



The Cosmic Walk and Other Learning's / Kate Robertson
Essay excerpts / John Seed

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I CALL ON THE SPIRIT OF HERBS

In 1979, after years of meditation, of growing organic food in community, of planting seeds that grew from the seeds I had planted the season before and feeling body and mind grow awestruck from the wonder of it all, I found myself somehow embroiled in the defense of a little forest.

*What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and of wilderness? Let them be
left,
O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness
yet*
Gerald Manley Hopkins

I stood with my fellows on that bewildering line between the human world and the dark green vegetation, but this time not with an eye to conquest, to the "development" of this forest, but standing with the trees, alongside the trees to prevent their destruction.

*I speak for the trees as the trees have no
tongues
And I'm telling you sir AT THE TOP OF MY
LUNGS...*
The Lorax, Dr. Seuss

Out of this small beginning came the Rainforest Information Centre, The Council of All Beings workshops, and my personal path of speaking for Earth. How little could I have known what strange paths I would walk once I re-membered the ancient language of Earth and plant and animal and gave myself up to its voice.

*Our faith imposes on us a right and duty
to throw ourselves into the things of the
earth.*
Teilhard de Chardin

The Council of All Beings is the ceremonies and rituals that bring our deep ecology to life. Here we have a practice where we approach a leaf as though approaching our

revered zen master. We breathe to this leaf the oxidized carbon of our body. We do so with the gratitude and the generosity that is the signature, the clue to the Nature of which we are a fragment.

As we add consciousness to the ancient processes of sharing respiration, we savour the leaf in our imagination. Now we must notice and then lay aside our prejudice that we are the only one capable of consciousness in this transaction, this holy communion that accompanies our every breath. We consciously nourish a leaf and invite the leaf to nourish us not just with the oxygen it creates, but with further communications.

FULL ESSAY

rainforestinfo.org.au/deep-eco/herbs.htm

BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM

When humans investigate and see through their layers of anthropocentric self-cherishing, a most profound change in consciousness begins to take place. Alienation subsides. The human is no longer an outsider, apart. Your humanness is then recognised as being merely the most recent stage of your existence, and as you stop identifying exclusively with this chapter, you start to get in touch with yourself as mammal, as vertebrate, as a species only recently emerged from the rainforest. As the fog of amnesia disperses, there is a transformation in your relationship to other species, and in your commitment to them. What is described here should not be seen as merely intellectual. The intellect is one entry point to the process outlined, and the easiest one to communicate.

For some people however, this change of perspective follows from actions on behalf of Mother Earth. "I am protecting the rainforest" develops to "I am part of the rainforest protecting myself. I am that part of the

rainforest recently emerged into thinking.” What a relief then! The thousands of years of imagined separation are over and we begin to recall our true nature. That is, the change is a spiritual one, thinking like a mountain¹, sometimes referred to as “deep ecology”.

As your memory improves, as the implications of evolution and ecology are internalised and replace the outmoded anthropocentric structures in your mind, there is an identification with all life. Then follows the realisation that the distinction between “life” and “lifeless” is a human construct. Every atom in this body existed before organic life emerged 4000 million years ago. Remember our childhood as minerals, as lava, as rocks? Rocks contain the potentiality to weave themselves into such stuff as this. We are the rocks dancing. Why do we look down on them with such a condescending air. It is they that are immortal part of us.²

Deep ecology is the search for a viable consciousness. Surely consciousness emerged and evolved according to the same laws as everything else. Molded by environmental pressures, the mind of our ancestors must time and again have been forced to transcend itself. To survive our current environmental pressures, we must consciously remember our evolutionary and ecological inheritance. We must learn to think like a mountain. If we are to be open to evolving a new consciousness, we must fully face up to our impending extinction (the ultimate environmental pressure). This means acknowledging that part of us which shies away from the truth, hides in intoxication or busyness from the despair of the human, whose 4000 million year race is run, whose organic life is a mere hair's breadth from finished.³

A biocentric perspective, the realisation that rocks WILL dance, and that roots go deeper than 4000 million years, may give us the courage to face despair and break through

to a more viable consciousness, one that is sustainable and in harmony with life again.

The term “deep ecology” was coined by the Norwegian professor of Philosophy and eco-activist Arne Naess, and has been taken up by academics and environmentalists in Europe, the US and Australia. “The essence of deep ecology is to ask deeper questions... We ask which society, which education, which form of religion is beneficial for all life on the planet as a whole”.⁴

REFERENCES

¹ “The forester ecologist Aldo Leopold underwent a dramatic conversion from the ‘stewardship’ shallow ecology resource management mentality of man-over-nature to announce that humans should see themselves as ‘plain members’ of the biotic community. After the conversion, Leopold saw steadily, and with ‘shining clarity’ as he broke through the anthropocentric illusions of his time and began ‘thinking like a mountain’.” George Sessions “Spinoza, Perennial Philosophy and Deep Ecology” photostat, Sierra College, Rocklin California, 1979. See Aldo Leopold, “A Sand Country Almanac”, O.U.P. London, 1949.

² Prominent physicists such as David Bohm (“Wholeness and the Implicate Order”, Routledge, 1980), and biologists and philosophers such as Charles Birch and John Cobb Jr. (“The Liberation of Life” Cambridge, 1981) would agree with Alfred North Whitehead that ‘a thoroughgoing evolutionary philosophy is inconsistent with materialism. The aboriginal stuff, or material from which a materialistic philosophy starts is incapable of evolution.’ (“Science and the Modern World”, Fontana, 1975 (first published 1926) p133). Similar views to those of these authors on the interpenetration of all “matter” (better conceived as “events”) are developed in Fritjof Capra’s “The Tao of Physics” (Fontana 1976) while the sixth century B.C. “Tao Te Ching” itself tells us that “Tao” or “the implicate order” as Bohm might say, “is the source of the ten thousand things” (trans. G. Feng and J. English, Vintage 1972).

³ For the creative use of despair, see Joanna Macy, “Despair Work” Evolutionary Blues, Vol 1, No 1, 1981, PO Box 448 Arcata CA 95521 USA. For a long look at our impending extinction, see Jonathon Schell, “The Fate of the Earth”, Pan Books, 1982.

⁴ Interview with Arne Naess by “The Ten Directions”, Zen Centre of Los Angeles newsletter, Summer/Fall 1982.

FULL ESSAY

rainforestinfo.org.au/deep-eco/Anthropo.htm

The Cosmic Walk and Other Learning's

explores experiential learning and focuses on the understanding of the Deep Ecology philosophy. Deep Ecology observes that psychological and spiritual disarray can be contributed to the 'illusion of separation' between humans and the rest of the natural world. This concept is seen as a fundamental underlying issue of the current environmental crisis.

In June 2013, I attended a Deep Ecology Workshop facilitated by John Seed (writer, teacher, environmentalist and OAM) and became a participant-observer of deep ecology processes and healing ways. From my experiences at this workshop, I have developed a series of unique photograms to document the sensory modes of understandings I was exposed to.

Photograms are made by placing objects onto the surface of light-sensitive paper and then exposing to light. Solarisation is a photographic practice in which the image is completely or in part reversed in tone during the developing process.

Workshop tools and concepts such as string, leaves, dirt from the earth and the circle shape are utilised to create the photograms. The artwork titles are workshop names or healing concepts, such as *The Cosmic Walk*, *Circle Work* and *Breathing with Trees*.

My work is an inquiry into the photographic potential of working within the 'between space' linking contemporary art and ethnography, in order to record the energetic emanation connected with experiential learning in healing communities.

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Image credit (front page): Kate Robertson, *Cosmic Walk (study 1)*, solarised silver gelatin print (photogram) with toner, 25.4 x 20.3 cm, 2013.

Hyperlinks

John Seed Deep Ecology workshops
rainforestinfo.org.au/deep-eco/schedule.htm
Open Hearted Transformation workshops, retreats and sessions
openheartedtransformation.com.au

Thank you

John Seed, Phoenix Arrien, Carin Eisen, Iain Maclachlan, Cassie and Bob from neospace, fellow Deep Ecology Workshop participants, Nerida Robertson, Peter Fillmore.

Kate Robertson is represented by Edmund Pearce gallery.

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