

Nature's Death Wish

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This paper approaches pollution as part of the shadow of consciousness and looks for ways pollution can create soul. Instead of automatically condemning and suppressing our polluting impulse because it is "bad," I will give it a safe place to express itself no matter how much it contradicts my gentle environmentalist persona.

This approach was inspired by Jung's statement that man "needs to return, not to Nature in the manner of Rousseau, but to his own nature" (Sabini 125.) It made me interested in the possibility that it may not be in the interest of our conscious nature to preserve Nature.

Psyche has her finger in language as in everything else and it shows in the many uses of the word "nature." I will capitalize "Nature" when I am referring to the external physical world that has been minimally affected by conscious human effort. I will use "nature" without a capital first letter to refer to the essential character of something, which is also related to a limited role for the consciousness in the sense that "Jung says the goal of individuation is not to become conscious, but to become naturally unconscious" (Slater Depth Psychology.)

I will follow the class model and create a three way dialog between psyche, nature and myth. I will start by observing the relationship between nature and Nature. I will then explore death and show that it is based on the archetype of decay. This shows its mythological similarity to pollution, which is also an instance of the decay archetype.

Then I will put pollution into the alchemical myth, which I will show is an inevitable consequence of consciousness. Finally I will show how our attitude toward pollution would change if we adopted the attitude Nature seems to have toward death.

I will pay very little attention to the scientific data because "The soul loves metaphor and poetry. It's not concerned with what's going on neurologically" (Slater Post-Jungian.)

Nature and nature are related. They generate similar archetypal fields which is probably why Nature is such fertile ground for projecting.

Both nature and Nature are realms of the unconscious because of the absence of consciousness' footprint. "Small n" nature lives away from consciousness as an essence in the unconscious, waiting to be brought onto the ego self axis. "Big N" Nature lives away from consciousness because there has been no purposeful activity in the area. If we destroy Nature, then the self will lose a place (but not the only place) to meet itself.

Our moorings to Nature and nature depend on each other. "Our disconnection from Nature is parallel to our disconnection from the unconscious" (Slater Psyche and Nature.) I believe this can be explained by a theory in my [previous paper](#) in which I suggested that myth lives in the bardo and is the way that experience moves from one discrete sense perception of groundedness to another. Each myth connects to every perception which fits its myth and most perceptions are attached to many myths. When we are experiencing a sense perception, we can oscillate to any other sense perception in the same myth or we can switch to any of the other myths attached to that perception. The sense of groundedness that a moment provides depends on the number of myths that are attached to it in a relationship similar to the way crossbeams stabilize a building. If nature and Nature have a lot of similar mythic patterns, then they would be providing stability to many of the same perceptions. By disconnecting either nature or Nature from the sense perceptions, all of the many shared sense perceptions would lose some of their stability, leading us to feel disconnected and less grounded.

The essence of both nature and Nature is life and death. In Nature, this dynamic plays out in animals killing each other and plants for food. A living ecosystem is one in which the animals and plants are in balance. In the realm of nature our self perception is always dying so a new, hopefully deeper, one can be born. When you follow your nature and balance your instincts, you're alive. When you lose your balance and give preference to some instincts over others, you are endangering your well being.

Nature is the entire universe and that universe is an expression of the nature of the tiny singularity that spawned the big bang. The self of that singularity is the unified field theory, which determined how the universe would develop just as our self guides our own development.

Nature is a symbol of our nature and thus of the self. This is because Nature plays a prominent role in myth where many of its features allude to psyche, a relationship which fits the description of a symbol as "the best possible figure by which allusion may be made to something relatively unknown" (Campbell 99.)

Life and death are conscious constructs that result from our ability to measure things like heartbeats and brain waves. However, Psyche can have a rich, living experience of someone who has been clinically dead for years and a flat, dead experience of someone who is clinically alive.

We associate death with many things. We will die, close friends die, acquaintances die, and strangers die. Specific abilities (running a 6 minute mile, sexual prowess, etc) die. Each of these deaths is really the death of a biological system. Death as we think of it is the death of millions of cells over some period of time.

Decay is a more appropriate term for this process than death because it is an analog time-based concept which allows for degrees where death is a digital absolute, "not life." Our conscious has two experiences of death. One is the anticipation, experience and resolution of the death of others. The second is the anticipation of our own death.

Our mythological experience of the death of others is the decay of our ability to project onto them. If we aren't projecting, we won't experience their death, which is why the death of a stranger does not impact us the way that of a spouse, child, close friend or pet does.

Mythological death is only loosely related to measurable death. It may start well before any signs of measurable death, such as when a friendship dies or Alzheimer's begins, and it may continue well after measurable death in the way we mourn loved ones for years.

Our mythological experience of our own death is grounded in the mystery of what lies beyond clinical death. Just as "The gods perceived reality through the imagination" (Raff 81,) we, too, imagine in order to perceive. Death in our culture is an informational black hole, so our imagination doesn't get enough clues to ground our perceptions and we therefore see a boundary we interpret as an end. If we could communicate with the spirits of the dead (as happens in other cultures,) then we could imagine our existence after that time, and it wouldn't seem like "death."

Pollution and death are both instances of the decay archetype. Pollution is a decay of our ability to project onto Nature. The above discussion about death could also be applied to pollution.

The modern industrial computer age is an alchemical one. Alchemy was probably always a polluter. It worked with mercury, which has fascinating properties (prima materia) but terrible environmental consequences. We have raised the temperature of the alchemical fire and the desirable instance of the prima materia has changed with the ages, but we are still searching for whatever the current age values most and will do whatever it takes to get it.

When we are refining petroleum, we are seeking to extract the prima materia of energy. If we are making steel, we are seeking to isolate the prima materia of strength. When we make computer chips, we are extracting the computational intelligence from matter using a very brutal polluting process that reduces the form of the original raw material into a shape that can experience coniunctio with ethereal electricity.

Consciousness believes it can continue to get to a prima materia (not all of earth need be beautiful, just the part that consciousness inhabits) faster than pollution catches up. We polluted the rest of the world so the prima materia here in the U.S. could surface. As pollution encroaches in the U.S., the prima materia retreats into sub regions all the way down to gated communities which are also searches for a prima materia. But if consciousness (and by this I mean a subset of humanity because not everyone is very conscious) can keep its own apparent self/prima materia surrounded by beauty, why should it care?

One of the main themes of last year's summer session was that when we approach a topic, we bring a fantasy with us (Slater Post-Jungian.) We come to Nature in an environmental fantasy, which is a myth of nostalgia. Because we are dealing with a symbol of the self when we approach Nature, this fantasy is very powerful.

We are losing our relationship to the old Nature of trees and forests. "When we lose someone in a relationship, we start an imaginal relationship with them" (Slater Post-Jungian.) We hark back to an imagined pristine time where we see the gods and goddesses. This imaginal relationship idealizes a harmonious past relationship with nature but who today really understands what it meant to be "close to nature?" Who from the past who lived in that relationship wouldn't have traded it for our current alienation?

We sense that something has gone wrong with our relationship with Nature instead of accepting a change as a natural evolution. Is a forest an intrinsically better place to meet our unconscious than the inside of an office building or has our imagination been stifled by nostalgia and inertia? Perhaps we hold on to this fantasy because we want to continue projecting in the same, comfortable ways, onto Nature. A more challenging and soul making approach might be to consider that our nature may be in conflict with the needs of Nature and we are now powerful enough to do something about it.

We have a long and deep history of fearing Nature that is hard to shake and has led to a deep desire to be "good." Consciousness leads to myth because it wants things to make sense. Consciousness leads to alchemy because the prima materia is that sense. The Prima Materia is the root reason, the cause of everything. It operates with awesome and mysterious power at a level we can't comprehend. Because we can't ignore that power, we need to develop a relationship with it. We label as "good" those things likely to appease that power, because it is easier for us if that power is appeased. We label those things in conflict with it "bad" because it's dangerous for us to aggravate that power.

Because we still fear Nature, our increased power combines with our desire to be good and results in psychological inflation because we take it on ourselves to maintain the world and its creatures.

Our attempts to be a god lead us to ask "What would Jesus do?" and we give this a priority over following our own nature because not only do we need a beneficent sacred essence, but we need to be the agent of that essence. Our divine sense must be good, so we can't be exploitative.

Is Nature more curious and open minded about pollution that we are? We have learned to accept that Nature enjoys decay, but we are not willing to join Nature in this game. We are holding out for a nicer, world saving role, an attitude which brings to mind the comment that "It is infinitely more important to strip him of the illusion of his power than to strengthen him still further in the mistaken idea that he can do everything he will" (Sabini 126.)

We don't think about Nature the way Nature thinks about us. Nothing is sacred to Nature except change and dynamism. Why should our attitude toward Nature be any different than Nature's attitude toward us? If Nature works toward our demise and decay, why should we worry about Nature's demise and decay? If Nature is exploiting us to serve its plan, then why should we feel bad about exploiting Nature instead of being committed to maintaining it in an eternally pristine state?

Even though, for almost every other experience of life, mythological thinkers believe that "If you honor the experience you are in, that will free up the other energies in the psyche to do what they need to do" (Slater Post-Jungian,) we make an exception for pollution. We have already arrived at the conclusion that all pollution is bad and something to be abhorred, even though "The great enemy of soul is literalism, which contains the arrival fantasy"(Slater Post-Jungian.) The debate is how best to get rid of pollution, not how to bring it to soul. But the soul isn't interested in fixing pollution because "In depth psychology there is an emphasis on creating an experience in the here and now. It is not interested in treatment" (Slater Post-Jungian.)

We need to continue to think mythologically as we destroy the environment. Pollution may offer as many opportunities as death for soul making.

The fantasy of pollution can help us imagine a relationship with Nature which may be able to take us deeper than the real relationship we had because "fantasy of death takes you into rich fields of

imagination" (Slater Post-Jungian.) Instead of moaning about the loss of our old relationship with Nature, we could use the loss as a way to gain new insights because "it is a good teaching moment when we are disturbed" (Grillo) and environmental consciousness has certainly disturbed us.

We must continue development, for that is in our nature, but we need to honor the spirits that dwell in the environment. If we honored our polluting nature we might learn something from the buffalo that sacrificed themselves and caused the creation of the buffalo dance. We would accept that the environment is sacrificing itself and be able to free up the energy of denial so we could honor all the homeless spirits we are creating. Otherwise those homeless spirits inhabit our psyches and create our homeless epidemic.

This paper has raised a number of questions I did not have time to pursue. I wonder how the perception of death has changed throughout time. Do we make a bigger deal of it now? How does paying attention to death change it? Has consciousness made us wonder if it can be avoided, instead of accepting it?

Death has become a problem, not an instinct. If the death instinct has atrophied, then does that alienate us from the death experience? Why do we fear death?

Does our obsession with avoiding death and discomfort lead to pollution? We fight death and disease with technology and the manufacturing process for technology can be highly polluting. The alchemical search for renewal and life causes decay, death and pollution. We are on such a health trip that psyche is making the world sick.

Our consciousness does not have a temporal breadth. Does that impact our perspective on death? Does the fact that we are aware we will die lead to pollution because we're in a hurry and won't be around for some of our consequences?

If rocks are alive, then what is death? Does the rock die?

What happens to our complexes when we die? What happens to the ego self axis?

The line of reasoning in this paper is connected to that of the cyborg enthusiasts because if it's true that the future doesn't need us then it probably won't need Nature either. If the future is the Borg, there could well be no reason to save Nature. I believe I saw every television episode of Star Trek that featured the Borg and I don't remember ever seeing a plant.

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