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Re-Engaging Gaia: A psychological exploration and feminist response to the Anthropocene

Abstract:

This visually rich artist presentation explores the underlying psychological foundations, historical and cultural dynamics of the oppressed feminine as shadow aspects of individual and collective consciousness that are seeking integration in the age of the Anthropocene. Through the lens of Jungian depth psychology we will see how the archetypal feminine has been suppressed creating a deep separation between *logos* and *eros*, spirit and matter, body and mind, with the incidental effect of oppressing women and all that is considered “other” - indigenous cultures, people of color, animals and nature - to the detriment of humanity and earth. We will trace the initial split of these dualistic forces from the Iron Age through early Christianity, to the 17th century Age of Reason and modern industrialization, piecing together the story of how this psychic rupture has manifested as pollution and ecological devastation that have prompted climate change and the potential for human self-annihilation.

Drawing on the works of Jungian depth psychologists Erich Neumann and Marion Woodman, we will examine Neumann’s precept [*Fear of the Feminine*, 1953] that “the peril of present-day mankind springs in large part from the one-sidedly patriarchal development of the male-intellectual consciousness, which is no longer kept in balance by the matriarchal world of the psyche” and his pronouncement that “The different nature of the feminine psyche must be discovered anew if women are to understand themselves, and also if the patriarchally masculine world that has fallen ill thanks to its extreme one-sidedness is again to return to health.” We will also consider Woodman’s assertion [*Dancing in the Flames: The Dark Goddess in the Transformation of Consciousness*, 1996] that manifestations of the archetypal feminine in the scientific community are informing the new science of quantum physics and spurring a paradigm shift in how humans relate to earth and cosmos.

To complete the story and offer possibilities for action, we will review the writings of feminists, ecologists, scientists and theologians who have articulated the enormous challenges facing us and also offer suggestions for restoring the balance. Susan Griffin, Charlene Spretnak, Elizabeth Dodson Gray, Matthew Fox, Lynn White, Thomas Berry and Fritjof Capra are just a few of the revolutionary thinkers who envision the age of the Anthropocene as a time when archetypal feminine forces expressed as Gaia consciousness are emerging through dream, myth and metaphor to rejuvenate our human psyche and revitalize our world.