

Mind and Earth: Psychic Influence Beneath the Surface

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The Expanding Notion of Psyche

Does earth have spirit or soul? The question might sound odd to some ears, and materialists might dismiss it as absurd. But more people are asking this question, especially those who are interested in the depths of matter and the mystery of the natural world. In particular, those who are seeking a spiritual basis for the new ecological awareness are asking this question, as well as those seeking to build connections between contemporary consciousness and the earth-based religions of indigenous peoples (Tacey 2000, 93–122).

The notion that the earth has spirit could be a mistaken formulation or an error of perception. Perhaps we could put it the other way around: Spirit *has* earth, and earth is insinuated in and surrounded by a much larger reality of spirit. This is what the ancient Greeks meant by *panentheism*, all things in God. Matter might be seen as the finite dimension of the infinite spirit. If this is true, then Western thinking about the world, based as it is on a dualism of earth versus spirit, is rendered false at the outset. Jung worked to undermine and deconstruct this dualism, finding it overturned in his clinical practice and in his studies in alchemy and medieval religion. In his essay on Paracelsus, he asserted: “Nature is not matter only, she is also spirit. Were that not so, the only source of spirit would be human reason” (1942 CW 13, ¶229).

Summarizing Jung’s position on spirit and matter, Meredith Sabini said, “Matter is the tangible exterior of things and spirit the invisible interior” (Sabini 2002, 79). This radical vision of spiritual immanence challenges the typical materialist view, which sees matter as devoid of spirit and spirit as a projection of the human upon an inanimate world. On the other hand, this vision also challenges the typical metaphysical

view, which places spirit *above* matter and regards it as being beyond the material world, only entering that world in unusual moments of intervention.

Jung arrived at his nondualist position by way of his intuitive investigations into the structure and dynamics of the psyche. At first, he began with the Freudian assumption that the ego has an unconscious, and the unconscious contains elements rejected by the ego and suppressed by conventional morality. Then, on further reflection, he realized the unconscious was not a product of the ego, but it had a collective dimension and did not *belong* to individual persons. He then began to postulate that things worked the other way around: The ego is a creation of the unconscious, and it emerges from it like an island thrust up out of an expansive sea. Jung adopted the view that something infinite and “as yet unknown” creates and guides the finite realm, and consciousness is a product of the unconscious. He reversed the chain of causality that had governed psychodynamic thinking.

Far from being the product of the ego, the psyche or “soul” was the origin of the ego. The psyche was larger, wiser, and more encompassing than the ego. The vastness of the psyche suggested to Jung that it was not ultimately human at all. Rather, what we call the “human psyche” is our portion, our experiential segment, of a world psyche that embraces and envelops the whole of creation. Jung quotes the alchemists, “The largest part of the soul is outside the body.” This linked Jung’s thinking to Neoplatonic philosophy and to ancient notions of the *anima mundi* or the *spiritus mundi*. The human psyche could be one aspect of a psyche the size of the world. The human psyche is that part of the psyche we have immediate access to, but which often blinds us to the cosmological dimension of the psyche as a whole.

Hence the clinical idea that we *have* a psyche or we *create* an unconscious was slowly unraveled and revealed as a prejudice of ego-based consciousness. If psyche is large enough to encompass the world and is not confined to a subjective realm inside us, the possibility arises that we walk not only through an outside world, but also through the interiority of the world. We can speak poetically of the “innerness of things,” and the natural world has an internal dimension that can impact on and affect us. This subtle idea, which Jung rediscovered but did not invent, has formed the basis of an important new discourse called *eco-psychology*, in which Jung’s speculations have become a source of great practical and ecological application (Roszak 1998).

The Influence of the Earth

In his thinking about mind and earth, Jung invited us to consider what he called, the “chthonic portion of the psyche,” a portion not immediately accessible but expressed indirectly through archetypal configurations. In a later phase of his career, he introduced the notion of the *psychoïd*, a level of mind where matter and psyche interpenetrate and become one substance or energy. His views with regard to the extent and

reach of the psyche constantly deepened, but even as early as the 1920s, he postulated that human behavior was impacted by “the psychic influence of the earth and its laws” (1927/1931 CW 10, ¶53). Jung’s argument begs many questions, not only about whether the human psyche has a chthonic or earthly aspect, but also about whether the earth has a psychic or spiritual dimension. To the amazement of some readers, Jung writes of “the conditioning of the mind by the earth,” as if the earth were a living entity, as if it could impose its “laws” and “influence” upon us (1927/1931 CW 10, ¶52).

Jung’s reflections on mind and earth are scattered throughout his collected writings, but are especially located in two essays, “Mind and Earth” (1927/1931 CW 10) and “The Complications of American Psychology” (1930 CW 10). They are extraordinary essays in some ways, because although Jung makes the most “mystical” of claims about psyche and earth, he does so with the appearance of being cool-headed and scientific. He speaks of his “findings” about the influence of earth on the mind, as if he were delivering a research paper at a scientific meeting. He claims that he is “not indulging in any psychological mysticism” while indulging the mystical all the time (1927/1931 CW 10, ¶84).

What he meant by this, I think, is that he wanted to approach the mystical through a scientific method. Some might see this as sleight of hand or deceptive, but a more sympathetic approach might concede that Jung is attempting to bring complicated and “very subtle [matters]” into the realm of thought (1927/1931 CW 10, ¶54). He is concerned that the relations between mind and earth are often felt but rarely discussed because we have no language to speak of them. This topic is generally regarded as too difficult to deal with, but Jung wants to bring it into discourse in the interest of making the unconscious conscious.

The “As If” Model and the Problem of Science

In discussing this topic, Jung wants to appear credible, wary, and scientific. He is reluctant to make wild assertions about the nature of ultimate reality and requests, at the start, that we adopt a metaphorical approach as part of our “working hypothesis.” “Our inferences can never go beyond an ‘as if’” (1927/1931 CW 10, ¶51), he cautions the reader. Here, he is trying to appear scientific, and yet his warning seems almost ironic because he regularly moves beyond metaphor and frequently violates his own hypothetical model. His true intellectual passion, as distinct from his self-consciously groomed stance, is anything but cautious or empirical. His real concern is to affirm the reality of hidden universal forces in nature, and at one point in his essay “Mind and Earth,” he drops his guard, becomes impatient with the “as if” approach, and declares his subject is “anything but a metaphor.” He even chides his readers lest we think that “all this is only a metaphor” (1927/1931 CW 10, ¶64).

He tries to establish a metaphorical model and becomes frustrated with it because we might be imagining that he is discussing an idea that is *only* or *merely* metaphorical. A true metaphor for Jung, like a true symbol, points beyond itself to something real. He wants to grant the spirit of the earth a degree of reality, and if he speaks in metaphors, he wants them to refer to facts that cannot be directly apprehended. That is, he wants the metaphors to point to metaphysical postulates. Jung is aware that metaphor and symbol have been heavily discounted and are given no more weight than illusions or lies. This frustrates him because so much of his system is based on symbols and metaphors. The archetypes are symbolic constructs, and the psyche itself (as he conceives it) is symbolic, based on an “as if” perspective. The importance of his constructions is undermined as soon as we say the archetypes are *only* symbolic, or the psyche is *only* psychological. To safeguard his speculations, Jung is inclined to claim more for his ideas than science would allow. He does this in the name of bolstering the reality of psychic structures, but it can have the reverse effect if we feel that he is artificially weighting his concepts with a truth-value that is not apparent.

Jung's Two Voices

Jung is worried that he cannot make himself understood about the “power of earth” and its hold over us. The reader can either reject his reflections as silly and unscientific or suspend judgment and enter with Jung into his investigation into the semidarkness, giving him the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps we can reduce the sense that he is being deceitful by speaking about Jung's paradoxical or two-fold approach. His first voice in these writings is that of the reasoned mind, trying to open up mysteries that have long laid buried in the unconscious. This voice attempts to remain true to the methods and assumptions of science and resists flights into fancy and speculation. His second voice, however, is highly intuitive and passionately engaged in realities that empirical science cannot see and, therefore, cannot prove. His second voice is convinced that the earth is alive, and the psyche is alert and responsive to the earth's aliveness.

Jung's acquired stance is scientific; he tries to maintain reserve and pretends to be dispassionate. But his deeper self is mythopoetic, visionary, and prophetic. In these essays, we witness the inherent tension between the scientist and the prophet, the man of learning and the man of vision. Despite his cautionary warnings about not going too far, Jung is convinced that the earth is sentient, knowing, and intelligent, and directed by inexplicable cosmic forces. He grows tired of his scientific persona, which is like a shackle he wants to throw off. His true voice is passionate, cramped by reason, and eager to allow his imagination to soar. His reflections on the “power of the earth” thus represent an internal debate with himself, but generally speaking, the scientist and his cautions give way to the poet and his visions. For some scientists, this means he oversteps the mark and can no longer be considered in a scientific way.

The Ancient Night Religion

In speaking of the sway of earth over mind, Jung says he is not talking about the influence of external physical or environmental conditions—not about “the banal facts of sense-perception and conscious adaptation to the environment”—but about things archaic, elemental, chthonic and primordial (1927/1931 CW 10, ¶52). He sums up the influence of earth over mind by referring to the “night religion” of primitives (Jung’s word) and children:

What I call “night religion” is the magical form of religion, the meaning and purpose of which is intercourse with the dark powers, devils, witches, magicians, and spirits. Just as the childish fairytale is a phylogenetic repetition of the ancient night religion, so the childish fear [of the dark] is a re-enactment of primitive psychology. (¶59)

This ancient religion, with its “dark powers, witches, magicians, and spirits,” expresses the forces of the earth as they represent themselves to and in the mind. Jung argues we should not take these figures literally and that we need to separate the “forces themselves” from their “infantile forms” (¶59). Clearly, Jung treats witches, demons, spirits, and so on, as secondary personifications of a more primary, but perhaps no less terrifying, background reality. What this reality is, Jung cannot say, only that it is unknowable. He seems to think that if we grasp this reality psychologically it will be more knowable. As Jung said in another context, in our efforts to “explain” the nature of invisible reality in modern terms, all we can do is offer a “more or less successful translation into another metaphorical language” (1940 CW 9i, ¶271).

The primary reality is unrepresentable as such and can only be known through its symbolic representations. Hence, although Jung’s scientific persona recoils from the idea of demons and spirits, his second self is forced to embrace them and treat them with more respect than his scientific training would allow. He is forced to have “second thoughts” about symbolic forms that he would normally dismiss as infantile or primitive. That is, he has to take seriously these archaic forms until new forms come along. Perhaps his poetic vision looks forward to a future time when a new symbolic order will come into being, and we can move beyond the “infantile forms” that have governed the representation of chthonic forces in the past. Until science comes up with new and compelling metaphors, we are stuck with the old ones.

Three Ways of Imagining the Invisible

Jung’s writings seem to posit three separate ways or stages of approaching nonrational phenomena: (1) premodern literalism and supernaturalism, (2) modern disbelief and skepticism, and (3) a post-rational reappropriation of the chthonic forces. In the first, spirits of the earth are treated as forces “out there” in the world, requiring the intercessions and interventions of shaman priests and witch doctors. The first stage is called

animism and is generally represented by modern anthropologists and scientists as irrational and anthropomorphic. That is, they see these forces as mere projections of the human mind upon inanimate phenomena. But those who espouse and practice these folk religions do not treat these forces as subjective; they see them as entirely objective forces of the world.

In the second stage of modern disbelief and skepticism, the dark figures of night religion are regarded as morbid figments of fantasy, arising from disturbed, unenlightened, or infantile minds. This is the approach adopted by Freud and his psychoanalytic school, at least until Winnicott and Bion adopted a completely new and more positive approach to the meaning and value of fantasy. But as I have indicated, modern Western science and education operate almost entirely in this second stage, having no regard for cosmic forces apart from viewing them as telltale projections of the human mind, usually traced back to hysterical ideas or unruly emotions.

In the third stage of post-rational mysticism, the forces of the earth are “real” again, but their traditional forms are regarded as outdated and appropriate for an earlier time. This is the approach that is now in the making, and we can see early traces of it in the psychology of Jung, the biology of Rupert Sheldrake, the physics of David Bohm, and the ecological science of “deep ecology.” We stand on the brink of a new dispensation, where we become receptive again to the transpersonal forces of earth and world. But we urgently need new cosmologies and symbolic systems appropriate to our advanced, post-scientific view of the world.

In his Terry Lectures, which were published as “Psychology and Religion,” Jung made clear the nature of stage one or *magical thinking*. He was particularly interested in how magical or animistic thinking was gradually undermined by the rise of science:

The world is as it ever has been, but our consciousness undergoes peculiar changes. First, in remote times (which can still be observed among primitives living today), the main body of psychic life was apparently in human and in nonhuman objects: it was projected, as we should say now. Consciousness can hardly exist in a state of complete projection. At most it would be a heap of emotions. Through the withdrawal of projections, conscious knowledge slowly developed. Science, curiously enough, began with the discovery of astronomical laws, and hence with the withdrawal, so to speak, of the most distant projections. This was the first stage in the despiritualization of the world. One step followed another: already in antiquity the gods were withdrawn from mountains and rivers, from trees and animals. (1938/1940 CW 11, ¶140)

The withdrawal of psychic projections leads to stage two thinking, which we know as the dominant form of thinking in the modern period. Stage two thinking lands us in a spiritual and emotional wasteland, in which reason and science have cleansed the world of all projections, leaving nothing in the world with which we can relate or form spiritual bonds. Stage two thinking leads to ecological crisis because the world is no longer experienced as sacred, and because it is divested of spiritual significance, we have

no reason to care for the world. No longer sacred, it becomes real estate or a natural resource to be used to satisfy egotistical desires. The desacralization of nature thus leads too easily to the degradation and exploitation of nature.

Animation Beyond Projection

Jung's work clearly looks toward a third stage in which the world is enchanted again, but in a different way from stage one. With the third stage comes the realization that the so-called projections that animate primitive thinking may not be entirely of our personal making. True, they come at first from within us, but their origin may be archetypal rather than human, transpersonal rather than personal. The most profound projections are expressions of archetypal reality that speak of the nature of ultimate reality. In other words, these projections do not only belong inside us, or to the human mind, but might belong inside the soul of the world, the *anima mundi*.

The very word *projections* may be wholly inadequate because it assumes a dualistic Cartesian universe at the outset, in which nature possesses no spiritual content unless that content is first projected into it by the human being. If we adopt a dualistic approach, we cannot comprehend that spiritual forces in nature are "always already" there, independent of our mental activity. I think Jung worried a great deal about the subjectivism of the position that speaks about all animations as projections. Indeed, as Roderick Main has argued, "The concept of projection had in its way contributed to the disenchantment of the world, for the concept implies that the meanings we perceive in the world are not there in reality, but are being foisted onto the world by the human mind" (2007, 26). At the heart of psychology is a Cartesian dualism that is difficult to transcend because Descartes provides the basis upon which psychology is established. By the time Jung arrived at the concept of synchronicity, however, he no longer spoke about projections as the basis for the connection between psyche and world. Synchronicity, which assumes a meaningful connection between the human subject and the world, calls for a different philosophical conception of the world other than that provided by the model of projections.

If, after withdrawing our projections, nothing is left that binds us to the world in a meaningful way, something has gone horribly wrong with our philosophical worldview. At this point, I believe, Jung stood as the author of the theory of synchronicity, as he was in need of a new worldview that transcended psychology. Gilles Quispel reports that after delivering his landmark lecture on synchronicity at Eranos in 1951, Jung told him, "Now the concept of projection should be revised completely" (quoted in Segal et al. 1995, 19). Jung had reached the limits of psychology and the limits of epistemology.

In "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle," Jung struggles with the notion of a meaning in the world beyond that which humans may project. He calls

it variously “objective,” “transcendental,” “latent,” “a priori,” or “self-subsistent.” “The great difficulty,” he writes, “is that we have absolutely no scientific means of proving the existence of an objective meaning which is not just a psychic product,” since “meaning is an anthropomorphic interpretation” (1952 CW 8, ¶¶915–916). In a letter to Erich Neumann, Jung points out that the fact we discover meaning generates the impression we have invented meaning, and he disagrees with this impression, which is a kind of illusion:

Meaningfulness always appears to be unconscious at first, and can therefore only be discovered post hoc; hence there is always the danger that meaning will be read into things where actually there is nothing of the sort. Synchronistic experiences serve our turn here. They point to a latent meaning which is independent of consciousness. (1959, ¶495)

If meaning is always already present, how can we know this if we are forced to discover it post hoc or after the event? The rules of the epistemological game, of how we come to know things, seem to work against the discovery of a priori meaning and in favor of the notion that meaning has been added by us, which gives us the biases of materialistic science and existential philosophy. Jung recognizes that there is meaning in the world beyond that which might be projected into it, but he lacks the science to be able to tackle this problem.

The Post-Rational Vision

This epistemological problem that meaning appears as a projection of content rather than a revelation of what is already there is what makes it difficult for us to leave stage two and enter stage three thinking. To rational scientists, stage three thinking is merely a regression to stage one, and they can see no difference between a post-rational vision that finds spiritual meaning in the world to a pre-rational superstition that projects unconscious human contents onto the world, thereby changing it into a likeness of our own unknown face. It is true that stages one and three both advocate the animation of the earth and the presence of spirit in matter. But in stage one such animation is wholly “contaminated” with human contents, whereas in stage three we have begun to separate the strands of what is projected and what is already there.

Because we need to move to stage three, and because it is so difficult for science to take us there, the new age movement has arisen, which forces the issue and asserts the existence of animation in nature and world. The new age is an inevitable social movement and something that had to happen; if our science proves unable to take us to a new stage of thinking, then popular mysticism has to assert the existence of what science cannot see or understand. The new age, however, is only a parody of the new science that is to come because it confuses stage three with stage one, and lacking the resources of science or philosophy, it often returns us to superstition and magical thinking. The new age rightly senses that we need to return animation to the world,

but it adopts the position of least resistance and chooses going backward over going forward. This, in turn, confirms the prejudices of stage two scientists, who look with horror and disdain at the assertions made by popular mysticism, which reinforce their suspicion that spirit is a projection, not a discovery.

Such, for instance, is the predicament of Richard Dawkins, the Oxford evolutionary biologist, who finds in much popular spiritual concern a regression to a superstitious and implausible worldview. In part, the horror and disdain of such scientists is justified because Dawkins sees society returning to a pre-scientific worldview that sends alarm bells ringing in the ears of concerned scientists. But at the same time, their resistance to mythopoetic or nonrational modes of thought is what is stopping society from moving out of the sterility of stage two to a more enchanted view of the world. We live “in between” the times in this regard and in an unstable transition period where everything seems slightly chaotic and without order. But this transitional period is inevitable if our consciousness is to achieve a holistic thinking that makes a higher unity possible between subject and object, mind and earth, spirit and matter.

Rationalism Fends Off the Future

What I am calling stage two thinking, where we explode the myths of the past and reveal them as mere illusions, continues to dominate our universities and educational systems. This intellectual enlightenment, which has produced the secular world, rationalism, and secular humanism, is evidently only a stage on our way to a truer and more complete enlightenment.

First there is spirit, and then there is no spirit, and then there is: That’s the history of Western civilization. Stage two thinking feels besieged on either side, protecting itself from a past it continues to debunk and a future it attempts to fend off. Any genuine attempts to provide a post-rational, postmodern enchantment are quickly dismissed as regressions to the past, illusions, or escapes from reality. Hence Jung continues to be berated and undermined by the university system because his post-rational thinking is seen as archaic, pre-rational or escapist. Ironically, Jung is championed by the new age and reviled by the university for exactly the same reason—namely, he is viewed by both as a champion of unreason.

Jung is definitely not saying that the chthonic powers of the earth are mere figments of the disturbed mind. But because stage two thinking cannot conceive of chthonic powers except as vestiges of archaic or disturbed minds, he is seen as a throwback to former times, rather than a visionary who is trying to shape our future. The movement from stage two to three consists largely of a reevaluation of fantasy, imagination, and projection. Although many of our “projections” are as stage two imagines—personal, neurotic, escapist, and superimposed—we have a lot of work to do to sort out the personal from the archetypal and to investigate the nature of reality. A true

mythic or symbolic content reveals the real and does not conceal it. This difficult task is already underway in Jungian and post-Freudian discourses, where illusions are being separated from myths, pathologies from cosmic visions, and atavistic regressions from genuine prophesies of the future.

Changes to our point of view are beginning to take place where the views of indigenous peoples are respected by historians and anthropologists, that is, in new-world countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. My concern is not to validate every wild and popular assertion that “spirits” inhabit earthly places. I simply wish to open our minds to the possibility that earth breathes its own *pneuma* upon us and that at least some of what cultural critics refer to as the “personification of land” or “anthropomorphism” could be a sensitive and intuitive response to what is emanating from the land. I want to suggest the possibility of two-way traffic between mind and earth.

Colonization-in-Reverse

Jung was interested in the phenomenon that is popularly called “going native” and in more intellectual terms might be called “colonization-in-reverse.” After several trips to North America, during which he observed the ways in which former Europeans had adapted to American conditions, he intuited that the land itself had somehow claimed its new inhabitants. The colonizers had, in turn, been colonized, even indigenized. This appealed to Jung’s understanding of the psychological process, given the colonizing project was the work of the heroic ego, and the opposite process, colonization-in-reverse, was operating at an unconscious level and was not even on the horizon of consciousness. As a depth psychologist, Jung was alert to the ways in which unconscious dynamics could overturn, subvert, or replace the goals and aspirations of the ego.

The colonizing ego thinks the “New World” nation is new, that it is virgin territory, which the ego is able to conquer and control. But while the nation is new, the land itself is ancient and powerful. In Australia, for instance, the British colonists referred to the land as *terra nullius*, the “empty land,” possessed by no-one and available for appropriation. This proved to be a disastrous illusion in terms of the destiny and wellbeing of the Aboriginal cultures. For the colonizing powers had overlooked the fact that the land, vast in size and without visible monuments, was already imagined and possessed by Aboriginal Dreaming traditions that the colonists failed to understand. Moreover, the Aboriginal tradition is the oldest continuous cultural tradition in the world, and recent estimations suggest the indigenous people have lived on the land for more than fifty-thousand years. The Australian national anthem claims that the country is “young and free,” but the continuing Aboriginal presence looks on with scorn and derision at the hubristic colonizing project.

Numerous works of Australian literature and visual art have exploited this opposition between an ego that is unaware of the land and the ancient indigenous culture that

has been ignored, forgotten, or misunderstood (Tacey 1995). There can be no more perfect example of a psychic system at war with itself, with the ego seizing control and the ancient underlying reality having little or no regard for the ego's designs. Eventually, the earth makes its presence felt through various cultural disturbances and psychological complications. The film *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is a cinematic masterpiece that makes use of this grinding tension between the colonial overlay of society and the unconscious substratum of ancient and denied realities. Needless to say, the ego's ignorance of prior and deeper realities leads to tragedy, as the society finds itself at the mercy of the earth, which claims living sacrifices in the spirit of vengeance and retribution.

Just as depth psychology became aware of a collective unconscious through symptoms that disturbed the conscious sphere, so the New World nations have become aware of prior, deeper ancient realities by disturbances in the social field. The society is new and thinks of itself as being in control of its own destiny, but it has to reckon with a prior and deeper claim on its life, which only gradually begins to surface from the depths of its experience. In time, the land has to be respected as having a life and will of its own, quite independent from the designs of the colonizing ego. This kind of maturity and insight is hard won and does not come easily to a new nation full of its own dreams and aspirations. Gradually, a second or alien will begins to impress itself upon the society and makes its presence felt with peculiar and unerring force.

The Psychology of "Going Native" in America

Jung was fascinated by the sense of conflict between the ego and unconscious in new nations. He did not visit Australia, which would have given him ample material to develop his depth psychology of nations, but his eye was fixed firmly upon what he called "the American experiment." He wrote, "The greatest experiment in the transplantation of a race in modern times was the colonization of the North American continent by a predominantly Germanic population" (1927/1931 CW 10, ¶94). Jung said we could expect "all sorts of variations of the original racial type." How this had come about was mysterious. There were climatic and environmental conditions that would have an impact, but Jung was not thinking of "external" factors such as climate or physical environment. He wrote:

At all events the "Yankee" type is formed, and this is so similar to the Indian type that on my first visit to the Middle West [sic; he means upstate New York], while watching a stream of workers coming out of a factory, I remarked to my companion that I should never had thought there was such a high percentage of Indian blood. He answered, laughing, that he was willing to bet that in all these hundreds of men there would not be found a drop of Indian blood. That was many years ago when I had no notion of the mysterious Indianization of the American people. (1927/1931 CW 10, ¶94)

Such discussions about blood and soil were very attractive to the Nazi propagandists some years after Jung's reflections, since *blut und boden* (blood and soil) was a

slogan of the National Socialist Party. Hitler believed that people of German descent (blood) had the right to live on German soil, but those without this blood did not (Patterson 1982). Jung's intuitions about land and people had placed him in a dangerous and sensitive area, especially because he kept using the term *race* in these reflections about psyche and place.

Understandably, after the death of Jung, and subsequent to the horrific consequences of ideologies based on blood and soil, the Jungian tradition has been reluctant to move into these areas of enquiry. Jung's theme of "mind and earth" has only just begun to be reopened by serious scholarship in recent years (Samuels 1993; Singer and Kimbles 2004). Jung's reflections, however, arising as they did some years before the Nazis, have an air of innocence, as he was genuinely fascinated by the way in which land could make its claim upon the mind.

Jung was astonished by the way in which North Americans of European descent seemed to demonstrate in their demeanor and appearance certain traits of the Indian people. "The remarkable thing," he went on, "is that [no-one seems to] notice the Indian influence" (1927/1931 CW 10, ¶98). Jung claims that he "got to know of this mystery only when I had to treat many American patients analytically" (¶94). This is a tantalizing remark, but Jung gives no clinical information, leaving us to guess what he might mean by this statement. Presumably, Amerindian culture appeared in significant ways in the inner lives of his North American clients, perhaps in a similar way to the role of the Hiawatha motif in the dreams and fantasies of his classic study of Miss Miller (Jung 1912/1952 CW 5).

Jung was intrigued by the early research of the American anthropologist Franz Boas (1858–1942), who sought to prove that anatomical changes began in the second generation of New York immigrants, "chiefly in the measurements of the skull" (1927/1931 CW 10, ¶94). Jung had already referred to the research of Boas in his earlier essay, "The Role of the Unconscious" (1918). In a work called *The History of the American Race* (1912), Boas claimed that the skull measurements of North Americans of European descent had begun to resemble those of the Indian people. This highly controversial hypothesis, which anthropologists have alternatively sought to discredit, revalidate, and disprove again, is still somewhat shaky in the history of anthropology, but Jung found in it a confirmation of his hunch that mind was impacted by place.

Unconscious Primitivity

Jung noted the way in which Americans of African descent, or as he called them, "the Negro," had influenced Americans of European descent, but he felt that this influence, although significant, was confined to behavior, social attitudes, and cultural activities such as music, dancing, talking, partying, and laughter. This influence could be accounted for by theories about the migration and dissemination of cultural styles that

did not necessitate a theory of influence through the earth or the “chthonic portion of the psyche.” “Only the outward behavior is influenced by the Negro, but what goes on in the psyche must be the subject of further investigation” (1927/1931 CW 10, ¶98). Jung was convinced that the North Americans were becoming Indianized or “going native,” and in psychodynamic terms, he felt that this was because the unconscious life of the migrants moved “downward,” sinking roots into the native soil of America:

Thus the American presents a strange picture: a European with Negro behavior and an Indian soul. Everywhere the virgin earth causes at least the unconscious of the conqueror to sink to the level of its indigenous inhabitants. (1930 CW 10, ¶103)

It is a pity that Jung’s metaphor of the psyche sinking its roots “downward” into native soil is fused with the racial idea that indigenous people are inferior to or “below” the level of the European. I like the image of the psyche sinking its roots into the earth, as that accords with the developmental process in a culture that has imposed itself from above, but the fact that this is used to support a white supremacist ideology is distinctly unpalatable. Alongside Jung’s spiritual discourse about the mystery of psychic life is a moral discourse about racial inequality and inferiority. He speaks of “the infection of the European by the primitive” (1927/1930 CW 10, ¶97), of “the heavy downward pull of primitive life,” and he asks: “What is more contagious than to live side by side with a rather primitive people?” (1930 CW 10, ¶962).

Jung delivers a backhanded compliment to indigenous people by suggesting that migrants gain vitality, energy, and closeness to nature from their proximity to Amerindian people, but at the same time, Europeans have to guard against moral collapse and a lowering of ethical standards: “The inferior man has a tremendous pull because he fascinates the inferior layers of our psyche, which has lived through untold ages of similar conditions” (1930 CW 10, ¶962). Hence, the “growing down” into new lands activates ancient levels of the psyche, levels that Europeans have presumably dealt with and put to rest in their unconscious. What has been put to sleep in the European comes to new life in the American, and according to Jung, this creates internal tension within the New World psyche:

Thus, in the American, there is a discrepancy between conscious and unconscious that is not found in the European, a tension between an extremely high conscious level of culture and an unconscious primitivity. This tension forms a psychic potential which endows the American with an indomitable spirit of enterprise and an enviable enthusiasm which we in Europe do not know. (1927/1931 CW 10, ¶103)

The European in America tries to resist the process of “going native,” and therefore, in colonial America moral standards were often more rigidly puritanical than back home in Europe. But underneath the pietistic colonial surface, the European in new lands seeks to merge with primitive nature. The “indomitable spirit of enterprise” is found not only in the rapid emergence of the Northeast as a center of culture and

industry, but also in the great enthusiasm with which the Americans pursued their westward expansion.

According to Jung, American women often carried “the more conservative element” (1930 CW 10, ¶970), whereas men often yielded to laxity and the call of the wild. We often see this pattern in Western movies, where the woman on the ranch or in the remote village battles to maintain the civilized codes of morality, while the men in her life abandon all decorum and fall foul of the law. Hence “nature versus culture” was often enacted as a battle of the sexes in colonial America. Returning to the wild, however, is by no means always synonymous with breaking the law or becoming immoral. Sometimes it means that American characters of unusual caliber discover a new moral integrity in their relationship with the land and primitive conditions, as in, for instance, the film *Dances with Wolves*. Such characters are not only highly sensitive to the American land but also deeply respectful of Indian cultures and values. In this new, chthonic kind of moral balance, there is often a note of cosmic spirituality because becoming at one with the land means becoming at one with the forces that govern the cosmos and the deep unconscious.

Jung’s Frustration with His Own “Primitive” Intuitions

Jung is forever trying to imagine why the unconscious life of the migrant “sinks” to the level of the indigenous earth. In addition to his metaphor of the psyche needing to set down roots, he is intrigued by a notion that comes from Australia. Jung read the anthropological writings of Spencer and Gillen, who recorded their encounters with the indigenous peoples of the central Australian desert. Drawing on Aboriginal beliefs about the fate of foreign peoples, he wrote:

Certain Australian Aboriginals assert that one cannot conquer foreign soil, because in it there dwell strange ancestor-spirits who reincarnate themselves in the new-born. There is a great psychological truth in this. The foreign land assimilates its conqueror. (1927/1931 CW 10, ¶103)

Jung is clearly impressed by this idea, but not able to translate it into a concept or idea that might make it convincing to modern reason.

In “The Complications of American Psychology,” he addresses the topic again in a “poetic” or metaphorical fashion, suggesting that “the foreign country somehow gets under the skin of those born in it” (1930 CW 10, ¶969). Jung’s reliance on the word *somehow* does not strengthen his case, but he again narrates the Aboriginal belief he found in the anthropology of Spencer and Gillen:

Certain very primitive tribes are convinced that it is not possible to usurp foreign territory, because the children born there would inherit the wrong ancestor-spirits who dwell in the trees, the rocks, and the water of that country. There seems to be some subtle truth in this primitive intuition. (¶969)

Here, Jung could be speaking about himself. He has “primitive” intuitions about the earth and its powers, but cannot find a language that might make them credible, let alone scientific. The “very primitive tribes” are, in this sense, personifications of Jung’s own intuitive thoughts, and he remains frustrated by his primitivity because it prevents him from communicating with a scientific and critical audience. For many of Jung’s followers, the power of his intuitions are what remain useful and suggestive, even if he cannot express them in a convincing way.

As Jung became aware of the gap between his intuitions and his ability to justify them, we find him backpeddling and adopting a defensive attitude. After discussing the “Indianization” of the Americans, he adds this apology:

This is not just a joke. There is something in it that can hardly be denied. It may seem mysterious and unbelievable, yet it is a fact that can be observed in other countries just as well. Man can be assimilated by a country. (1930 CW 10, ¶968)

In his essay on America, Jung attempts to suspend the reader’s disbelief by commenting:

There is nothing miraculous about this. It always has been so: the conqueror overcomes the old inhabitant in the body, but succumbs to his spirit. The conqueror gets the wrong ancestor-spirits, the primitives would say: I like this picturesque way of putting it. It is pithy and expresses every conceivable implication. (1930 CW 10, ¶979)

Jung tries to justify his intuition by saying there is “nothing miraculous” about it; “it always has been so.” By employing forthright rhetoric, he is trying to make the indigenization process, which is quite miraculous, seem entirely natural. “It may seem mysterious . . .,” he writes, “yet it is a fact.” But what kind of fact? He cannot find the science to account for it, so he hopes to rely on the reader’s tacit agreement, a kind of secret agreement between him and us.

Sometimes in his writings about spirit of place, Jung withdraws entirely from the mystical side of his speculations and speaks more colloquially about the spirit of place. He speaks, like any tourist, about external forces such as weather, climate, landscape, and human geography, and how these have impacted people. Although in his first essay on this topic, he said he was not interested in “the banal facts of sense-perception and conscious adaptation to the environment” (1927/1931 CW 10, ¶52), he nevertheless occasionally retreats to this more banal level in a bid to convey the influence of the earth on the mind:

Almost every great country has its collective attitude, which one might call its genius or spiritus loci. Sometimes you can catch it in a formula, sometimes it is more elusive, yet nonetheless it is indescribably present as a sort of atmosphere that permeates everything, the look of the people, their speech, behavior, clothing, smell, their interests, ideals, politics, philosophy, art, and even their religion. (1930 CW 10, ¶972)

Jung notes the atmosphere, cultural tone, and social manners that give any place its distinctive character. This is how “spirit of place” is used by travel agencies and tourist bureaus, as a way of enticing people out of their familiar surroundings to experience

something new and different in exotic locations. But this “spirit of place” is not mystical; it is social and geopolitical; it is an entirely rational spirit, with no sense of mystery, apart from the mystique of cultural difference.

Jung seems to sometimes move from one personality to another in trying to come to terms with the mystery of the spirit of place. His number two personality is spell-bound and enchanted by the indigenous view that spirits of the land can reincarnate themselves in the newborn and influence the psyche of foreigners from within. That is his principal attraction, and he tries to rework this theme at the archetypal level, speaking about archetypal forces in land and place, rather than resorting to the superstitious idea of reincarnated spirits. But occasionally his number one personality intervenes and provides a far more rational and acceptable interpretation, in terms of national types, flavors, cultural atmosphere, and such things. In his more public writings and speeches, where he is addressing large crowds of people who might be terrified by his more esoteric aspect, Jung puts a lid on his interest in stage one or magical thinking and speaks like a tour director about the exotic lure of new and foreign lands.

I admit Jung does not always get far with his main interest in the influence of earth and place. For instance, although his first piece in this genre is called “Mind and Earth,” this essay is disappointing to those of us who seek enlightenment on this topic. Jung only makes a few suggestive remarks about the influence of earth and then abandons the main topic to write a lengthy treatise about the psychology of anima and animus (1927/1931 CW 10, ¶¶61–92). In other words, his initial impulse is genuine, but he quickly runs out of things to say and returns to a topic that he knows much more about. He wants to write more about the earth and place but is easily drawn back to the psychological study of human nature, rather than of nature itself. Jung’s predicament is expressed in a letter to Emil Egli on September 15, 1943, in which he writes:

Many thanks for kindly sending me your book, *The Swiss in their Landscape*. I entirely agree with the pages you have marked. The more so as my thoughts have often moved along similar lines. At one time I related the idiosyncrasies of Paracelsus to his early environment and also dropped similar hints in my answer to Keyserling’s expose of Switzerland. I am deeply convinced of the—unfortunately—still very mysterious relation between man and landscape, but hesitate to say anything about it because I could not substantiate it rationally. (1943, ¶338)

As so often happens, Jung’s letters reveal the inside story—far more than his published and professional essays. He is attracted to a theme that frustrates him in the sense that it seems so palpable and real, the impact of earth on psyche, and yet as he reaches out to touch it, it bobs away and resists being known in a direct or rational consciousness. It can be felt, but not reasoned. Nevertheless, Jung’s powerful intuitions have been expressed and shared, even if he has not yet found the science to make them convincing. At the end of reading Jung’s essays on this subject, the reader can say of Jung what he says of indigenous Australians: “There seems to be some subtle truth in this primitive intuition.”

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ABSTRACT

In 1927/1931 Jung wrote "Mind and Earth," where he suggested the earth has an unconscious effect on the mind. Earth seems to mold or influence mind in subtle ways, shaping our behavior and thoughts without us realizing it. Different places impact the mind in different ways, and Jung's essay was written after his journey to North America, where he felt the land had had a strong effect on its European immigrants, even "indigenizing" them in an uncanny way. This was an intuition rather than a scientifically testable hypothesis. In the present essay, I try to "dream onward" Jung's intuition and grasp what it might mean for us today. Despite what critics say, Jung was not advocating a regression to premodern animism, but he seemed to be pointing to a postmodern or post-rational awareness of psyche in the world. How do we imagine the relationship between psyche and earth? Jung psychologized the Neoplatonic idea of the *anima mundi* or world soul, which Hillman was to take up later in his writings. Jungians may have been reluctant to explore the relation between mind and earth, in part because of the disquieting controversy over Jung's early anti-Semitism and the Nazi motto *blut und boden*, or blood and soil. Despite these associations, however, the ecological crisis, among other things, forces us to reopen the discussion about mind and earth.

KEY WORDS

American mind, *anima mundi*, animism, *blut und boden*, earth, ecology, German soul, indigenous, nature, postmodern, premodern, psyche

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