

Oikosophia: For we need a home where we may once again speak the language of the soul, and a language of the soul that may take us home

written in Italian and translated into English by Daniela Boccassini

... as if the soul might be saved while the biosphere crumbles ... where do we turn to find a standard of sanity that comprehends our environmental condition?¹

Infinite development

«Life is like a roll of toilet paper: the closer it gets to the end, the faster it goes», I read in a magazine while I am at the loo.² I giggle at the analogy, but bitterly, as it reminds me that I am way past the middle of my roll, and could in fact be much closer to its end than I'd like to imagine. While I put down the magazine in order to reach for the toilet paper, I feel my mirth wither away. There is something uncanny, I surmise, about this ludicrous image — which has so aptly caught my attention in exactly that place, at exactly that time.

I behold the image as if it were a stranger suddenly crossing my path, and I realize that the quip does not challenge our individual lives only, regardless of how obsessively intent on its measurement and artificial prolongation all of us are, by contagion, these days. Life as a whole is the true, hidden dimension that this joke calls into question: like an oil spill suddenly resurfacing from the depths, like a skeleton that accidentally tumbles on us while, absent-minded, we open a closet. Something, as of late, has put us on notice with regard to the turn that life has been taking on planet Earth. To be fair, warnings hark back at least to the times of my childhood — when the pine grove that shadowed the courtyard was replaced by a hideous iron and cement conglomerate pompously called a holiday home for city-dwellers. We were assured that the barter was in our best interest, despite the abuse to the pine grove, despite the scar that the abuse etched into our souls.

While I line up these words on the page, below my windows I see thousands of logs floating on the ocean, towed by a tugboat: majestic skeletons of age-old cedars, tied to one another

¹ Roszak 1992: 19.

² I came across this quote a few months ago while reading *The Economist*. It is commonly attributed to the American radio and television writer Andy Rooney (1919-2011).

like prisoners at the end of a long, cruel massacre, the ghostly remnants of a whole primeval forest turned into a desert, a wasteland upon which new conurbations will soon rise. All round me I hear the roar of the excavators and the growl of trucks taking turns to pour cement, while relentless hammering rises from at least seven building sites: those I can see and count from my windows. But as here, so everywhere: the sparse lights on the horizon which, until five years ago, barely loomed in the twilight, are now a huge yellow eye that projects from the earth a ghostly glare into the night, eclipsing the stars. The rumble of the floatplanes responds to the angry bellowing of the speedboats and jet skis, which multiply year after year like invasive seaweeds. It has been months since we last saw an eagle or a vulture — only sparrows, chickadees and red robins flutter around the house, sparser than ever.

From nuclear disasters to global warming; from the sixth continent of floating plastics to the seismic repercussions of fracking and other inconceivably ferocious techniques of extraction; from water contamination to deforestation; from the extinction of traditional cultures to overpopulation, with its aftermath of misery, wars, genocides and migrations, we cannot but sense — if for just a moment we can disengage from our daily routine, from the screens of our cell phones, from the automatic gesture of unwinding the small cardboard tube, which we trust will keep providing us with just the right amount of toilet paper, every time we need it — we cannot but sense how the acceleration that signals the approaching end of the roll might have to do with something much vaster than our personal existence. It may well relate, that something, to a process that inexorably makes of us participants in, rather than witnesses to, its own unfolding. This is perhaps why we grab at the scraps left hanging off the roll ever more feverishly, as though the compulsive repetition of that apotropaic gesture could reassure us in our unyielding demand for *infinite development*.

One can indeed detect a palpable despair in our collective obsession with extracting, producing, consuming, building (and demolishing) ever more rapidly on an increasingly grand scale. At this time of magnified globalization, when the world's vastness seems to have shrunk enough to fit like a glove the human scale — the dream of generations of explorers finally come true — at this very moment, those who vouchsafe for unchecked globalism are simultaneously abdicating responsibility, both locally and globally.

This is what irks and hurts in the image of a roll of toilet paper: it's this approach to life — individual and planetary, human and cosmic — as homologous to the nethermost of our items of consumption. *Life* turned into a roll of toilet paper: a small technological miracle, to be sure, which assists us in the privacy of our bodily functions, thereby civilizing the physiological act by which we eliminate the waste of what, with greater or lesser voracity, we have previously

gobbled. And yet, despite this, or perhaps because of this, if we can behold the image for just a bit longer than our attention span is generally capable of, we will come to see that, far from being just ironic, this way of equating life with a roll of toilet paper comes with blasphemous undertones. It is in this second, unexpected guise that the analogy inadvertently turns into a mirror, and a mercilessly truthful one at that: because it reveals to us what we, as a species, have dared to inflict on life. Life as ζωή (*zoe*), the entire biosphere's breath and pulse, the *only* home of cosmic Being: this is indeed a mystery we have been remarkably slow to fathom, yet brutally quick to appropriate.

This life pared down to a roll of toilet paper: *life*, foredoomed and enslaved to our lower bodily needs. For, if we look at things through the eyes of *life* rather than our own, it becomes obvious that the planet as a whole is being turned, literally, into a cesspool — the only place where we will be able to spend whatever little time is left for us, drowning in our own waste, while we hang on to our little technological miracle, a cardboard tube that dangles a melancholy strip of paper slips. The ever more appalled eye of our mind can thus behold an image vastly different from the «magnificent progressive destiny» (Leopardi, “La ginestra,” l. 51) we had been promised. Soon enough that illusion will only survive in snapshots, reproduced billions of times over on our soft paper squares; all for the sake, to put the matter in Rabelais' straightforward terms, of continuing to *nous torcher le cul* with any whichever item we can lay our hands on.

As a matter of fact, toilet paper is a very recent invention, which as late as the middle of the past century had little currency in the Alps, where people found it perfectly suitable for their needs to use paper squares of a different kind: the news-bearing kind, which in the everydayness of mountain life embodied the treacherous intrusion of the city-dwellers' mindset. *We behold as we believe*: the world signifies for us depending on the kind of connection we establish with it.³ Adopt this take on things, and there is a chance we might see how our postmodern industrial way of exploiting natural spaces for purposes of supposed development seemed — and at times still seems — sacrilegious to peoples who have had no use for such "development". To those peoples, accustomed to hear the voice and read the symbolic writing of the *living* earth, the earth itself is soft, sacred paper on which to walk and rest, wherein to become inscribed in the course of a lifetime.⁴

³ This is a central concern of Iain McGilchrist's, a psychiatrist whose work I will evoke repeatedly in the following pages: «there *is* something that exists apart from ourselves, but we play a vital part in bringing it into being. ... The kind of attention we pay actually alters the world: we are, literally, partners in creation. This means we have a great *responsibility*, a word that captures the reciprocal nature of the dialogue we have with whatever it is that exists apart from ourselves.» (2009: 5)

⁴ I am thinking of indigenous societies, for whom the point is less to be able to "read the book of nature" (an image arising in the Christian context as a complement to the text revealed by the Bible) than it is to understand

Just like the apprentice sorcerer of the legend, our post-industrial society keeps spinning the dream of star-like apotheoses, as it creeps out of its catatonic depths; meanwhile, the technocratic powers which we have unknowingly unleashed are about to submerge, with their exponential growth, the very house with which we have been entrusted. Finding ourselves embroiled in this mess yet unwilling to wake up to it, we have consigned ourselves to a blind *laissez-faire* ideology so as to keep dreaming, in the misplaced hope that the powers which ever more tightly control our lives will show us the way out, will show us — as though by magic — the remedy to our apathy, the flip side of our impotence. What so far we have failed to grasp about that story is this: there is something that sets apart the old sorcerer from his demented trainee, and that is his ability to stop the process of "infinite development" accidentally triggered by the apprentice, to put an end to the intrinsic destructivity of such "development"; it's his ability to see and to choose, so as to activate a non-linear approach to both organic and technological unfoldings.

Such ability comes about because the sorcerer's consciousness is inhabited by a higher form of intelligence, one that knows how to relate dynamically to the events. Hence, either the apprentice submits to the training required in order to activate this other form of intelligence, proper to the sorcerer, or he will remain a sleeper, a dreamer, whose wishful Promethean fantasies can only, in the long term, bring about disaster on a global scale. All along the apprentice — «an excellent servant, but an inadequate master» (McGilchrist 2009: 437) — has been dreaming of usurping the sorcerer's role, yet his dependence on the sorcerer remains unabated, especially in the long run. And the long run is precisely that which today calls to account our sense of responsibility.

«*Der Weg des Kommenden*» — «*The Way of What Is to Come*»

Ever more clearly today, we experience the feeling that we are living the end of an age, of an αἰών (*aion*), or more precisely of that geological era which it is now customary to call, for the better and the worse, anthropocene (Ruddiman 2003). Yet others before us foresaw the coming of both such an "end of times" and of its counterpart: less a transition into the unknown than the subtle yet unmistakable «sensing and presencing an emerging future possibility» (Scharmer 2013). Still nameless, this future unknown is already inhabiting and

nature's language and to communicate with all living beings through their way of existing and, hence, of expressing themselves. As compared to the mass of the earth and of the universe surrounding it, the biosphere is indeed the thinnest of layers: a page teeming with life, for those willing to dialogue with it and with the symbols inscribed in it.

reclaiming us, in its attempt to take shape: in us, through us, making itself viscerally known. This is not the place to sketch, however broadly, the past and present, gradual coming-into-being of this new consciousness — a consciousness that seems to be coming about as ecological, rather than ego-logical — so varied and diverse are the strands partaking of this fabric, whose weaving is still in the making, and whose bards are still in dreamland. One thing is certain: precisely this inner presence, this enigmatic disquiet, soon turned pervading certainty, has been the true inspirational thrust that has progressively shaped and re-shaped this book and its title into its final form. In order to illustrate the emergence of this other consciousness, of this eco-logical gnosis, in the time we live,⁵ I shall evoke the example of C. G. Jung, on whose spiritual legacy *Oikosophia's* coming into being actually hinges. Each in their own way, many of the contributions that shape this volume's small constellation are, indeed, clustered around Jung's teachings.

In 1950, at the peak of his career as an explorer of the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious, Jung wagered his scientific reputation by ascribing the course taken by humanity, from the beginning of the Christian era till the dramatic acceleration occurred during his lifetime, to the characteristics of the constellation of Pisces. Of the twelve aeons making up the Platonic Year, Pisces is the one said to set around the year 2000 (CW 9/2: ix-xi, 72-94, and passim).⁶ Jung saw in that astrological era the traits of an ambivalent anthropocentrism, and he argued that, while expanding during that age, human consciousness had also been ever more drastically separating itself from the unconscious that nourishes and sustains it. Specifically in the Western context, this was bound to trigger the entropic risk of an annihilation of human personality, because of the parallel loss of both nature and the divine (which can also be understood as the archaic, or the world view mediated by the right hemisphere of the human brain) as vital foundations of the human psyche.⁷

⁵ Anti-grammatical though it may seem, the sentence expressing «time» as a direct object is intentional (and means to convey eco-logical awareness). As Corbin aptly put it, we do not live *in* time, we live time; time itself, that is, comes into being through the choices which, in successive moments, we make in order to bring it forth (see Corbin 1956).

⁶ The term Platonic Year, or Great Year, designates the time necessary for the Earth's axis to complete its full precession with respect to the ideal sphere of the fixed stars (= about 25.800 solar years, i.e. 12 x 2,150). It goes without saying that this macro-period transcends, and subsumes, our multiple trackings of the micro-periods marked by the solar year, which is but a tiny fraction of its Great Year counterpart. Whereas the astrological component of the precession of the equinoxes remains a controversial topic, the shift of the celestial poles which it implies is a scientifically proven fact. Awareness of this phenomenon in the West is said to date back to Plato's *Timaeus*, but many unconventional scholars consider it central to the archaic, distinctly cosmological, view of the cosmos (see for ex., among others, De Santillana and Schwaller de Lubicz).

⁷ See CW 9/2: §346, where Jung identifies the root of our alienation in the «rationalistic hybris which is tearing our consciousness from its transcendent roots and holding before it immanent goals» — a concept which it is especially fascinating to read now in parallel with McGilchrist 2009: 428-34.

I don't need to recall the extent to which the astrological component of this work of Jung's was ignored, or blamed, or ridiculed. We would do well to resist the temptation to renew that scorn, though: because, with a deftly *irrational* choice Jung succeeded in snatching historical becoming out of that sort of mental disease of ours, which spawns an unendingly linear and progressive representation of time (and its attendant concept of "infinite development"), so as deftly to inscribe instead such an eminently anthropocentric view of time within the far more realistic, far more sober view of Becoming understood as universal circularity — a perspective that far surpasses the horizons of analytical intelligence in its linear acquisitiveness. In other words, Jung saw the Platonic or Great Year as a cosmic home of sorts, a galactic ecosystem wherein the Earth and the larger solar system constantly progress, yes, but in an endlessly circular way, by rotating on their own axis.⁸ On the part of an empiricist such as Jung meant to be, choosing to look at the events of human history from the perspective of the Platonic Year could mean one thing only: it meant reactivating a form of intelligence other than the one — regulated by the principle of linear development in its antinomic unfolding — which had dangerously succeeded in imposing itself on planet Earth in the age of Pisces.

Jung, and not only he, referred to this other intuitive, holistic manner of experiencing and apprehending the world with the name of symbolic intelligence, and this well before 1950.⁹ In

⁸ Unsurprisingly perhaps, in the *Commedia* Dante strove to achieve something of this kind. Whereas in its infernal parade human life is characterized by ego-centeredness and the obsession with "linear" acquisitiveness, the eco-sophical perspective of divine intelligence springs, in its eternal revolving, from the circular motion of «the love that moves the sun and the other stars» («*l'amor che muove il sole e l'altre stelle*», *Pd* XXXIII: 145). This journey from intellect to mind, from the head to the heart, from line to circle, is the very homecoming to which Dante invites those among his readers endowed with «sane minds» («*intelletti sani*», *Inf* IX: 61). The pre-anthropocentric wisdom tradition of Antiquity in its entirety conceived of itself as initiatory, as aimed at (re)activating *this other*, circular way of relating to the world — an intelligence of the heart which Buddhism calls awakening, enlightenment. It is worth noting that the research carried out by McGilchrist on the different ways in which each of the brain's two hemispheres experiences the world has identified a propensity for linear progression in the left hemisphere, and a proclivity for circular movement in the right one. But there is more: «Circular motion accommodates, as rectilinear does not, the coming together of opposites [the very end of alchemical wisdom] ... Cognition in the right hemisphere is not a process of something coming into being through adding piece to piece in a sequence, but of something that is out of focus coming into focus, as a whole.» (McGilchrist 2009: 447)

⁹ After spending fifteen years in Egypt delving into Pharaonic cosmology, in 1951 Schwaller de Lubicz argued in hardly different terms the same point: «It is certain that such a revolution in thought — that is, such an expansion of consciousness, such an evolution of intelligence — is not the result of a whim. It is in fact a question of a cosmic influence to which the earth, along with everything in it, is subjected. A phase in the gestation of the planetary particle of our solar system is completed ... A new period must begin.» (1978 [1951]: 39) In 1967 Hillman embraced Jung's reading of the temporal myth in order to advocate, at the dawn of the new aeon, a new relationship, or rather the oldest one: our depending as human beings on the divine

fact, Jung had entered the service of that other form of intelligence, and of the different type of relational consciousness it engenders, since his breakup with Freud, the First World War and his visionary writing of the (then secret) *Liber novus*. From its very title, this truly *new* book meant to track, if not trace, the process of inner transmutation that humanity is now called to embrace, if we wish our exit from the anthropocene to be something more dignified than the catastrophic end of a world, of the world.

As early as 1914 Jung had understood that the way of what is to come, if a way there is to be at all, has got to be the way of the soul, whose language is the symbol. Many unmistakable signals point to the fact that *to this day*, and today more than ever, this is «der Weg des Kommenden», this is the path most conducive to establishing an eco-sophically grounded *relation to the world*. A relation to the world, that is, literally based on Σοφία (*Sophia*) or wisdom — possibly the first and foremost among the many concepts that have grown alien to us within the world-view of "infinite development" steered by the discriminatory, commodifying mindset that rules our thoughts and our relation to the world. As a vital principle, Σοφία transcends all definitions, especially the diminishing one imposed on it by the modern acceptance of the term "philosophy". To get a sense of the relevance of Σοφία as an alternative hermeneutic principle to the dominant one, we would do well to consider the following remarks, which highlight its rootedness in the pre-philosophical «intelligence of the heart»:

Σοφία is *understanding of the Light, wisdom-light, wisdom that enlightens*, thereby making those who are saturated with it one and the same with light. (Tonelli 1997/2007: 19; italics in the original, translation mine)

[Sofia] is both subject and object, one and many, divine and human, spirit and matter. Yet, of course, she is neither, for she is not merely a person but *a relationship*, the principle or energy or potential that can conjoin. She does not exist in either a sacred or a natural world, but mediates dynamically between the two [...] Like an icon, Sophia brings heaven to earth and in the interaction of the opposites creates a new whole: a poetic, often joyful, light-infused creation. She is the mediator and the element that causes us to see reality from more than one perspective at once. [...] she is] the energy that binds and transforms through the binding itself. [...] Sophia not only links but fully participates in two opposites and in the new creation their relationship produces. (Judith Deutsch Kornblatt in Solovyov 2009: 93-94).

As a relational principle, rather than a discriminatory one, Σοφία activates a *non-argumentative* intelligence, a "gnosis", a knowledge that is intrinsically dialogical, both

light of natural consciousness (see Hillman 1999: 53-54).

experiential and innate.¹⁰ Only this "intelligence of the heart" can allow us to reconnect to the οἶκος (*oikos*), literally our communal "home", where by "home" I mean the world's bio- and ethno-sphere, as well as the universe that hosts it. As he patiently re-worked his first intuitions into the manuscript pages of the Red Book, Jung understood that walking this path is what allows the tension between opposites to get resolved into the unforeseen of a "new" synthesis: a synthesis whose newness carries within itself, and thereby reveals, the ancient, or better yet, the archaic. Underpinning such an apparent paradox is a circular view of the psyche: an intrinsically symbolic view, wherein "the ancient" meant for Jung both the historical dimension accessible to dianoetic consciousness *and* the collective unconscious — the cosmic Self, of whose wholeness the human self is part and parcel:

The soul of humanity is like the great wheel of the zodiac that rolls along the way. Everything that comes up in a constant movement from below to the heights was already there. There is no part of the wheel that does not come around again. Hence everything that has been streams upward there, and what has been will be again. For these are all things which are the inborn properties of human nature. It belongs to the essence of forward movement that what was returns. Only the ignorant can marvel at this. Yet the meaning does not lie in the eternal recurrence of the same, but in the manner of its recurring creation at any given time. (RB, 394; *Liber secundus* ch. xx, p. 138)

When writing the Red Book, Jung had already established a connection between the mutations of the Platonic / Great Year and the characteristics of the sign of Pisces at its twilight (see RB: 405-06; *Liber secundus*, c. xxi, p. 145). In the cosmological perspective he had come to embrace, the future and the past are once again inseparable: their creative co-presence and union, rather than their mutual exclusion, characterizes the upcoming aeon of Aquarius.¹¹ Being able to intuit the potential of such a symbol engenders, in turn, a symbolic disposition in those who, by accepting this challenge, literally subject themselves to an inner death by crucifying and sacrificing their ego-centered rationalism (which is why the chapter of the Red Book containing this vision is titled «The way of the cross»). In order to tread this path, Jung

¹⁰ In addressing his relation to Jung's work and thought, Corbin's "sophianic" contribution to this volume sheds light on the way in which the transition between these two forms of intelligence may become actualized. Along with Schwaller's opening piece, Corbin's can be said to make up the hub around which this volume's entire eco-sophical project revolves.

¹¹ It is worth noting that the sun's transition from the constellation of Pisces to that of Aquarius is a founding theme in the Red Book. It is clearly illustrated in the great miniature that opens *Liber Secundus*, where the landscape (extraordinarily reminiscent of Lake Zürich in the area of Küsnacht, by the way) is surmounted by the astronomic strip of the Great Year; the sun is positioned at the specific juncture between Pisces and Aquarius (see Tilton's contribution below).

warns, one must suspend conscious will and its attending self-referential pre-conceptions, so as to make room for the dialogical, eco-logical encounter with the unknown (yet well-known) that stands before us while also living within us, that lives out both itself and ourselves simultaneously in its own unfolding. This is «the resolution of the task», today in light of tomorrow: «The task is to give birth to the old in a new time.» (*ibid.*)¹²

From his remote position in Luxor, René Schwaller de Lubicz had similarly come to realize that the way of the future is the way of the symbol, because it fosters «knowing first of all how to think without objectifying» (1978 [1951]: 40). In the Pharaonic tradition, which predates the Christian era, this type of intelligence was called «intelligence of the heart», and in later centuries it continued to be called *cardia*, among Eastern and Western mystics alike (all the way down to Jung, see CW 8 §543). One of Schwaller's final essays (the opening essay in this volume) takes up and condenses precisely this aspect of holistic intelligence, connecting it to the Pharaonic principle of *confondement*. This reawakening of an innate gnosis, of a sophianic pre-dianoetic intelligence — as Mead already pointed out, and as Tonelli reminds us — may well have been the initiatory secret guarded and transmitted by both Hermeticism and the mystery traditions alike. Thanks to the work carried out by Peter Kingsley, Tonelli and Susanetti, we are poised today to develop a foreboding of how such an attitude of amorous dialogical submission to the ἄπειρον (*apeiron*), on which so-called Presocratic wisdom was based, may in fact be the only type of knowledge we ought to attend to and care for, so that it may one day sprout «underneath our densely-packed diaphragm». ¹³ In the 1960s Dino

¹² My choice of the term *oiko-* i.e. *eco-sophy* to designate this «way of what is to come» is far from being accidental; in fact, I am proposing it rather with an "activist's" intention, now that the budding "return of the new" in the form of *eco-logy* (or, as is the case here, in the form of *eco-sophy*) is called to ... *face* an utterly different kind of "newness". I am alluding to the humanoid robots, which are reproducing today Pygmalion's myth, in modernized appearance yet with an identical substance. Not by chance the first of the humanoid robots bears not just a woman's semblance, but the laughably attractive semblance of an archetypally objectified woman. And what is more, it was given by its creator (Hanson Robotics) the name ... one would think this is a joke, but it is not ... Sofia (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LguXfHKsa0c>). This shows in a stunning way how archetypes carry on living their own lives even (and indeed, possibly, above all) when embodied in those technological devices that strive to deny the mystery of life and soul ... while attempting to duplicate it by forgery. Beyond the technological sophistication of the object, the choice of forms and names given to such humanoids emphasizes the archaic impulse that drives man's intentions (the masculine gender being here inescapable) in his post-human delirium: the delirium, that is, to create humanoids *artificially endowed with the semblance of a soul*, able to produce the delusion of that free will, of that *sophia* — of that gnosis, and hence, of that divinity — which they are intent on denying to themselves and to the living world (and to which by that very fact they are proving themselves beholden). Never was the primary *mechanism* of projection more blatantly detectable in the history of humanity: a sign, perhaps, that we have indeed reached the peak of enantiodromia.

¹³ See esp. Kingsley 2003; the quote from Empedocles is on p. 519. Immediately before we read: «the avenues to rediscovering what has been forgotten, what has gone missing, are always open. Strangely enough it is never too late to retrace our way back again, through the ruins of our own past, into the timeless present.» (2003:

Fraccari, a fearless explorer of the «way of what is to come» now all but forgotten, had recognized in Heraclitus's take on such enigmatic naturalist gnosis the most precious bequest of archaic Mediterranean civilization. Daringly for the times he wrote in, which were unaccustomed to dialogic circularity or disinclined to accept it, Fraccari established a dialogism between Heraclitus's legacy and another form of gnosis, no less archaic and no less valuable for the future: that of Lao Tsu's *Tao te Ching*.¹⁴ In the pages to follow, readers will be able to witness further and equally spellbinding dialogues among archaic forms of wisdom, such as are developed especially in the contributions by Gregory Shaw, Cesare Catà, and Patrick Laude.

Hence, the aspiration of the present tenth issue of *Quaderni* is to re-establish a dialogical circularity, space- and time-wise, in the "unfolding present". Accordingly, in the following pages one will see original articles by living scholars juxtaposed with contributions — presented in yet unpublished translations — by some among those authors whose work, in the first half of the past century, proved decisive for the rise of what would become the ecological movement. So visionary was their thought at the time of its inception, however, that for just this reason it was systematically branded as anti-academic esotericism, as unscientific theosophism, precisely by those who rejected, or feared, the coming of a future rooted in archaic wisdom, blind as they were to its essential vitality. To this day, among those who endeavor to ensure that humanity's and the planet's ecological future may come to fruition, many still regard a self-avowed eco-sophical approach with thinly veiled suspicion, and at times with downright hostility. Yet the structural relation between ecology and a wisdom-based, intuitive *Weltanschauung* — as distinct from that promoted by the dianoetic, primarily anthropocentric worldview — had already been clearly spelled out at the inception of what was envisioned as

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¹⁴ See for ex. Section 27, where the Tao is the intelligence of the heart. In the preface to his *Eraclito e la civiltà mediterranea*, Fraccari lucidly states: «Let us banish any such slogans as "the light comes from the Orient" or the other way around. Rather, we must assume that among those ancient peoples, or to be more precise among their most representative elites, there was a way of thinking, *and above all of feeling and seeing*, which as time wore on, due to a reversal in spiritual perspectives, by and large became ever weaker in the human mind and, as a consequence, also did so in the prevailing world view» (1981: 7; emphasis added). The following years (suffice it to mention Capra's *The Tao of Physics*, 1975) saw the inception of a dialogue between «modern physics and Oriental mysticism» (as per the very subtitle of Capra's book) which over time has borne extraordinary fruits. Conversely, the dialogue between archaic Mediterranean and Asiatic gnosis was as yet a thing of the future, and even today we are only seeing the beginnings of a conversation commensurate to today's challenges; see Kingsley's perceptive insight: «And it takes such sensitivity, so much discipline, so much patience, even to start grasping the peculiar irony and humor of the situation we are faced with. After all, we have come to a strange turn of events in the West where only by looking to Tibet and Mongolia are we able to understand ancient Greek texts ignored or distorted by the best of experts for thousands of years.» (2010: 28)

an encompassing ecological awareness:

Ecosystems sustain themselves in a dynamic balance based on cycles and fluctuations, which are nonlinear processes. Linear enterprises, such as indefinite economic and technological growth will necessarily interfere with the natural balance and sooner or later will cause severe damage.

Ecological awareness, then, will arise only when we *combine* our rational knowledge with an intuition for the nonlinear nature of our environment. Such *intuitive wisdom* is characteristic of traditional, nonliterate [i.e. oral, non-written] cultures, especially of American Indian culture, in which life was organized around a highly refined awareness of the environment. (Capra 1982: 41; emphasis added)

As in the case of Jung's new/old symbolism, for an ecological awareness — and not merely an ecological technology — to arise, it is necessary that human beings become adept at braiding together analytical thinking and gnosis (*intuitive wisdom*). But firstly, in order to gain insight into the ways in which such complementary forms of knowledge coexist, rather than being mutually exclusive, we need to find out how best to approach that old growth forest which is sophianic intelligence. We need to come to the realization that always and everywhere *we* are a part of it, rather than the other way around; that the intelligence animating every ecosystem always gushes out of that primeval forest's living core.

It is not a matter of lumping all categories under the same heading; it is rather a matter of opening a *τέμενος* (*temenos*) wherein we may create an *ἔρανος* (*eranos*), an initiatory circle of symbolic conviviality, so as to have a real *potlatch* — an exchange of gifts, that is, among different manifestations of ecosophic intelligence, which are as varied and yet as interdependent on one another as are the species that make up the entirety of the mineral, vegetal, and animal kingdoms. In today's world, where ethnosphere and biosphere are equally threatened with extinction, it is imperative that we preserve biocultural diversity as well, that we celebrate and protect the non-linear visionary, a-scientific, pre-technological "irrationality" of each of the infinite eco/ethno-systems that our planet needs in order to continue to thrive — in order to engender, rather than endanger, both forest and *anima(l)*.¹⁵ The *way* in which we approach this task is the discriminating factor here. For, should we confine ourselves to carrying out this endeavor as ethnographers or as historians of human wisdom, we would only add yet another library, yet another museum, yet another confraternity to the many that already bedeck our urban spaces, that lifelessly adorn our lives' bewildering emptiness. Were

¹⁵ This endeavour has been given extraordinary impulse by my colleague Wade Davis, from whose vast life work I feel I must flag for the Italian public at least a few fundamental words from the back cover of *The Wayfinders* (2009): «Rediscovering a new appreciation for the diversity of the human spirit, as expressed by culture, is among the central challenges of our times.»

we to remain collectors and observers of the world's sophianic wisdom (itself a privilege, be it said in passing, to which no generation before ours was ever able to aspire), we would remain at best devoted, yet estranged, custodians of such a wisdom. Clearly, what is expected of us at this juncture is something altogether different. We are now called to re-create not the library, not the museum, not the confraternity, but rather the τέμενος: a space, that is, not added to our ordinary urban use (a use which Eliade would have called "profane," and others could call political or civil — although this space, too, is being denied us ever more frequently these days), but rather, a space sheltered from "urban-ity". If we succeed in doing so, we may come to see how this other, arcane space, is the meeting ground where the Elders of every tradition and generation gather to converse with each other since time immemorial. They do so by sharing a language that does not belong to our habitual *forma mentis* because — let us be clear about this — it never belonged to it in the first place.

Ever since the times of Empedocles, if not earlier still, the temptation we need to resist is thus one and the same; except that today, when AI (artificial intelligence) and telecommunications permeate every single circuit of human awareness, not to mention the atmosphere, we need to be more skillful than ever. As a hominid species possibly less *sapiens* than we wish to admit, the temptation that we generally find most difficult to resist is that of yanking the sophianic word from its τέμενος in order to relocate it in our brains and our urban spaces. This is the temptation to appropriate wisdom, to make it say whatever *we* think it is saying, or ought to say. In contrast, the way of what is to come asks of us to do something altogether different; it requires of us that we remain on the threshold of the τέμενος, listening intently, till such a time when (be it at once or gradually) we will be granted the realization that the language shared in that arcane space, far from being foreign to us, is the very language that since time immemorial speaks to *itself*, while addressing *us*, in our innermost τέμενος. For, in no other way can we come to understand that the language current in that space removed from our "bio-logical" being, from our civil, cultured ways, is ζωή (Zoe)'s own original language: and therefore, it is also the inborn/innate language of our own symbolic, dialogical, inalienable *wildness*.¹⁶

¹⁶ «We arrive at the position (which is so familiar from experience) that we cannot attain an understanding by *grasping* it for ourselves. It has already to be in us, and the task is to awaken it, or perhaps to unfold it — to bring it into being within us. Similarly, we can never make others understand something unless they already, at some level, understand it. We cannot give them our understanding, only awaken their own, latent, understanding. This is also the meaning of the dark saying that ideas come to us, not we to them. Our role in understanding is that of an open, in one sense active, passivity» (McGilchrist 155). On *wildness* as the inalienable essence of every component of planet Earth, us human beings included, see esp. Snyder 1990: 11-

To set out on the long way of what is to come, then, means to resist the temptation which has always differentiated us as a species: the temptation to domesticate wildness, both outside and within us. I need not evoke once again here the horrors and devastations, past and ongoing, caused by our caving in to this temptation: in the absence of forest, in the absence of τέμενος, civil space turns against itself, morphing into its own demonic double. Today, when such a demonic *Doppelgänger* of our would-be "civil" identity has come to dominate us, threatening from within both our civil home (*domus*) and along with it the entire eco-system, our «more-than-human» home,¹⁷ the way of what is to come demands of us that we reverse course, that we once again learn to relate to the wild, to the sophianic τέμενος, which is the wild's symbolic epiphany. In order to heal our by now pathological urban hyper-rationalism, we need to re-discover our substantive wildness — which, it goes without saying, has nothing in common with today's disproportionate growth of the tourism industry. «He who goes to himself, climbs down»: down as far as touching the ground with his forehead, because «no one speaks louder of his power and greatness than he from whom the earth disappears under his feet» (LR: 390; *Liber secundus* p. 136). It follows that we are the ones who must allow ourselves to be *domes*-ticated by wildness, so that the forest may once more become, certainly not our *domus*, but rather our τέμενος, the initiatory space that alone can conjure the re-birth of our more-than-human identity gone amiss. Only by standing on the threshold between those two interdependent, opposite spaces, the open and the enclosed, which the threshold both marks out and reveals, can we come to recognize how both of them together make up the οἶκος, the more-than-human home which hosts us and encompasses us.

One day, at the beginning of the 1930s, Black Elk (*Heñáka Sápa*, 1863-1950, "medicine man" and Oglala Sioux visionary) shared with John Neihardt, U.S. writer and passionate ethnographer, the cosmic vision he had received as a boy. I wish to recall that vision here, specific to aboriginal wisdom as it is, because it astonishingly dovetails with C.G. Jung's aforementioned symbolic and sophianic vision of the cosmos. But even more astonishing, perhaps, is the fact that Black Elk's comprehension of the circular nature of both micro- and macro-cosmic life emanates, just like Jung's, from an awareness of its dynamic, axial energy. Look closely, and you will come to see that it is the sacred tree, the tree of life as *axis mundi*, that supports Black Elk's circular cosmic vision:

18.

¹⁷ The expression «*more-than-human world*» is David Abram's (1996). I owe it to him, and I gratefully wish to give him credit for it. Over time, it has become a real and true "access words" of ecological thought. Just as has been the case for the concept of «*imaginal*», which was originally coined by Corbin and later came into (often erroneous) common usage, today many invoke such a key concept of ecosophic thought without perhaps even knowing whose creation it is. It is therefore a great privilege for me to be able to present David Abram's voice (see below) to the Italian public, who I hope will extend to him and his work the full recognition they deserve.

Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw; for *I was seeing in a sacred manner* the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy. (Neihardt 2014: 33; emphasis added)

We should keep in mind that Black Elk's vision precedes the time when he and all surviving American Indians were forced to become subjects not "of" but "to" the new civic and political state that advanced and expanded through the continent, not to mention Christianity, the theology in whose name the ecosystem of Turtle Island (North America's name in aboriginal languages) was being reconfigured.¹⁸ That reconfiguration transformed the open space of *wilderness*, i.e. the οἶκος which had been the aboriginal peoples' home, into a confining and confined space — a space subject to state ownership and management, commercialization, and to all sundry forms of exploitation of "natural resources" which to this day go under the name of development, *infinite* development. This colossal, and ongoing, taming project imposed itself from the outset as a drive to acculturate and urbanize the wild heart of both nature and humanity.¹⁹

The inclusion of the indigenous view within the *Oikosophia* project has been the last in a series of adjustments while this volume was in the making. It is meant to signal that, in order to confront knowingly the various fundamentalist dogmas held in and by the societies that are in

¹⁸ To call those peoples "American Indians", as we are wont to do, already amounts to imposing on their original identity the double yoke of "civilizing" words — words which, if we just pause to listen carefully, only contain the projection of the Eurocentric fantastic imagination that generated them. "Indians" they were on no stronger grounds than the erroneous assumption, held by the explorers, to have reached the "Indias" of the Asiatic continent; and "Americans" because of the later correction of that misapprehension by the Italian explorer and cartographer Vespucci. One more case of *nomen omen*: the name which European "civilizers" imprinted on the unknown lands and on their inhabitants, instead of evoking their living identity, perpetually branded them first into a mistaken hypothesis, then into a rectification elaborated by the first person who organized on paper that newly discovered ecosystem, thereby marking their destiny through a process of civilizing commodification. For a visualization deeply revelatory of the European imaginary at the time of first contact, see «*Americae Retectio*» by Johannes Stradanus (ca. 1615). Regarding the European projection of the concept of wilderness/forest as synonym of "savage", as opposed to the "oikosophical" view of the natural "open" held by indigenous consciousness, see the words used by Luther Standing Bear quoted below, p. 369 and 371.

¹⁹ Recent historical studies, based on contributions by aerial photography, have allowed us to establish that the Greek *emporía* from the 5th c. BC show extraordinary structural resemblances with the method of acquisition and partition of land used by North American colonists over two millennia later (see Robb 2013: 15), an archetypal element well worth reflecting on.

the grips of today's ego-logical mode of development, we certainly need to retrieve the archaic wisdom of Euroasiatic cultures; but we equally need to acknowledge the no less vital contribution offered today by aboriginal cultures to the safekeeping of the world's eco-logical knowledge. This openness to the wild — which *revives itself in re-anima-ting us* — brings about a drastic change in perspective that deeply affects our understanding of the archaic. What light does such an altered perspective shed, one wonders, on the world of *pagan* civilizations in the Eurocentric area, or on the never-settled question of all of the heterodox traditions, heretical, Jewish or Muslim, with which History was deemed to have settled scores, once and for all, according to the version of the events we have been offered until last night, until this morning? The ripples sent across the pond of our civil consciousness by the outbreak of the Second World War have not ceased to expand since, setting our rational consciousness up against the abyss of its own dark side. Today, when the entire ecosystem is at risk, when the last vestiges of aboriginal chastity fall under the impassive assault of excavators and drilling rigs, we can gauge like never before the immeasurable sacrifice visited upon the *pagus* — and upon the *pagans* of all times and places — by our religiously-anchored sense of civil superiority.²⁰ This acknowledgement, too, this *impervious* obligation to touch ground — which to many ears sounds like an insult, an arbitrary reprobation of the conquests lined up by our unquestionable civilization — belongs to the way of what is to come, and is part and parcel of tomorrow's ecosophy. Far from wishing to deny the gifts of civilization, we need to delve into the darkness into which civilization's roots descend, till such a time when we (re)discover that another light comes forth from those recesses, while the sparkle on the surface is but a game of reflections: a beguiling, evanescent dazzle.

Seeing more clearly

Ecosophy today, then, for the sake of tomorrow: because the intelligence of the heart strives to understand and (re)learn the language of the cosmic home as a "symbol" which,

²⁰ The *Dizionario etimologico Bonomi* offers the following helpful entry: «*Pagus*: ... was a stronghold in the middle of the open countryside, reinforced, however, more by nature than by art, being the case of a steep hill, atop which the rural populace could withdraw itself ... on the occasion of a raid ... [As a consequence, later on] the name *Pagus* was given to the surrounding hamlet and district, and that of *Pagans* to the rural populace thereon scattered, expressly to distinguish it from the military in encampments. When Christianity supervened, idol worshipers were called *Pagans*, since indeed the inhabitants of hamlets were the most resistant to the new beliefs, and the last to abandon the cult of the false Gods; or else because, having the Emperors become Christian and by their order the temples of the idols having been closed, many individuals still attached to the religion of their ancestors withdrew to the hamlets in order to offer there their clandestine sacrifices to the ancient Gods.» An essentially identical modern English formulation can be found at <https://www.etymonline.com/word/pagan>.

today more than ever, calls upon us — so that the care for *presence* may once again ensoul and impel our ecological awareness, and so that it may once again embody the myth underpinning the deeper sense of our actions. Yet how are we to retrieve that archaic wisdom, that sophianic knowledge which is no mere accrual of technical know-how? What are the fundamentals of its art, and who are we to turn to in order to become initiated into it?

As argued by Angela Voss, Martin Shaw and David Abram, we are on the quest for a new language: «a new way of speaking, one that enacts our interbeing with the earth rather than *blinding us* to it.» (Abram 2010: 3; emphasis added) Yet such a language can only be truly new if it proves able to reassure us, at one and the same time, about its and our own immemorial antiquity — if it can offer us a self-reflection, a self-recognition capable of healing the dark affliction of our rambling monologue: «what I looked for was some archaic language that would expand words and frame images so beautifully that I felt connected to human folk as well as kestrels and mud. *What I found was myth.*» (Shaw 2011: xx; emphasis in the original)

In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante met the challenge, and succeeded in expanding, framing, and connecting. The three essays devoted to his poem in this volume (Frisardi, Naydler, Boccassini) explore some of the ways in which Dante opens up this initiatory, imaginal space wherein the analogico-anagogical vision revives myth in its symbolic form, that is to say in both its cosmic *and* personal modes of expression. And this it succeeds in doing, because imaginal vision transcends the entanglements in which analytical thought, constantly occupied with drawing boundaries between antagonistic confessional identities, remains ever enmeshed. Other contributions, mostly gathered in the volume's second section (Scarpi, Jevolella, Catà, but I would argue Laude too), show us how difficult it has been for the speculative thought of both Neoplatonic monistic transcendentalism and Abrahamic monotheism to resist the temptation to separate — and, in separating, to set against one another — the divine and the creaturely, the bodily and the spiritual, the discourse of science and the word of God, insensitive matter and the immortal soul. For centuries now have we inhabited this myth: the myth of divergence. As a consequence, the mysteric and initiatory, properly speaking theurgic, function (θεός-ἔργον "divine activity") of reviving in the human being the memory of a divinity shared with the rest of creation — that function, utterly misunderstood as might be a hieroglyph from earlier times and earlier cosmologies, has for centuries, ever since Iamblichus, remained confined to the "reservations" of Euro-Mediterranean heterodox thought. Yet it is precisely from those "reservations" that we now need to draw, if we want to be able to see more clearly. For this is the point of the matter, right now: to see more clearly.

In the Red Book Jung already saw, and transcribed, how, having realized the urgency to

«give birth to the old in a new time», but not knowing how to do so, he had set out in search for Philemon: from him Jung hoped to learn the magic arts, so as to allow the future to come about without interference from will or intention. Philemon's answer, however, had been remarkably elusive: there is nothing in this sphere, he cautioned, to be taught or learned, because there is nothing to understand. Thus magic, Jung began to realize, «ist eine Art Leben» (*Liber Secundus* 144, RB 404). Magic, in other words, is a way of life that arises (*ergiebt sich*) whenever the ordering intention of reason (*Vernunft*) does not intervene; it is the experiential ability to come into contact with the *wild* (Jung says the chaotic) dimension of reality. As such, just like the wildness with which it resonates, this way of life is incomprehensible to discursive reason, and hence incommunicable, although of course it needs to call upon reason, and upon language, «for the magical translation of the not-understood into the understandable, since only by means of reason can the understandable be created» (*ibid.*). And this is the point: when language and reason put themselves in the service of that other way of life, when they devote themselves to the «magical translation of the not-understood into the understandable», by the very fact of doing so they undergo a transmutation in their way of relating to reality. Word and reason then become imaginal; they become again, as Corbin understood and as Proulx reminds us, *musical* (anima-ted, that is to say, by the power of the Muses), insofar as they are attuned to the subtle, deep vibration that ensouls the living reality from within. When this intervenes, our very ability to see and to comprehend becomes transformed. As the *Rosarium philosophorum* urges us, our goal must be to learn to see *secundum naturam* — wildly, that is, rather than according to the fantastically civil dictates of our short-sighted, self-referential discursive reason.

In his *De mysteriis*, Iamblichus writes about theophanies as gifts received by those who invoke the Gods. The subject is complex, but as far as such things go, we ought to consider that Dante's *Divine Comedy* ends precisely on a divine vision — a vision whose illuminating power remains linked to the individual's potential to behold (quite simply, to see fully, and accept) *that* (the mystery, the magic, the un-namable) which unceasingly shapes cosmic reality, and which for this very reason transcends our argumentative reason's ability to understand. Most valuable, it seems to me, is how Iamblichus expresses in words the transmuting experience of vision: «the presence of the Gods [...] causes a light to shine with intelligible harmony, and it reveals the incorporeal as corporeal to the eye of the soul by means of the eyes of the body.» (DM II. 81.13; see Shaw 2014: 246) This sentence may well read at first like a riddle, yet it is but the meeting point for experiences which our culture has for centuries striven to keep apart; it is the crossroad (Rilke's *Kreuzweg*) where theophany occurs. There, at that point of intersection, the transparency of the new human-divine vision "magically" reveals the imaginal transparency of creation. From such an encounter arises

(*ergiebt sich*) a new cosmology, one which is anagogical and cathartic by virtue of its being symbolical.

As Hermes pointed out to his disciple Tat, the pragmatics of this transmutation of vision can be neither taught nor learned, for it requires a reversal of inner perspective, the activation of a different kind of intelligence. The disciples must miraculously manage to «no longer see things as without him[/her], but all things as within him[/her]» (Mead [1906] II: 154); they must be able to die unto the ego-logical vision in order to be reborn in the eco-sophical one.²¹ To die, to be reborn: a long, lonely night voyage into the unspeakable «beyond», on the other side of any human dwelling. Yet, as we stare in the face the death of our entire eco-system, this leap into the unknown is precisely the one move that today, unlike yesterday, we can no longer dispense with. «The longest road you will ever have to walk in your life is the sacred journey from your head to your heart»: this is what the Hermes of Sioux wisdom reveals to his young Tat. On that course we have neither map nor itinerary to follow, nor do we have any assurance that we will be able to reach our goal.

By way of conclusion, two examples may perhaps give us a glimpse into the possible import, in the near future, of such a transformed vision. First let us consider the example of Tat, Hermes's disciple, who, after almost giving up hope to belong to his master's kin, finally feels that he has been gifted with the transformative vision, and exclaims:

In heaven am I, in earth, in water, air; I am in animals, in plants; I'm in the womb, before the womb, after the womb; I'm everywhere!... Father, I see the All-One, I see myself in Mind [voũς]. (CH XIII: 11, 13; Mead [1906] II: 143)

Words such as these should cause us to reconsider the charge that ancient gnosis despised creation — a charge leveled by those very people who, in fact, proved and keep proving themselves to be day-to-day negationists of the autonomous vitality, and individuality, of that very creation.

The second example involves René Schwaller de Lubicz. In a writing significantly titled *Verbe nature*, penned in 1952 but published posthumously, Schwaller argued for a worldview that may well be called "eco-sophical" *avant la lettre*. Along with our conventional way of relating to the world, stemming from what he called «Psychological Consciousness», Schwaller identified an altogether different disposition, which he named «Functional Consciousness». This different

²¹ In Peter Kingsley's words, what was/is of the essence «was an inner sense of revelation capable of pointing to the real nature and significance of the things outwardly observed» (1995: 373). See also, and above all, Kingsley 2000.

consciousness, which is able to see, feel, and touch without resorting to reification, hinges on a more transparent, clearer vision of the world:

To awaken the Functional Consciousness is to be Love, to be Unity. Qualification separates you from the water of the sea, from the stone, from the earth, from vegetation, from the amorous turtle dove, from the ferocious beast, from all human races; but all that appears outside of you is functionally within you, man of the end of a Time.

Qualification shows you a Moslem separate from a Jew, a Buddhist, a Brahman, a Taoist, a Christian; it discusses endlessly their "philosophies" and their merits. What is your criterion, you who do not know the revelation of Knowledge? Everything in its own fashion tells you the Truth, while only Truth speaks to you openly of Redemption.

Redemption is within us, provided we awaken the Consciousness of the *function* which unifies, and renders all discussion null and void. Is not Knowing more precious than seeking Learning? (1982: 142-43)

Sophia, then: the wisdom language that unites, rather than divides. For the time of homecoming has come. At long last.

Halfmoon Bay, BC
February 2018

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