

Spirituality in the Work of Theodore Roszak: Implications for Contemporary Ecopsychology

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Abstract

Despite the recent flourishing of ecopsychology research, risks may be involved if ecopsychology remains a loosely defined paradigm. We suggest that drawing from some of the central themes of Theodore Roszak's *The Voice of the Earth* (1992), a seminal text of ecopsychology, may help to elucidate the unique contribution of ecopsychology and its sustained relevance for environmentally focused psychologies. To provide a comprehensive review, we consider *The Voice of the Earth* by placing this text in the context of Roszak's broader body of literature, discussing his earlier and more recent works. We particularly focus on the theme of spiritual experience throughout Roszak's literature, as we believe that this is one of the more unique and important aspects of his work that has implications for the future development of ecopsychology as a paradigm and social movement. In conclusion, we suggest that Roszak's emphasis on the value of a spiritual or animistic experience of nature, as a means of fostering empathy toward the natural world, may assist in providing meaningful focus to contemporary ecopsychology.

An attempt to synthesize ecological and psychological principles is visible in the work of a variety of authors, including Aldo Leopold (1949), Paul Goodman (1970), Paul Shepard (1982), Warwick Fox (1990), and Ralph Metzner (1991). Indeed, Paul Shepard's (1982) text, *Nature and Madness*, is often recognized as a prototype for the later development

of ecopsychology (Fisher, 2002; Hibbard, 2003; Metzner, 1999; Roszak et al., 1995). However, the historian and cultural critic Theodore Roszak (1992) is usually credited with formally naming and outlining the principles of ecopsychology. In *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology*, Roszak draws on a wide range of theories in the development of a complicated thesis with a specific focus on what he sees as a historical divide between the psychological and the ecological. His vision in this undertaking is to "see the needs of the planet and the person as a continuum" (Roszak, 1992, p. 14). The text climaxes with a specific set of principles that attempt to outline a future course for this emerging paradigm.

After publication of *The Voice of the Earth* in 1992, a number of authors attempted to refine and contribute their own understanding to the development of ecopsychology, including Fisher (2002), Scull (1999, 2008), and those authors who contributed to the volume *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind* (edited by Roszak et al., 1995). Despite attempts to develop and refine ecopsychology, the effect of ecopsychology on the academic discipline of psychology was limited at best (Roszak, 2001). Reser predicted in 1995 that mainstream psychology would be unlikely to encompass ecopsychology due to a series of conceptual difficulties evident in *The Voice of the Earth*. In recent times, however, the birth of the peer-reviewed journal *Ecopsychology* in 2009 has encouraged a flourishing of ecopsychological research (see the following recent examples of ecopsychology research: Amel et al., 2009; Besthorn et al., 2010; Guiney & Oberhauser, 2009; Hinds & Sparks, 2009; Jordan, 2009; Kasser, 2010; Norton, 2009; Thompson, 2009).

Doherty (2009) describes this recent flourishing as a transition from the countercultural, Romantic, experiential emphasis of Roszak and related authors to a potential second generation of ecopsychology with emphasis on pluralism, self-reflection, and pragmatism. In this context, contemporary ecopsychology can be understood as one

of a number of environmentally focused psychologies, including environmental psychology, conservation psychology, and ecological psychology, all of which assume that an understanding of human behavior and mental health requires attention to an environmental or ecological context. In many ways these psychologies overlap and are mutually dependent but differ according to the research and modes of investigation that they tend to privilege (Doherty, 2010). For instance, environmental psychology tends to prefer research concerned with the complex interactions between people and their built or natural environments (Gifford, 2009) and often fosters quantitative modes of inquiry. Ecopsychology, in contrast, tends to prefer the more subjective aspect of human relationships in the natural environment (Doherty, 2010) and is well suited for qualitative research methods (Fisher, 2002).

We believe that the transition to a second generation of ecopsychology has been a positive development for this emerging area of study, particularly with regard to a pragmatic focus on multidisciplinary research. However, given that ecopsychology remains a loosely defined area that overlaps significantly with other environmentally focused psychologies, there is a potential risk that ecopsychology may lose sight of what makes it unique and become disenfranchised by related areas of scholarship. Consider, for example, the recent spate of empirical research on connectedness with nature and its relationship to environmental behavior. This is a topic closely related to the theoretical focus of ecopsychology, yet most of the relevant research articles appear under the heading of environmental psychology (Berenguer, 2010; Dutcher et al., 2007; Gosling & Williams, 2010; Kals et al., 1999; Mayer & Frantz, 2004; Nisbet et al., 2009; Schultz, 2000; Schultz & Tabanico, 2007). A number of these articles cite ecopsychology literature in the preface to their research (Berenguer, 2010; Mayer & Frantz, 2004; Nisbet et al., 2009), raising the concern that ecopsychology might ultimately be subsumed under the more established field of environmental psychology.

A loosely defined ecopsychology also raises concern for the application of ecopsychology in a therapeutic context. Due to the broad overlap between ecopsychology and related areas of literature and the range of metaphysical concepts that ecopsychology draws upon, there is a danger that ecopsychology will be confused with “new age” spirituality. In particular, Reser (1995) notes that Roszak’s (1992) uncritical appropriation of indigenous beliefs in *The Voice of the Earth* shares something in common with new age literature. This kind of association is unlikely to be helpful if ecopsychology is to be taken seriously in the academic community. Given also that *ecopsychologist* and *ecotherapy* are currently unprotected terms, they may be misappropriated in a therapeutic context to describe treatments that

are unrelated to the tradition of ecopsychology. Psychotherapy clients with a concern for the environment may be drawn to therapies so labeled that are neither evidence based nor theoretically consistent with the ecopsychology literature. Malpractice by individuals who claim to be affiliated with ecopsychology has the potential to damage the reputation of ecopsychology as a whole.

Through a process of self-reflection on the scope and tradition of ecopsychology, we believe that it may be possible to present a more clearly defined area of research. By highlighting some of the unique contributions of ecopsychology and its relevance for contemporary research, we hope to differentiate ecopsychology from other environmentally focused psychologies. Additionally, by delineating the conceptual focus of ecopsychology more clearly, it may be easier for therapists and clients to distinguish this area of study from intellectually irrelevant and ethically dubious approaches. In what follows, we reflect on some of the key themes developed by Roszak (1992), a seminal author of ecopsychology, and consider how these themes are relevant for the further development of ecopsychology.

In the current article, we will begin by summarizing a range of Roszak’s earlier works and will argue that Roszak’s exposition of spiritual experience, as an alternative to a scientific mode of consciousness, is an enduring theme throughout much of his literature. This will lead to a discussion of Roszak’s (1992) exploration of ecopsychology. We will suggest that, although Roszak avoids using the term *spiritual*, his central thesis emphasizes an animistic or sacred experience of nature as the means through which a shift in environmental attitudes and behaviors might occur. We then present a critical reflection on Roszak’s literature and summarize what we believe are the more enduring aspects of his work. An exposition of Roszak’s literature is considered to be particularly worthwhile given the complexity and lack of clarity noted in critiques of *The Voice of the Earth* (Fridgen, 2005; Howard, 1993; Nicholson-Lord, 1993; Reser, 1995). Finally, we briefly review Roszak’s most recent work, *The Making of an Elder Culture* (2009), and discuss how spiritual experience appears in this text as a less overt but still enduring theme. In the context of Roszak’s broader body of literature, we will argue therefore that ecopsychology may have an important and relatively unique contribution to make to contemporary environmental psychologies by offering spiritual experience in nature as a means to foster empathy toward the natural world.

Early Literature and Ecopsychology

Coope (2010) presents a scholarly review of the historical context out of which some of Roszak’s earliest literature arose. Coope describes how Roszak became involved in the opposition to a massive

Cold War bomb shelter program during the 1960s. During this time Roszak became aware that proponents of the bomb shelter program deliberately dismissed the emotional experience of a potential nuclear holocaust in favor of a cold scientific rationality. Out of this formative experience, Coope argues that Roszak began to conceive of a “spectrum of consciousness,” where scientific knowledge and visionary religion exist on either end of a psychological continuum (Roszak, 1974). Coope goes on to suggest that Roszak’s criticism of a scientific thinking, which deliberately excludes affective experience, is a consistent theme through much of his early literature published in 1970, 1971, and 1972, and forms a crucial foundation for his later exploration of ecopsychology in 1992.

While we agree with Coope that a critique of scientific thinking, at the expense of affective experience, is an essential component of Roszak’s literature, we believe that his discussion of spiritual experience in nature may have more relevance for the future development of ecopsychology. In addition, spiritual experience is an important and consistent part of Roszak’s earlier work, yet Roszak avoids references to spirituality in his exploration of ecopsychology as such. In a personal communication to Reser (1995), Roszak claims that this is to avoid new age connotations. As we will discuss later, however, Roszak’s discussion of ecopsychology again leads to a conclusion that emphasizes the value of spiritual experience. An examination of Roszak’s earlier literature is therefore necessary to fully appreciate the importance of spiritual experience and its relevance to the development of ecopsychology.

As Coope (2010) notes, much of Roszak’s literature arises from a critique of the scientific worldview. Roszak (1970, 1972, 1974) argues that since the Scientific Enlightenment, urban-industrial culture has assimilated a view of reality that has had a devastating impact on our well-being, our social systems, and our environment. Roszak (1972) suggests that in an urban-industrial culture, scientific knowledge that can be quantified, communicated, and independently verified is viewed as the ultimate description of reality. In contrast, the subjective experiences of the individual, including those experiences that may be unique and ineffable, are seen as an impediment to objective truth. As a consequence, Roszak (1970, 1975a, 1978) argues that the experience of the individual is repressed and restricted, imposing a severe psychological cost and a censoring of experience. This psychological cost involves what Roszak (1970) describes as a splitting of the internal and external worlds, where the experience of the individual is restricted to the process of observation and the external world is diminished as empty and without inherent value. Due to this division, the individual becomes alienated from his or her environment and feels no remorse in conquering and exploiting the

natural world. We can recognize Roszak’s adoption of the psychoanalytic concept of splitting, and especially the splitting of worlds, from use by R. D. Laing in *The Divided Self*. Laing’s training was very much influenced by the work of pioneering psychoanalyst Melanie Klein and the British School of object relations (see, for example, Klein’s 1959 article on *Our Adult World and Its Roots in Infancy*).

Throughout much of his earlier work, Roszak argues that the Romantic Movement provides a healthier alternative to the scientific worldview of urban-industrial culture. Roszak (1975b) presents Romanticism as a movement that hungered for experience, particularly the exotic, strange, and mysterious, in contrast to the “cautious self-control” of the Scientific Enlightenment. He (1972) suggests that the desire for a greater depth to human experience found in the Romantic Movement is also evident in the Renaissance and the countercultural movement of the 1960s. Ultimately, Roszak does not argue that the scientific method should be dismissed, rather that scientific thinking should be included as one part of a greater vision of reality that values and investigates multiple models of experience and knowledge, particularly the sacred and spiritual (Roszak, 1972, 1975a).

Concerning the limitations that the scientific worldview places on the variety of permissible experiences, Roszak considers repression of the sacred and spiritual to be the most painful and diminishing (Roszak, 1972, 1974). In *Where the Wasteland Ends* (the title being a reference to the modernist poem by T. S. Eliot [1922/1963]), Roszak (1972) states that his central aim is to discover how “the essential religious impulse, was exiled from our culture, what effect this has had on our quality of life...and what part the energies of transcendence must now play in saving urban-industrial society from self-annihilation” (p. xv). Spirituality in this context is presented as the core religious feeling without the restrictions imposed by religion. Roszak (1975b) even suggests that for many, organized religion is yet another means of censoring experience.

Roszak (1970) describes the spiritual quest and the experience of oneness as the means by which individuals living within urban-industrial culture can overcome an oppressive scientific worldview. To transcend urban-industrial culture Roszak argues that we must allow for “spiritual regeneration” (1972) and “spiritual need” (1978), to see “the great sacred Way of things in what has normally been described as profane” (p. 257, 1975b) and focus on the nonrational powers of personality: “those capacities that take fire from visionary splendor and the experience of human communion” (pp. 50–51, 1970). He suggests that individuals who are able to experience the sacred will assign the scientific worldview a marginal place in their lives: “they will realize that the objective mode of consciousness, useful as it is on occasion, cuts them off from too much that is

valuable...which diminishes life rather than expands it" (Roszak, 1970, p. 235). Although Roszak (1972) might not state specifically that a spiritual worldview will be the unmaking of an urban-industrial culture, he does argue that some form of transcendent experience will be necessary to move beyond an urban industrialization he depicts as destructive and unhealthy:

Until we find our way once more to the experience of transcendence, until we find the life within us and the nature about us sacred, there will seem to us no "realistic" future other than more of the same: single vision and the artificial environment forever and ever, amen. (Roszak, 1972, p. 420)

Unfortunately, Roszak does not offer any specific recommendation that might encourage individuals to experience the transcendent. Instead he hopes that psychology, psychiatry, or psychotherapy may take on the role of spiritual renewal. Drawing upon the views of "radical therapy," and in particular the work of R.D. Laing (1960), Roszak (1972) regards psychology to be the product of an urbanized intellect and a force for adjusting people to the standards of life in urban society. However, he also sees great potential for psychology, or "psychotherapy in its broadest experimental sense" (p. 17, 1975b), as a force for understanding and modifying the habits of urban culture. According to Roszak (1972, 1975b) "therapy is mysticism with all the metaphysical commitments drained off" (p. 92, 1972) and perhaps the most appropriate discipline to introduce traditional spiritual teachings to Western culture: "It is psychotherapy which serves as the major conduit for consciousness exploration...it is therapy working most ambitiously and eclectically to meet that potentiality in the experience of most people" (p. 240, Roszak, 1975b). Roszak presents psychology therefore as a product of an urban culture dedicated to scientific values yet having the potential to become a source of spiritual renewal that legitimizes and finds value in sacred experience.

Taking his earlier literature into account, one might argue that Roszak's (1992) later development of ecopsychology appears to be his own attempt to use psychology to introduce a range of spiritual concepts. Perhaps becoming dissatisfied with the development of psychology from the 1970s onward, particularly what he later (1992) refers to as the inability of radical therapy to move beyond "heroic opposition," Roszak may have felt that more deliberate prompting was required for psychology to legitimize the value of spiritual experience in an urban-industrial culture. Roszak's exploration of ecopsychology suggests, much like his earlier literature, that the experience of the spiritual and sacred may act to transform urban-industrial attitudes toward the natural environment.

In *The Voice of the Earth*, Roszak (1992) argues that to address the problems inherent in urban industrialism, the desires that underpin our standards of consumption must be understood and reshaped. For this task, Roszak looks to psychology as the means by which the motivations of individuals can be changed for the benefit of humanity and the environment. His discussion draws upon many of the same critiques of psychology presented in his earlier literature (Roszak, 1972, 1978). Roszak argues that the dominant schools of psychology are created by the same industrial culture that threatens the environment. He suggests that an alliance with the scientific model, originating with Freud, supports the distinction between subject and object, and he considers as a consequence that mainstream psychology is theoretically incapable of considering self in the context of the natural environment. In *The Voice of the Earth* there is also a discussion of the positive potential of psychology to understand human motivations and promote alternative means of happiness. However, in contrast to his earlier literature (Roszak, 1972, 1975b), Roszak gives little emphasis to the role of psychology for spiritual renewal as such. Instead, he undertakes an indirect route to reconceptualize psychoanalytic theory in the context of tribal animism.

Following Freud's (1930/2005) argument in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Roszak (1992) contends that a society which destroys the environment that sustains it must be pathological in itself. For this reason, he turns to the only form of culture that he personally believes is sustainable, that of tribalism, and asks whether tribal cultures have anything to teach us about sanity. In particular, he draws upon an animistic experience of nature, where nature is experienced as a sacred realm that exhibits intelligence and intentionality, as a fundamental feature of tribal culture. Roszak argues that this feature of tribal culture encourages a view of psychological well-being, what he refers to as "traditional psychotherapy," where sanity demands a transcendental bond with nature: "Precisely because the natural realm possesses a sacramental quality, traditional psychotherapy would insist that people must remain vitally with it as if there were between them an ongoing dialogue" (Roszak, 1992, p. 79).

Taking animistic experience of nature as a normal and important aspect of human well-being, Roszak (1992) goes on to translate this new standard of mental health into the language of psychoanalysis. Rather than a classical psychoanalytic view of the id, which Roszak defines as "a repository of unruly energy at the instinctual core of our nature" (1992, p. 289), he attempts to re-envision the id as a treasury of ecological wisdom. Precisely because the id reflects our basic human instincts, Roszak argues that these instincts have been specifically selected over the course of our evolution to allow humanity

to adapt well to the environment. He suggests that the id (as he sees it) may have a greater transpersonal role as a reservoir of intuitive environmental knowledge and an innately animistic sensibility common to children and tribal cultures. Roszak argues that this intuitive reading of sentience into biological systems serves to confer a metaphysical truth about the health of the ecosystem as adaptive, if not more adaptive, than the mechanistic truth offered by scientific observation. He concludes that the ego should be allowed to connect with the id, where nature is experienced as sacred and sentient, to encourage a natural environmental reciprocity common to children and tribal cultures.

Founded on this lengthy re-imagining of what he understands of psychoanalysis, Roszak describes the principles of ecopsychology at the end of the text. These principles describe the importance of connecting the ego with the id, or the ecological unconscious, with the goal of creating an ecological ego. Given that for Roszak in 1992 the id represented our innately animistic response to nature where the natural world is experienced as sacramental and intelligent, the principles that define his description of ecopsychology fundamentally highlight the value of a particular type of experience: "Ecopsychology seeks to recover the child's innately animistic quality of experience in functionally 'sane' adults" (p. 320). Roszak does not explicitly state, as he does in his earlier literature (1970, 1972, 1975b, 1978), that spiritual or sacred experience is necessary to transcend urban-industrial culture and the scientific worldview. However, in his exploration of ecopsychology Roszak (1992) arrives at a conclusion that does emphasize the value of "animistic" experience, where the natural world is experienced as a sacred place, for changing the destructive habits of urban-industrial culture. According to Roszak's ecopsychology, therefore, we are once again introduced to the value of an essentially spiritual or sacred experience as an alternative to the scientific worldview.

Critical Reflections

Critics note in reviewing *The Voice of the Earth* (Roszak, 1992) that by attempting to integrate such a wide range of subject matters the text will likely appeal only to a limited, highly educated readership steeped in the history of ideas (Fridgen, 2005; Nicholson-Lord, 1993). Howard (1993) also noted that Roszak's thinking arises almost entirely from Freudian and Neo-Freudian sources, and readers who are not partial to psychoanalytic theory will likely remain unconvinced. In addition, Roszak's (1992) description of the ecological unconscious in *The Voice of the Earth* appears to share something in common with Jung's collective unconscious. He describes what he sees as the wider therapeutic project of ecopsychology:

Just as it has been the goal of previous therapies to recover the repressed contents of the unconscious, so the goal of ecopsychology is to awaken the inherent sense of environmental reciprocity that lies within the ecological unconscious. Other therapies seek to heal the alienation between person and person, person and family, and person and society. Ecopsychology seeks to heal the more fundamental alienation between the person and the natural environment (Roszak, 1992, p. 320).

In Roszak's (1995) article, *Where Psyche Meets Gaia*, Roszak remarks concerning his "idea" of the ecological unconscious, that it is "speculative," "though no more so than Jung's collective unconscious" and several other psychoanalytic notions (p. 14). Interestingly, he dismisses for his purposes the usefulness of Jung's concept, saying, "At least in its most prominent interpretation, Jung's collective unconscious belongs wholly to the cultural realm."

Various mischaracterizations of psychoanalytic thought are reflected by a wider lack of awareness concerning the then current state of psychology. As Reser (1995) notes, Roszak (1992) presents a peculiar misunderstanding of the modern role of psychology and psychiatry in *The Voice of the Earth*. Roszak seems to suggest that most therapists are psychiatrists working from a Freudian or Neo-Freudian perspective. It also appears that Roszak considers psychology to be more of a school of research and psychiatry as therapeutic practice: "Psychology is the study of these motivations...In its therapeutic mode as psychiatry, it is meant to trace the twisted connections between what people say they want and what they really want" (p. 39). Such an assertion suggests that Roszak's understanding of the role of psychology and psychiatry was then considerably out of date. This misunderstanding is exacerbated by alternating references to psychology, psychotherapy, and psychiatry, with little to no consideration given to the distinguishing features of each discipline. Given the confusion and lack of clarity concerning the contemporary role of psychology in *The Voice of the Earth*, it is difficult to accept it as a valid critique. However, this does not necessarily mean that Roszak's critiques are unjustified or that his work is uninfluential. Kidner (2001), inspired partly by Roszak's literature, presents a better-developed and more detailed analysis of the influence of industrialization and scientific language on modern psychology. Similarly to Roszak, Kidner argues that psychology, like many other enterprises of industrialized culture, reinforces an individualistic split between self and the rest of the world such that psychology can only offer superficial and ineffective resolutions to environmental problems. Kidner's work demonstrates a well-informed critique of contemporary psychology that reflects

and expands upon a number of the same arguments made by Roszak.

Roszak's integrative approach to his subject matter, attempting to bring together a wide range of ideas into a single thesis, ultimately means that he is unable to describe specific topics in great detail, with the exception perhaps of Romantic literature. This approach is not uncommon from a historical or sociological perspective, and it serves to provide a useful overview of the underlying cultural themes that have and continue to direct the structures of society. Roszak's mischaracterization of psychology and psychiatry is less excusable, but, setting aside the inaccuracy of Roszak's representation of psychology and of psychoanalysis, what remains relevant for contemporary ecopsychology is the underlying theme that occupies his text. This is his presentation of animistic experience, the experience of nature as sacred and spiritual, as the means to foster empathy toward the natural world.

In light of Roszak's earlier literature, we suggest that his propounding of ecopsychology appears as an interesting yet confusing attempt to highlight the value of an animistic experience of nature. This is a very similar task that Roszak sets himself in many of his earlier texts, which, as discussed earlier, consistently offer spiritual experience as an alternative to the urban-industrial reality principle (Roszak, 1970, 1972, 1975b, 1978). His discussion of ecopsychology, however, might be considered to be a more specific recommendation, a vehicle that Roszak has constructed to provide coherence to the variety of human experiences and the value of the ecosystem. With the potential for psychology to become a source of spiritual renewal and sacred experience in Western culture (Roszak, 1972, 1975b), ecopsychology might be seen as Roszak's attempt to push psychology further in that direction. By questioning the assumptions that underlie psychotherapy and synthesizing psychological theory with tribal animism, Roszak's exploration of ecopsychology appears as an attempt to validate spiritual experience by employing the authority of psychoanalytic theory. [See Simmonds (2004, 2006) for empirical, conceptual, and historical research regarding spirituality in contemporary psychoanalysis and the psychoanalytic literature.]

Recent Literature

Since the publication of the first edition of *The Voice of the Earth* (1992), Roszak has written three major works of nonfiction that introduce new themes and further develop concepts that have occupied his career. These texts include *America the Wise: The Longevity Revolution and the True Wealth of Nations* (1998), *World, Beware! American Triumphalism in an Age of Terror* (2006), and *The Making*

of an Elder Culture: Reflections on the Future of America's Most Audacious Generation (2009). There is insufficient scope to discuss all of these texts in the present article, although a consideration of just his latest work indicates the continued importance of many of the central themes that are fundamental to his early literature and his exploration of ecopsychology.

In *The Making of an Elder Culture*, Roszak (2009) again discusses the costs of urban-industrial culture and describes the positive values of a Romantic worldview. However, in contrast to much of his earlier work, Roszak is willing to seriously acknowledge many of the benefits of industrial culture, particularly the increase in life span that such a culture allows through better medical care. He argues that due to the changing demographics of Western populations, with an increasing proportion of individuals in older age brackets, the values of elderly individuals will become an increasingly influential aspect of Western politics and culture. According to Roszak, these values include acknowledging dependence on one another and the ecosystem as well as a more spiritual feeling to life. These values, Roszak argues, are contradictory to the "ecocidal" character of industrial culture. As a consequence, Roszak hopes that an elder culture may help to transform the competitive self-interest and environmental ills of the industrial city into an "Eldertown" that values cooperation, interdependence, and environmental wisdom.

As with his earlier literature and his exploration of ecopsychology, *The Making of an Elder Culture* emphasizes the spiritual costs of industrialization. Additionally, there is a discussion of how a more spiritual consciousness will help to undo the destructive aspects of urban-industrial culture. Particularly for the baby boomer generation (those born between 1946 and 1964), Roszak argues that a fascination with religious experience evident in the countercultural movement may return to the fore as this generation reaches old age: "if the appetite for spiritual sustenance was there in youth, why should it not return when time and experience have prepared more fertile ground—and, above all, when mortality is that much nearer?" (p. 191). Roszak notes that this is also the same generation that can be credited with the environmental movement, with many key environmental texts and movements initiated during the counterculture. In the same way he argues that as these individuals approach older age their need for community, spiritual life, and interdependence will provide fertile ground for the development of a greater ecological wisdom.

In Roszak's most recent writing we therefore see the continuation of an emphasis on the problems of urban-industrial culture and the need for a greater sensitivity to the spiritual life. However, Roszak's repulsion toward urban-industrialization seems to have lessened

considerably. This is a point that Roszak acknowledges early in the text: "In my own writing I have lashed out many times at the impersonability, the faceless, unfeeling bureaucratic impact of urban-industrial society....And yet it has granted millions the empowering right to say 'I'm *entitled*.'" (Roszak, 2009, p. 15). He refers here to basic entitlements, such as access to health care and social security, which would not likely be achieved without industrial citification. Less explicit also is the presentation of spiritual experience as a means to transcend urban-industrial life. Spiritual attitudes are discussed among a number of values that might help transform mainstream culture, but the reappearance of this theme and a continued reflection on the value of the spiritual life indicates the importance of the spiritual theme in his literature. Interestingly, he devotes only a few pages of the text to discussing the spiritual meaning of aging.

So why is the value of spiritual experience less explicitly addressed in contrast to his earlier literature? One might argue that Roszak's views have simply changed from his earlier years or that, much like in his work on ecopsychology, he wanted to avoid new age connotations. The last chapter in his latest text might be more telling, however, as he discusses his own close encounter with death undergoing life-threatening surgery. Roszak writes that the view from the hospital bed has allowed him to recognize the value of every small experience, not just the self-transcendent and supreme. Perhaps this experience, and experiences like this that allow for a deeper reflection on life, are ultimately what underlie much of Roszak's work. As Coope (2010) suggests, some of the most enduring themes in Roszak's literature were formed as a consequence of his experiences during the bomb shelter program of the Cold War. Consistent with his earlier literature, the primacy of experience for informing our understanding of the world remains as an enduring theme.

Conclusion

We have discussed some of the core themes of ecopsychology as they were described by one of its seminal proponents, Theodore Roszak. We have particularly focused on the theme of spiritual experience throughout Roszak's literature, as we consider this to be one of the more unique and interesting aspects of ecopsychology presented in his earlier work but not well described in *The Voice of the Earth* (Roszak, 1992). In his earlier work, Roszak described spiritual experience as a necessary means to transcend the repressive scientific worldview of urban-industrial culture. Although he offers few specific recommendations, Roszak suggests that psychology may become a source of spiritual renewal. We have

suggested that, out of this context, Roszak's exploration of ecopsychology appears to be his own attempt to deliver these teachings in the language of psychoanalysis. Although Roszak avoids using spirituality as a term, his discussion of ecopsychology essentially highlights an animistic experience of nature, where nature is experienced as sacramental and intelligent, to improve our relationship toward the natural world.

By highlighting the value of spiritual experience as an important theme running through Roszak's ecopsychology, our article may help to differentiate ecopsychology from closely related disciplines. For example, as discussed earlier, a number of articles from the field of environmental psychology investigate the relationship between connectedness to nature and environmental behavior (Berenguer, 2010; Dutcher et al., 2007; Gosling & Williams, 2010; Kals et al., 1999; Mayer & Frantz, 2004; Nisbet et al., 2009; Schultz, 2000; Schultz & Tabanico, 2007). Of these studies only Dutcher et al. suggests that, as an experience, connectivity with nature may essentially be a spiritual phenomenon. However, given the background we have discussed, ecopsychology as a discipline is uniquely well suited to conceptualize connectedness to nature as a spiritual experience. Ecopsychology may therefore have an important and relatively unique contribution to make to contemporary environmental psychologies by considering spiritual experience in nature as a means to foster empathy toward the natural world.

As discussed earlier, a loosely defined ecopsychology raises concern for the application of ecopsychology in a therapeutic context. Roszak's literature in particular is easy to confuse with new age spirituality (Reser, 1995). In this regard, our discussion of the importance of spiritual experience in Roszak's ecopsychology may assist to identify therapies that misappropriate this important theme. This was certainly one of Roszak's concerns, as he specifically avoids using the term *spiritual* in his discussion of ecopsychology for fear that the field may take off in "odd, sectarian directions" (cited in Reser, 1995). According to Roszak's ecopsychology, therefore, fostering a spiritual or animistic experience of nature should be an important part of ecopsychological therapy. However, the value and meaning of this experience carries with it some important caveats drawn from Roszak's earlier literature and described in this review for example, that scientific objectivity should not be dismissed in favor of animistic or spiritual experience but rather included within a view of reality that values and investigates multiple modes of knowledge and experience.

In Roszak's most recent work we have noted that he continues to address the importance of spiritual experience, although in contrast to his earlier literature it appears he is less focused on transcendent

experience alone. Spiritual experience is discussed as one part of a larger process of aging that might help to transform the ills of urban industrialization. Roszak's own experiences, particularly his discussion of being close to death, may have changed his view that only transcendent spiritual experiences can allow us to go beyond the scientific worldview. Roszak (2009) now describes immanent experiences, noting that being close to death has allowed him to experience what he names as "the Presence" (p. 283) in small, seemingly inconsequential experiences. His latest work reflects on the value of all experiences, of which the elderly are particularly wealthy, for informing our knowledge and attitudes toward the world.

This might be said to be the more enduring theme throughout Roszak's literature. Roszak calls for our subjective experiences, in which the spiritual and the sacred are to be found, to be taken seriously in a wider vision of reality that includes objective knowledge as part of a greater whole. Reflecting on this theme in Roszak's work may have implications for the direction of future, or "second generation," ecopsychology. If ecopsychology is to remain consistent with Roszak's literature, a focus on personal experiences in nature, particularly the spiritual and the sacred, may be the more appropriate avenue for practice and research. Alternatively, if ecopsychology evolves in other directions, it will, nevertheless, be prudent to account for Roszak's contribution and the significance of spiritual experience in his representation of ecopsychology. We hope that the present article has helped to elucidate the meaning and importance of this significant theme in Roszak's work and its relevance for contemporary ecopsychology.

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