The voices we speak and the silences we keep:

toward an epistemology of immanence

"The tree that would grow to Heaven must send
its roots to hell" (Nietzsche).

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Abstract

In this dissertation conjunctions between Environmental Studies and Jungian psychology are explored. The research interweaves theoretical discussions of western cultural conceptions of human-ness, non-human nature and human relations with nature, and personal explorations of the related experiences of being human within the contemporary cultural world. In the first section, critical analyses of environmentally destructive, conceptual separations between humans and nature are combined with depth psychological understandings of separations between unconscious and conscious dimensions within the human psyche. Particular attention is paid to epistemological dimensions of these separations, in which culturally-specific modes of knowing arise as humans are associated with disembodied mind, whilst nature is conceived as mindless matter. It is argued that inclusion of Jungian depth psychological perspectives provides a way into envisaging a human knowing which is immanent within, and therefore interconnected with, wider nature.

This discussion provides an overview-mapping of cultural conceptions which are relevant to the goals of critical environmental approaches, and provides a background for the more finely focussed views within this terrain which follow. In the second section, some ways in which Jungian depth understandings of human psyche cohere with transformational possibilities presented in postmodernism, science and feminism are explored through a method of transitional thinking. Analyses of human subjectivity and knowledge; understandings of holism and complexity across nature; and western mythological stories about the nature of creative processes and humans’ place in nature, are gathered together, and presented with related depth psychological understandings of human knowing, being, and creative activity. In the concluding section these themes are revisited and expressed through images from a process of personal Jungian analysis which accompanied academic and theoretical explorations. In its modes of expression this presentation departs from academic conventions, to include personal, imaginal and dream voices, in order to speak of, for and with speech which is radically silenced within dominant western modes of knowledge and expression.

Overall, this presentation provides a critical analysis and deconstruction of western cultural modes which are implicated in contemporary environmental destructions. Simultaneously, alternative ways of being and knowing are constructed, in which hierarchical separations of humans from nature are moved toward a reconciling space of respectful relationship.