ECOLOGICAL NARCISSISM AND THE DENIAL OF DEATH

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ABSTRACT

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This theoretical dissertation uses a hermeneutic methodology to weave together three strands—ecopsychology, narcissism, and death denial—to explore ecological narcissism, defined as the tendency of humans in technologically advanced cultures to be so self-absorbed as to be unable to see anything in nature except objects that might satisfy their own needs. The study responds to 3 research questions: How is ecological narcissism related to the denial of death? Does ecological narcissism, with its denial of death, play a role in our destruction of the environment? And, how might we mitigate ecological narcissism and renew a more life-sustaining attitude towards death?

It posits that beneath the confident, manic façade of modern cultures lurks fear of death masquerading as death denial. Ecological narcissism co-arises with this fear as the offspring of human belief in separation from nature. The study examines the theories developed by Berman, Hillman, and Shepard to account for how humanity has come to feel separate from nature. It proposes that ecological narcissism and death denial support us in perceiving nonhuman created environments as a collection of objects devoid of the sentience and subjectivity credited to humans. Such a perceptual orientation is interested in the answer to only one question: Do these objects (which might include elephants, oaks, and oceans) help further human life? If so, we feel free to use them, and if not, we feel free to destroy them.

A final conclusion of this study is that one way in which humans might move towards a more life-sustaining attitude towards nature and death is through an increase in direct experience of wilderness “out there” and “in here” (within one’s psyche). Practitioners of depth psychotherapy therefore have an opportunity to support a welcoming attitude towards wild forces within and beyond us, which in turn may support a cultural transition from the prevailing attitude of narcissistic entitlement to a maturity recognizing human relationship with all nature.

Dedications and Acknowledgments

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved late husband Dwight VandenBerghe. Your love and belief in me launched me on this journey in the first place.

I also want to acknowledge the following people, because without their ongoing encouragement and love through some dark and difficult days I could not have completed this project: Barb, Sue, F.J., Bill, Bob, Ben, and Ladson.

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The style used throughout this dissertation is in accordance with the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th Edition, 2009), and *Pacifica Graduate Institute's Dissertation Handbook* (2013-2014).

Chapter 1
Introduction and Overview

Autobiographical Origins of the Topic

I stand with my hand on the ragged grey-brown bark of the ancient eucalyptus and feel its quiet strength calm my racing mind. I ponder my enduring sense of connection with this particular tree on the campus of Pacifica Graduate Institute. I feel sadness well up in me as I recall that I am halfway through my studies and that when I am done, in eighteen months or so, I will have little or no opportunity to touch this tree again. I speak aloud to the tree as tears well up in my eyes: "I will always remember you." To my astonishment I believe I hear the tree say back to me, in a slow, quiet, masculine tone (as a voice in my mind): "I will always remember you too."

My perception of myself, and the tree, and the larger world around me is turned upside down and inside out. Am I going mad? Is this communication from the tree a projection from my own mind? Is there any chance the tree is alive in a way I don't yet fully comprehend and is actually capable of communicating with me? What would be the implications for my understanding of the world and my experience of being in the world if the latter were true? For example, what would happen to my sense of existential aloneness if I experienced myself connected to the entire natural world, not just to people? Just as importantly, what would be the implications for the larger culture of which I'm a part—modern, industrialized, technologically advanced culture—if it were true that the natural world is alive and sentient in a way we deny?

Introduction to the Topic

John Mack of Harvard Medical School has been a highly visible advocate for a changed relationship between the peoples of Western, industrialized cultures and the

natural world. He pulls no punches with this scathing commentary on how our culture tends to perceive the Earth:

> We regard it as a thing, a big thing, an object to be owned, mined, fenced, guarded, stripped, built upon, dammed, plowed, burned, blasted, bulldozed, and melted to serve the material needs and desires of the human species at the expense, if necessary, of all other species, which we feel at liberty to kill, paralyze, or domesticate for our own use. Among the many forms of egoism that have come to be the focus of psychodynamically oriented psychologists in an age of self-criticism about our narcissism, this form of species arrogance has received little scrutiny. (1995, p. 282)

I read Mack as saying that the human species—at least those members of the human species who identify with industrialized cultural paradigms—are behaving narcissistically in relationship to the other living things and beings of the natural world. In other words, we see only ourselves and our own needs reflected in the natural world and seem to be incapable of seeing, hearing, or relating to whatever Other or others actually live there. Our narcissistic stance results in destruction on such a massive scale that the lives of all beings on the planet may now be in jeopardy. I hear Mack inviting an in-depth examination of this narcissistic response to the natural world.

Stephen Aizenstat of Pacifica Graduate Institute is another steady voice in the growing chorus of those who advocate a shift in our perception of the human-nature relationship. He advocates "extend[ing] the work of Freud and Jung to include consideration of the psyche of non-human experience" (1995, p. 95). He invites us to expand beyond the familiar Jungian idea of a collective unconscious to an even more encompassing aspect of psyche: "The world unconscious [where] all creatures and things of the world are understood as interrelated and interconnected" (pp. 95-96). Clearly, the implications of this idea are immense: it is not just humans, but all other things, animate

and inanimate—trees, rocks, rivers, toads—that are connected within an unconscious field of being.

Founder of archetypal psychology, James Hillman, stands behind the ideas of Aizenstat, offering his thoughts on the *anima mundi*, "which means nothing less than the world ensouled" (1982, p. 77). Elaborating on such a world, Hillman tells us that it "comes with shapes, colors, atmospheres, textures . . . all things show faces, the world not only a coded signature to be read for meaning, but a physiognomy to be faced" (p. 77). He challenges old psychological constructs which claim that only humans have feelings, memories, intentions, asking us to notice that "not only does this view kill things by viewing them as dead; it imprisons us in that tight little cell of ego" (p. 78). He prods us to remember that the ensouled things of the world "regard us beyond how we may regard them, our perspectives, what we intend with them, and how we dispose of them" (p. 77), a call to change our narcissistic response to the world.

Aizenstat (1995) goes on to say, "This change in orientation requires a move beyond the personal-particular human psyche into an active psychological relationship with the other species and things on our Earth" (p. 97). Hillman points out that such a relationship is imperative, since "the soul of the individual can never advance beyond the soul of the world, because they are *inseparable*, the one always implicating the other" (1982, p. 79). How do we engage in such a psychological relationship with other species and things? Varying cultures over millennia of human existence have answered in different ways—some welcoming other species as brothers and sisters in the world, and some, like current Americanized culture, relating to other species as if they had no meaningful inner life that we can relate to. Beloved German poet Rainer Maria Rilke

demonstrated 100 years ago a willingness to try to reach into intimate relationship with another species in "The Panther," (1981, *Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke*, p. 139):

> From seeing the bars his seeing is so exhausted
> that it no longer holds anything anymore.
> To him the world is bars, a hundred thousand
> bars, and behind the bars, nothing.
>
> The lithe swinging of that rhythmical easy stride
> which circles down to the tiniest hub
> is like a dance of energy around a point
> in which a great will stands stunned and numb.
>
> Only at times the curtains of the pupils rise
> without a sound . . . then a shape enters,
> slips through the tightened silence of the shoulders,
> reaches the heart, and dies.

We can't know with any certainty what it was that Rilke imagined entered through Panther's pupils into his heart, only to die, but we can wonder: A memory of open spaces and fragrant grasses triggered by a scent on the wind? Hope?

I believe that Martin Heidegger is speaking of something that connects the words and worlds of Aizenstat and Rilke when he says this of poets:

> The poet always speaks as if beings were expressed and addressed for the first time. In the poetry of the poet . . . there is always so much world space to spare that each and every thing—a tree, a mountain, a house, the call of a bird—completely loses its indifference and familiarity. (1959/2000, p. 28)

I am including poetry in this dissertation proposal because I believe it will help us to remain grounded in the particularity and aliveness of the beings and states of being we are discussing. One of my basic tenets is that we have fallen away from such grounding, so it is important to me to try to embody it in my writing. Heidegger asks: "Is it the fault of the word that it remains so empty, or is it our fault, because in all our bustling and chasing after beings, we have nevertheless fallen out of Being?" (p. 39).

A comprehensive analysis of Heidegger's works is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, I believe that in his discussions of Being he is pointing to ideas deeply related to the essence of my work, and he is certainly relevant to the foundations of hermeneutic methodology which I am using in this dissertation, so I will continue to include his thoughts as we go along. He asks such amazing questions: "Why are there beings at all? . . . From what ground do beings come? On what ground do beings stand? To what ground do beings go?" (1959/2000, p. 3). Such questions touch upon my questions, and upon the ideas of the many authors I discuss in this study.

Returning to Aizenstat, who has some ideas about the ground which beings stand upon and share, I found in one of his statements, after my experience with the eucalyptus tree at Pacifica, an opening into a worldview which would allow for my felt sense of an "I—Thou" encounter. He says, "The idea that all beings are ensouled, in and of themselves, locates the life spark in the entity, outside of personal human psychic ownership" (1995, p. 96). That was my experience. The voice of the eucalyptus tree seemed more than just an extension of my personal psyche—tree within me but also more than tree within me. And therein lay the ego-shattering effect.

Andy Fisher (2002) offers these thoughts about the meaning of "contact," which seem relevant to our discussion. He says, "*Contact*, then, denotes the activity of ex-change, transaction, meeting, fusion-across-difference, transmission, encounter, or engagement with the world" (p. 65). Yes. There was a moment between tree and me of fusion across difference—of transmission. It would be so easy to label that moment a moment of purely inner experience. Most of the culture in which I live would tell me it was all in my own mind. But Fisher reminds us that "it is of our cultural pathology to

interiorize experience" (p. 65), and in that interiorizing we become blind and deaf to others—human and nonhuman.

Theodore Roszak (2001) writes eloquently in *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology* of the consequences of modern culture's deafness to other voices in the natural world. He tells us, "When, in obedience to a narrow reality principle, we make the nonhuman world less than it is, we also make ourselves less than we are. More of the mind is split off and driven into that zone of impermissible experience called "insane" (p. 81). As a practicing psychodynamic psychotherapist, educated originally in clinical psychology, I am familiar with the ways in which human culture, including the culture of modern psychology, labels experiences that fall outside consensus reality, insane. Yet R. D. Laing (as cited in Roszak, 2001) says, "We live in the midst of 'socially shared hallucinations . . . our collusive madness is what we call sanity'" (p. 55). Fisher (2002) sees some of that insanity in our narcissistic preoccupation with our inner lives, saying, "The unfolding of our lives is not just the flowering of some inner potential—as if the only role of the outer world were to water our seed" (p. 65).

Poets, as well as therapists, challenge definitions of sanity. Denise Levertov asked us in 1978: ("Part III – April," p. 130)

> But what are
>
> the trees to which –
> (to whom, were they not beings,
> impassive but sentient? 'Dreamy, gloomy,
> friendly . . .')
>
> – I ran long ago, and still
> when I'm alone, embrace sometimes, shyly,
> not impulsively: pensively;
>
> what within me or in those I love, or who draw me
> towards themselves (as water
> is pulled by roots out of the soil, to rise up
> up, and up

into the tower of the tree)
– what is the counterpart, then,
in these or myself,
to imagined, retrieved, pines and oaks of the past
uttering ocean on inland gusts of autumnal wind?
(Eyes closed, eyes closed,
swaying as they swayed,
listening with the heart to envisioned breakers,
the sense confounded, my breathing
breathing with boughs' tossing
until delight
broke in me into a dance,
unwitnessed, secret, whirling,
as if I became
a heap of firstfallen leaves
to eddy and fly
joyfully over the field
and scatter)
What within us is tree? . . .

Is Denise Levertov insane? Am I? How about Rilke, Roszak, Aizenstat?

Aizenstat specifically invites depth psychologists to take up research "to explore how the human being interacts with the 'voices' of others who share the Earth… cultivating different ways of listening [that] would foster the ability to hear the diversity of nonhuman phenomena" (1995, p. 99). Gary Snyder echoes this invitation, saying: "The dialogue to open next would be among all beings, toward a rhetoric of ecological relationships" (1990, p. 74). My interest for the purposes of this dissertation is in states of mind and being that may be getting in the way of our ability to hear the voices of nonhuman phenomena. Why *aren't* we listening to them? Perhaps our narcissism is getting in the way. Are there other factors as well?

Carl Jung had some interesting thoughts on this issue. He often spoke of humanity's refusal to remember our connectedness with the natural world, saying:

> At times I feel as if I am spread out over the landscape and inside things, and am myself living in every tree, in the splash of the waves, in the clouds and the

> animals that come and go, in the procession of the seasons. There is nothing with which I am not linked. (1963/1989, p. 225)

He clearly did not become deaf to communication with other life. Some parts of humanity retained that capacity in the past, and some retain it still.

How is it that some cultures have managed to maintain a belief that the natural world is alive in a way that requires relationship, not just *use* as a source of food, shelter, and energy for humans? In *Wisdom of the Elders: Sacred Native Stories of Nature* (1993) David Suzuki and Peter Knudtson collected stories from many such surviving indigenous cultures. For example, the Chewong in Malaysia still "are obligated to honor the spiritual essence of particular trees, guided by . . . a memory that connects them directly to that earlier era when all trees could shout, sigh, and weep" (p. 215). Closer to home, in the Alaska interior, the Koyukon people "live in a natural world that *watches, in a forest of eyes*, and as they travel across the familiar landscape, they are never truly alone. *The surroundings are aware, sensate, personified*" (p. 37). Why do they remember the natural world as aware and sensate while we have forgotten?

Leslie Gray, who is both a clinical psychologist and shamanic counselor, has found her way back to this awareness of a personified world. She quotes a Chuckchee shaman who taught her, "Everything that is, is alive" (1995, p. 181). She reminds us:

> Indigenous peoples believe that you have to do your part to keep the earth alive, i.e., you must have reciprocal relations with the environment. You tend the natural world, and it in turn empowers you and gives you energy and health. (p. 181)

So what was I to do when directly invited into such a reciprocal relationship? One crisp, bright morning in late spring of 2010, as I was driving home through northern California farmland from my classes at Pacifica Graduate Institute, a vision of a great angelic presence appeared in the sky before me, saying, "Please listen—all those who have ears

to hear—Earth needs our help!" As with my encounter with the tree, I was shaken, and my first tendency was to doubt my own sanity.

I pulled over at my first opportunity and calmed my beating heart and trembling hands. Then I reviewed what I had experienced, and recalled the many materials I had been reading which question consensual reality assumptions of Americanized culture, and decided to accept the encounter for what it appeared to be: a call for help from an ensouled and sentient aspect of the Earth herself. This cemented my intention to write this dissertation as a first offering in the direction of exploring what gets in the way of our relationship with Earth. I wonder what my response might have been had I not been in a program that supports exploration of alternative views of reality, or if my spiritual beliefs told me that such an experience must be an encounter with evil. I would certainly have turned away from this call: denying the consciousness behind it, declaring it dangerous and to be purged from my mind. Even if I had not done either of those things, it would have been so easy to decide it was simply a projection from my unconscious, to be analyzed for its meaning purely in terms of my internal world, rather than having relevance for the larger world.

One way that depth psychotherapists have conceptualized this tendency to see only ourselves as we gaze into the world is under the rubric of narcissism. Hillman (1982) connects the narcissistic tendencies of Westernized culture with the entrenched philosophical traditions of positivism, materialism, secularism, and reductionism, saying:

> Of course I am in desperate narcissistic need, not because I have been neglected or still neglect my inmost subjectivity, but because the world without soul can never offer intimacy, never return my glance, never look at me with appeal, with gratitude, nor relieve the essential isolation of my subjectivity. (p. 89)

He suggests that it is our own move away from recognizing the world as ensouled that leaves us feeling empty and in need of reflection from others. We do not notice that the world is always there, speaking to us in a myriad voices. We have turned away, and now we feel alone.

Nathan Schwartz-Salant (1982) explores the phenomenology and mythology of narcissism extensively in *Narcissism and Character Transformation.* He takes his study of narcissism beyond early definitions of the problem, which include "self-love to a pathological degree and an associated impenetrability" (p. 9), towards an understanding that narcissism may include an element of striving towards connection with the Jungian concept of Self.

Schwartz-Salant (1982) describes Self thus: "1) as content of the ego; 2) as a focus and center outside the ego; and 3) as an energy field beyond both ego and psyche, experienced as outside both" (p. 17). He goes on to use religious language to describe Self as both immanent and transcendent, and even suggests that the narcissist's struggle with identity is at least partially a struggle to come into relationship with the sacred as imaged in the Self. He suggests that narcissistic problems "may represent nothing less than the psyche's response to the call that 'God is dead' . . . painfully brought home to us in the fragmentation our modern society suffers and creates" (p. 37). Narcissism as an unconscious attempt to reconnect with the sacred? What is the sacred?

Webster's tells us the word "sacred" means "consecrated to or belonging to a god or deity; holy; or regarded with the same respect and reverence accorded holy things; venerated; hallowed" (1984, p. 1252). So if Schwartz-Salant is on the right track, the narcissist is desperately seeking in his own reflection something to venerate, something

to consecrate to deity—perhaps misperceiving himself as deity in his attempt to get back to a sense of belonging with the sacred, which Hillman (1982) reminds us has always been right there, in the world we turned away from.

Circling back to the shamanic worldview we heard just a moment ago, where god—in the sense of the sacred livingness of all things—is not, and never has been, dead, brings us around again to the kinds of questions which launched me on this journey in the first place. C. Michael Smith (2007) discusses the similarities and differences between modern, depth ideas of self/soul/world and ancient shamanic ideas of self/soul/world. He feels in the modern idea of a dead world without animating soul, "An existential nausea (Sartre) that comes with such a nihilistic view of reality. Such a view is itself a symptom of deep spiritual, social, and ecological pathology" (p. 242).

Dead world—dead god: Death has claimed the sacred and natural realms if one believes this worldview which maintains a focus on me, me, me, and death itself has lost its sacred aspect for many of us. Yet modern Americanized culture also fights with all its might to deny the reality of death. Is there some connection between these apparently disparate strands: a narcissism that denies the aliveness and sacredness of other beings and things, yet denies the reality of death and longs for the sacredness which has been denied?

Ernest Becker, in his magnificent 1973 book, *The Denial of Death*, has some thoughts to share that may help us begin to unravel the tangle. He calls on the ideas of Freud, Rank, Kierkegaard, and others to help illuminate his premise that much human misery, self-preoccupation, and destruction of the world is related to the denial of the reality of death. Becker begins by offering his view on narcissism: That each child takes

off in "a flight from helplessness and obliteration" (p. 36) and remains "intent on shaping [the] world to his own aggrandizement" (p. 37). Why are we driven by such fear, according to Becker? He answers with a question: "Who wants to face up fully to the creatures we are, clawing and grasping for breath in a universe beyond our ken?" (p. 27). So we deny our creaturely existence, elevating ourselves in our minds above being part of the hunter/hunted dance that we consciously shared with other living beings for millions of years.

Becker (1973) cuts right to the heart of the questions I am posing for this dissertation when he connects narcissism, the denial of death, and the destruction of the world in this way:

> Modern man's defiance of accident, evil, and death takes the form of sky-rocketing production of consumer and military goods. . . a rage against our impotence, a defiance of our animal condition. . . . If we don't have the omnipotence of gods, we at least can destroy like gods. (p. 85)

So it appears that our impenetrable self-love allows us to maintain the illusion of being indestructible while we gradually destroy everything around us.

Philippe Aries, the French historian who wrote the classic, *The Hour of Our Death* (1977/1981), brings some further light to bear on modern Western humanity's narcissistic attempts to deny the reality of death. He says, "Death has ceased to be accepted as a natural, necessary phenomenon. Death is a failure, a 'business lost'" (p. 586). He speaks of the attitudes of people from the Middle Ages to the early 20th century as still acknowledging death as a natural part of the fabric of life (p. 559), though there were great variations in how people managed such issues as where the dying person should die (at home or in a medical facility) and what to do with the dead body.

Aries' (1977/1981) description of what happened to Western attitudes towards death later in the 20th century helps us continue the process of examining my questions about the relationships between ecological narcissism and the denial of death. He suggests:

> People began to believe that there was no limit to the power of technology, either in man or in nature. Technology erodes the domain of death until one has the illusion that death has been abolished. The area of the invisible death is also the area of the greatest belief in the power of technology and its ability to transform man and nature. Our modern model of death was born and developed in places that gave birth to two beliefs: first, the belief in a nature that seems to eliminate death; next the belief in a technology that would replace nature and eliminate death the more surely. (p. 595)

So Aries examines attitudes about death that have shifted in response to changes in cultural beliefs from a sociological perspective, and Becker explores the underpinnings of our fear and denial of death from a social psychological perspective. Another perspective I want to invite into the discussion is that of archetypal psychology which looks at the world through a mythologizing lens.

How does Death as mythic presence connect to our alarming human tendency to be blind to the presence of a living Other in nature? How does our relationship with Death impact our attitudes about destruction of the natural environment upon which our survival depends? James Hillman talks about Hades as image of Death, suggesting this archetypal relationship between nature and death: "The essential 'what' that holds things in their form is the secret of their death. And if, as Heraclitus says, Nature loves to hide, then nature loves Hades" (1979, p. 27). Hillman also tells us, "Hades is said to have no temples or altars in the upperworld and his confrontation with it is experienced as a violence, a violation." (p. 27). We have another perspective on the problematic, triangulated relationship between humans, nature, and death. Humans experience Hades

as a violation and do their best to avoid recognition of Death's existence, whereas nature loves Hades. Might this not cause humans to distance themselves from nature? With what consequences?

As I continue my explorations into the connections between Death as an archetypal power and presence and "ecological narcissism," I want to keep in mind these words from Hillman: "The depth dimension is the only one that can penetrate to what is hidden; and since only what is hidden is true nature of all things, including nature itself, then only the way of soul can lead to true insight" (1979, p. 26). I see a depth psychological perspective as the way of soul, and it is my intention to bring this soul perspective with me into every aspect of this work. Therefore, poetry, dreams, and even my symptoms and complexes will accompany us on our journey because I believe they can often speak more immediately to soul than the typical language of academic inquiry.

I want to offer some final thoughts for this introduction to the basic themes of my dissertation. Though it may not be immediately obvious, I do see a connection between this research and my clinical work. I have long been aware of how clients' denial of both death and grief can thwart their aliveness and ability to find meaning and move forward in their lives. I now hold it as a possibility that clients might also be unconsciously grieving the death of the natural world, or unconsciously feeling guilt about their part in causing that death. In addition, I have noticed for many years that clients tend to do better when they have something beyond themselves—perhaps their family, perhaps nature, perhaps their spiritual beliefs—that gives life meaning.

Terrance O'Connor works as a psychotherapist to connect clients' awareness of environmental crisis with a search for meaning. In "Therapy for a Dying Planet" he says:

> Clients struggling with the purpose and meaning of their lives are often doing so in obsessive isolation from the movement of life around them. . . . Coming to grips with the global crisis offers both a deeper understanding of the human condition and a motivation to break down the psychological barriers that allow us to tolerate our starving children and ailing oceans. I have even, upon occasion, interrupted a client's obsessive, self-absorbed soliloquy with, "Are you aware the planet is dying?" (1995, p. 154)

As my own attention to environmental destruction comes to the forefront, I feel increased grief over the loss of great forests and unique species, and notice my own sense of aliveness growing by speaking up rather than remaining a silent witness.

Though I don't feel inclined to directly intrude upon clients' thoughts with a suggestion that they think about the environment instead of themselves, I *am* considering shifting my private practice to a space that would make it possible to sit outdoors and talk. I'm also considering the possibility of conducting sessions with certain clients during walks in the forest, or along the seashore, if I can figure out a way to ensure privacy. In such situations I may invite clients to notice how relaxed attention to the natural world affects them. Elizabeth Perluss reminded me that the dreams and images of nature that clients bring into therapy are "indeed present in a real way," and we should not forget that "the tree in our dream is just as real as a tree in the park" (August 2012, personal communication). As I continue with my dissertation process I remain open to noticing other connections between my research interests and my clinical practice.

Jungian analyst Jean Shinoda-Bolen expresses her support for exploration of the themes in this dissertation in her book, "*Like a Tree: How Trees, Women, and Tree People Can Save the Planet*" (2011). She discusses her understanding of the profound and complex interconnections between humans and nature, and at the end of the book she puts out this call:

> We are in a period of crisis—where danger and opportunity exist side by side. The situation calls for intelligence, mysticism, wisdom, and compassion to find ways we can act individually and together to save the planet and restore soul. Whatever comes to your mind and heart, as an intention or a dream, take the first step that has its origins in who you are and what has meaning for you. The path will open up as you travel it. There will be companions. (pp. 208-209)

I do find the path opening up as I continue this work, and herein I am accompanied by many companions in a rich dialogue that will go on long after I have completed this.

So many pieces to the puzzle. So many voices with a relevant point of view. We have heard from psychologists, psychiatrists, poets, a sociologist, an historian, a shaman, Earth, and a tree. I believe, based on my explorations so far, that there is ample evidence to support the need for this research into the complex web of human narcissistic response to the natural world as it is entangled with fear and the denial of death.

Statement of the Research Problem and Question

There appears to be no specific research on the relationship between ecological narcissism and the denial of death by people in modern Americanized culture. Ecological narcissism is the tendency of some humans—in particular humans in industrialized, technologically advanced cultures—to be so self-absorbed as to appear unable to see anything in the natural world except reflections of objects which might satisfy their own needs. It is possible that such narcissism interferes with our ability to see and hear the living reality of nonhuman others in the natural world, which includes not just animals, but such entities as trees, plants, insects, and the earth itself.

Perhaps the powerful denial of death by people in modern Americanized culture is connected to our alarming tendency to be blind to the presence of a living Other in nature, and to destroy the natural environment upon which our survival depends.

If we are doing our best to avoid recognition of death's existence, but the natural world reminds us everywhere we look that death is a natural, constant phenomenon, might this cause us to disregard and destroy nature? With what consequences? Or, might there be some factor that underlies both our narcissistic response to the natural world and our fear of death? This leads to my primary research question: How is ecological narcissism related to the denial of death? Two questions follow upon this primary question: (1) Does ecological narcissism, with its denial of death, play a role in our destruction of the environment? and (2) How might we mitigate against such ecological narcissism and renew a more life-sustaining attitude towards death?

Research Methodology

When we head off into unknown territory it is important to have a map or guide. Joseph Coppin and Elizabeth Nelson (2005), in their text on doing research from a depth perspective, remind us that, "Etymologically the word *method* refers to the way over, across, or through. It is a pathway marked by previous travelers and known to be reliable" (p. 89). I have chosen to approach my research using hermeneutics as the way through, acknowledging at the outset that hermeneutics is as much attitude as method.

Webster's (1984) defines *attitude* as "a manner of acting, feeling, or thinking that shows one's disposition" (p. 90). In my study of hermeneutics I have come to understand it as a manner of thinking—an attitude—that both shows and fits my disposition. I believe it also fits the disposition of the ideas I am exploring, offering a way through for this intellectual traveler as I try to find the hidden passageways between such concepts as narcissism, denial of death, and ecopsychology that don't, at first glance, appear to have much to do with one another.

I plan to keep in mind Palmer's (1969) thoughts on the very idea of method in conjunction with hermeneutics. He strongly cautions those who plan to take up the use of hermeneutics to remember that "method is in reality a form of dogmatism, separating the interpreter from the work . . . and barring him from experiencing the work in its fullness" (p. 247). There may be something about narcissism that, in separating us from the fullness of experience, is related to our denial of death and our destruction of the environment. Perhaps we could consider narcissism a kind of dogmatism of the self.

Palmer (1969) makes it even clearer that he is uneasy about the idea of hermeneutics as a method when he says:

> Method is an effort to measure and control from the side of the interpreter; it is the opposite of letting the phenomenon lead. The openness of "experience" – which alters the interpreter himself from the side of the text – is antithetical to method. (p. 247)

This suggests some of the threads connecting the different elements of the dissertation question. How is current American culture addicted to a fantasy of being able to measure and control the world through scientific method? How are we unwilling to be open and allow ourselves and our conceptions of the world to be radically altered by the phenomenon we encounter? It sounds as if there is a deep, underlying worldview which reverberates through Palmer's approach to hermeneutics and my questions about narcissism, death, and ecopsychology.

Though it is a qualitative method or attitude of interpretation, it is not just about interpretation. Martin Packer (1989) reminds me in his chapter "Tracing the Hermeneutic Circle" (pp. 95-118) that "the goal to which interpretive inquiry is ultimately directed is not just one of mirroring reality in a descriptive account but of changing it for the better in some way . . . that at the very least [it] fosters our understanding and clarifies our

action" (p. 117). I do hope that this study will help to clarify some actions of modern humans and foster our understanding of any connections between ecological narcissism and death denial.

Returning to our consideration of hermeneutics as a method appropriate to psychology as a social science, one of the most significant philosophers related to hermeneutics—Heidegger—has this to say about scientific method:

> This is a great misfortune only if one believes that scientific thinking alone is the authentic, rigorous thinking, that it alone can and must be made the measure even of philosophical thinking. But the reverse is the case. All scientific thinking is just a derivative and rigidified form of philosophical thinking. (1959/2000, p. 28)

He goes on to speak about science as "spiritless" (p. 51), "decadent" (p. 50), and nothing more than a "technical and practical matter of gaining information" (p. 51). All of this confirms my understanding of hermeneutics as philosophical attitude more than scientific method.

I want to be thoughtful about my inclusion of Heidegger as a thinker foundational to the attitude/method of this research because some of his ideas appear to be in direct contradiction to other ideas I am presenting in this work. For example, in his elaboration on the theme of Being he speaks of a "darkening of the world" (1959/2000, p. 47), which entails "the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, [and] the reduction of human beings to a mass" (p. 47). This certainly sounds related to themes in my dissertation. However, he also says, "World is always *spiritual* world" (p. 47) and then he separates humans from other living creatures, saying: "The animal has no world" (p. 47), denying them soul or spirit, and thereby excluding other beings from the realm of human and spiritual Being.

Jacques Derrida, another philosopher whose ideas are deeply connected with hermeneutics, refutes Heidegger's point of view about animals. He speaks of an "abyssal rupture" that has occurred between "Man and the Animal":

> Beyond the edge of the *so-called* human, beyond it but by no means on a single opposing side, rather than "The Animal" or "Animal Life" there is already a heterogeneous multiplicity of the living . . . a multiplicity of organization of relations between living and dead, relations of organization or lack of organization among realms that are more and more difficult to dissociate by means of the figures of the organic and inorganic, of life and/or death. These relations are at once intertwined and abyssal, and they can never be totally objectified. . . . It follows that one will never have the right to take animals to be the species of a kind that would be named The Animal, or animal in general. Whenever "one" says "The Animal," each time a philosopher, or anyone else, says "The Animal" in the singular and without further ado, claiming thus to designate every living thing that is held not to be human . . . well, each time the subject of that statement, this "one," this "I," does that he utters an *asinanity.* And this "I am uttering an *asinanity*" should confirm not only the animality that he is disavowing but his complicit, continued, and organized involvement in a veritable war of the species. (2006/2008 p. 31)

Every time I read this statement it brings tears to my eyes. Derrida is bringing nonhuman beings back into dialogue with us, questioning the very act of dividing beings into human and nonhuman, saying, "Animal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give. These humans are found giving it to themselves, this word, but as if they had received it as an inheritance" (p. 32).

Derrida (2006/2008) questions our right to say animals have no language, and in so doing cracks open the door to bring the communications of nonhuman beings as texts into this dissertation for interpretation, alongside the texts of humans. He comments: "Men would be first and foremost those living creatures who have given themselves the word [animal] to designate it as the single being that remains without a response, without a word with which to respond. That wrong was committed long ago and with long-term

consequences" (p. 32). He explores what might be necessary to "break with the Cartesian tradition of the animal-machine without language and without response" (p. 119).

Lest I be accused of cracking the door open much farther than Derrida ever intended it to be opened, I want to include some of his remarks about Lacan's concept of the "Other" and "the animal" (2006/2008, p. 120). Derrida interprets Lacan as saying: "The animal has neither unconscious nor language, nor the [O]ther, except as an effect of the human order, that is by contagion, appropriation, domestication" (p. 121). Derrida tells us that Lacan defines "the Other as the one from whom 'the subject receives even the message that he emits'" (as cited in Derrida, 2006/2008, p. 126). Derrida then challenges philosophers to stop reducing "a world of life forms . . . to one between the human subject . . . and the nonsubject that is the animal . . . where the latter comes to be, in another sense, the nonsubject that is subjected to the human subject" (p. 126). Next, he takes an even more radical step and inquires if the Other (from whom the human subject receives the message he emits) must not, by definition, be "ahuman" (p. 132).

He goes on to explore what it means to be ahuman and includes:

> *Divinanimality,* [which] even if it were to be felt through the human, would be the quasi-transcendental referent, the excluded, foreclosed, disavowed, tamed, and sacrificed foundation of what it founds, namely, the symbolic order, the human order, law and justice. (Derrida, 2006/2008, p, 132)

Derrida suggests that animals are originally foundational, via the recognition of their ensouled aliveness and communicativeness (divinanimality) by early humans, to the very language (essence of symbolic order) which humans claim animals do not have. He confirms this by saying: "Must not one recognize Father, Law, Animal, etc. as being at bottom the same thing? Or rather, indissociable figures of the same Thing?" (p. 132).

Poet and naturalist Gary Snyder has written extensively about the human-nature relationship—not about hermeneutics or qualitative methodology—and has some things to say that are worth reflecting on in this methodology discussion. In *The Practice of the Wild* (1990), he acknowledges: "One of the formal criteria of humanistic scholarship is that it be concerned with the scrutiny of texts. A text is information stored through time" (p. 71). Then he goes on to question what we include in our definition of texts and language, saying, "The stratigraphy of rocks, layers of pollen in a swamp, the outward expanding circles in the trunk of a tree can be seen as texts" (p. 71). However, he also cautions us to beware of "metaphors of 'nature as books'" (p. 74) reminding us that "language is not a carving, it's a curl of breath, a breeze in the pines" (p. 74).

As I write this long text that was inspired by my embodied encounter with a living, sentient tree, and as I interpret my written versions of that experience as well as my experience of Tree and Earth in the imaginal realm, I don't want to forget what Snyder reminds us of: "The overattachment to the bookish model travels along with the assumption that nothing of much interest happened before the beginning of written history" 1990, p. 75).

Returning to a more traditional discussion of hermeneutic methodology, we have established that hermeneutics entails interpretation, and in particular, interpretation of texts. Robert Romanyshyn (2007) suggests that "where there is ambiguity, there is a need for interpretation, and interpretation is needed because there is ambiguity" (p. 219). The core concepts that are part of my research inquiry are rife with ambiguity. What does ecopsychology mean? What does narcissism mean? What does ecological narcissism mean?

And how about the denial of death? *Denial* is a word loaded with ambiguity—so charged with psychological meaning that our first impulse is probably to say, "Death is not ambiguous! Everyone knows what death means!" And yet Aries (1977/1981) reminds us that even death is a complex phenomenon. With our increasingly sensitive technologies that can monitor and display brain activity how do we decide when is someone dead? When the doctor says so? When the family says so? When the computer says so? How about an entire ecosystem? When do we say it is dead?

But let us not forget that interpreting because there is ambiguity does not require banishing ambiguity—uncomfortable though ambiguity may sometimes make us. Interpretation to resolve ambiguity does not fit the psychodynamic sensibility I bring to this use of hermeneutics. It means dancing with ambiguity, having a conversation with ambiguity. My methodology is informed by a depth psychological sensibility that constantly reminds me: "It is the nature of the psyche to be complex and contradictory beyond any ultimate settlement of what is true" (Coppin & Nelson, 2005, p. 71)

So we engage the dance of ambiguity and interpretation in our efforts to understand our world. In discussing the relationship between interpretation and understanding, Palmer (1969) asserts, "An existing human being cannot survey understanding from without; understanding is always the position from which all that is seen is seen" (p. 228). Our position affects what we are able to see. It would be easy to take this too far, sliding into something like, "Nothing is real except my point of view."

Lewis Aron (2005) sounds as if he is propounding exactly this when he says, "Interpretations inevitably reflect the subjective world of the interpreter" (p. 698). But we don't have to turn it into an either/or. Yes, our subjectivity is part of the circle, but

Palmer reminds us that "what comes to stand in understanding is not something subjective but something which encounters man from the outside and discloses itself to understanding as world" (p. 288). Point of view matters, but it is not the entire matter. There is also something there, outside me, that I am encountering from where I stand.

This brings me around to the idea of the hermeneutic circle. It is in the circle that the dance of ambiguity and interpretation occurs. Romanyshyn (2007) describes the hermeneutic circle in this way:

> Within the embrace of this circle of understanding, the knower approaches a text with some foreknowledge of it, which in turn is questioned and challenged and amplified by the text, thereby transforming the knower who returns to the text with a different understanding of it. (p. 221)

I am prepared to approach and be challenged and questioned by the many texts of my areas of inquiry, including the actual books and journal articles, as well as the texts of any of my dreams, active imaginations, or dialogues with others relevant to this research. I believe I am prepared to be transformed, and in that transformation to bring some new understanding into the world.

Susan Sontag, author of *Against Interpretation* (1966), raises an alarm about interpretation in general, declaring: "Interpretation thus presupposes a discrepancy between the clear meaning of the text and the demands of (later) readers. . . . The interpreter, without actually erasing or rewriting the text, *is* altering it" (p. 97). This worries me. It is not my intention to alter a text, and yet I wonder if that may be inevitable. I am altered by the text as I read it, and I bring to it in reading it my own worldview which affects what I am able to see and hear in the text, so perhaps in the very act of reading it I am altering it. Is there a way to encounter a text that does not entail such alteration? Sontag seems to imply so.

My training in depth psychotherapy may make me especially susceptible to a kind of interpretation that involves alteration—a searching for what is under or inside what I initially encounter—and that is exactly what Sontag condemns, saying, "The modern style of interpretation excavates, and as it excavates, destroys; it digs 'behind' the text, to find a sub-text which is the true one" (1966, p. 98). She refers specifically to Freud, father of psychoanalysis, as contributing to "elaborate systems of hermeneutics, aggressive and impious theories of interpretation" (p. 98). Sontag calls modern interpretation "the revenge of the intellect upon the world" (p. 99). Might my dissertation be viewed as a revenge of the intellect upon the world: intellect split off from embodiment? A startling question for me to consider.

I was struggling with how and if my dissertation might be a representation of intellect split off from embodiment when I encountered this equally startling question from Perluss: "What would embodied intellect look like?" (personal communication, August 2012). I reflected on this question for over a month, taking it with me to mull over on my retreat to Mt. Rainier. It finally dawned on me that I was doing it again—taking myself as a human out of the loop of nature—seeing my use of my own intellect as somehow artificial in comparison to the intellect of the wolf hunting its prey, or the salmon finding its way many miles back upstream to spawn at its birthplace. It is so insidious, this tendency to see ourselves as separate from nature. I came back from my retreat with this response to Ms. Perluss: "Embodied intellect looks like this!"

I still have to ask myself if I am contributing to the destruction of the planet by my very act of writing this dissertation. It is a thought that had occurred to me prior to reading Sontag. Before Sontag I thought about it more in terms of the resources I use to

keep the lights on and the computer running; the trees cut down to produce the paper I consume for hard copies and books that I purchase; and the energy consumed in e-mails and phone calls to committee members. After Sontag I felt impelled to think about it in terms of the very nature of a hermeneutic dissertation: an interpretive act which is an outgrowth of a cultural point of view which elevates mind over matter, essence over substance.

Can this dissertation be an example of *both* embodied intellect, and my own tendency towards abstraction and interpretation, which lead toward separation from more direct relationship with the natural world? Yes. That feels true. I sit here in my brown microfiber office chair, my lower back aching a bit from sitting too long, staring at the pine walls of this basement room, a sepia photo of oak trees hanging on the wall to the right of me, and feel my longing to walk outside to soak up the warmth of the sun on this autumn day, knowing the rains are just around the corner here in Seattle. I allow myself all of two minutes outside on the back patio, the sun heating up my face to the point of discomfort, and retreat back inside, pulled by this other pleasure of pondering the meaning of our narcissistic relationship to the natural world and our denial of death. Something in me wants clear answers—a solution—a final meaning. Something in me harbors a heroic fantasy about being able to save the world by cleverly interpreting the unconscious urges that drive us to destroy the world. And there it is: my narcissism.

Sontag speaks sharply: "To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world—in order to set up a shadow world of 'meanings'" (1996, p. 99). Fortunately, she does offer us an alternative. She proclaims that we must "recover our senses. We must learn to *see* more, to *hear* more, to *feel* more" (p. 104). She recommends that we attend more to form

than content/meaning in our interpretation. Although she is talking about art in general, she does speak specifically about texts, so I am taking her ideas seriously and have deliberately included in this work images, poetry, and descriptions of direct experience to try to evoke more seeing, hearing, and feeling senses, for both myself and my reader.

Ecopsychologist Andy Fisher (2002) mirrors Sontag in her stand against disembodied interpretation. We have heard some of his ideas about the consequences of our Cartesian tendency to split mind and soul from body and nature. He moves into the realm of hermeneutic philosophy when he says, "Any hermeneutical effort to overcome our alienation must therefore also be a retrieval of our embodiment" (pp. 58-59). He reminds us that any interpretation of what we read, see, or experience is mediated by what he calls "the felt ground" (p. 58), and this is true, "especially because . . . the body is itself a kind of ground" (p. 58). I feel delighted by his reminder that, "Body and world are *originally* together, and are only isolated—turned into cadaver and object—in an act of reflective abstraction" (p. 65).

Hillman expands on this theme asking us to address our questions to "*what* things are, and *where*, and *who*, and in *which* precise way they are as they are, rather than *why*, *how come*, and *what for*" (1982, p. 84). He nudges us towards "an animal sense of the world—a nose for the displayed intelligibility of things, their sound, smell, shape, speaking to and through our heart's reactions" (p. 84).

One way to honor Sontag's, Hillman's, and Fisher's pleas against intellectualized and disembodied interpretations that seek hidden meanings is to include embodied writing, a style described by Rosemarie Anderson (2001). She tells us that "embodied writing brings the finely textured experience of the body to the art of writing. Relaying

human experience *from the inside out* . . . embodied writing affirms human life as embedded in the sensual world in which we live our lives" (p. 2). Anderson's thoughts echo Sontag's when she speaks about "Disembodied writing [that] just perpetuates the object-subject bifurcation between the world of our bodies and the world we inhabit" (p. 2). Sontag's thoughts are echoed in this statement by Anderson: "Embodied writing does not assume that there is any essential nature of experience to be found or reported. . . . What can be known is interpretive, ever changing, and creative" (p. 6).

How does one bring embodied writing to life? Anderson (2001) offers these suggestions: (1) "True-to-life, vivid depictions intended to invite sympathetic resonance" (p. 6); (2) "poetic images" (p. 7); and (3) "narratives embedded in experience, often first-person" (p. 7). Ergo: the many poems and descriptions of direct encounters I have included herein. I believe that if I do not convey anything of the sensate nature of what I am talking about in this dissertation I will have failed, doing nothing more than contributing to the abstracted, dissociated nature of our relationships with self, other, and world.

Nancy Moules (2002) also offers us a way to keep interpretation from becoming too distant from felt world when she engages a discussion of how to define hermeneutics and what "method" means in the context of hermeneutics. She reminds us that the God whose name lends itself to hermeneutics is Hermes, who "has the character of complication, multiplicity, lies, jokes, irreverence, indirection, and disdain for rules; however he is the master of creativity and invention" (p. 2).

Moules invites us to remember that definitions are "the shape that language takes around a word" but are not true in an essentialist sense (2002, p. 2). As I seek to find

some definition of ecological narcissism and its relationship with death denial, I will recall her words about considering definition hermeneutically by "ventur[ing] into the contingent understandings that are situated in lives, relationships, contexts, and histories" (p. 2). Moules also reminds me that in hermeneutics, "interpretation moves to represent the particular and to bring it to presence, not essence" (p. 3). So perhaps I can worry a bit less about Sontag's admonishment against interpretation if I try to remain as close as possible to presence, resisting my impulse to peer behind everything looking for essence.

When I read this quote from Coltman in Moules' (2002) article on hermeneutics, it had an immediate, amazingly liberating effect on my anxieties about my own efforts at interpretation. Coltman is interpreting Gadamer's take on interpretation: "Gadamer exhorts us to go ahead and interpret . . . decide what a text means and argue for our interpretation, but . . . he also exhorts us to always remain open to the eventual inadequacies of our own considered opinions" (as cited in Moules, p. 10). Two fundamental aspects of hermeneutics return: ambivalence and particularity. Both avoid generalization about truth, that unfortunate by-product of scientific determinism that hates uncertainty and attempts to destroy anomaly. Moules' reading of Gadamer tells us:

> Truth is a living event; it is changing, not stagnant, and is expansive and full of possibilities. The truth is what allows the conversation to go on, recognizing that understanding is not a solo undertaking for it always occurs with others. . . . It occurs in keeping something open, in not thinking that something is known, for when we think we already know, we stop paying attention to what comes to meet us. (2002, p. 11)

Ah. There it is again. That sigh of relief. I am not required to come to some Truth. I am engaging in hermeneutics as in a conversation—helping to keep something open—paying attention to what comes to meet me from other writers and thinkers, from trees, from my own psyche, from world psyche.

Because this research is informed by a depth psychological orientation, it embraces the first commitment mentioned by Coppin and Nelson (2005) in their list of "philosophical commitments of depth psychology" (p. 39) as part of a depth approach to research. The first commitment is: "Psyche is real" (p. 42), which includes the belief that there is such a thing as the unconscious and that it is always affecting how we think and feel and behave. Therefore, it will inevitably affect research. How then, can I simultaneously remain open to the often hidden depths of the unconscious while also honoring Sontag's 1966 warnings against interpretation? I can try my best to hear, see, and feel what comes to me from or through psyche in this process and express that in its particularity as clearly and completely as possible.

What this means in practice is that "from the moment the inquiry begins until the day it ends, nothing is dismissed as meaningless, random, or inconsequential" (Coppin & Nelson, 2005, p. 91). This provides the grounding for my choice to include dreams, poems, active imaginations, and dialogues with others, including nonhuman others, in this work. It is possible that nonhumans—even nonanimal nonhumans—may participate in psyche in a way that makes it possible for us to communicate. Jung reminds us that

> Western consciousness is by no means the only kind of consciousness there is; it is historically conditioned and geographically limited, and representative of only one part of mankind. The widening of consciousness ought not to proceed at the expense of other kinds of consciousness. (1957/1970, p. 55)

With that in mind, I want to include an account of my encounter with some forest land near Mt. Rainier on Monday, November 5, 2012.

I was sitting on the back porch of a rustic cedar cabin at a retreat center near the entrance to Mt. Rainier National Park. I was rocking gently in the chill air as I sat bundled up in a warm blue parka on the forest green gliding rocker, staring out into the

old growth forest that climbed up the ridge in front of me. Huge firs, pines, cedars, and maples were my companions, along with sword ferns, wet rocks, a stream keeping up a friendly chatter as it cascaded down a small hill nearby, and one tiny brown wren hopping about with a staccato little chirp that sounded like a click.

I felt absorbed in a kind of communion with the forest, knowing myself a part of the fabric of life and death out of which it, and I, emerged. I felt overwhelmed with love for the forest and grief at the thought that we humans might manage to destroy all such wondrous places. I called out with my mind and heart to the forest and to the fabric of life: "Fight back! Please, fight back! Don't let us destroy you!" What I heard in response was: "We are doing everything we can, but there is no 'us' and 'you,' there is only us. Please, you must also do what you can do because you are a part of us that has a particular kind of voice that can speak to those who are able to hear only that kind of voice. So, please: speak up! Don't let us be destroyed!"

Aware as I am at this point that no amount of reading someone else's words will ever take the place of direct experience with the natural world, I nevertheless proceed with recording these words. They might just spark an impulse in someone to go out their door into a field or forest or pond and risk an unexpected, perhaps even world-altering encounter. And so, in this bookish presentation, I have tried to keep alive some traces of my direct consciousness of, and experiences with, a eucalyptus tree, and Tree, and Forest, and Earth. The experiences are what matter. If I had never written a single word about these things, let alone this entire dissertation, they would still have transformed my life. In support of that, Snyder tells us:

> Animals [and trees] as characters in literature and as universal presences in the imagination and in the archetypes of religion are there because they were *there*.

> Ideas and images of wastelands, tempest, wildernesses, and mountains are born not of abstraction but of experience. (1990, p. 79)

The eucalyptus tree was *there*—living its quiet life rooted in the earth—and now it is also *here,* living in my soul and imagination, and perhaps living in yours as well.

Hillman's (1982) foundational thoughts reverberate with mine. He speaks of valuing "thing before meaning . . . noticing before knowing . . . what and who before why" (p. 92). He admonishes us to "turn again to the world, giving back what we have taken from it by storing inside ourselves its soul" (p. 93). He asks us to "pay respect to it simply by looking again, re-specting, that second look with the eye of the heart" (p. 93).

In the beginning of this work I spoke of a startling experience with a particular old eucalyptus tree on the campus of Pacifica Graduate Institute in spring of 2010 that shook my world. A depth psychological hermeneutic attitude has invited me into a circle of exploration with that tree and all the ideas, dreams, imaginings, and experiences that have arisen as a result of that encounter. May I remain as open to what comes during and after this process of writing and interpretation as I was open to that tree. May something of what I express in this work go out into the world and touch one open heart.

I give the last word to Mary Oliver. Her magnificent 2004 work *Blue Iris: Poems and Essays* is an anthem to all I have said. This quote is from "Upstream" (pp. 55-56):

> Teach the children. We don't matter so much, but the children do. Show them daisies and the pale hepatica. Teach them the taste of sassafras and wintergreen. The lives of the blue sailors, mallow, sunbursts, the moccasin-flowers. And the frisky ones—inkberry, lamb's-quarters, blueberries. And the aromatic ones—rosemary, oregano. Give them peppermint to put in their pockets as they go to school. Give them the field and the woods and the possibility of the world salvaged from the lords of profit. Stand them in the stream, head them upstream, rejoice as they learn to love this green space they live in, its sticks and leaves and then the silent, beautiful blossoms.
>
> Attention is the beginning of devotion.

Organization of the Study

Following this first chapter is the literature review in Chapter 2; my findings in Chapters 3, 4, and 5; the limitations and delimitations in Chapter 6; and my conclusion in Chapter 7. I organized my findings into three separate chapters in response to each of my three research questions.

The first of the findings chapters (Chapter 3) is titled, "Ecological Narcissism and the Denial of Death." In it I discuss my surprise at coming to the conclusion that denial of death is not a causative factor in ecological narcissism, nor is ecological narcissism a causative factor in denial of death (premises I carried into this work), but both are rather a result of a third, underlying factor. I discuss my conclusion that this third factor—this ground—out of which death denial and ecological narcissism have grown, is the widespread belief that humans are separate from nature. I also discuss two of the theories I find most plausible about how most modern humans have come to perceive themselves and their cultures as separate from the natural world, and how this perception could lead to attitudes of ecological narcissism and fear/denial of death.

The second of the three findings chapters (Chapter 4) is titled, "Ecological Narcissism, Death Denial, and Environmental Destruction." In this chapter I discuss the ways in which the modern human hunger for *more* (food, fuel, comfort, control) is stoked by denial of death and ecological narcissism, leading towards increased destruction of the environment. In this context I am using the term *environment* to mean the part of our world that is not human created, such as mountains, oceans, forests, bugs, or animals.

I posit that ecological narcissism is implicated in the vast human appetite for more in a complex dance: narcissism arising primarily out of a traumatic sense of emptiness and then contributing to that emptiness by maintaining a mask of arrogance and a wall of

distance. Note that I am stretching the usual definition of narcissism beyond one's internal psychic world, and one's interactions with other humans, to encompass the entire world, including the psyche of nature.

It is also my premise that denial of death is an aspect of narcissism that reflects a fantasy of control masking terror. The burgeoning modern fantasy about eventually being able to conquer death via technology, and widespread religious beliefs that split body from soul/spirit, saying soul survives death and matter is not ensouled, are all expressions of our fear of nature with its recurring cycles of death and birth which are beyond human control. Such fear and denial of death contribute to our uneasiness with the natural world and our willingness to destroy it.

In this chapter I also expand on my thoughts from the first chapter of findings, suggesting that because denial of death and ecological narcissism are actually just results of a deeper layer of human belief (the belief in human separation from nature), and because this deeper layer of belief leads to a human sense of emptiness and alienation, death denial and ecological narcissism inevitably reflect and contribute to that emptiness and alienation. As that gnawing human void seeks fulfillment through more goods, more control, and more activities and substances that temporarily quell the sense of being lost in a hostile universe, narcissism and fear of death naturally nudge us toward the consumption and annihilation of the environment.

The third chapter of my findings (Chapter 5) is titled, "Reducing Ecological Narcissism." The reader will note that this third chapter about findings is significantly longer than the prior two. That is because my interest in the third research question about how we might mitigate ecological narcissism and denial of death has become

progressively more and more compelling for me as I have proceeded with the work on my dissertation. When I started this work, I had a strong intellectual and personal interest in the connections between ecological narcissism and the denial of death, based on experiences I had during, and prior to, my doctoral program. One of those experiences (the encounter with the eucalyptus tree at Pacifica Graduate Institute) was the clearest trigger for my decision to pursue this line of research, but there were others that fed into the decision, including my husband's death, and my encounter with the angelic presence calling for help for Earth.

Still, I initially experienced this whole process as primarily an intellectual exercise of reading and writing, and thinking about all the ideas I was encountering as I explored the works of others who have written about topics related to ecological narcissism and death denial. As I proceeded, I kept running into the idea that the foundational issue was actually human belief in separation from nature, and that a radical change in this belief was necessary to alter modern humans' egocentric relationship with nature and attitudes about death.

This idea was fascinating to me, particularly because I had a direct experience of union with the forest that temporarily dissolved my sense of separation from nature while on a retreat near Mt. Rainier (described in detail in Chapter 2). I avidly read more and more (particularly the ideas of Berman, 1981, and Shepard, 1998) about what may have contributed to a transition from a human sense of union with nature to a human sense of separation. I became convinced that ecological narcissism and denial of death were actually symptoms of this earlier development in human belief, and that they could not be meaningfully considered without reference to it.

Before I continue, I want to note that I am mindful that the manner in which I am using words such as “natural world,” “nature,” and “wilderness,” holds within it the very split between humans and nature I am advocating that we attempt to bridge. I cannot think of another way to discuss these issues in an academic format that requires extensive use of rational discourse. I can bring in the more-than-rational point of view via poetry and dreams and description of my own direct experiences, and I am hopeful they convey more of an awareness of self/nature/culture as one interwoven texture of being. But when I speak about the splitting of those strands of being, and my hope that more modern humans will recognize how they are actually knit together, I am speaking from the place of the split. Please allow me to bring in Levertov’s voice from the place of interweaving so that we might have a moment of respite from that state of alienation before we go on with our discussion of findings. From her 1978 work, “Artist to Intellectual (Poet to Explainer)”, (p. 104):

> ‘Don’t want to measure, want to be
> the worm slithering wholebodied
> over the mud and grit of what
> may be a mile,
> may be forever – pausing
> under the weeds to taste
> eternity, burrowing
> down not along,
> rolling myself
> up at a touch, outstretching
> to undulate in abandon to exquisite rain,
> returning, if so I desire, without
> reaching that goal the measurers
> think we must head for. Where is
> my head? Am I not
> worm all over? My own
> orient!’

With pardons to Levertov, I might say, “Where is my head? Am I not nature all over? Is the world not nature all over?”

The reader may recall that I was urged by Professor Perluss from Pacifica Graduate Institute to keep in mind that it is not enough to read and think and write about our relationship with nature (as noted in literature review of ecopsychology readings). She declared that we must also have direct experience with it to comprehend what a sense of union with nature might entail. I took her advice seriously. In addition to doing two personal retreats to a rustic cabin in the forest near Mt. Rainier while I was completing the first half of this dissertation, I did two additional retreats to that same location while completing the second half of this work. I also signed up for a 12-day wilderness vision quest with the intention of experiencing it prior to submitting the first draft of my completed dissertation. I will speak more about that in a moment.

First, I want to share that because I followed Dr. Perluss’s recommendation, this entire project became less and less an intellectual exercise (though I must bring my intellect to bear on what is happening), and more and more an experience of change in my own relationship with nature. The love of nature I have carried for my entire life (which was still fundamentally based on a sense of me relating to something outside myself) began to morph into something more akin to a sense of immersion in or identification with nature. I still have plenty of moments of experiencing myself as apart from the natural world I am writing about, but they are dwindling. There have been moments when it is not clear to me who is attempting to communicate via this writing: me or the natural world. Or, another way to say it, which doesn’t perpetuate the sense of

splitting apart of self and world, is to say that sometimes it feels like me speaking as an aspect of the world, rather than me speaking about the world.

It has become imperative that I do more than offer an interesting and well-written treatise on ideas about ecological narcissism, fear and denial of death, and the human relationship with the natural world. It has become necessary that I attempt to bring into this realm of words something about how my own experience of, and belief about, the natural world has changed (and is changing) in a direction that reduces the gap between self and world. This change in me has, in turn, affected what I want to bring into my practice as a depth psychotherapist. My emphasis has expanded beyond the client's inner world and relationships with other people, to include attention to how we might create some conditions within which a transformation in clients' beliefs about their relationship with nature could unfold.

Because I believe in doing my best to walk my talk, in December 2012, in the midst of work on the second half of my dissertation, I signed up for the aforementioned 12-day wilderness quest offered by the School of Lost Borders in California. Such a quest involves 4 days of preparation for a solo wilderness experience while camping in a group setting; 4 days of being alone with minimal shelter and no food in a wilderness area; and then another 3 days of camping with the group to share and reflect on one's experience. I wanted to find out if such an experiential process might be a way of altering our modern human sense of separation from nature. I had been feeling fraudulent as I sat, day after day, writing in my office, staring out at the fir trees and huckleberry bushes in my back yard, finding them lovely to look at, but not wanting to actually go out there and be with

them as the temperatures dropped into the 40s. I felt confronted with my own lack of integrity about how I actually live most of the time in relationship with nature.

On the one hand, I was having these moments of feeling no separation between nature and myself, recognizing that everything which arises into the field of being (me, metal, highways, porcupines, literature, hydrogen molecules, plastic picnic tables) arises out of and within nature. I felt supported in these moments of recognition by ideas I'd encountered in my readings from the field of deep ecology, such as these thoughts from philosopher Warwick Fox (1984), who says that there is "no firm ontological divide in the field of existence . . . no bifurcation in reality between the human and the non-human realms . . . to the extent that we perceive boundaries, we fall short of deep ecological consciousness" (p. 195).

On the other hand, I was spending 95% of my time in my usual state of mind: nature out there—represented by huckleberry bushes, bumblebees, Mt. Rainier—and me in here. I was also busy keeping all the stuff I experience as the more uncomfortable parts of the natural world out there (bugs, cold air, dirt, decay) as far away from me as possible. I decided I should take myself into a radical encounter with the elements of nature I fear and avoid so that I might have a clearer understanding of what it is in me that gets in the way of more consistently enacting my growing sense of being inherently a part of nature. I decided that only in this way did I have a right to say anything about what might be getting in other people's way of perceiving themselves as part of the natural world.

As soon as I signed up for the March 2013 wilderness quest, I began to be flooded with anxieties about the upcoming experience. My reluctance to experience dark and cold

and hunger gnawed at me frequently, especially in the middle of the night. I will go into significant detail in Chapter 5 about what happened for me in response to the wilderness quest. For now, suffice it to say that committing to participate in that adventure had the desired effect. It put me right up against everything in me that fears and resists a more direct experience of the dark, cold, hungry, mysterious, and uncontrollable aspects of nature (both within and without), even as I pay lip service to welcoming such experience.

When I initially signed up for the quest, I was mindful of Shepard's unease about the modern human propensity to seek a "spiritual uplift derived from a 'wilderness experience'" (1998, p. 142). He suggests this can be just another misuse of wilderness to feed human needs. I considered his point of view and questioned myself about my motives. I had to acknowledge that I was hoping for a spiritual "uplift" as part of the experience, but I was also wanting to express an honoring of nature, and a willingness to learn from nature, by putting myself in her hands with a minimum of the usual barriers between us. So I signed up, convinced that it was important for me to see if I could understand more deeply the potential for communication and union between the human psyche and the world psyche. I had already experienced such union briefly. Now I wanted an extended experience of it to further build bridges between inner nature and outer nature; to know in my bones—not just to think about—our human embeddedness in nature. It didn't turn out at all the way I expected it to. But I did learn a great deal of relevance to this dissertation, and I did come away still convinced that direct experience of nature is our best hope for a changed relationship with nature.

Chapter 2
Review of the Literature

This review includes significant works of literature relevant to the three basic themes that are intertwined in my research question. Those themes are ecological psychology, which explores relationships between the phenomena of the natural world and the human psyche; narcissism, as seen through a depth psychological lens; and the denial of death, also seen primarily from a depth psychological perspective but including a sociological point of view.

Ecological Psychology

Inviting, informing, pleading: A multitude of voices in the field of ecopsychology beckon readers into deeper reflection on our human relationship with the rest of the natural world (Abram, 1997; Adams, 2010; Aizenstat, 1995; Berman, 1981; Hillman, 1982; Kidner, 2001; Mack, 1995; Macy, 2007; Plotkin, 2003; Shepard, 1998; Snyder, 1990). One of the newer voices in the field, Will Adams (2010) reminds us that

> throughout the existence of the human species we have engaged in close, conscious interaction with the other beings and presences of nature . . . [now] we are suffering from an unprecedented and perilous estrangement of a single participant—we human beings—from the rest of the shared earth community. (p. 39)

Why have we moved away from such close, conscious interaction? John Mack (1995) sees our human estrangement from nature as a kind of "species arrogance" (p. 82).

Stephen Aizenstat speaks of it in more alarming terms: "Avoiding our relationship with nature only hastens the inevitable: the death of the natural world" (1995, p. 93). Also raising the alarm, but sounding less pessimistic about the ultimate outcome, is David Abram (1997), as he asks: "How . . . have we become so deaf and blind to the vital existence of other species and to the animal landscapes they inhabit, that we now so

casually bring about their destruction?" (pp. 27-28). Aizenstat (1995) sounds more hopeful when he, echoing Mack (1995), calls for further research by depth psychologists on impediments to, and ways to heal, the human-nature relationship.

Though a biologist and not an ecopsychologist, Rachel Carson helped launch the environmental movement, which spawned the field of ecopsychology. No exploration of human-nature relationships would be complete without her 1962 book, *Silent Spring*. On page after page of her work, she raised the alarm about human destruction of the environment, which she perceived as jeopardizing all life, including human life. For example, she said:

> The most alarming of all man's assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials. This pollution is for the most part irrecoverable; the chain of evil it initiates not only in the world that must support life but in living tissues is for the most part irreversible. In this now universal contamination of the environment, chemicals are the sinister and little recognized partners of radiation in changing the very nature of the world – the very nature of its life. (p. 6)

Her explanations of biological processes that will carry pollutants far afield from where they originated, and that can actually concentrate rather than dilute their effects, are stunning.

Her book was written 50 years ago, and though some changes have been made in the kinds and amounts of chemicals we dump into the world, all industrialized countries are still busy dumping. Carson asked 50 years ago: "The question is whether any civilization can wage relentless war on life without destroying itself, and without losing the right to be called civilized" (1962, p. 99). In my exploration of narcissism and death denial and alternative ways of thinking about and experiencing our relationship with the natural world, I have certainly thought of our culture as narcissistic, and riddled with

grandiose efforts to deny the reality of death, but I have not asked if we can even be considered civilized. Carson offers a wonderful twist on our usual conception of the highly esteemed fields of science and philosophy when she remarks: "The 'control of nature' is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man" (p. 297).

Civilized, according to Webster (1984), is an adjective, affiliated with its associated verb: *civilize*, which means "to bring or come out of a primitive or savage condition and into a state of civilization" (p. 261). This leads me to *civilization*, which carries several meanings, including "the countries and peoples considered to have reached a high stage of social and cultural development" and "intellectual and cultural refinement" (p. 261). Is it really intellectual refinement to ignore scientific facts about our destruction of the environment? Or to ignore such expressions of psyche as dreams—now considered primitive by cultures that consider themselves civilized—when dreams guided the choices of many human cultures for millennia. Are we really in a high stage of social development when we declare that any being (including other humans) with an appearance quite different from our own, that we can't easily comprehend, is ignorant, unnecessary, or dangerous, and should be imprisoned or destroyed?

Though much of her book is pessimistic about the consequences of what humans have already done to the earth, Carson does offer some words of hope. In talking about our destruction of water systems, she says: "To assume that we must resign ourselves to turning our waterways into rivers of death is to follow the counsel of despair and defeatism" (1962, p. 138). Later, in a chapter titled "The Other Road," she also talks

about hopeful signs she was witnessing as some scientists moved to develop alternatives to dangerous chemicals. She says, "Through all these new, imaginative, and creative approaches to the problem of sharing our earth with other creatures there runs a constant theme, the awareness that we are dealing with life" (p. 296).

Others also seem to hold out hope that a reconciliation between nature and humanity may yet save our world (Abram, 1997; Hollifield, 2010; Jung, 1975a). Gary Snyder (1990) was calling for such reconciliation 20 years ago, saying, "To speak of wilderness is to speak of wholeness. Human beings came out of that wholeness and to consider the possibility of reactivating membership in this Assembly of All Beings is in no way regressive" (p. 212). Snyder offers a radical reframe, or perhaps an expansion, of our modern concept of *home*. Most of us would think of the house or apartment we live in if we were asked to say what home means to us. Yet Snyder reminds us that

> it has always been part of basic human experience to live in a culture of wilderness. There has been no wilderness without some kind of human presence for several hundred thousand years. Nature is not a place to visit, it is *home*. (p. 7)

Even in the midst of writing about our relationship with nature, I constantly slip into thinking of home (and all the comforts associated with the idea of home) as inside my house, and nature as somewhere outside of home. Jung supports Snyder's point of view saying: "I am fully committed to the idea that human existence should be rooted in the earth" (1977, p. 203).

Paul Shepard describes how a world in which humans felt at home in nature became a world where humans are dissociated from nature in his fascinating1982 work: *Nature and Madness*. He examines existing tribal cultures to get clues about experiences and perceptions of early human cultures, postulating:

> Among those relict tribal peoples who seem to live at peace with their world, who feel themselves to be guests rather than masters, the ontogeny of the individual has some characteristic features. I conjecture that their ontogeny [life cycle] is more normal than ours (for which I will be seen as sentimental and romantic) and that it may be considered to be a standard from which we have deviated. Theirs is the way of life to which our ontogeny was fitted by natural selection, fostering . . . the study of a mysterious and beautiful world where the clues to the meaning of life were embodied in natural things, where everyday life was inextricable from spiritual significance and encounter. (p. 6)

What an intriguing idea: that modern culture is actually a deviation from "normal." That sounds like another thread in the discussion of modern culture as insane.

Stephen Foster and Meredith Little (1998) echo this view in their thought-provoking work, *The Four Shields: The Initiatory Seasons of Human Nature*. As leaders of wilderness passage rites for over 30 years, they have studied, taught, and practiced ancient native traditions of transition and initiation in the context of nature, coming to the conclusion that, "Somewhere along the way our ancestors gradually lost the tendency to grow into the full maturity of human nature. Our development was arrested at some point between childhood and adolescence" (p. 21). What a fascinating reversal of our usual take on modern culture: arrested in its development, rather than advanced. Certainly we have advanced in technological gadgetry and the ability to have an impact on the world, for better or worse. But have we advanced in our human emotional or psychic maturity? Foster and Little say we have not.

They explore what they call "The Big Lie" (p. 21), which includes the belief that we as humans are not nature, and that we do not depend on a close relationship with the natural world for life, health, and happiness. Foster and Little (1998) remark that "we stopped taking responsibility for the condition of the earth and of ourselves. . . . We grew more childlike, more dependent on technobiotic wombs that promised safety and security

from the howling cold" (p. 21). They compare that with our ancient human ancestors who appear to have participated with all other living things in "related awarenesses that cooperated with the environment to provide optimum conditions for survival and completion" (p. 13).

Using language that sounds both poetic and mythological, Foster and Little describe their vision of how early humans may have experienced themselves in their relation with the natural world:

> You and I are "self-thus." Our people are all self-thus. All the animals, plants, birds, insects, are self-thus. The sky, the wind, the rain, the snow, the mountains, the sea, the lightning, the thunder, the shadows, the night are self-thus. The sun, moon, and stars are self-thus. Everything is self-thus. . . . We are "self." My self, your self, every self – the self of all things, the self we all share. . . . We are also of "thus". . . . "Thus" implies time passing, aeons rolling – and how it all happened was like "thus". . . . If you want to look for self-thus, you will have to remove the masks and costumes it uses to express and defend itself. You will have to peel away the color, form, and species. . . . Underneath it all you would find the center of the circle of life. (1998, pp. 2-3).

How different this sounds from the experience of most of us in modern life with our sense of boundaried, individualized self so separate from every other person, and so different from other species or aspects of nature that we no longer recognize any kind of self, or thus, dwelling there.

As Hillman says, "We need the nose of common animal sense, an aesthetic response to the world. This response ties the individual soul immediately with the world soul; I am animated by its anima, like an animal" (1982, p. 79). Aizenstat continues Hillman's theme when he speaks about the relationship of older cultures to the natural world in his 2009 book, *Dream Tending*. Like many other authors we have heard from, Aizenstat posits that, "Primal humans experienced a strong, meaningful, and continuous connection to the world around them. The world was like a person: it had its dreams, and

it would often share those dreams with passersby" (p. 145). He suggests that the last 500 years of movement away from such close relationship with nature is the anomaly, not the previous hundreds of thousands of years of human connectedness with nature.

Shepard (1982) expands on his thoughts about the typical life cycle of a human being in early cultures, proposing that becoming an adult would entail something entirely different from what usually happens in modern industrialized culture. He suggests that a young person stepping into adulthood would retain his delight in the natural world and his perception of it as valuable: "He will not study it in order to transform its liveliness into mere objects that represent his ego, but as a poem, numinous and analogical, of human society" (p. 9). So such an adult would feel the natural world as sacred home to human society, not alien to it.

Lest we romanticize early human cultures too much in our efforts to recall the positive in their connection with nature, Aizenstat reminds us: "We must not forget that their lives were short and rife with disease, pain, ignorance, fear, and oppression" (2009, p. 146). They were prey for other creatures to a degree most humans no longer are. However, he also points out the problems with the modern underlying worldview of scientific culture, saying:

> For all we have gained with our logical, rational view of the world. . . . the achievements of science have also allowed us to despoil the planet, eradicate countless species, and threaten the survival of life itself. People today live in such an extreme state of alienation from the natural world and one another that it can only be seen as a kind of pathology. (2009, p. 147)

This echo of alienation runs through many of the ideas in this dissertation. Alienation from nature, alienation from self, alienation from other humans, alienation from the basic cycles of life and death. We feel lost. Will we be able to find our way back home?

Poet David Wagoner offers us his thoughts on the theme of "lost" in his *Traveling Light: Collected and New Poems*, (1999, p. 10) and we feel the ground under our usual assumptions begin to shake and tilt:

> Lost
>
> Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
> Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
> And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
> Must ask permission to know it and be known.
> The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
> I have made this place around you.
> If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
> No two trees are the same to Raven.
> No two branches are the same to Wren.
> If what a tree or bush does is lost on you,
> You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
> Where you are. You must let it find you.

A radical shift: to allow ourselves to be found (again) by the forest; to remember that we are not lost there but are home; to be relieved of our alienation as we come home to ourselves in coming home to the forest. Such an earthquake in consciousness is possible, and encouraged in the radical ecopsychology movement.

Yet more prosaic issues also need to be considered as we explore the many faces of our sense of alienation from the natural world. We move from the meaning of home on the deepest psychological level to a discussion of how we occupy and use our literal homes on a practical level.

Alan Durning (1992) talks about the transformation of homes in modernized culture from places of production of goods to places of consumption of goods in his fascinating study, *How Much is Enough? The Consumer Society and the Future of the Earth*. He reminds us that "older houses had pantries, workshops, sewing rooms, built-in laundry chutes. New homes have compact kitchens equipped for little more than heating

prepared foods. Laundry rooms and root cellars gave way to hot tubs and home entertainment centers" (p. 45). So we stopped going out into the natural world, gathering elements of that world for preparation to eat (or, as in my grandmother's case, to use for clothing or soap or medicine), and we stayed home, turning it into a place where we use up resources that others, often from more impoverished cultures, gather by going out into nature.

But is it better that we once gathered our own resources, as opposed to paying others to do it for us? The frame of this discussion still holds nature as something to use, not to relate to as living presence in its own right, with its own needs.

David Abram (1997) speaks of our unthinking use of the inhabitants of the natural world to feed our vast appetites for easily attainable food, shelter, and entertainment. He offers a voice for "the plants and animals we consume [that] are neither gathered nor hunted—they are bred and harvested in huge, mechanized farms. 'Nature,' it would seem, has become simply a stock of 'resources' for human civilization" (p. 28). No wonder then that I sometimes come to an encounter with nature filled with guilt, and denial of guilt, which may turn the mirrored face of monster onto the inhabitants of the world I so readily and unthinkingly consume.

Yet, even as I acknowledge that in those earlier times my family and I often viewed nature as resource for consumption, there was another aspect to the experience for me. While I was out there walking, fishing, picking flowers and berries, I encountered other living realities with their own needs, and I, for one, never forgot the whispering of the wind in the apple trees, and the tadpoles turning themselves into frogs. That memory is part of what brings me to this dissertation, even as I muse on the irony of my time now

being so pressed with work (reading, writing, and seeing clients) that I do more of what Durning describes next in his broad condemnation of consumer culture:

> Over the past century, the mass market has taken over an increasing number of the productive tasks once provided within the household, diminishing people's practical reliance on one another. More and more, flush with cash but pressed for time, we opt for the conveniences of prepared, packed foods, miracle cleaning products, and disposable everything—from napkins to cameras. (1992, p. 44)

Though Durning's perspective is from a resource management part of the ecological movement, not from deep ecology with its focus on a complete shift in human consciousness in relationship to the natural world, I believe it is important to attend to his ideas too as we consider what causes may be fueling our disconnection from nature.

With his exploration of the consequences of massive consumption in Westernized cultures, Durning notes that "the historic rise of the consumer society has been quite effective in harming the environment, but not in providing people with a fulfilling life" (1992, p. 36). He places the blame for the rise of consumer society squarely on the shoulders of America, insisting it all started here in the 1920s as the American public became enchanted with automobiles and processed food. In a fascinating effort to put this all in perspective, he quotes Aristotle as saying, "The avarice of mankind is insatiable" (p. 37). However, in the time of ancient Greece, humankind did not have the numbers and the technology to threaten the survival of the planet with their insatiable desires for more.

Taking the discussion more deeply into the psychological realm, Paul Wachtel (1989) discusses what he calls "the growth mentality" (p. 16) and its illusions, which keep us discontent. He comments, "Our entire economic system is based on human desire's being inexhaustible, on there being a potential market for almost anything we can produce" (p. 17). He notes that our increasing consumption threatens to destroy the

natural world as source of the goods for our markets. But rather than laying all the blame on corporations or the world of advertising, he suggests that we must turn to modern human psychological habits and assumptions to get at the roots of the problem. He says, "At the root of our present malaise, I would suggest, is our tendency to try to use economics to solve what are really psychological problems" (p. 42).

And what are those psychological problems, habits, and assumptions, according to Wachtel? One he notes is modern stress on productivity, or what he calls, "Turning oneself into a machine for a number of hours each day" (p. 45). He also talks about the lack of "attention to human relationships and cultivation of the senses and of aesthetic experience" (p. 23). Later in his book he refers to our culture as one of "competitive individualism" (p. 232) and notes the loss of a sense of community as fundamental to our chronic sense of discontent. He wonders in print about how narcissism may be related to all of this. Turning my expectations upside down, he declares that the current tendency for humans in modern culture to be more narcissistic is caused less by changes to internal personality structure and more by changes to social guidelines that tell us that we should feel fulfilled by that next new car, house, or hairdo.

Wachtel seems to be promoting more of a social psychology point of view than a depth psychology point of view, but his ideas are thought-provoking. I also noted that when Wachtel is talking about the value of an increased sense of community, he seemed to be talking only about human community, not about our sense of community with the other beings in the world. So in that way he is perpetuating a Westernized view of nature, thinking of it only in terms of what resources it can provide humans.

Abram (1997) points us toward a way to reconceptualize our Westernized, industrialized view of nature as nothing but a set of resources. He invites us to move beyond "scientific determinism and spiritual idealism" (p. 67) with their splits between body and soul, subject and object, sentient and sensible (sensible as in: having and being perceived by physical senses). He invites us to remember that in our encounters with other human beings, "each of us, in relation to the other, is both subject and object, sensible and sentient" (p. 67). So I am a subject experiencing you as an object, just as I am an object to your subjectivity. He next makes this bold intellectual leap: "Why, then, might this not also be the case in relation to another, non-human entity—a mountain lion, for instance, that I unexpectedly encounter in the northern forest?" (p. 67).

Mary Oliver asks a similar question in the language of poetry in "Some Questions You Might Ask," in *Blue Iris: Poems and Essays* (2004, p. 9):

> Is the soul solid, like iron?
> Or is it tender and breakable, like
> the wings of a moth in the beak of the owl?
> Who has it, and who doesn't?
> I keep looking around me.
> The face of the moose is as sad
> as the face of Jesus.
> The swan opens her white wings slowly.
> In the fall, the black bear carries leaves into the darkness.
> One question leads to another.
> Does it have a shape? Like an iceberg?
> Like the eye of a hummingbird?
> Does it have one lung, like the snake and the scallop?
> Why should I have it, and not the anteater
> who loves her children?
> Why should I have it, and not the camel?
> Come to think of it, what about maple trees?
> What about the blue iris?
> What about all the little stones, sitting alone in the moonlight?
> What about roses, and lemons, and their shining leaves?
> What about the grass?

Taking his own bold questioning into nonhuman realms—is Carl Jung who asks us, “Why not go into the forest for a time, literally? Sometimes a tree tells you more than can be read in books” (1975a, p. 479). He seems to be implying that the tree is as sensible and sentient as the mountain lion and human. Many other authors point toward this idea that it is not just animals with whom humans need to renew conscious relationship, but also such entities as trees, insects, mountains, rivers, and the earth herself (Abram, 1997; Adams, 2010; Aizenstat, 1995).

Joanna Macy expands upon this idea, speaking of the potential for us to “fall in love with our world” (2007, p. 27), and in that falling to be able to “begin to see the world as ourselves” (p. 27). She draws from her study of ancient Buddhist tradition to remind us that “the tree that will grow from the seed, that art thou; the running water, that art thou; and the sun in the sky, and all that is, that art thou” (p. 27). Macy’s thoughts remind me of the words we heard earlier from Foster and Little (1998) in their beautiful passage about “self-thus.”

If and when we begin to see the world as ourselves, some questions we might then ask are: How much we are projecting from our own psyche into or onto the world? How is world psyche speaking to us? How are we to distinguish between “our” psyche and “world” psyche? Is that distinction false?

Jung (1964) suggested some possible answers to these questions in explorations of how the unconscious is related to nature. At one point he says, “Whatever the unconscious may be, it is a natural phenomenon producing symbols that prove to be meaningful” (p. 93). A little later he goes on to say: “The unconscious shows that it is a natural phenomenon and that, like Nature herself, it is at least *neutral*. It contains all

aspects of human nature—light and dark, beautiful and ugly, good and evil, profound and silly" (p. 94). How then, might we be projecting good and evil, beautiful and ugly, into Nature from the unconscious? Or is the question more about how Nature and the unconscious bring us experiences that we label good and evil, beautiful and ugly?

Jung speaks about how "man feels himself isolated in the cosmos, because he is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional 'unconscious identity' with natural phenomena" (1964, p. 5). Is being unconsciously identified with the natural world and its phenomena another way to describe what Macy (2007) described as a kind of seeing the world as ourselves? Jung notes that in modernized, industrialized cultures "no river contains a spirit, no tree is the life principle of a man, no snake the embodiment of wisdom, no mountain cave the home of a great demon" (p. 85).

We seem to have withdrawn our projections of good from nature, other than as a source of beauty or resource, and kept our projections of evil and danger, as nature continues to demonstrate to us that we humans are not in control of everything, despite our longing to be. Jung (1964) continually reminds us that nature, and the unconscious as part of nature, are realities we can relate to but not command. Yet some of us find a way to fall in love with the world, and find peace in knowing self as world and world as self.

Of course if we risk allowing ourselves that sense of world as self, we are at risk of feeling the pain all around as us the world is plundered and extinguished. Macy exhorts us not to turn away from that pain but to feel it and use it to propel action. She quotes Thich Nhat Hanh as saying: "What we most need to do is to hear within us the sounds of the Earth crying" (Macy, 2007, p. 95). Therein lies a risk beyond the pain of awareness: the risk of being considered mad by modern culture.

Roszak, in continuing his theme of questioning our current culture's definition of madness says: "We frequently refer to mad people as 'hearing things' 'seeing things' that the conventional reality principle insists are not there. In tribal societies, there is very much more to see and hear. The mountain speaks, the bear speaks, the river speaks" (2001, p. 82). He asks us to consider whether such a reciprocal relationship with the other beings and things of the natural world might not be more, rather than less, sophisticated than our current Americanized point of view about nature which says it is nothing more than a batch of resources to serve our needs. He dares to suggest that "taken as a basis for understanding the deep self-organizing intricacy of matter, animism may provide a better initial model than Newtonian atomism ever did" (p. 82).

Perluss (2007) offers us a depth psychological way of thinking about how our inner subjectivity may be inextricably linked to the external world, which would be one way of describing animism. She says: "It is impossible to conceptualize the physical landscape apart from the viewpoint of the unconscious" (p. 205). So in conscious experiencing and perceiving of the natural world that we experience as outside of us, we are also being invited by Psyche to attend to our own and the world's inner unconscious life.

I noticed in writing that last sentence how I automatically set up a dichotomy between in here and out there, between world and me. Immersed as I am in this material, I still fall into the old habit of dualistic splitting. Let me try again: Would it not also be true then that in attending to dreams and other representations of our own and the world's unconscious, we are simultaneously invited to attend to the natural world? Perluss seems to confirm this, saying: "To consider landscape from a depth psychological perspective

involves a downward movement towards the roots of our being and the wellsprings of our soul" (2007, p. 206). She urges our attention to sink downward towards roots and springs common to the soul of self and world, rather than engaging in the old dualism of inside versus outside.

A dream may provide us an illustration. In August of 2012 I traveled to Sedona, Arizona with my partner. I was transfixed by the beauty of the red cliffs and green oaks, and thought to myself, "This is a place where I could see myself living and dying." That night I had this dream:

> I get up out of bed in the dark and wander over to look at myself in a floor length mirror. I see an ancient, wrinkled, rotund, brown-skinned woman with pendulous breasts and belly, piercing eyes and sharp teeth. She emanates tremendous power. I am fascinated and horrified. When I look into her face it's as if I am looking into my own face, yet she also feels profoundly alien. She says, "Here!"

I wake up in my bed shaking. I want to turn on the light in the room to see if this woman is still here—the dream felt so real to me—but I don't want to wake up Bob who is sleeping peacefully next to me. I let my mind ramble in response to the dream: "Oh my god, I don't want to look like that!" "Was that an image of me?" "If it wasn't, who was it?" "I'm afraid." "She makes me think of some ancient fertility goddess." "She makes me think of a witch." "What if I wind up that old and fat and ugly?" "What did 'Here!' mean?" "Am I supposed to be *here*, like being more present, or am I supposed to move here, literally to this place, Sedona?" I finally drift off to sleep again.

I feel so rattled by the dream I can't bring myself to go into a deeper exploration of it for weeks, though I know I must return to it, and her, eventually. The dream floats in the back of my consciousness until I invite her back into an active imagination when I am at a retreat center near Mt. Rainier National Park in early October. I first let all my

personal associations come up in response to her: Fat, gross, mother, shame. I feel my big, fat mother overwhelming me. No room for me. Appetite out of control—food and lust for food as comfort and pleasure—I see it in my mother and I feel it in me. She buries her feelings in food. I bury my feelings in food. Don't speak, don't cry, don't yell. Eat! Eat! Please, let me out of here! Out from under her enormous fat thighs, away from my own enormous fat thighs. Shame! Shame for eating, for wanting, for lusting. Disgusting! No man will ever want me. The world will despise me. To be fat is to be alone. To be old and fat is to be alone and loathed, a worthless human being.

I ponder and feel the power of my own complexes that sometimes run my life. Then I turn to amplifications of the dream. I recall the images of fertility goddesses that Marija Gimbutas documented in *The Language of the Goddess*, and I find one that mirrors the woman who came to me in the mirror in my dream: The Goddess of Laussel (1989, p. 142). I think of an aging Demeter; the Great Mother; Jack Sprat's wife (who could eat no lean, and he needed her because he could eat no fat, so together they made a whole); the witch in Hansel and Gretel; Tiamat; Au Sept (an ancient form of Isis); Kali; the Crone; Grandmother Moon; Wise Woman; Sow; Roseann Barr; Kirstie Alley; the Minoan Snake Goddess; Mother Earth. I notice that these images range from nurturing to devouring; profound to laughable; compassionate to implacable.

I invite the ancient fat brown woman to speak to me in active imagination. She says, "I am myself! I am not for the consumption of man! I do not care what they think or what they want. I am here to do my own work. I am here to teach you and remind you to be yourself; do your own work; be crafty; be powerful. These folds of skin are life in process, like the gnarls on a tree or the ridges of the mountain foothills. You find those

beautiful, do you not? How did you get so conditioned to think you need to meet some idea of beauty to attract a man? Ah—you like that dance of passion and attraction! Well, you can be your own fleshy, flabby, wrinkled self and still have that. Just don't let it eat up your life! You have work to do and you have dawdled too long, do you hear me? I am alive in you! Me! Old Mother! I have things to say you might like to hear, or maybe not. I have lived all the seasons of life. I know all the delights and dangers. I am making an invitation. If you welcome me, I will share what I know. What do you say?"

I extend a mental "yes" to Old Mother and then speak it out loud. I feel both frightened and exhilarated. I then turn to a dreamwork step recommended by Aizenstat (2009), which he calls "Sustaining a relationship with an Image by Using the Senses" (pp. 44-46). Old mother smells like a mixture of forest (earthy), lilac (floral), and urine (a bit pungent). She is naked and stares directly into my eyes. She grins and her sharp teeth give me chills. She talks loudly, and then whispers so that I have to lean my head near to hear her. Old Mother's skin is warm and soft. I ask for a hug and it feels like cozying into a feather bed with flannel sheets. But her arms feel so powerful I have no doubt she could crush me if she wanted to.

Is this dream about my unconscious or about the natural world? Yes. And yes. Might this not be considered an example of that place where the personal unconscious and world unconscious connect in the roots of being, as Perluss (2007) suggested? She invites a Jungian perspective on the natural world, which is willing to wade imaginally into the realm of the ecological unconscious. In a personal communication on August 29, 2012, Perluss declared that "we must experience this union and not just talk about it to fully grasp its meaning." Supporting her point of view, Robert Romanyshyn elaborates on

Jung's thoughts about "the psychoid realm," stating, "At the deepest level of the unconscious, the unconscious is nature" (2007, p. 38). He goes on to remind us that "the unconscious is not just in us but . . . we are in the unconscious of nature" (p. 39).

Again the language moves us away from the usual simple dichotomies: Does this point to something out there in consensual reality or in here in my interior world? A depth psychological point of view refers us to other possibilities that bridge this duality, or perhaps I should say they turn it inside out and upside down. Mary Watkins offers us just such a mind-bending point of view when she speaks of our exploration of the unconscious via dreams and active imagination:

> Just when we begin to treat all characters of the imagination as mere projections of self, a central paradox emerges. Although the other may bear some resemblance to myself or my experience, this is not always the case. I often do not plan his appearance. In the midst of my thinking, my activities, my speaking, I find he has appeared and spoken to me. (2000, p. 93)

Figures encountered in the unconscious may have an autonomous existence, which leads right back to Aizenstat's (2009) premise about dreams as potentially arising from the world unconscious. We need to remain open to multiple possibilities, even as we explore this new one. We must try to remember that "our desire for a solid backstop somewhere needs to be reconciled with Heraclitus' idea of depth of soul which stops nowhere" (Hillman, 1979, p. 151).

Taking Watkins's, Romanyshyn's, Perluss's, and Hillman's words seriously, I paid attention when I felt an inner call in February 2012 to do an active imagination related to my research topic. I decided this could be an opportunity to illustrate my commitment to Psyche as a real companion in this process. I had no preconceived idea of what or whom I might encounter in such an inner journey, only that I must make myself

available to listen. With that in mind I prepared myself for the journey and began. Here is the text:

> I am going down a heavily wooded path and come to a giant oak door. I pause and then knock three times. The door opens and I enter. At first all appears dark, but then a soft light begins to grow illuminating a pathway towards a mighty tree at the center of the space. I can see its roots, which sink into the curved edge of the planet Earth. I immediately think of the Scandinavian myth of Yggdrasill, the great World Tree. I wait quietly. The tree eventually communicates this to me: "It is not enough to think and feel and read and write about your relationship with the natural world. You must also *act* on what you believe. You talk about how much you love that gigantic maple in your front yard, yet when do you actually take the time to touch it or sit with it and invite its communion? You must nurture your relationship with the natural world in the same way that you nurture your relationships with your human loved ones. What stops you from this? I can hear your thoughts: 'I am so busy. I must do my work and make money to support myself and complete my dissertation and find time for my partner and friends and exercise to keep my body healthy. I barely have time to sleep! I will grow my relationship with the natural world when I finish my dissertation.' Do you not notice the irony in that—you who are spending hour after hour extoling the importance of relationship with the natural world in your dissertation? Where are your priorities, truly? If even you, with your good intentions, will not take the time to honor and know us, who will?" (February, 2012)

Within the reality of the experience of the active imagination, I feel chagrined and acknowledge the hypocrisy of my actions. I promise myself and Tree to take more time to connect with the maple in my front yard and to seek out other opportunities to expand my connection with the natural world. I return to consensual reality.

Should the text of this imaginal experience be included in a qualitative dissertation? We have entered the circle of hermeneutic inquiry about which we will speak more in the section on methodology. But the question needs to be raised here and now because my experience of this active imagination is a direct example of the type of communication between unconscious and world we have just been discussing. This text of my active imagination is not a text in the sense of a published work recognized by

most writers and readers as a valid form of communication. Yet it is a written documentation of a human experience that, within the context of any psychodynamic psychotherapy process, would be seen as a valid communication from my personal unconscious, worthy of exploring. Or, in the case of a Jungian analysis, it might also be seen as an archetypal communication from the collective unconscious.

But what happens if we take it a step further, and recall Aizenstat's (1995) invitation, in the beginning of this paper, to explore the possibility of new ways of communicating with the nonhuman world via what he calls "the world unconscious" (p. 95). What happens if I take that idea so seriously that I invite Tree (not just as archetypal, mythological reality, but as sentient, communicative reality) into dialogue with us here? What if Tree is speaking from the world unconscious to my unconscious, or, using Jung's term *psychoid*, what if we have connected in the psychoid realm? Then must not Tree's words appear here as a living example of what many authors have been pointing us toward?

Advocating for an enhanced relationship between human and nonhuman realms, Aizenstat suggests we attend to "inner processes such as dreams, visions, and affective states [that] would be listened to from an *eco*centric perspective" (1995, p. 99). Ecocentric means viewing things from the point of view of the natural world as alive, ensouled, communicative, and of central importance. This is contrasted with the usual modern perspective: anthropocentric, which means viewing thing as if the human world were of central importance.

Poets like Levertov ask questions about psyche that challenge our egocentric and anthropocentric points of view (from "Emblem II," *Life in the Forest*, [1978, p. 46]):

A silver quivering cocoon that shakes
from within, trying to break.
What psyche
is wrestling with its shroud?
Blunt diamonds
scrape at its casing,
urging it out.
But there is too much grief. The world
is made of days, and is itself
a shrouded day.
It stifles. It's our world, and we
its dreams, its creased
compacted wings.

Are we the dreams of the world? Of Psyche? Is Psyche the dream of the world? So I circle the text of my encounter with yet another tree—this one Tree in my active imagination—and I welcome the questions that stir in me, such as: Might Tree be speaking from personal, archetypal, *and* world unconscious?

I certainly felt I had an encounter with something more than my own subjectivity, which is what Richard Palmer (1969) reminds us is true for all our encounters with texts we seek to understand. (I will say more about this in my methodology section.) But, of course, it is my own subjectivity that holds open a space for communication with a nonhuman presence in the context of an imaginal space. David Abram "redefines imagination as intense participation with the sensible world instead of disengagement from it" (Coppin & Nelson, 2005, p. 50). This fits my direct experience. My imaginal activity in this encounter with Tree is participation with Tree.

I certainly brought some foreknowledge into my encounter with Tree, which became a text for our exploration. I quickly interpreted Tree as an example of Yggdrasill from Scandinavian mythology. As Romanyshyn (2007) reminds us, we will always bring some foreknowledge into our interaction with texts, but then the text challenges and

questions *us*, and we come back to the text changed. How does this text challenge and question me? It asks me: What and whom do you think you are hearing? From what point of view are you listening? Can you accept that others are going to hear and see something completely different from you? Can you hold multiple perspectives as part of the larger whole, rather than as oppositional to each other? How does it limit Tree, and how does it enlarge Tree, to equate it with Yggdrasill? Are you *really* prepared to reveal yourself to the world as accepting the radical shift in perspective which says that Tree has a living reality separate from your own mind, and may reach out to you via a world unconscious to communicate its needs and perspective?

Macy (2007) invites us into an even deeper step of exploration of relationship with the natural world, beyond communication to communion. She tells us, "Indigenous traditions around the globe know the self as one with its world. Nature is alive and seamlessly whole, often symbolized by a circle: the sacred hoop of life" (p. 27). In her lovely book, *World as Lover, World as Self,* in which she unashamedly offers a Buddhist perspective to support a changed relationship with the natural world, she speaks about an "infinite circle whose periphery is nowhere and whose center is everywhere. That center, that one self, is in you and me and the tree outside the door" (p. 28).

Turning back now to the language of depth psychology, Hillman (1979) speaks of an "imaginal ego," which acknowledges it is not the center of everything. I think this idea is relevant to our discussion of a human unconscious in relationship with the unconscious of nature. Hillman suggests that we open ourselves to recognition of "not monotheistic consciousness looking down from its mountain, but polytheistic consciousness wandering all over the place, in the vales and along rivers, in the woods,

the sky, and under the earth" (1975, p. 33). Hillman is inviting a decentering of our modern sense of an individualized, boundaried self with its fantasy of mastery and control. And his idea of a polytheistic consciousness appears to fit well with an animistic worldview, though I believe he would say that animism concretizes too much, when we should be recognizing all points of view about the world as mythologies.

Returning to Roszak, who does value the ancient animistic view of the world, he tell us: "Things were once *transparent* to the human eye: greater realities moved behind and within them . . . something other than matter move[d] behind matter . . . [and] of that 'something' tribal people stood in awe" (2001, p. 93). We know that Jung also sensed that "something" when he says: "Trees in particular were mysterious and seemed to me direct embodiments of the incomprehensible meaning of life" (1963/1989, p. 68).

Echoing this more animistic point of view, Snyder (1990) comments on his encounter with a giant sequoia during his stint of logging in the Oregon Cascades in the summer of 1954: "It was an elder, a being of great presence, a witness to the centuries" (p. 134). (Sadly, Snyder witnessed this being of great presence cut down for lumber that summer long ago.) What wisdom might such an elder have had to share with humankind, if someone had been able to hear it? At least Gary Snyder was able to comprehend the ancient sentient presence of the tree and grieve its loss when it was taken before its time.

> Okay, not one can write a symphony, or a dictionary,
> or even a letter to an old friend, full of remembrance
> and comfort.
>
> Not one can manage a single sound, though the blue jays
> carp and whistle all day in the branches without
> the push of the wind.
>
> But to tell the truth after a while I'm pale with longing
> for their thick bodies ruckled with lichen

> and you can't keep me from the woods, from the tonnage
> of their shoulders, and their shining green hair.
>
> Today is a day like any other: twenty-four hours, a
> little sunshine, a little rain.
>
> Listen, says ambition, nervously shifting her weight from
> one boot to another – why don't you get going?
>
> For there I am, in the mossy shadows, under the trees.
>
> And to tell the truth I don't want to let go of the wrists
> of idleness, I don't want to sell my life for money,
> I don't even want to come in out of the rain.

If Mary Oliver (2004, p. 5) can feel so at home there in the woods with her beloved Black Oaks that communion with them is more precious than money and success, perhaps America can find her way home too.

In researching the beliefs and practices of modern indigenous peoples Suzuki and Knudtson (1993) spoke with the Haida people who live in the most western archipelago off the coast of Canada. The authors came to understand that this place has been home to these people since their beginnings as a people with a sense of their own unique cultural identity. Suzuki and Knudtson tell us:

> The land and all the creatures that inhabit it represent their history, their culture, their meaning, their very identity. Without them, the Haida are no longer Haida. The Haida refer to whales and ravens as their "brothers and sisters" and to fish and trees as the finned and tree *people*. (p. xxxii)

Another example of modern indigenous people's relationship with the natural world is found in the Chewong of Malaysia. Suzuki and Knudtson discovered in the language of these people a "conspicuous absence of an all-embracing term for 'non-human' creatures [which] suggests that in the world of the Chewong, *human beings are only one species among many different kinds of animate creatures"* (1993, p. 108).

In talking with the Chewong about this aspect of language that is different from our own, the authors found that the Chewong, "attach great significance to the notion that each species has its own perception of reality . . . that is every bit as valid and complete as that of humans" (Suzuki & Knudtsen, 1993, p. 109). Supporting this idea, Jung commented that "the idea that man alone possesses the primacy of reason is antiquated twaddle. . . . Our capacity for reflective consciousness may be a unique human attribute but it does not necessarily imply superiority" (1975a, p. 119).

The Haida's affirmation of a sibling relationship with trees and fish, or the Chewong's affirmation of the validity of other species' perception may be an attempt to heal a felt split from the natural world, or it may be an expression of a felt connection with it. Their views do offer hope for the planet if we will listen. Linda Hogan (2007) says: "We need new stories, new terms and conditions that are relevant to the love of land, a new narrative that would imagine another way, to learn the infinite mystery and movement at work in the world" (p. 94). Perhaps we also need to relearn some of the old stories.

There appears to be evidence of new and old stories emerging as we hear the many voices speaking from the field of ecopsychology. Speaking from another field—quantum physics—that also may offer some hope for our relationship with the natural world, is Jeffrey Satinover. He describes a transition he sees in human thinking and belief from the ancient perception of the universe as purposeful and meaningful, to the perception of it in the 19th and 20th centuries as mechanical and meaningless, to a newly emerging perception of it, once again, as mysterious and "free" rather than mechanical. He tells us:

> The idea that the entire universe is nothing more than a "physical system"—that is, a machine—unfolding mechanically according to rigid and immutable laws began as the radical heresy of a few brave minds. With this idea as their starting point, they and their followers began to experience an uninterrupted string of successes. . . . Needless to say, there were (and are) a great many people who found this vision of reality a horribly bleak one. They hoped . . . that one day scientists themselves might discover a fundamental law of the universe that was not wholly mechanical but in some sense "free." These hopes were rekindled with the emergence of the strange theory of *quantum mechanics*. (2001, pp. 4-5)

This pendulum swing back and forth from human belief in a free and meaningful universe to belief in a fixed, mechanical universe may represent some deeper archetypal pull between needs for stability/structure and transformation/chaos. Since the universe itself seems to hold the two forces in some kind of ongoing balance, can humans learn to do the same, and use the benefits of each in order to save the earth and our own lives?

We have heard many voices within the field of ecopsychology asking us to consider not just recognition of the inherent value and sentience of the natural world, and willingness to communicate with the beings and things that inhabit it, but even openness to placing ourselves within a larger Self which encompasses all things without hierarchical ranking. For many of us in current America, these are radical ideas, dangerously insane ideas, ideas that threaten the deepest pillars of our culture.

Narcissism

This research postulates that narcissism has something to do with Western industrialized people's blindness to the living reality and intrinsic value of the natural world. With that in mind, multiple depth psychological perspectives on the concept of narcissism are relevant, as are the overlapping themes emerging from them: human helplessness, desire for control, self-loathing, and grandiosity (Freud, 1905/1986; Green, 2001; Kohut, 1971; Moncayo, 2006; Piven, 2003, 2006; Schwartz-Salant, 1982; Symington, 1993, 2002).

Neville Symington (2002) presents a psychoanalytic view of narcissism in *A Pattern of Madness* which includes a fascinating discussion of an internal constellation he calls "god and worm" (p. 80). The god-self aspect of this pair is a powerful internal force in the human ego that feels like the divine and attempts to command the worm-self aspect of the pair that feels helpless and contemptible. This echoes Jung's (1931/1970) concept of the complex in which an aspect of ego sometimes "splits off from the conscious mind as an independent complex and then leads a sort of separate existence in the unconscious . . . a miniature self-contained psyche, which, as experience shows, develops a peculiar fantasy life of its own" (p. 56). Jung also suggests that at the core of each complex is an archetype, and archetypes tend to come in pairs of opposites. In describing their concepts both Jung and Symington are speaking purely of the internal world of humans, not human-nature interactions, but we might be able to imagine how Symington's god-worm concept in narcissism might also be related to our modern human perception of our relationship with the natural world.

Another well-known psychoanalyst, Heinz Kohut (1971), focused most of his career on theorizing about and treating narcissism. He moved away from talking about the ego to speaking of the self as the sight of narcissistic disturbance. This distinction is important for understanding his ideas. Kohut spoke of the ego (as well as the id and superego) as "constituents of a specific, high-level, i.e. experience-distant, abstraction in psychoanalysis: the psychic apparatus" (1971, p. xiv). The term "apparatus" is a mechanism that drives behavior, or is the site of the drives, in Freudian terminology. Kohut defined the self as a "comparatively low-level, i.e. comparatively experience-near, psychoanalytic abstraction, as a content of the mental apparatus . . . a structure within the

mind" (p. xv). So for Kohut the focus shifted to self as content or structure away from ego as driving apparatus.

To further the distinction between ego and self, Kohut offered these thoughts, which lead us back to Symington's (2002) god-worm constellation:

> The self then, quite analogous to the representation of objects, is a content of the mental apparatus but is not one of its constituents, i.e. not one of the agencies of the mind . . . [and] self representations are present not only in the id, the ego, and the superego, but also within a single agency of the mind. There may, for example, exist contradictory conscious and preconscious self representations – e.g. of grandiosity and inferiority [god-worm] side by side. (1971, p. xv)

Kohut presents a more compassionate and hopeful stance towards people suffering from such narcissistic disturbances than did Symington, Freud, or most other psychoanalysts. He sees narcissists dominated internally by shame and emptiness, compensated for by grandiosity, but perceives them as amenable to long-term psychoanalytic treatment, whereas many psychoanalysts see narcissism as an untreatable disturbance. Kohut's stance brings hope to me if it is true that our entire culture is fundamentally narcissistic, and such narcissism is a major contributor to our destruction of the planet.

Jerry Piven (2003), another psychoanalytic author, has made a connection between narcissism and nature. He speaks of human "helplessness and terror of annihilation which inflate narcissistic phantasies of power and autonomy" (p. 228). Again I hear the inner struggle of god-worm. Piven also notes that "nature mocks at human control in quakes that bury all human life, deluges that drown everything in turmoil, and storms that blow everything before them" (p. 229). Symington (2002) makes a more oblique connection between narcissism and nature when he notes: "If I put my own survival at the center of my endeavors, then I am narcissistic . . . it is important to note that survival applies to the continuation of the species, not the individual" (p. 50). What

would happen if we extended concern about continuation of the species to all species on the planet? Perhaps if other species were included within our concept and experience of self, as suggested by Macy (2007), narcissism would be less harmful.

Psychiatrist Alexander Lowen (1985) takes narcissism beyond consideration of the individual human psyche: "Narcissism describes both a psychological and a cultural condition" (p. ix). His definition of narcissism is straightforward and adds a piece to the puzzle: "Narcissists are more concerned with how they appear than what they feel." Lowen then expands this to the cultural realm, saying:

> On the cultural level, narcissism can be seen in a loss of human values—in a lack of concern for the environment, for the quality of life, for one's fellow human beings. . . . When wealth occupies a higher position than wisdom, when notoriety is admired more than dignity, when success is more important than self-respect, the culture itself overvalues "image" and must be regarded as narcissistic. (1985, p. xi)

He doesn't explicitly state it, but it certainly sounds like he is pointing at Americanized culture. He then asks a question we have heard before: Can a culture be insane?

Fisher (2002) offers his thoughts on that question in his deep exploration of the unfortunate consequences of our culture's immersion in a Cartesian worldview and a capitalistic economic system. He proposes that "Cartesian dualism truly describes only self-estranged, disembodied, narcissistic experience" (p. 56), and goes on to say, "The workings of capital . . . violate the nature of things *in general* . . . [and] this process now shows up in humans as the universalizing of pathological narcissism" (p. 85).

Ecopsychologist Larry Robinson also has some comments to make about the connection between culture and narcissism, declaring: "It could be argued that our entire culture suffers from a narcissistic personality disorder . . . as evidenced by our distant, superior, and entitled relationship to the more-than-human world" (2009, p. 27). He ties

such narcissism to our capitalistic economic system, which in its effort to continue to feed itself more consumers, does its best to feed us the belief that if we just consume more stuff (cars, alcohol, make-up, clothes, food, electronic gadgets, McMansions), we will feel less of the void that underlies the veneer of superiority and entitlement. Of course, in consuming more and more stuff, we desecrate the planet.

Returning to Lowen, he proceeds to answer his own question about cultural insanity, saying, "Narcissism denotes a degree of unreality in the individual and in the culture. Unreality is not just neurotic, it verges on the psychotic" (1985, p. xi). And what would an insane culture do? Lowen offers us an example: "There is something crazy about a culture that pollutes the air, the waters, and the earth in the name of a 'higher' standard of living" (p. xi). It may suddenly sound as if we have drifted back into the "ecopsychology" section of this literature review, but I am describing Lowen's book, *Narcissism: Denial of the True Self*.

In a final chapter, "The Insanity of our Time," Lowen invites us to consider the apparent goals of modern Americanized culture: "To eliminate sickness, overcome aging, and conquer death. . . . Is there a greater megalomania than this?" (1985, p. 225). How can we not be struck by the obvious contradiction between our culture's grandiose intention to "conquer death" and our blind destruction of the very environment that sustains our life? Such is the essence of unconscious conflict: A conscious intention subverted by an unconscious impulse/intention. (Therein lies the heart of my exploration in this dissertation, but before I can foreclose on any answers, I must continue opening to possibilities.)

And before I can continue exploring the topic of narcissism I must bring into the discussion the father of modern depth psychology, Sigmund Freud. In his oft-quoted paper "On Narcissism: An Introduction" (1905/1986), Freud distinguished between what he calls "primary narcissism," which "would not be a perversion, but the libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation, a measure of which may be attributed to every living creature" (p. 18), and "secondary narcissism." He postulated secondary narcissism as the result of a child withdrawing his libido (life-energy) from investment in other people and the external world, and turning that libidinal investment towards his own ego or towards internalized "objects" (internalized images of external people like mother or father who have emotional significance for the child). I want to note that Freud equated "primary narcissism" with an instinct for self-preservation, which he acknowledged as true for "every living creature." Though he did not appear to make the leap himself, he left a tiny gap there between humans and other living beings for later thinkers to bridge.

Freud (1905/1986) went on to describe people with secondary narcissism as "display[ing] two fundamental characteristics: megalomania and diversion of their interest from the external world" (p. 18). Many later psychodynamically-oriented authors (Kohut, 1971; Schwartz-Salant, 1982; Stolorow, 2006; Symington, 2002) eventually moved away from the idea of a primary (non-pathological) narcissism and a secondary (pathological) narcissism, but before we discard Freud's terms of "primary" and "secondary," I think it worth examining his ideas further. Might we connect Freud's primary narcissistic "egoism of the instinct of self-preservation" (p. 18) with Lowen's (1985) observation that current culture wants to conquer sickness, aging, and death?

Might we also connect Freud's secondary narcissistic shifting of investment in other people and the world towards investment in the ego and its internalized images (objects), with Lowen's observation that our current culture evidences lack of concern about the environment and human quality of life, and places too much emphasis on self-image? This may be too simplistic, but it appears to be worth exploring further.

French psychoanalyst Andre Green is another major thinker and writer on narcissism. His 2001 book *Life Narcissism Death Narcissism* adds richly to our discussion. Green distinguishes between what he calls life (or positive) narcissism and death (or negative) narcissism in a clear manner. Life narcissism entails a continued effort by the ego to find objects that might fulfill its need for a sense of completion and perfection (p. xx). Thus, this narcissist feels desire for life and love in some form, even if it is in the form of self-love. Death narcissism entails a loss of hope and desire, or rather desire for non-desire (p. xxi). With no desire the narcissist imagines the possibility of no further loss or disappointment. Of course a wish for no desire and no hope is essentially a death wish.

Green (2001) suggests that in the state of death narcissism, "Death takes on the aspect of absolute Being" (p. xxi). He elaborates on this theme, telling us that "negative narcissism tends towards non-existence, anaesthesia, emptiness, the *blanc*" (p. 10). So could it be that the narcissistic tendencies that grip modern American culture are not just tendencies towards self-absorption and fascination with image over substance, but also tendencies towards emptiness and non-existence? This could be one of the links between death denial and ecological narcissism. Also, as Norman O. Brown points out, death

denial can be seen as an extroversion of the death instinct: desire for death turning into the desire to destroy (1985, p. 102).

Green continues to expand on his ideas about negative narcissism, taking it beyond the individual to the cultural level, saying:

> It is not just individuals who let themselves die. There are also whole civilizations which seem to be stricken with apathy, renouncing their ideals and sinking into passivity, a forewarning of their extinction, once they have lost all illusion with regard to their future. (2001, p. 222)

Not all of modern Americanized culture is sinking into passivity about its destruction of the natural world, but there are certainly many people who appear to be in such a state.

I have heard multiple clients and friends say something to the effect of: "It's too late to save the planet anyway," or "What difference does it make? Life in Heaven is what really matters, not life here on Earth." That sounds like loss of hope on one hand, and death denial on the other. Green (2001) offers this last sentence in his exploration of narcissism, declaring, "It is no longer enough to prepare oneself serenely for the eventuality of death. It is also necessary to try and check the temptation to abandon ourselves collectively to it when it threatens the planet with irreparable havoc" (p. 224).

Perhaps we are getting closer to the root of the unconscious conflict that appears to bedevil our culture into destroying its literal ground of being. Have most of us developed with an unconscious opposition between (1) wanting to preserve ourselves, and (2) avoiding emotional investment in the outer world, our literal ground of being, which includes both human and nonhuman environments? Or is this question set within too small a frame? Other points of view suggest that shifting the ground of questioning can bring some meaningful discussion.

Chilean psychoanalyst and author, Raul Moncayo (2006), contributes to this shift in thinking about narcissism. He describes "degrees of differentiation within narcissism" (p. 565), and suggests that it is possible to move the discussion towards what he calls "no-ego" (p. 566). Moncayo sums up a century of theorizing about the concept of narcissism in this way: "Basically the question of narcissism within psychoanalysis has been an answer to the question of selfhood. Psychoanalysis has ostensibly described the self as a form of libidinal attachment or fixation to ego-representations of various kinds" (p. 568). Then he injects this shift, which shakes the foundations:

> However, it is also possible to formulate the question of self beyond the ego. There can be subjectivity and identity based on no-ego. Such identity can be very intimate but "extimate" to the ego. No ego does not mean no-identity. . . . The notion of a subject or subjectivity outside or without the concept of ego includes human faculties and functions not attributable to an isolated individualistic ego. Memory, judgment, and insight or knowing can also be conceived as functions of the interdependence of the larger, unconscious, symbolic structure. I use the term unconscious in a descriptive sense to indicate the preconscious "Big mind," and not the repressed unconscious. (pp. 568-569)

To clarify what he is pointing to with his talk of subjectivity without ego, functioning as part of the larger unconscious or preconscious "Big mind," Moncayo reminds us of human "breathing as an image or function of the body that is connected to different organisms and to the earth through the vehicle of the air and oxygen that we all depend on" (p. 569). He is suggesting that there is an identity or subjectivity of humans that may precede or grow beyond the state of ego or self-identity that *knows* itself as connected to other living things, including the earth, and this knowing precludes a fantasy of separation, which allows for fantasies of domination and destruction of other life without harm to self. This recalls Schwartz-Salant's (1982) idea about narcissism potentially leading towards identification with Self, rather than self.

Moncayo goes on to support his idea about narcissism developing beyond self to no-self, saying: "Within psychoanalytic theory the notion of an absolute primary narcissism linked to a principle of quiescence and profound connection tends to get lost" (2006, p. 568). He describes primary narcissism as akin to the state of a fetus in utero: "Intrauterine life does not represent a state of solipsistic encapsulation and separation from the world but rather one of profound connection and interpenetration of life processes" (p. 568). This is Freudian terminology rather than Jungian, but a fetus in utero is a lovely image for Jung's idea of self in relation with Self. Moncayo contrasts absolute primary narcissism to other degrees of narcissism aimed towards success or stabilization of ego. He suggests that no-ego narcissism is not pathological but is the positive end of a developmental trajectory.

Mancayo then invites us to remember the entirety of the myth of Narcissus. He speaks of what happens after Narcissus dies in his attempt to grasp his own image in the pool:

> In the place where Narcissus fell, the Narcissus flower appears . . . [and] then the self becomes a metaphor, a poem and a rose that rises and falls, waxes and wanes, blooms and withers away in the great dance of universal material transformations. (2006, p. 595)

What happens to our fear of death, and attempts to control others and the world in order to protect ourselves and our image, when we feel ourselves as a metaphor within the grand play of life? Might we laugh out loud in relief from the burden of taking ourselves so seriously? Might we show more compassion to other living beings in this great drama?

James Hillman, writing from the point of view of archetypal psychology, has related thoughts about the decentering of "me" as the central reality, or unifying force in human personality. He speaks of myth rather than metaphor, and is not discussing

narcissism per se, but I believe his basic idea is very similar to Moncayo's. Hillman states:

> The "I" has its function, which is expressed by its capitalization. The "I" is legitimately written with a large letter, not because it is the capital person of the psyche, but because it too has a particular mythic part to play in the dramatics of the psyche—as the one personification whose necessary perspective is to take itself as literally real. (1975, p. 48)

So the I plays itself as real but in doing so forgets it is but one in a cast of characters who participate in the complex exchange between aspects of self and aspects of other beings. In its forgetting, the I gets frightened and tries desperately to fend off threats (real or imagined) to what it feels as real—the cluster of images and beliefs it has accumulated about itself.

As we will see when we explore the theme of "Denial of Death," Becker (1971) has some relevant things to say about how the I may be unconsciously aware of the fragile edifice upon which it has built its reality, and about how this may contribute to its chronic anxiety, which gets acted out in narcissistic rage and destruction, but we will save that discussion for later. I want to return to the thread of Moncayo's ideas on narcissism.

Turning our usual concept of "real" on its head, Moncayo explores Lacan's ideas on "the Real," telling us that for Lacan, "the Real is the empty mirror that sustains and nourishes both images and signifiers of identity. As the ground of identity-being, the empty and timeless mirror is what allows us humans to experience identity with rocks, trees, and clouds" (2006, p. 595). Moncayo goes on to describe what he calls "cosmic narcissism" (the term he uses to replace absolute primary narcissism). He tells us that Lacan speaks of the Real as "an empty locus or space that allows for a nexus of relations to exist . . . [and] the dimension of the subject that escapes definition by . . . the

Imaginary ego" (as cited in Moncayo, 2006, p. 596). So the Real is an emptiness that allows presence. It is beyond definition by our usual efforts to clarify and concretize. And within the Real, the ego is imaginary. I hear connections between Lacan and Hillman.

Moncayo tells us that "within Big mind or cosmic selfhood, the subject is revealed as Real beyond identification with the imaginary presence or negative absence of the object" (2006, p. 599). So we can have an experience of subjectivity/identity both prior to a splitting of subject/object (absolute primary narcissism), and subsequent to a resolution of the split between subject/object (cosmic narcissism).

Moncayo's (2006) ideas offer some hope for the human relationship with the natural world. If we can remember our connectedness with the larger world, beyond narrow ego concerns of questions like "What can it do for me?" we might yet find a way to live in a state of mutual exchange with the world, helping to sustain it, just as it sustains us. If we can come to a sense of co-identification with the world, our self-interest will suddenly expand to include the well-being of the world. We explored some of these ideas when we discussed Macy's *World as Lover, World as Self* (2007). Now we will hear poet Mary Oliver's exploration of this theme in "How Would You Live Then?" (2004, p. 57):

> What if a hundred rose-breasted grosbeaks
> flew in circles around your head? What if
> the mockingbird came into the house with you and
> became your advisor? What if
> the bees filled your walls with honey and all
> you needed to do was ask them and they would fill
> the bowl? What if the brook slid downhill just
> past your bedroom window so you could listen
> to its slow prayers as you fell asleep? What if
> you painted a picture of a tree, and the leaves
> began to rustle, and a bird cheerfully sang
> from its painted branches? What if you suddenly saw

> that the silver of water was brighter than the silver
> of money? What if you finally saw
> that the sunflowers, turning toward the sun all day
> and everyday – who knows how, but they do it - were
> more precious, more meaningful than gold?

We turn now to the thoughts of Barbara Hollifield (2010) and Will Adams (2010) as they examine the myth of Narcissus, looking specifically for clues to causes, and potential cures for, Western industrialized humans' disconnection from nature. Hollifield views modern humanity as in relationship only to the surface of self, unable to hear or see the living reality of others, including nonhuman others. Commenting on the mythical imagery, she says, "Narcissus does not behold the lake. This is a myth arising from Western culture. As Western civilization evolved, our sense of place as humans, as a subsystem of the earth community, has fallen away" (p. 22). Narcissus sees only his own reflection in the lake, not the lake as a separate presence.

Hollifield (2010) asks this poignant question: "Can any healing be sustained in our world today if this relationship of the human to the more-than-human world remains unknown, disconnected, unconsidered?" (p. 21). She reminds us that Carl Jung often commented about the deleterious consequences (to human psychological well-being) of isolation from the nonhuman world, saying:

> No voices now speak to man from stones, plants and animals, nor does he speak to them believing they can hear. His contact with nature has gone, and with it has gone the profound emotional energy that this symbolic connection supplied. (1964, p. 85)

Adams (2010) agrees with Hollifield and Jung, saying: "Narcissus alienated himself from the community of nature just as he alienated himself from other people" (p. 41). Adams reminds us that "the words narcissus and narcissistic, like the word narcotic, come from the Greek root *narke*, meaning 'numb'" (p. 41). So individually and culturally we remain

numb to protect ourselves from what? Awareness that we are part of a larger whole in which we are not the center? Awareness that our illusions of control are just illusions?

Adams and Hollifield, as practicing depth psychotherapists, each have their own take on what might be helpful for healing human alienation from the earth community. Adams (2010) advocates for consideration of a Buddhist perspective, which he sees as an Eastern version of existential-phenomenological thought, and which might facilitate relativizing of the narcissistic ego, allowing a healing of our split from nature. Hollifield (2010) nudges depth psychotherapists to consider whether or not they may have an obligation (or at the least an opportunity) to directly remind clients of their relationship with the natural world, and to facilitate appreciation of this world by encouraging client familiarization with their own "wild being processes" (p. 29) in the depths of their own psyche.

Returning to the ideas of Jungian analyst Schwartz-Salant (1982), we hear his examination of the myth of Narcissus in which he speaks of narcissism as reflecting "self-hate, hunger, secret stealing, and lack of bestowing warmth" (p. 24), as well as a "grandiose-exhibitionistic self" (p. 49). He sees the hallmark of the grandiose-exhibitionistic self as "its capacity to exert control over others . . . the one being controlled has difficulty in maintaining his or her own standpoint" (p. 49). Though Schwartz-Salant is clearly speaking of a narcissist's attempts to control other human beings—to annihilate their standpoint—how might this be played out in the human relationship to other species, in fact to the entire natural world? Perhaps it would constantly remind us that we are not actually in control, which for some is an intolerable idea. Or, as Elizabeth Nelson notes, such a narcissistic stance might prompt us to engage

the popular fantasy that wild animals are our friends, thereby reducing them from the complex and sometimes dangerous beings they are, to controllable beings who can serve our needs for feelings of mastery and safety (May 2013, personal communication).

Robert Stolorow also describes narcissism purely in terms of human relationship with other humans, but he makes a statement which seems relevant to me as we consider human relationships with nonhuman others. Attempting to differentiate between a "healthy" narcissism and an "unhealthy" narcissism, he offers this definition: "Whether a piece of narcissism is healthy or unhealthy reduces to the question of whether or not it succeeds in maintaining a cohesive, stable and positively coloured self-representation" (1986, p. 206). Note that narcissism is considered healthy by such writers as Stolorow and Kohut if it supports a stable sense of identity or "self-representation."

However, ecopsychologists, as well as some psychotherapists we have already heard from, are challenging people's sense of identity: asking them to consider whether or not their self-representations may be too narrow. Can it be healthy to maintain a cohesive sense of identity that excludes the rest of the natural world from within which our being emerges, or which distorts the reality of other beings to support our narcissistic fantasies?

Surprisingly, Carl Jung had little to say on the topic of narcissism. In the general reference to Jung's immense volume of collected works there are only five brief references to narcissism, and none offers a definition of narcissism, a recommendation for treatment, or a discussion of the myth of Narcissus. For example, in his *Psychological Commentary on the Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation* (1953/1958), Jung discusses the differences between Eastern and Western views of psychic reality and notes that an

Eastern view is introverted, whereas a Western view is extroverted. He notes that Freud saw "introversion . . . as something abnormal, morbid, or otherwise objectionable. Freud identifies it with an autoerotic, 'narcissistic' attitude of mind" (p. 481).

Offering a more obvious critique of Freud's ideas, Jung declares in *Civilization in Transition* that Freud thought that

> everything turns on the question of whether one can do what one wants . . . narcissism, wish-fulfillment and the rest are all concepts that relate to the grand drama of the pleasure principle. It almost looks as if man's desire and greed have been made the cardinal principle of psychology. (1934/1978, p. 160)

Continuing to focus on this one piece of Freud's thinking about narcissism, Jung explores love in another chapter, remarking that "the word love must be stretched still further to cover all sexual perversions. There is incestuous love, and a masturbatory self-love that goes by the name of narcissism" (1922/1978, p. 99). Jung did not develop his own concept of narcissism or consider the topic of great importance, but merely reacted to some of Freud's thoughts on it.

In exploring these many depth-oriented thinkers and practitioners, I am beginning to wonder whether the fields of psychoanalysis and psychology may have contributed to a narcissistic focus in modern culture. Nearly everyone is more concerned about one's interior psyche than with one's relationship with psyche in the world. In fact, most don't even mention our relationship with the natural world.

Denial of Death

As I proceed more deeply into this topic, I am coming to think of death denial more as an aspect of narcissism than as an entirely separate theme. At lunch one day I was describing my research topic to one of my sons, whom I hadn't seen in quite a while, and he paused to reflect on what I had told him. Then he commented, "It sounds like

there is a common element in the piece on narcissism and the piece on the denial of death: me. They are both all about me—what I need, what I fear" (April 2012, personal communication, B. VandenBerghe).

That struck me as essentially true. However, death denial is such an important aspect that I will continue to treat it as a separate theme. As we have already seen in our prior discussion, there is a great deal in narcissistic individuals and narcissistic cultures that contributes to the destruction of our natural world**,** but I am particularly interested in the effects of death denial on the human psyche in relationship to the environment.

The classic (1973) Becker text, *The Denial of Death*, is foundational to my research. His statement that "the child wants to conquer death by becoming the father of himself, the creator and sustainer of his own life" (p. 36), is an essential piece of how death denial might be related to ecological narcissism. Becker also suggested that for human infants "the narcissistic project then becomes the mastery and possession of the world" (p. 37), which recalls Symington's (2002) god half of the god-worm. This evokes for me an image of a terrified 2-year-old with master of the universe fantasies cowering inside an immense armored and armed robot that is dressed up to look like Zeus.

How could a person craving a sense of invincibility welcome conscious membership in the flux of the natural world with its great recurring round of birth and death? As Becker puts it, "realistically the universe contains overwhelming power. Beyond ourselves we sense chaos" (1973, p. 145). He suggests that it is natural, if unfortunate, that frightened humans might retreat into narcissistic fantasy like the classic Western idea: "the world is mine oyster" (Shakespeare, 1992, Act 2, Scene 2, Line 3).

The reader may ponder, as did I, the fact that this modern narcissistic attitude was already so entrenched 400 years ago that it was found in a popular play.

Perluss points out that Becker's ideas are based on an existential point of view that says death is the end and there is no meaning to it all, so anxiety is inherent to aliveness (personal communication, August 2012). She also reminds us that there is an alternative to this existential anxiety, as represented by Jung's ideas which acknowledge that death is the end goal of life, but a spiritual belief system can help us to honor and accept death. I would add that some spiritual belief systems have an unfortunate tendency to deny death, rather than honor and accept it.

Continuing an exploration of Becker's ideas, the research of Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, and Tom Pysczynsky (2003) explores how death denial may result in human destructiveness across cultures. Though their work is focused on the causes of human destruction of other cultures seen as a threat to cherished cultural viewpoints, the basic concepts may apply to the human-nature relationship as well. These authors suggest that "the essence of culture is death denial" (p. 461). They posit this reason for such denial: "The horror and dread of death becomes amalgamated into unmitigated terror when combined with the recognition that humans are animals: sentient pieces of breathing, defecating . . . meat—no more fundamentally significant or enduring than a fly" (p. 460). The authors imply that death denial leads to creation of beliefs that elevate humanity above membership in the more-than-human world, and competing beliefs are so threatening that people will kill to protect their own. The authors' words seem to imply a belief that members of the animal and insect species are insignificant.

Fisher (2002) sees our modern sense of lack and emptiness fueled by the forces of capitalism as generating a "death-denying people [who] are obsessed with using their technology for building immortality projects such as banking towers" (p. 169). He believes that both narcissism and capitalism arise from our disconnection from nature.

Levertov, in her poem "Human Beings" (1978, p. 4), captures some of the fear and emptiness that gnaw at us in our lack of connectedness with the natural world.

> Human being—walking
> in doubt from childhood on: walking
>
> a ledge of slippery stone in the world's woods
> deep-layered with wet leaves—rich or sad: on one
> side of the path, ecstasy, on the other
> dull grief. Walking
>
> the mind's imperial cities, roofed-over alleys,
> thoroughfares, wide boulevards
> that hold evening primrose of sky in steady calipers.
>
> Always the mind
> walking, working, stopping sometimes to kneel
> in awe of beauty, sometimes leaping, filled with the energy
> of delight, but never able to pass
> the wall, the wall
> of brick that crumbles and is replaced,
> of twisted iron,
> of rock,
> the wall that speaks, saying monotonously:
>
> > Children and animals
> > who cannot learn
> > anything from suffering,
> > suffer, are tortured, die
> > in incomprehension.
>
> This human being, each night nevertheless
> summoning – with a breath blown at a flame,
> or hand's touch
> on the lamp-switch – darkness,
> silently utters,
> impelled as if by a need to cup the palms

and drink from a river,
the words, “Thanks.
Thanks for this day, a day of my life.”
And wonders.
Pulls up the blankets, looking
into nowhere, always in doubt . . .

Her wondrous words capture something about our dilemma that no prose can ever express: “the mind’s imperial cities . . . that hold evening primrose of sky in steady calipers.” Isn’t that somehow the essence of it? That our minds clamor desperately to grasp in calipers what is forever actually outside of our grasp?

In an earlier work, Becker (1971) offers some ideas that suggest a reason for our constant grasping at a sense of certainty and timelessness. He describes the human ego as a “verbal edifice” (p. 19), and the human self as “not physical, it is symbolic” (p. 31). So somewhere in the development of human life we created a sense of self that was no longer directly connected to a sense of embodiment in the natural world. We became an abstraction, cut off from the ground of our very being. Is this the root of our fear and destruction of nature? Try though we may to turn it into an abstraction such as we feel ourselves to be, nature remains embodied and reminds us of our own embodiment at every turn.

Becker (1971) believes that humans have come to value their own interior, symbolic sense of self over their exterior, embodied sense of self, and in a move towards elevating our species over others, have stopped perceiving the interiority of other living beings. Once again, it may sound as if we are back in the field of ecopsychology, but these words come from a book based in social anthropology and sociology:

> All objects in nature have some “interiority” even though we experience only their outside. . . .Why not say that a tree leans on a fence because it feels weak, or

> soaks up water because it is thirsty; or that it grows crookedly because it is stretching toward the sun? (1971, p. 28)

Indeed. Why not say that? Some of us would feel entirely comfortable saying that, but I doubt most people in modern Americanized culture would accept such a view.

Becker's theory proposes that maintaining a solid sense of self—what we typically think of as "self-esteem"—has become "a matter of life and death" (1971, p. 67) for modern humans, and that this life and death issue is built around what he calls a "linguistic contrivance" (p. 67). He goes so far as to say that once a child has established some basic sense of self in response to the linguistic, symbolic, artificial culture in which he grows up, "almost all his time is devoted to the protection, maintenance, and aggrandizement of the symbolic edifice of his self-esteem" (p. 67). So humans spend vast amounts of energy defending their linguistic, symbolic, and artificial creations (both individual and cultural) at great expense to the natural and the sensate, ignoring communications from beings most of us can no longer comprehend.

Challenging this view of culture as an artificial contrivance, Perluss reminded me that a radically different way to think of culture is as a natural aspect of human nature, with human nature seen as an inherent part of the larger world of nature (August 2012, personal communication). I have reflected deeply on this point of view for over two months now and have come to the conclusion that this perspective on culture as an expression of nature is the only view that, a priori, heals the split between humans and nature, mind and body.

If everything that arises, including all human cultural creations—which would include religious and scientific belief systems—arises out of nature, then there never has been a split. It is simply another in the unending parade of human myths that such a split

exists, and this myth contributes to more antagonism between humans and the world of which they are a part than other myths which weave a story about how we are related to everything else. I will pursue this line of thought more deeply in the findings sections of my dissertation. For now I will return to exploring the many ideas I have encountered in my research about death denial and its effect on our relationship with the natural world.

Jerry Piven (2003) directly ties death denial and fear of nature's power to our destruction of the natural world, observing, "Thus we seek to tame and destroy nature, to protect ourselves against helplessness and death" (p. 229). For example, we offer token habitat for the big mammals that used to routinely subject humans to the experience of being prey, trying to keep them alive without having to experience our own frailty in relationship to them. In his examination of death denial from a psychoanalytic point of view he suggests that "death-related ideas and imagery are avoided, and subsequently consciousness is narrowed down so as not to conceive of, as well as perceive, anything reminiscent of death" (p. 236). Nearly 20 years earlier, Norman O. Brown (1985), reflecting on Freud's concept of a death instinct, interpreted human aggression towards other humans and the natural world in this way: "The drive to master nature as well as the drive to master man—is the result of an extroversion of the death instinct, the desire to die being transformed into the desire to kill, destroy, or dominate" (p. 102). Both authors appear to suggest that humans may avoid or destroy the natural world as a way to avoid awareness of death.

Given that we are speaking of psychoanalytic thought on the idea of a death instinct and denial of death, we must certainly hear from Freud. In his earlier thinking on a death instinct in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* he posits:

> It would be in contradiction to the conservative nature of the instincts if the goal of life were a state of things which had never yet been attained. On the contrary, it must be an *old* state of things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads. If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons – becomes inorganic once again – then we shall be compelled to say that '*the aim of all life is death.'* (1922/1961, pp. 45-46)

In his efforts to equate psychological functioning with biological functioning Freud often used the term *instincts* to refer to psychological impulses. He seemed to find in biology a template to help him make sense of human destructiveness turned inwards or outwards that made no sense to him otherwise.

In his later work, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930/1961), Freud elaborated on his idea that human aggression towards others and the world was an expression of an inherent death instinct. He comments that "even where it emerges . . . in the blindest fury of destructiveness, we cannot fail to recognize that the satisfaction of the instinct [death instinct] is accompanied by an extraordinarily high degree of narcissistic enjoyment" (p. 81). He connects this sense of narcissistic enjoyment to the ego's old need for a sense of omnipotence, which we heard much about in our exploration of narcissism.

Freud (1930/1961) goes on to insist that "the inclination to aggression is an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in man . . . [and] constitutes the greatest impediment to civilization" (p. 81). Piven (2003) and Brown (1985) have already helped us connect these Freudian ideas of inherent tendencies towards death of self and death of other with their expression in death denial and destruction of the natural world. Now we are prepared to hear Freud's most relevant statement for the topic of this dissertation:

> The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction. It

> may be that in this respect precisely the present time deserves a special interest. Men have gained control over the forces of nature to such an extent that with their help they would have no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man. They know this, and hence comes a large part of their current unrest, their unhappiness and their mood of anxiety. (p. 145)

Freud is concerned only with how the postulated death instinct affects human survival, not survival of the rest of the world. Fortunately others have expanded their circle of concern to include the larger world of which humans are just a part.

Richard Chessick is one of those persons. As professor of psychiatry at Northwestern University he has written extensively about an unfortunate passivity and denial about our destruction of the natural world that may have grown out of acceptance of the Freudian idea of a death instinct. In *The Death Instinct and the Future of Humans* (1989) he traces the history of the concept of a death instinct through its elaboration in the thinking of Klein, Lacan, Trilling, and Kohut, and connects it with the thinking of Heidegger suggesting that both Freud and Heidegger "imply a certain resignation, a sense of hopelessness about the role of people's active efforts to basically improve the status of civilized life" (p. 555).

Chessick (1989) challenges our modern resignation, noting that Freud himself foreshadowed an option to passivity in the face of a death drive when he suggested that it was possible for one instinct to tame another. Chessick explores how Eros might tame Thanatos, offering his point of view that "the Western ego, based on repression and internalization of aggressive strivings and the expression of them in what Heidegger calls the age of technicity, is not the necessary or even the 'normal' destiny of aggression" (p. 557). He suggests that it is possible for humans to make conscious choices to use

"healthy sublimatory channels available to all of us in work, art, religion, and so forth" (p. 557) rather than acting out our destructiveness while denying its consequences.

Chessick asks us these two powerful questions:

> Is this massive disavowal not the indispensable basis of the current regressive cultural narcissistic preoccupation that characterizes affluent people of the Western world? Is it not the prime obligation of psychiatrists, as physicians and citizens, to call attention to the explosive dangers of such massive disavowal, even if it disturbs everybody's sleep? (1989, p. 558)

I would reply "Yes" and expand the list of those responsible to speak up. A word of caution comes from Perluss, who says: "And at the same time maintain a humble stance that always looks toward our own shadow in such things. . . . It is easy to become self-righteous even with the most justifiable causes" (August 2012, personal communication).

Sabina Spielrein also speaks of the death instinct in her most famous work, *Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being* (1994), reminding us that "in our depths, there is something that, as paradoxial as it may sound, wills self-injury" (p. 160). Her description of the complexity of psyche is refreshing and on-point when she says, "I have come to the conclusion that the chief characterisitic of an individual is that he is 'dividual'" (p. 160). She supports her point by referring back to Jung's description of psyche as composed of multiple parts or complexes struggling for priority of expression in one's life, with the ego itself divided amongst multiple parts.

In describing the unconscious as a powerful force in our lives, Spielrein again makes a statement I find particularly evocative. She says, "the depth of our psyche knows no 'I' but only its summation, the 'We.' It considers the ego to be an object observed and subordinated to other similar objects" (1994, p. 160). She also connects the unconscious to the image of the Great Mother, and through the Great Mother to the earth, saying, "the

earth once played the mother's role, nourishing the little men through an umbilical cord" (p. 181), and "in the 'Mothers' there is no light or dark, no above or below, no opposites; differentiation from . . . the Great Mother, has not yet occurred" (p. 181). Our profoundly narcissistic, individualistic culture might then experience Great Mother earth as a dangerous enemy, threatening to take us back into that realm where "I" has so little meaning and we are simply part of the larger whole.

Spielrein suggests that differentiation from the Great Mother brings humanity conscious awareness of death. Prior to differentiation there is no "I" to die. Spielrein says it this way: "With differentiation, one is, for the first time, consecrated to life and to death (de-differentiation). Death's source lies in life itself and vice versa" (1994, p. 181). She makes fascinating connections between humanity's efforts towards continuation, and human "assimilation and differentiation," suggesting that as a species we have a tendency towards "transformation of the I to the We" (p. 174), because we must "dissolve the old to create the new" (p. 174). That statement contains her entire premise about destruction as a cause of coming into being, and it makes me wonder if perhaps I have it wrong: If our unthinking destruction of the natural world (and potentially ourselves and all other living things) is actually a desparate and unconscious effort to create something new, rather than an arrogant flailing against our mortality.

Perhaps it is not an either/or. Is it possible that our desparate efforts to feel ourselves part of something which lives on past our individual death is actually part of that unconscious pull to create something new? Is it possible that our modern cultural, symbolic constructions (like religion), which were intended to help us feel immortal, are not working, and we are in the process of creating new (drawing from old) ways of

knowing which would allow us to connect with ourselves and the world in a new way? If there is any truth in that, I hope we are able to accomplish the transition in time.

Sam Keen, in the preface to Becker's (1973) seminal work, takes the discussion about human denial of death into the realm of concepts about good and evil, stating: "The root of humanly caused evil is not man's animal nature . . . but our need to gain self-esteem, deny our mortality, and achieve a heroic self-image" (p. xiii). Expanding on the theme of good and evil in relation to the denial of death, Lewis Aron (2005) provides a fascinating discussion of varying views of the biblical myth of Genesis, Adam and Eve, and the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. He examines two of the major interpretations of this myth: one by psychoanalyst Eric Fromm, and a second by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik.

Aron (2005) informs us that there are at least two versions of Genesis, within which the stories of Adam and Eve and the Tree of Knowledge occur, and the differences are significant to this study. Within the Jewish myth, Lewis tells us, "God creates the human on the sixth day, only after God has created all other creatures" (p. 688), and "There is no reference to Eden's being a place where the first couple sinned, nor is there any reference to the Fall of mankind" (p. 685). In addition, referring to the work of Rabbi Soloveitchik, Lewis says that Jewish scholars note differences between two chapters of Genesis. "The first chapter of Genesis describes the primal human surround by the cosmos. Here Adam I is part of nature, part and parcel of the environment" (2005, p. 689). This is contrasted with the second chapter of Genesis in which, "Adam II struggles with two drives and two sets of fears: the fear of death and the fear of ignorance" (p.

690). What happened to cause "Adam II" to lose his sense of being part of nature, which appears to be correlated with his new fear of death?

Soloveitchik (as cited in Aron, 2005) tells us that now, rather than living an "instinctive existence, an earth creature in nature" (p. 689), the human becomes "eager to live an . . . inextinguishable existence. His greatest aspiration, his most fascinating dream, is to defeat death" (p. 690). Why? Why this shift from knowing ourselves as part of nature without apparent fear of death, to separating ourselves out with narcissistic preoccupation, destruction of the natural world, and ultimately denial of death?

In discussing Fromm's interpretation of the Christian version of the myth, Aron notes that Fromm himself was raised Jewish and probably brought this sensibility, along with his existential and psychoanalytic education, to his comments about Genesis, Adam and Eve, and the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. Fromm, (as cited in Aron, 2005), sees these stories as describing "the liberation of man from the incestuous ties to blood and soil . . . to freedom for the individual" (p. 686). Interestingly, Fromm does not perceive this freedom of the individual to mean escape from death. On the contrary, Aron tells us that Fromm insists that human freedom involves "accepting self-consciousness, sex, work, and death" (p. 687).

Aron ultimately seeks a reconciliation between these two versions of the myth. He invites us to remember that all being within the world may be seen or experienced as both good and bad—therefore: "Knowledge can be used for both good and evil; sexuality, both good and evil; . . . even death and our awareness of death, both good and bad" (2005, p. 709). Dr. Nelson invites us to consider a provocative question (May 2012, personal communication) relevant to this discussion: How is death good?

I pondered ways to respond to that question and came up with these possibilities. Death could be considered good in that it (1) can relieve living beings from what might otherwise be interminable suffering; (2) can serve as a reminder of the profound preciousness of this particular moment, place, being, which death tells us will pass away; (3) can invite consideration of the experience of surrender into something greater than ourselves; and (4) as Spielrein noted, can allow for the creation of something new which requires dissolution of the old (1994, p. 174). A question I would then ask is: Might tolerance of this ambivalence between death as good and death as bad lead us away from the denial of death that seems to permeate Westernized culture?

Duane Larson (2003) also notes changes to Christian attitudes about death, which have traditionally equated human animal nature to evil. Larson compares newer Christian attitudes to the beliefs of more ancient spiritual traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, seeing a shift occurring in which death is less often seen as a result of sin and evil, and more often viewed as a "natural piece of the creation that God called good" (p. 203). This stands in contrast to Philippe Aries' (1977/1981) sociological examination of Westernized attitudes about death which revealed a marked tendency in the 20th century for people to avoid awareness of death which was seen as unnatural.

Aries (1977/1981) extensive study of attitudes about death shows a major change starting in the 19th century. Prior to that time, death was still seen as a normal part of life, even in industrialized nations. This perception of death as normal did not preclude beliefs about an afterlife; it just meant people accepted the reality of corporeal death. According to Aries a gradual change occurred reflected in multiple factors, including (1) removal of death from home to hospital related to "the beginning of medicalization" (p. 563); (2) the

growing perception of death as "dirty" (p. 568); (3) "the progress of the lie" (p. 565) in which people grow reluctant to tell the dying that they are dying, just as the dying become reluctant to believe they are dying; and (4) "the indecency of mourning" (p. 578) in which it becomes inappropriate to show grief in public.

All of these tendencies have been exacerbated by our growing confidence in technology as the answer to all human problems. Aries tells us, "People began to believe that there was no limit to the power of technology, either in man or in nature" (1977/1981, p. 595), and along with this belief came "the idea that suffering, poverty, and death should and could be eliminated" (p. 595). All of this fueled our drift away from conscious relationship with the natural world, where death remains inevitable.

Margaret Gibson elaborates on these ideas in her fascinating 2007 journal article, "Death and Mourning in Technologically Mediated Culture." She observes that "personal bereavement and/or seeing a dead body can remain outside 'real life' experience for most people in early to mid-adulthood, living in relatively affluent nation-states" (p. 415). This fits my direct experience of growing up in this country. In a fascinating juxtaposition to this apparent absence of death in our lives she posits that "at the same time it is very likely that the majority of these people have seen hundreds, possibly thousands of simulated deaths via media technologies" (p. 415). That also rings true for my direct experience. So are we in denial of death or not?

Gibson (2007) interprets the work of Geoffrey Gorer as she looks for an answer to that question, and tells us that he thought "the dominance of violent images of death in the mass media was indicative of, and a mechanism through which, natural death was concealed and rendered taboo" (p. 417). Gibson makes her own observation: "Through

the camera lens, images of death and dying are brought close to the eyes and consciousness of the viewer/audience and yet a relationship to distance is part of the experience" (p. 417). Dr. Nelson notes that sight itself, of all the senses, requires at least some minimal amount of distance from the object or experience (May 2012, personal communication), which would suggest that it is not just the camera in the world of media that is involved in that complex dance of closeness/distance to the images and experience of death, but vision itself. This could open up a rich area of study for another researcher around a theme of how our cultural fascination with visual forms of media/technology may be somehow related to (perhaps an expression of?) our distancing from direct experiences of the more-than-human natural world.

Returning to Gibson, her comments on "temporality" may address at least part of the complexity of the closeness/distance issue. She says:

> There is a quite different temporality between the experiences of death and grief as they are represented in popular culture and the real-life experiences of death and grief, which obviously have more sustained temporal, not to mention deeper levels of psychic and emotional, impact. (2007, p. 418)

I can attest to the truth of this statement via my own experience when my supposed comfort with death was shattered by the real death of my husband in 2000. Prior to Dwight's death, I had convinced myself that I was at peace with death. I had watched many episodes of the popular HBO TV series "Six Feet Under," seen hundreds of movies and read hundreds of books depicting both violent and more peaceful deaths, and had even done volunteer work at a local hospice. Death seemed like an old friend, familiar and even safe, and my husband and I had calmly made preparations for each other's death and funeral. None of that prepared me for the massive shock to my sense of life and my

sense of self generated by his death, which reverberated in my heart and soul for over ten years, and continues to have a profound impact on me to this day.

I want to note that Gibson does not mention the physical impact of real-life experiences of death on survivors, only the psychic and emotional impact. As both a professional grief counselor and a bereaved spouse, I can state definitively that experiencing a death can affect every aspect of our physiology. Sleep and appetite often increase or decrease dramatically for some time. Muscle aches, heart palpitations, dry mouth, headaches, stomach upset, and shortness of breath are common. Physical symptoms mirroring those of the dead loved one are not at all unusual.

I could eat nothing but small amounts of potato salad (which I normally ate rarely) for 2 weeks following my husband's death; I slept only an hour or 2 a night for a month (when I normally slept at least eight hours); and I literally felt like I'd been run over by a truck for weeks. I also had the fascinating experience of seeing the world as gray—literally without color—for months following his death. Somehow, color did not register on my brain, and returned only when I began to feel moments of joy again.

Gibson asks us to consider that "one of the possible paradoxes of this open and expanding market of produced and mediated death culture is that it might widen the inevitable gap between 'real death' and its imagined or simulated forms" (p. 423). She is implying that our saturation in images of death in technologically mediated society may actually drive us deeper into denial of the reality of death, and I must concur. In media, death is often presented as a form of entertainment, or perhaps education. Few of us (psychopaths or others in the grip of a psychosis) find "real death" entertaining.

Piven once again has some ideas that he offers in a later work on what he calls "terrorist theology" (2006) that are relevant to this discussion. He shares his thoughts on what drives terrorists to the horrific deeds they enact, noting that religious texts may be pointed to as a cause, but "texts do not kill people. They don't force people to annihilate one another" (p. 233). Images in media are texts, just as books are texts. So can we say that these media images are causing an effect in our relationship with death, or are they mirroring something that already exists deep in modern human psyche?

In exploring the themes of narcissism, ecopsychology, and death denial for this dissertation, it is tempting for me to believe that certain spiritual belief systems may be a driving force behind human destruction of the environment as well as death denial. Yet Piven's work raises questions. It makes sense when he says, "We must ask why one person instead of another finds select words so divinely mandated that he is ready to slaughter others" (2006, p. 233). (I would include nonhuman life in the category of "others"). Piven answers his own question this way: "Individuals are absorbed by aspects of their religion that ennoble and sanctify their own psychological needs" (p. 233), so we must keep returning our attention to psychological depths in addition to external causes.

Piven elaborates on his thoughts, reminding us that people "invent and reinvent beliefs, rework their shared realities to conform to their own wishes, create gods and the sacred to feel powerful, important, and defended against terror and death" (2006, p. 236). He reduces the sweep of human history to "shifting modes of death transcendence and immortality ideologies" (p. 236). Piven, like Lowen (1985) in my section on narcissism, suggests that an entire culture may be considered insane. He says, "Societies themselves manifest and are organized around certain psychotic fantasies and behaviors" (p. 240).

How does current Americanized culture organize itself around narcissistic fantasies which include denial of the reality of death? Piven tells us that "trampled narcissism is transcended by vengeance against persecutors" (2006, p. 245) which leads me once again to consider how the natural world may wound the narcissism of humans, reminding us of our, "inferiority, injury, insignificance, helplessness, [and] weakness" (p. 245), and inviting us to experience nature as persecutor and justifying our wanton destruction. Piven's work suggests to me that we are constantly creating systems of belief that allow us to maintain our desperate dreams of omnipotence and immortality, destroying anything that reminds us of the secret lie in the heart of our fantasy.

Local Seattle poet and psychoanalyst Jed Meyers offers these thoughts which seem relevant in his "Iris," from *Flowers of War* (2004, p. 26):

> Ready now, and resolute, the stems
> Foil the wind, uphold the bloom to be.
> To see these sentinels erect along the brick
> Border of my walkway plot this morning,
> Where they stand amid arrays of slanting swords,
> Recalls not just the fragile fine-veined variegated
> Purple petals of the still swaddled flowers
> To be unfurled so boldly, briefly, sadly,
> Before what clings curls down and involutes
> So soon in the wake of brave creation,
> But also calls to heart the human warning
> Of what's to come across the windy parapets
> In its own season to each cabal or nation –
> Reason, stem, and stanchion all collapse
> Into their roots, rivers, and foundations,
> Nourishing again Earth's fertile Hades,
> Stirring the next surge of bloom and battle,
> As warrior' blood still swirls in the Euphrates.

Flowers fade and die, animal bones bleach in the sun, ancient icebergs melt into oblivion. Human beings create artificial hearts, impermeable armor, mountainous monuments, irrefutable religions: "I can't die! I won't die! I will kill you if you question my beliefs!"

Turning towards a radically different take on these issues is Paul Shepard, in his provocatively titled book, *Coming Home to the Pleistocene* (1998). He explores the mental, physical, spiritual, and cultural transformations that have occurred in humans over the many thousands of years that have passed since we lived as foragers in the world (also known as hunter/gatherers), and he challenges us to consider the possibility that as modern humans we have regressed in our development as compared to our ancient ancestors. He asserts:

> Our idea of ourselves embedded in the context of the shibboleth of growth places us at odds with the notion of kinship with nature. When we grasp fully that the best expressions of our humanity were not invented by civilization but by cultures that preceded it, that the natural world is not only a set of constraints but of contexts within which we can more fully realize our dreams, we will be on the way to a long overdue reconciliation between opposites that are of our own making. (p. 6)

Shepard goes on to unravel much of what we think we already know about early humans, drawing upon anthropological and philosophical works that undermine deeply embedded assumptions about our ancestors as ignorant and brutish. He also strongly challenges our reliance on written history as reliable evidence about what is actually important in the story of humankind.

The aspects of his work that are most relevant to this study are his discussions of our human relationship with the natural world, including the human relationship with death. Shepard (1998) speaks in great detail about the participation of early humans with other species and the rest of the natural world in the practice of hunting for food. He explores the differences between humans as hunters in a world where they are just as likely to be prey as are the beings they are hunting, and humans in a world where they have gained significant control over plants and animals. He suggests that humans in that

earlier world had a sense of "play" or "the game" of the hunt in which "life goes on and nature provides the essential structure in a rule-regulated cosmos . . . [where] winning and losing are transient phenomena—some small part of the whole." (p. 91) He speaks of a love of one's opponents in the game and of how it would be unimaginable to consider an ultimate obliteration of those opponents.

Shepard compares this attitude of our ancestors with the modern human "need for complete victory, a final solution" (1998, p. 91). He comments on our "obsession with total supremacy, as though the objective were to obliterate all defeated foes, all pests, all disease, all opponents, all the Others. To end the game" (p. 91). Rather than positing some inherent, internal driving force that is leading us in this direction Shepard sees the settlement of humans around agricultural centers and all cultural development arising in connection with that effort towards control and centralization as the root of the problem. It was our discovery that we could at least partially separate ourselves from the ancient game of life and death, not some biological instinct, that fueled our increasing sense of separation from the rest of the world. And such separation now allows us to actively work towards, or resign ourselves to, an end to the world.

In a fascinatingly brief but profound tracing of the history of spiritual beliefs, Shepard tells us: "For hunter/gatherers the living metaphor of cosmic power is other species; for farmers it is the mother; for pastoralists, the father. For urban peoples it has become the machine" (1998, p. 97). He bemoans our modern machine mentality, and traces much of our modern misery to our acceptance of centralized living conditions and destructive belief systems, saying: "We face decrepitude of body and spirit caused by sedentism, the psychoses of overdense populations, failed ontogenies, and cosmologies

that yield havoc because they demand control over, rather than compliance with, the wild world" (p. 137). This theme of control over the wild world, which equates with the fantasy of control over and denial of death, emerges again and again in varying contexts.

We return to a psychodynamic perspective on these themes with Otto Rank (1930/1998), who also explored the roots of death denial in earlier human cultures that began to turn toward the concept of an immortal soul, separate from the physical body. He posits that rather than accepting themselves as part of the great round of living and dying, within which all being continued, humans began to insist that they did not really die. Rank sees in this "the birth of the soul" (p. 11), which arose from "a total denial of death and of loss of individuality" (p. 11). He calls this, "the naïve, narcissistic belief in the embodied soul that continues the physical self beyond sleep and death" (p. 20).

Rank (1930/1998) does discuss those early human cultures where all beings were perceived as ensouled in the sense of having a living spark connected with whatever greater life was seen as the source of all individual lives. But he notes the gradual drift towards a belief that only humans are ensouled, offering this controversial interpretation of Christianity: "From the esoteric meaning of totemism and matriarchy a direct path leads to Christianity, which consciously formulates totemism's animistic features in religious doctrines" (p. 21). He postulates religious beliefs such as (1) impregnation by a spirit, rather than a human; and (2) the dove as symbol of the soul (echoing the ancient idea of the 'soul-bird'), as proof of Christianity's connection with animism.

He brings his thoughts on death denial forward into modern culture by suggesting that now, "at the core of our inner life lies that problem of death and its denial through belief in an immortal material soul, the ego's double, that survives death" (1930/1998 p.

11). Rank even perceives the field of psychology as contributing to death denial, when in speaking of recent human history he says, "we find tenacious attempts to preserve belief in the soul's immortality in religious, social, and scientific institutions, all pitted against the combined evidence of sense, reason, and knowledge. Psychology is only the latest of these attempts" (p. 16). How does psychology contribute to death denial?

Rank views psychology as making its object of study "ideas created by soul-belief" (1930/1998, p. 125). Insisting again that "the soul may not exist, and like belief in immortality, may be mankind's greatest illusion" (p. 125), he acknowledges that consciousness itself may promote death denial when consciousness is experienced as that individual self-consciousness which "makes us feel immortal, despite our belief in the frail transience of the body" (p. 125). Rank offers this bit of compassion by telling us: "We make reality bearable through denial, displacement, and rationalization, not by recognizing psychological truth" (p. 123). So Rank seems to see it as inevitable that humans would deny the reality of death, yet some cultures seem to have found a way to neither deny it nor shrink in terror from it.

Shepard does not hold death denial, or destruction of the natural world because of it, as inevitable for Westernized culture. He holds out some hope for us, saying:

> We live with the possibility of a primal closure. All around us aspects of the modern world – diet, exercise, medicine, art, work, family, philosophy, economics, ecology, psychology – have begun a long circle back toward their former coherence. Whether they can arrive before the natural world is damaged beyond repair and madness destroys humanity we cannot tell. (1998, p. 170)

He offers this shred of hope because he is seeing everything from a radically different perspective from most of us. "We can go back to nature, [he says], because we never left it" (p. 170). I envy him his perspective. In truth, I only occasionally feel that way.

In discussing foundational ideas in the deep ecology movement, Bill Deval invites us to remember what many cultures still know: “There is no death that is not somebody’s food, no life that is not somebody’s death” (Deval & Sessions, 2007, p. 13). Most modern humans choose to deny our status as prey/food for other beings, as well as turning a blind eye to the lives of the beings that wind up packaged in the grocery store as our food. Deval informs us that the modern Eskimo still keep in mind that “all our food is souls” (p. 13), and we have heard prior evidence that some other tribal cultures still keep that in mind as well. He questions the many “otherworldly” beliefs in our world that “end up doing more damage to the planet (and human psyches) than the existential conditions they seek to transcend” (p. 13). How can we come to a state of being happy in “see[ing] ourselves too as an offering to the continuation of life” (p. 13)? Others before us have done it. Some still do.

John Seed and Joanna Macy have a suggestion. They invite us to “think to your next death. Will your flesh and bones back into the cycle. Surrender. Love the plump worms you will become. Launder your weary being through the fountain of life” (Seed, Macy, Fleming, & Naess, 2007, p. 43).

Chapter 3
Ecological Narcissism and the Denial of Death

We are afraid. I am afraid. Underneath the confident, manic façade of our Westernized industrialized culture lurks raw terror. And in our terror we are selfish. Ecological narcissism and fear of death (which masquerades as death denial) walk hand in hand, the anxious offspring of the widespread human belief in separation from the natural world. How and why did most of modern humanity come to believe in such a separation? Theories abound. I will refer to the two I find most plausible (Berman, 1981 & Shepard, 1998), keeping in mind that a complete exploration of those questions (how and why did human belief in a separation from nature occur in the first place?) is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

What does remain within my scope is how ecological narcissism and fear of death sprang up from the terrain of humans' perception of themselves as somehow apart from the rest of nature. I acknowledge that there are still a few isolated cultures that continue to perceive and experience themselves as intimately connected with the natural world, but they are the exception in a world dominated by a Westernized, industrialized paradigm.

I must also explain why I made the move from originally talking about denial of death in its relationship with ecological narcissism to now talking primarily about fear of death, which I have come to recognize as the foundation of denial. A description of an embodied experience may illuminate some of my own shadow around these issues before I move on to a more academic discussion.

I adjust the straps of my black daypack around my waist so it will sit more comfortably against my lower back. I'm carrying my usual quart-size bottle of water, a peanut-butter flavored Power Bar, some matches, an old Swiss Army knife, a plastic

compass, a silver space-blanket, a couple of tissues, some eye drops, lip gloss, my driver's license and medical insurance card. I'm only going for a 90-minute hike in Cougar Mountain Park on the outskirts of Issaquah, but I'm an old Girl Scout: "Be prepared!"

It's a cool fall day, perfect for a good long walk. I love this park with its well-marked meandering trails through the forested foothills of the Cascade Range. I know there are other people wandering these trails because I see their cars in the parking lot, so I don't feel completely isolated, but there are enough different routes to travel that I usually see only a few fellow hikers. I head out towards the grove of old cedars I love so much. They feel like a cathedral to me.

I smell the damp earth and greenish fragrance of old pines and firs and cedars (not Old Growth, but old). It rained earlier today and the trail is muddy and I slip a bit going up a short steep stretch. I decide to look for a good walking stick to help me coming back down later on. When I spot a likely candidate a few minutes later, and step off the trail to pull it out of the undergrowth it's tangled in, a squirrel above in the branches of a fir chatters at me sharply. I stop, charmed by the sight and sound of him. His tone suggests that he is probably more alarmed than charmed by me.

I head up the trail, breathing deeply, welcoming that familiar sense of renewed aliveness that fills me as I walk in the woods. I feel relaxed, safe, filled with raw delight at the sights and smells around me. I smile at the sound of my boots clunking over the logs of the rustic bridge that crosses the small stream just below me. I'm almost to my beloved cedar grove, where I plan to sit and meditate a while.

Wait. What's that ahead in the middle of the trail? A pile of blackish animal scat. It looks fresh. It's too big to be from something small like a raccoon, and it's not deer droppings. I know what those look like. I feel a twinge of fear in my stomach. I've seen the signs at the trailheads saying to watch for cougars and bears in the area but I've never actually encountered one. I've even seen the signs (with pictures on them!) telling what to do if you see a bear or cougar (don't run—make yourself look as big as possible—make noise), but I have never taken it too seriously. I mean, if I had really let myself think about the need to do those things, I'd be too scared to hike up here at all. Besides, I've been here a dozen times in various seasons and have never seen or heard anything (except those signs at the trailhead) that made me think a cougar or bear might be nearby, and I have never heard any of the other hikers mention seeing one, so I have just put it out of my mind.

I've been thinking about this place with a vague sense of ownership: one of *my* special places where I can come and enjoy my love of walking and my love of trees and feel a spiritual connection with nature. Now my heart is pounding. It's one thing to intellectually understand, in the recesses of my mind, that bears and cougars call this place home. It's another thing entirely to encounter immediate evidence of their presence. My body and brain are on the edge of panic. I'm telling myself to stop being silly—that I'm not in any danger—but now, when I look around me into the woods, I'm not seeing the beauty of the myriad shades of green. My eyes felt soft and open before. Now they feel sharply focused. Is that dark place over there a good hiding place for a bear? Do I hear something big moving in the bushes off to my right? I'm stopped in my tracks on the bridge, breathing shallowly and quickly. No matter what I say to myself with my rational

mind, I cannot convince myself to keep going up this trail. I cannot convince myself that they are more afraid of me than I am of them. All of my sense of warm and cozy spiritual connection with nature is gone, and in its place is raw fear, which I am not experiencing right now as a spiritual connection. (Later, I could reflect on what happened and recall that awe and fear can also be reactions to the numinous.)

For most of my adult life I have considered Cougar to be my totem animal. I had recurring dreams about Cougar as a child, and I have had multiple, meaningful dreams about Bear as an adult. But can I hold onto some sense that I might now have an opportunity to have meaningful communion with one of these magnificent mammals? Not on your life. That idea feels ridiculous. I want communion in the form of lovingly gazing into one another's eyes, not perusing each other with the hair standing up on the backs of our necks, trying to decide if the other is going to attack. Meditating in the enclosure of the cedar trees now seems irrelevant. Getting the hell out of here and back to the safety of the metal enclosure of my car has become imperative.

I rush back down the trail, not running, for fear I might attract a chase by a hungry predator, but walking as fast as I can. I keep telling myself how foolish I am being—but it does no good. I have my stick; could I use it as a weapon? If a cougar or bear came at me could I actually keep my wits about me to be able to stand up tall and open my coat to make myself look bigger, and then yell at them, rather than running away, screaming? I'm not at all sure.

As I come into the open area near the end of the trail by the parking lot I see three people who appear to be getting ready to head out for a hike. I feel an immense sense of relief flood through my body and mind. I'm safe. There are other people here. My car is

within sight. Then I overhear the man telling the two middle-aged women, “I just came down from a hike up on the south side of the park and some people who were leaving told me they spotted a bear up there about an hour ago. You might want to stay out of the woods right now, or take some bear spray with you.”

My heart is back in my throat. No one had been at the trailhead to warn me when I headed out. What if I had run into that bear? What if it had attacked me? I suddenly have an urgent need to pee, and rush over to the women’s outhouse at the trailhead. I barely manage to make it without wetting myself, and then head to the safe haven of my car. The sound of the car door shutting is sweet.

I never actually saw a bear or cougar on that trail, just a pile of unknown animal scat. But the idea that there might really be a bear or cougar within range of direct contact with me scared me so badly that I could hardly think straight to get back down the trail, and the fact that it turned out there genuinely was a bear in the vicinity of where I had been hiking caused me to nearly pee my pants in fear. I went up the trail in a state of denial and ecological narcissism: This forest exists for my use and enjoyment; those warning signs and my daypack full of emergency supplies are ridiculous forms of over-preparedness because nothing bad could happen to me out here; Bear and Cougar are my friends; the idea that I could be prey is intolerable so I will not think about it.

I came out of the park that day confronted with the existential terror that lurked beneath my denial and narcissism: (1) I am woefully unprepared to deal with the realities of life beyond the confines of the human created world; (2) there are animals in this place that could harm me or kill me, perhaps because they are hungry, or perhaps because I’m invading their home and they are protecting their young, or have nowhere else to go

because we humans have left them nowhere else to go; (3) this place doesn't exist just for human enjoyment—it has its own reasons for existence—and humans may be part of that but they certainly aren't the most important part; and finally, (4) I'm a fool to imagine for one second that Cougar and Bear are just images to fuel my personal growth. They are living beings with their own needs, and those needs could potentially include literally chewing me out for invading their space: eating me for lunch. That was over six years ago. I have never been back to that park.

Since childhood I've considered myself a nature lover. I say I love animals, I love trees, I love streams, I love fields, I love rodents, and I even love most creepy-crawly things like bugs and snakes. I contribute to multiple organizations whose goal it is to save animals and the planet from human destruction. I am writing a dissertation on our relationship with the natural world out of my heartfelt response to my encounters with a particular tree and a particular embodied expression of the Earth.

And yet, in that forest, on that day, when I felt overwhelmed with fear about the possibility of becoming prey for a hungry bear or cougar, I would have welcomed Charlton Heston with all the rifles he could carry, or Arnold Schwarzenegger as The Terminator with a flame-thrower. In the face of my own raw fear of death (not Death, that fascinating abstract—but death, as in having my throat torn out by a large hungry mammal with sharp teeth), all my usual concern about making sure the big predatory mammals have plenty of room to roam was a faint echo in my brain. It was so distant from my experience that it never even flashed into my consciousness until I was back in the safety of my car. Then I could begin to entertain the thought: "Poor bear. He's probably scared to death by all the people tromping around in his territory."

While I was out there with bear, all I could think was: "It's him or me," and fight, flight, or freeze seemed the only options. I chose flight, but if it had come down to fight, I would have done my best to kill or wound him to save my own life (or perhaps I would have just frozen in fear). My friend Bear had become the enemy. And lest I get caught in feeling guilty about that shift in perception—naively holding onto a kind of peaceful paradise fantasy—Dr. Perluss reminds me that, "You trusted your instincts, your own nature, and that ended up protecting you from harm. In other words, by returning to safety, you actually behaved quite naturally" (personal communication, July 2013).

We can talk all we want about me withdrawing and owning my projections of life-threatening monster from Bear. We can talk about who is really the life-threatening monster in the big picture, Bear or Human. None of that changes the fact that in a specific encounter between a bear and me, it is possible my life could be threatened, and if I was trying to fend off a bear's claws and teeth I simply can't imagine experiencing him as anything other than a monster. Perluss also declares: "It is vital to have this experience of being possible prey to remind ourselves just how little control we do have over life and death [and] it is also this fear that has led to environmental destruction" (personal communication, July 2013).

My point in all this? I believe I am a prime example of the contradictory stew of feelings, beliefs, hopes, and fears about our relationship with nature that slosh around inside most modern humans, even those of us who have had moments of recognizing our inherent membership in nature, and moments of recognizing that nature actually encompasses everything that exists. It's like this: One moment I might experience the forest as my private sanctuary for the renewal of my physical and spiritual well-being and

I'm not thinking about what's best for the forest or its inhabitants; the next moment I might experience the forest as an expression of the Ground of Being of which I am only a small part, and I'd gladly sacrifice my comfort and well-being, and perhaps even my life, to help sustain the life of the forest; and in the next moment I might experience the forest as a terrifying place full of dangers that I'd like to eliminate so I can feel comfortable and safe again.

Narcissism, denial, identification, projection, love, fear, communion, separation: It's all there. And it's all part of nature, but I continually have to remind myself of that because my mind continually falls into the habit of splitting nature and human apart from one another. Jung (1975b) suggests that it is the ego that wants to push nature away, even though ego arises as an aspect of the natural functioning of psyche. Why would our ego want to push nature away? Jung tells us: "Since Nature contains everything it also contains the unknown. It is beyond truth and error, independent of the interference of consciousness, and therefore often completely at odds with the intentions and attitudes of the ego" (p. 540).

For over sixty years I have conceived of nature as something separate from me, and my culture has supported me in that conception. Even the aspect of nature our culture does claim as part of us—human nature—has been something to overcome or rid ourselves of, according to many modern spiritual traditions. The good news is that most psychological traditions at least encourage us to recognize and honor what we call human nature, but the bad news is that these same psychological traditions (with the exception of some folks in the field of ecopsychology) still support a narrow view of self that keeps us separate from the ground of being from which we, and everything else, arises. Before I

experienced all that this dissertation has brought into my life, I would have named that ground of being spirit. Now I call it nature. Nature, spirit, me, you: no separation in the deepest sense, and yet we often feel and perceive a separation. It is a mysterious dance I will speak more about later.

Let's talk about denial. Psychoanalyst Nancy McWilliams (1994) offers us a lucid description of this psychological defense. She talks about the human infant who handles frightening, overwhelming experiences by simply refusing to acknowledge that they are happening, and reminds us that we all carry vestiges of infancy within us. She speaks of denial as "an archaic process rooted in the child's egocentrism" (p. 101).

Narcissism, as we will recall, is the infant's inversion of her energy and attention back upon her own ego/self (egocentrism) when she is either unable to find adequate sources of support or connection in her external environment, or is severely traumatized. So denial is a fear response that comes when we experience something emotionally unbearable or psychically overwhelming, and it is rooted in narcissism. In fact, Symington (1993) suggests that narcissism is, itself, a kind of denial. He declares:

> One of the ways of managing trauma, a sudden onrush of stimulation, is the narcissistic option. To distance himself from what is happening, the person enters the narcissistic way of being. In a grandiose state, he or she is able to push away those things that are painful, is able to dispel parts of himself into others, and lives anaesthetized against whatever the painful thing may be. (p. 74)

This supports my shift from talking primarily about death denial to talking more about fear of death, which I now see as having a more direct relationship with ecological narcissism. Denial is one step removed. Fear is the primary emotion fueling both denial and narcissism.

McWilliams applies her psychodynamic understanding of character structure to clinical treatment of patients, connecting defensive strategies with specific personality

types. She links denial with manic personality in this way: “In a manic state, people may deny to an astonishing degree their physical limitations, their need for sleep . . . even their mortality” (1994, p. 102). We have already heard significant evidence that Westernized culture is essentially manic as well as narcissistic (Becker, 1973; Hillman, 1982; Lowen, 1985; Piven, 2003; Symington, 2002; Wachtel, 1989), so we now have a fundamental depth psychological understanding of why Westernized culture may be inclined to employ denial of death (as well as denial of other kinds of limitation) as a major defense against reality.

McWilliams does propose that denial can be a useful defense in the event of a crisis, stating, “The capacity to deny emotionally that one’s survival is at risk can be lifesaving: One can take the most realistically effective and even heroic actions using denial” (1994, p. 102). When I heard this I immediately questioned whether death denial by Westernized cultures, including denial of the extent of our damage to world ecosystems (which threatens our survival), is actually helping us take realistic actions. I suppose that if overwhelming despair at the state of the world were to cause people who are working to support healthy ecosystems to give up, then some denial of the severity of the problem might be a useful psychic defense. But the larger pattern of death denial which began thousands of years ago was not a response to a crisis. It was a long, slow shift in human belief which grew out of a larger shift: the shift from perceiving humans as inherently part of the natural world (which includes the cycles of organic life and death) to perceiving them as apart from it.

I want to circle back now to my statement that ecological narcissism and fear of death are a consequence of our belief in disconnection from nature. When I began the

intellectual and experiential journey of this dissertation, I was operating from the premise that denial of death was probably a causative factor in ecological narcissism. It has come as quite a surprise to me to conclude that my premise was wrong and that denial of death is actually more a sibling to ecological narcissism, and that both arise from another, deeper layer of the puzzle. Hillman (1982) was the first to shake my conceptions. As I noted in my introduction, he wrote about the idea that we are left with a narcissistic hunger which seeks to fill itself through display, control, and destruction *because* we ignore the living soul of the world around us which could fill that emptiness.

Hillman places our disconnection from an experience of the world ensouled at the feet of an "external, non-subjective view of the world" (1982, p. 73). He holds Descartes and Aquinas, among others, responsible for supporting such a worldview. I eventually discovered Morris Berman's (1981) book on the evolution of Cartesian thought, and it affirms Hillman's point of view. I will expand on Berman's thoughts shortly, but Hillman was the first to bring these ideas to my attention, so I don't want to leave him just yet.

In a powerful and poetic passage Hillman speaks of the kind of psychological theories arising from "the Scholastics, Cartesians, and British Empiricists" (1982, p. 80) saying:

> Their notions abetted the murder of the world's soul by cutting apart the heart's natural activity into sensing facts on one side and intuiting fantasies on the other, leaving us images without bodies and bodies without images, an immaterial subjective imagination severed from an extended world of dead objective facts. (pp. 80-81)

We are left with a sense of being alone inside our own interior world in a dead external world, and we crave attention, power, anything to fill up that void left by an unspeakable murder that few of us now want to turn and face because we have unwittingly become

accomplices to it. To make such a turn, back towards the world's soul, is to risk upheaval in our relationships, career, lifestyle, spiritual beliefs, and identity.

Think, for a moment, what it would mean to most of us to seriously question what Snyder (1990) calls "the values of western civilization . . . the ideology of individualism, of human uniqueness, special human dignity, the boundless potential of Man, and the glory of success" (p. 68). For example, how would friends and co-workers respond if we walked away from a highly lucrative career that we came to see as destructive to the environment? What if we turned aside from a lifelong religious affiliation shared by our extended family, deciding that the belief system contributed to an inflated view of humanity? And could we tolerate knowing ourselves as no more important than (but just as important as) a dolphin or a dung beetle? (Perluss points out that "the problem is not really an overvaluing of the human, but rather a devaluing of all else" [personal communication, July 2013]).

As I face these questions more and more deeply through the process of this dissertation, I am shaken by tremors in my perception and experience of the world and myself. Though I welcome most of the tremors, others are so disorienting that I have brief moments of wishing I'd never begun this journey. However, I'm aware there is no going back. It is like the experience of the well-known psychological perception test where the person being tested is presented with a black and white line drawing that can be seen as either a vase or an old woman's face (in profile). Most people start out by seeing one image or the other, but once prompted, can see the alternative image. Once seen, the alternative image cannot be unseen.

In the following passage Abram (2010) beautifully describes a shift in awareness I have now experienced, so I know others are familiar with this perceptual territory:

> The body is a portable place wandering through the larger valleys and plains of the earth, open to the same currents, the same waters and winds that cascade across those wider spaces. It is hardly a closed and determinate entity, but rather a sensitive threshold through which the world experiences itself, a traveling doorway through which sundry aspects of the earth are always flowing. Sometimes the world's textures move across this threshold unchanged. Sometimes they are transformed by the passage. And sometimes they reshape the doorway itself. (p. 230)

Direct experiencing of this alternative to the typical Westernized worldview with its dualism and individualism has altered my life, and though much of the time I still fall into old habits of perceiving myself as separate, a moment's reflection brings me back to the awareness that I am inherently part of the larger world—just one doorway in it. A simple experiment could provide many of us with an experience of what Abram is pointing toward.

If you'd like, you can try this. Go outdoors—anywhere you can reasonably expect to spend several minutes uninterrupted by your phone or other people. Stand or sit comfortably and take a few, slow deep breaths. Now allow yourself to become aware of the sounds or the silences in the world around you. This will probably initially be felt via your ears. Now allow your attention to sink into the center of your body, around your abdomen and chest. What do you notice there in response to the sounds or silences? Perhaps you become aware of a tightness or a softening or a fluttering (or any other felt sense) that is a bodily response in your core to the experience of what is coming to you from the world. You may be surprised that it is not just your ears registering the aural landscape. What do you make of it that your body is responding in this way?

Perhaps your body is paying attention in a manner that hadn't occurred to you. Perhaps the boundaries between your body and the world are more fluid than you imagined. Jung, in describing the many facets of psyche, describes it as "a phenomenon occurring in living bodies . . . a quality of matter, just as our body consists of matter . . . [and] this matter has another aspect, namely, a psychic aspect. It is simply the world seen from within" (1977, p. 303).

You could try the experiment I've just described for experiencing the world from inside yourself in relation to any aspect of the world—sights, sounds, smells, sensations, including aspects of what most of us think of as nature, as well as aspects of the human created world. Of course you can also do this process in relationship to your own emotional, mental, and sensory states. If you would like more information on the process of accessing felt senses, explore *Focusing* (Gendlin, 1981).

Returning to Abram's thoughts about the body as a sensitive threshold, Perluss notes that what Abram is describing (and, I would add, Gendlin) is also known as phenomenology, a "sensual experiencing through the body . . . which is another way of listening beyond our egos" (personal communication, July 2013). Roger Brooke speaks of phenomenology as a way of describing our experience, not in distanced theoretical assumptions, but in nuanced felt reality (1991, *Jung and Phenomenology*). He declares: "To describe is to return repeatedly to the phenomenon itself so that it may show itself in ever deeper, richer, and more subtle ways. This repetitive return is the disciplined and self-critical hermeneutic circle" (p. 31).

Shepard (1998) traces our modern perception of split from the natural world—away from more attention to direct felt experience towards more attention to abstracted

beliefs elevating us above the world—to the roots of Greek and Hebrew civilizations. He sees those roots in the shift from hunter/gatherer societies to settled, agrarian societies, saying, "Between about twelve and eight thousand years ago this transformation in human culture took place in the eastern Mediterranean and Near East" (p. 81). Shepard describes the change from small, roving groups of hunter/gatherer humans to agricultural settlements with domesticated animals as the beginning of ecological destruction, dualistic perception of the world, and spiritual beliefs separating humans from nature.

He details the transformation in this way:

> The game of comity of life and death, which the hunter/gatherers entered in the great savannas, accepting the nature of nature, was altered by agrarian thought: from a core process of chance to one of manipulation, from reading one's state of grace in terms of the success of the hunt to bartering for it, from finding to making, from sacrament received to negotiations with humanlike deities. The transformation took place slowly and for various reasons, but the result was to concentrate populations in certain areas and make them dependent on the products of domestication. (1998, p. 81)

Shepard attributes many of the ills of our world today to that ancient shift in how humans organized themselves on the face of the earth to maintain their food supplies: alienation, centralization of power, domination of the many by the few, constant sense of time pressure, belief in endless progress, denial of death, radical alternations between plenty and scarcity, and perception of the earth as nothing but a set of resources for human control and consumption.

In trying to understand what myth or fantasy is preoccupying Shepard while he talks about the benefits of the human hunter/gatherer past, and the detriments of the human present with developed agriculture, industry, and technology, I was initially inclined to say that he is longing for a return to Eden—an imagined realm of peace and plenty and sense of kinship with all that is—where we could let go our desperate attempts

to control the world and rest in the arms of the Great Mother. That is certainly the fantasy that occupies me when I follow some of his ideas back to what I imagine to be an ancient past of psychic and physical embeddedness in a world alive with meaning.

But I had to acknowledge that as *my* fantasy, not Shepard's, when I re-read some of his material and found references to hunter/gatherer peoples as both "profoundly religious, creative, socially and politically astute, and ecologically knowledgeable" (1998, p. 3) and also "subject to individual human frailty and to aggression, lying, stealing, and cheating" (p. 3). Clearly, he is not imagining a simple paradise, as I have been, but a complex world of misery as well as joy.

I decided I would have to look more deeply to attempt to understand where Shepard is coming from psychologically as he challenges us to rethink our modern stance that the human present is inherently better than the past. I noticed that, in particular, Shepard points to the development of written history in Hebrew and Greek culture as signaling the end of "prehistory, which is by far the greater period of time that humans have been on earth" (1998, p. 8). Why does he suggest that we should care that prehistory became history? Shepard makes a compelling argument, describing written history as "a way of perceiving human existence that opposes and destroys its predecessor, the mythic world, which sees time as a continuous return and space as sacred, where all life is autochthonous" (p. 9).

Shepard posits that alienation became the touchstone of human experience with the emergence of Greek and Hebrew civilizations with their emphasis on written history. Again we may ask: why would a written, rather than oral, history create a sense of alienation? Shepard suggests that oral history, passed on through a story-telling which is

constantly subtly evolving, involved "mythical consciousness with rituals of eternal return, mimetic conveyance of values and ideas, the central metaphor of nature as culture, and most of all, the incorporation of the past into the present" (1998, p. 8). On the other hand, written history, as introduced by the Greeks and Hebrews, involved a "dichotomy that divides experience into good and evil, eternal and temporal" (p. 8), and it declared that everything in life is "novel, uncertain, tangential, and contingent, rather than embedded and structured . . . [a] linear sequence of ever-new events, where nothing was repeated and to which nothing returned" (p. 9).

Shepard goes on to tell us that the Greeks and Hebrews eventually "understood themselves as outside the nature-centered belief systems of other peoples, whose cosmologies linked past, present, and future in stories and art with eternal cycles and sacred places" (1998, p. 9). They came to perceive themselves as standing alone, outside, and eventually their traditions of thought and perception came to dominate most of Westernized culture. How different from earlier cultures for whom being alone was impossible since all things were alive and sentient; for whom being outside was impossible because all things dwelt within a meaningful cosmos.

In this tale about how humans in a specific area of the earth threw off millions of years of belief and practice for something new that has radically altered much of human culture, Shepard points most strongly to "the Hebrews, who initiated the move away from the earth and toward the historical view, [and] did not try to reconcile opposing beliefs. Nor did they have a sense of place" (1998, p. 8). However, Dr. Nelson reminds us that we must be careful about laying so much blame on the Hebrew people, who did not choose

to have no sense of place: they were driven from their homes and did their best to adapt to a longstanding homelessness (personal communication, May 2013).

Shepard connects the Hebrews' identity as a homeless people with their creation of "the myth of a single god who, outside the world, reached into his creation, willfully deranging its rhythms, acting arbitrarily, making life a kind of novel" (1998, p. 9). Such a myth eerily echoes their experience of having their prior lives in Egypt willfully and arbitrarily deranged by a powerful external force (the Egyptian rulers). In connection with this, Perluss reminds me that "Hillman points to monotheism as a major problem in the western psyche and largely responsible for our capacity to destroy the environment," going on to add that "from monotheism emerges the notion of heaven and everlasting life (thus, the denial of death)" (personal communication, July 2013). So the myths we make about our lives emerge from we live upon the earth, and the way we live upon the earth emerges from the myths we make about our lives, in a never-ending circle. May we weave new myths that will support all of life as we find new ways to live upon this earth.

Although Shepard accuses Hebrew culture of the development of beliefs that most clearly damaged humans' perceptions of themselves as inherently part of a meaningful whole in the natural world, he believes that the Greeks facilitated the process by, "distancing themselves from sacred immanence in the natural order through further development of the 'reflective consciousness'" (1998, p. 10). Then, along came Christianity, which "further emphasized the distinction between the word of a patriarchal god and all myths of an earth mother – thereby separating themselves even more from the numinous earth and its processes" (p. 10). The cradle of Western civilization became the casket of human belief in an ensouled world.

Shepard's criticism of the tradition of written history is sharp and fascinating, and again makes me wonder about what fantasy grabs him as he posits the benefits of the earlier tradition of oral history. Although he sees oral history as rooted in an embodied experience of life and the world that allows for mythic presence and eternal return, he blasts written history, saying:

> History is not a neutral documentation of things that happened but an active, psychological force that separates humankind from the rest of nature because of its disregard for the deep connections to the past. It is a kind of intellectual cannibalism which creates from those different from us a target group that becomes the enemy, upon whom we project our unacknowledged fears and insecurities. . . . History declares independence from origins and from 'nature,' which is outside the human domain except as materials and the subject of science. (1998, pp. 14-15)

Oral history, then, which Shepard clearly sees as a more valuable and accurate kind of representation of life, would be an active, psychological force that connects humankind with the rest of nature, regarding the past as an important part of the present.

How, exactly, does oral history accomplish this? Perluss puts it this way: "Oral tradition is not just about retelling the past but about the *way* the story continues. Written history doesn't entail continual co-creation. It is stagnant. Stories passed on orally are continually evolving. Thus, we become co-creators" (personal communication, July 2013). This implies that earlier cultures with oral traditions experienced the universe not as we do—as witnesses to a world apart from ourselves—but as inherently part of the unfolding drama. And how much easier it is for us to thoughtlessly destroy that which we experience as separate.

However, Perluss also reminds us that writing per se is not inherently a problem, but rather how we write (personal communication, July 2013). Abram continues this line of thought, saying:

> For those of us who care for an earth not encompassed by machines, a world of textures, tastes, and sounds other than those that we have engineered, there can be no question of simply abandoning literacy, of turning away from all writing. Our task, rather, is that of *taking up* the written word, with all of its potency, and patiently, carefully, writing language back into the land. Our craft is that of releasing the budded, earthly intelligence of our words, freeing them to respond to the speech of the things themselves—to the green uttering-forth of leaves from the spring branches. (1997, p. 273)

We could certainly say that much poetry and some literature responds to the speech of the things themselves, whereas many writings of science and social science have contributed to our sense of a world ripped apart into subject and object. So we can't just throw all writing into the trashcan as a human experiment gone bad, but must seek ways to entice the so-called objective voice of academic writing back into the pulsating, aromatic, erotic life of the world.

I have continued to try to ferret out an answer to the question of what myth has grabbed Shepard as he hacks away at the value of written history and asks us to consider the possibility that hunter/gatherers lived a life richer than ours: bursting at the seams with numinous meaning. The myth that everything is alive in some way and that time and life are cyclic is connected with the myth of anima mundi—the world ensouled—which Hillman reminds us offers world as "psychic reality" (1982, p. 77). It certainly appears that Shepard is inviting us into what Hillman calls "a restoration of soul to world [which] means knowing things in that further sense of *notitia*: intimate intercourse, carnal knowledge" (p. 86). So perhaps Shepard is speaking to us with the voice of anima mundi, suggesting that written history tends to kill psychic reality, which is subjective and imaginal in nature, trying to turn it instead to a literalized, objective reality, devoid of intimate intercourse.

This generates interesting questions. What can we believe from the writings of the social sciences about the realities of the lives of humans in ancient cultures? Have our academic traditions of history and anthropology been inherently distorting the nature of those cultural realities? Clearly, Shepard is telling us in writing that he believes he has a grasp on the fundamental nature of certain realities in the lives of ancient peoples, while he is also cautioning us about the ability of writing to convey lived experience. This brings us right back to Abram's, Hillman's, and Perluss's comments about the necessity for attention to the quality and perspective of the writing.

Considering all of this, I am coming to the conclusion that we cannot truly comprehend, via the written word, what it means for those earlier peoples to have experienced an ensouled world as it is described by Shepard, Hillman, Berman, or any of the other authors I have referred to in this dissertation. We can only take their words as pointers to some reality that must be directly experienced. Poetry is sometimes an excellent pointer, as Oliver reminds us in "Rice" (2004, p. 32).

> It grew in the black mud.
> It grew under the tiger's orange paws.
> Its stems thinner than candles, and as straight.
> Its leaves like the feathers of egrets, but green.
> The grains cresting, wanting to burst.
> Oh, blood of the tiger.
>
> I don't want you just to sit down at the table.
> I don't want you just to eat, and be content.
> I want you to walk out into the fields
> where the water is shining, and the rice has risen.
> I want you to stand there, far from the white tablecloth.
> I want you to fill your hands with the mud, like a blessing.

We must ultimately set down our books (and our forks), open up our doors, and go out into the more-than-human world, allowing our habituated perceptions to drop

away, at least for a moment. Then we might catch a glimpse of a stunningly alive and mysterious world; a luminous fabric of being in which we are one meaningful strand. I will expand on these thoughts at length in Chapter 5 when I discuss how we might mitigate against ecological narcissism and fear of death. For now I will return to the discussion of how ecological narcissism and fear of death have arisen out of our belief in human separation from nature.

Shepard (1998) specifically points toward ecological narcissism (although he doesn't use that phrase) when he discusses his understanding of human development in the spheres of psychology and mental representation. He states that such development follows a basic pattern that arose in ancient hominids and continues now, with some unfortunate deviations related to modern culture.

For example, Shepard speaks of neurobiological states of mental representation in humans, noting the enactive (primarily sensory); the iconic (using signs, which bear some resemblance to what is being represented, including spoken language); and the symbolic (using written word and imagery to refer to a meaning which must be learned because it bears no resemblance to what it stands for). He suggests that in the realm of development of iconic representation, humans used to include a rich and extended set of references to the natural world because we grew up in constant contact with that world. Now, he believes, "The absence of a functional iconic basis in nature impairs our sense of the diversity of life or the implications of terrain, earth, and its life" (1998, p. 27). If we can no longer remember and recreate through the vehicle of our own embodiment the howl of wolf in the woods, and his fiercely attentive stalking of prey, relying instead on machines

(CDs, DVDs, I-Pods) to do it for us, we have forgotten the language of our brother and then it becomes only too easy to see him as alien and disposable.

In addition, Shepard perceives modern Westernized culture as contributing to the stunting of human psychological maturity, echoing the thoughts we heard from Foster and Little, (1998). He comments:

> That modern psychology has taken the wrong track is reflected in the popular narcissism of the self and study of the personality as though adolescent self-absorption were normal in the context of the hubris and hedonism of our affluent society. Modern psychology, including "eco-psychology" and "environmental psychology," tends to portray the self in terms of individual choices about beliefs, possessions, and affiliations rather than defining the self in terms of harmonious relations to others—including other species—and in terms of the ecological health of the planet. (1998, p. 27)

This sounds to me like a perfect description of what I am calling ecological narcissism, and Shepard lays these developmental deficits at the feet of the early Greek and Hebrew cultures with their adoption of an agrarian way of life and a written history.

Shepard also posits that death denial emerged from the agrarian way of life. In another brilliant compression of incredibly complex ideas into an astonishingly simple sentence, he declares, "Agriculture lent itself to imagining gods in the image of humankind who controlled humans as they controlled domesticated nature and as men controlled women" (1998, p. 96). Shepard suggests that prior to agriculture, hunters and gatherers perceived "signs of a gifting cosmos, a realm of numerous alternatives and generous subsistence, not so much to be controlled by humans as to be understood and affirmed and joined" (p. 60). Rather than gods in the image of humans, people revered "animals and plants [which] are regarded as centers, metaphors, and mentors" (p. 60).

With the advent of agriculture, Shepard suggests that initially "the idealized image of the fecund female was projected onto nature and centered the ego on controlling

nature in the form of a governing deity" (1998, p. 63). Why idealized female? Shepard offers the explanation that goddess images came to represent "the numinousness of the world through the eyes of a regressive, immature society that had lost the vision of themselves as counterplayers in a vast cosmos of other species" (p. 64). Now, rather than ranging across the land, seeking the freely given (and taken away) gifts of the cosmos, most humans "had become instead the caretakers of seeds and livestock much as they themselves had been nurtured by their mothers" (p. 64).

So these gods that humans came to imagine in their own image became more and more divorced from immanence in the natural world as humans became more and more divorced from a sense of connection with the natural world in their efforts to control it to their own benefit. Eventually humans came to believe in a masculinized form of "the Incarnation, the embodiment of God. . . . Yet death has been constantly revised into the form of 'everlasting life' in order to . . . deny the corruption of the organic body that is part of the natural processes upon earth" (Shepard, 1998, p. 97). As belief in immanence of the sacred in the embodied world, where the archetypal feminine honored the cycles of death and rebirth, turned into a belief in transcendence of the sacred from the embodied world, where the archetypal masculine sought to supplant the feminine, death itself became a punishment to be avoided by denial of its very existence.

Shepard examines the shift from a hunter/gatherer's perception of death as part of a natural cycle (which includes humans as prey, hunted by other creatures, not just as hunters of prey) to our modern fear and denial of death. He sees within that shift a connection with the narcissistic preoccupations of modern culture and asserts:

> People who deal with natural death daily and directly do not deny and hide it; nor are they likely to become coarsened by it unless it becomes commercialized. The

> interdependence of life, however, is likely to be obscure to those who turn the killing of food animals over to specialists who practice in secret. Those who fear death become politically and socially conservative and less tolerant of other species, other creeds, and any deviation from their own mode of life. (1998, p. 98)

He seems to be suggesting here that fear and denial of death *causes* reduced tolerance to otherness and greater narcissistic preoccupation. I have become reluctant to make that leap, given everything I have studied and experienced on this topic. I believe that ecological narcissism and denial of death are related as siblings are related in emergence from the same womb: that womb being the belief in separation from nature. Ecological narcissism and death denial do not cause it, nor do they cause each other.

Morris Berman (1981) emphasizes a different set of causative factors from Shepard when he seeks to explain how most modern humans have come to the view mind and body, earth and soul, as split apart from each other. He notes in the introduction to his book, *The Reenchantment of the World*, that he tried in an earlier work to find the causes for this splitting in social and economic forces, but came to the conclusion that they did not provide sufficient explanation. He turned toward the realm of human meaning-making, coming to believe that it was useful to focus directly on the changes in human beliefs about the meaning of self and world wrought by the Scientific Revolution.

Berman does acknowledge a connection between the emergence of the scientific paradigm in human meaning-making and the emergence of an industrial/capitalistic mode of economic activity in the Middle Ages, so he does not entirely separate the generation of meaning from social and economic forces. He is also careful to note:

> This is not to treat mind, or consciousness, as an independent entity, cut off from material life; I hardly believe such is the case. For the purposes of discussion, however, it is often necessary to separate these two aspects of human experience; and although I shall make every effort to demonstrate their interpenetration, my primary focus in this book is the transformations of the human mind. (1981, p. 16)

So, rather than taking us back into the world of our Pleistocene ancestors as Shepard did, Berman takes us back into the world of 16th and 17th century Europe where he believes mind and body became more explicitly separated.

It is important to keep in mind that Berman (1981) also acknowledges that the changes in meaning brought by the Scientific Revolution hark back to foundational ideas from the ancient Greeks. In this way his thought connects with Shepard's (1998). (We will recall how Shepard noted that the ancient Greeks participated in the transformation from a hunter/gatherer society to settled agrarian society, thereby becoming more susceptible to beliefs separating humans from nature.) Berman traces Cartesian dualistic thinking back to Plato's and Aristotle's ideas about the nature of human knowledge. He reminds us that Plato advocated for a pure reason, divorced from sensory data (which we now call rationalism), whereas Aristotle advocated generalization from sensory data (which we now call empiricism).

However, Berman gives Plato and Aristotle credit for believing that "things were never 'just what they were,' but always embodied a non-material principle that was seen as the essence of their reality" (1981, p. 28). He sees the idea of a non-material principle as a continuation of some form of belief (however altered) in an ensouled world that was later abandoned by most people who embraced rationalism or empiricism during the Scientific Revolution. The Greeks continued to be concerned with the "why" of things, not just the "how." In our current era, declares Berman, '"How' became increasingly important, 'why' increasingly irrelevant. In the twentieth century, as we shall see, 'how' has become our 'why'" (p. 28).

This shows up clearly in the modern field of psychiatry, where the how of neurochemical processing in the brain has become the why of human states of mind. No longer do most psychiatrists help clients seek the meaning of their depressions or anxieties in the realm of beliefs about, and experiences of, family, world, or inner self. Instead, the chemistry of the client's brain is seen as faulty, and in need of some tweaking with a little boost of serotonin or a little less norepinephrine, as if the human mind were nothing but an engine in need of an oil change and a better grade of gas to run just right.

I am mindful of Hillman's (1982) warning that we should be attending to the "what" and "where" and "who" of things, rather than to the "why" and "how" (p. 84). He sees attention to questions of why and how as inevitably taking us away from the animated presence of the world in the moment of encounter. Berman clearly agrees that we need less attention to how, but sees attention to why (meaning) as foundational to human experience. He advocates such attention as a way to change our beliefs about meaning (our whys) to take us back into direct relationship with nature.

I am not prepared to declare Hillman or Berman right or wrong about the value of attending to why. I can see the importance of immersing our attention in what and who and where (this cat right here on my kitchen rug, with his variegated fur of black and gray and brown, no tail, gray eyes, soft little meow, rubbing the side of his face against my hand). I can feel the magic of just being present with him in this shared aliveness of fur against skin, mutually appreciative murmurs crossing the language barrier. I can also feel the pull of the why luring me beyond the animated immediacy of the encounter towards a more mental/emotional/spiritual experience of the encounter. (What does it mean that kitty and I are sharing this moment?) But in this case that doesn't necessarily feel like a

separation, but more of an enlargement of my awareness to include those other elements. Couldn't it be possible to have attention to the who, what, where, and also attention to the why? If we were then to include attention to the how, we would have the whole world woven back together again, wouldn't we? Isn't that the whole problem—that some of us now say the how is the only thing that matters, while some of us say it's the why, and others of us say it's the who or what?

The whole wondrous (and terrifying) universe of trees and music and quarks and dreams and rockets and fears and goddesses and mud and gravity and beliefs and striped kitty-cats lies around us and within us and we are fighting about which piece of it we ought to pay attention to! For now, I will continue with my exploration of Berman's ideas because he has some thoughts on what led us to the great split between how and why, substance and meaning, that haunts us to this day. I believe that in the end there is nothing but direct experience of the unity of the whats, hows, and whys that will mend the rifts, but this dissertation is an exercise in the presentation of words that point to concepts that point to experiences, so I will move forward in the presentation of words and concepts.

Berman suggests that "the view of nature which predominated in the West down to the eve of the Scientific Revolution was that of an enchanted world . . . and human beings felt at home in this environment" (1981, p. 16). He acknowledges that the Greeks and Hebrews had begun the process of belief in separation from nature, but suggests that this process did not reach its culmination until the era of the Scientific Revolution. He sees evidence of continuing elements of belief in an ensouled world up through the Middle Ages, when nature was still perceived as alive, not dead; when the earth was seen

as held within a series of containing spheres, the outermost of which was God; when time was still perceived as cyclic, not linear; when all things still had meaning. To be sure, the beliefs of most people in Europe and the Near East in the Middle Ages were not the same as their ancestors who saw god(s) in the world, not outside of it. But the world had not yet become the dead, mechanistic, meaningless place it became in many people's minds with the dawn of science.

Berman tells us that prior to the 17th century, '"What do I know?' and 'How should I live?' are in fact the same question" (1981, p. 51), and they are the same question because of an underlying assumption of immanent meaning in the universe. With the advent of the scientific frame of reference, "things do not possess purpose, which is an anthropocentric notion, but only behavior, which can (and must) be described in an atomistic, mechanical, and quantitative way" (p. 51). Without a purpose provided by an animated world, or god(s), humans are left to find their own purpose, and when they look to science for an answer they discover that "modern science . . . can only tell us how to do something, not what to do or whether we should do it" (p. 51).

I think this statement by Berman captures the entire essence of his message in one simple sentence: "Scientific consciousness is alienated consciousness" (1981, p. 17). He points out that the insistence on separation of subject and object results in humans becoming objects as well, so that eventually I experience myself as an "alienated 'thing' in a world of other, equally meaningless things. . . . The cosmos cares nothing for me, and I do not really feel a sense of belonging to it" (p. 17). Why then, would I not just use up whatever I could of the meaningless things in this meaningless world to fill the void inside me? Why would I not feel such terror about my meaningless death that I would

deny its existence, or mindlessly drive myself and all other living things toward the point of extinction? What difference would any of that make in a meaningless world?

But let us press further into the why of this shift in human belief from immanent meaning to meaninglessness—from what Berman names "participating consciousness" (1981, p. 16) to alienated consciousness. I am tempted to say, "Poor Descartes." In all my readings it has become clear that the blame for much that is currently seen as problematic in modern Westernized cultural perception has been laid at his feet. Berman adds his share of recrimination. But Berman also acknowledges that others (Bacon, Newton, and Galileo) contributed mightily to dualistic consciousness, and that the scientific paradigm they helped birth into the world was just one aspect of a monumental movement away from participating consciousness that included the forces of organized religion and capitalism.

At this point I want to bring Dr. Nelson into this conversation about the effects of the scientific paradigm on our sense of separation from nature. She questions Berman's premise, pointing out that separation, in and of itself, is not necessarily the problem, but rather the quality of our relationship with what we perceive as separate (personal communication, May 2013). She reminds us of such scientists as Barbara McClintock, whose scientific attitude, as described in Evelyn Keller's biography, *A Feeling for the Organism* . . . (2003), showed great respect and reverence for the biological organisms she studied. Keller tells us that "for McClintock, reason—at least in the conventional sense of the word—is not by itself adequate to describe the vast complexity—even mystery—of living forms" (p. 199).

Keller, herself a scientist, declares that "however severely communication between science and nature may be impeded by the preconceptions of a particular time, some channels always remain open; and, through them, nature finds ways of reasserting itself" (2003, p. 197). She further emphasizes the sense of connection with nature she, McClintock, and other scientists, have experienced by offering these thoughts:

> A deep reverence for nature, a capacity for union with that which is to be known – these reflect a different image of science from that of a purely rational enterprise. Yet the two images have coexisted throughout history. We are familiar with the idea that a form of mysticism—a commitment to the unity of experience, the oneness of nature, the fundamental mystery underlying the laws of nature—plays an essential role in the process of scientific discovery. Einstein called it 'cosmic religiosity.'" (p. 201)

I, for one, have had little contact with the scientific community so was surprised to hear that a mystical sense of the unity of nature and experience is common amongst scientists.

In the brief encounters I have been required to have with the scientific enterprise, through the study of statistics and qualitative methods for research, I have come away with the impression that objectivity was the goal, and that separation from the object studied was a prerequisite for the sought-after state of objectivity. From Keller's remarks it sounds like some who go more deeply into the realm of science discover that the long pursued objectivity is a chimera after all.

Berman (1981) has been telling us about the effects of such a belief in the value of objectivity, and he asserts that it was Descartes who took the rationalism of Plato, which sought to elevate thought above sensory data, and expanded it to declare that we must not just elevate thought above sensory date, but first eliminate all consideration of sensory data, and get our thought straight. Then we might view sensory data through the eyes of Truth. Of course we see the problem immediately. Descartes' notion that it was even

possible to eliminate consideration of sensory data in the pursuit of pure thought already holds within it a split between mind and body. He was looking for something certain to hold onto. No more complexity or ambiguity. He decided that the only thing he could know for sure was that he existed, and only through logical thinking could he know this. Mathematics was considered the purest expression of logical thinking, so mathematics must be the foundation for our understanding of the world and ourselves. God(s) help us.

Actually, Berman (1981) tells us that Descartes did try to find God again in the world of pure logic he had created, but had great difficulty doing so, and ultimately gave up the effort. Berman credits Descartes with the generation of our modern mechanical view of the world, based on mathematics (especially geometry). Descartes declared that any problem, no matter how complex, could be solved by breaking it down into simpler and simpler parts until those parts could be understood, at which point the whole edifice could be reassembled with a complete understanding of the whole. Of course, as Berman reminds us, a participating or holistic consciousness comprehends that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, but Descartes was reaching for certainty, not meaning. Meaning has a tendency to shape-shift.

Bacon, according to Berman (1981), contributed to the movement towards belief in mind as separate from nature by subtracting an important element from Aristotle's empiricism, with its belief that we must check our thoughts against sensory data. Aristotle still saw metaphysical meaning in sensory data. Bacon decided it was time to abandon metaphysical thinking, which he saw as leading to endless circularity and uncertainty (there it is again—that search for certainty), and turn to the accumulation of data as if sufficient quantity of data could, in and of itself, give us truth without any

interference by metaphysical suppositions. (As if the possibility of separation of data from meaning was not itself based on a metaphysical supposition.)

Bacon turned towards technology to help him tear apart the sensory world in order to force it to cough up its secrets. Berman tells us that Bacon's attitude became "Vex nature, disturb it, alter it, anything—but do not leave it alone. Then and only then, will you know it" (1981, p. 31). Berman also declares that Bacon's mechanical treatment of nature meant that inevitably "your mind must behave mechanically as well" (p. 31).

So Bacon's empirical technology combined with Descartes' rational philosophy in the 17th century to exert "a staggering impact on the subsequent history of Western consciousness" (Berman, 1981, p. 34). Mind and body, earth and soul, substance and value, became completely unhinged from one another in the beliefs of Western humans. Berman suggests that Newton and Galileo finished what Bacon and Descartes (and Plato and Aristotle) started, by finding ways to combine and apply rationalism and empiricism to demonstrate that the earth was not the center of the universe. This shift in perception was an immense blow to the religious beliefs of the time, which were still providing some sense of meaning in the world, even as they fostered the body/soul split.

And as we have seen in our discussion of Barbara McClintock and Evelyn Keller, not all scientists fully adopted this paradigm of absolute separation of soul from nature.

There is a little bit of good news in the midst of all this. An ancient tradition of belief that was mined by Newton to support the blossoming of Cartesian duality, despite being fundamentally counter to such dualism, survived the upheaval of the 16th and 17th centuries, and lives on to this day. Of course it had survived up to Newton's time since at least the era of pre-Homeric Greece, so it had already proven itself a hardy and adaptable

belief. Some call it the Hermetic wisdom: “The notion that real knowledge occurred only via the union of subject and object, in a psychic-emotional identification with images rather than a purely intellectual examination of concepts” (Berman, 1981, p. 73). In the Middle Ages, the Hermetic wisdom emerged in Europe, primarily in the practice of alchemy.

We are informed by Berman (1981) that Isaac Newton himself was alchemy’s “last great practitioner . . . though he wisely kept it a private matter” (p. 95). Berman posits that Newton was fascinated with alchemy because it combined (1) belief in the meaningfulness of the material world; (2) the possibility of union with the divine; and (3) a willingness and desire to manipulate the material world. Such manipulation in alchemy might bring material reward, but its primary purpose was believed to be spiritual reward. As we have seen, the scientific worldview arises out of an intense desire to manipulate the world, so as to understand and control it, and this aspect of manipulation, not union with the divine, was the part of alchemy on which Newton focused most of his attention.

Alchemists in the Middle Ages were busy trying to turn lead into gold (along with multiple other manipulations of various substances), but for them, these operations were both mystical and practical. Ultimately, according to Berman (1981), the alchemists were seeking what Jung would call a transformation of self into Self. Gold, for them, still had a deeper meaning than just an object that could be traded for other objects in a monetary economy. It was a symbol of the sacred, and union with the sacred via a deep comprehension of the natural world. But Newton ultimately turned away from that deeper meaning, and his published work signed the decree in a divorce between the sacred and the material. Berman speculates that Newton’s traumatic childhood, as well as the

pressures of the growing scientific community of the time, caused his abandonment of the search for meaning in matter.

With a nod to Jung, Berman recognizes the survival of alchemy to the modern era because it "represents a map of the unconscious, [and] because it apparently corresponds to a psychic substrate that is trans-historical" (1981, p. 95). He sees it living on in the realms of dreams, psychosis, and surrealist art. I would add that it survives in the form of active imagination, trance work, and some forms of spiritual practice. Its essence is also being revived in attempts at renewal of a more participatory kind of consciousness. For hundreds of years now such consciousness has been the exception rather than the rule in Westernized culture, but thanks in part to alchemy, it never entirely died out.

We have already heard that Berman connects the emergence of capitalism with the emergence of the Cartesian, dualistic worldview. He states:

> Once natural processes are stripped of immanent purpose, there is really nothing left in objects but their value for something, or someone else. . . . Embedded within the scientific program is the concept of manipulation as the very touchstone of truth. To know something is to control it. (1981, p. 40)

Ah, to know the Truth; to feel certain; to perceive everything as an object that can be manipulated and owned; to feel in control. Here we are again, back at the heart of ecological narcissism and the fear of death.

Berman asserts that "a schizoid duality lies at the heart of the Cartesian paradigm" (1981, p. 35). I decided to remind myself about the basics of what schizoid means, so I checked in again with McWilliams (1994). She informs us that "the defense that defines the schizoid character is a primitive one (withdrawal into fantasy)," and she suggests that professions like philosophical inquiry and theoretical science attract people with schizoid tendencies (p. 189). This opens the door to fascinating speculation about how and why

Descartes became such a dominant voice in the Middle Ages. Was he a reflection of the culture's retreat from the reality of an ensouled world into a fantasy of a world bereft of meaning, or was he just the expression of such a retreat? Perhaps both.

McWilliams also notes how a person with schizoid tendencies "is preoccupied with avoiding the dangers of being engulfed, absorbed, distorted, taken over, eaten up" (1994, p. 190). She goes on to tell us that these preoccupations express unconscious hunger and aggression. If we expand McWilliams' definition to cultures—say modern, Westernized cultures—we might more clearly see the connection with Berman's comment about Cartesian dualism. Our culture is obsessed with independence, self-assertion, control. We retreat into fantasies of flight from earth and destruction of death to avoid the fear of being absorbed back into this world, from which we emerged, and which we used to recognize as home.

Berman may have been absorbed in the opposite fantasy when he was occupied with laying the blame for our sense of separation from nature at the feet of the world of scientific thought. Is it possible he was longing for a return to the realm of what Spielrein called "The Mothers" (1994, p. 181)? Perhaps the pull of immersion into the place where there is no I/Eye to create that feel of separateness was tugging at him, as it tugs at all of us. From that place, splitting apart into self/other, mind/body, soul/nature feels like a profound violation.

I am experiencing that dance between a pull towards union and separation as I write this dissertation. Right now, I am in the place of separation, with schizoid and narcissistic tendencies. I keep wanting to display some clear grasp (control) of these incredibly complex ideas about how and why millions of years of human belief in an

animated world, within which we felt ourselves an inherent part, turned into 2000 years of human belief in a dead world from which we feel separate. I keep wanting to find a way to stand above and apart from those who came before me in this exploration of ideas. I want to be able to clearly state: "We separated from the world because we declared it dead and could no longer find comfort and meaning in it. No, we declared the world dead and without meaning or comfort because we separated from it."

I must let go this frantic search for certainty and its accompanying desire to be queen of the hill, and acknowledge that I can't know any final answer about this. Berman invites me to remember, "It is not merely that what we consciously know is only a fraction of reality, but that incompleteness of knowledge is the source of knowledge itself" 1981, p. 254). He goes on to reassure me that "the research undertaken by a future holistic science would take incompleteness and circuitry as axioms" (p. 254). Well, the future is here and I am awash in incompleteness and circuitry. I can only hope that my gaps in knowledge will spur some other sojourner to press on for further understanding.

I have offered two of the points of view that I find most interesting and meaningful about how most modern humans have come to perceive and experience themselves as apart from the natural world (Berman, 1981; and Shepard, 1998). I have noted some ways in which it appears that ecological narcissism and fear of death have arisen, hand in hand, from the matrix of this underlying belief. Beyond that I must surrender to a not-knowing that ignites the agitation I feel living in the cultural field of the Cartesian split, but which also sometimes brings glad moments of a more holistic awareness that says, "Allow the contradictory possibilities to exist side by side. Sink right

now into that place of wholeness where contradictions dance with each other and mystery is a balm."

Bear is a living wonder representing power and majesty and awe. I love Bear and welcome Bear into the space of this world as a reminder that humans are not inherently kings of the hill. Bears are a living reality that could easily eat me for dinner. I fear bears and only want to see them on the other side of a very tall fence, or on some nice TV show about the wonders of nature.

Can I dance with these contradictions? Can I honor my experience of wanting to abstract meanings about the magnificence of Bear, and also honor my experience of shaking in my boots at the nearness of a bear's teeth and claws? Here it is: the dilemma living in me. Abstraction from direct experience takes all living into its maw—other living things going the way of my own uncomfortable feelings. Yet abstraction as meaning-making is also a natural human response to experience. I pray that I, and others caught in this dilemma, learn to honor *both* abstraction and direct lived experience.

Chapter 4
Ecological Narcissism, Death Denial, and Environmental Destruction

Ecological narcissism and death denial—as manifestations of the worldview of Westernized cultures which separates body from mind and earth from soul—support us in perceiving the nonhuman environment as a collection of objects. Clouds, elephants, orchids, hummingbirds, the Mississippi, the albatross: all are seen as essentially objects. These objects may be viewed as useful or useless; dangerous or helpful; dead or alive, (but if alive, not sentient at the same level as humans). None of these objects (not even other mammals) is allowed its own subjectivity, in the same sense or at the same level that humans have subjectivity ("I am the subject perceiving the object").

How different this is from such traditions as the Hopi, who, according to Stan Steiner, view the world in this way: "In the Circle of Life every being is no more, or less, than any other. We are all Sisters and Brothers. Life is shared with the bird, bear, insects, plants, mountains, clouds, stars, sun" (1976, p. 113). Deval and Sessions describe the same idea in the language of anthropology: "For the primal mind there is no sharp break between humans and the rest of Nature" (2007, p. 97).

But from our modern, dualistic, egocentric point of view, there is only one meaningful question to ask about those things we perceive as objects in the nonhuman environment: do they help me further my own life or the lives of other humans? If they do, I am free to attempt to use them or alter them in whatever way I see fit, and if I am unable to find a way to replace, repair, or renew them, I am free ultimately to destroy them. If I can't see any way in which they will serve the needs of myself or other humans, I am free to destroy them immediately.

Even such things as oceans and winds are perceived essentially as objects in the sense that most modern humans would see them as providing one of the following uses for humans: (1) a potential energy source; (2) a matrix for transportation; (3) a matrix for food supplies; (4) a source of emotional or spiritual renewal. As I wrote that last sentence I noticed that I could not think of a good way to refer to the oceans and winds except as things. I considered referring to them as presences or kinds of being, but that felt awkward, even to me. Perhaps if I were writing this dissertation as more of a myth than an exposition, declaring Ocean as a presence would feel more appropriate.

Abram (2010) says: "There is something eerie about the ability of the written word to shrink the elemental power of a place. Something bizarre about the power of printed letters . . . to domesticate the bursting-at-the-seams agency of the wild" (p. 262). Written language is part of the abstracting, dualistic consciousness that haunts modern culture and feeds the ecological narcissism that turns oceans into objects to be exploited for human use. And yet, I am mindful of Nelson's admonition: "Be careful about damning words since they can take us deeper *after* the experience" (personal communication, May 2013).

After thorough consideration of this point I must acknowledge that written language can also lead us toward points of view, and ultimately experiences, that can bridge the dualism initially contributed to by the abstracting power of written language. I recall that when I had my experience with the eucalyptus tree at Pacifica, I quickly sought an increased comprehension of what had happened by communicating (orally) with a professor on campus. I then sought out books to expand the range of people whose words I could "hear" about my experience. Perhaps it is because of my enculturation in the

Western paradigm, but I didn't entirely trust my own interpretation, based purely on my sensory experience of hearing a tree speak to me, subject to subject.

Even the objects that our culture does grant some level of subjectivity to (always a level beneath that of humans)—say, the primates we imprison for medical experiments or the cows we imprison in stock yards to become our food—are seen as inherently less valuable than humans. This perceptual degradation of other beings, transforming living presences into things, allows us to justify their suffering to serve our own needs.

Abram nudges us again:

> The contemporary person sits enveloped in a cloud of winged words fluttering out of his mouth, delighting in their colored patterns and the way they flock and follow one another, becoming convinced that he alone is in blossom . . . that the things stand mute and inert until he chooses to speak of them. Yet the things have other plans. Bereft of our attentions, their migratory routes severed by the spreading clear-cuts and the dams, their tissues clogged by synthetic toxins leaking into the soils and the waters, they nevertheless carry on. . . . The things of the world continue to beckon to us from behind the cloud of words, speaking instead with gestures and subtle rhythms . . . inviting our thoughts to remember and rejoin the wider community of intelligence. (2010, p. 40)

I, too, get caught up in that cloud of winged words that have their own kind of music to my ears and heart. I, too, begin to imagine sometimes that it is my job to attempt to speak for those presences in the world that other humans do not recognize as sentient. But then I catch myself in my arrogant hero posture again, and remember that if I have any job at all, it is to encourage others toward a deeper attention to the world, and the more-than-human presences in it that are already constantly speaking in their own voices.

Our sense of separation from, and elevation above, everything nonhuman, which we feel free to manipulate or destroy for our own purposes, reveals our narcissism. Our insistence that only humans have some form of deathless sacred essence, and that the death we may bring to everything else in the world is meaningless, and therefore

justifiable, because it is the death of nonanimate, nonsacred substance, reveals our fear and denial of death (as well as confirming our narcissism).

Becker (1973) affirms this point of view, discussing "the large scale ravages that man makes upon the world" (p. 139). He suggests that modern man is fundamentally narcissistic: "a naturally and lustily destructive animal who lays waste around him because he feels omnipotent and impregnable" (p. 139). He goes on to say that man is also terrified of death: "a trembling animal who pulls the world down around his shoulders as he clutches for protection and support" (p. 139). And McWilliams (1994) confirmed this connection between denial of death and narcissism in Chapter 3.

I also spoke at length in Chapter 3 about how ecological narcissism and the fear and of death have arisen from the underlying belief that humans are separate from nature. I presented two theories about how this perception of a split between humans and the natural world emerged out of prior widespread beliefs that humans are inherently part of the fabric of an entirely animated world. We humans found a way to come in out of the cold, avoid being prey, and keep our bellies full (at least most of the time), thereby setting ourselves apart from all other beings that are so affected by uncontrollable vacillations in food supply, predators, and temperature range.

We literally put physical walls between ourselves and the world we had formerly been so intimate with, and in so doing we erected mental, emotional, and spiritual walls as well. As Kidner puts it:

> The historically evolving split between the modern individual and the rest of the world is therefore the initial dissociation in the more general fragmentation of the cultural and natural fabric of the world: and from this initial dissociation emerges both the egoic individual and a world that seems to invite exploitation. (2001, p. 51)

He is affirming that we first dissociated ourselves from the natural world and then we came to feel somehow above it, and therefore entitled to exploit and destroy it.

Kidner provides a vivid comparison of a typical modern view of the world with an ancient (yet currently still active) view of the world. He suggests that we first consider how a Cartesian (dualistic) worldview tends to shape our perception: "Landscape as view through a window" (2001, p. 120). Then he invites us to consider how we might perceive the world as an Australian aborigine: "A timeless landscape that one is integrated into through the media of song and myth" (p. 120). Kidner confirms Shepard's (1998) and Berman's (1981) propositions that the modern world's penchant for separation and objectivity fosters "a style of personal functioning in which the relation of humanity to the natural world is one of comfortable domination" (p. 140). We declare ourselves separate and then we feel free to destroy. The Nazis did it with other humans. Most modern humans do it with the entire nonhuman world.

Becker's (1973) voice offers a thought-provoking counterpoint in our discussion of what the world may have looked and felt like to early humans. When I read some of the words of Shepard and Kidner, I find it easy to slip into a dreamy kind of fantasy about what it would be like to feel more intimately intertwined with the natural world. Being part of that "timeless landscape" just mentioned by Kidner (2001, p. 120), or "the numinous earth and its processes" (Shepard, 1998, p. 10), evokes for me a sense of cozy belonging. But Becker reminds us of the fear that also comes along with recognizing our place in the larger fabric of being. He says:

> What do we mean by the lived truth of creation? We have to mean the world as it appears to men in a condition of relative unrepression; that is, as it would appear to creatures who assessed their true puniness in the face of the overwhelmingness and majesty of the universe . . . as it probably appears to the earliest men on the

> planet and to those extrasensitive types who have filled the roles of shaman, prophet, saint, poet, and artist. What is unique about their perception of reality is that it is alive to the *panic* inherent in creation. (1973, p. 282)

This fits my own direct experience, as I have spent more and more time out in the wilds of nature. I have known both terrifying vulnerability and wondrous comfort and joy. We have to own both pieces of this reality if we are to rejoin the greater community of nature.

Over the past two millennia, most humans have forgotten that we are spun out of the same thread as the wolves and trout and spiders and rivers and stars, and we are subject to the same delights and horrors. We have convinced ourselves that because we have walked away from these brothers and sisters, so have the gods. We have convinced ourselves that they were never really our brothers and sisters to begin with—that we had just been deluding ourselves. We have told ourselves stories about how the gods (God) now dwell only in and with us. We have told ourselves stories about how we no longer die like the others who used to be our brothers—recycling endlessly through the chain of being—but instead have the capacity to throw off organic being forever to dwell apart in a realm divorced from the disgusting and terrifying round of bloody birth and eventual decay. We have come to believe that everything in creation (including our own creations, except for the God we created) is really essentially dead already (at least not alive in the same way that we are alive), and is here just for our use. Our hubris would be laughable, were it not so deadly.

We have unwittingly morphed from millions of years of humility and familiarity in relationship with the natural world around us to two thousand years of arrogance and alienation. Jung says it this way: “Western man has no need of more superiority over nature whether outside or inside. He has both in an almost devilish perfection. What he

lacks is conscious recognition of his inferiority to the nature around him and within him" (1936/1958, p. 535).

All of this arrogance because our brains allowed us to figure out how to strike rocks together to create an enduring spark, as well as how to put the seeds of food plants into the earth to get more food. Those discoveries have led us to the point where many of us dream of leaving Earth—which provided rocks and seeds in the first place—behind altogether.

Abram (2010) astutely points out that

> all of these ways of disparaging material nature or of aiming ourselves elsewhere, enable us to avoid the vulnerability of real relationships with other persons and places [and presences] in the depths of this unmasterable world. . . .There remains something about earthly reality that frightens us, and especially unnerves most of us born into civilization. Not just the decay to which our earthborn bodies are prone, and the death that patiently awaits us, but also our steady subjection to what exceeds us . . . over which we have little control. (p. 302)

Our narcissistic fantasies of mastery and control, and the inevitability of a death we deny, feed our fear and destruction of nature. Let us hope that our brains that brought the use of fire to ward off the dark will allow us to recognize that the beliefs we have woven from our accomplishments are leading us to destroy the fabric of life from which we emerged.

Levertov remembers on our behalf in "Part III – April," from *Life in the Forest* (1978, pp. 129-130)

> Neither mighty tree,
>
> sounding of ocean
>
> nor river flooding toward
>
> sea-depths;
>
> my self is a grey-barked sapling
> of a race that needs
>
> a hundred years' growth
>
> close to water.

Its dryad soul
dreams of plunging, of
swallow-diving off the pliant
twigs of its crown
into fathomless caverns, sliding
through yielding glass.

Its roots
inch their toes
toward hidden streamlets
planning to pull them
drop by drop
up through clay, gravel, thick
topsoil, to slake
sip by sip
tree-thirst, flesh of wood that harbors
that dreamer.

I pray that others of this race of species to which I belong also dream of plunging into the fathomless caverns of being, that we might all remember what it is to savor, honor, and become roots and clay, streamlets and sea-depths.

Kidner (2001) notes that modern society tends to eat away at the natural tendencies we have towards connectedness with others and with nature, perpetuating narcissism and "an attitude of distance, attempted domination, and even fear or revulsion toward anything whose essence seems different to our own" (p. 226). Once again, he uses a comparison between Australian aboriginals and people in modern industrialized cultures to illustrate a point about the consequences of different forms of self-concept. He reminds us that the aboriginal peoples have a "sophisticated interweaving of individuality and the natural world" (p. 208).

Deval and Sessions (2007) confirm Kidner's point as they describe what they call primal mind (the worldview of primal or native peoples): "Primal mind holds the totality of human-centered artifacts, such as language, social organization, norms, shared meaning, and magic, within the first world of Nature" (p. 97). This view, that humans and

human culture are just as much part of nature as rains and caverns and kangaroo, would seem to me to make it less likely that people would want to exploit the world as most of us do now, with our modern sense of self which we experience as essentially separate from nature.

Even in the realm of depth psychology, where object-relations theorists are recognizing the importance of relationships with others in the creation of self, little movement has occurred towards recognizing the value of relationship with the more-than-human world. The kind of interweaving of self and nature experienced by the aboriginal peoples would be explained away by most theorists in depth psychology as an experience of projection or introjection (and by theorists in other branches of psychology as delusion), not an actual fluidity of self. Such beliefs perpetuate the notion that humans are essentially different from, and superior to, the natural world, and feed the feelings of fear and revulsion towards a world we desperately want to control, but cannot.

However, Kidner (2001) holds out hope that the general direction in which object-relations theory and practice is heading may be positive for our relationship with nature. He suggests that "the idea that relation to the world is an important constituent of identity is one that intrinsically raises the status of the world to that of subject" (p. 244). We have already seen how it is easier for us to destroy that which we have turned into an object, and we have already discussed how, for most of Westernized, industrialized culture, the more-than-human world began its transformation from subject to object long ago.

Kidner (2001) sees in "an extended object relational view" (p. 244), which he links with the views of radical ecopsychology, a "subjectivity that extends beyond the

constraints of human physicality, diffusing as well through a diversity of intelligently interacting systems" (p. 244). He holds such a view as a possible antidote to

> the violence that industrialism does to nature . . . [which] is not *just* a matter of the violence that it separately inflicts on nature "out there" or to nature "within"; it is *primarily* the violence that separates these two natures in the first place, destroying that resonance between the psychic and material worlds that constitutes the cultural realm. This enforced separation diminishes both selfhood and the nature we experience as "outside," although it is a diminution that we have learned to accept as "natural." (p. 16)

This theme related to a perceptual split between self and nature, or nature and culture, as foundational to all problems in our relationship with nature, is nowhere expressed as clearly and powerfully as Kidner expresses it here. Though I agree with Kidner about the violence in that splitting, he attributes it to industrialism, and we have heard from others (Berman, 1981 & Shepard, 1998) that earlier influences—such as the establishment of a settled, agrarian way of life, and the adoption of a scientific worldview—may have preceded industrialism as causes of that wrenching divide.

Ecotherapist Robinson (2009) sounds another hopeful note, reminding us that humans evolved originally in the context of intimacy with the natural world. He is convinced that it remains true that "as human beings we have a need for place—where we can be connected to a community of people, plants, animals, and the land. Without this, we feel lost, alone, and alienated" (p. 29). Or, as Jung puts it, "It is the body, the feeling, the instincts, which connect us with the soil . . . there is too much head and so there is too much will, too much walking about, and nothing rooted" (1988, p. 1541).

Once, we were like the aboriginal peoples with their sense of selves interwoven in and rooted to the natural world, and not just the world in general, but a very specific place in the natural world. This raises an interesting question, for another researcher to

pursue: How does it affect a person's relationship with the natural world to be homeless? Does one reconnect with the plants, animals, land? Does one feel more utterly lost and alienated? What are other possible impacts on one's relationship with nature?

Returning to Robinson, he insists that we still have, buried within us, the capacity to remember that "there are no inanimate objects, but only multiple, interacting subjectivities, each having the capability of acting in its own right" (2009, p. 28). He sees the role of the ecotherapist as reminding us that "this Earth is our only home and that if we are to survive, let alone find happiness, we must come home" (p. 29). Again, another researcher might pursue all of the complexities of what it means to be "home."

Robinson does acknowledge that over the past 2,000 years, "We have, however, come to interact only with other humans or with our own creations. So like Narcissus, we see only our own reflections everywhere we look" (2009, p. 28). He goes on say that "our entire culture suffers from a narcissistic personality disorder . . . as evidenced by our distant, superior, and entitled relationship to the more-than-human world" (p. 27). Clearly, he is speaking of modernized cultures, not existing aboriginal cultures.

Robinson offers this compressed version of an ancient Greek myth that succinctly expresses the connections between ecological narcissism and our destruction of the environment:

> A wealthy landowner named Erysichthon came across a great oak sacred to the goddess Demeter. His men recognized the tree for what it was and felt the proper awe. Erysichthon saw only the potential for profit and ordered his men to fell the great tree. When they refused, he seized an ax, decapitated his foreman who had tried to protect the tree, and proceeded to cut it down. When Demeter learned of this sacrilege, she placed a curse on him: whatever he ate would only increase his hunger. He consumed everything he had, including his own children, and eventually, himself. (2009, p. 27)

For Erysichthon, the sacred tree was just a dead object that might be traded for material wealth. And the curse for his refusal or inability to remember his connection with the sacredness inherent in the tree was an unquenchable hunger that eventually turned his own children, and even himself, into objects for consumption.

I hear echoes of Hillman's point about how our choice to turn away from relationship with an ensouled natural world brought about the narcissistic void that now consumes our peace of mind and our world. Our hunger for more (profit, endless progress, endless life) is impossible to fulfill, and it drives us to destroy the world.

Chapter 5
Reducing Ecological Narcissism

I have come to the conclusion that the most likely way humans might shift from ecological narcissism and denial of death towards a sense of profound connection with the natural environment, and a life-sustaining attitude towards death, is through a mixture of direct experience with nature's wilderness "out there," and nature's wilderness "in here." I want to clarify how I am using the terms *wilderness* and *nature* in this context.

If we first turn to *Webster's* (1984) we encounter this definition of *wilderness*: "an uncultivated, uninhabited region; waste; wild" (p. 1626). The definition of *nature* is much more complex, including among other things: "(1) the sum total of all things in time and space; the entire physical universe; (2) not cultivated or tamed; wild; (3) inborn character; innate disposition; inherent tendencies; and (4) natural scenery, including the plants and animals that are part of it" (p. 948). We can already see elements of wilderness and nature intermingling in the wild and uncultivated areas of world and psyche. We also can't help but notice that areas uninhabited and uncultivated by humans are considered a waste in this dictionary which claims to express the meanings true to the Westernized culture from which it arises.

Snyder (1990) helps us along with his own thoughts on wilderness, nature, and the wild. For example, he points out that even when we talk about nature as "the physical universe and all its properties" (p. 9), modern culture is still inclined to split human apart from universe, paring that down to mean '"the outdoors' or 'other-than-human'" (p. 9). Snyder also suggests that it is difficult to talk about the meaning of wilderness without first talking about the meaning of wild, so let us attend to that. He points out that "*wild* is largely defined in our dictionaries by what—from a human standpoint—it is not" (p. 10),

and he goes on to list some of the things wild is not: civilized, cultivated, restrained, inhabited, subordinated, rule-bound.

I prefer Snyder's definition of wilderness to *Webster's*. Snyder says, "Wilderness is a place where the wild potential is fully expressed, a diversity of living and non-living beings flourishing according to their own sorts of order" (1990, p. 12). So wilderness is a place (within or without) where being is unrestrained; not subordinate to modern humanity's preference for rules and regularity; not colonized and controlled. It is my premise that direct, recurring experience with such wilderness is our best hope for a reduction of the destructive forces of ecological narcissism and denial of death.

Only direct experience can confirm in our bones and souls this truth:

> Environmental problems are simultaneously psychological. . . . Thus the repression of particular forms of psychological awareness is matched by the extermination in the "outside" world of those species that are inconvenient to industrialism; the dissociation of "wilderness" from areas that are zoned for "development" is simultaneously an ecological and psychological dissociation. (Kidner, 2001, p. 7)

Unruly rivers and animals are no more welcome in Westernized, industrialized culture than are unruly dreams and imaginings that whisper to us that there is another way to look at the world than a detached, scientific view that insists: (1) unruly rivers are simply collections of molecules we should feel free to dam and divert; and (2) unruly dreams are simply the random firing of collections of molecules in our brains and we should feel free to ignore them (thereby repressing them) because they are meaningless.

Jung (1944/1953) declares: "Despite its undeniable successes the rational attitude of present-day consciousness is, in many respects, childishly unadapted and hostile to life. Life has grown desiccated and cramped, crying out for the rediscovery of the

fountainhead" (p. 59). What is Jung pointing to here as the fountainhead of life? The unconscious with its roots in nature.

I am proposing that direct encountering of the wilderness within us and outside us with an open heart and an open mind can help shift our embedded cultural beliefs which are dissociated from the lived experience of being an embodied human in a wildly alive universe. Direct experience can open the door to a questioning of the old paradigm of separation between humans and nature. The more-than-human world, and its sister world in the psyche we experience as inside us, are both constantly speaking in myriad unrestrained voices and if we dare a direct encounter those voices may break through our self-imposed deafness. Then we may be able to hear at least a stanza of the song of meaning that inheres there, in all its mysterious and untamed aliveness.

I believe our human psyches have a natural tendency to find or make meanings. We weave meanings into whatever set of circumstances we find ourselves in. Hillman (1991) tells us, "We are always in one or another root-metaphor, archetypal fantasy, mythic perspective. From the soul's point of view we can never get out of the vale of our psychic reality" (p. 119). So, if we immerse ourselves in the wilderness of both the nonhuman world and our own psyches, we will tend to weave a mythic perspective (and see value or the sacred) there. If, instead, we immerse ourselves only within the confines of the human-created world, we will tend to weave a mythic perspective (and see value or the sacred) there. Ideally, of course, we could find meaning and experience value and the sacred in all domains, but because our culture already overemphasizes immersion in the human-created domain, I am advocating a shift of attention to the wilderness areas of world and psyche.

The further we have slipped away from immersion in the world beyond the human-created world, the less we have been able to remember the meaning, aliveness, and sacredness therein, and the more we have felt entitled to plunder that world in an attempt to fill the emptiness we feel as a result of the very separation we created. We take and take and take, insanely believing that more goods will make up for the loss of sense of connection with a meaningful ground of being in the earth which bodied us forth.

Fisher (2002) supports my basic premise, stating in his own way that

> genuine sanity is grounded in the reality of the natural world; that the ecological crisis signifies a pathological break from this reality; and that the route out of our crisis must therefore involve, among other things, a psychological reconciliation with the living earth. (p. xiii)

I see genuine sanity as including, among other things: (1) an ability to be in relationships which are mutually nurturing and respectful (not based primarily on narcissistic rage, fear, and manipulation); and (2) an ability to acknowledge death and find a meaning in it that does not deny the reality. Of course when I speak of relationships, I mean our relationship with the more-than-human world, not just with other people.

Bernd Heinrich reminds us of an ancient, respectful, and hopeful view of death seen through the lens of a modern biologist. His 2012 book, *Life Everlasting: The Animal Way of Death*, describes in vivid detail how flesh bodies remain part of the great cycle of life and death, and he invites humans to welcome our participation in that cycle. Speaking as a respected scientist he declares:

> Just as space-time connects the cosmos, and the molecules that make up our bodies connect us to past exploding stars, we are connected to the cosmos in the same way we are connected to earth's biosphere and to each other. Physically we are like the spokes of a wheel to a bicycle. . . . The metaphor that we are part of the earth ecosystem is not a belief; it is a reality. We are tiny specks in a fabulous system, part of something grand. (p. 192)

His play on words is wonderful. He leads us gently into the realm of belief that some people already occupy: humans as part of earth's ecosystem. Then he boldly asserts that this is not an issue of belief. It is not just a metaphor. It is literal: a physical reality.

I see hope for a changed relationship between modern humans and death in some of Heinrich's ideas. He is able to describe what most of us would consider disgusting aspects of reality (beetles, worms, and vultures eating carcasses of dead animals) in a way that is fascinating, beautiful, and respectful of both the dead creature and the miracle of the cycle of death and life. Near the end of his book, Heinrich reveals how his own beliefs about death have been changed by his deep explorations into the workings of nature. He proclaims:

> Nature is the ultimate standard of reality, and from what has been revealed so far, I see the whole world as an organism with no truly separate parts. I want to be connected to the grandest, biggest, most real, and the most beautiful thing in the universe as we know it: the life of earth's nature. I want to join in the party of the greatest show on earth, life everlasting. (2012, p. 197)

For Heinrich, death is part of the reality of the everlasting life of nature, and he suggests that we reconsider our beliefs and practices around death. He encourages us to think again about our belief that biological death is ultimately meaningless, and nudges us to stop the practice of burial in caskets, which prevent humans from returning to the food chain. He invites us, instead, to partake in the everlasting life of nature.

Most Western industrialized human cultures have unfortunately come to believe that only humans live and die in a meaningful way (with such meaning often denying death itself); that only humans are conscious in a meaningful way; that only humans have access to, and inhere in the sacred; and that only the human-created world (which includes beliefs about the sacred) ultimately matters for humans. How many modern

humans now imagine that the solution to the problems on earth is to blast off into space and leave it behind? Immersed as they are in that odd Westernized cultural stew of faith in a scientific paradigm that separates mind from matter, and faith in a humanistic or religious paradigm that elevates humans above the rest of nature, it does not occur to them that their paradigms are the problem.

Plotkin (2003) concurs, insisting:

> We must face the brutal fact that neither religion nor science is going to save us . . . . Our technologies, psychotherapies, politics, and religious organizations have been leading us further . . . from harmony within ourselves, between each other, and between us and the more-than-human world. (p. 44)

As we have seen, some scientists (Heinrich, 2012; Keller, 2003) think in a direction that could foster such harmony, so some glimmerings of hope for a paradigm shift may be coming from that direction after all.

My focus is on experiential ways to rediscover the harmony between us and the more-than-human world, with its wilderness that resists taming by humans. I also want to help renew the harmony within ourselves, appreciating our own untamed wilderness. I believe the way to accomplish those things is to encourage more direct interaction by peoples with these worlds of wilderness. Experience is the key.

I have become convinced that words are unlikely to ever be able to effect a change in paradigm. I will again use myself as an illustration. In the process of reading hundreds of thousands of words for this dissertation, I encountered ideas like those of E. O. Wilson, who gave this definition of nature: “Nature is that part of the original environment and its life forms that remains after the human impact” (2006, p. 15). That was exactly how I was inclined to define nature when I started this journey. On the other hand, I also encountered authors such as Macy (2007) who informed me that

> as open, self-organizing systems, our very breathing, acting, and thinking arise in interaction with our shared world through the currents of matter, energy, and information that move through us and sustain us. In the web of relationships that sustain these activities there is no line of demarcation. (p. 153)

She was talking not just about the shared world of humans, but about the world humans share with everything else. I liked the idea, but had never actually experienced life that way, until I went on my retreat to Mt. Rainier (as described in Chapter 1). During that retreat I had a visceral recognition of oneness with the entire forest (as well as all the creatures in it, and even the human created structures scattered through it). I no longer resonated with Wilson's words about nature, and Macy's words now rang true.

Words can help people remember they are immersed in a paradigm, and can point towards the possibility of another paradigm. Hillman (1982) reminds us that the best way to do this with words is by "naming what is there, rather than what we feel about what is there and abstraction away from what is there" (p. 93). He suggests that if "the emptied sense of our words would be refilled by concrete images, our talk, an animal talk, echoing the world" (p. 93) we would be moving in the direction of renewed respect for the more-than-human world. But I believe it requires experience to actually shift a paradigm. That experience might be communicable in words—and it might be a dream or vision rather than discovery of a new elementary particle or the recovery of an ancient artifact—but it is the experience, not the words, that makes the difference.

Therefore, I doubt written words can lead people back to remembrance of their profound connection with—nay, their inherent membership in—the wildernesses of nature and psyche, because written words are part of what emerged from the illusion of separation in the first place. Writing is of the symbolic order, which is an abstraction from the direct experience. Abstraction has been incredibly useful (mathematics!) but its

very nature is separation. *Webster's* (1984) provides this definition of abstraction: "Formation of an idea, as of the qualities or properties of a thing, by mental separation from particular instances or material objects" (p. 6). Many written words have already become separated from the particularity they point to.

Having said that, I was later urged by Nelson to think more deeply about my stance on the written word (personal communication, May 2013), and was then reminded by Fisher (2002) that "symbolic forms and experiencing interact in a life process" (p. 63). He states emphatically that we must be careful about implying that symbolic process is inherently separate from bodily existence, because such a stance leads to the lie that the symbolic order is the ground of being for our bodily existence, rather than acknowledging that the symbolic order/culture/language and bodily existence co-arise in this mysterious dance of being. Again and again I get caught in the web of seeing something outside of nature, and must find my way back again to a deeper view.

It remains easier for me to remember spoken language as connected with bodily experience. As we will recall, Shepard pointed to oral language as part of iconic meaning systems (1998, p. 27), where the sign has a direct connection with its referent. There are spiritual traditions that believe the correct intoning of a name of a goddess/god will bring her or him forth. And the vibration in the body and throat, and the consequent sound issuing forth, from a human child crying, "Maaaa!" is no different from the young sheep crying, "Baaaa!" Who, upon hearing these sounds with their own ears, would need an abstract explanation to register the fear of the little ones?

I can describe to you in written words how at home I feel in the arms of my lover, and how I sometimes experience in the depths of my being that he and I are actually one,

not two. I can select words to attempt to communicate that sense of at-homeness and at-oneness. But I doubt that anything I say in writing will truly illuminate the experience for you unless you too have experienced such sense of union and being at home with your lover. Then, my words will evoke in you a visceral memory of your own embodied experience. You will vibrate with the meaning of that experience. It is the reality. Not my written words, which feel like a bleached sign with the image of an arrow, a wave, and the word "ocean" pointing to that incomprehensible immensity of depth, wetness, and movement.

Or, as Oliver puts it so beautifully in "Upstream," (2004, pp. 52-53):

> And whoever thinks these are worthy, breathy words I am writing down is kind. Writing is neither vibrant life nor docile artifact but a text that would put all its money on the hope of suggestion. *Come with me into the field of sunflowers* is a better line than anything you will find here, and the sunflowers themselves far more wonderful than any words about them.

Berman (1981) declares a similar idea in the language of academia: "Rationality, as it turns out, begins to play a role only *after* the knowledge has been obtained viscerally. Once the terrain is familiar, we reflect on how we got the facts and establish the methodological categories" (p. 139). And yet, bringing Fisher (2002) back to mind again, I am cautious about this implied separation of reason and bodily experience, as if they do not co-arise from the larger ground of nature. Ah . . . let us reflect on which brings us more sense of aliveness: Sunflowers as botanical category, sunflowers as written poetry, or SUNFLOWERS.

Fisher puts it yet another way:

> Our divorce from nature, whatever else it may involve, has surely been a progressive cutting of this vital relation [between nature and our own body]. Any hermeneutical effort to overcome our alienation must therefore also be a retrieval of our embodiment. (2002, pp. 58-59)

This dissertation is certainly an effort, via hermeneutical methodology, to overcome our alienation by encouraging us to reclaim direct embodied experience of intimacy with nature and psyche. Only such experience will lead us back home to the rich aliveness of the wild places we've turned away from. SUNFLOWERS!

This isn't to say that having a direct encounter with nature, especially those parts we label wilderness, is guaranteed to be pleasant or even conducive to our own life continuing. As Abram (2010) admits, "the body is an imperfect and breakable entity vulnerable to a thousand and one insults. . . . And the material world that our body inhabits is hardly a gentle place. The shuddering beauty of this biosphere is bristling with thorns" (p. 6). We might enjoy a peaceful walk in a magical red rock canyon. We might get bitten by fire-ants. We might stare in awe at a rainbow arching to the earth from distant storm clouds. We might get swept away and drowned by a thunderous tsunami.

But if we rarely leave our homes or offices to go out there at all, except to take out the trash, or drive to work, we are likely to continue to dwell in that unfortunate modern delusion that the human world can and does exist apart from that larger world we call nature. As Foster and Little (1998) put it, "Life in technological cages and increasing ignorance of natural processes lulls us into thinking that we no longer depend on the earth for our survival" (p. 13). It is important to note that they are referring not just to the physical survival of the human species, but also to the survival of healthy human psyches.

All of what I said previously about the importance, and potential dangers, of encountering the wilderness in nature outdoors is just as true of any encounters we may have with our inner nature or wilderness. We may be terrified or disgusted by what we encounter in dreams or active imaginations; or by the emotions or sensations of our

bodies that arise in us; or by what pops out of our mouths unconsciously. We may be brought to tears of wonder and joy. We are less likely to kill or be killed as a result of wandering our inner landscapes, but it is certainly possible (murder, suicide). I suspect that at this point in history, more of us in modern cultures are likely to have spent time exploring our inner wilderness, via psychotherapy or spiritual process, than exploring wilderness areas outside ourselves. And I think we are more likely to have come to the conclusion that we belong in the inner realm, and that it is inherently part of us, than to have come to the same conclusion about the realm of nature and wilderness outside.

Of course I am separating these realms again as I speak about them in this way, and Hillman (1982) admonishes us to "let fall such games as subject-object, inner-outer, masculine-feminine, immanence-transcendence, mind-body, the game of opposites" (p. 92) if we are to "rework our notion of psychic reality" (p. 92). But I don't think it would be useful, for the purposes of this dissertation, to always speak of nature and wilderness as if we are all assuming those words are pointing to both inner and outer worlds, even after I have offered a definition of them as such.

Entrenched cultural patterns of belief, thought, and speech hold them separate, and I will often refer to them that way. I have not forgotten that Kidner (2001) says, "If conventional forms of awareness assume a detachment of self from world, therefore, the participative awareness that environmentalism reaches out toward is one that implies a reintegration" (p. 109). I am reaching toward that reintegration, and methods to facilitate it, but find I must often use the conventional perspective and language of detachment to talk about my efforts.

I am using words in a way that comes directly out of that perceived split between humans and nature (especially the nature we perceive as outside ourselves) that does not actually exist. I am talking about nature as if it didn't automatically include all humans and everything that humans have created—as if there were somewhere or something else from which we might have arisen. But in order to talk about what might heal the split between humans and nature I must sometimes talk from the place of the split.

If I were writing purely as a poet or mystic I could, perhaps, write entirely from the place of union of human and nature and hope that someone might be drawn towards that place from which I beckon. I will let Walt Whitman beckon for me in this excerpt from "Song of Myself," from *Voyages: Poems by Walt Whitman* (1988, p. 28):

> You sea! I resign myself to you also—I guess what you
> mean,
> I behold from the beach your crooked inviting fingers,
> I believe you refuse to go back without feeling of me,
> We must have a turn together, I undress, hurry me out of
> sight of the land,
> Cushion me soft, rock me in billowy drowse,
> Dash me with amorous wet, I can repay you.
>
> Sea of stretch'd ground-swells,
> Sea breathing broad and convulsive breaths,
> Sea of the brine of life and of unshovell'd yet
> always-ready graves,
> Howler and scooper of storms, capricious and dainty sea,
> I am integral with you, I too am of one phase and of all
> phases.

Ah, if all humanity would recognize, as Whitman did, that we and nature must have a turn together—that we are integral to each other. Why have so many poets and mystics come to such recognition when so many scientists and religious leaders have not?

Perhaps it is because poets and mystics allow themselves to be informed by their direct experience of self, nature, and the sacred, while others do not. Perhaps they are

more willing than most to tread the terrain of wilderness. Though not a poet or mystic, I have traveled such terrain in the search for something meaningful to say about how we might mitigate ecological narcissism and denial of death, and I now struggle with finding the words to express in the language of Cartesian dualism what I experienced.

Berman (1981) offers one way of trying to understand the problem I am grappling with when he discusses what he labels a participating kind of consciousness. He describes this as a form of consciousness experienced by humans who do not separate mind from matter, and know themselves to inhere in a world where everything is part of a larger field of consciousness, capable of some form of communication. He sees our typical modern consciousness as a nonparticipating kind of consciousness in which we split mind from matter, and imagine both that our consciousness is superior to all other forms of consciousness, and that some things have no consciousness at all. He states emphatically: "Nonparticipating consciousness cannot 'see' participating consciousness any more than Cartesian analysis can 'see' artistic beauty" (p. 95).

So I am often talking in a state of nonparticipating consciousness as I attempt to describe my ideas about how we might facilitate a sense of oneness with nature and a healthier attitude towards death by encouraging people to spend more time in direct encounter with both outer and inner wilderness. Based on my own experience, I am convinced that such encounters can open the door to the experience and comprehension of participating consciousness.

Ecopsychology professor and wilderness guide Betsy Perluss reminds us that "it is not enough to 'spend time in nature.' One must also find meaning in nature . . . the experience has to be put into words to be meaningful" (personal communication, July

2013). So perhaps nonparticipating consciousness cannot see participating consciousness, but participating consciousness can reach out to nonparticipating consciousness through story or poetry or dream or and offer the scent or flavor of the experience to be woven into meaning. As I dance back and forth between participating and nonparticipating consciousness while writing this dissertation, I often trip over my own feet. Perhaps it is a dance whose steps I will come to embody more gracefully over time.

I hope so, because I don't think it is going to be useful or possible at this point in history to throw nonparticipating consciousness out the window. I agree with Berman (1981), who first says: "Some type of holistic, or participating, consciousness, and a corresponding sociopolitical formation have to emerge if we are to survive as a species" (p. 23). But then he also insists that nonparticipating consciousness will continue to be helpful, and hopes that "the two will reinforce each other rather than generate a 'two cultures' split" (p. 273). Jung, too, describes the need for both of these different types of thinking, though he calls them directed and nondirected thinking, with directed, rational thinking arising primarily from conscious process in verbal form, and nondirected thinking arising primarily from unconscious process in the form of imagery (1952/1956). We have already seen the unfortunate consequences of the splitting apart of forms of consciousness and valuing the directed over the nondirected.

Please allow me to share another of my own direct experiences to illustrate why I believe the effort to encourage such experiences in the more-than-human world may be a useful part of reducing our sense of separation from nature. After I had signed up for the 12-day wilderness quest, I came across Plotkin's (2003) book, *Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche*. I found in it much that reflected my hopes and fears

about the journey I planned to make. At one point he says, "Nature—the outer nature we call 'the wild'—has always been the essential element and the primary setting of the journey to soul" (p. 15). This affirmed for me my sense of the importance of direct experience of wilderness as a potential matrix for healing of a divide between nature and humanity. Later he offers these additional thoughts: "Nature and soul not only depend on each other but *long* for each other and *are*, in the end, of the same substance, like twins or trees sharing the same roots" (p. 15). This spoke to me especially strongly because of my transformative experience with trees.

I also felt supported in my decision to attempt the wilderness quest (and to encourage others into more direct contact with nature) by these words from Foster and Little (1998): "The true reality, that we are, in fact, nodes in the vast network of nature, has been overlooked, ignored, forgotten" (p. 22). I believe that we have the potential to vividly recall ourselves as such nodes in the network of nature only if we take ourselves into direct encounter with it.

With all of that said, I must acknowledge that I did not actually do the 12-day quest I signed up for. What stopped me? My body's and psyche's reaction to cold, fear, and lack of food during the "day-walk" process I did as preparation for the wilderness quest. Though I feel quite certain that the 12-day quest would have taken me further in my deepening sense of being part of nature, the one day I spent fasting and wandering in the outdoors had a profound positive impact. Surprisingly, I think that impact came exactly as a result of my discomfort, rather than in spite of it. As Abram reminds me, "we shelter ourselves from the harrowing vulnerability of bodied existence. But by the same gesture we also insulate ourselves from the deepest wellsprings of joy" (2010, p. 7). I

certainly experienced a harrowing sense of vulnerability, but I also experienced a deep joy and aliveness that calls me to go back out again, to make myself vulnerable again, because in that vulnerability there is an intense aliveness and a necessary humility.

When I reflected upon the day-walk over subsequent weeks, I came to see how it did bring the hoped for strengthening of my connection with the natural world. I came to see the entire experience as essentially winter embodied in me, just as winter was embodied in everything around me. But that is not how I thought of it while it was happening. In fact, as that day proceeded I found it increasingly difficult to think about, or reflect upon, what was happening at all. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I went out on Monday, February 4, 2013, to do the "day walk" advised as preparation for the wilderness quest. I arrived just after dawn, per instructions, at the forested area I chose for my experience. I'd had nothing to eat for breakfast, just some hot water to warm my belly. I was bundled up in extra-warm socks, pants, sweaters, mittens, and a winter jacket with a hood. I understood that I was expected to stay out, wandering in this area until dusk, without eating. I anticipated a meaningful encounter with nature.

I had brought some liquids, which I was allowed, and I was aware that I had stretched the expectations on the liquids. Water had been recommended. I brought water, but also some sugar-free Gatorade, since I tend to have mild bouts of hypoglycemia, and some hot chicken broth in a thermos. I left the thermos in my car with the intention of using it only as an emergency back-up in case I got too cold.

I set out on this adventure with the memory of having been vulnerable to cold in the past—of having some difficulty getting warm again once I'd gotten chilled. I wanted

to prevent that by being proactive. It felt important to me to prove to myself that I could manage the chill temperatures because I'd already found out that the nights might drop into the 30s or 40s at the two camp sites arranged for the wilderness quest adventure. I was aware of two conflicting impulses wrestling in me: one was the impulse to prepare, prepare, prepare so that I might be protected as much as possible from uncomfortable aspects of this experience; the other was the impulse to go out with minimal protection to have a more open encounter with nature.

Obviously, the impulse to prepare won, and I continue to ponder how much that either enhanced or hindered my experience. I am mindful of Plotkin's (2003) statement:

> Our society is forever erecting barriers between its citizens and the inner/outer wilderness. On the outer side, we have our air-conditioned [and heated] houses and automobiles, gated communities and indoor malls, fences and animal control officers, dams and virtual realities. (p. 15)

I am absolutely a product of that society, and am probably more addicted to the luxuries of heated cars and homes than most. So I anxiously erected an extra barrier to the day-walk experience (bringing hot broth in the expectation of getting uncomfortably cold).

Initially I left my hot broth in my car, setting out towards the forested area of trails I planned to wander in for the day. At the trail-head I immediately encountered a reader-board announcing: "Cougar alert!" Next to that posting was another that said, "Bear alert!" Hikers and campers were warned to stay especially vigilant, and to keep an eye on children and pets. Oh shit! The chill of fear invaded me, taking my mind off the chill in the air. My fantasies about a pleasant day wandering in the woods, communing with nature in an easy, happy way, flew out the window.

Reading this story some months later, wilderness guide Perluss commented, "Your fear is totally natural. To ignore the fear to a very possible threat is . . . *not* natural,

not instinctual. Instinct—fight, flight, or freeze—is intrinsic to humans" (personal communication, July 2013).

Yet on that day, I was not appreciating my fear. It felt like a nuisance. Here I was again, up against my fantasies about Cougar and Bear. Were they teachers or terrors? Could they be both? I was not wanting a lesson about my vulnerability in a place where cougar and bear had just as much power and control as me—perhaps even more—since they knew this terrain intimately and I was a stranger here. I was just feeling afraid and then pissed off, quietly and narcissistically fuming about how my plans for the day were being disrupted. This was supposed to be *my* special day to do *my* special process, and here were these darn animals complicating things! I'd been seeking a warm-blanket, fuzzy-dream kind of connection with nature, not this sharp jolt of a reminder about my own fragility and relative unimportance in the big scheme of things.

I called on denial to help. I decided that the odds of encountering a cougar or bear must actually be tiny (since the signs indicated that only one of each had been sighted in the past month), and the odds of being attacked by one even more remote. I shored up my belief in my own invincibility and headed off up the trail. I was determined to have this day walk resemble what I had planned for myself. I made it about a mile up the trail when I noticed what looked like fresh scratch marks on a number of trees along the way, many of them four to six feet up on the trunks. My stomach began doing flip-flops. There was no way I could convince myself those marks had been made by people. I suspected they were made by a bear. But I convinced myself to keep going. I walked another 30 yards and then noticed a large cave off to the left of the trail, just across a shallow stream

that meandered next to the path. It yawned, dark and full of frightening possibilities. Might that not be a perfect place for a bear to seek shelter in this cold winter air?

I made it another 20 yards and saw more apparently fresh scratch marks on trees. I fled, walking quickly back down the trail, glancing back over my shoulder, heart thumping in my chest. I felt ashamed of myself—but safe—when I got back down to where my car was parked. I thought: "Good grief! You've done it again! You've let a well-meaning sign and your own imagination frighten you into running away when it was probably perfectly safe to hike that trail!" Of course the operational word is "probably" and probably wasn't enough to keep panic from flooding my body and mind, sending me back to the metal womb of my car.

I eventually plucked up my courage and ventured out again, spending the next several hours meandering around in a forested area near the foot of the trails. There were a few picnic tables and a toilet in one corner of that area, and when I grew tired from wandering I would sit at a picnic table for about 30 minutes and jot notes about what I was experiencing. I felt quiet inside yet alert. I couldn't quite drift into an entirely comfortable sense of oneness with this place, as I had in the past with other forested areas, because of the warnings about cougar and bear blinking on and off like a neon sign in the back of my mind. I had a sense of both belonging here and not belonging here, and pondered what it is about a heightened sense of vulnerability that shakes my sense of belonging in the natural world.

Snyder speaks to my sense of unease when he reminds us: "Life in the wild is not just eating berries in the sunlight, I like to imagine a 'depth ecology' that would go to the dark side of nature—the ball of crunched bones in a scat" (1990, p. 118). Yes. I was

faced with that darkness and bolted in terror from becoming crunched bones in a scat. I wanted to avoid remembering that "the other side of the 'sacred' is the sight of your beloved [or yourself] in the underworld, dripping with maggots" (p. 119). Yet, Snyder would remind me that even my avoidance is an aspect of nature: "Shame, grief, embarrassment, and fear are the anaerobic fuels of the dark imagination. The less familiar energies of the wild world . . . have given us ecologies of the mind" (p. 119).

Perluss speaks of "the necessity of fear to host us in the underworld side of nature" (personal communication, July 2013), and Abram (2010) encourages us to remember that

> only by welcoming uncertainty from the get-go can we acclimate ourselves to the shattering wonder that enfolds us. This animal body, for all its susceptibility and vertigo, remains the primary instrument for all our knowing, as the capricious earth remains our primary cosmos. (p. 8)

I must honestly declare that I am much better at welcoming uncertainty conceptually than I am at welcoming it in my lived experience. When I think about the earth being our primary cosmos, capriciousness and all, I find it simple to say, "Well, of course!" But I suspect I'm not alone in wanting to say, "Wait a minute! Not this capriciousness, right here, that's making it more difficult for me to accomplish what I set out to do. I don't want to suffer! I don't want to feel abject fear! I don't want to die in the jaws of a hungry animal!" In fact, I think that's the essence of the Cartesian paradigm: "Down with capriciousness!"

All morning, I saw only one other person who came and used the toilet and then wandered back to the parking lot. I vacillated between registering his appearance as an intrusion and a relief. I pondered my assumption that the human was less danger to me than a bear or cougar. I made a note in my journal that it was beautiful here amongst

these grand old pine and fir trees, next to the softly splashing stream, but I couldn't imagine spending the night alone here in the dark without feeling miserable and terrified, even in a good sleeping bag, on an air mattress, in a tent. (I even imagined having a can of bear spray and a loaded gun by my side, but that helped very little.)

By about noon I was finding it harder to stay warm, even while wandering. I went to my car and got my thermos and sat at a table sipping hot broth. I had to wrap my legs in the space blanket I'd brought in my day pack to try to stay warm. I asked myself how much my sense of cold had to do with fear, and how much of it had to do with the actual temperature outside, but couldn't arrive at any clear answer. Before long I noticed a man, woman, and large dog heading up the trail I'd tried to hike earlier that morning. The man had a tall walking stick with him. As they disappeared from site around a bend in the trail I thought to myself: "I could follow them! If there really is a cougar or bear up there they will surely either scare it away or rush back down the trail so I'll have plenty of warning not to go further." I took my thermos back to the car, waited 15 minutes so as not to be right on their heels, and then headed up behind them.

As I passed the place on the trail where I'd seen the claw marks and turned back before, my stomach turned over again and my pulse quickened. I stole a quick glance at the cave and talked myself out of fleeing again. I was determined to conquer my fear, which I convinced myself was out of all proportion to the actual threat. (Ego won this particular battle.) I kept moving. At one point I could hear the others calling to their dog, and told myself that since I was within shouting distance of them I should be safe. However, nothing I said to myself could stop my eyes, ears, and nose from working overtime, or my heart from beating harder than my walking pace would warrant.

I operated on high alert for the hour it took me to get back around to the end of the trail. I never saw or heard the others again. The shadings of green leaves and needles seemed especially lovely. The smells of damp earth and decaying vegetation seemed especially pungent. The sounds of the birds (maybe chickadees?) seemed especially friendly. A section of the trail that revealed a huge, deep, dark ravine plunging off to my right, which looked as if nothing but wind and water had disturbed it for many years, simultaneously thrilled and terrified me. I felt both blazingly alive and horrifyingly vulnerable. One part of my mind kept interrupting with its line about how I was perfectly safe, while another part generated constant alarms suggesting I was in mortal danger. I think my body (and deeper psyche) brought a little more balance to the whole business by heightening my senses and encouraging me to notice both the loveliness and fragility of everything here—including myself.

By the time I returned about 1:30 p.m. to sit at the picnic table and make notes about what I'd experienced, I felt exhilarated but exhausted. I was haunted by the memory of the immense ravine with its primeval appearance. Somehow, it—even more than the warning signs about cougar and bear—came to represent my sense of awe, fear, and wonder in the face of the immense mystery of nature. Perhaps it was because I actually encountered its living presence, rather than just hints at its presence. Abram tells us that "such encounters with the outrageous scale of the larger Body we inhabit bring a shuddering humility, yet they can also release . . . a sense of being held and sustained by powers far larger than anything we can comprehend" (2010, p. 261).

I decided to just rest for a while in the forested area at the foot of the trail. It was my intention to stay until dusk, which wouldn't come for another 4 hours, so I thought I'd

best use my remaining energy wisely. I drank more hot broth. I drank Gatorade and water. I wrapped up in my space blanket. I discovered I couldn't sit for more than 20 minutes without getting chilled, so I started moving again. I wandered: walking, stopping, walking, stopping. I had been sitting again for what I thought was a brief interlude when two bald eagles glided in towards me through an opening in the trees. I felt a leap of joy and astonishment as one landed in the top of a giant spruce not 10 feet from where I was resting. I then groggily realized that I'd been half asleep for more than 30 minutes before the eagles arrived. I thanked them for waking me and got up to stretch.

It was now nearly 3:30 in the afternoon. I felt chilled to the bone. I didn't feel hungry, just hollow inside somehow, and my brain felt mushy, as if I'd taken a mild sedative. I tried to walk around briskly, convinced that if I just moved enough again I'd feel better, warmer, more alert, but it didn't work. My legs felt leaden, and all I could think about was how much I wanted to take a nap. Sleep called to me like a long lost lover, and the call became irresistible. I considered lying down on top of one of the picnic tables in my space blanket for a few winks but fuzzily decided that was not a good idea.

Slowly, it began to dawn on me that something unusual was happening. I'd never felt this way before except when coming out of anesthetic after a surgery. In some ways it was a pleasant feeling—a kind of warm blanket of not caring too much about anything except drifting off into the land of nod. I decided it might be a good idea to go sit in my car, turn on the heater for a bit, and have a short nap, planning to get back out there and wander some more until dusk. I knew sitting in my car wasn't supposed to be part of the day-walk experience, but I just couldn't bring myself to lie down outside in the cold.

In retrospect I am left wondering why I didn't attempt to communicate with the living presences around me (legged-ones, rooted-ones, winged-ones), or the planet herself, to see if I might find a way to deal with my chilled sleepiness rather than giving up and getting in the car. I claimed to be making the day-trip to welcome deeper experience of the local wilderness, but when I became uncomfortable I immediately reverted back to ignoring the wisdom around me and relying only on my own wits. It honestly didn't occur to me to inquire of eagle or Earth about how to get warm and wake up (though I did think to express gratitude to the eagles for rousing me from my stupor).

Oliver offers these thoughts in "Upstream," (2004 p. 54):

> When the chesty, fierce-furred bear becomes sick he travels the mountainsides and the fields, searching for certain grasses, flowers, leaves and herbs, that hold within themselves the power of healing. He eats. He grows stronger. Could you, oh clever one, do this? Do you know anything about where you live, what it offers? Have you ever said, "Sir Bear, teach me. I am a customer of death coming, and would give you a pot of honey and my house on the western hills to know what you know?"

I did not ask Sir Bear, or any other available presences, to teach me. In the hubris of my enculturation in a Westernized world I had forgotten that they may carry more wisdom than I do about how to survive in the wilderness I was exploring that day.

I expect that one purpose of a longer term encounter with wilderness—like the 12-day quest I had signed up for—is to remove the option to run back to our car or house when we get uncomfortable, thereby encouraging us to reach out and perhaps experience the wisdom of other beings, and the land itself, that share this world with us. Such reaching out has the potential to bridge the artificial gap we have created between us and world, bringing us back into the larger family of life, reducing our ecological narcissism

and fear of death. Of course such reaching out isn't just about what wilderness can do for humans.

As Kidner, in describing one form of traditional wilderness quest, reminds us,

> the Lakota vision quest is not a matter of *using* the landscape to promote an individual vision, but rather an opening of the self to a vision that comes from the landscape, thus integrating self and landscape within a common frame. This is an integration that is more-than-intellectual, drawing out of us feelings and intuitions that cannot be articulated in a rational way. (2001, p. 102)

At the same time that I was not attempting a deeper communication with the natural world around me to solve the problem of my soporific mental state, I was also not attempting deeper communication with nature *simply to hear what it wanted to say to me!*

One way to interpret my muddled mental state that afternoon might be to read it as an indicator of a profound state of unconsciousness: a reversion into a primitive state of denial (sleep) so as to ward off some unwanted awareness. However, another way to interpret it was suggested by Perluss when she read this story long after it happened. She said: "I would also call it your body's attempt to warn you to get warm. Your body is nature, too. If you can't trust your body and its needs, how can you trust nature?" (personal communication, July 2013). This reminds me of my ongoing struggle to remember that body, nature, and psyche are interwoven parts of one living process.

I cannot now go back and discover what I might have learned that day if I'd been able to stay more awake, but I can (and did) learn from my experience of sleepiness. And on that particular day I did have the option of returning to my car with its heater, so—for better or worse—I took advantage of that option. As I began to warm up a little, it seemed as if my brain began to wake up too, enough to really notice that I wasn't thinking as clearly as usual. I still felt a need to sleep, but I also began to feel anxiety

about how I was going to make the hour-long drive home in the dark, part of it through an area of heavy rush-hour traffic. I weighed the idea of taking a nap in the car and staying to wander around again, versus just heading home now in the daylight while I was a little more awake, and before the traffic got bad. I felt some shame at the idea of leaving early, but I was more frightened by my sense of fuzzy-headedness. So I went home.

I was aware all the way home that my alertness was fading in and out. This was more than the usual kind of going semi-unconscious while driving long stretches of empty highway. I experienced episodes of feeling myself drifting into a fog, and forcing myself to come back. When I got home I turned up the heat in the house and cranked the setting on the electric blanket on my bed to high. I kept puttering around for 15 minutes, waiting for the bed to warm up. I finally climbed into that heavenly haven with its flannel sheets, thermal blanket, heating blanket, and down comforter. I still had my clothes on. I blissfully sank into the coziness and prepared to drift off to sleep.

I drifted and drifted but couldn't quite fall asleep because I couldn't get past the uncomfortable awareness that my hands and feet and legs were like ice. I wiggled. I rubbed my hands and feet. I waited for the electric blanket to work its magic. After nearly an hour I finally gave up and got out of bed and ran myself a hot bath. It took 20 minutes in the hot water to finally bring my hands and feet and legs to a comfortable temperature, and then I dozed a bit in the bath. I remember thinking: "Wow! I must have been even colder than I realized out there." It was only after I told a friend the next day about my experience and she said, "That sounds like hypothermia," that I decided I had some

physical reason for feeling so sluggish and sleepy. (I have already mentioned the possibility of a pull to unconsciousness, enacted by my body.)

I went out into winter and I became winter. The communion with nature I sought on the day-walk did occur, just not in the warm and cozy form I was expecting. Later in the week, in the warmth of my apartment, with my brain fully available for reflective processing, I was able to hear at least some part of what wilderness was attempting to communicate to me. She said: "Here: Feel what the other living beings who dwell out beyond the shelters of the human world feel in winter." Based on my experience, this is what I believe they were feeling: (1) Life under a chill of scarcity with less light, heat, and food; (2) Movement more difficult because energy supplies were reduced; (3) A sleepy hibernation beckoning enticingly; (4) Fear of death growing in the face of increased cold, dark, lack, and vulnerability. Everything seemed reduced to two elementary questions: Can I get enough food and shelter to survive?

I was in winter—winter was in me—and the answers to those questions felt frighteningly unclear. It is easy and fascinating to read about, and see the beauty in, the meaning of winter in a text, while one is sipping hot cocoa in a cozy home with central heating. It is harder and more frightening (at least it was for me) to have a direct embodied experience of winter while outdoors without adequate food or shelter. I am reminded by Hillman (1991) that recognition of a world ensouled includes remembering the "close link of soul with mortality, limitation, and death" (p. 134), which points toward the basic premise of my dissertation. While I say that I welcome such remembering, and am encouraging others in that direction as well, I must also own and honor that there is a life force in me which shies away from encounters with mortality and death.

Given all this, how can I still claim that direct experiences have the potential to enhance our relationship with wilderness within and without, when I have recently had a difficult experience myself? Because having a good relationship isn't just about feeling comfortable all the time. Sometimes it requires confronting aspects of ourselves and the other that we'd prefer to remain in the shadows.

As Perluss pointed out to me after reading this story:

> The fact that you heeded the warnings about bear and cougar, that you drank hot broth, and that you got back into your car and warmed yourself at home, all point to a connectedness with nature. It was the ego that wanted to stay and "commune" with nature and overcome physical limitations. But it was the instinctual knowing to get warm that saved your life. Paradoxically, in wanting to connect with nature, and remain in the cold, you actually went against nature. In responding to your body's needs, you followed nature. (personal communication, July 2013)

Her words were a reminder that I was doing it again: splitting my body and sense of lived experience apart from a nature that I was perceiving as out there, somewhere else. What a complex and challenging dance it can be to hold an attitude of honoring and welcoming knowledge of our limitations and vulnerability as humans in the greater web of life, while at the same time honoring and welcoming that in us which fights to protect us from our vulnerability and overcome our limitations.

What is lacking in our relationship with inner and outer wilderness is not just appreciation of its beauty and wonder. Many of us in modern industrialized society see the beauty and wonder, at least in isolated parts of what we label nature or the natural. What is lacking is a clearer recognition and acceptance of humanity's place in all of this: an acceptance that we too are subject to cycles of lack as well as plenty, fear as well as joy, contraction as well as expansion. A recognition that we too are prey—subject to being consumed by other beings—though we have done our best to ensure that we rarely

fall prey anymore to the large mammals who used to share that experience with us. Now we fall prey mostly to the tiniest organisms or dysfunctions of our own bodily systems, and we throw vast resources at trying to prevent even that.

We've come to imagine that humanity can somehow rise above lack and suffering, and that we have the right to consume the entire world to try to accomplish that. And it would be easy for me to label that as purely destructive narcissism, but, based on my own direct experience, I must also acknowledge that there can be an element of healthy narcissism there too: an instinctual effort towards saving our own lives. I think the key to the conundrum lies in remembering that in the bigger picture we are all in this together—and by all I mean not just humans but the nonhuman world as well—and our survival depends on the survival of the complex systems of which we are a part.

Abram acknowledges our tendency to retreat from the nonhuman world of complex living systems beyond our homes and cities, with their reminders that we too are vulnerable, saying: "There are things out and about that can eat us, and ultimately will. Small wonder, then, that we prefer to abstract ourselves whenever we can, imagining ourselves into theoretical spaces less fraught with insecurity" (2010, p. 6). We imagine that we can remove ourselves from the food chain just as we imagine that we can remove ourselves from such emotional spaces as grief and depression, which threaten to consume our happiness.

Yet modern humanity cannot continue to have its artificially created world of endless spring and summer, as if growth and plenty and joy and ease could exist without death and lack and suffering. If we continue to maintain such an unbalanced existence, we will continue to disrupt the lives of all the other presences that share this cyclic fabric

of being with us, and we will continue to suffer the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual consequences of dwelling in the midst of a delusional cultural mania. Besides, as Perluss reminds us, "In the end, everyone—no matter how modernized—is reconnected with nature when they die. We can't escape nature. It will eventually take us" (personal communication, July 2013).

Is it easier to welcome remembrance of ourselves as nothing more (or less) than one member in the community of nature if we are having a pleasant experience? You bet! Is it easier to welcome dreams of beauty and bounty rather than nightmares of death and suffering? Absolutely. While I was out there shivering, sometimes with cold and sometimes with fear, in the forest on my winter day-walk, I noticed that it was harder to hold onto a sense of belonging and being at home than it had been while I wandered in the warm, sunny forest of early fall. My sense of home and belonging appear to depend a great deal on my sense of comfort, and when I am consumed with my own desire for comfort, I am not thinking about the comfort (and need for a sense of home) of bear and cougar. Is that what drives us: a hunger for comfort which then propels us to rationalize separation from, and destruction of, wilderness?

Part of me desperately wanted to keep me separate from that winter forest—to take me out of there—to convince me that I should just drop this whole crazy idea of deepening my connection with nature. Some piece of that urge toward separation felt like survival instinct. Bears and cougars actually do hurt and kill people sometimes (though I recognize that modern humans, with their many weapons, are much more threat to bears and cougars). Trails along the edge of steep ravines really are places where a wrong step

can mean injury or death. Even moderate cold (as I discovered) can be a threat to our survival if experienced over a long enough period of time.

But there was another large part of that urge in me toward separation that wasn't about survival. It was about comfort, physical and psychical comfort. That part of me, which still believes in my essential difference and specialness, my elevation above bugs and bushes and boulders, whispered, "Why set yourself up to be so uncomfortable? You have a great deal of choice. They (bugs, bears, boulders) have less choice. Wouldn't they also choose to come in out of the cold, and have plenty to eat, and be unafraid and comfortable, if they could?" It's hard to argue with the logic of that. I can imagine very few beings preferring suffering to comfort (though some humans with a masochistic streak get a kind of comfort out of suffering—but that is a topic for another dissertation).

However, the natural tendency for humans, and other beings, to seek comfort is not the problem. The problem is that we humans have become so adept at creating our physical and psychical comfort at the expense of other living beings—including the planet herself—convincing ourselves that this imbalance is entirely fair because these others do not share sentience with us. We have felt free to take for our own use so many of the resources that have supplied necessary food, shelter, and environmental context for other living presences that some of them are now hard pressed to survive at all. And we have felt free to take so much because we have shut off the communications from the wilderness within and without that would alert us to the monstrosity of our behaviors.

Many millennia ago, when humans still experienced the participating kind of consciousness that Berman (1981) describes, we were more likely to remain in balance

with the other living things of the world. In our forgetting of our prior intimacy with the world beyond the human world we have forgotten that we are part of it and we need it. And we need it not just because it is a receptacle of resources to feed our various hungers (ecological narcissism). We need it because the well-being of our bodies and souls depends on our sense of connection and community—our awareness of being a part of something sacred that is greater than ourselves. It is not enough to reduce such connection to just connection with other humans, and such awareness of sacredness to a sacredness detached from the world. We need to expand our circle of connection and sense of sacredness out to include all that exists.

In his discussion of modern humanity's preference for spirit over soul, titled "Peaks and Vales" (1991), Hillman's thoughts about our attitudes toward death are especially relevant here. He tells us:

> If spirit would transcend death in any of several ways – unification so that one is not subject to dissolution; union with self, where self is God . . . the moves toward timelessness and spacelessness . . . dying to the world as place of attachments—soul-making would instead hew and bevel the ship of death, the vessel of death, a container for holding the dying that goes on in the soul . . . that which slips into the ground—not just at the moment of physical death but is always slipping into the ground, always descending, always going deeper into concrete realities and animating them. (p. 139)

He is not advocating that we give up or dishonor that in us which moves toward spirit. Instead, he is advocating that we also remember and honor that in us which moves toward soul with its recognition of the animated nature of the world—human and nonhuman. He is advocating that we remember ways to honor death in its many guises, which would imply accepting and honoring the profound vulnerabilities that connect the lived realities of self and world.

In trying to find solutions to the problematic belief that humans are separate from nature, I am focusing on the idea of encouraging people to go out into the wilderness that we think of as outside, because I believe it also opens up the opportunity to encounter wilderness within. Plotkin (2003) concurs, saying:

> Wandering in nature is perhaps the most essential soulcraft practice for contemporary Westerners who have wandered so far from nature. The earth speaks to us in a manner and muscle with which nothing in town compares. What nature has to say is the necessary complement to what we hear all day long from news, ads, and social chatter. To save our souls we need *nature's* news. (p. 244)

Many of us still believe our souls—our psyches—are separate from nature, and the news from our culture supports that unfortunate conclusion.

Let me reiterate: There is no guarantee that an encounter with nature is going to be comfortable. We may find ourselves basking in the beauty and warmth of a sunny afternoon meander along the edge of the Pacific ocean, salt spray filling our nostrils, the crash of surf a percussive music welcomed by our ears. We may delight in venturing out into the surging water, feeling it dance and swirl around our bodies, the sand sucking deliciously at our feet. And then suddenly we may be caught up in a rip tide beyond our strength, feeling ourselves torn from the safety of the beach, fear surging and heart hammering, knowing ourselves at the mercy of vast, ancient, watery forces that make human power laughable. This, too, is part of a relationship with nature we must honor.

In challenging me to think more deeply about the meaning of my own encounters with fearful aspects of nature (Bear, Cold, Chasm), which I initially felt as a disconnect from nature, Perluss declared:

> Your near (perceived or real) encounter with death was a catalyst for connecting to nature and . . . this also fostered an encounter with the Self which is, as Jung says, a felt sense of death to the ego . . . the antidote to ego narcissism. . . . Rather than go out and do what you *thought* you should do in nature (have a communal

> oneness) your intentions were subverted by the unconscious psyche and physical reality. . . . Even the Buddhist[s] say that when the dualism of the mind is finally overcome, it is first felt as death. And in alchemy, the conjunctio is always followed by a symbolic death. (personal communication, July 2013)

So I cannot naively promote wilderness encounters for myself or clients as a simple path to a positive relationship with nature, if by positive I am implying easy and friendly. Nature, inside and outside, does not always feel friendly to our egoic sense of self.

What I can do instead, is encourage an attitude of patient gentle curiosity about what appears in the field of our experience, be it inside or outside—a curiosity that is open, as much as it is possible to be open, to shifts in sense of self. In the end, nature doesn't just encourage a reduction in ecological narcissism and denial of death. It simply takes us into death, obliterating our narcissism. We have the opportunity to make a paradigm shift away from entrenched Western cultural attitudes and come consciously into relationship with nature and death before that happens.

Some of us have already experienced that paradigm shift of recognizing nature and soul, psyche and body, sacred and matter, as one interwoven reality, and I think that with the proper preparation, and in the appropriate context, encounters with wilderness could help others renew their sense of self. Such renewal might include a willingness and ability to recognize the many forms of consciousness arising within nature, as well as its inherent value, which exists apart from any use it may have for humans.

I am aware that the language I am using about paradigm shifts and recognizing a particular form of reality leans into the territory of language about religious conversion, and that makes me nervous. Yet we have already heard from many others in the field of ecopsychology who have spoken of the need for a kind of conversion in our beliefs about

self and world. Kidner (2001) is one of the ecopsychologists who have made such statements:

> Such conversions represent the glimmerings of an awareness that selfhood can be defined not only by its *contradistinction to* the world, but also through its *resonance with* the world; and this resonance invites us to perceive and participate in the world in a more-than-rational way, drawing out aspects of subjectivity that normally remain unrecognized and dormant in modern society. An ecological subjectivity, then, is both an enhanced awareness of the character of the world, and an enhanced self-awareness; and these two enhancements cannot occur in isolation from one another. (p. 109)

Ultimately, then, differentiation between inner and outer nature is a false differentiation, but most of us in Western industrialized culture still experience and discuss them as separate things. So, *conversion*, as in "a change from one belief, religion, doctrine, opinion, etc. to another" (*Webster's*, 1984, p. 311) seems an appropriate term to describe the shift that needs to take place.

Psychotherapy can be a forum for a person to experience a kind of conversion, in the sense of undergoing a change in beliefs about self, others, and world. Paradigm shifts do happen as clients gradually (or suddenly) see and understand things in a radically different way. In Jungian dreamwork, for example, clients might come to recognize that there is an abiding intelligence or presence communicating with them through what we call the unconscious, and their sense of themselves as alone in the world could dissolve into an awareness of being held and guided by something larger. So too, can ecotherapy foster such change.

As my emphasis in the work of this dissertation has shifted from a fascination with the theoretical connections between ecological narcissism and denial of death, to a search for ways to help heal the perceptual split between humans and nature that underlies such narcissism and denial, I have been incorporating more elements of

ecotherapy in my psychotherapy work with clients. I too have experienced a kind of conversion, in which my professional identity has expanded beyond the label Jungian psychotherapist to include ecotherapist.

What is ecotherapy? Linda Buzzell and Craig Chalquist (2009) offer this excellent description:

> Ecotherapy represents a new form of psychotherapy that acknowledges the vital role of nature and addresses the human-nature relationship. It takes into account the latest scientific understandings of our universe and the deepest indigenous wisdom. This perspective addresses the critical fact that people are intimately connected with, embedded in, and inseparable from the rest of nature. (p. 18)

Yes. Inseparable from nature. That is the key point. Long before I experienced the life-changing communication with the eucalyptus tree at Pacifica, many other scholars and psychotherapists had already been on the trail, searching out clues to what was causing our disconnection from, and destruction of, the natural world. In their search they have laid a magnificent foundation of theory, and recommendations for ecotherapy practice, for those of us who have joined the journey later.

In joining that journey I have begun to engage clients in work that goes beyond the usual Jungian practices of dreamwork, active imagination, and attention to complexes and archetypal themes. I am now actively inviting clients to engage with the wilderness outside, as they are engaging the wilderness inside, in the hopes that they might discover for themselves a meaningful connection between the two. Allow me to illustrate by telling you about a woman I will call Anne.

Anne came to me as a client just a month ago, seeking support in her grieving over her adult daughter's estrangement from her. Anne is a tall, slender woman in her mid-50s with dark hair and a warm smile. She has described feeling "stunned" by her

daughter declaring a need for distance from her several months ago, "for no reason that I can understand." She reports that she considered her daughter her closest companion, even closer than her husband. She has stated, "I still can't believe this is happening. I keep expecting her to call me, like she used to every week. I haven't cried. I feel like a ghost of myself. I keep picking up the phone to call her and then putting it back down when I remember that she doesn't want to talk to me."

Since Anne told me in our first visit how much she loves to take a hike several days each week in the woods near her home, I suggested to her in our second visit that she might take a hike with the specific intention of being mindful of how the natural world might reflect her wounding in a way that could be meaningful for her. (Betsy Perluss suggested this phrasing in a personal communication in July of 2013). I also suggested that she specifically attend more closely than usual to her senses of smell, sound, touch, and sight. I thought there was a chance this might help her move beyond that frozen, ghostlike place she felt herself in.

During our third visit Anne relayed this experience to me. She stated that she went out for a hike but walked more slowly than usual, not knowing what she might be looking for, but trying to "just be open to what wanted to come to me." She walked for a couple of miles without anything "leaping out" and began to feel discouraged. She said, "I thought there should be some big AHA! moment, but there wasn't." She reported that she finally sat down on a fallen log to rest for a few minutes, and gradually became aware that dampness from the log was soaking through her jeans. She said, "I looked around, startled, and noticed that everything was wet. It was actually raining a little, but I'd been so lost in my own thoughts that I didn't notice."

She continued her story, commenting that she saw some mushrooms growing out of the side of the log, which she now recognized as a dead log. She saw where it had been chopped down by someone long ago; she smelled the damp earthy smell of the rotting log; she felt the rain falling, more heavily now, on her cheeks; and then she burst out crying. She declared: "It slowly dawned on me that this whole thing feels like a death. It's the death of the relationship I had with my daughter for 30 years. And this is grief that I'm feeling, not just shock. But there was also something about those mushrooms, sprouting out of the side of that dead log. They reminded me that something new can come from the death of something else. So maybe there is hope that eventually we can find our way toward a new relationship. I felt sadness all mixed up with hope, and the sadness is hard to bear, but it's better than that awful blank feeling I've been carrying around for months now."

Then she said to me, "Does that seem crazy? I mean, I know you told me to go out there to see if maybe I'd run into something that would mean something to me about this void in my life from my daughter breaking away from me, but it almost felt like that old log and those mushrooms were talking to me or something. That's weird, isn't it? I'm not telling anybody about that except for you for fear they might think I'm going crazy."

Her remarks reminded me of my own fear and confusion after my encounter with the eucalyptus tree: That fear of being seen as crazy by the culture in which we're embedded. Kidner (2001) acknowledges the problem in this way:

> And where the world does still speak to us, its voice is likely to be pathologized by the definers of normality and abnormality. Hearing voices is one of the classic symptoms of psychosis; and yet perhaps madness is appropriately viewed as our failure to listen to or to make sense of what we hear. The commonplace view that

> the human intellect is the only source of structure has made us deaf to what the earth is saying; and "environmental problems" are regarded simply as practical problems to be solved by the application of science. But they are also communications that have other dimensions: spiritual emotional, intuitive. (p. 74)

I reflected back to Anne her anxiety about being viewed as crazy if she were to actually experience some meaningful communication with an embodied aspect of wilderness, and I wondered aloud if she had questions about my sanity since I'm the one who suggested this process. She grinned and acknowledged that she thought I might be "way out there" in some of my ideas about therapy. Since she had told me early on that she is an avid reader, I asked if she might be willing to explore some books on ecotherapy. When she agreed, I suggested she might start with Bill Plotkin's (2003) *Soulcraft*.

Anne continues to reflect on her experiences in the woods that day. We have only been working together for a few weeks now, so I have much yet to learn about the depths of Anne's psyche. With the little bit of information and experience I have so far, I will speculate that in relation to the estrangement of her daughter, Anne had been stuck in a place of denial of the death of the particular form that relationship had taken for many years. Her response to her daughter's distancing was a kind of internal, "No!" that left her blocked in her ability to feel much of anything, feeling "like a ghost." This frozen state was reflected in her inability to be aware of her surrounding in the woods. She didn't allow herself to be aware of the rain in the same way that she didn't allow herself to be aware of her own tears, needing to fall.

Her ramble in the woods didn't resolve her relationship with her daughter, but it did seem to help her make a shift toward feeling the reality of her loss. It helped shift something in her relationship with herself, and with the woods, which she now experiences as more deeply alive than she did before. I took the advice of Perluss, who

had warned me against prescribing a ramble in the woods as a kind of "fix it" for a client's troubles, and was amazed at the results of simply suggesting to Anne that she notice how wilderness might reflect her wound.

As I begin to suggest such journeys in outer nature to certain clients, as a balance to the inner journeys I've been recommending for many years, I remain mindful that the wilderness outside is not there just to help serve the needs of humans. Though I cannot direct the unfolding of a client's path in any manner, offering only occasional light along the way, I can hold hope that they might discover, as I have, that "you can count on wild nature to reflect your soul because soul is your most wild and natural dimension. Nature gives birth to your soul—and that of all other animals and plants on the planet" (Plotkin, 2003, p. 41). That crucial step—the recognition that the animals and plants, and I would add the planet herself, are ensouled, just as we are ensouled—is a leap I cannot make for clients. But I can help open the door to direct experience of wilderness, and allow the inherent aliveness and intelligence there to work its own magic.

Poetry speaks so clearly of that magic because poetry is the language of the soul, and Rilke is a voice of the soul of poetry in, "How surely gravity's law . . . ," published in *Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*, (1929/2005, pp. 171-172):

> How surely gravity's law,
> strong as an ocean current,
> takes hold of even the smallest thing
> and pulls it toward the heart of the world.
>
> Each thing –
> each stone, blossom, child –
> is held in place.
> Only we, in our arrogance,
> push out beyond what we each belong to
> for some empty freedom.

If we surrendered
to earth's intelligence
we could rise up rooted, like trees.

Instead we entangle ourselves
in knots of our own making
and struggle, lonely and confused.

So, like children, we begin again
to learn from the things,
because they are in God's heart;
they have never left him.

This is what the things can teach us:
to fall,
patiently to trust our heaviness.
Even a bird has to do that
before he can fly.

The wondrous things (that our culture mistakenly labels *things* when ancient cultures would have named them *presences*), these can be our teachers, leading us to release our arrogance. That very gravity which ever pulls us toward the center of the earth patiently invites our surrender, whispering: "Let go your denial and fear of death. Let go. It is safe to fall. You can rise up again, perhaps rooted like a tree, perhaps flying like a bird. There is nowhere soul is not."

Ah, such beautiful words and beautiful ideas. Living them, however, is easier said than done. In her critique of an earlier stage of this dissertation Perluss suggested that I draw clearer connections between my theme of the relationship between ecological narcissism and the denial of death, and my description of my day walk in winter during which I experienced tremendous fear related to potentially life-threatening cold and wild animals. In particular, she noted that "from a depth perspective, one might suggest that

the fear itself was felt like a defeat for the ego and thus a portal to a deeper relationship with nature" (personal communication, July 2013).

A number of Dr. Perluss' comments about my description of that day made me realize that I wrote it from a perspective in which I felt ashamed of my fear, as if being connected with nature meant that I should not feel afraid of cold or suffering or being hunted as prey or dying. Always, the ego wanting to avoid suffering—wanting to feel invulnerable—when nature informs us that everything changes and eventually dies. So my instinctive fear of dying from hypothermia or a bear attack was simultaneously a defeat for my ego and an opening into a more authentic connection with the natural world in which I am forced to acknowledge that I am not in control.

Ironically, I was pondering these ideas over a period of time in which I was experiencing serious health problems, including a heart problem that caused me to fear for my life three times over a period of 3 weeks. I was dramatically reminded of the fact that body is nature, and psyche is integral to both, and that nature in its myriad forms constantly reminds us of our vulnerability. Even with all of those ideas running around in my head, I was hating my body with its troubles that were getting in the way of what I was trying to accomplish in my life. I wanted to just make it all go away: the pains, the palpitations, the fear, the sense of uncertainty.

At some point in the midst of all this I recalled Perluss' comments about looking to nature to reflect our wound. I had to look no farther than my own body. My wound is that I am an organic being with a kind of sentience, and during most of my conscious moments I can't bear the idea that I'm subject to suffering and death. I do everything in my power to remain unaware, but it is impossible always to deflect that awareness. When

nature/reality breaks in, I fight it, try to bargain with it, try to distract myself, and often I'm successful. When I'm not successful, I sometimes get to a place of surrender and serenity, and other times I just feel defeated and terrified.

When I was lying on the floor in my office with my heart beating nearly 200 beats a minute, dizzy and short of breath, what I wanted was medical intervention to make it stop. At that moment I didn't care that our huge, lumbering medical enterprise is a reflection of our narcissistic preoccupation with saving ourselves at the expense of all other life in the world.

I started this dissertation feeling quite sanctimonious: "Look at all those people out there who are behaving narcissistically in relation to the natural world out of their fear of death." Now, in the same way that I have come to feel (sometimes) one with the natural world, I also feel one with those who destroy it through narcissistic blindness. Perhaps if those parts of me can remain in communication, there is hope. Ecopsychology and depth psychotherapy promote an attitude of welcoming towards diversity of forms. Where shall I imagine that to occur, if not within me?

Chapter 6
Limitations and Delimitations of the Research

The hermeneutical approach I have chosen for this dissertation necessarily limits some possibilities for how this work might be received by the larger world, yet opens up others. As a qualitative rather than quantitative approach, hermeneutics will generate conclusions that do not lend themselves to the kind of validation and generalization so highly prized by researchers with a more scientific bent. The reader will note that I have nevertheless taken the risk of suggesting in my findings that some of the conclusions I have drawn from the experiences and interpretations brought to me by this dissertation journey might fruitfully be applied to other people. I make that claim with trepidation.

I cannot know whether my discoveries have relevance for anyone but me. I did no controlled studies. I experimented on myself a great deal, and I have some positive anecdotal evidence from the one client with whom I tried an experiential exercise arising out of my conclusions, yet even my labeling of that outcome as positive must be suspect, because I cannot avoid acknowledging a vested interest in viewing it as positive.

As this dissertation is hermeneutical in nature, it is possible that some of my interpretations and conclusions might expand on some previous ideas about the human relationship with nature, and might inspire some further explorations into this topic. I am hopeful that is the case, but cannot know for sure if others will take up any of these threads of discussion and weave something further from them.

There is also the issue of my switching horses in midstream. I set out on this journey with the intention of maintaining what I thought of as a hermeneutic approach, in the sense of interpretation of texts. I planned to read books on my topic areas of interest and write about what I discovered, allowing for the reactions of psyche in the form of

such textual recordings as dreams, myths, and active imaginations. I felt on solid ground in stretching the term *text* in this way. Palmer (1969) defines hermeneutics as focusing "specifically on the interpretation of an always historical object, a text" (p. 41). But he expands on that to say: "The object of interpretation, i.e., the text in the very broadest sense, may be the symbols in a dream or even the myths and symbols of society or literature" (p. 43).

However, as I continued with my interpretation of various forms of texts during this journey, I came to the conclusion that the direct experience that underlies textual interpretation, or language itself, was more important than the words that arise from experience. In fact, that became my most profound conclusion, so my emphasis moved away from reading books about my initial topics of interest to seeking out more direct experiences related to my topics of interest.

I abandoned further explorations of the many fascinating threads of discussion about narcissism and death denial that I had opened up in my literature review, and began to investigate instead what came to feel much more compelling: how to mitigate those two unfortunate results of the deeper problem of a human belief in separation from nature. Because I had come to believe that direct experience of the wildness within and without (especially without) was the best chance for mitigation of ecological narcissism and death denial, I used myself as a guinea pig to explore whether or not that might be true. I then found myself attempting to point to my encounters with such wilderness through the medium of text; struggling with how to meaningfully interpret my own direct experiences in symbolic form; and appreciating the irony that my direct experiences had been invited by the words I encountered in the texts I was reading.

As I worried about whether or not what I was doing could even be considered a form of hermeneutics anymore, I found this statement in Palmer (1969): “Hermeneutics is an encounter with Being through language” (p. 42). He goes on say, “Hermeneutics is plunged into the fully philosophical questions of the relationship of language to being, understanding, history, existence, and reality” (pp. 42-43). I decided that this must be an ancient dance of complexity with no clear beginning or end.

Though I am leaning on the side of privileging direct experience as the most transformative force in the dance between experience/being and language/text, I do acknowledge that if we can’t find some way to express what we experience it remains locked in our own sensory apparatus, unavailable for sharing with others who are joined in this dance of being. And since our culture is so immersed in the realm of the written word, if we can find a way to express our experience in writing, it becomes more available to sharing with a wider group. I must also acknowledge that in my own experience, struggling to find the right words to describe in writing an indescribable experience does take me more deeply into that experience as I relive it, and feel out its many nuances.

Hermeneutics allows for an open-ended expression of being and meaning. It is up front about its interpretive moves which always take into account the interpreter. As Coppin and Nelson (2005) remind us, “Transference and projection are seen as descriptions of the natural exchange between knower and known rather than some mistake one makes upon the other” (p. 98). This approach therefore fits well in the worlds of depth psychology and qualitative research theory, which welcome fluidity of meaning and acknowledge the value of ambiguity. But a scientific paradigm requires

validation of results through (supposedly) exact replication of conditions of the research. Such validation is impossible in the context of hermeneutics, where the researcher herself is viewed as inherently part of the results, and no two researchers will ever be replicable.

Having mentioned depth psychology, I must now move on to noting limitations to this study based on its grounding in a depth psychological, and in particular a Jungian, orientation. Advocates of behaviorism, CBT, humanism, existentialism, and some camps in the psychoanalytic world will find little here of relevance. Readers from outside the world of ecopsychology may feel that this work stretches the realm of psychology to the breaking point. Readers from outside the realm of psychology in general may be baffled or offended by the clear entanglement of researcher self with research outcomes.

A Jungian depth approach honors the reality of what we call the unconscious, and holds psyche as an enveloping perspective from within which we encounter self and world, rather than as just an internal presence. Coppin and Nelson (2005) tell us that psyche "includes both consciousness and the unconscious" (p. 42), and they are including in the definition of unconscious the larger realms of the collective unconscious (identified by Jung) and the world unconscious (identified by Aizenstat). The Jungian approach I am using also includes the ideas of Hillman, who advocated for our re-awakening to "anima mundi" (1982, p. 71), the world ensouled.

With psyche as my guide, I have taken to heart Coppin and Nelson's (2005) invitation to allow the presence and interpretation of "the figures who show up in dreams, fantasies, and artwork as well as the natural and man-made things of the world" (p. 52). Winter has spoken as a living presence here. Such figures would render this dissertation not only unacceptable—but delusional—in the minds of some readers.

In the end this dissertation must be seen as more of a beckoning to join a journey than a set of conclusions or results. Perhaps it will be of use in providing a platform for others to plunge into direct experiences connected with their relationship with nature, and perhaps it will offer some ideas that might invite further explorations by others with a penchant for psychological and ecological journeys, which are separated only in our speaking of them, not in our experiencing of them.

I find a sense of release from my complexes about perfection and control when I read these words of Coppin and Nelson about the dissertation journey: “Perhaps the true journeyer finds sanctuary in movement more than stillness, in surrender more than control . . . in discovery more than certainty” (2005, p. 162). I hope there is movement here. I believe there is surrender and discovery. Beyond that there are only questions, opening endlessly.

Chapter 7
Beckoning—Conclusion

We have forgotten our home in the heart of nature. We have forgotten the faces of our brothers and sisters who share a common source of life with us but wear different raiment. Acting like entitled adolescents, not yet able to make the transition to a maturity which entails responsible relationship with, and stewardship of, the earth and the rest of its inhabitants, most of us in Westernized, industrialized cultures remain caught in a web of ecological narcissism and denial of death.

This long forgetting of our inherent embeddedness in the more-than-human world appears to have begun with the human shift away from a hunter/gatherer lifestyle to a settled, agrarian lifestyle. As we deliberately separated ourselves more and more from the wildness of the world which bodied us forth—putting up walls and fences, planting and harvesting crops, domesticating animals—our stories about ourselves began to change. We did our best to convince ourselves that we were no longer part of that wildness which we were doing our best to banish beyond our walls erected of stone and suppression. In fact, we did our best to convince ourselves that humans were never really part of that wildness in the first place—that we were always separate and special, standing above and apart from all other beings and earth herself.

Blooming from the seeds of our separation from nature grew—not just more plentiful and reliable physical comfort—but also a fear and denial of death, which led us to remove our bodies from the cycle of taking and being food. We became takers only, refusing to give back our own flesh as fair trade for all the flesh of other beings we had consumed. Our fear and denial were also reflected in the altering of ancient sacred mythologies within which all being had been known as part of a meaningful web of

existence. The new myths we wove about ourselves and the world declared that only humans were ensouled, only human death was meaningful, and that, ultimately, we could be saved from death by science, or a divine being divorced from embodied life.

Another of the unfortunate fruits of our move away from wilderness—in fact, growing on the stalk right next to death denial—was a deep narcissistic wound. As we closed our eyes and ears to the ensouled presences of the more-than-human world we came to imagine two terrible things. First, we imagined ourselves alone in the world, and the vast emptiness we created began to eat us up inside. Then, in a frantic effort to fill up that inner void, we imagined ourselves the rightful owners and users of whatever we wanted from the world. Now, when we looked out into the world, we saw only essentially dead things, without souls or voices of their own; things that appeared to reflect nothing more than satisfaction of human needs or evocation of human dreads.

When we looked at the river we saw only water for our cups, electricity for our cities, or destructive power to be harnessed, not River—magical embodiment of both the grace and force of fluidity—life and death in motion. When we looked at the deer we saw only food for our tables, or nuisances for our crops, not Deer—leaping soul of alert and gentle life in the forest.

We made ourselves blind, deaf, and mute, and then imagined all other presences in the world besides humans to be lacking the very sentience we took from them in our burgeoning arrogance and fear. Why? That question is a question of ultimate meanings that is beyond the scope of this work. All I can say with some reasonable certainty is that there appears to be a correlation between humanity's ancient choice to try to reduce our exposure to the cyclic flux of food and temperature that all other beings on the planet are

exposed to, and our eventual creation of mythologies and identities rooted in separation from nature.

I am inclined to believe that meanings grow up out of experiences, so I lean toward Shepard's (1998) idea that agrarian life preceded stories elevating humans above the natural world. But we can't ignore the fact that experiences can also follow upon meanings, with established belief coloring everything we perceive. I think this is one of those mysterious weavings of being and meaning that we must allow to be a spiral, rather trying to force it into a linear, cause-and-effect shape that does not fit.

And, of course, the very wilderness that we tried so hard to exile to the other side of our city walls lived on inside our psyches, despite our best efforts to squash it there too, through religious, political, cultural, and scientific dogmas. In fact, as we know so well in depth psychotherapy, the very act of squashing can evoke an eventual eruption. Dreams, manias, panic attacks, depressions, slips of the tongue, speaking in tongues, psychosis, group hysteria, genocide: wildness has not and will not be tamed, in all its glory and horror.

So what are we to do? We must come back into deeper relationship with the wildness of nature within and without. We must find a way to re-bridge the artificial separation which split nature into a within and without in the first place. We must weave new stories and new identities based on a remembering of humanity's membership in the more-than-human world. We can do this. Some of us are already doing it. Some of us never forgot in the first place.

How are we to do this? One way—the way I am advocating as a result of my research—is to encourage people to have more direct experiences with wilderness, both

inside and outside themselves. Direct experience has the most potential to change a person's paradigms. If I am convinced that the natural world outdoors is a meaningless heap of resources, or an ugly, nasty, dangerous realm, I *might* experience something different if I spend some significant time in it, attending closely to it. There is no guarantee. I might decide it's even more meaningless or nasty than I imagined in the first place. But if I don't go out and encounter it directly, the odds of my perspective changing are remote.

The same is true for our beliefs about our inner nature. If we've been taught that our dreams, sensations, and imaginations are full of evil, or nothing but manifestations of chemical processes, our best chance to perceive them as somehow meaningful, and even sacred, is to attend more directly to our experiences of them. Once again, there is no certainty that a person enmeshed in a rigidly scientific point of view is going to experience a paradigm shift in her view about herself and the world, even if she enters Jungian analysis, but she *might*. It opens a door of possibility that was closed before. I believe we need to encourage the opening of more doors to such a shift in perspective.

I mentioned before that I believe in doing my best to walk my talk. So I have been spending more time outdoors, in wildish areas of nature, attending to what I am hearing and seeing and feeling. I have also been spending more time attending to how my dreams, intuitions, and active imaginations may be related to, and arising from, my relationship with outer nature. As I practice on myself I am also bringing my ideas about the value of direct experience into my practice as a Jungian therapist. No longer am I just inviting clients to attend to their inner natures. I am also now inviting them to go out into the wild places, with the hopes that they might experience a connection between inner

and outer that could ultimately help to heal some of the wounds in the larger world between human and nature.

And, as I continue to speak and write in this awkward language distinguishing inner and outer, I am reminding myself repeatedly that such a division is artificial, a linguistic contrivance describing a perceptual split woven into our cultural fabric. Through my research I have come to the conclusion that such an imagined split between humans and nature expresses an untruth destructive to all life. I will continue to do what I am able to embody a view of numinous wholeness, and I would beckon to other researchers interested in humanity's relationship with nature to explore the terrain ever more deeply. I have invited Rilke to help me in beckoning towards renewed possibilities with his poem, "All will come again . . . ," (1929/2005, p. 181):

> All will come again into its strength:
>
> the fields undivided, the waters undammed,
> the trees towering, and the walls built low.
> And in the valleys, people as strong
> and varied as the land.
>
> And no churches where God
> is imprisoned and lamented
> like a trapped and wounded animal.
> The houses welcoming all who knock
> and a sense of boundless offering
> in all relations, and in you and me.
>
> No yearning for an afterlife, no looking beyond,
> no belittling of death,
> but only longing for what belongs to us
> and serving earth, lest we remain unused.

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