

Systems Theory:

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"The Western Sioux believed that each being, a rock for instance, is an actual community of persons with ample locomotion among themselves, and such locomotion not regarded as circumscribed or restricted, save as the maker (oicage) of the whole gives to each species his own sphere...not a few of their people actually had the ability to see into and through a rock discerning its make-up, similarly as we look into a community or grove of trees." (Deloria Jr., 'If You Think About It, You Will See That It Is True')

Back in mid-January of this year, 2003, I was sitting in a class entitled 'The Gifts of the Universe' in which we were intended to view the lens of creation through the eyes of quantum mechanics. As I sat there with an understanding that we were of collective mind and intention, embedded in the very title of the Class, I was astounded to hear one of the members of the group use an example of rock as an opposite to consciousness. Not only did her ease of discardment shock me but so did the gut level/instinctual depth of my response to it. I felt morally punctured and somehow affronted by what I perceived to be an utter lack of understanding of the totality of 'place/placement' of all things in the Universe and also a vacuum of relationship, visible only as an unfortunate lack of respect.

On later reflection I was able to consider it along the lines of Ancestry. I wish now I had been able to explicate then that I consider rocks to be my ancestors and ancient parents; wisdom bearers, seers/overseers and participants of all life. I would invited her to imagine transporting her human ancestors of perhaps a few generations back from Asia [her ancestral roots] into the room and observe them sitting there unable to participate in a foreign language on a foreign subject and then ask her if she felt that that symbolized a lack of consciousness or intelligence or indeed sentience on their part, or whether she would have been able to see the divide as purely linguistic and cultural and one of time-based perception. As Deloria Jr. says in his article, *'If You Think About It, You Will See That It Is True'*, (Pg.40) "there is no reason to suppose that other forms of life did not have the same basic intelligence [as man]" indeed, (Pg.41) "the fact that man had been the final product of the purposeful life force did not make him the crown of creation" .

What I did manage to say was that just because she didn't speak 'rock' per se, she shouldn't write off the intelligence or consciousness of 'other', especially a pre-emptive other. Ah, the beauty of hindsight. We miss so much when we lose sight of relationship as process and as the gift of life. Here I refer to both cross-cultural as well as cross-species relationship/discourse (if there is a difference) . At least it gave rise to a further exploration of my own relationship to nature in a way that I was forced or encouraged to put words, shape and form to my innate feelings of collective identity as shared consciousness among all beings.

This division between self and other (other as Nature particularly) is succinctly referred to by Susan Griffin in 'The Eros of Everyday Life', many times, as a product of a 'division of education' that we experience collectively, in our western paradigm of scholarly and cultural learning (pg. 39);

"During the week I was educated in the modern idea that natural universe consists of random forces without consciousness or meaning. On Sunday I learned that God created and still rules a universe constructed with meaning and a moral order"

She comments on how she grew up (pg.34),

"believing that this cold, dry approach to existence was a necessary component of intellectual freedom, that the courageous mind could look at a universe stripped of all myth with a clear, unblinking eye. I thought that somehow meaninglessness represented the mind with an open field. Only later did I come to sense that underneath this idea of freedom an older way of ordering the world remained."

There is something to this innate knowing of connection, place and relationship that manages to survive underneath and beyond all the confusing, cultural layering that would have us participate in a distance-oriented relationship to oneself and to life, in what is ostensibly a truly holographic, interdependent process of becoming and of being.

The contrast between a world where mythology incorporates totality of relationship between 'humanness' and 'natureness' is visible in Deloria Jr's words (pg.39), "What the Western Sioux sought was the moral content of entities and relationships; they tried to understand their role and function in the natural world" in contrast to the Western paradigm where he observes (pg.38) "the idea that knowledge existed apart from human beings and their communities and could stand alone for 'it's own sake'." Without the richness of deep belonging in a nature-based context, meaning falters and becomes like a cancer of the mind, out of control and out of touch, unchecked and unresponsive to intimacy, need or connection.

We are not distinct from nature...we can't be. We are *of* nature...we ARE nature!

In an attempt to understand ourselves (Griffin, Pg.39); "People thought they could explain and conquer nature - yet the outcome is that they destroyed it and disinherited themselves from it" and this is no small loss. Not only do we inherit a natural inclination toward a self-surviving stance that leads inevitably to eco-disaster but we also make ourselves the 'other' with no natural family beyond one of materialistic ideals and separatist consumer models of enlightenment and accumulation, surrounding ourselves with hollow castles of 'stuff'. How lonely. And how devoid of the intrinsic magic of life available to us via the very real portals of perception.

As Griffin puts it, we end up with (Pg.38), "An ambivalence toward nature which at the same time [has] subtly diminished human nature." Not only do we suffer the interiority of loneliness and dis-enfranchisement but this choice of perception is obviously entirely threatening to our own entropic fashion of a continued depletion of relationship toward our life giver; nature. We are killing ourselves when we kill nature, both physically and morally.

Again, to quote Griffin, at this point, for us now...(Pg.46);

"The task is to study the nightmare that has driven us to self-destruction...beneath familiar ideas of reality there lives perhaps an older sense of self tied to an older connection to the cosmos, a sense of being and place that hold a coherence one has all along desired."

Can this desire be acknowledged consciously? Can it be allowed to replace the subservient satisfaction of having 'things' and the illusion of controlling reality? Of being *above* nature? The only outcome we seem capable of controlling at the moment is the one where the soap opera ends and we write ourselves out of the script. We can change this ending by changing our relationship to our expectations, indeed, perhaps by changing our expectations themselves.

It is understandable that to consider a paradigm shift toward collective placement *in, of* and *to* Nature (Griffin, Pg.40) must "seem like a threat to consciousness itself...to sever them [separatist, mechanistic and dualistic perceptions of life] would seem like erasing the very facts of the world is to change the self". The threat is very real but also very much a portal, as I have said, into another, more expanded world. It is important that we learn to let go our tight fist on mechanistic, linear thinking and realize that we can co-create in a way that speaks to learning and not to manipulating. We are losing our heritage, our family and our way of life. It is time for positive, self-initiating change. We need to change the story. And we need to change it now.

I truly believe that, as Deloria Jr. points out (Pg.41) "Coming last, human beings were the "younger brothers" of the other life forms and therefore had to learn everything from these creatures." We can learn. We need to invite the learning.

Finally, as Deloria Jr. again points out in considering the Native American Sioux tradition of thinking and mythologizing (Pg.44), "Medicine men taught that plants and animals do not become extinct, they go away and do not come back until the location is being treated properly"

For myself, I would like to invite them back. They are my family, my ancestors and I would like to listen to their stories, the stories that are currently only marked by their absence, and pass them on to future generations in a fuller and richer tapestry of life.

With thanks,
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