

## Ecopsychology: A Review

---

Whit Hibbard

Whit Hibbard is a graduate student at Saybrook Graduate School in San Francisco where he is completing his Ph.D. in Human Science. A Montana rancher by heritage, Whit is committed to sustainable agricultural practices. His family's ranch won the Montana State and Northwest Regional Environmental Stewardship Award for 2002. His publications include *Forensic Hypnosis* and *Psychic Criminology*.

*Psychology, so dedicated to awakening human consciousness, needs to wake itself up to one of the most ancient human truths: we cannot be studied or cured apart from the planet.*

James Hillman

The one discipline that, sad to say, has hitherto remained virtually untouched by any concern for the environment or the human-to-nature relationship is psychology—clinical, behaviorist, cognitive, physiological, humanistic or transpersonal—for any theory or research concerning the most basic fact of human existence: the fact of our relationship to the natural world of which we are a part.<sup>1</sup>

This omission is all the more surprising given that “the pivotal psychological reality of our time”<sup>2</sup> is the question of long-term survival of the human species. Yet, as Roger Walsh notes, even though this is the most serious question of our time and raises profound issues and implications for psychology, it is addressed rarely in the psychological literature:

This deficiency in the literature becomes all the more remarkable when it is realized that all the major global threats to human survival and wellbeing are now primarily human caused. That is, they stem directly from our own behavior and *can therefore largely be traced to psychological origins*.<sup>3</sup>

Clinical psychologist Ralph Metzner believes that this “glaring, scandalous, and embarrassing omission has now begun to be remedied and addressed”<sup>4</sup> by the new field of “ecopsychology.” As defined by Theodore Roszak, ecopsychology is a name used for the emerging synthesis of the psychological and the ecological.<sup>5</sup> It is “an appeal to environmentalists and psychologists for a dialogue that [will] enrich

both fields and play a significant role in public policy.”<sup>6</sup> As a psychology it seeks to comprehend humankind’s interrelationship with the nonhuman world (a “forgotten land” for most modern people, as Fisher [2002] notes), to diagnose what is wrong with that interrelationship, and to suggest paths to healing.

This essay is a survey of the emerging field of ecopsychology. Its purpose is to bring some order to this confusingly diverse field by answering the following questions: What are ecopsychology’s intellectual foundations and history? How is ecopsychology defined and delimited? What are the goals, purposes, and objectives of ecopsychology?

---

## **Intellectual Foundations**

The environmental movement and some of its offspring—ecotheology, ecophilosophy, deep ecology, and ecofeminism in particular—were foundational to the development of ecopsychology in three important ways:

1. They expanded the intellectual horizon of people—professional, academic, and lay—thereby fertilizing and readying the intellectual soil for the revolutionary thesis of ecopsychology.
2. They provided the impetus and precedent for academic and professional psychologists (and others) to look seriously at the relation of psychology to the environmental crisis.
3. They articulated many of the essential insights upon which ecopsychology is based.

---

## **The Environmental Movement**

In the largest sense, ecopsychology is a child of the environmental movement which began in the 1960s in response to the dawning recognition that modern industrial civilization had engendered an environmental crisis. According to Fox, “the birth of the environmental movement . . . is typically dated to the virtual explosion of interest that attended the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* [which] served to raise and galvanize public concern over environmental issues.”<sup>7</sup> The enduring contribution of the environmental movement, which Roszak calls “the largest political cause ever undertaken by the human race,”<sup>8</sup> is the bringing to the forefront of public discussion the fact that there is a serious environmental problem. This acknowledgement provided the impetus for professional academic

disciplines to address the problem, which contributed to the “greening” of public consciousness and laid the necessary intellectual foundation for the eventual emergence of ecopsychology.

---

### **Ecotheology**

The student of medieval history, Lynn White Jr., in his influential 1967 essay, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” incriminated an unabashedly anthropocentric Judaism and Christianity for sanctioning an unqualified dominion over and exploitation of nature. White’s essay served to catalyze discussions about the environmental implications of the Judeo-Christian tradition and to foster the beginning of a new field: ecotheology. Ecotheologians, in a story well told by Nash<sup>9</sup> and Gottlieb,<sup>10</sup> searched their own Judeo-Christian tradition, as well as Asian and indigenous religious traditions, in an effort to make Christianity and Judaism environmentally responsible, especially by expanding the spiritual community to include nature and all its creatures.

---

### **Ecophilosophy**

Just as the greening of theology played a crucial part in changing modern perceptions and attitudes towards nature, the greening of philosophy was of equal importance. The ethical relationship of human to nature was not a subject of serious philosophical discussion until

the intensity of environmental concern in the 1970s, coupled with an unprecedented eagerness on the part of philosophers to apply their craft to contemporary issues, created a new field: environmental philosophy [or ecophilosophy]. . . . About a decade after American religion began to ‘green,’ philosophy as a profession started a major exploration of the proposition that moral standing did not begin and end with human beings.<sup>11</sup>

The environmental movement, according to Zimmerman, was so compelling that it influenced a new generation of philosophers concerned about environmental issues to raise basic questions about humanity’s relationship to nature, including the question of ethical responsibility.<sup>12</sup>

---

### **Deep Ecology**

George Sessions explains that deep ecology emerged as

a philosophical and scientific social/political movement during the so-called Ecological Revolution [environmental movement] of the 1960s. Its main concern has been to bring about a major paradigm shift—a shift in perception, values, and

lifestyles—as a basis for redirecting the ecologically destructive path of modern industrial growth societies.<sup>13</sup>

Deep ecology, according to Sessions, is characterized by: (a) a move from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism, biospherical egalitarianism, and social activism; (b) a willingness to ask deep questions, thus challenging fundamental assumptions in its search for the roots of the environmental crisis; and (c) a rejection of the prevailing “second nature” view which holds that civilization has “transcended” or “evolved out of” nature and is thus not subject to evolutionary and ecological laws.<sup>14</sup>

---

### **Ecofeminism**

Ecofeminism “emerged in the 1970s with an increasing consciousness of the connections between women and nature.”<sup>15</sup> The key insight of ecofeminism, according to ecofeminist philosopher Karen Warren, “is that there are important connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature, an understanding of which is crucial to feminism, environmentalism and environmental philosophy.”<sup>16</sup> The problem is not anthropocentrism as deep ecologists claim, but more specifically, androcentrism, which manifested in oppressive, patriarchal social structures and hierarchies that sanctioned the exploitation of women and nature.<sup>17</sup>

---

### **Summary**

The net result of the environmental movement, ecotheology, ecophilosophy, deep ecology, and ecofeminism was a systematic critique and deconstruction of the anthropocentric, androcentric, patriarchal, hierarchical, Western Judeo-Christian worldview in relation to environmental beliefs and perceptions. This led to: (a) a general public awareness of the ecological crisis (environmental movement); (b) a reconceptualization of all of nature as part of God’s creation and spiritual community, and the formulation of the Christian ideal of healthy stewardship (ecotheology); (c) an extension of ethical consideration and natural rights (at least in the minds of the more radical ecophilosophers) to a much larger community including animals, plants, ecosystems, and Gaia (ecophilosophy); (d) an explication of the dominant Western anthropocentric, second-nature worldview, and a discussion in the public consciousness of the possibility of an ecocentric, egalitarian worldview (deep ecology); and (e) an awareness of the relation of the abuse of nature and the abuse of women in patriarchal, dominator hierarchies (ecofeminism).<sup>18</sup> The time had come, the intellectual foundation laid, the key insights articulated,

and the impetus provided for psychologists (and others) to examine their own discipline in relation to the environmental crisis, and to formulate their own radical thesis: Psychological health of the human and the health of the planet are interconnected intimately and inextricably.<sup>19</sup>

---

## History

It is difficult to say with certainty exactly when and by whom ecopsychology was started, since from its nebulous beginnings it has been a rather loose coalition of people, mostly academics, who began to look seriously at the psychological causes of the environmental crisis. Several formative events and persons, however, stand as particularly noteworthy.

According to *The Ecopsychology Newsletter*, Paul Shepard, former professor of human ecology at Pitzer College, “can be credited with pioneering the study of ecopsychology”<sup>20</sup> with the publication of his *Nature and Madness* in 1982. Roszak, in fact, calls Shepard “the first ecopsychologist, the first thinker in the environmental movement to apply psychological categories to our treatment of the planet.”<sup>21</sup> A contender for that title, however, is arguably ecopsychologist Robert Greenway, who first brought his interests in “psychoecology” to the psychology department at Sonoma State University in 1969 where he taught courses in that subject. It was not until 1992, however, that ecopsychology was named formally and outlined seriously by Theodore Roszak, professor of history at California State University in Hayward, in his *Voice of the Earth*, which he considers “an essay in ecopsychology.”<sup>22</sup> This contribution certainly places Roszak as a serious contender for the title of founder. Roszak, however, considers naturalist Prince Peter Kropotkin and Gestalt psychologist Paul Goodman among the first ecopsychologists for their early efforts to combine psychology and ecology. Roszak also considers Ralph Metzner “one of the founders,”<sup>23</sup> ostensibly because of his early participation and influence, his many ecopsychological essays, and his early courses in the subject at the California Institute of Integral Studies. Maverick psychoanalyst Harold Searles is considered by some to be “a proto-ecopsychologist”<sup>24</sup> for bringing the nonhuman environment into the psychoanalytic equation as early as 1960,<sup>25</sup> for postulating the importance of “ecologically healthy relatedness to our nonhuman environment” to psychological health, and for encouraging psychoanalysts to “make some real contribution . . . toward meeting the ecological crisis.”<sup>26</sup>

Other impetuses for the growth of ecopsychology were the first ecopsychology conference in 1990, "Psychology As If the Whole Earth Mattered," sponsored by the Center for Psychology and Social Change in Cambridge, Massachusetts; the establishment of The Bay Area Ecopsychology Group and The Ecopsychology Institute at California State University at Hayward in 1994 (both now defunct); the founding of the Ecopsychology Roundtable at the Center for Psychology and Social Change in 1994 (which became The Ecopsychology Institute in 1996); and the 1995 publication by Sierra Club Books of *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, an ecopsychology anthology which brought many voices together in the dialogue.

---

## Definition and Delimitation

Ecopsychology lacks a definitive, generally accepted definition. In surveying the literature on ecopsychology, one is struck by the diversity of articulations of the term and is left with the impression that many ecopsychologists are in search of an identity for their field. If this trend continues, ecopsychology could become impossibly diluted and confused in a sea of loose, even competing, interpretations. Consequently, I believe that ecopsychologists need to be very clear about what ecopsychology is and is not; that is, ecopsychology needs to be defined and delimited clearly.

The purpose of this section, then, is to answer the questions: What is "ecopsychology"; that is, how is it defined? Is ecopsychology the same as "ecological psychology," "psychoecology," "ecotherapy," or "green psychology"? How is ecopsychology different from "environmental psychology"? Is ecopsychology a new subdiscipline of psychology?

When Roszak first added the prefix "eco" to "psychology" in 1992, he did so out of recognition of the profound need for, and the explicit dual purpose of, "ecologizing psychology" and "psychologizing ecology." Regarding the first purpose, Roszak argues that conventional psychology is in desperate need of reconceptualizing its theory and practice within an ecological context if it intends to impact constructively the environmental crisis. Regarding the second purpose, Roszak believes that the environmental movement is in dire need of "a new psychological sensitivity"<sup>27</sup> and has much to learn from psychology about how to motivate people to change their environmentally destructive behaviour. Three years later, Roszak reinforced his original formulation by writing:

Ecopsychology is the name most often used for this emerging synthesis of the psychological (here intended to embrace the psychotherapeutic and the psychiatric) and the ecological. Several other terms have been suggested: psychoecology, ecotherapy, global therapy, green therapy, Earth-centered therapy, re-earthing, nature-based psychotherapy, shamanic counseling, even sylvan therapy. . . . But by whatever name, the underlying assumption is the same: *ecology needs psychology, psychology needs ecology.*<sup>28</sup>

For Roszak, then, it is clear that ecopsychology is the emerging synthesis of the psychological and the ecological. Others, however, have sought to expand or change that definition, even rename the discipline, ostensibly to reflect differing purposes or orientations. For the sake of illustration, three primary examples will be addressed here.

Judging from title alone, Winter's *Ecological Psychology: Healing the Split Between Planet and Self*,<sup>29</sup> appears to be straightforward ecopsychology in consonance with Roszak's original definition<sup>30</sup> and subsequent articulation in his 1995 *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*. Winter, however, does not trace her thought to Roszak or acknowledge any indebtedness to him. Winter would like "to suggest a new direction for psychology's future: ecological psychology," which she defines as "the study of human experience and behavior, in its physical, political, and spiritual context, in order to build a sustainable world," and whose pivotal question is: "How to survive in an increasingly fragile ecosystem."<sup>31</sup> The primary difference between Roszak's ecopsychology and Winter's ecological psychology is that whereas Roszak advocates a deconstruction of traditional psychology and a total revisioning within an ecological context and sensitivity, Winter advocates syncretically mining and extending the theory and methods of the major schools of psychology in service of understanding and solving our environmental problems.

A second book on ecological psychology, *Ecological Psychology: Creating a More Earth-Friendly Human Nature* by Howard,<sup>32</sup> once again sounds like ecopsychology. The author, however, never defines his terms, nor does he relate his ecological psychology to either Roszak's ecopsychology or Winter's ecological psychology; the reader is left to make this distinction. Howard is clear, however, that the essential purpose of his ecological psychology is "the development of constructive changes in the ways we think and behave that will promote an earth-friendly human nature."<sup>33</sup>

A third illustration is Clinebell's *Ecotherapy: Healing Ourselves, Healing the Earth*. Once again, this title is similar to the prior examples. (In fact, the four titles could be assigned randomly to the four different texts without doing an injustice to any.) Clinebell, however,

differentiates his notion of ecotherapy from ecopsychology: “*Ecotherapy* refers to both the healing and the growth that is nurtured by healthy interaction with the earth,” whereas *ecopsychology* refers “to what is called the ‘greening of psychology.’”<sup>34</sup> Although Clinebell is correct in saying that ecopsychology refers to the greening of psychology,<sup>35</sup> he apparently does not recognize that ecopsychology has a significant ecotherapeutic component. Furthermore, Clinebell incorrectly asserts that the psychologizing of ecology is its own field, psychoecology, ostensibly not part of ecopsychology, but this is a misreading of Roszak.

For unstated reasons, Winter distances her ecological psychology from Roszak’s ecopsychology, Howard simply ignores it, and Clinebell not only claims no allegiance to ecopsychology, but obliterates half of it through misdefinition. All, however, can be considered a part of ecopsychology. Although both ecological psychologies are arguably shallow in their approach (more on this later) they nonetheless are true to Roszak’s second purpose—to psychologize ecology—by using psychology to impact positively our environmental problems. And by definition, Roszak incorporates ecotherapy—in spite of what Clinebell believes—in ecopsychology; that is, he intends “to embrace the psychotherapeutic and the psychiatric.”<sup>36</sup>

How is ecopsychology different from environmental psychology? Unfortunately, there seems to be considerable confusion, even among some persons advertising themselves as ecopsychologists, as to what ecopsychology really is and is not. An obvious confusion is to equate ecopsychology with environmental psychology, which it arguably is not (which is not to say that environmental psychology has no relevance or import for ecopsychology; it does, and ecopsychologists should be versed in it). For example, Michael Hutton, in an Institute of Transpersonal Psychology Global Program course, “Ecopsychology and Deep Ecology,” defines ecopsychology in part as “a study which explores how our psyche is influenced by our environment; that is, how our environmental condition influences how we think and feel” (course brochure). This definition defines environmental psychology, *not* ecopsychology, and to conflate the two is mistaken. “Environmental psychology,” according to Kidner, “is typically concerned with the effects of particular environmental conditions, such as stress, pollution, noise, urbanization, crowding, and so forth, on individuals.”<sup>37</sup> Ecopsychology’s primary concern, on the other hand, is the opposite: the impact of the human on the environment. Metzner summarizes this point by writing that “ecopsychology . . . is *not* a variation of environmental psychology, which deals mostly with the impact of institutional environments on psychological states.”<sup>38</sup> Furthermore,

Fisher notes that ecopsychology is much more radical than environmental psychology and, as such, challenges the latter's traditional scientific worldview and methodology, technocratic ethos, and anthropocentrism.<sup>39</sup> And in a recent discussion of his formulation of ecopsychology, Roszak explains that he was aware of "the well-developed field called 'environmental psychology'" but he found it insufficient to underpin a dialogue between environmentalists and psychologists because its concern is "the architectural environment of urban life, which is more the problem than the solution when it comes to our alienation from nature."<sup>40</sup>

A review of three classic environmental psychology texts<sup>41</sup> supports Kidner's,<sup>42</sup> Metzner's,<sup>43</sup> Fisher's,<sup>44</sup> and Roszak's<sup>45</sup> evaluations. For instance, Stokols and Altman define environmental psychology as "the study of human behavior and well-being in relation to the sociophysical environment";<sup>46</sup> Bell et al. state that the primary concern of environmental psychology is "with the environment as a determinant or influence on behavior and mood";<sup>47</sup> and Gifford, although expressing interest in "improving our relationship with the natural environment . . . and the stewardship of natural resources,"<sup>48</sup> defines environmental psychology as "the study of transactions between individuals and their physical setting."<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, all three texts situate environmental psychology firmly in the traditional scientific paradigm and do not ask deep questions or challenge basic assumptions, which is contrary to ecopsychology.

In answering the question—which is likely to surface when faced with a new definition of ecopsychology or a new label for what may be old wine—of whether this or that ecological psychology, green psychology, environmental psychology, psychoecology, ecotherapy, or whatever, is ecopsychology or not, one should resort to Roszak's original definition.<sup>50</sup> If the new definition or label is in line with one or both of his two purposes (i.e., ecologizing psychology or psychologizing ecology), it is ecopsychology. If it does not, then it is something else. Additionally, I suggest evaluating each new definition or label on a shallow-deep continuum. As noted, ecopsychology is embedded in the tradition of deep ecology and as such it is imperative for ecopsychologists to ask deep questions about the human-nature interrelationship relative to the ecological crisis (and anything else under their purview). To illustrate, Howard's ecological psychology is shallow because he does not question the fundamental assumptions of the Western worldview in general, or psychology in particular.<sup>51</sup> Winter, on the other hand, suitably questions the assumptions of the Western worldview but inadequately questions the assumptions of psychology.<sup>52</sup>

It is important to note, however, that Roszak defined ecopsychology as an “emerging synthesis”<sup>53</sup> and later stated that “ecopsychology is intended as an open dialogue with many voices.”<sup>54</sup> Roszak himself, then, believes that ecopsychology is open to, even welcomes, creative input from diverse sources. These diverse sources, however, should be admitted only if defensible; that is, if their inclusion furthers the purposes of ecopsychology.<sup>55</sup>

The remaining question here is: Is ecopsychology a new subdiscipline of psychology? In answer, Roszak made it clear in the first issue of *The Ecopsychology Newsletter* that “We [the Bay Area Ecopsychology Group] do not see ecopsychology as a new therapeutic doctrine or a new ideological camp; our purpose is not to replace, but to supplement the efforts of all those who are working to create a sustainable relationship with the Earth.”<sup>56</sup> Metzner concurs:

Those of us in this field . . . do not mean to advocate the creation of a new subdiscipline of psychology, to join clinical, social, developmental, and other forms. Rather we are talking about a fundamental re-envisioning of what psychology is, or what it should have been in the first place—a revision that would take the ecological context of human life into account.<sup>57</sup>

Hence, Metzner prefers the term “green psychology” to “ecopsychology” because it refers to the greening of the entire discipline of psychology and avoids the misperception that a new subdiscipline is being formed.<sup>58</sup>

---

## Summary

Regarding definition and delimitation, although there are “competing conceptions of this field,”<sup>59</sup> some are justified, others perhaps not.<sup>60</sup> Since Roszak’s initial 1992 essay is seminal—it was the first to name, define, and articulate ecopsychology—I maintain that it is imperative to honour that original formulation; that is, it is incumbent upon any subsequent articulation to pay homage and to delineate clearly its position relative to Roszak.<sup>61</sup>

---

## Goal, Purposes, Objectives

In *The Voice of the Earth*, Roszak asserts that the goal of ecopsychology is “to bridge our culture’s long-standing, historical gulf between the psychological and the ecological, to see the needs of the planet and the person as a continuum.”<sup>62</sup> To this end, Roszak articulates two primary and essential purposes: (a) to ecologize psychology; that is,

to re-envision psychology within an ecological context; and (b) to psychologize ecology; that is, to develop a psychologically sensitive and sophisticated environmental movement.<sup>63</sup>

To operationalize these purposes and thereby progress towards his goal, Roszak enumerates several objectives:<sup>64</sup>

1. To answer ecopsychology's fundamental question
2. To redefine sanity within an ecological context
3. To speculate on a new cosmology for ecopsychology
4. To advance a theoretical basis for ecopsychology
5. To enumerate some initial principles of ecopsychology
6. To educate environmental advocates on how to use psychology to affect positive, ecological behaviour change in people<sup>65</sup>

I will address each of these in order in the following sections.

---

## **Ecopsychology's Essential Question**

In his groundbreaking book, *Nature and Madness*, Shepard "launched the first searching discussion of the interplay between human psychology and humankind's increasingly destructive environmental behavior."<sup>66</sup> His essential question was: "Why do men persist in destroying their habitat?"<sup>67</sup> An attempt to answer this question was instrumental in the creation of ecopsychology. By definition, ecopsychology attempts to understand the ecological crisis from a psychological perspective. From this perspective, the ecological crisis can no longer simply be regarded as the result of a lack of information or appropriate technology. Rather, implicit in Shepard's question is the presumption of an underlying psychopathology. In fact, Glendinning asserts that "psychological dysfunctions and the ecological crisis are indeed one and the same."<sup>68</sup> A first step, then, is "to discern the nature of the psychological disturbance that has *Homo sapiens* in its grip, so that we can apply psychotherapeutic techniques and treatments to the amelioration of the present ecocatastrophe."<sup>69</sup> Until we understand and heal that underlying psychopathology, ecopsychologists claim, we are unlikely to make any significant and lasting impact on our environmental problems.

The purpose of this section, then, is to examine briefly how several major contributors to ecopsychology attempt to answer Shepard's original question.<sup>70</sup>

Shepard's answer to his own question is that "there are profound psychic dislocations at the root of modern society,"<sup>71</sup> that "pathology might be epidemic in [Western] culture, yet hidden from itself."<sup>72</sup> These profound psychic dislocations, this epidemic pathology, Shepard argues, is essentially an "ontogenetic crippling" beginning with the transition to agriculture and sedentary village life, and culminating in Western industrialized civilization. According to Shepard, mature, healthy adult functioning depends on a critically important ontogenetic and psychogenetic development that too often is frustrated by modern civilization, resulting in a "psychopathic mutilation of ontogeny" and "arrested development" characterized by "concealed infantilisms" and "a readiness to strike back at a natural world that we dimly perceive as having failed us. From this erosion of human nurturing comes the failure of the passages of the life cycle and the exhaustion of our ecological accords."<sup>73</sup> The various psychopathic mutilations documented by Shepard "all persist and interact in a tapestry of chronic madness in the industrial present, countered by dreams of absolute control and infinite possession."<sup>74</sup>

Echoing Shepard, Roszak wonders "why people around the world have decided to undertake the mad devastation of the planet."<sup>75</sup> Essential to his answer is the postulation of an "ecological unconscious," which is "the enduring reservoir of intuitive environmental knowledge"<sup>76</sup> that shelters the ancestral sensibility and the "compacted ecological intelligence of our species."<sup>77</sup> In answer to his question Roszak contends that the "repression of the ecological unconscious is the deepest root of collusive madness in industrial society."<sup>78</sup> If this is the case, it is vital to know the cause of the repression. According to Roszak, the cause is the dualistic severing of the vital link between the macrocosm and microcosm, the mental and physical, the inside and outside: this "sense of being split off from an 'outer' world . . . has everything to do with our obsessive need to conquer and subjugate."<sup>79</sup> This split, Roszak argues, was the end result of our worldview, a worldview that truncated the innate ecological wisdom within and created a massive "collective alienation [that] lies at the root of both the environmental crisis and individual neuroses."<sup>80</sup>

In consonance with Shepard, Glendinning asks: "What on Earth is wrong with us?"<sup>81</sup> Her answer is that in the course of their history, human beings severed their natural, reciprocal relationship with the earth, resulting in what she calls the "original trauma." Human beings evolved over the course of millions of years to live in a healthy, symbiotic participation with nature. Glendinning calls this state of being our "primal matrix." She asserts, however, that

the violation of this participation forms the basis of our *original trauma* [which] is the disorientation we experience, however consciously or unconsciously, because we do not live in the natural world. It is the psychic displacement, the exile, that is inherent in civilized life.<sup>82</sup>

Agreeing with Shepard, Glendinning implicates the transition to agriculture and pastoralism as being devastating to the human psyche, society, and the earth. Furthermore, the transition allegedly initiated massive social, cultural, economic, and ecological disruption: “The human relationship to the natural world was gradually changed from one of respect for and participation in its elliptical wholeness to one of detachment, management, control, and finally domination.”<sup>83</sup>

Metzner, one of the few clinical psychologists to consider Shepard’s question, reviews several diagnostic metaphors that “have been proposed to explain the ecologically disastrous split—the pathological alienation—between human consciousness and the rest of the biosphere,”<sup>84</sup> including:

1. Shepard’s “ontogenetic crippling” and Roszak’s “repression of the ecological unconscious.”
2. Berry’s “autism” metaphor which claims “that the human species has become ‘autistic’ in relationship to the natural world” due to “Descartes’s invention of the mechanistic worldview.”<sup>85</sup>
3. LaChapelle’s and Glendinning’s “addiction” model which identifies humankind’s environmentally destructive behaviour as clearly compulsive or addictive, whether addiction to consumerism or technology.
4. Devereux’s “collective amnesia” hypothesis in which humankind is alleged to have forgotten what it “once knew and practiced: 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>86</sup>
5. Velikovsky’s “traumatic amnesia” thesis which postulates that catastrophic earth changes may have led “to almost total amnesia and permanent fear and insecurity among humans.”<sup>87</sup>
6. Hilgard’s “neo-dissociationist” theory of “a ‘vertical’ separation of strands of consciousness that may be equally well organized, rational, and in touch with reality.”<sup>88</sup> Metzner believes that Hilgard’s theory provides a very useful understanding of the collective human pathology in relation to the environment in

two regards. First, he argues that “the entire culture of Western industrial society is dissociated from its ecological substratum,”<sup>89</sup> and that our political, economic, and educational institutions all have this dissociation built into them. Second, he contends that a dissociative split between spirit and nature is a core feature of the Euro-American psyche: “We have a deeply ingrained belief that our spiritual life, our spiritual practices, must tend in a direction opposite to our nature.”<sup>90</sup> The unfortunate consequence, Metzner explains, is the psychological projection of our own dissociative split upon nature, thus “supporting the well-known Western ‘conquest of nature’ ideology.”<sup>91</sup>

As a psychologist, Winter agrees that the answer to Shepard’s question lies primarily in the domain of psychology. Our environmental problems, she asserts, are “psychological in origin: they have accrued because of the thoughts, beliefs, values, and worldviews that human beings have acted on and continue to act on.”<sup>92</sup> Winter is unwilling, however, to attribute the psychological origins to any one, primary cause. Rather, she argues that the causes are several and varied. To uncover these causes, she believes that the major schools of psychology—social, psychoanalytic, behavioural, cognitive, gestalt, and transpersonal—should be mined for their possible contributions to a comprehensive understanding. Briefly, Winter claims that each school can contribute to our understanding in the following essential ways:

### **Social psychology**

To understand humankind’s environmentally destructive behaviour, social psychologists maintain that we must examine the social determinants that shape our behaviour.

### **Psychoanalytic theory**

Psychoanalysts stress the importance of unconscious drives and needs that fuel our ecologically destructive behaviour, and the defense mechanisms that we employ to blind ourselves to the consequences.

### **Behaviourism**

From the behavioural perspective our ecologically destructive behaviour is the result of inappropriate environmental reinforcement schedules that reinforce behaviours that are detrimental to the environment.

### **Cognitive psychology**

Cognitive psychologists assume that behaviour is a function of how adequately our minds process information. Therefore, our destructive environmental behaviours are due to inadequate or distorted information about the consequences of our actions.

### **Gestalt psychology**

In contradistinction to the above psychologies, which are all reductionistic, Gestalt psychology is holistic; it believes that the whole cannot be understood by reducing it to its constituent parts, rather, only by understanding the relations between the parts can we understand the whole. From this viewpoint, our environmentally problematic behaviour is a perceptual problem, a result of seeing ourselves as not embedded in a whole, such as an ecosystem.

### **Transpersonal psychology**

Transpersonal psychologists' emphasis on a larger, transhuman sense of self is very similar to the *ecological self* postulated by deep ecology and adopted by ecopsychology. From this perspective, Winter contends,

our standard sense of self as a separate, autonomous being seriously jeopardizes our ability to live harmoniously within our ecosphere. Our environmental problems are not so much a crisis of technology as they are a crisis of insight: mistaking . . . our core sense of self, we quite naturally abuse the environment with which we feel no identification.<sup>93</sup>

---

## **Redefining Sanity**

“The people down there are dangerous, they are all insane,” warned Jeanette Armstrong’s Native American grandmother as they watched newcomers move into their valley on the reservation.<sup>94</sup> Indeed they are crazy, for who other than crazy people would intentionally, recklessly, blindly destroy their own habitat?

In our hearts we know there is something maniacal about the way we are abusing the planetary environment. The extinction of species, the depletion of the ozone, the annihilation of the rainforest . . . how often do we read reports of the devastation and say “That’s crazy!”<sup>95</sup>

The environmental crisis, ecopsychologists believe, forces us to reappraise what we consider “sanity” for it is ostensibly “sane” people who have led us into and perpetuate this crisis. “At its most ambitious,” writes Lester Brown, founder and president of the Worldwatch Institute, “ecopsychology seeks to redefine sanity within an environmental

context”<sup>96</sup>—one of Roszak’s primary objectives.<sup>97</sup> We need to recognize, as ecopsychologist Leslie Gray says, that “you cannot have sanity without sane relationships with your environment.”<sup>98</sup> Yet, even though

inflicting irreversible damage on the biosphere might seem to be the most obvious kind of craziness . . . when we turn to the psychiatric literature of the modern Western world, we find no such category as ecological madness. . . .

Psychotherapists have exhaustively analyzed every form of dysfunctional family and social relations, but “dysfunctional environmental relations” does not exist even as a concept. Since its beginning, mainstream Western psychology has limited the definition of mental health to the interpersonal context of an urban industrial society.<sup>99</sup>

Due to the ecocrisis, however, “the context for defining sanity in our time has reached planetary magnitude,”<sup>100</sup> therefore, a new definition is needed, one that defines sanity in terms of healthy ecological relationships and behaviour. Our understanding of human sanity, Roszak claims, “has always stopped at the city limits.”<sup>101</sup> We look to psychology to teach us the meaning of sanity (and insanity), but Roszak explains that our dominant schools of psychology “are themselves creations of the same scientific and industrial culture that now weighs so brutally on the planet.”<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, Roszak suspects that psychologists and psychotherapists might be “the ultimate guardians of our dysfunctional environmental volitions, . . . the people who define sanity, [whose] job is to enforce what Lewis Mumford once called the ‘mad rationality.’”<sup>103</sup> Hence, their definitions are suspect, if not disqualified.

Freud, after witnessing the insanity of the First World War, proposed that society itself might be mad and therefore could not serve as a standard of mental health: “May we not be justified in reaching the diagnosis that, under the influence of cultural urges, some civilizations or some epochs of civilization—possibly the whole of mankind—have become ‘neurotic’?”<sup>104</sup> And Erich Fromm raised the same question in *The Sane Society* in which he asked: Can a society be sick?<sup>105</sup>

It wasn’t until much later that a small group of insurgent psychiatrists, led by Laing and Szasz, developed Radical Therapy, or Antipsychiatry, to take Freud’s notion of collective insanity seriously. Laing argued that we live in the midst of “socially shared hallucinations . . . our collusive madness is what we call sanity.”<sup>106</sup> Roszak comments that

sick souls may indeed be the fruit of sick families and sick societies; but what, in turn, is the measure of sickness for society as a whole? While many criteria might be nominated, there is surely one that ranks above all others: the species that

destroys its own habitat in pursuit of false values, in willful ignorance of what it does, is “mad.”<sup>107</sup>

The measure of insanity for ecopsychology, then, is not so much the effect of the collusive madness on individuals, but its effect on the nonhuman world.

Psychological theory that cannot address itself to irrationality on such a scale is surely deeply flawed. A culture that can do so much to damage the planetary fabric that sustains it, and yet continues along its course unimpeded, is mad.<sup>108</sup>

And to make the point that “consensual validation has no bearing on mental health,” Shepard quotes Erich Fromm as saying: “That millions of people share the same forms of mental pathology does not make these people sane.”<sup>109</sup>

What is needed desperately, then, is an “environmental criterion of sanity,” to borrow Roszak’s phrase.<sup>110</sup> “The time has come,” writes Jungian psychologist Stephen Aizenstat, “to move beyond the widely held belief that psychological health is solely a function of individual wholeness and nurturing human relationships.”<sup>111</sup> Essentially, a new criterion would define sanity in terms of healthy ecological relationships and behaviour; that is, ecocentric, sustainable, respectful, balanced, co-operative and reciprocal. General criteria may include:

1. A sense of being “bonded emotionally to the Earth”<sup>112</sup>
2. “An ecologically harmonious sense of self and world”<sup>113</sup>
3. An “ecological *consciousness*, or ‘ecological conscience’”<sup>114</sup>
4. A permeable sense of self, interpersonally and ecologically interconnected<sup>115</sup>
5. “An ecologically responsible construction of the self [or] ‘ecological self’ which includes a broadened identification with the nonhuman world”<sup>116</sup>
6. “Happiness in a nonmaterial wealth” and “a sense of ‘enoughness’” or “plenitude”<sup>117</sup>
7. “Sustainable and mutually enhancing relations, not just at the intrapersonal level (within humans) or the interpersonal level (among humans) but also at the level of ‘interbeing’ (between humans and the nonhuman world)”<sup>118</sup>

Conversely, a criterion of insanity from an ecopsychological perspective may include:

1. An atomistic and radically individualistic sense of self

2. A feeling of being alienated from the nonhuman world
3. Narcissistic
4. Techno-addicted
5. Consumption-addicted
6. A desire to dominate, subdue, and control nature
7. Denial and other behaviours aimed at avoiding realizing and taking responsibility for the environmental crisis and the consequences of our nonecological behaviours

To define sanity and insanity within an environmental context, I would suggest simply rewriting Leopold's famous land ethic: A behaviour is sane when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is insane when it tends otherwise.

In any case, what is needed, Roszak suggests, is "a new, legally actionable, environmentally based criterion of mental health."<sup>119</sup> This could have tremendous practical import for the environmental movement's political action strategy. He hopes that someday environmental policy-makers

will be able to defend the beauties and biodiversity of nature by invoking an environmentally based definition of mental health. We might then see an assault upon endangered species or old-growth forest as an assault upon the sanity of a community, upon children, or upon our species as a whole.<sup>120</sup>

It is important to note, however, that currently "there is not a single recognized disease of the psyche that connects madness to the nonhuman world in which our environmental responsibility is grounded."<sup>121</sup> The psychiatric *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* excludes any reference to the human-nonhuman or human-earth relationships, which in itself is diagnostic of a pervasive ecological blindness and dissociation in Western culture.

---

## Cosmology

Essential to the ecopsychological project of spanning the gap between the personal and planetary, Roszak contends, is the reconnection of the two realms of being—mind and matter, human and nature, inner and outer, subject and object, above and below, macrocosm and microcosm—which were divorced so radically during the Enlightenment and scientific revolution.<sup>122</sup> To once again be on "speaking terms" with nature, to live sanely within a larger ecological context, to recover in a contemporary form some trace of our ancestral

animistic sensibility, our species' oldest natural philosophy, Roszak argues that we desperately need a new model of reality, a new cosmology:

The model we choose can make a great deal of difference. Conceive of nature as a machine—any machine, even a “thinking” machine—and you assume one relationship to the world. Conceive of it as sentient mentality, and you take another stance.<sup>123</sup>

As an ecopsychologist, Roszak takes “another stance” and asserts that the old model, the old cosmology that engendered a wholly other and alien nature must be replaced by a cosmology that heals the pervasive dualisms mentioned above. To that end Roszak reviews numerous contributions that seriously challenge the old cosmology and have been forcing “scientists, philosophers, and theologians to rethink the place of life and mind in the universe,”<sup>124</sup> including: (a) the new physics which discredits classical materialism by evaporating the imagined dividing lines between matter, energy, and space; (b) chaos theory which erodes the deterministic probability of classical physics; (c) challenges to neo-Darwinism, such as the mathematical refutation of evolution by chance associations of random particles; (d) the discovery of an expanding universe; (e) the discovery of cosmic evolution towards hierarchical, increasing levels of coherent organization; (f) the Anthropic Principle which acknowledges a teleological or guiding intelligence at work in creating the conditions necessary for life; (g) the “autopoietic Gaian” view of nature which vindicates the ageless archetype of the *anima mundi* or World Soul; (h) deep systems theory, as a new Deism, which respects natural systems as primary structures that cannot be reduced to parts without losing something essential, and which honors the mental, cultural, and spiritual as much as the mathematical and physical; and (i) the sciences of complexity that describe nonlinear, far from equilibrium, self-organizing, dissipative structures in open systems as nature's norm, thereby reducing the second law of thermodynamics to “an arbitrarily morbid vision” that holds true only for closed systems which are “wholly hypothetical phenomena” and can't be found in nature<sup>125</sup>.

“The New Cosmology,” Roszak concludes, provides “the raw material for a new understanding of human connectedness with nature [that] may mature into an ecologically grounded form of animism.”<sup>126</sup> Essential to our survival, Roszak believes, is a radical change in cosmology that supplants a mindless, mechanical, inert and impersonal universe with one that is evolving, creative, spontaneous, self-regulating, mindful, and purposeful. Perhaps most importantly, in this new universe, what Roszak calls an “ecological universe,” “it is no

longer a matter of scientific necessity in our time, as perhaps it was in Freud's, for us to regard ourselves as strangers and afraid in a world we never made or that was never made for us."<sup>127</sup>

---

## Theory

Given that "the basic aim of science is theory,"<sup>128</sup> it should be asked: What is the theory in ecopsychology? This is an essential question, but one difficult to answer.

To date, ecopsychologists have relied heavily on relevant theories from other disciplines (although at least one prominent ecopsychologist encourages expansion of the theories of the traditional psychologies to include the nonhuman world, i.e., Metzner 1999). Most fundamentally, ecopsychologists rely implicitly on ecology theory which articulates humankind's profound interrelatedness with the nonhuman environment. Specifically, "ecopsychologists are drawing upon the ecological sciences to re-examine the human psyche as an integral part of the web of nature."<sup>129</sup>

Ecopsychologists also look to the Gaia hypothesis—now accorded the status of theory by some.<sup>130</sup> Ecopsychologists see in the theory a compelling argument for the vital connectedness of all things, "as a dramatic image of ecological interdependence, . . . as the evolutionary heritage that bonds all living things genetically and behaviorally to the biosphere."<sup>131</sup>

Although generally not yet considered a theory, the biophilia hypothesis—the hypothesis that humans possess an innate *biophilia*, the biologically driven human need to relate with life and natural processes<sup>132</sup>—lends crucial support to the ecopsychological project. In fact, "ecopsychology might be seen as a commitment by psychologists and therapists to the hope that the biophilia hypothesis will prove true and so become an integral part of what we take mental health to be."<sup>133</sup>

Ecopsychologists also draw on: (a) object relations theory to support the notion of an ecological self;<sup>134</sup> (b) quantum theory to help break down the Cartesian distinction between observer and observed, mind and matter;<sup>135</sup> (c) general-systems theory to discern the principles by which entities are connected and evolve in a vast interconnected pattern;<sup>136</sup> (d) Gestalt theory which "brings in the natural environment in its understandings of mental health and dis-ease";<sup>137</sup> and (e) biological symbiosis which stresses co-operation within and between species<sup>138</sup> and the co-evolution of microbial communities.<sup>139</sup>

Relying on the insights of these theories, ecopsychologists promote their own theory—which is fundamental to their whole enterprise—of “the inseparability of human health and the health of the earth” (The Ecopsychology Institute “Profile”); or, as expressed by Roszak, the “synergistic interplay between planetary and personal well-being”;<sup>140</sup> or, by Glendinning, “the personal is planetary, the planetary is personal”;<sup>141</sup> or, by Clinebell, “heal persons by healing the earth—and vice-versa”;<sup>142</sup> or, by Gomes, Leupold, and Albracht, “a healthy ecosystem is inseparable from a healthy psyche”;<sup>143</sup> or, by Swanson, “to preserve the health of the planet is to preserve the health of humanity”;<sup>144</sup> or, by Fisher, “the diminishment of the human self and the natural world are reciprocal processes.”<sup>145</sup>

Beyond this, ecopsychologists articulate numerous principles that inform and guide their inquiry and practice.

---

## Principles

In *The Voice of the Earth*, Roszak articulates a list of principles for ecopsychology:

1. “The core of the mind is the ecological unconscious. For ecopsychology, repression of the ecological unconscious is the deepest root of collusive madness in industrial society; open access to the ecological unconscious is the path to sanity.”
2. “The contents of the ecological unconscious represent, in some degree, at some level of mentality, the living record of cosmic evolution, tracing back to distant initial conditions in the history of time.”
3. Contained within the ecological unconscious is an “inherent sense of environmental reciprocity” that can be awakened, thereby healing the “fundamental alienation between the person and the natural environment.”
4. “The ecological unconscious is regenerated . . . in the newborn’s enchanted sense of the world. Ecopsychology seeks to recover the child’s innately animistic quality of experience in functionally ‘sane’ adults” and to create the “ecological ego.”
5. “The ecological ego matures toward a sense of ethical responsibility with the planet that is as vividly experienced as our ethical responsibility to other people. It seeks to weave that responsibility into the fabric of social relations and political decisions.”

6. There are “certain compulsively ‘masculine’ character traits that . . . drive us to dominate nature as if it were an alien and rightless realm.” These need to be re-evaluated.
7. “Small scale social forms and personal empowerment nourishes the ecological ego [whereas] large-scale domination and the suppression of personhood undermines the ecological ego. Ecopsychology therefore deeply questions the essential sanity of our gargantuan urban-industrial culture, whether capitalistic or collectivistic in its organization. . . . Ecopsychology is *postindustrial* not *anti-industrial* in its social orientation.”
8. “The needs of the planet are the needs of the person, the rights of the person are the rights of the planet.”<sup>146</sup>

Roszak suggests that this list of principles is “merely a guide,” thus clearly anticipating, even inviting, further development by others. Members of the Ecopsychology Roundtable obliged two years later with the addition of five principles (some original contributions, others a recapitulation of several of Roszak’s):

1. The earth is a living system, part of the cosmos which is also a living system.
2. Human beings, their products and cultures are integral and crucial parts of that system.
3. The health of the entire system and all its parts requires harmonious, sustainable, and mutually nurturing relationships among the parts, and between the parts and the whole.
4. Healthy human development, which includes “physical” and “psychological” dimensions, must include realization of the interconnectedness and interdependence of the human and nonhuman aspects of the world.
5. At the core of the human organism and the part we refer to as “psyche” is information which has been preserved in us, as we have co-evolved with other aspects of the earth’s living system. The ecological intelligence, which has been called the ecological unconscious, is like a deep reservoir of “knowing” about the human-earth connection.<sup>147</sup>

Although other contributors to ecopsychology have proposed more, these thirteen principles may be considered the core principles of ecopsychology.

---

## Psychologizing Ecology

As noted, ecopsychology, as formulated by Roszak, has a dual purpose: to ecologize psychology and to psychologize ecology. To date, disproportionate attention has been paid to the first purpose. The second purpose remains largely an unfulfilled promise, a promise of making environmental activists more psychologically sophisticated, to arm them with psychological insight and techniques to aid in their mission. As Lester Brown notes:

Every political movement has its psychological dimension. Persuading people to alter their behavior always involves probing motivations and debating values; political activism begins with asking what makes people tick. What do they want and fear and care about? How do we get and hold their attention? How much can people take—and in what order of priority? Have we overloaded them with anxiety or guilt? How do we make credible the threats we perceive? Movements that fail to think carefully about this may fail to persuade.<sup>148</sup>

Brown argues that those in the environmental movement need to ask: “*Are we being effective?* Most obviously, we need to ask that question with respect to our impact upon the public, whose hearts and minds we want to win over. The stakes are high and time is short.”<sup>149</sup>

Unfortunately, as an environmental writer and speaker, Roszak observes that

the environmental movement went about its work of organizing, educating, and agitating with little regard for the fragile psychological complexities of the public. . . . As intensely aware as environmentalists may be of the complexity of the natural habitat, when it came to human behavior their guiding image was simplistic in the extreme. They worked from a narrow range of strategies and motivations: the statistics of impending disaster, the coercive emotional force of fear and guilt.<sup>150</sup>

Rozzak suggests that it is time for the environmental movement “to draw up a psychological impact statement. Are dread and desperation the only motivations we have to play upon? . . . Like all political activists busy with their mission, environmentalists often work from poor and short-sighted ideas about human motivation.”<sup>151</sup> Basically, Roszak believes that environmentalists have failed to realize that every environmental issue has a psychological dimension and that “environmentalists seem to forget that the whole purpose of environmental politics is to change the way people behave.”<sup>152</sup> Ostensibly, “once the interaction between human psychology and environmental destruction is better understood, environmental groups will have the information needed to design and evaluate interventions

that *effectively* encourage humanity to address unprecedented, yet often invisible, threats.”<sup>153</sup>

So, what can ecopsychologists offer the environmental movement? Roszak believes that ecopsychologists can teach environmentalists about: (a) how to get beyond the narrow range of negative motivations that they have relied on to more positive reinforcements; (b) their own psychology as activists; (c) the irrational and emotional psychological forces that influence our environmental behaviour; and (d) the common ecopsychological problems of denial, psychic numbing, overload, consumer- and techno-addiction, repressed grief, environmental anxiety, and influence of gender roles.<sup>154</sup>

Of particular interest to ecopsychologists, Fisher notes, “is how to bring more psychological know-how to ecological activists. . . . Guilt, shame and scare tactics . . . may do more to engender resistance and hopelessness in the public than to embolden them to act.”<sup>155</sup> Similarly, environmental activist Melissa Nelson argues that “the us-versus-them combative mode of environmental activism is in need of deep re-examination. If environmentalists are to be more effective in changing environmentally destructive behavior, we need to develop more sensitive ways of reaching people.”<sup>156</sup> Drawing partially on the insights of ecopsychology, Nelson explores ways in which environmental activists can develop better communication skills. But beyond Nelson’s specific recommendations, environmentalists unfortunately are offered precious little by ecopsychologists of practical use.

In addition to the potential benefit of educating environmentalists in better communication skills, ecopsychologists have another potential useful function, and that is “to address the amount of anger, negativity, and emotional burnout one finds in the movement.”<sup>157</sup> A laudable goal, but one that has yet to be addressed in any serious and meaningful way.

---

## Conclusion

In spite of the semblance of order that I have attempted to bring to the confusingly diverse field of ecopsychology, it nonetheless suffers from several serious deficiencies.<sup>158</sup> Ecopsychology lacks a solid theoretical basis, is deficient in research, and has no well-defined methodology or practice. Ecopsychologists are generally unsophisticated with regard to ecology and specific environmental debates, lack familiarity with social and environmental psychology, and do not address adequately the reality of the political, economic, and institutional forces that shape our behaviour. And, the ecopsychology literature includes little or no

reference to contemporary psychological theory or research, environmental ethics, bioregionalism, or the various radical ecologies.

Furthermore, it can be argued that Roszak's original purposes of ecologizing psychology and psychologizing ecology have yet to be realized in any meaningful or significant way. Additionally, given the magnitude of the ecological crisis, the argument can be made that ecopsychologists have too little to add too late, that short of a radical sociopolitical agenda they can make no significant impact; that is, the way is clearly not individual and group therapy and education, which has been their focus to date. As Mack notes, meaningful change requires change in the "powerful institutional, structural, and systemic realities" that fuel the ecological crisis.<sup>159</sup> What is really needed, Roszak maintains, is a "political force" to enact the political agenda common to both ecopsychology and ecology. That agenda includes (a) scaling down, (b) slowing down, (c) democratizing, (d) decentralizing, and (e) enacting ecological goals that can heal the psyche, and psychological values that can heal the planet.<sup>160</sup>

To have any significant and meaningful impact, ecopsychology must be a radical, activist psychology. Ecopsychology is necessarily a political movement. Ecopsychologists cannot be content to sit complacently in an ivory tower or urban office as if it doesn't matter that the biosphere around them is crumbling. Because the "systems that perpetuate the destruction of our environment are entrenched, ubiquitous and powerful," ecopsychologists must "engage the full social and political reality."<sup>161</sup> Ecopsychologists must join ecologists and environmentalists in their struggle to invent and implement ecologically sustainable sociopolitical institutions. To do otherwise, Fisher believes, "ecopsychology will lack the necessary teeth to have much influence."<sup>162</sup>

In spite of its deficiencies, perhaps ecopsychology should not be judged too harshly. After all, it is admittedly a "body of thought,"<sup>163</sup> "an open dialogue with many voices,"<sup>164</sup> a "project" rather than a formal discipline.<sup>165</sup> Ecopsychologists are exploring new terrain, searching as much for the right questions as answers, assimilating theories and therapies from wherever appropriate in their process of self-discovery. As Fisher notes, ecopsychology has yet to "organize itself as a coherent project, its efforts to date remaining largely unconnected to one another,"<sup>166</sup> and that those nascent explorations have been "directed 'toward' an ecopsychology rather than attempts to actually build one."<sup>167</sup> With time, work, and maturation, its deficiencies (e.g., in research, theory, practice), it is hoped, will be remedied. And, as Roszak speculates, even if ecopsychology "never qualifies as more than

a hypothesis, it can make a significant political difference”<sup>168</sup> that is essential to the continued survival of the planet and all its species.

The future of ecopsychology, however, is certainly open to question. To date, it lacks any formal graduate programs (although there have been several master and doctor degrees in ecopsychology awarded through alternative schools, e.g., The Union Institute), official journal, professional criteria or educational standards, and APA recognition. Furthermore, it lacks credentialed psychologists within its ranks, and lacks credibility within mainstream psychology. Even Roszak is discouraged. When he began *The Voice of the Earth*, Roszak “naively assumed that both psychologists and environmentalists would find . . . a dialogue worthwhile.”<sup>169</sup> But after nearly a decade of observation and work he realized that he was wrong. Roszak discovered that few psychologists are interested in the human-nature interrelationship and environmentalists generally are not interested in what psychologists have to offer them.

---

## References

- Aanstoos, C. 1996. Culture, psychology and ecology: An interview with Theodore Roszak. *The Humanistic Psychologist* 24(2): 155–174.
- Aizenstat, S. 1995. Jungian psychology and the world unconscious. In *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*, edited by T. Roszak, M. Gomes, and A. Kanner. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Armstrong, J. 1995. Keepers of the earth. In *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*, edited by T. Roszak, M. Gomes, and A. Kanner. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Barrows, A. 1995. The ecopsychology of child development. In *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*, edited by T. Roszak, M. Gomes, and A. Kanner. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Bell, P., T. Greene, J. Fisher, and A. Baum. 1996. *Environmental psychology*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace.
- Brown, L. 1995. Ecopsychology and the environmental revolution. In *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*, edited by T. Roszak, M. Gomes, and A. Kanner. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Capra, F. 1996. *The web of life: A new scientific understanding of living systems*. New York: Anchor Books.

- Center Review*, 1990. Synopsis of panel discussion on “Psychology as if the whole earth mattered.”
- Clinebell, H. 1996. *Ecotherapy: healing ourselves, healing the earth*. Minneapolis, NM: Fortress Press.
- Conn, S. 1995. When the earth hurts, who responds? In *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*, edited by T. Roszak, M. Gomes, and A. Kanner. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Conn, S., and L. Conn. 1999. Ecopsychology and psychotherapy within the larger context: Response to Jack Aylward’s Article on Paul Goodman’s Legacy. *Gestalt Review* 3(2): 119–125.
- The Ecopsychology Newsletter* 6 (1996, fall).
- Ecopsychology Roundtable. 1994. *Statement of Purpose for an Ecopsychology Conference*. Unpublished draft. Center for Psychology & Social Change at Harvard Medical School.
- Fenwick, S. 1998. The dreaming earth: Foundations for a process-oriented approach to ecopsychology (Doctoral dissertation, The Union Institute, 1998). *UMI Microform 9910825*.
- Fisher, A. 1996. Toward a more radical ecopsychology. *Alternatives Journal*, 22(3): 10–26.
- Fisher, A. 2002. *Radical ecopsychology: Psychology in the service of life*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Fox, W. 1995. *Toward a transpersonal ecology*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Freud, S. 1962. *Civilization and its discontents*, translated by James Strachey. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Fromm, E. 1955. *The sane society*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Gifford, R. 1997. *Environmental psychology: Principles and practice*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Glendinning, C. 1994. *My name is Chellis & I’m in recovery from Western civilization*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Gomes, M., S. Leupold, and M. Albracht. 1998. Advertising, community, and self: A qualitative analysis. *ReVisio* 20(4): 426–36.

- Gottlieb, R., ed. 1996. *This sacred earth: Religion, nature, environment*. New York: Routledge.
- Gray, L. 1995. Shamanic counseling and ecopsychology. In *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*, edited by T. Roszak, M. Gomes, and A. Kanner. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Howard, G. 1997. *Ecological psychology: Creating a more earth-friendly human nature*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Kellert, S. 1993. Introduction. In *The biophilia hypothesis*, edited by S. Kellert and E. Wilson. Washington, DC: Island Press.
- Kerlinger, F. 1973. *Foundations of behavioral research* (2nd ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Kidner, D. 1994. Why psychology is mute about the environmental crisis. *Environmental Ethics* 16: 359–376.
- Kropotkin, P. 1914. *Mutual aid*. New York: Knopf.
- Laing, R. 1967. *The politics of experience*. London: Penguin.
- Lovelock, J. 1991. *Healing Gaia*. New York: Harmony Books.
- Mack, J. 1995. The politics of species arrogance. In *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*, edited by T. Roszak, M. Gomes, and A. Kanner. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Macy, J. 1995. Working through environmental despair. In *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*, edited by T. Roszak, M. Gomes, and A. Kanner. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Margulis, L. 1993. *Symbiosis in cell evolution* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Freeman.
- Merchant, C. 1992. *Radical ecology: The search for a livable world*. New York: Routledge.
- Metzner, R. 1991. Psychologizing deep ecology: A review essay. *ReVision* 13(3): 147–152.
- Metzner, R. 1995. The psychopathology of the human-nature relationship. In *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*, edited by T. Roszak, M. Gomes, and A. Kanner. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

- Metzner, R. 1999. *Green psychology: Transforming our relationship to the earth*. Rochester, VT: Park Street Press.
- Nash, R. 1989. *The rights of nature: A history of environmental ethics*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Nelson, M. 1998. A psychological impact report for the environmental movement. *ReVision* 20(4): 37–43.
- Pilisuk, M. 1995. *Learning guide and syllabus for ecological psychology*. San Francisco: Saybrook.
- Pilisuk, M., and M. Joy. 2001. Humanistic psychology and ecology. In *Handbook of humanistic psychology*, edited by K. Schneider, J. Bugental, and F. Pierson. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Reser, J. 1995. Whither environmental psychology? The transpersonal ecopsychology crossroads. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 15: 235–257.
- Roszak, T. 1992. *The voice of the earth*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Roszak, T. 1992/2001. *The voice of the earth: An exploration of ecopsychology* (2nd ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press.
- Roszak, T. 1994. The greening of psychology. *The Ecopsychology Newsletter* 1(1): 6.
- Roszak, T. 1995a. Where psyche meets Gaia. In *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*, edited by T. Roszak, M. Gomes, and A. Kanner. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Roszak, T. 1995b. The greening of psychology: Exploring the ecological unconscious. *The Gestalt Journal* 28(1): 9–46.
- Roszak, T. 1997 (January). Introducing ecopsychology: Defining the field. *Ecopsychology On-Line* 2. Retrieved, April 17, 2003 from: <http://isis.csu Hayward.edu/ALSS/ECO/0197>
- Roszak, T., M. Gomes, and A. Kanner, eds. 1995. *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Searles, H. 1960. *The nonhuman environment in normal development and in schizophrenia*. New York: International Universities Press.

- Searles, H. 1972. Unconscious processes in relation to the environmental crisis. *The Psychoanalytic Review* 59(3): 361–374.
- Sessions, G., ed. 1995. *Deep ecology for the 21st century*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Shepard, P. 1982. *Nature and madness*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Shepard, P. 1995. Nature and madness. In *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*, edited by T. Roszak, M. Gomes, and A. Kanner. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Stokols, D., and I. Altman, eds. 1987. *Handbook of environmental psychology*. New York: Wiley.
- Swanson, J. 1995. The call for Gestalt's contribution to ecopsychology: Figuring in the environmental field. *The Gestalt Journal* XVIII (1): 47–85.
- Walsh, R. 1992. Psychology and human survival: Psychological approaches to contemporary global threats. In *Psychology and social responsibility: Facing global challenges*, edited by S. Staub and P. Green. New York: New York University Press.
- Warren, K. 1998. Introduction: Ecofeminism. In *Environmental philosophy: From animal rights to radical ecology*, edited by M. Zimmerman. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- White, L. 1967. The historical roots of our ecological crisis. *Science* 155(3767): 1203–1207.
- Winter, D. 1996. *Ecological psychology: Healing the split between planet and self*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Zimmerman, M., ed. 1998. *Environmental philosophy: From animal rights to radical ecology*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

---

## Notes

---

- <sup>1</sup> Metzner 1991, p. 147
- <sup>2</sup> Macy 1995, p. 241
- <sup>3</sup> Walsh 1992, p. 59, Walsh's emphasis
- <sup>4</sup> Metzner 1991, p. 147
- <sup>5</sup> Roszak 1995a
- <sup>6</sup> Roszak 1992/2001, p. 323
- <sup>7</sup> Fox 1995, p. 4
- <sup>8</sup> Roszak 1995a, p. 1
- <sup>9</sup> Nash 1989
- <sup>10</sup> Gottlieb 1996
- <sup>11</sup> Nash 1989, pp. 122–123
- <sup>12</sup> Zimmerman 1998
- <sup>13</sup> Sessions 1995, p. ix
- <sup>14</sup> Sessions 1995
- <sup>15</sup> Merchant 1992, p. 184
- <sup>16</sup> Warren 1998, p. 264
- <sup>17</sup> Warren 1998
- <sup>18</sup> Other intellectual currents, although playing a less direct role in laying the foundation for ecopsychology, may include environmental justice (environmental racism), social ecology, green politics, bioregionalism, and any other fields that helped to “green” the public consciousness.
- <sup>19</sup> Roszak 1992
- <sup>20</sup> *The Ecopsychology Newsletter* 1996, p. 11
- <sup>21</sup> Roszak 1992/2001, 327
- <sup>22</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 14
- <sup>23</sup> Roszak 1995b, p. 10
- <sup>24</sup> Fisher 1996, 22
- <sup>25</sup> Searles 1960
- <sup>26</sup> Searles 1972, pp. 368, 373
- <sup>27</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 39
- <sup>28</sup> Roszak 1995a, pp. 4–5, Roszak's emphasis
- <sup>29</sup> Winter 1996
- <sup>30</sup> Roszak 1992

- 
- <sup>31</sup> Winter 1996, p. 283
- <sup>32</sup> Howard 1997
- <sup>33</sup> Howard 1997, p. 1
- <sup>34</sup> Clinebell 1996, p. xxi
- <sup>35</sup> see Metzner 1999
- <sup>36</sup> Roszak 1995a, p. 4
- <sup>37</sup> Kidner 1994, p. 368
- <sup>38</sup> Metzner 1999, p. 183, Metzner's emphasis
- <sup>39</sup> Fisher 2002
- <sup>40</sup> Roszak 1992/2001, p. 323
- <sup>41</sup> Stokols and Altman 1987; Gifford 1997; Bell et al. 1996
- <sup>42</sup> Kidner 1994
- <sup>43</sup> Metzner 1999
- <sup>44</sup> Fisher 2002
- <sup>45</sup> Roszak 1992/2001
- <sup>46</sup> Stokols and Altman 1987, p. 1
- <sup>47</sup> Bell et al. 1996, 4
- <sup>48</sup> Gifford 1997, pp. 1, 4
- <sup>49</sup> Gifford 1997, p. 1
- <sup>50</sup> Roszak 1992; 1995a
- <sup>51</sup> Howard 1997
- <sup>52</sup> Winter 1996
- <sup>53</sup> Roszak 1995a
- <sup>54</sup> Roszak, 1997
- <sup>55</sup> Other voices may have been included in this review, however, I made an editorial decision from the outset to include only those people who think of themselves (at least in part) as ecopsychologists. A lot of people are doing ecopsychology-type work, but if they do not identify themselves as ecopsychologists I automatically did not consider them for inclusion. For example, the work of Alan Dregson, Ed O'Sullivan, Delores LaChapelle, Joanna Macy and John Seed, Starhawk, and Terry Tempest Williams is all relevant and important, however, none refer to themselves as ecopsychologists and, perhaps unfortunately, they and many worthy others are seldom, if ever, cited in the works of ecopsychologists.
- <sup>56</sup> Roszak 1994, 1
- <sup>57</sup> Metzner 1999, p. 2
- <sup>58</sup> Metzner 1999

---

<sup>59</sup> Pilisuk 1995, 3

<sup>60</sup> This is not to say that other tangential areas may not be brought within the purview of ecopsychology, such as certain aspects of environmental psychology (especially its research on people's attitudes and activities towards the environment, and environmental risk assessment), the social and psychological effects of contaminated environments, and indigenous science. My point, however, is that there is a burden of justification that needs to be met before any such inclusion is made.

<sup>61</sup> Roszak 1992

<sup>62</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 14

<sup>63</sup> Roszak 1992

<sup>64</sup> Although these "objectives" are not enumerated clearly in Roszak's (1992) original "essay in ecopsychology," they represent areas of considerable interest and discussion by him, which I have extrapolated in support of this essay's purpose: to bring some order to and make some sense of this confusingly diverse area of inquiry and practice. Furthermore, although other ecopsychologists advocate additional objectives (and purposes and goals), these, I suggest, are axiomatic and shared by all ecopsychologists.

<sup>65</sup> Roszak 1992

<sup>66</sup> Roszak, Gomes, and Kanner 1995, p. 21

<sup>67</sup> Shepard 1982, p. 1

<sup>68</sup> Glendinning 1994, p. 164

<sup>69</sup> Metzner 1995, p. 56

<sup>70</sup> Although Shepard's (1982) question is ecopsychology's core question, ecopsychologists ask and attempt to answer many others in their quest to understand the psychological dimensions of the ecocrisis.

<sup>71</sup> Shepard 1982, p. xii

<sup>72</sup> Shepard 1982, p. x

<sup>73</sup> Shepard 1982, p. 124

<sup>74</sup> Shepard 1982, pp. 37–38

<sup>75</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 39

<sup>76</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 291

<sup>77</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 304

<sup>78</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 320

<sup>79</sup> Roszak 1992, 42

<sup>80</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 277

<sup>81</sup> Glendinning 1994, p. ix

<sup>82</sup> Glendinning 1994, p. 64

<sup>83</sup> Glendinning 1994, pp. 70–71

- 
- <sup>84</sup> Metzner 1995, p. 55
- <sup>85</sup> Metzner 1995, p. 59
- <sup>86</sup> Metzner 1995, p. 61
- <sup>87</sup> Metzner 1995, p. 61
- <sup>88</sup> Metzner 1995, p. 64
- <sup>89</sup> Metzner 1995, p. 64
- <sup>90</sup> Metzner 1995, p. 65
- <sup>91</sup> Metzner 1995, p. 66
- <sup>92</sup> Winter 1996, p. 2
- <sup>93</sup> Winter 1996, p. 249
- <sup>94</sup> Armstrong 1995, p. 317
- <sup>95</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 19
- <sup>96</sup> Brown 1995, p. xvi
- <sup>97</sup> Roszak 1992
- <sup>98</sup> Gray 1995, p. 173
- <sup>99</sup> Roszak 1996, p. 22
- <sup>100</sup> Roszak 1994, 6
- <sup>101</sup> Roszak 1995a, p. 2
- <sup>102</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 19
- <sup>103</sup> quoted in Aanstoos 1996, pp. 168–169
- <sup>104</sup> Freud 1962, p. 91
- <sup>105</sup> Fromm 1955
- <sup>106</sup> Laing 1967, pp. 61–62
- <sup>107</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 68
- <sup>108</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 70
- <sup>109</sup> Shepard 1982, p. xi
- <sup>110</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 69
- <sup>111</sup> Aizenstat 1995, p. 99
- <sup>112</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 15
- <sup>113</sup> Shepard 1995, p. 39
- <sup>114</sup> Metzner 1995, p. 63
- <sup>115</sup> Barrows 1995
- <sup>116</sup> Conn 1995, p. 163
- <sup>117</sup> Roszak 1992, pp. 255, 254

- 
- <sup>118</sup> Conn and Conn 1999, p. 121
- <sup>119</sup> Roszak 1995, p. 15
- <sup>120</sup> Roszak 1996, p. 24
- <sup>121</sup> Roszak 1992, 15
- <sup>122</sup> Roszak 1992
- <sup>123</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 172
- <sup>124</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 323
- <sup>125</sup> Roszak 1992, pp. 190, 189
- <sup>126</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 213
- <sup>127</sup> Roszak 1995b, p. 20
- <sup>128</sup> Kerlinger 1973, p. 8
- <sup>129</sup> Brown 1995, p. xvi
- <sup>130</sup> e.g., Lovelock 1991; Capra 1996
- <sup>131</sup> Roszak 1995a, p. 14
- <sup>132</sup> Kellert 1993, p. 20
- <sup>133</sup> Roszak 1995a, p. 4
- <sup>134</sup> Clinebell 1996
- <sup>135</sup> Fenwick 1998
- <sup>136</sup> Macy 1995
- <sup>137</sup> Swanson 1995, p. 59
- <sup>138</sup> Kropotkin 1914
- <sup>139</sup> Margulis 1993
- <sup>140</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 321
- <sup>141</sup> Glendinning 1994, p. 162
- <sup>142</sup> Clinebell 1996, p. xxii
- <sup>143</sup> Gomes, Leupold, and Albracht 1998, p. 26
- <sup>144</sup> Swanson 1995, p. 60
- <sup>145</sup> Fisher 1996, p. 20
- <sup>146</sup> Roszak 1992, pp. 320–321
- <sup>147</sup> Ecopsychology Roundtable 1994
- <sup>148</sup> Brown 1995, p. xiv
- <sup>149</sup> Brown 1995, p. xiv, Brown's emphasis
- <sup>150</sup> Roszak 1995a, p. 2
- <sup>151</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 38

- 
- <sup>152</sup> Roszak 1995a, p. 21
- <sup>153</sup> *Center Review* 1990, p. 1, their emphasis
- <sup>154</sup> Roszak 1995a
- <sup>155</sup> Fisher 1996, p. 23
- <sup>156</sup> Nelson 1998, p. 37
- <sup>157</sup> Roszak 1995a, p. 3
- <sup>158</sup> For a detailed critique of ecopsychology by a psychologist, the reader is referred to Reser 1995.
- <sup>159</sup> Mack 1995, p. 285
- <sup>160</sup> Roszak 1992, p. 311
- <sup>161</sup> Pilisuk and Joy 2001, p. 106
- <sup>162</sup> Fisher 2002, p. 161
- <sup>163</sup> Gray 1995, p. 173
- <sup>164</sup> *Ecopsychology On-Line*, No. 2, Jan., 1997
- <sup>165</sup> Fisher 2002
- <sup>166</sup> Fisher 2002, p. xiii
- <sup>167</sup> Fisher 2002, p. 6
- <sup>168</sup> Roszak 1995a, p. 15
- <sup>169</sup> Roszak 1992/2001, p. 328