human-caused near-extinctions. Anger, or mocking any mention of the crisis, or displacement of the anxiety onto other parts of life such as relationships and work may occur.

The third stage, awakening, emerged full blown at times in the writing of this paper. I had a hunch that this was one of the latent personal reasons for taking on the task but had no idea what this actually would mean. The night after speaking to my wife about just this - vestiges of crisis denial being continuously bombarded by my research, reading, and writing - I dreamt:

*my wife and I are staying near a large body of water...big winds and waves are becoming larger. Suddenly the waves breach a breakwater and flood the land...I am watching now from a distance and see the water lapping at the door of a friends house who reassures me that things haven't gotten too bad yet.*

Dreams have a multiplicity of unfolding meanings. This dream, given the strong feeling content of the previous days communication with my wife, speaks to me of states of emotional flooding and overwhelm. These states likely accompany such awakening. It is visceral. It is not intellectualized. There is no turning away. Importantly, the authors write that at this point "*our genetic wiring kicks in, and our physiological and emotional threat responses*"<sup>92</sup> arise in various forms: obsessive reading and news watching and/or doom and gloom expressions of our mounting anxiety. Loved ones may wonder about our sanity.

More subtle forms such as the crisis honeymoon may arise where "*It's all going to be fine if we just...change a few lightbulbs, buy a hybrid...*"<sup>93</sup> The authors warn that this glow wears off when the magnitude and depth of the needed yet unwanted changes continue to accumulate. More fragile self structures or those with histories of trauma may experience increasing panic attacks and PTSD reactions.

Then shock. Denial has mostly been vanquished. Our concerns in this stage may lead to feelings of disconnection and aloneness. "*We now inhabit a reality we can no longer ignore, but it's one that few others seem to notice.*"<sup>94</sup> I often experience what Edwards and Buzzell refer to as a "bizarre sense of the surreal". We may have a difficult time communicating our sense of the unreal in the midst of the business-as-usual world. Do we act as if nothing has changed? Do we reach out to others? Do we withdraw into sentiment about the past or into the virtual worlds of cyberspace?

Despair, the fifth stage, is a low-point in the awakening process. *“The realization that one person, or even one group or community, can’t stop climate change, the depletion of resources, economic instability, species loss, or the multiple threats to human survival often leads to hopelessness, a sense of powerlessness, and even guilt.”*<sup>95</sup> Akin to the depression stage of grieving a singular loss, there is a difference that the authors highlight: *“It’s more like the process of accepting a degenerative illness - a chronic permanent state that will continue to worsen, probably for the entire lifetime of most people alive today...[what] social critic James Kunstler calls...‘the long emergency’”*<sup>96</sup> And perhaps during this stage, insult is added to injury as concern is judged as pessimistic negativity and doom-saying.

Last is the stage of empowerment, where the distressing feeling states associated with despair are more able to be experienced and related to, while limitations of “what to do” are more accepted. Gratitude for the present and what means most to us grows as does what Kunstler calls *“‘the intelligent response’, seeking and taking whatever creative, constructive action will best sustain those aspects of life that are most important to us.”*<sup>97</sup>

Nick Totton, in a post to the IARPP web seminar, writes: *“we need to do the work of mourning...and reach an acceptance of reality....Then we can ask ourselves: What is still worth doing? What can be preserved, both materially, and in terms of ideas? What can we pass on to the unknown future? And how can we help other people to make this journey of acceptance?”*

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Do you recognize yourself anywhere in the above stages of environmental grief? If you do, have you spoken of this to anyone? Try pausing long enough to at least briefly contemplate these questions.  
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*“I remembered a dream this morning where I was in a forest but the land was being sold and I somehow had to experience this forest before it was gone.”*

--Kim, psychotherapy patient, 2011

We continue our exploration of loss related to the environmental crisis and of the defenses utilized to manage the associated anxiety and avoid the difficult mourning process. Rosemary Randall, psychotherapist and Director of Cambridge Carbon Footprint, writes of the parallel narratives associated with climate change. One narrative concerns the problems of climate change and frightening images of the future, and the other narrative concerns mitigation - what can be done.

In the first narrative, loss is the predominant theme: loss of bio-diversity, extinction of species, loss of water and soil, loss of fuel, and loss of livelihood to mention just a few. However, for us in the developed world these losses appear remote in location and in time - it's happening to someone else, somewhere else, or will happen sometime in the future - which makes the loss feel "unreal".

Randall makes the point that in the second narrative about the crisis and climate change, loss is usually ignored. *"Although [the solution narratives] imply that if we do not act now, then catastrophic losses will occur, they do not raise the possibility that we might already be experiencing losses or that the actions that need to be taken to avert catastrophic losses themselves involve loss."*<sup>98</sup> Referencing Melanie Klein and DW Winnicott, she writes further about the defensive process of splitting where *"good and bad in both self and other are deemed to be separate, unrelated experiences...unwelcome knowledge can be split off and projected into other people, other times or other places...What we see in the treatment of loss and climate change is a process where fear of loss leads to it being split off and projected into the future. The present continues to feel safe but at the expense of the future becoming terrifying."*<sup>99</sup>

Randall suggests that loss and mourning need to be restored to our own environmental crisis and climate change narratives in order to reduce the split between what we know and how we act upon what we know. She believes this may encourage acceptance of *"changes that may threaten aspiration, culture, security, and identity."*<sup>100</sup>

From an intersubjective point of view, without the attunement of others or by the culture at large, central affect states related to the experience of environmental crisis and climate change, with the associated losses, may be relegated to the dynamic unconscious. Here affect states potentially become a source of haunting internal conflict. These states of anxiety about what is happening and what might happen in the future to the very ground of our existence go largely unattuned and consequently, unintegrated. They threaten not only one's own internal psychological organization but also external ties to significant others and connectivity to the current norms of society.

Perhaps of even more concern, given the notion of "nature deficit disorder" and our centuries-old growing disconnect from the natural world, is what resides in intersubjectivity theory's unvalidated unconscious. Recall that this is the realm where unacknowledged human experience resides. I suggest again that increasingly the unvalidated ecological unconscious has become a phantom. We are forgetting that we have forgotten. The subject of our grief no longer has substance. The loss unreal and therefore meaningless. Our mourning, a ubiquitous dis-ease. This means that concern for the MTHW has no ground from which to grow. And if there is validation, and one somehow dares to think or speak passionately about their inchoate experiences and feelings of affinity, love and concern for polar bears or family farms, what has been unvalidated may then be attacked and ridiculed.

*A client recently spoke of her childhood experience with ants. With a narrative of little maternal and paternal emotional warmth and physical affection, as a pre-schooler she*

*discovered the pleasure and stimulation of ants scurrying across her hands and through her fingers. Too ashamed of her physical need and the means she'd found to meet it, she had never spoken about this prior to its' emergence in therapy. Understandably she expected the story to be met with a pathologizing, humiliating, or disinterested attack. When that didn't happen she was freer to describe her memories in more detail and restore the experiences to their rightful place in consciousness. As well, this helped her understand more deeply the depth of some of her feelings for the natural world and how troubling it currently is that her suburban grandchildren have become terrified of "bugs".*

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## **Denial**

Let's look more closely at various forms of denial.

Freud saw two broad forms, negation or the denial of a fact - "climate change doesn't exist"; and disavowal, where the fact is held but the meaning is erased - "climate change is happening but at the same time it's not happening because it has no meaning."

Some describe disavowal as a defense where the self seemingly splits into two: one part sees and experiences a disturbing reality and the other part denies the seeing and experiencing. Disavowal has particular meaning at this time where climate change has reached a critical mass of belief. Few argue convincingly, except for fringe group deniers, against the reality of climate change. In a February 2011 CBC reported poll, 80 percent of Canadians, and 58 percent of Americans, believed climate change was real. Yet, as has been discussed, we, our political representatives, and the economic systems proceed as though climate change is not real.

Coincidentally, while I wrote this morning, the following appeared on google - CTVNews (Sept. 29/11):

*"Climate change will cost Canada about \$5 billion a year by 2020, a startling new analysis commissioned by the federal government warns... Though the researchers came up with a range of estimates, they point to the same conclusion: the longer the effects of climate change are ignored, the costlier they become.... The group also warns that while many of the costs of adaptation can seem large at the outset, the cost of not adapting could be more expensive... The highest costs result from a refusal to acknowledge these costs and adjust through adaptation..."*

"*Startling*"? Denial of cycle. "It just happened out of nowhere."

"...*the longer the effects...are ignored...*"? Denial of impact. "This really has nothing to do with me."

"...*a refusal to acknowledge these costs...*"? Denial of responsibility. "It's not that bad and besides, it's not my fault."

Are these all expressions of disavowal; or a combination of denial and disavowal?

A Wikipedia excursion into the meanings of disavowal uncovered a possibly relevant finding. This source reported that Freud's illustrations were rooted in the disavowal of absence. Whether his references to the woman's absent penis or the death of the father have enduring clinical importance is another story. What is pertinent to our explorations is the idea that the critical creative action of symbolization is based to some degree on being able to imagine and keep in mind that that is absent.... *"the ability to represent the object to oneself as something that can be absent."*<sup>101</sup>

My question is this. Have we been brought by historical forces to the brink of a new reality where nature's absence must now be imagined? It is hard to conceive that such a notion would have entered our hunter-gatherer ancestral minds, except on occasion when water and food were scarce. But even then, it is doubtful that they could imagine that species would disappear forever, or that water would be used and poisoned at such a rate as to endanger future access? But we CAN imagine it if we dare. The environmental crisis narrative, as we are acknowledging, is full of loss, abundant with absence. The disavowal of these environmental absences then creates an obstacle to constructing psychological reality. If we can't imagine these losses and hold them in mind then we regress to the more primitive denial, negation; or, we walk around in a fragile bifurcated reality accompanied by an ongoing sense of unreality.

Perhaps it is within the perverse realm of disavowal where we, along with our patients, want to leave the thinking about the unthinkable to someone else, in another time, in another place, in another session, in another profession. Psychoanalyst, Sally Weintrobe, wonders *"if we deny this piece of external reality, are we on the road towards accepting it or are we disavowing it and turning even further away from it? Indeed, are there circumstances where each may be happening, or a mixture of the two? It is very difficult to distinguish between these different forms of denial in practice and on the ground, but I suggest it is important to make a start at conceptually distinguishing between them."*<sup>102</sup>

Denials' other forms, minimization and projection, also play a part in managing the overwhelming idea of mass environmental degradation. "It's not that bad" and "technology and the future will take care of it" are common examples of these forms. Both deny either the seriousness or the responsibility.

Considered to be one of the pathological defenses, one has to wonder what the ongoing effect on self structure might be of this more primitive and urgent imperative to deny or disavow the knowledge of what is occurring to the world that breathes us.

Finally, we understand that denial plays a large role in addictions and abuse. The incidence of which has not only risen in public awareness but has metastasized into ubiquitous societal symptoms. Psychologist Jennifer Freyd writes of the common strategy of the abuser. Listen for the parallels between the abusers stance and our own denial of the effects we are having on the natural world. Common attitudes and behavior towards concerned citizens may take this abusive form.

*“...I have observed that actual abusers threaten, bully, and make a nightmare for anyone who holds them accountable or asks them to change their abusive behavior. This attack, intended to chill and terrify, typically includes threats of law suits, overt and covert attacks on the whistle-blower’s credibility, and so on. The attack will often take the form of focusing on ridiculing the person who attempts to hold the offender accountable...The offender rapidly creates the impression that the abuser is the wronged one, while the victim or concerned observer is the offender. Figure and ground are completely reversed...The offender is on the offense and the person attempting to hold the offender accountable is put on the defense.”<sup>103</sup>*

There is no doubt a host of defenses at work attempting to manage our anxiety about current and future effects of, and our responsibility for, the crisis: acting out; fantasy; passive aggression; somatization; displacement; dissociation; intellectualization; and regression, to name a few. Our living systems paradigm reminds us that such defenses, including denial/disavowal, co-dependently arise to varying degrees within an intersubjective field. This helps ground us in non-blame, dismantles another defense, projection, where the patient, or the politician, becomes the self-contained locus for our abrogated responsibility and we, once more, the objective, superior observer.

Before this paper’s last mile discussion of what it might be to become an environmentally-minded analyst/psychotherapist, a brief exploration of enactment.

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## ***Enactment***

Intersubjectivity theory proposes that human conduct may be patterned in order to perpetuate a particular organization of experience, or to maintain psychological organization, or to defend against threatening subjective constellations from emerging into conscious experience. Psychoanalyst Susan Bodnar explores the notion that *“aspects of oblitative drinking and dissociative materialism may be enactments of a changing relationship between people and their ecosystems.”<sup>104</sup>*

Reflecting on her treatment of three twenty-somethings, she wonders whether these enactments are *“bipolar enactments of an increasingly bipolar earth whose boundaries have not been respected by the society it supports?”<sup>105</sup>* I have wondered, like Bodnar, particularly with certain patients aged twenty to forty who were born after the first Earth Day in 1970, whether patterns of unregulated drug taking, drinking, and sexual activity were somehow related not only to personal histories, but also to the unregulated abuse of the earth. Were these young people acting out, with a vengeance, patterns of conduct embedded and rewarded in our culture of consumption, exploitation, excess, and denigration of the natural world?

I recall a woman patient in this age range who spoke to me about her years of attending raves, taking ecstasy, and being, as she put it, dissociated for 5 years. Along with her belief that these repeated experiences of trance music and tribal, chemically-induced

altered states somehow kept her from falling apart, she also wondered in a revealing question, *“whether it was also a way to numb out from knowing how we’re fucking the earth...and a doing to myself, my body, what I see us doing to the oceans and the forests.”*

Further clinical reflection is needed in this territory of enactments. I’ll complete this section with Susan Bodnar’s poetic summarization:

*“The freedom to negotiate our relationships with each other as well as the earth that homes us is hard to hold onto in a consumption-driven society. Most can survive the assault upon our bodily and psychic borders. Many easily dissociate any connection to nature. And some go along with the devaluation of the natural world even though they still feel the earth’s colors brushing their heart’s canvas. For those people especially, the wasting, the bombing, and the lack of balance in our world grips them in a personality organization that enacts all that chaos. But they may also be our prophets. Those who still hear the weeping earth, the mountain’s call, the desert’s sigh and the ocean’s aria may yet awaken the transitive imagination in us all.”<sup>106</sup>*

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## **THE ENVIRONMENTALLY-MINDED ANALYST/PSYCHOTHERAPIST**

The basic tenets of Ecopsychology - a metaphor of self that is co-extensive and co-arising with the human and more-than-human world; and the reciprocal relationship between the psyche, the land, and society - bring us face to face with the split between mind and body (including the body of the earth), and between theory and practice. These crisis times urge us to reduce these splits in our thinking and relating, and indeed, work towards healing them.

Our actions in our session rooms not only impact our patients but also the earth. And our behavior effects the societal waters within which the practice of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy swims. Not only does personal psychology reflect social, political, and economic patterns, personal psychology and socio-political patterns reflect our relationship to the ecological. Transitioning from the minds-eye being focused on human intrapsychic and interpersonal developmental vicissitudes towards seeing with the intersubjective-ecosystems-perspectival eye is disorienting. It is one thing to embrace intersubjectivity’s theoretical allegiance to human experiential worlds and intersubjective fields mutually organizing each other. It is quite another to open the field to include the cultural or societal, and most importantly for our theme, the ecological - the living earth.

If we do find ourselves awakening, we will then inevitably enter states of anxiety, overwhelm, loss, and sometimes, despair. The environmentally-minded clinician becomes personally acquainted with these states. And through this practiced acquainting will become more able to serve as a holding vessel for the similar experiences of patients. The environmentally-minded clinician will possess a clearer

analytic vision that is more able to recognize the subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, narratives and enactments arising from an ecosystem in escalating distress.

Opening to and becoming more acquainted with these states of response to a shifting environmental ground, however muted the states may be, may help us wake up from the spell cast by clinical theory embedded within socio-cultural habits of thinking and perception.

*"...I don't believe that greened-up psychotherapy constitutes the kind of counterinstitution we really need if we are ever to see the widespread shifts in culture and character we are dreaming of."*<sup>107</sup>

Andy Fisher, in his essay, "Ecopsychology as Radical Praxis", has a point. He asks further, "*Can our practice measure up to the kind of critical social theory that ecopsychology inspires?*"<sup>108</sup> If embodied embraced over time I believe it can lead us to "walk the talk", day by day, clinical moment by clinical moment. We clinicians have a unique role and opportunity in these challenging times to have our finger on the human pulse of the environmental crisis and to listen for the voice of the earth. Attending to our patients' subtle pathological structures of accommodation may be good practice for seeing their, and our own, accommodations to environmentally destructive, unsustainable structures of belief.

Let's move in closer now to the clinical moment and illustrate how significant the concept of pathological accommodation may be for the environmentally-minded clinician. For Intersubjective analyst, Bernard Brandchaft, "*The analyst must resist the temptation to fit the patient to a theory and instead strive to keep the process of discovery alive despite ways of thinking and responding acquired developmentally and during professional training, that may interfere with noticing crucial subtleties in the patient's modes of organizing experience.*"<sup>109</sup> This has particular meaning for us here as we bring our environmentally aware self, implicitly or explicitly, into the clinical moment.

### ***Pathological Accommodation***

*A husband, father, and businessman in his early 40's, Frank was raised the youngest of three in material wealth and emotional poverty. He survived his father's critical, belligerent distance, and his mother's emotionally-absent presence, by becoming the "good" boy, ever-eager with his handy-man talents to fix things for his parents. Prone to inferior/superior splitting and though outwardly bombastic like his father, the good boy was adept at covertly reading cues so he could "fix things" between us. Five years into his psychotherapy, and after several experiences of seeing how anxious, and indeed terrified, the good boy would become when he disagreed with an interpretation or tuned in to a slight alteration in my mood, we had established enough of a working alliance that the following event could be held by both of us, though not without stresses at the relational seams.*

*Frank knew I was a “greeny” canoe camper and that my yearly August vacation trips took place in the backcountry north of Toronto near his cottage. This area is known for being the home of the Massasauga rattlesnake, the only venomous snake in Ontario and a threatened species due to habitat loss and human persecution. He had spoken only briefly of his fear of snakes before this session. He told me how he had spotted a rattler near his cottage and in a fearful rage had bludgeoned it to death with a shovel. He was distressed that he had done this and the distress was compounded by his rudimentary but emotionally attuned knowledge of my environmental interests.*

*I experienced visceral shock and outrage as Frank told me his story and had to willfully direct my empathic focus towards him and away from the snake who, in those moments, became my primary figure of identification. I said that in spite of how I was feeling about the snake’s violent end, I was able to acknowledge how difficult it must have been for him to tell me, and that perhaps, in some way, our being able to relate to this experience together may help us look further at his terror and violence. Road rage was no stranger to Frank. There was visible relief in his demeanor as he saw my metabolization of the narrative and another step was taken in softening his defensive patterns of pathological accommodation in the therapy.*

*His fear that I would use this against him as evidence of my environmental superiority was not fully realized so he was cushioned from sinking into well-known states of gross inferiority. His cohesion was enhanced. This therapeutic experience has remained an oft visited reference point for him where, as Frank puts it, “you put me first...you put me before your beliefs...I knew you were upset...I felt like I existed in myself...I didn’t have to fix it for you...”.*

*Since, Frank has been able to speak more of his rattlesnake remorse without feeling significantly diminished and inferior. He has even begun to open to his own identification with the snake as a way to access how he felt when facing his father’s sudden enraged attacks. However, as much as this is a good news vignette, my environmentally-minded self remains vigilant with Frank knowing that without my sensitivity to his patterns of accommodation, his gradual autonomous shift towards authentic environmental concern will be impeded.*

This vignette illustrates that analysts and psychotherapists need to bring an increased sensitivity to how their environmental beliefs and concerns impact the relational field, particularly with patients with pervasive patterns of pathological accommodation. These patients could have yet another reason to idealize, hate, and distance the analyst who makes no secret of their environmental concern, while configuring themselves into false shapes to stave off relational ruptures and disintegration.

The environmentally-minded psychotherapist listens for the voice of the earth. With the earth in mind we will be more able to link the attacks on external environments with what may be occurring within patients internal environments. My patient Kim, who’s dream of having to experience the forest “before it was gone”, not only associated this image with her repeated experiences of premature separation from her mother and the

resultant expectation in her therapy that I would “kick her out before she was ready”, but also with her felt concern for the disappearing landscapes around her. She recalled in this session how viscerally disturbed, and almost sick to her stomach, she’d been after seeing a clear-cut landscape (or “moon scape” as she described it) in British Columbia.

I have little doubt that Kim included the eco-interpretation in the session to hopefully please me, and we’ve spoken about this trap in the work. However, there seemed to be a clear demarcation between the personal-historical and the environmental in the tone of her narrative. There was a sense of differentiation between the two. She suggested further that though her mother-wound likely yielded susceptibility to experiences of premature loss, perhaps this had its’ painful advantage of making her more open to the reality of the worlds’ myriad environmental losses. This notion seems to have redeemed her mother-wound in some way that enabled it to transform from being solely a debilitating narrow symbol of deficiency and disconnection to a more complex symbol of connection to the wider world.

### **Questions and Listening**

The environmentally-minded therapist has a wider repertoire of concern evidenced in possibly unthought questions like, “how much time in the week do you spend out of doors in nature?” Or, “do you remember a special place in nature; and what did you experience?” Or, “what of your bonds with animals; with plants?” Or, “what was the childhood landscape of your parents and did they speak about it, and how? What are their stories of the land?”

Such questions are subject, of course, to timing and context. It is through such sensitive, well-timed interest that we may help create a safe space for our clients to verbalize, and through this articulation, validate their intimate, formative experiences with the more-than-human. A psychologist wrote in a June 2010 IARPP seminar post:

*“my practice has been transformed in recent years by experiencing the breadth of selfobject support some clients have received in nature...Once I had twigged that some people have had significant relationships with nature from an early age, and it is that that has kept them sane, I became actively open to any mention of nature in the consulting room.”*

A number of environmentally-minded clinicians write of the need to hear patients’ accounts of experiences in and with the MTHW as authentic in their own right and not just as a degraded replacement of a human selfobject. Analyst and author Jerome Bernstein writes of the importance of not interpreting such experiences, *“certainly not in the moment...[and] to hold [such] an experience that can feel between language...To not seek the comfort of rational understanding, but to come to some kind of knowing through a holding and wonderment.”*<sup>110</sup>

## **Children**

Another IARPP seminar participant who works with children wrote:

*“I have been writing about the effect of the environmental crisis on the mental health of children, taking notes immediately after sessions that are particularly poignant. So far I have not read any posts about this topic. But perhaps we do not want to know the minds of those who will inherit this very difficult situation, dealing with it (hopefully) long after we’re gone...”*

This same participant added:

*“Children have never before been enlisted in a project as daunting as rescuing their very means of existence...Children currently are aware of other children so allergic to environmental allergens that their lives depend upon avoidance. I think few of us my age saw the environment as potentially toxic in this way...How should we respond to our child patients’ environmental anxieties? Are they different from our own?”*

The writings of Richard Louv (“Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder”) are pertinent here but beyond the scope of this paper. But I did want to include some mention of our young who will inherit from us our attitudes of denial, or perhaps, some of our awakening capacities. Our themes are clearly no less relevant to children and those that work with them than they are to work with adolescents or adults, though how we handle these issues clinically will obviously differ.

And certainly these themes are highly relevant to our adolescent youth who will likely be living in a world of increasingly degraded environments and will be called to significantly adjust their lifestyles. It may be vital to help them work through de-idealization experiences and mourn what they thought was their future. For example, following their de-idealization of eco-heroes and sustainability’s progress, they could split from admiration and hope and turn towards the negative in rage, depressive apathy, and blame. Psychologist Tim Kasser asks: “...how are we going to prevent that sort of move - just giving up on nature as young people begin to encounter the struggles that they are no doubt going to encounter?”<sup>111</sup>

## **Self Criticism and Grandiosity**

It’s likely that our patients will increasingly bring us their angst about the state of the natural world and their complicity in its’ abuse. As well as our listening to, recognizing, and serving a holding function for their anxieties and valid concern, they may need us to see their self-torment and help them moderate harsh self-criticism and states of despairing helplessness. Patients may express such affect laden statements as “I should be doing more...nothing I do will make any difference...how come I’m not doing anything?...I’m going to make a big difference.” Guilt, impotent outrage, self attacks, and grandiose expectations of saving the world require our attunement, otherwise they may spiral towards intensified overwhelm, depression, and the paralysis of apathy.

## **Thomas Doherty**

Doherty is a Portland ecopsychologist with a practice he calls “sustainable self”. Some of his latest work is published in the May-June 2011 special issue of the American Psychologist - “Psychology and Global Climate Change”. His 4-stage model of addressing environmental concerns with clients - 1) recognition and validation; 2) centering and acceptance; 3) nurturing and celebration; 4) grounded action - neatly sums up his approach:

*“...impulsively moving into lifestyle changes or activism regarding environmental issues can be counterproductive without a better understanding and acceptance of the personal meaning of these issues and plans for self-care...It is important to note that this is not about mental health professionals pushing an agenda. The assumption is that we may be dealing with individuals who are experiencing consciousness-raising regarding environmental issues, dissonance between their lifestyle and developing ecological values, and possibly clinically significant health symptoms....It is not necessarily our job to educate people about environmental issues...but it may be unethical to avoid or mistakenly redirect clients away from these issues.”<sup>112</sup>*

## **Identity**

identity: *“Being oneself or itself and not another; who or what one is...”<sup>113</sup>*

Tom Compton and Tim Kasser in their book, “Meeting Environmental Challenges: The Role of Human Identity”, offer some important reminders for the aspiring environmentally-minded clinician. They write of identity being comprised of two elements - 1) a person’s values; and 2) their goals. They also focus on how we cope with experiences of environmental threat. The authors highlight:

*“with regard to values, one of the things we know from the research is that the same values and goals that tend to promote positive environmental outcomes are the same values and goals that also tend to be associated with personal well-being. On the flip side, the same values and goals which undermine ecological outcomes also tend to be associated with being less happy and having more distress.*

*“...and...many of the same kinds of defense mechanisms...that people engage in that are problematic for the environment - things like denial or...projection or...apathy - not only hurt the environment, but they are the ones that most psychotherapists recognize as also damaging to people’s well-being.”<sup>114</sup>*

“Who or what one is” in our culture is pervasively defined by consumption, economic growth and success, and individualism. The authors challenge this socio-cultural norm and propose *“a different kind of identity that will help us feel meaningful and have relationships and be sustainable...”<sup>115</sup>* How do we clinicians foster with sensitive

sophistication such a needed identity shift towards a sustainable self-concept or identity: day by day with ourselves, session by session with our patients?

Rosemary Randall provides an illustrative account of one such symbol of identity, the car:

*“Take for example a young woman whose car is her cocoon. She has chosen it for its color and style. She fills it with personal comforts - her CDs, a favorite rug, a mascot, water bottle, and tissues within easy reach, radio tuned to her favorite station. Snug inside, she feels safe. At the start of the day, it helps her make the transition from sleepy, child-like dependence to independent, responsible, working woman. At the end of the day, its’ privacy and containment comfort her from the bruises of working life. Its’ outward gleam and shine speak of her success. Its inner warmth and comfort acknowledge her fragility. It both protects and expresses her identity. The suggestions that she might take the bus or lift-share with colleagues will not be appealing.”<sup>116</sup>*

I included this quote in its’ entirety because of the descriptive detail that highlights how delicate and complex the environmentally-minded clinical territory is for us. We must understand how deeply rooted our identities are in early 21st century socio-cultural patterns of belief and behavior. Decentering from these will enable us to make our own shifts toward sustainability. Making the effort to groundedly embody these shifts in our personal and professional lives will benefit the psychological and physical health of our patients’ who come to us with their personal suffering, and as human expressions of social and ecological dis-ease.

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## ***Once Again, Loss***

My mother died in the midst of writing this paper, 8 days shy of her 99th birthday. Grieving my last surviving parent has opened me once again to the stark experience of deaths' absoluteness. Strands of denial continue to weave their way through my mind and heart: "how is it possible that I can't talk hockey with her...how can it be that I won't hear her living voice again?"

This current experience of grieving my personal mother has also mercilessly, and mercifully, opened the door wider to other losses. My father. Grandparents. A marriage. Friends and pets who are no more. Formerly-imagined futures. Landscapes I no longer walk. Woodlots paved over. The ongoing news of other species diminished and disappearing.

It seems there is one great grief river fed by human and more-than-human tributaries. I am realizing anew the importance of opening to this grief and articulating my lived experience of loss. I am reaching to realize, without idealized sentiment, the significance of telling the story of the river and the valley and mother loss, no matter how anticipated, and the story of losing Mother Earths' ecological certainties, no matter how unimaginable. Such realizing must be necessary for the soft, slow dissolution of shock and denial...and for a freshly imagined future.

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## ***Closing***

Will we hear the credible news of these great losses? Will we bear witness? Will we dare to further imagine what blind destructiveness we are capable of? Will we dare to re-imagine the future? Will we ask ourselves what we stand for and answer with truthful depth? Will we consult our bodies about what lifestyle makes sense to us?

And so the grief river must wind its' way though our hearts and minds as we continue to turn towards the reality of environmental crisis and its' many faces.

And so the grief river must wind its' way through our hearts and minds as we confront the defenses that are part of our lifestyles.

And so the grief river must wind its' way through our hearts and minds as we face the reality of losing the comfort of who we thought we were.

We need each other. We need to talk with each other of these losses. We need to feel and think of these things. And we need to feel and think about these things together.

We analysts and psychotherapists have much to offer the collective tasks of grieving and transitioning to a sustainable future. Through our passionate search for depth understandings of healing relatedness we can become a voice of, and for, the earth.

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So, who IS the patient?

When you sit in session with a patient, or a couple, a family, or a group, and during some of your clinical theory reflections, I have a hope, maybe it's a prayer of our planet, that you will permit that question to persist and awaken.

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