

# THE VOICE OF THE EARTH

*An Exploration  
of Ecopsychology*

THEODORE  
ROSZAK

*"Powerful, compelling, extraordinary. . . . We need urgently to heal  
our relationship with our life-giving planet and feel deeply the  
intimate connection with nature Roszak so beautifully describes."*

—Al Gore

## Two

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 MODERN PSYCHOLOGY IN SEARCH  
OF ITS SOUL

## BART SIMPSON AND THE TIGER

I am sitting in a crowded airport waiting to board a plane that will fly me home from a distant city where I have been attending a conference on Artificial Intelligence. The city is Rio de Janeiro, an ailing Third-World metropolis whose government and financial masters have been maniacally plundering one of the planet's last rainforests. More than it needs computers and expert systems, Brazil needs its jungles. And beyond that, its cities, teeming with violence and cluttered with garbage, need social justice and decent sewers. But almost as if high tech might be the magic wand that will dispel these brutal ills, the Brazilians I have met on this visit have been preoccupied with modems and E-mail and multimedia.

Beside me in the waiting room, a little boy about six years old is casually flipping through an American magazine. He pauses on one page to study the picture of a tiger. The illustration is part of an advertisement for Exxon oil. The boy spends several seconds gazing at the photographed face of the great beast whose image, even in this tawdry commercial version, preserves a certain lordly dignity. Then he turns the page to confront another advertisement. At once the boy brightens. He recognizes the picture. It is an animated television cartoon named Bart Simpson, the current media rage. Excitedly, the boy turns to his mother to show her the picture, which also happens to be emblazoned across his T-shirt.

I think: by the time this boy is my age, Bart Simpson will have come and gone, replaced many times over by similarly ephemeral fictions. And by then the tigers will also be gone, never to be replaced. They may not even survive in zoos; not all the wild things agree to reproduce in captivity for our convenience and amusement. When they have no real place of their own, they quietly surrender to extinction. Someday children coming upon the picture of a tiger will view it the way we view the dinosaurs, wondering if such creatures ever really existed. But the extinction of the tigers—and the gorillas and the wolves and the whales—will be different. *We* will have exterminated these species, unthinkingly, without purpose, without remorse.

I have never seen a tiger in the wild. Nor a gorilla or a wolf. But as civilized as I may be, something in me nevertheless insists that it is important these beasts should be there sharing some corner of the world with me. If they perish, it closes an episode in planetary history that represents millions of years of evolution. Granted, extinction is a constant theme of life on Earth, one of nature's ways of pruning, improving, and clearing space. But if it is to happen, best that it happen as part of some grand global transformation that has a certain geological, even cosmic grandeur to it. Some think the dinosaurs met their end sixty million years ago in the wake of a meteoric collision that cast the planet into a worldwide winter. Other species were rendered extinct by the drifting of the continents or the advance of glaciers, only to have their place taken by new types. There is an almost ceremonial magnificence to such processes that matches the magnitude of the calamity. We might consider extinction on such a scale as an "act of God," meaning not only that it happened before our time and beyond our control, but that it happened on whatever we take to be the highest authority.

But the tiger in the Exxon advertisement is not doomed to so dignified an end. The demise of its species will be fortuitously bound up with oil spills like that which Exxon in its money-mad recklessness inflicted upon the Alaskan coast a few years back. Bound up too with this airport where I am sitting, whose planes are fueled by Exxon's oil. Bound up with the devastation of the Brazilian rainforest, which is going on night and day somewhere west of where I sit. And with the high tech that was the subject of the less than necessary conference I have seen fit to travel eight thousand miles to attend. It is even con-

nected along less visible lines with funny little Bart Simpson, whose fictitious existence is dependent on the technology I have just finished discussing with other experts flown in from all over the world.

All these are expressions of heedless power on the part of a human culture that is running amok, wildly expending its technical cunning and industrial energy in all directions. And for what purpose that is worth the death of a species? Too little of what we do with our affluence is done to feed the hungry, heal the sick, comfort the desperate. Between the fate of the Earth and the luxuries, frivolities, and greedy profiteering to which we devote our technological might there is no sane proportion. Yet we live in this imbalance, degrading the planet without the capacity to hear its cries of anguish and anger.

The little boy turns a page. A species dies. A television cartoon takes its place in his life. He does not know, he does not feel. At his age, I was just as uncaring, a child raised on the entrancing illusions of urban culture.

The words of the semilegendary American Indian leader Chief Seattle echo in my mind, a voice that has attained nearly prophetic stature among environmentalists. I know the pronouncement to be apocryphal, but it is nonetheless moving.

What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, man would die from great loneliness of spirit, for whatever happens to the beasts also happens to man. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the Earth befalls the sons of Earth.<sup>1</sup>

As greatly as they may differ in theory and practice, all schools of modern psychiatry agree that the question of truth lies at the core of madness. We go crazy when we lie to ourselves, refusing to face painful realities, hiding from our shameful fantasies. Lust for the mother, hatred for the father . . . these guilty secrets have long since been laid bare. But what of the guilt that comes of annihilating whole species of our fellow creatures, not because we must do so to survive, but in ignorance and for the sake of nothing better than ephemeral amusements, petty pleasures, quick riches? We are, after all, in ways that may even be part of our innermost genetic inheritance tied to the beasts from whom we evolve. At what risk of madness do we break faith with them?

### THE THIRD OUTRAGE

At its deepest level, psychology is the search for sanity. And sanity at its deepest level is the health of the soul. In these respects, psychology, whatever techniques it may use, is necessarily a philosophical pursuit, a critical examination of ethical conduct, moral purpose, and the meaning of life. Every major philosophical and religious system of the past has grounded itself in a psychology, seeking to heal the soul of its wounds and guide it to salvation.

Modern psychology, on the other hand, has been most distinctively an attempt to disconnect from the supposed subjectivity of philosophy and religion. It has followed the example of other fields—economics, political science, sociology—in choosing a scientific model of inquiry, hoping to escape the hazards of judgment. The Behaviorists of the early twentieth century were the most extreme in their assertion of this ideal. Though their principal study was the human mind, whose passions and yearnings they might be expected to share, they affected the cool detachment of the astronomer viewing a distant heavenly body or the biologist dissecting a specimen beneath the microscope. Clark Hull, one of the founders of the school, once described his methodology as a “prophylaxis against anthropomorphic subjectivism.” His goal, he claimed, was to treat the “behaving organism” he was studying as if it were “a completely self-manipulating robot constructed of materials as unlike ourselves as may be”—a capacity that might serve as well in a torture chamber as in a laboratory.

Though he is usually regarded as Behaviorism’s chief opposition, Freud struggled with no less determination throughout his lifetime to remain as rigorously scientific as possible—a goal that, for the most part, he fortunately failed to achieve. As a result, his studies were destined to have a far greater influence upon the arts, literature, and philosophy than those who were patterning their study of human nature on rodents and pigeons. Still, while Freud was willing to grant that human nature had a shadowed interior whose secrets might be more elusive than the logic of the reflex arc, he nonetheless hoped to make the psyche’s dark forces and hidden fantasies the stuff of objective scrutiny.

A great deal has changed in the theory and practice of psychiatry since Freud's time. Here we will be using him as a baseline because he, far more vividly than the Behaviorists, realized the philosophical implications that were posed by the pursuit of a scientific psychology and pitched the issues at the most ambitious level. In his eyes, psychoanalysis was nothing short of epoch-making. It was the final stage in mankind's long, difficult march from superstition to civilization. Yet as much as the life of reason deserved to be cherished, Freud was frank to admit that it brought no happiness with it. Quite the contrary. The progress of science was a punishing ordeal. "Humanity has in the course of time had to endure from the hands of science two great outrages upon its naive self-love," he declared. The first of these came in the age of Copernicus when the human race "realized that our Earth was not the center of the universe. It was only a tiny speck in a world system of a magnitude hardly conceivable."

Three centuries later came the Darwinian revolution in biology, which "robbed man of his peculiar privilege of having been specially created, and relegated him to a descent from the animal world, implying an ineradicable animal nature in him." Bad enough, but worse was yet to come: "Mankind's craving for grandiosity is now suffering the third and most bitter blow from present-day psychological research which is endeavoring to prove to the 'ego' of each one of us that he is not even master in his own house."<sup>2</sup>

Did psychoanalysis *have* to be another outrage to the human ego? It did insofar as Freud insisted upon creating a psychology that shared common ground with the science of Newton and Darwin. Never one to flinch at public disapproval, he predicted there would inevitably be a "universal revolt against our science . . . and the liberation of opposition from all the constraints of impartial logic." He was prepared to meet this response by forcing the bitter pill down the public throat. It never occurred to him that there might be more to that revolt than infantile petulance; it might betoken a legitimate need for transcendent meaning that his science was too readily dismissing.

At the outset of his career Freud made the key decision to adopt the medical model of psychiatric disease, picturing the injured psyche as something like a broken bone: obvious damage in need of some equally obvious repair. It was a safe, minimal assumption, one that came easily to him as a neurologist and which might be expected to appeal to his

colleagues. At times he outdid the mechanistic Behaviorists, speaking of the mind as a repository of pressures, drives, and discharges, as if it were a sort of dynamo inside the head fueled by the instinctual energies. To be sure, a good deal of this clanking, technical jargon was imported into his writing by his translators; Freud did, after all, refer to his subject of study as *die Seele*, "soul" rather than "mind," choosing the German word a poet or philosopher might have used.<sup>3</sup> Still, he did have a weakness for engineering metaphors and for the reductionistic methods that dominated the science of his day. It was Freud's hope that the medical model would guarantee the scientific rigor of psychoanalysis. But in order to live up to that criterion he required an objective measure of mental health. Like the Behaviorists, he felt this could be found in the preexisting social standard of normality. What father and mother, church and state, friends and neighbors, defined as sanity *was* sanity. Seeking to sound as scientific as possible, Freud called the child's assimilation to the adult world the "reality principle." Once the reality principle takes over, the infantile "pleasure principle," with its impractical demand for immediate consolation, is subordinated to a more sensible system of hedonistic budgeting. The child learns to settle for deferred gratifications. If this transition to adulthood ushered children into a humane and fulfilling quality of life, it might represent a decent enough ideal of "normality." But of course it does not. The world of the reality principle is the world of wars, witch-hunts, crusades, pogroms, prisons, criminal violence, class exploitation. Nevertheless, Freud's original position was straightforward and stoical. One must submit oneself to the powers. The psychiatrist's role was to guide the wayward patient back into socially normative paths.

### COLLUSIVE MADNESS

Simplistic assumptions like these characterize Freud's early period, when he still hoped to ingratiate himself to the medical establishment of his day. But in his later years, he opened up two extremely rich veins of speculation that are hardly simple and potentially the very opposite of reductionistic.

The first of these derives from Freud's growing doubts about the social context of sanity, a skepticism that eventually led him to ques-

tion, though not entirely reject, the medical model of neurosis that he had pioneered. The shock of the First World War put an end to Freud's complacent acceptance of consensual normality. What he saw before him in the carnage of the battlefield was a world gone murderously berserk in behalf of ideals, policies, and interests that had long been respected as "rational." How could such a society presume to prescribe criteria of sanity? Can those who fail to adopt its norms fairly be regarded as mad? Was it the psychologist's role to label them as such and whip them back into step with these "communal neuroses"?

Freud was the first to raise the ominous possibility that society itself might be psychopathological and so cannot serve as a standard of health. He asked: "May we not be justified in reaching the diagnosis that, under the influence of cultural urges, some civilizations or some epochs of civilization—possibly the whole of mankind—have become 'neurotic'?"<sup>4</sup> With these words, Freud was on the brink of departing psychiatry to assume the task of a chastising Jeremiah. It was a role he was unwilling to take on. "I have not the courage to rise up before my fellow-men as a prophet," he apologized. Accordingly, he never pursued the political implications of his great insight, nor did he seek to integrate it into his clinical practice. By all reports, Freud the father, husband, teacher was too much the authoritarian to challenge the ruling powers; his political stance was that of the intellectual elitist staving off the revolt of the masses. Ultimately he was willing to defer to official authority even if it was diseased. The alternative, he felt certain, would be anarchy. Caught between crazy governments and the threat of total social upheaval, he resigned himself to the conclusion that civilization was hopelessly tormented by discontents that might turn out to be genocidal: more frustration, leading to more explosive fits of rebellion, leading to more repression, leading to bigger wars.

With the exception of Freud's eccentric disciple Wilhelm Reich—to whom we will return later—it was not until a second World War had come and gone that a school of psychology appeared that was willing to take Freud's hypothesis of collective insanity seriously and to launch out along a different route. R. D. Laing, whose background was as much Existentialist-Marxist as it was Freudian, was among the first to assume an adversarial position on the issue of insanity. Convinced that the mad (or at least some portion of those designated "schizophrenic") may be a rare and endangered species desperately in need of

protection, Laing argued that psychological breakdown could be the first step toward enlightened breakthrough. It might be an incipient assertion of true sanity by those who were still at least resilient enough to feel the pain of society's oppression. It is therefore the psychiatrist's responsibility to take the side of the mad against wrong-headed social authority. We live, said Laing, in the midst of "socially shared hallucinations . . . our collusive madness is what we call sanity."<sup>5</sup> This is the fact from which both theory and therapy must take their bearings. If families are the source of neurosis, then the family must be resisted; if the state makes demands that drive sensitive people mad, then the state must be resisted. Psychiatry is called to a revolutionary task.

From Laing's work and that of Thomas Szasz (*The Myth of Mental Illness*), a small, insurgent school of Radical Therapy (sometimes called "Antipsychiatry") has developed, which sees itself as a sort of Mad Liberation Front, the ally and advocate of suffering souls against all the forces that would "adjust" them to their place in an insane world. One group of Laingian disciples, Activists For Alternatives, which calls itself "an organization of former psychiatric inmates, commonly known as 'mental patients,' " describes its mission in this way:

Our position is uncompromising. We believe the "mental health" Establishment has conned the American people. The idea of "mental illness" is a misleading and degrading metaphor. "Psychiatric treatments" in mental hospitals are for the most part forms of physical and emotional abuse. Psychiatric "diagnoses" are demeaning labels without any scientific validity. . . . There has been no revolution in the treatment of individuals who are psychiatrically labeled: it is an unbroken history of barbaric practices, justified by professionals as medical procedures designed to control patients' ostensible mental diseases.<sup>6</sup>

The project of the Radical Therapists is a brave and compassionate one; but, like many forms of political radicalism, it fares better at denunciation than reconstruction. It speaks out for the rights of rebellion but with no clear image of that higher sanity it would place above the authority of family and society. My impression has been that those who commit to Radical Therapy may never get beyond heroic opposition to the psychiatric establishment. The result is often a political cause rather than personal health—though always with the hope that the two



can be allied as "a people's psychology" that will provide "the integrating factor of self-awareness within the revolutionary process."<sup>7</sup>

With the Radical Therapists, I accept the premise that neurosis is defined within a political context; it is therefore intimately related to the social health and harmony that surround the individual. I also believe Radical Therapy is correct in challenging any form of psychiatry that sees its role as that of simply imposing its definition of mental illness upon the socially deviant as if this act might not be a subject of controversy. But in these pages my purpose is to connect that controversy with a second great insight in the later works of Freud, one that raises an even greater intellectual challenge than the concept of collusive madness.

### THANATOS

When, following the First World War, Freud set about revamping psychoanalysis, the task took him beyond both the pleasure and reality principles. In these uncharted regions of the mind he erected a daring new theoretical framework that would do no less than give psychology a cosmic dimension. Exploring the deepest foundations of consciousness, he concluded that there are instincts deeper than sexuality. Below the level of the libido, we find the elemental biological thrust of life itself, which, Freud was convinced, cuts across the grain of physical nature. Life is an "unnatural" event in an uncaring universe, opposed by the most conservative of all the instincts. Thanatos, the death instinct. Thanatos wants nothing less than to extinguish life and return the universe to its inorganic state. Vitality, Freud believed, is at war with the very physicality it must draw upon to make living bodies and thinking minds.

The attributes of life [he reasoned] were at some time evoked in inanimate matter by the action of a force of whose nature we can form no conception. . . . The tension which then arose in what had hitherto been an inanimate substance endeavored to cancel itself out. In this way the first instinct came into being: the instinct to return to the inanimate state.<sup>8</sup>

Though the idea seems metaphysically rarefied, Freud sought to give it clinical application. For a time he believed the "repetition compulsion" might be connected with the primal biological need to return to some previous pleasure, repeating it over and over. This might issue from the hidden drive in all living things to return to the primordial inorganic state. "The goal of all life is death," Freud believed—a marvelously ambiguous pronouncement that may represent the height of wisdom or the depth of despair.

Because the death instinct longs to soothe away the anguish of existence, Freud also referred to it as the "nirvana principle," the desire for that absolute tranquillity that he felt could only be found in total annihilation. This is a quite illiterate interpretation of what Buddhism means when it speaks of nirvana as the cessation of desire; Freud's reading smacks much more of early German Romanticism. It is closer to the *weltschmerz* of the poet Novalis, who longed to expire before the anguish of unfulfilled existence. It is nonetheless a provocatively ambitious idea. By way of its neurophysiological constitution in the brain, Freud connects the mind with the material universe at large. In this encounter of the quick and the dead, life is the underdog. Nature, Freud was convinced, "is eternally remote. . . . She destroys us—coldly, cruelly, relentlessly."<sup>9</sup> This tragic and inexorable truth is too fearful for most people to face. In its terrible presence, the vast majority of our fainthearted species can do nothing but turn to the illusions of religion or go crazy with terror and grief.

Such desolate views were common among agnostic intellectuals at the turn of the century; the physical science of that period gave life an inconsequential place in the universe. It was seen as the improbable result of random fluctuations among inert chemicals. Only a few theoretical physicists had begun to feel their way into that newly discovered realm of subatomic paradox where all the old Newtonian certainties disintegrate. Even so, the New Physics provided life and mind with no more "natural" place in the quantum universe. For the public at large, matter was still a simple thing: little balls and clusters of dead, insentient stuff, so very different from life that there seemed no way to account for the existence of living things at all except as a freakish accident that has temporarily violated the sovereignty of the second law of thermodynamics. Life was a transient condition doomed to annihilation by the inevitable drift toward maximum entropy; ultimately, every chemical

process in the universe would succumb to the great and final "heat death." After that, for all eternity, there would be nothing, nothing, nothing at all except empty space sparsely littered with the wandering cinders of long-expired stars.

At the turn of the century, this vision of inescapable doom permeated philosophy and the arts as well as the sciences. It accounts for the aura of invincible pessimism that surrounds the poetry of Housman and Dowson, the historical studies of Henry Adams and Oswald Spengler, the plays of Eugene O'Neill, and the novels of Thomas Hardy. The poet Swinburne lamented

*Then star nor sun shall waken,  
Nor any change of light:  
Nor sound of waters shaken,  
Nor any sound or sight:  
Nor wintry leaves nor vernal,  
Nor days nor things diurnal  
Only the sleep eternal  
In an eternal night.*

This was the brooding intellectual atmosphere in which Freud set about connecting consciousness with the cosmos. A doctrinaire materialist, he envisaged psychoanalysis as essentially an inquiry into "the demands made upon the mind in consequence of its connection with the body." The body was the reservoir of the instincts; and when Freud spoke of "instinct," he meant the word in its evolutionary sense: that which connects human with animal in biological history. Ultimately, however, Freud's search for the physical foundation of the psyche reached a literal dead end. His vision of a lifeless, uncaring universe was so grim that it proved to have no future in psychiatry. It yielded an image of the human psyche trapped in the desolation of an infinity where it finds no consolation, no remorse, no response to its need for warmth, love, and acceptance. A cosmology like this has nothing to warm the human spirit.

There may be a hearty few who find a certain fatalistic bravado in facing that alien void. The Existentialist philosophers have, for example, characterized human life as a cosmic absurdity that has no meaning except that which is heroically but arbitrarily assigned to it by each

isolated individual consciousness. At the extreme, Ernest Becker displays a sadistic delight in brandishing Freudian pessimism like an intellectual whip.

What are we to make of a creation in which the routine activity is for organisms to be tearing others apart with teeth of all types—biting, grinding flesh, plant stalks, bones between molars, pushing the pulp greedily down the gullet with delight, incorporating its essence into one's own organization, and then excreting with foul stench and gasses the residue. . . .

*Creation is a nightmare spectacular* taking place on a planet that has been soaked for hundreds of millions of years in the blood of all its creatures.

Freud knew better, as he gradually came to see that the evil in the world is not only in the insides of people but on the outside, in nature—which is why he became more *realistic* and pessimistic in his later work. . . . whatever man does on this planet has to be done in the lived truth of the terror of creation, of the grotesque, of the rumble of panic underneath everything.<sup>10</sup>

What does the practicing psychotherapist do with a vision like this? Distressed clients arrive bearing the wounds of unresolved infantile fears and longings, grinding insecurity, debilitating anxieties. Does their physician then heap the "terror of creation" upon them?

Despite their rich metaphysical resonance (or perhaps because of it) the death instinct and the nirvana principle have remained intellectual curiosities in the history of Western psychology. Even before Freud's death, the psychiatrist Edward Bibring had designated these primal instincts as "theoretical," never to be adduced "in discussions of a clinical or empirical nature."<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, psychiatry after Freud has gone off in other, more practical directions. By and large the development can be described as the search for a larger social framework in which to treat the neuroses. The usual criticism of Freud is that his theories are claustrophobically restricted to the intrapsychic mechanisms, the familiar battleground of the ego, superego, and id. His disciples felt the need of escaping from this tiny psychic box into the outer world of the family, the group, the culture at large, in order to find the sources of neurotic suffering. Most of the schools that have grown up this century have been of this character, variations on inter-

personal themes that take as their goal a functioning accommodation to social demands.

Freud's followers made an understandable adjustment meant to give their professional work more applicability. But there was also a significant loss that has gone unnoticed. Because these psychiatric alternatives simply ignored Freud's explorations beyond the pleasure principle, they have appeared to be larger, more comprehensive therapeutic systems. In one sense, this is true; they are socially more integrative. But in another sense, they have severely lowered the horizons of psychiatric theory, leaving out the universal dimension that Freud sought to give his science in his later, more prophetic essays. Neo-Freudianism has become, as one might only expect, the psychotherapy of urban industrial culture, sharing that culture's blithe ignorance of the greater natural environment on which we depend in body, soul, and mind.

### NORMATIVE ALIENATION

Freud's attempt to qualify psychoanalysis as a branch of medical science led some, beginning with his most gifted pupil, Carl Jung, to criticize his approach to the study of the mind as narrowly reductionistic. The response is by now a familiar one. It holds that Freud sought to trace all human conduct to physical, mainly sexual origins, assuming that once these mainly childhood traumas had been brought back into consciousness, the patient would be cured. Yet, as critical as Jung was eventually to become of Freud's militantly scientific stance, he was among the few analysts to speculate, at least in passing, upon the connection between the psyche and physical nature. In his studies of alchemy, Jung was struck by the prominence of the number four in the religious symbolism of the world. He noted that quaternities (the four points of the compass, the four elements, the four temperaments, the four sides of the square, etc.) frequently appear as images of wholeness. What to make of this "statistical probability" in myth and lore? "I can hardly refrain from remarking—a curious 'sport of nature,' " he observed, "that the chief chemical constituent of the physical organism is carbon, which is characterized by four valencies. . . ." Jung quickly backed off the idea, fearing that "such an analogy" might be "a lamentable piece of intellectual bad taste." One wonders what Jung had in

mind. Some deep archetypal recollection of the chemical basis of life, perhaps?<sup>12</sup>

At other points in his writing, Jung dabbled with the possibility that there may be an overlap between depth psychology and the new field of quantum mechanics. The hypothesis relates to Jung's concept of the *unus mundus*, the ineffable unity that lies at the core of mystical illumination. He wondered if quantum mechanics, especially the principle of complementarity, might offer some insight into this otherwise impenetrable theoretical realm.

If these reflections are justified, they must have weighty consequences with regard to the nature of the psyche, since as an objective fact it would then be intimately connected with physiological and biological phenomena, but with physical events too—and so it would appear, most intimately of all with those that pertain to the realm of atomic physics.<sup>13</sup>

Though Jung undertook an exchange of letters on this subject with the physicist Wolfgang Pauli (who was one of his patients), he pressed the idea little further. Some Jungian theorists, among them Victor Mansfield and J. Marvin Spiegelman, have since sought to resume the inquiry. They suggest that the radically ambiguous relationship of particle to wave in quantum physics might, at least symbolically, express the complementary relationship between the conscious and unconscious mind.

In contrast to Freud, the consummate urban intellectual, Jung always remained sentimentally attached to the rural surroundings in which he was raised. A sympathy for natural beauty and wildlife plays in and out of his writing. In his memoirs *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, he tells how filled with wonders nature was for him in his childhood. "Every stone, every plant, every single thing seemed alive and indescribably marvelous. I immersed myself in nature and away from the whole human world." In 1923, at one of his earliest professional seminars, he identified the four integral parts of the psyche that he believed had experienced the most serious repression in civilized people: "nature, animals, primitive man, and creative fantasy."<sup>14</sup> Still, in the years that followed, a deepening reaction to the dominant scientific paradigm of his day comes to color Jung's thought. Ambitious theoretical attempts to connect the psyche and physical nature fade from his more mature



thought to be replaced by an adamantly nonphysical conception of the psyche. Underlying, or cradling the mind, he envisioned a nonmaterial collective unconscious that contains the compounded wisdom of the human race. The contents of this root mind are written in the language of archetypes, symbols that transcend parochial cultural boundaries, summoning the mind to enlightenment. How exactly this reservoir of salvational teachings came to exist, Jung could not say. But judging by the grandeur and universality he attributed to it, and by the reverence with which he always addressed it, for Jung the collective unconscious was either God or of God. At least that is how he believed people have traditionally understood this "world-system of the spirit." They explained it as a person "and they called this being God, the quintessence of all reality."

As Jung fully realized, the idea of the collective unconscious and its archetypal contents represented a decisive break with Freud's biomedical reductionism. He had at last rejected "the omnipotence of matter" in favor of "an independent psyche that is not determined by the body." His would be "a psychology that does not explain everything upon physical grounds, but appeals to a world of the spirit whose active principle is neither matter and its qualities nor any state of energy, but God."<sup>15</sup> In later years, Freud would mock his once-favored student for his defection, making it clear that he respected only those ideas Jung had developed when he was "a mere psychoanalyst and did not yet aspire to be a prophet."<sup>16</sup>

For many religiously estranged Westerners, Jungian psychiatry has opened doors that were long locked shut by conventionally rational thought. Jung once called his work an effort to heal "the urban neurosis of atheism." Some commentators have seen in Jung's work a modernized form of ancient gnosticism, the quest for illumination through knowledge of the mysteries.<sup>17</sup> The system certainly offers a grandiose perspective for the discussion of sanity. All the highest teachings of the great religious traditions can now be brought back into our culture through the collective unconscious and discussed in a more negotiable, psychologized idiom. Unfortunately, that idiom is not always the best vehicle for spiritual purposes. Too often a Jungian analysis of the archetypes takes on a dry, eclectic flavor. Things get labeled and listed: an example of the Divine Child here, there an example of the Suffering Savior. One pigeonholes the items and moves on. Such an approach

may succeed in breathing a small, academic breath of life into the old myths; the recent popularity of the work of Joseph Campbell, the Jungian mythologist, is testimony to the attraction people find in combing through the world's forgotten lore when the project seeks to salvage things of living value. But the approach can become oppressively pedantic.

More seriously, it can have the effect of deepening the very dichotomy between psyche and nature that needs to be healed. This is ironic, since it was Jung's conviction that he was contributing to a "practical psychology . . . one which helps us to explain things in a way that is justified by the outcome for the patient." As he saw it, "in practical psychotherapy we strive to fit people for life. If I recognize only naturalistic values and explain everything in physical terms, I shall depreciate, hinder, or even destroy the spiritual development of my patients." While he professed the desire to do justice to "the physical being" of his patients, Jung's decision was finally to ally himself all but totally with the "psychic reality" that scientific materialism placed under such killing pressure. Like the efforts of so many other humanistic champions, his "practical" strategy finished by surrendering the natural world to a desacralized science and so deepening the rift between the physical and the spiritual. It also transformed certain strains of Jungianism into a quasi-religious sect that other therapists, still concerned to guard their scientific credentials, have been reluctant to follow.

Beyond his undeveloped hypotheses about complementarity and the archetype of quaternity, it seems fair to say that Jung, for all the size and spiritual resonance of his system, is resolutely lacking in the one significant quality that emerges in the later Freud. Though Jung was, throughout his life, most at home in a pastoral retreat surrounded by woods and waters, his formal theoretical work tends to have little sense of *nature* to it, except insofar as it gives scholarly attention to abstractions like the Mother Earth or the Father Sky. Otherwise Jung seems to overleap all the universe to land in the high and rarefied intellectual empyrean. The result is a kind of unfleshed, phantasmal collection of ideas about the mind that seems wholly divorced from the world in which that mind evolved. Like all the post-Freudians, he too accepts our estrangement from forest and sea, rivers and mountains, and from all our brother and sister creatures as given and irreversible. Therapy

does the best it can within this condition of normative alienation to replace the "urban neurosis of atheism" with a religiosity that is no less urban.

In later chapters, we will return to certain ecologically promising extensions of Jungianism. Here, let us leave off with noting that although Freud could find nothing kindred or consoling in insensate nature, nature is still there in his work, if only as a tragic backdrop. Human beings are bonded to it. Their psyche is an outgrowth, if an anomalous one, of the material stuff of the universe at large; the forces of nature pulse through us, filling our lives with animal lust and hunger. The mind is the brain, the brain is flesh, flesh is chemicals, atoms, electrical energy, and all these belong to the province of science. Where Jung seems to abandon science, Freud clings to it as the only reliable study of natural objects. And for Freud, though the fact is a cheerless one, the psyche is a natural object.

### THE DENATURED ENVIRONMENT

Though it is rarely discussed in the professional literature, Freud's despairing vision of life continues to haunt the major schools of mainstream psychiatric thought. It is a sort of negative presence, unmentioned but always there in the background: the image of a cosmos too alien to take into consciousness. The decision modern psychiatry has made to cut itself off from nature at large and minister to the psyche within a purely personal or social frame of reference follows from Freud's courageous but failed effort to find a humanly acceptable connection between the inner and the outer worlds.

That failure shows up with special pathos in the school of Existentialist therapy that has made one of the most determined efforts to revise Freudian orthodoxy. *Daseinanalyse*, which draws heavily upon German existentialism and phenomenology, sets out to discover the patient's *real* world, "the world in which he lives and moves and has his being." Most emphatically this means that the therapist must—in Rollo May's words—"portray the human being not as a collection of static substances or mechanisms or patterns but as emerging and becoming, that is to say existing." In undertaking this effort to find the patient's living, immediate reality, the Existentialists are careful to

include the environment (*die Umwelt*) in their theoretical apparatus. But their understanding of "environment" is sadly revealing. *Umwelt* is only one of three "worlds" in which the psyche resides; it is quickly passed over in favor of the social world (*Mitwelt*) and especially the personal world (*Eigenwelt*). *Umwelt* is understood to be little more than the sum total of thwarting physical necessities. In May's words, it consists of

biological needs, drives, instincts—the world one would still be in if . . . one had no self-awareness. It is the world of natural law and natural cycles, of sleep and awakesness, of being born and dying, desire and relief, the world of finiteness and biological determinism, the 'thrown world' to which each of us must in some way adjust.<sup>18</sup>

All this, we learn, was adequately handled by Freud. For the Existentialists, getting beyond Freud does not mean revising his vision of nature but rather building new layers of analysis on top of it. *Umwelt* therefore need only be noted in passing as one moves rapidly into the "unexplored frontier of psychotherapeutic theory." And what is that? The *Eigenwelt*, "the self in relation to itself." This is the distinctly human realm, where we disengage from objective nature and stand above it. It is a true "world" in contrast to a mere "environment." "The animal," as Ludwig Binswanger puts it, "not being able to be an *I-you-we-self* . . . does not have any world. . . . The animal has an environment by the grace of nature, not by the grace of freedom to transcend the situation."<sup>19</sup>

What we have here is the denatured environment precisely as we might expect urban therapists and their clientele to know it: a blank, characterless, somewhat bothersome background to "real life," which is social and personal. As Rollo May would have it, "the aim of therapy is that the patient *experience his existence as real*." A laudable goal. But the Existentialists understand this to mean turning inward and away from the environment. "The neurotic is overconcerned about the *Umwelt* and underconcerned about *Eigenwelt*." *Umwelt*, being the world common to all organisms, is of little interest. On the other hand, *Eigenwelt* is a repository of fascinating human anxieties, exactly those traumas that people go to psychiatrists to discuss. In mapping the contours of *Eigenwelt*, the Existentialists, like Freud before them, are

prepared to borrow insights from literature and philosophy. But the authorities they favor—Nietzsche, Marcel, Tillich, Sartre, Camus—are one and all specialists in the peculiar *angst* of modern Western man. For all their insight, they are the articulate symptoms of a neurotic culture rather than its medicine. Even the religious among them—like Kierkegaard—begin by endorsing the dead and alien universe of modern science and then working away from it as an agonizing premise. One does not work *through* nature, but seeks to transcend it by a “leap of faith.” Nature is the prison we must escape in search of a God who is taken to be wholly other.

Granted there is much to be learned from the study of such gifted and articulate victims of our alienated status. But the main lesson therapy might draw from them is the one question these sensitive, but intensely urbanized minds never raise. What is the source of the “epistemological loneliness” that characterizes modern life? *Can it be our ecological ignorance?* While clients may have to begin their therapeutic quest as pathologically isolated egos, can the impoverished, essentially negative conception of environment we find embodied in *Umwelt* do anything to heal that condition?

Mary Midgley, seeking to delineate the subtle and complex connections between “beast and man” in our cultural heritage, finds the doctrinaire dismissal of the physical and biological worlds to be “the really monstrous thing about Existentialism.” The philosophy reasons

as if the world contained only dead matter (things) on the one hand and fully rational, educated, adult human beings on the other—as if there were no other life-forms. The impression of desertion or abandonment which Existentialists have is due, I am sure, not to the removal of God, but to this contemptuous dismissal of the biosphere—plants, animals, and children. Life shrinks to a few urban rooms; no wonder it becomes absurd.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, in the Object Relations school, one of the major post-Freudian revisions, the concept of “environment” appears frequently. But upon inspection, it turns out to be the *social* environment, which supposedly takes over immediately upon birth. “The external world to which the human organism must adapt,” Jay Greenberg tells us, “is unquestionably a social world.”<sup>21</sup> Specifically, that social world is the

mother, who, if she were the ideal candidate for her role, would be the “facilitating environment” for harmonious child development. No mother is really expected to be perfect, only “good enough.” But whether perfect or merely adequate, the mother’s role is a socializing one. She must bring about a smooth separation and individuation of the baby. In the process, gender formation and role training take place, and another certified urban-industrial personality is initiated into the culture, ready to make a career, raise a family, take advantage of what the marketplace offers, and in general carry on in the same state of ecological ignorance as the parents that came before.

To take one last example: even when we turn to the more daringly innovative Humanistic Psychology of the late twentieth century, we find the same cultural limitations at work reducing the physical environment to the status of nonentity. The pioneering work of Abraham Maslow, for example, is “humanistic” in a meek and defensive way; it wears the same air of resignation that surrounds the Humanities in our universities. There the study of literature, philosophy, history, sometimes the arts survives as a ghettoized body of knowledge strictly segregated from the natural sciences. The Humanities attend to those things that happen exclusively inside the human mind on purely subjective ground. All the world outside and beyond is left to the scientists. Similarly, the “growth” and “self-actualization” in which Humanistic Psychology distinctively deals have no connection with the real world outside the mind. They are the private affairs of the solitary psyche.

Psychology, Maslow insisted, has its own “unique jurisdiction.” It deals with “that portion of the psyche which is *not* a reflection of the outer world or a molding to it.” But of course the only “outer world” Maslow had in mind was the world of social relations. Thus, in reacting against what he took to be the other-directed emphasis of interpersonal psychiatrists such as Harry Stack Sullivan, Maslow moved further and further in championing an “autonomous self or pure psyche.” He thus becomes a sad but instructive example of what befalls ambitious psychiatric theory when it lacks an environmental dimension.

Maslow’s ideal was “transcendence of environment,” understood in purely social terms. Even so, at a certain point, he relented, believing he had pressed his pursuit of the “self-governing character” too far in the direction of detachment. Admitting that it might seem “paradoxical,” he suggested that the search for the “real Self” might actually

mature into a form of re-connectedness. But since, as a man of the academy and the clinic, Maslow could not imagine anything beyond the social world, his major concession was to admit the possibility of a "biological brotherhood to all other human beings." Thus far and no further Humanistic Psychology.<sup>22</sup>

Such schools of psychiatry are born of a healthy revolt against the dispiriting reductionism and physicality of the Behaviorists and Freudians; but the rebellion finishes by locking itself away in an existential vacuum. One looks in vain in the work of Maslow or the Existential therapists for any sense of the nonhuman environment. It is not there; it has been surrendered to the "hard sciences." Purpose, meaning, and value are left to be improvised within the human heart.

### THE PSYCHE AND THE BIOSPHERE

The post-Freudians who sought a larger social context for psychiatry were justified in feeling that the mind had to be freed from the restrictions of classic psychoanalysis. In their desire to create a relevant and helpful therapy, they were also justified in turning away from the route Freud had mapped beyond the pleasure principle. He seemed to find nothing in the outer darkness of the universe that was of practical therapeutic use.

What his successors could not appreciate was the dynamism of an urban culture that would at some point impinge upon the planetary environment. When it did, questions would arise about the relationship between the human and natural worlds that could no longer be avoided. It would then be essential to provide the family and society with an ecological context. Sick souls may indeed be the fruit of sick families and sick societies; but what, in turn, is the measure of sickness for society as a whole? While many criteria might be nominated, there is surely one that ranks above all others: the species that destroys its own habitat in pursuit of false values, in willful ignorance of what it does, is "mad" if the word means anything.

Within such an environmental frame of reference, we may find the beginning of that higher sanity that the Radical Therapists would use as a refuge from oppressive social authority. The scientized psychiatric establishment with which they are at odds is, after all, grounded in the

same vision of nature that permeates the official politics of the industrial societies. From this realization may follow a psychology of permanence that transcends the conventional wisdom and transient values of the day. *The two bold departures of Freud's later years—his search for a transcultural standard of sanity and his desire to integrate the mental and the physical—meet within an ecological framework.*

There is a historical dimension to this matter that makes the environmental criterion of sanity peculiarly relevant in our time. In the past, societies have, in their ignorance, blighted portions of their habitat sufficiently to endanger their own survival, but the urgency of the matter was much less than we feel today. River valleys have been devastated, forests denuded, the topsoil worn away; but the damage was limited and temporary. Other societies in distant parts of the world may never have known of the tragic loss. The species with whom we share the planet carried on in blissful disregard of the blunders perpetrated by their human cousins who were so often too smart for their own good. Populations relocated and multiplied. Soon after the calamity—a few decades, a few centuries—the land was healed, the ruin mercifully covered over. The rivers rolled on, the great natural systems of the planet closed upon the damage and continued functioning unaffected.

Now all this has changed. Our power over the global environment has become enormous and practically instantaneous. A single human invention may be marketed and put into use around the world before we realize what harm it can do to the environment. We are being warned that within a few decades industrial culture may, out of simple inadvertence, be able to warp the biosphere in ways that will derange age-old ecological harmonies for millennia to come. The chloro-fluorocarbons used as propellants and refrigerating agents are an instructive example of such lethal—and yet utterly casual—dynamism. Following their first commercial use in the 1930s, CFCs were rapidly distributed worldwide before, out of mere curiosity, two inquiring scientists (Frank Sherwood Rowland and Mario Molina of the University of California) began to wonder in the mid-seventies where this odd new chemical might be going once it had been released into the atmosphere. The answer was jolting. The CFCs are eating away the ozone that protects life from potentially lethal ultraviolet radiation. Since the discovery of the first ozone hole over the Antarctic, we at last

understand the lethal power of this substance. Yet even now, with evidence of the risk clearly before our eyes, it remains uncertain that people—or rather governments—will act quickly enough, on a large enough scale to heal the damage. For that matter, there are still some experts who question the reliability of the data, as if it might be wisest to run the risk of waiting to act until we are absolutely certain that our survival is at stake.

Yet what we are dealing with here is but a minor product, many of whose uses are little better than novelties. One might almost conclude that as a species we lack some necessary instinctive reflex to respond to problems of such magnitude. Instead we find bad excuses to continue our destructive ways. We say there are jobs at risk . . . investments to be considered . . . conveniences we dare not sacrifice. Can it be that our survival instincts are solely tuned to emergencies of a far more obvious, immediate, and local character? What would we say of a man who could not make up his mind to flee a burning building because he could not locate his credit cards? Confronted with global crisis, we lose our way among similarly petty distractions.

Psychological theory that cannot address itself to irrationality on such a scale is surely deeply flawed. A culture that can do so much to damage the planetary fabric that sustains it, and yet continues along its course unimpeded, is mad with the madness of a deadly compulsion that reaches beyond our own kind to all the brute innocence about us. We are, in ways that have been expertly rationalized, pressing forward to create a monocultural world-society in which whatever survives must do so as the adjunct of urban industrial civilization. Unquestionably such a depletion of the planetary variety is ecologically hazardous, perhaps genocidal. But even short of that dire prospect, our devastation of the biosphere deprives us of the beauty and magnificence of things. And the loss that comes of that crime falls upon us as much as upon any species of plant or animal we annihilate; for the planet will, of course, endure, perhaps to generate new adventures in life in the eons to come. But we are being diminished by our destructive insensitivity in ways that cripple our ability to enjoy, grow, create. By becoming so aggressively and masterfully "human," we lose our essential humanity.

The issue we raise here is at once both ethical and psychological, a debate that pits many increasingly distressed environmental scientists against a far greater number of invincibly optimistic entrepreneurs.

Underlying the controversy lie deep questions about what we perceive to be "real" and what we understand to be "good."

Toward the end of the 1980s, the Science Advisory Board of the Environmental Protection Agency issued a report in which it took to task the priorities that have been set by the EPA during the current politically conservative era. Specifically, it called into question the EPA's willingness to reduce its role to a minimal emphasis upon problems that immediately endanger public health. While recognizing that "healthy ecosystems are a prerequisite to healthy humans and prosperous economies," the SAB argued for greater ethical range.

The value of natural ecosystems is not limited to their immediate utility to humans. They have an intrinsic, moral value that must be measured in its own terms and protected for its own sake. . . . EPA has paid too little attention to natural ecosystems. . . . [Its] response to human health risks as compared to ecological risks is inappropriate, because in the real world, there is little distinction between the two.<sup>23</sup>

The words may be stilted and academic, but if one listens closely, one hears behind them the impassioned plea of Chief Seattle quoted earlier in this chapter. His lamentation for the slaughter of the beasts who share the world with us sounds through the SAB's demand for an environmental ethic that embraces the rights of the nonhuman.

But across a significant segment of the business community, the SAB's noble appeal fell on deaf ears. It proved no more persuasive than Chief Seattle was in his entreaty to America's political leaders a century ago. A rebuttal authored by one of the country's leading business schools argued:

If the Science Advisory Board's notion of finding better methods to value natural resources is to attach "intrinsic, moral value . . . measured in its own terms" to natural ecosystems, then the process will degenerate into an ideological dispute to be decided quite apart from sound scientific and economic principles. Protecting an ecosystem "for its own sake" implies a blank-check approach that entails bearing many opportunity costs, including losses in public health and welfare. . . . often what is good for ecological systems is good for human health and welfare. Taken literally, however, Americans are being asked to attach as much significance to the Northern Spotted Owl or the delta smelt as they do



to human beings. Most people are not ready to embrace that they are no more significant in the universe than owls and fish.<sup>24</sup>

Clearly, the "real world" as the SAB perceives it is not that of practical business leaders. Yet approached as the business leaders propose by way of a species-by-species, cost-effective analysis, every environmental issue we face will seem to point to an obvious choice. Is the owl, the smelt, the dolphin, the redwood tree worth the loss of profits, jobs, conveniences to the planet's dominant species? Starting from "sound scientific and economic principles" like these, where will the line ever be drawn short of the wholesale extinction of the planetary variety—if it were within our power to achieve such a nightmarish result?

The narrow-gauged logicity of such thinking reminds one of the paranoid who proves his case point by point with legalistic precision. Each incident makes perfect sense within his tiny universe of unquestioned assumptions; but the pattern as a whole is insane. This is what Lewis Mumford once called "mad rationality"; it reveals itself nowhere more fully than in our relations with the nonhuman world from which our human world rose into being.

Among the commanding figures in Existential psychiatry is Viktor Frankl, who was able to bring the most extreme of "boundary conditions" into his life's work as a matter of personal experience. A survivor of the Holocaust, Frankl had traversed the depths and heights of human nature as a prisoner in the death camps of Nazi Germany. He returned to the world determined to integrate the hellishness of what he had suffered into contemporary psychiatric theory. Though he respected the work of his predecessors, he reflected almost mockingly on the comfortable bourgeois origins of his profession.

Thank heaven Sigmund Freud was spared knowing the concentration camps from the inside. His subjects lay on a couch designed in the plush style of Victorian culture, not in the filth of Auschwitz. *There . . .* people unmasked themselves, both the swine and the saints.

Thanks largely to Frankl, the horror of the camps and of the war as a whole has forced serious psychiatry to revamp its understanding of the human condition. The task has been a wrenching one; but to avoid it in favor of therapeutic business as usual would be cowardly. Frankl

insisted that there were parameters of terror and despair that have to be confronted. "So, let us be alert—alert in a twofold sense: Since Auschwitz we know what man is capable of. And since Hiroshima we know what is at stake."<sup>25</sup>

Now we encounter another landmark in our exploration of the psyche, the most imposing thus far. We come upon it as our technological power attains global closure. What Auschwitz was to its human inmates—an expertly rationalized, efficiently organized killing ground—our urban-industrial system is fast becoming for the biosphere at large, and for ourselves as an inseparable part of that environment. The dimensions of psychiatric theory, and with them our understanding of our connection with all things human, nonhuman, and transhuman, must grow to include the planetary habitat as a whole. Once again, to shrink from the challenge would be cowardice.

In one of his late prophetic essays, Freud pondered the dilemma of collective madness, recognizing that it raises "a special difficulty."

In an individual neurosis, we take as our starting point the contrast that distinguishes the patient from his environment, which is assumed to be "normal." For a group all of whose members are affected by one and the same disorder, no such background could exist; it would have to be found elsewhere.<sup>26</sup>

What follows is a reconnaissance of "elsewhere." It begins with the oldest psychiatry we know.