

Mind-Body-Earth: a primer on finding true health

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To become whole again, to heal and find true health, we must re-connect our mind to our body and our body to our earth.

Gaia: the living earth organism

James Lovelock referred to the earth as Gaia, the Greek earth goddess, after founding the discipline of geophysiology. He noted that life on earth has generated an atmosphere far from equilibrium and contributes to the homeostasis of the earth habitat. In brief, earth system dynamics and the totality of life on earth exist as a single complex system in response to cosmic influences. This system is dynamic and constantly changing which, paradoxically, leads to a sustainable and resilient entity. Change propagates throughout the system. Evolution is co-evolution or holistic evolution. It occurs not in one species or genome, but throughout the entire earth system as a whole. A change in one part of the whole results in system wide adjustment or adaptation. It is true, the universe has truly conspired to create this very moment. Con-spired, that is breathed together your life, your experience in this world, and now the whole earth breaths with you and from you, to continue in time and space.

The Earth organism is like the human organism. The oceans are earth's blood circulating around its body, the many life forms on earth are its cells which do the biochemical work, the atmosphere is the earth's breath moving through its lungs and exchanging oxygen and carbon dioxide at its cellular or lifeform level, the great land masses and the earth's core are its bones and muscle giving structural support and movement. Each one of us is part of Gaia's body. Each decision we make and action we take alters her physiology, self-organization, and her future.

But just as we are part of the earth's body today, the earth has become and continues to become our bodies. Over 4.5 billion years, small units of self-organized matter have developed and combined as part of this process of holistic evolution. Atoms became molecules, molecules became self-replicating automatons and then single cells, cells became multi-cellular organisms and organelles, and eventually we have the diversity of life we see today. A microscopic examination of any part of our body will reveal that we are these past others, these endosymbiont organisms and commensal bacteria and fungi. We are the present past. Essentially, we achieved our current form through the progressive enfolding of earth's life and life supporting matter. The oceans became self-contained as our blood and body fluids and the waves continue within us as pulses of circulation, the atmosphere enfolded into our lung cavities and the wind continues to blow within us as our breath, the earth's crust accumulated into our bones and muscles and continues in continuity with its origin through our feet. The little known discipline of medical geography confirms this relationship and illustrates it's moment to moment fluidity. The salts of our blood are quite similar to the oceans. The minerals of our bones are quite similar to those in the earth's crust. The body is continually remaking itself and the material for this reconstruction is taken from our environment. The unique mineral or chemical characteristics of one's local environment can be observed in one's body. The rhythms of our solar system and nature become incorporated into the multitudes of biorhythms in the body. Everything in the body has a rhythm. The rhythms of light/dark, sun and moon, and earth's surface electrons all have corresponding changes in the human body. The connection of bare feet to earth embeds the body in the earth's daily electrical flux. Changes in the body's connection to these rhythms, due to their substitution with artificial environments (i.e. lighting, etc.) or disconnection from the earth (shoes, cars, mattresses, etc.),

degrades the body's rhythms. Further, one's body adopts the microbial characteristics of one's geographic habitat. To change locations is to change our bodies. We become our environment. What happens to the environment also happens to our bodies. Environmental contamination results in a growing body burden of chemicals. Infants are born with 287 chemicals in their blood. All adults have hundreds and possibly thousands of chemicals in their blood. Of note, of the 80,000 chemicals produced today, the EPA has only been able to require independent study of 200 of them and has only been able to regulate 5 of them. Nothing is protecting our nature from our selves. What causes cancer? 79,800 possible answers have not been researched.

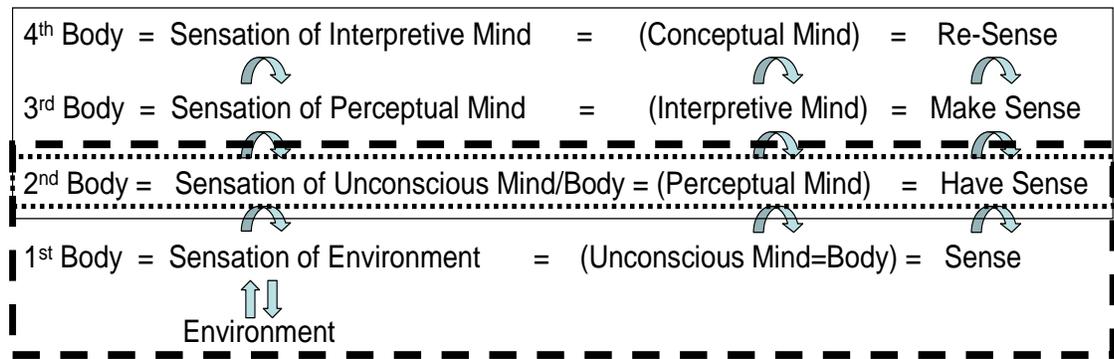
The body is not constructed according to our genes. Instead, our genome reflects a range of potential and waits for direction from the environment. Our phenotype, our body at any given moment, is the product of past and present genome-environment interactions. Our genes respond to the environment, the environment is incorporated into our body, and our body then acts upon and influences the environment, which continues to direct the expression of our 30,000 genes. One's phenotype and one's environment are plastic and interdependent. They are co-created through one's ecology. Changing the environment changes our ecology which changes our body-mind. Immigrant studies and twin studies have shown the powerful effect of different environments. The risk for and incidence of most degenerative diseases changes with one's environment, not one's genes.

So we create the earth and the earth creates us, continuously. In fact, the dichotomy of earth and US is an illusion. The idea that humankind has transcended nature somehow is a conceptual illusion. We are wholly dependent upon and immersed in nature, regardless of how much our built environment and technology confines us from nature and alters the dynamics of nature. A more accurate individual perspective is to view humankind as nested organisms within a larger organism called the earth. But if we could perceive holistically, from the whole, we are, in fact, one with the whole. We are continuous with nature and the earth. The boundaries are arbitrary. Is your hand not you? If your body is only made of parts, where is the "you" you think you are? A cut on your hand is pain for you, not your hand. Contamination of one pond is contamination for the entire earth, including you and your hand. Disease in one person is disease for all of us and the whole planet. Sadness and suffering in one person, in one animal, in one tree propagates through the system and the whole suffers as one. No matter where you are, we are all in it together. The local becomes global and the global becomes local. Such is true of happiness as well! These are experiences of the mind.

The Emergent Mind, The Ecological Self, and Ecopsychology

So where are YOU? Where is your mind with which you observe and experience yourself and your environment? The field of complex systems science and the writings of Gregory Bateson, Merleau-Ponty, and others would suggest that the mind is no where... YOU are nowhere in particular, but you emerge from the continuous information and energy exchange between the body and the environment. YOU are greater than the sum of the parts, YOU are brought forth by your ecology. YOU exist diffusely. Not within your body, but between or throughout your body and your environment. YOU are as much your environment as your body (and the environment is your extended body). YOU are neither body or environment in isolation, but both in integration. The mind emerges between the sensing and the sensible. And the sensible environment consists of sensing entities itself. For those sensing entities, we are included within their sensible environment. Another way to examine this is to consider that without sensation (the lack of either sensing ability or a sensible environment) there is no perception. Without perception there can be no thought and, therefore, no mind. To sense and be sensible is to co-create the present and our presence, or our sentience. Experience and perception precede thought and the self-referential awareness we casually call mind. Perception first requires the bi-directional coupling of the sensing and the sensible, the body and the environment. The sensing of the sensible by the body is, at once, also a response to the sensible or a form of somatic cognition. I believe this somatic cognition

underlies the concepts of the subconscious as well as the collective conscious. One's ecology is engaged in total, holistically, at this level. I call it ecological embodiment, or the 1st mind-body (see heuristic below). This is pure being or rather, becoming. This is engagement with the "other" or environment in which "self" is lost. This experience is the origin of the saying, "to lose oneself" in an activity. An awareness of this cognition is the 2nd mind-body. This is pre-conceptual, pre-interpretive, and pure ecological awareness or perception. It is the pure sensory or somatic awareness of the body-environment exchange. It is to observe our continual becoming, the advancing edge of our existence within nature. This is the realm of phenomenology. Not the tree but the entity we call tree. This is the actual terrain before we generate the map. This is also the level of mindfulness. Labeling, judging, and evaluating our environment intellectually is to step out of the terrain and into the map, it is to leave ecological embodiment and institutionalize our awareness. Ecological embodiment is one level before mindfulness. There is not observing oneself doing, but only doing. The body is sensing and responding in a near fusion with one's surroundings. The angle of a rock or the leaning of a tree becomes an angle or leaning of the body and it moves within this space. The movement of the body becomes the movement of the grass or the ferns. It is a dance without a lead. So the 1st mind-body, as I call it, is somatic cognition or the body sensing and responding to the environment. The 1st mind-body is an eco-somatic phenomenon. The 2nd mind-body is the sensation of this sensation. It is a somatic reflection into (usually filtered or directed) awareness. This is now occurring in the attentional centers of the nervous system. I refer to this type of awareness as perception. The 3rd mind-body is then the sensation of this awareness or perception. It is a recapitulation of pure ecological awareness into a disembodied representation. Perception is essentially looped and now escapes a temporal and spatial connection to the environment. At this level of mind, the perceptual information is related to memory to allow interpretation. This is where judgment and objectification occurs. The eloquent and unique moment of ecological embodiment is reified at this level to a judgment or label, which I consider to be interpretation. The 4th mind-body is yet another iteration upon the interpretive mind in which past and present interpretations can be manipulated for cohesion and relativity. This is where concepts and paradigms emerge. The content of this mind-body is purely a map, a pragmatic representation of filtered and interpreted somatic experience. In more than one way, somatic experience has been fragmented, consolidated, and reassembled into a lower resolution and abstract reality. While the 1st mind-body is an eco-somatic phenomenon, the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th mind-bodies are iterative somato-somatic phenomena building upon this primary eco-somatic connection. Our culture operates almost entirely upon 3rd and 4th mind-body cognition, and the result is a disembodied perspective separate from nature and earth.



Mind-Body Separation
Transitional Space/Void
State of "fragmentation"

Mindfulness

Environmental Integration
Ecological Embodiment
State of "wholeness"

If the mind is between the body and the environment, why does it seem that YOU are in your head? This is because most of our sense organs are in the head. The awareness of a visual, auditory, olfactory, or gustatory exchange of information and energy generates the perspective being in the head or eyes, ears, nose, mouth, respectively. But think about when you might primarily use your tactile sense in isolation. A dark room, the electric is out, and you are slowly sliding your feet along the floor to locate and avoid stepping on that toy or piece of furniture you know to be somewhere close. Have you ever reflected back on this intense tactile encounter between foot and environment and noticed that YOU seemed to be in your foot? It is true, YOU can appear to be in any body part, but YOU are emerging between the body and environment. Stop and think about the general sense of touch for a moment. Do you feel your hands becoming more prominent or as if you are extending out into your environment through your fingers? Think about audition, in isolation of the other senses. When you hear something distant, is your consciousness, your mind, not at that distant location? Think about olfaction. When you pick up the scent of something in the air, is your consciousness not hanging out there, swirling, in the air as well? It is not at the plant which generates the pollen in the air that you smell, but it is in the field defined by your nose and the air containing the scent. Before we discuss ways to develop and experience this awareness, let's consider the implication of the emergent mind, or mind-earth non-dualism.

We know the body and mind are a unity and these entities are different perspectives of same process. Now we have mind-body-earth as a single unity in which the mind emerges from both the body and earth, which are actually in continuity. The landscape is the mindscape. Just as changes to the body equal changes in the mind and these changes can be experienced and measured, changes to the environment or earth must equal changes to the mind. What effect, then, does a polluted earth or environment have on one's mind? This is the subject of ecopsychology. It could be said that the earth's mind is diffuse throughout biosphere, emerging at the interface between sentient life and the environment. Since we are part of nature and the sensing environment, we contribute to the earth sensing itself. As the equivalent of our body sensing the sensible and itself and manifesting our mind, this self-sensing earth manifests an earth mind. Your mind would be nested in this diffuse mind, Gaia's mind. We can even look at mind as a diffuse biospheric field and the individual mind is the experience of this collective mind from one unique vantage point, one ecology, within this field. When you feel sadness or happiness, you could say that the earth, known to you locally, has sadness or happiness. It's not that your feelings contribute to the earth's feelings, or that the earth's feelings contribute to your feelings, it's just that the feelings are there, emerging with the mind from the interactions of life on

earth and these feelings (the emotional mind) are shared or communal. They are there in the environment to be manifested and perceived through interaction. So is there an association between environmental destruction, loss of biodiversity, ecosystem distress disorder, pollution, climate change, and etc. and the epidemics of depression, ADHD, and rage and violence in our world? When we pollute the environment do we pollute our minds? When we endanger ecosystems and sentient life forms, do we endanger our own sentience? When we fragment nature with concrete and steel, do we fragment our minds and feel broken? Do we destroy ourselves with the environment? There is another way to look at this more personally. Why do you feel joy, energy, and peace when you enter a beautiful landscape or lush ecosystem? And have you ever felt flat or empty in a sterile looking built environment (think hospital or government building hallways)? This is your body-earth connection (or disconnection) manifesting your mind and emotion.

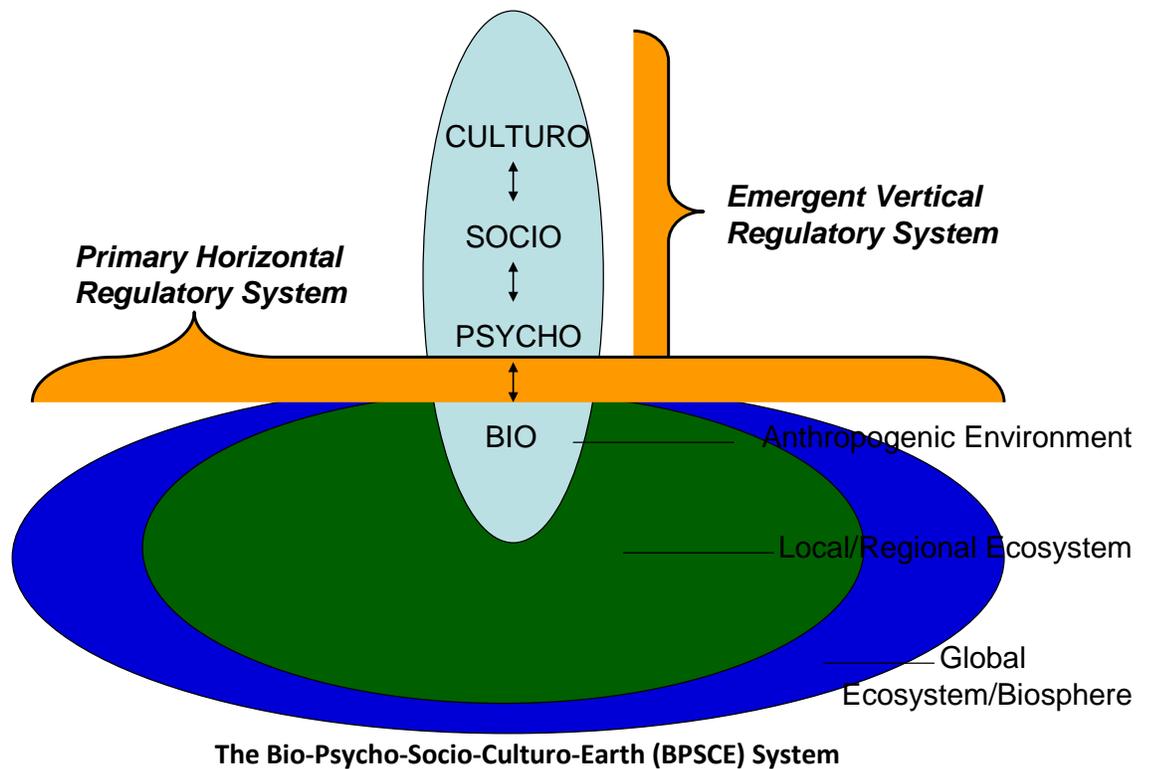
Why is closeness to nature a universal desire? E.O. Wilson called this “biophilia” and explained it evolutionarily... that favorable habitats for survival make us feel good and spend more time in these habitats. Living near water, visiting the ocean, gazing across the mountains and valleys, walking barefoot in the grass, being surrounded by lush vegetation, observing wild animals, listening to bird song, or scanning a vast horizon are all pleasant experiences associated with (usually) healthy and productive ecosystems. In our modern built environment, however, our minds are left to emerge from relatively non-sentient partners and fragmented ecosystems. To engage the 4.5 billion year lineage of earth’s ecological symphony is to reconnect to wholeness, fluidity, and balance. Engaging these ancient threads of life is like finding your mother in a crowd of strangers. There is a resonance from which emerges a balanced and pure mind. We all seek this wholeness, richness, and simplicity, but in its absence we experience a complicated and hyperstimulating incompleteness. All too often we try to suppress the mind, prevent its full emergence through desensitization, distraction, or numbness. We construct internal reference points of past and future and attempt to let the mind emerge only within the body. How do we get back to wholeness? How do we heal our body-mind-earth?

Disembodiment, disconnection, dysfunction, and disease.

From our ecology, our interactions with the environment, emerges our mind. From the sum of our individual human ecologies and minds, emerges our social dynamics and culture. Our mind, society, and culture exist as an emergent regulatory system with multi-directional feedback loops. I call this the vertical regulatory system and this system is critical for human health and balance (see illustration below). However, a problem arises when the foundation of this system, our biophysical integration with the biosphere, becomes disconnected. Our individual ecology and ecological embodiment connects us to and includes us within the self-regulating horizontal regulatory system of earth. This is the principle regulatory system for life, and the vertical regulatory system emerges from the human component of this system to manifest human society and culture. If the vertical system loses connection with the horizontal, the vertical system drifts away from self-regulation or balance and sustainability. Its influence upon itself (mind, society, and culture) and on the environment is not kept in check. The imbalance which results impairs human and ecosystem health. This imbalance is responsible for much of our modern distress and discord. The disconnection from the horizontal primarily occurs on the scale of the individual. When nature is unavailable or ignored and our ecology becomes mostly man made, the mind emerges from an ecology that is already mostly vertical. The body is essentially uprooted and the earth is viewed only from above or from an illusionary external or independent perspective. Our experience of life becomes more map than terrain and wholeness becomes fragmented. The body and its senses atrophy and the connection to the natural environment further deteriorate. The sensory abilities of urban dwelling people are a fraction of those observed in hunter-gatherers. Without being rooted in the rich soil of nature, the body almost literally wilts. In these circumstances, true positive

health cannot be achieved or maintained by the individual or the whole. Disease, dysfunction, and imbalance, across all scales and systems, become ubiquitous.

BPSCE Cybernetics



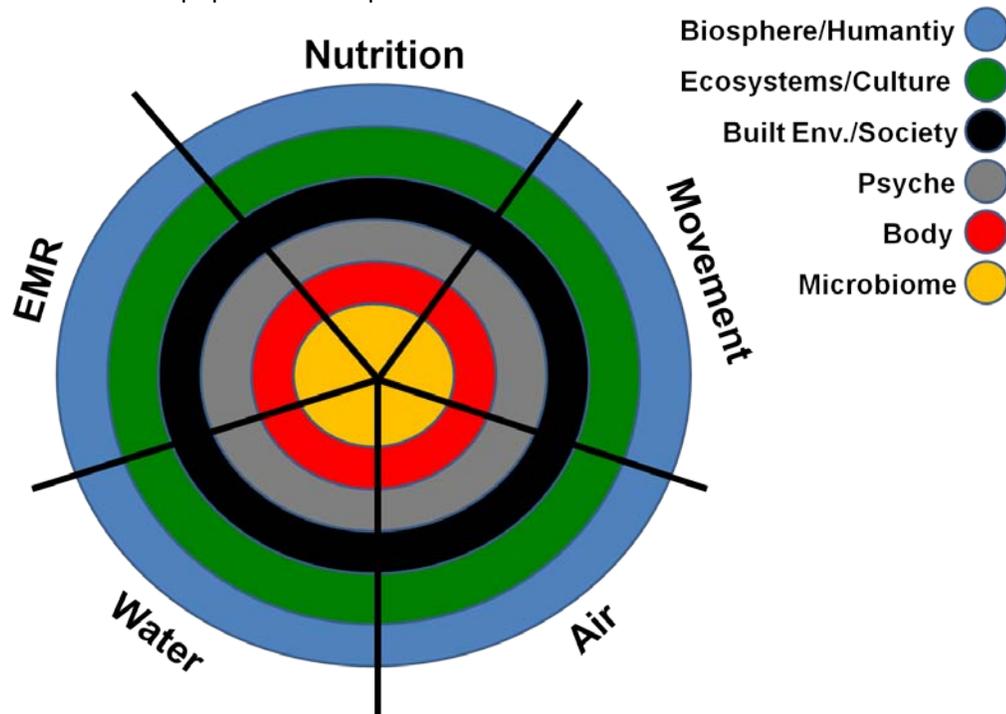
As a practical example of the vertical system emerging from the horizontal, let's consider knowledge. It is commonly thought that knowledge is culturally transmitted and evolved. It is handed down across generation through this system of paradigms and regulations we call culture. However, it is quite interesting how indigenous populations completely separate geographically and with different culture and world views tend to develop similar practical understandings of the world around them. It is also interesting to note how often "novel ideas" or "breakthroughs" are developed simultaneously by different intellectually isolated individuals. The anthropological work of Tim Ingold makes a powerful case that knowledge is not necessarily contained within culture, but is present in the environment and repeatedly discovered by maturing individuals and new generations. Knowledge is the conceptualization of the information contained in nature. The non-conceptual observation and understanding of (or resonance with) this information is what we call wisdom. The source of wisdom, therefore, is one and the same as the source of mind. This information is not the special privilege of the human animal, it is the domain of all life coming together as one. All life possesses this wisdom. The human mind filters, interprets, and transforms this wisdom into concepts and paradigms which become knowledge. Knowledge is in the vertical system, wisdom is in the horizontal system. Disconnection from the horizontal allows the vertical, including knowledge, to become dysfunctional or imbalanced. Dysfunctional knowledge would be the proliferation of concepts and paradigms which do not enable wholeness or health.

This disconnection of the vertical from the horizontal, or disembodiment from the earth, may, in part, begin during the transitional phase of early childhood as defined by the psychologist Donald Winnicott and the object relations perspective of psychology. Winnicott considered this phase as the weaning from maternal dependence and identification and the beginning of individual independence. He postulated that a gap opens during this time in which self becomes separate from non-self and this void produces anxiety. Usually a transitional object such as a blanket or pacifier becomes a surrogate mother during this transition to cope with this anxiety. In my opinion, this gap or void may be the origin of our modern alienation from the earth and from our bodies. Ideally, and what appears to happen in hunter-gatherer populations, the child moves from oneness with the mother to oneness with the other mother, or the first mother, nature. It seems fairly obvious that the fetus, in utero, is inseparable from the mother. After birth, a similar oneness or intense symbiosis is maintained and some have called this the fourth trimester. As the baby begins to ambulate, he or she begins to experience the depth of the world and naturally, would be experiencing the animate and dynamic world of nature. This is the beginning of the transitional period where the baby's identity slowly shifts from that as one with the mother to that as one with the surrounding living world we call nature. In modernity, this transition is blocked by the early conceptualization and intellectualization of nature and the immersion in a largely built environment isolated from nature. The built environment is much less embracing and does not provision for the baby in anyway like nature, it is not motherly or fatherly. Further, our eagerness to teach infants how to talk and function in society results in the very early objectification and conceptualization of the environment and nature. Infants are told that the image of a bird is a bird, before they may even see a real bird flying and exhibiting the essence of birdness in nature. Often we present a photograph in a book and say, this is a bird. The actual somatic and sensual experience of the bird in nature is absent and an interpretation (label) of a bird representation is given instead. Therefore, the bird exist in the mind only and without a somatic or ecological context. The same may actually occur with the child's body, when they are taught their name and self-identification through mirrors and photos of themselves. They know their body then as an image in their mind, rather than through the somatic awareness of interacting with their environment. The infant, then, is left to transition not to the embodiment of nature and the wholeness this provides, but to the reified and conceptualized world in the mind and the vertical chain of society and culture. Therefore, the void is never resolved and the transition to wholeness with the other mother, nature, is not established. Nature is devalued and seen as inanimate and non-sentient and a pervasive anxiety provoking void chases us throughout life. In fact, it has been commented that the transitional object is never outgrown in modernity. The object simply changes from a pacifier or blanket to toys, electronics, cars, clothes, houses, assets, occupations and titles, alcohol and other addictions. We remain on a constant quest to identify with an entity which re-establishes our sense of wholeness, oneness, and health or to simply suppress and numb the anxiety from the void. Unfortunately, wholeness and true health cannot be found in the vertical system and is only available by reconnecting with the horizontal, first with our bodies and then, through our bodies, with nature (ecological embodiment).

The disconnection of this vertical (anthropogenic) system results in its liberation from natural regulation and allows the human influence on nature to occur at an unnatural rate and magnitude. Without the finely evolved regulatory restraint of the horizontal system, the vertical system is able to achieve massive imbalance. This occurs on an individual as well as population level and the resulting societal and cultural imbalance drives further individual imbalance. This imbalance is ecological and both from changes of the physical environment and from changes in one's interaction with that environment. The result is disease or dysfunction propagating through the vertical system and driving disease and dysfunction in the horizontal system. The diagram below provides some examples. The only real locus of control is individual ecology (also referred to more narrowly as lifestyle or behavior). Thus, most, if not all, of our modern challenges can be connected to this scale.

The Ecology of Scale-Free Health and Disease

Below is a representation of human ecology and several scales across which the ecology exerts influence. The ecological divisions are arbitrary and only to make a boundless and open system manageable. It is a simplified map of the complex terrain. We can examine these ecological divisions and make changes to our related environmental interactions which dramatically enhance our individual health and the health of the population and planet.



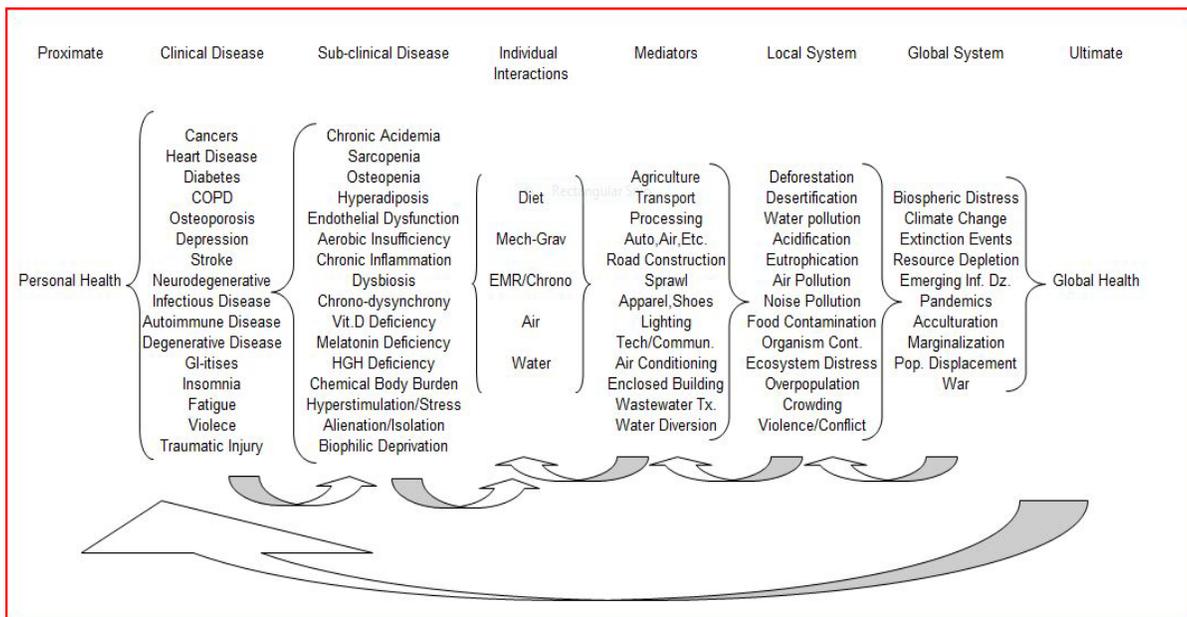
Optimizing one's interactions according to this map involves significant change and will have dramatic effects on personal to planetary health. Our ecology powerfully influences the characteristics of our cells, our microflora, our physiology and material body, our mind, our built environment, our local ecosystems, and the planet. There is an enormous amount of information in each of these divisions. Years could be spent exploring the research and scale specific influences of each division. While my clinical work involves going into great detail, I will keep my comments here ridiculously brief.

- a. Nutrition: Eat humanely, with gratitude and respect. Eat fresh, whole, local, organic, wild, or wild-like food (i.e. non CAFO). Avoid processed food and maximize diversity. Some hunter gatherer populations identify nearly 200 edible plant species. How many edible plant species are in your diet? How many edible plant species can you name? Eat more plant than animal foods. Know who you are eating. Life is food and food is life. Know how your food lived. Use somatic wisdom in choosing foods (within the limits above). Thirst, hunger, and fatigue are experiences which communicate physiological needs and provide impulses to interact with the environment in certain ways. In the same way, an affinity for a particular food (say broccoli) may be communicating a physiological need for certain nutrients (the nutrients in broccoli in this case).
- b. Movement: The body, its sensory capacity, and its connection to the environment atrophy without movement. Experience frequent, diverse, and whole body movement every day. Move fast, slow, intensely, and easily. Experience your limits. Let nature

move you and challenge you and express the boundaries of your physiology. Experience the terrain speaking through your breathing, your muscles burning, and your fatigue. Don't exercise, play. Move spontaneously. Prioritize active transportation. Rest, recover, and relax!

- c. Air: Seek fresh and unpolluted air. Know your air shed/air basin and how the earth's breath moves around you. Smell the air. Use passive solar for heating, convection and evaporation for cooling. Minimize fragrances, perfumes, etc.. Minimize off gassing material indoors as well as outdoors. Learn to fully breathe. Practice deep, abdominal breaths, 5 seconds in/out. Try alternate nostril breathing.
- d. Water: Seek fresh, local, and tested water sources (i.e. tested local spring water). If using municipal sources (tap water) use filtration such as carbon or reverse osmosis filtration. Know your municipal sources and your regional watershed. Minimize bottled waters. If bottled water is necessary, choose spring water in a glass bottle and recycle. Avoid manufactured drinks. Drink organic tea. Careful with caffeine and alcohol.
- e. EMR (electromagnetic radiation): Embody nature's rhythms (cosmic rhythms). Let your body go, it knows. Slow down with dusk, sleep with dark, and wake with dawn. Overcome naked wrist anxiety and watch nature's clock. Know the seasonal and daily patterns of your local vegetation. Love the sun like the leaves and soak it up with regular skin pigment appropriate exposures. Use ambient light rather than artificial light. Minimize interference (electrosmog, wireless, cell phones, electronics, light at night).

These ecological interactions affect the horizontal (body, local ecosystems, biosphere) and the vertical (psyche, society, and culture) systems simultaneously. Practically speaking, these interactions connect the personal to the planetary through scale specific (usually on the social and cultural scale) mediators. Though potentially infinite, these mediators can be quite ordinary. The chart below demonstrates some examples but, again, is a map and not the terrain. For example, cancer can be connected to war and stroke to climate change through human ecology and anthropogenic mediators.



Considering these ecological divisions and determining a healthy ecology scientifically, however, remains a "superficial" or "shallow" approach. It is a good place to start and results in rapid changes,

but to really become whole and really live in the richness of holos, we need to do the “deeper” work of reconnecting our mind-body-earth. Reconnecting to nature, one’s horizontal foundation, will accomplish similar but more profound and meaningful changes in one’s ecology as those briefly mentioned above. The changes, however, will be secondary to a rich and meaningful relationship with one’s natural environment and a sense of wholeness... a sense of returning home. The changes, then, come not from intellectual, scientific, and moral command but from a sense of identity, compassion, empathy, love, and inclusion. As Kant said, this is to act beautifully.

Healing Ourselves, Healing the Earth, the Return to Wholeness : Reconnecting mind-body- earth.

Becoming whole is essentially a self-realization process which is never complete, it is always ongoing. It is spiritual. It is to realize one’s personal ecosophy (a subjective ecological wisdom), and realize a way of life integrated with nature. This process can begin through the practice of sensuously and pre-conceptually participating with nature.

- Practice somatic awareness and redevelop your atrophied senses. Notice the sensations within, upon, and around your body. Do not label or analyze these sensations but curiously explore the richness of the phenomena. If you can find pain or body odor curious and rich, then you are truly experiencing the phenomena, perceiving it without interpreting it. Notice the tension of your muscles, notice the forces on your body in any particular position, notice the impulses you have to move and reposition, notice how different positions can produce different emotions or levels of alertness. Sit sad, sit happy, stand joyfully, and etc. Embody each somatic experience, truly be cold, hot, hungry and let the richness of these experiences become evident. Get “earthed” whenever possible by being barefoot in nature. Frequently take a moment to fully sense your surroundings. See, hear, smell, taste, touch your immediate sensory-scape. Explore the open boundaries of the sensory experience. Explore the synaesthetic experience of touching with vision, seeing through audition, etc. Let your senses converge into a gestalt sense. Explore the subtle emotion present with any sensation. Notice your attraction or aversion to sensory input (sights, sounds, smells, entire sensory gestalts). Notice how different environments or even locations within an environment create different gestalt sensations, emotions, or intuitions (peace, irritability, discomfort, comfort, restlessness, etc.). Cultivate sympathy from perception (the tree is sad, I am sad, there is sadness emerging). Emotion emerges from confluent sensation and connection. Let the total sensuous experience bloom into intuition. What is the message, the wisdom?
- Spend time in nature. Live in nature, camp, explore. Take your children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, etc. into nature and learn from them. Become immersed in the ecology with them. Enter the world of insects or plants through mindful observation and appreciation. Revel in the embodied experience, the pre-conceptual awareness or phenomenology, of the ecology and your fellow life forms. Experience not the tree, but that which we call the tree. Not just that which we call the tree but the total experience of that entity, which includes all perceived entities in summation. Look as if seeing for the first time and as if everything was new (because it is always new, always becoming). Find holistic perception in movement and sensation but not interpretation. Be present in the total experience and let the doing happen. Smell and touch just about everything and let the experience, not the thought, be the truth. Let the whole be primary, not the analysis. Recognize that no two things are the same and no one thing is the same at any moment. The richness of nature is dynamic yet time stands still, moments stretch and bend and consume. Experience the “bloom” as Thoreau said or feel the “flesh” as Merleau-Ponty calls it. Have you ever been struck by the vibrance of nature? A vibrance where your natural surroundings seem heavy with energy, even electric, and where the experience is not

contaminated with thought. A vibrance known only through pure and primary perception and engagement with the living or animate world. It is that feeling of being on the edge of some great truth or a pervasive presence. It is a glimpse of pure wisdom, of knowing and understanding without thought. There is no self and no other, but only sensation and becoming. Each moment in time or movement in space unfolds new flesh, a new texture and richness which is unique. This is the phenomenological awareness of ecological embodiment.

- Consider the emotion emerging from your engagement with the entities around you. Consider the mood present with a flower, bush, tree, cloud, etc. Notice how every shift in the landscape, sky, or the weather is a shift in your emotional mind. Sensing the clear blue sky and sunshine manifests a clear and bright emotion and mind while sensing the overcast sky or the thunderhead manifests a pensive, less illuminated, or more sluggish mind. Reference to one's head being foggy or cloudy is of literal origin.
- Realize that your home extends beyond your built home. Your true home is your local ecology. Explore your ecological-self. Identify with your ecology, let it be a part of you and you part of it. The goal is subjectification of the environment rather than the typical objectification of one's "self". Feel empathy and sympathy for the experiences of nature and its fellow co-creators. Think about the natural places you played and explored as a child. Does returning to these places and visiting the old tree or rock or shoreline or hill, etc. feel as if you are visiting yourself as a child. Does it feel as though you are reconnecting to a more complete and whole self in some way? A true home (the local and total ecology of one's place of dwelling) should have this feel.
- Get to know the beings or entities which co-inhabit and co-create your home. Let it be an animate community to which you belong. Realize that your community is made up of inter-being relationships rather than only inter-personal relationships. Acknowledge when another being presents itself to you and seems to reach out and catch your attention. Spend time with this entity and explore this connection. Speak, sing, gesture, or otherwise communicate with the beings you meet, not because they speak your language but because they sense the intent and connection (the foundation of language). When you need clarity or guidance, see if one of these non-human beings can provide it. Get in touch with (i.e. feel) your overarching intention in life, and pose to nature the essence of your question (if you have one), then release your thoughts and walk in nature. Notice when your attention is pulled to some entity, being, or presence. Experience the connection and nature's deep wisdom, which often provides an unspoken and somatically available answer to your question.
- Appreciate each part of any environment and recognize, with joy and fascination, the great diversity of unique entities around you. Each self-organized part of the whole, each nested whole, generates a nested mind-body-earth, fully dependent upon and interdependent with the other mind-body-earths which comprise the sentient environment. Nothing can take the place of what is, nothing can become better than that which is becoming, without the whole present moment and future becoming different. Nothing can become better than that butterfly which is becoming. Nothing can help the world manifest better than that vole in the soil, the lichen on the rock, and the giraffe eating the leaves. A human cannot hope to accomplish what any non-human accomplishes easily. There are no replacement parts in nature. Every change is a new nature and a new reality. Find joy and awe in the uniqueness of every entity in nature, doing its part, being and becoming itself as part of the whole, giving to you and the rest of the earth.
- Engage in activities in which you might "lose yourself." This is ecological embodiment in which self and other dissolve and become one. Consider and seek the experiential engagement and embodiment which might occur while running or mountain biking over trails, skydiving, kayaking whitewater, making love, watching an insect on a flower, arriving at a summit to view a vista,

driving a winding road, dancing, singing, playing music, drumming, etc. Let nature challenge you. Let your physiology reflect the terrain. The experience of oneness and the intuitive wisdom that experience offers may be facilitated by nearing your limits in nature. Why have so many ancient visions and enlightened moments occurred on top of mountains?

- Music is the rhythms and sounds of nature amplified. Listen, play, dance. Don't interpret and analyze it, just find yourself within it, resonating with it, participating with it, contributing to it. Let your body move without thought. Experience ecstatic dancing, drumming, or signing.
- Think differently about the non-human beings around you. For example, if we care for the plants in our garden, then do trees care for the humans in their ecosystem? We "care" for garden plants because we can change the environment to facilitate their growth, we stand over their small structures, and they have shorter lifespans than us. It appears, then, that they depend on us and can die or thrive depending upon our support of the soil. Trees, however, live much longer than us and support our environment. The length of our lives depends upon these trees as well as other plants. They seem to look over us as we stand under them. Are they not caring for us?
- Feel embraced by the biosphere and the atmosphere all around you. Feel blanketed by mother earth. David Abram articulates this experience beautifully. *"I may discern, if I attend closely, that there is a certain closure which is suggested by the horizon and its vicissitudes, a sort of promise, in the distance, of a secret kinship between the ground and the sky, a fundamental nonopposition, a suggestion that ground and sky are not two distinct entities but two layers or leaves of one single power, two leaves that open as I move toward that horizon and that close up, behind me, back there."* This experience is accurate, not imagined. To not experience it is to impair the richness of reality. We slip between earth and air, in continuity with both, enveloped and embraced by mother earth, the biosphere, in this thin space we call the planetary boundary layer. Nearly all non-marine or aquatic life lives within this 1000meters above the earth's surface and the great majority of marine life lives within a 1000meters of ocean depth (the epipelagic and mesopelagic zones). Life is indeed embraced in a thin layer of symbiosis. At any moment, we carry the earth on our feet, the atmosphere on our head and shoulders, and sense their fusion surrounding our body at the interface we call mind. This is not an infinite space, it is a thin space and an intimate space. What we give to it, it will give to us. What we make of it, will be made into us. Contained within it, we move through this flesh, this bone, muscle, blood, and breathe, in the continual process of making our bodies, of becoming the environment we simultaneously create. Nothing is more intimate than this unity of flesh. Our separation and observation from the outside is an illusion produced by ungrounding the conceptual, 4th order, mind-body.
- Feel the thickness of the air as you move. Notice that, as you move, the beings around you move as well, and they move in relation to one another. This depth is the experience of being part of nature, the experience of moving within the earth's living surface. Realize that pictures and videos are worth only words, not experience. They lack the depth and sensuous holism of actually living in the place.
- Slowly and gently consider the extended connections of all things in your local ecology. This includes all things consumed as well. Consider the environmental, economic, and social reverberations of each product or material object you utilize. Endeavor to understand where these objects originate and where they go once they leave your local ecology. Consider how these objects are involved in the earth's material and energy cycles. Everything leaves footprints on the earth and we can track them forward and backward from where we stand. With this knowledge, act from emotion, from empathy and sympathy, from identification, to live

sustainably in nature, on earth, for the health and wholeness of all beings. Do not act from duty or moral obligation, but from the compulsion which comes from having a deep identification and relationship with nature. Action from this level does itself, there is no decision, no effort, just a way of being and becoming.

- Evolve your discipline, specialty, occupation, or societal role into an ecocentric form. Creatively expand or refine your area of expertise to allow greater connection to nature or the horizontal system. Modify your occupational ecology. No other person can do this better than you. True scale-free health cannot occur without your participation!

As each of us reconnects to our bodies and to our earth, grounding ourselves in the phenomena of the horizontal world and returning to wholeness, the vertical system of society and culture will be pulled closer to balance and integration with the horizontal. Changing humankind and human activity in pursuit of true health, holos, cannot be accomplished from the top down within the vertical system. It cannot be accomplished through ethical, moral, intellectual, economical, or judicial direction. The change must come from the bottom up, starting with the only locus of control available to any of us, our individual ecology, and it must come from a sense of connection, love, and identification with our non-human mother. It must come from acting beautifully, as Kant said. Gandhi realized that, as a person improves oneself and endeavors toward self-realization, they improve the world around them. As each one of us moves toward an optimal ecology and health, the rest of humankind moves that much closer to realizing holos. There is nothing more powerful than this. There is no need to sacrifice yourself to save the world. Instead, save yourself, become whole, and let the rest of the world follow.