

THE MELTING POLAR ICE: REVISITING *TECHNOLOGY AS SYMPTOM AND DREAM*

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I. PRELUDE: ANXIETY AND ICE

I am sitting in my garden on a summer day in Santa Barbara thinking about the melting polar ice. How *distant and far away* that danger seems in this moment. Apart from a vague sense of dread that now and then takes hold of me and on occasion a more intense sense of sorrow that settles upon me, it is difficult to stay *close to* this issue, to keep in *touch* with it, and to *sense* its presence in my daily life. This disjunction makes me anxious, a sure sign that something between the melting ice and me is out of joint. What am I missing?

So I begin to write in this anxious state, wishing that somehow I could numb myself against this feeling and remembering that anxiety was also the beginning of my book, *Technology as Symptom and Dream*,¹ in which I traced out the image of the despotic eye, its shadows, and its role in the historical origins of technological consciousness. The anxiety then was the imminent prospect of a nuclear winter; the anxiety now is the prospect—is it as imminent?—that we have raised the stakes and are challenging again the capacity of the earth to tolerate the effects

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of our power. Anxiety, John Beebe writes, is a “proper starting point for the discovery of integrity.” Indeed, staying in touch with the experience, examining it and not numbing ourselves to it, is an “ethical process in which ‘one’s infinite obligation to the other is expressed.’”²

To stay with the anxiety of the moment is to be responsible, able-to-respond, because I am listening. The ecological problem which it expresses is a psychological problem, and the bridge that joins them is this movement of the soul against forgetting, against going to sleep, against numbing myself, against the comfortable illusion that I am separate from the world, that the “inside” does not really matter in the calculus of this danger, and that the “outside” is, after all, “inanimate” and, as such, subject only to the limits of our technological reason. But in this moment of anxiety I know in a way that deepens its uneasiness that the melting ice is more than a reasonable problem, and that beyond our powers to explain, to construct, and impose solutions, we are being called to listen to what the ice “within” is saying, to its speech, to its voice as it addresses us.

II. 350 PPM

Two decades ago NASA scientist James Hansen testified to Congress that the warming of the planet was increasing and was linked primarily to human activity. 350 ppm is a measure of that warming, a measure of the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere produced in large part by our planetary addiction to the burning of fossil fuels. Forty years ago the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was approximately 275 ppm, and the consensus at that time was that a doubling of that level was the danger point. The “red light,” so to speak, flashed 550 ppm, and the warning was to not exceed that number. 550 ppm was the tipping point beyond which global warming and its effects on sea levels, weather patterns, and crop cultivation might be irreversible. But on the way to 550 ppm, the warming has rapidly increased. The polar ice has been melting at a faster rate than predicted, leading some climate scientists to lower the measure to 450 ppm. Hansen, however, has most recently argued that that measure is too high and that the safe upper limit is 350 ppm. The most current data indicates we are already beyond that point. The polar ice is choking on green house gases that have reached a concentration level of 383

ppm. The tipping point is at hand. Our carbon footprint is penetrating deeper into the earth.

III. TRACES OF AN ABSENT PRESENCE

The beach is empty. No, that is not quite correct, because as I walk along the shore, I can see footprints in the sand. These footprints in the sand are a strange paradox. They are the presence of an absence and the absence of a presence. They tell me only that another who leaves a mark upon the world has been here, and in that mark I recognize a kinship with my kind. He or she is like me, or I like him or her. Perhaps a bit more can be surmised from the size and shape of the trace, but thinking about this other brings little beyond that. And yet the footprint haunts me. It invites dreaming. Its tension of absence and presence works a kind of magic, and as I walk along the shore, fantasies of this other emerge. This other who is here and not here, this other who has preceded me on this shore has become a companion whose epiphany is not reasonable and which no camera would record. The footprint as a presence that is an absence and an absence that is a presence is a matter of the imagination.

This metaphor of carbon footprints, no less than the actual footprints we have left behind on the moon, encodes a story. Indeed, the tale told in the two traces, the one below and the one above, might even intersect. As I showed over twenty years ago in *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, there is a connection between our flight into space and the despoiling of the earth. To the degree we have wired the planet for destruction, and now to the degree that we are encircling it with the noxious gases of our appetites for energy, our anxiety fuels an increasingly felt need to escape, to depart the earth. And to the degree that we engage the fantasy of departure we can loosen our attachment to earth as home. But as I showed in that book, the fantasy of departure is inescapably linked with the fantasy of dis-incarnation. To leave the earth we have to take leave of our senses.

These footprints—carbon and lunar—are then the traces of what I call the Spectator Mind—a solar mind, a consciousness that illuminates the world from afar and shines with a pitiless gaze, the gaze of the despotic eye, which, fixed and unmoving, does not blink; a mind that turns the world into a double of itself so that what it thinks about the world is what the world is; a mind, then, which, beyond the shadow

of a doubt, maps the world to fit its visions. Flooding the world with its own light, it takes leave of its senses, and, doing so, banishes its own shadows. A mind that casts no shadows becomes a creator god so far removed from the world which has been placed at the vanishing point, that it is unmoved by what it surveys from above; a mind, which, in splitting itself off from nature, becomes oblivious to what matters; a mind, which, in its increasing distance from the world, breaks its erotic bonds with nature; a mind, which, in its belief that the best way to know the world is to withdraw from it, freezes its feeling connection with nature. It is a mind whose despotic eye not only does not blink but also sheds no tears. As a creator god, the Spectator Mind is a split mind that severs light from darkness and an unnatural mind that generates its creations apart from the feminine. The carbon and lunar footprints are the traces of a dream of a mind unhinged from nature, of a consciousness without flesh, of nature as inanimate and soul as un-natural. The melting polar ice is the shadow of this tale, its unfinished business.

In “Atlanta Fugiens,” a 17th-century alchemical text written by Michael Maier, there is an illustration of an alchemist with thick glasses and only a little candle who is following the footprints of *mater natura* in the dark. We are not, however, like the alchemist of old following the trace of *mater natura* in the carbon footprint. Rather, we are following the trace of the Spectator Mind, which has made nature into a double of itself. We are following the footprints left by a dream whose origins have been forgotten, and which now is leading us to the melting ice.

IV. THE CARBON FOOTPRINT

The carbon footprint has become a ubiquitous metaphor for the perilous condition of our age. But I question whether the carbon footprint is functioning as a metaphor. In an article in the *International Herald Tribune*, Verlyn Klinkenborg says, “In some ways carbon footprint is not an especially good metaphor” because, as he adds, “The carbon in question—the carbon dioxide that contributes to global warming—is a gas and far too diffuse to resemble an actual footprint.”³ His point, however, goes beyond his claim that carbon footprint is not a good metaphor. In fact, his point is that carbon footprint is not functioning as a metaphor at all because we take the metaphor too literally, as if it were an actual footprint, as if it were a precise definition.

A metaphor is not, however, a precise definition; a metaphor is always an allusion to something that remains elusive. As such, a metaphor is the opening of a possibility. It is a perspective that offers a vision or a way of seeing and understanding things, and it tells us as much about the one who makes the metaphor as it does about what the metaphor addresses. A metaphor, the literary critic Howard Nemerov has said, is neither a thing nor a thought.⁴ Its vehicle is the image, and it is through the image that a metaphor opens a world. A metaphor invites a way of thinking about and being in the world that requires the creative play of imagination. As such, it stretches the boundaries of our two traditional ways of thinking in terms of either empirical facts or ideas of mind.

Carbon footprint is not an actual fact, like the footprint of my boot on the rug that attests to the fact that I was in the garden. Nor is it, as Klinkenborg suggests, a good idea. But we treat the carbon footprint as if it were like the footprint of my boot; and, taking its measure, we think and act as if we have gotten hold of something real, when in fact the metaphor has taken hold of us. Speaking to how fast this metaphor has taken hold of our consciousness, Klinkenborg says, “The swiftness of this change in consciousness—and the linguistic change that goes with it—is staggering,” and, he adds, “a little worrying.”⁵

What is worrisome here is the way in which a metaphor that is taken literally functions automatically as a statement of the way things truly and actually are. What is worrisome is that the metaphoric character of the trope is forgotten. Carbon footprint slips into the cultural unconscious where it functions as a projection. Klinkenborg addresses this issue. Even though carbon footprint is not an actual footprint, the phrase, he says, “sounds conscientious, and its automatic effect on behavior is somewhat magical.” “You feel,” he writes, “as though you’re reducing global warming by saying it.”⁶

This magical quality that adheres to a metaphor that has become unconscious gives to it a symptomatic character. Carbon footprint becomes a fixed way of thinking about climate change and the melting ice. The complexity of possibilities that a metaphor illuminates becomes narrowed and reduced to a single vision, and what does not fit into that single vision becomes excluded. A metaphor that has become a symptom identifies its vision with reality and thus requires massive denial of anything that would disturb that identification. A metaphor

that has become a symptom invites one to fall asleep. It offers an easy but illusory promise that we have taken hold of things. Hence, Klinkenborg can say that what makes him uneasy about the metaphor of carbon footprint is “simply knowing how quickly humans adopt new phrases and how readily we confuse them with the reality—or the unreality—of our actions.”⁷

The metaphor of carbon footprint is a problem because it has slipped into the collective unconscious. Noting how crucial it is “to grasp the idea that lies behind carbon footprints,” Klinkenborg says, “Think about it properly, and it leads you to a profound critique of who we are and how we behave.”⁸ To enter into this profound critique is to make this unconscious metaphor more conscious.

V. SOUL ON ICE

This ecological crisis is a psychological crisis; the melting ice is here with us, lives with us as a sense of anxiety, accompanies us as emotional states of dread and fear, and companions us as a pervasive quality of dis-ease that breaks through as an un-nameable irritation like a telephone call in the night that awakens us from sleep. As I showed in *Technology as Symptom and Dream* and in other works on the soul of culture,⁹ depth psychology does its work in the world as a cultural therapeutics. In this approach the symptom is regarded as a vocation to remember something that is too vital to forget but which has been forgotten because it is too painful to remember. The melting ice is a call to remember who and what is melting in the complex and archetypal dimensions of the soul, a call to awaken to and to remember what can no longer be ignored, dismissed, marginalized, or forgotten. Now at the beginning of the 21st century we cannot afford to make the same mistake that has haunted the origins of depth psychology, when the hysteric crossed the threshold of Freud’s consulting room. Her symptoms were the voice of soul awakening the collective Spectator Mind to its broken connection between the flesh of the body and the flesh of nature, as well as its splitting of the masculine/feminine tension in the psyche. Contrasting the images of the astronaut and the anorexic, I wrote:

...the anorexic...vividly calls our attention to the masculine character of our dreams of departure from the earth and escape from the body. We are all astronauts in this technological age,

but the astronautic body of technological functioning there on the launch-pad prepared and ready to depart the earth is a masculine figure. And the ...abandoned body, the body left behind...is the figure of the woman. What the shadow history of the abandoned body shows is that technology as a cultural-psychological dream of departing earth and remaking the body is not only a dream of escape from matter, but also a flight from the feminine.¹⁰

The hysteric’s symptoms were an appeal, but that appeal, that call to awaken, was imprisoned within the therapy room, placed within the mind of the sufferer herself, made into her problem, confined within the inside space of the psyche divorced from the outside space of the world. With the melting ice the ante has been raised. The *Anima Mundi*, the voice of the soul of the world speaking from the abyss between matter and mind, has become louder and more urgent.

The melting ice is a symptom that calls once again for us to bridge that divide between inside and outside. It is another chance, a danger that is also an opportunity. The melting ice is, in Al Gore’s term, an “inconvenient truth” because the soul and its symptomatic speech remains an inconvenient truth. We have had a hundred years of psychotherapy, as Hillman and Ventura point out, and the world has gotten worse.¹¹ We cannot imprison that truth within a version of the original mistake by turning the inside outside. We cannot imprison the melting ice within the confines of our technological ideas and treat it only as a problem that is out there.

VI. THE SPECTATOR MIND

In *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, I traced the origins of the Spectator Mind to the development of linear perspective vision in the 15th century. In that book I showed how in multiple areas of human life what began as a cultural-historical artistic invention for representing three-dimensional space on the two-dimensional plane of the canvas quickly became a cultural convention, a habit of mind, a way to map the world that nourished the birth of the modern scientific-technological worldview and rapidly fueled its expansion. At the time I wondered if assigning so much importance to an artistic technique invented over 500 years ago was too bold a claim, but numerous art and cultural historians lent support to its significance. The art historian Helen

Gardner, for example, wrote that linear perspective “made possible scale drawings, maps, charts, graphs, and diagrams—those means of exact representation without which modern science and technology would be impossible,” and cultural historian William Ivins noted, “Many reasons are assigned for the mechanization of life and industry during the nineteenth century, but the mathematical development of perspective was absolutely prerequisite to it.” It was, however, a remark by the art historian Samuel Edgerton that secured the point. He wrote, “space capsules built for zero gravity, astronomical equipment for demarcating so-called black holes, atom smashers which prove the existence of anti-matter—these are the end products of the discovered vanishing point.”¹² Riffing on Edgerton’s point, I showed how the vanishing point, which is the point at which all parallel lines converge, was prerequisite for taking leave of the earth. Although in the original text by the Florentine architect and painter Leon Battista Alberti, the vanishing point was called the center point, it also became known in his time as the *“punto di fuga,”* the point of flight. The vanishing point of linear perspective became a collective dream whose themes of distance, dis-incarnation, and departure were the codes by which the Spectator Mind was able to take leave of its senses and break the connection between incarnated mind and earth. The melting ice, so tellingly mapped from space, is a symptomatic expression of this dream.

The genesis of the Spectator Mind in linear perspective is traceable to Alberti’s image of the window as one of the two conditions for establishing the vanishing point. In his text he writes, “First of all, on the surface on which I am going to paint, I draw a rectangle of whatever size I want, which I regard as an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen.”¹³ If we read Alberti’s text as a collective dream, then, as compared with the Medieval world view, a radical shift in consciousness and a new dream is being born concerning the relation between person and world. A window establishes a boundary and even a separation between self and world, and it becomes a metaphor for a mathematical grid through which one maps and plots the world. In this dreamscape we are invited to imagine ourselves as essentially apart from rather than as a part of the world. Our connection with what lies on the other side of the world is now measured by the eye. The eye alone is singled out and privileged as the mode and means of a relation established not in sensuous proximity to things but in distance from them.

Figures 1 and 2 offer an image of this shift in consciousness. They show two different ways of dreaming about the relation of self and world. Both of them are depictions of Florence. Figure 1 dates from approximately 1350, while Figure 2, known today as *Map with a Chain*, dates from 1480. Together they straddle Alberti’s text of 1435-1436, and between them there is a world of difference.

Figure 1 presents a dream of the world in which the things of the world are encrusted into one’s flesh, a dream of the world in which the things of the world and the flesh of the body carry on a mutual erotic seduction. Merleau-Ponty addresses this chiasm between world and body when he says that painting’s interrogation of the world “looks toward this secret and feverish genesis of things in our body.” He adds, “There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen, what paints and what is painted.”¹⁴ On the far side of linear perspective there is a con-spiracy, a breathing together of body and world, the intimacy of breath in that moment of in-spiration when one takes the other into oneself, is impregnated by



Fig. 1: Panorama of Florence, detail from the Madonna della Misericordia fresco, anonymous, 14th century (Credit: Alinari/Art Resource, New York).



Fig. 2: The *Carta della Catena* (Map with a Chain), Lucantonio degli Uberti, c. 1480 (Credit: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resources, New York).

the other, and the surrender in that moment of expiration, when one gives back what has been transformed in the slight pause between these two moments, in that natural alchemy of the breath when one changes the world into paintings, or into a word, as Rilke notes in his *Duino Elegies*: “For the wanderer doesn’t bring from the mountain slope / a handful of earth to the valley, untellable earth, but only / some word he has won, a pure word, the yellow and blue gentian. / Are we perhaps here, just for saying: House, Bridge, Fountain, Gate, Jug, Olive tree, Window,— / possibly: Pillar, Tower?”¹⁵

On the far side of linear perspective, one is dreaming the world as an aesthetic, sensuous entanglement where the eyes that see are also the legs that walk about, the ears that hear the sounds, the nose that smells the odors, and the hands that touch the textures of the world. To be sure, Figure 1 is a confusing image because we have become accustomed to the dream of the world mapped by linear perspective, and yet we know that earlier way of being in the world. That landscape of the mid-14th century lingers, as Edgerton notes, in our muscles and bones. It is, for example, “the truth of the tourist arriving for the first time in a strange city with heavy baggage and an unfamiliar hotel address in hand.”¹⁶

On this side of linear perspective the dream of the world has changed. Notice in Figure 2 how the city is different. In *Map with a Chain*, we are offered a bird’s eye view of the city, a view of the city as seen from afar. In Edgerton’s terms it presents the city from a “fixed viewpoint, which is elevated and distant, completely out of plastic or sensory reach of the depicted city.”¹⁷ But who sees the world in this way? Who dreams the world in this fashion?

Notice the figure in the lower right-hand corner of the painting, the man on the hill above the city! He has what might be a sketchpad in hand. Is he drawing a map of the city? Of course, we cannot know for sure, but the image suggests as much, and indeed it suggests much more. From his high altitude perch above the city, he is

a man of distant vision, perhaps the first expression of the self we have become. . . . Seated there as he is above the city, he incarnates at its birth a new ideal of knowledge according to which the further we remove ourselves from the world the better we can know it.

He has climbed the hill; and, in doing so, he has had to turn his back on the city below. Turning back to the city, his vision is a disembodied one as he now fixes his gaze upon the city. He knows the city now not by moving about it but from his fixed position where “On the hill above the city only his eyes remain ‘in touch’ with the world observed below.” Commenting on that figure on the hill, I said, “But at that distance such eyes, unrelated, for example, to ears and hands, can no longer know the words of anger or of love uttered by those *living* in the city.”¹⁸ It is a way of being in the world that can be above and unmoved by what is experienced. We are the inheritors of that dream.

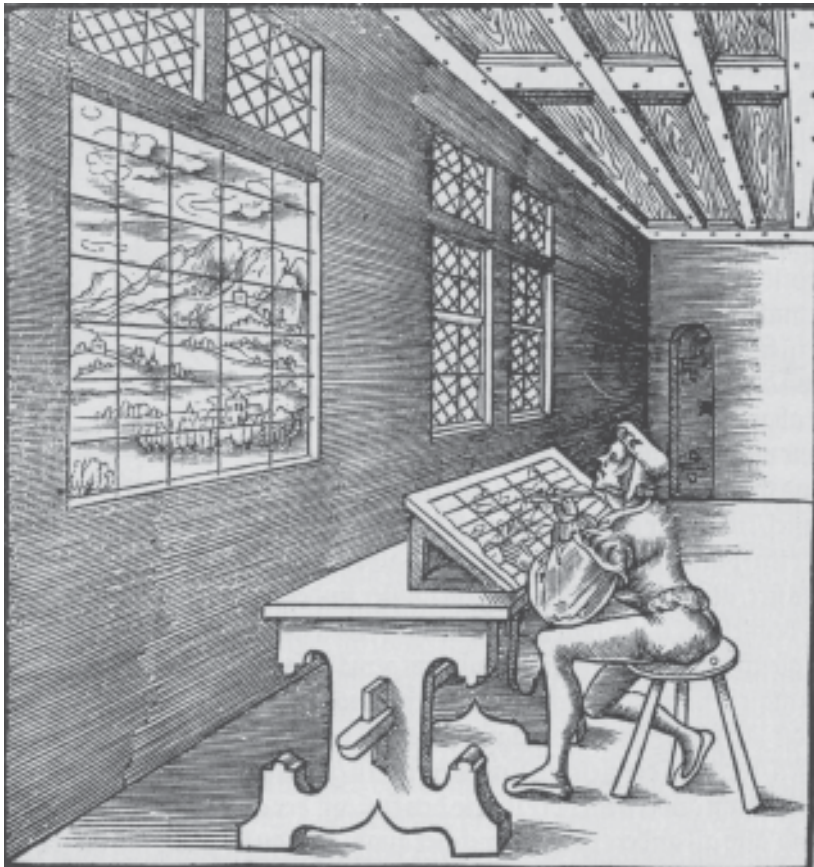


Fig. 3: Woodcut illustration from Hieronymus Rodler, *Eyn schön nützlich Büchlin und Underweysung der Kunst des Messens* (A Fine, Useful Booklet and Instruction in the Art of Measurement), Simmern, 1531. (Republished by Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, Graz, Austria, 1970.)

As I mentioned earlier, the open window with which Alberti began quickly became something else. It became a mathematical grid as depicted in Figure 3. Linear perspective, which began as an artistic invention for representing three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional plane, became a cultural convention, a habit of mind, a way of knowing the world and being in it that fragments the world into units and the bits and bytes of information that inform our world today. To dream the world in this fashion required a singularity of focus. Figure 4 illustrates this point.

It is a sketch by Albrecht Dürer made in 1525, which was intended by him to illustrate the technique of linear perspective drawing. It shows that the fixed vision of the man on the hill is a singular and immobile one, a Cyclopean vision. In Dürer's illustration the artist on this side of the grid, or the screen through which he views his model, has one eye locked in place. The artist's eye is not to move. William Ivins captures



Fig. 4: Woodcut illustration from Albrecht Dürer, *Underweysung der Messung* (Art of Measurement), Nuremberg, 1525 (Credit: Foto Marburg/Art Resource, New York).

this prescription when he notes, “A person can make a correct image of what he or she sees through a window ‘provided that while he does this he uses only one eye and does not move his head.’”¹⁹ In an essay entitled “The Despotism of the Eye,”²⁰ I described this singular, immobile eye of the Spectator Mind as an eye that not only does not move but also does not blink. It is the eye of the TV camera that records beauty and horror with the same indifference. This single-minded vision from afar, this fixed view from above that is unmoved by what it sees, is not the eye that will linger with things, not the eye that will wander and be distracted by the multitudinous possibilities of the world, not the eye that will drift into some reverie with things the better to imagine their still un-glimpsed depths and secrets. Have we not had a contemporary example of this despotism of the eye, this kind of fixed, singular, unblinking vision in the recent comment of the Vice Presidential candidate, Sarah Palin? When asked if she felt ready to assume the duties of the presidency, she said she did not blink. Her eye that does not blink is also the eye that has denied the role of human activity in the crisis of global warming and has denied that the melting polar ice is a threat to the habitat and well being of the polar bear. This eye that does not blink is the mind that knows no doubts.

We have learned the trick of commanding the world from afar. We have become masters of this fixed, singular gaze that maps the world into a grid and fragments it into its divisible parts, and in doing so we have become spectators of a world transformed as a spectacle that requires that we take leave of our senses, that we leave the body behind. In *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, I showed how this abandoned body became the foundation for modern anatomy in the work of Vesalius, whose textbook, *De Humani corporis fabrica libri septem*, was published in 1543, and how the anatomical body became linked as the specimen body with the Spectator Mind and the world as spectacle. I also traced the history of the shadows of this abandoned body from the 15th-century witch through the 19th-century hysteric, who crossed the threshold of Freud’s consulting rooms and undermined the epistemological foundations of a way of knowing the world that takes leave of its senses, to the anorexic. In symptomatic form the hysteric and her multiple feminine companions spoke an aesthetic of a broken desire, the aesthetic of a neglected, marginalized, and forgotten Eros. But depth psychology focused its gaze upon those symptoms and laid

the hysteric on the couch. The larger picture of the broken connection between body and world was not heard.

I am not arguing here that the pre-linear perspective world was a better world. On the contrary, my argument here is that while this way of dreaming the world as it moves toward the vanishing point has produced many benefits and has given us a great deal of power and control, it has exacted a price. In the face of the melting ice it is our task to know that price. The loss of wholeness in pursuit of mapping a perfectly ordered world that has resulted from this broken connection and the fragmentation that belongs to it is one price we have paid for this dream.

VII. THE MELTING ICE

The polar ice caps are the *Axis Mundi* of the world and the Polar Regions of the soul. When the early explorers of these regions at the top and bottom of the world went in search of its mysteries, charms, and terrors, they were also exploring the mysteries, charms, and depths of the soul. It is no accident, I believe, that Ernest Shackleton, one of the earliest and most famous of the explorers, said that his draw to the ice began with a dream:

But strangely enough, the circumstances which actually determined me to become an explorer was a dream I had when I was twenty-two. We were beating out of New York from Gibraltar, and I dreamt I was standing on the bridge in mid-Atlantic and looking northward. It was a simple dream. I seemed to vow to myself that some day I would go to the region of ice and snow and go on and on till I came to one of the poles of the earth, the end of the axis upon which this great round ball turns.²¹

Nor is it an accident that Helen Thayer, the first woman to reach the Arctic Circle on her own, entitled her book, *Polar Dream*,²² or that my explorations of the Spectator Mind for *Technology as Symptom and Dream* was preceded by dreams of the polar ice. The *Axis Mundi* is a vocation. The journey to the lands of ice and snow are journeys to the heights and depths of soul.

In the Introduction to his remarkable book, *The Spiritual History of Ice*, Eric Wilson says, “If a collective or cultural unconscious exists, then it was at work at the dawn of the third millennium.” He is referring

to the multiple scenarios of apocalypse, like the feared computer crashes that some predicted, would take place as the second millennium ended. A bit further on he focuses on the polar ice caps within this context and asks, “What secret link exists between ice and apocalypse? What ghostly bergs cruise in the millennial undertow?”²³

I am taking the approach not only that a collective unconscious exists, but also that its exploration is vital to our understanding of this event—is it perhaps apocalyptic?—of the melting ice and of ourselves. We are the melting ice, and perhaps the melting ice is our last best chance to awaken to the depths of soul and to the long, collective dream of the Spectator Mind. At the poles of the world an alchemy is taking place, dissolving the dichotomy between the inner domain of psyche and the outer domain of the world. At the *Axis Mundi* we are being made aware not only that psyche and nature are an *unus mundus*, but also that the melting ice is the ecological shadow, the darker, symptomatic side of the dream of the Spectator Mind.

In this section I want to explore these Polar Regions of the world and soul through four literary images that are personifications of the Spectator Mind. Who dwells there? In the frozen, silent landscapes of the polar north Victor Frankenstein encountered the harsh truth of his creation, the creature that he made and abandoned, the being whose creation transformed “nature into a double of his egocentric desire.”²⁴ And what does the Ancient Mariner, who stops the Wedding Guest to tell his strange tale of the southern ice, have to say to us? Face to face with the melting ice, whom might we encounter? “Mont Blanc,” a poem by Percy Shelley, and *Manfred*, a dramatic poem by Lord Byron, precede the discussion of Mary Shelley’s novel, *Frankenstein: Or, The Modern Prometheus*, and Coleridge’s poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

In 1816 Percy Shelley, alongside his wife Mary, stood beneath the towering glacial peaks of Mont Blanc, the scene of his poem of the same name. Awed by the cloud-shrouded majesty of the high summit, the poet—Shelley and the figure of the poet in the poem—struggles with the issue of the relation between mind and nature. On one side of this tension is the affirmation of the power of mind to organize the brute presence of the glacial forces, to interpret their meaning, indeed to give them existence. At one point in the poem Shelley’s poet says, “And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,/ If to the human mind’s imaginings/Silence and solitude were vacancy?”²⁵ In these lines Mont

Blanc, as well as the full wide expanse of nature from earth to the heavens, is addressed as “thou,” signaling a kinship of sorts between mind and nature, a relation between them. Commenting on these lines, Eric Wilson argues that they situate the human mind as a part of nature. He says, “If the human mind did not interpret—did not make meaningful and moral—the powers of nature, then these energies would remain insignificant—vacant and barren.”²⁶

But Shelley’s poet remains unsure of his conviction, or we should say his hope about the powers of mind to form nature into meaning. The poet in the poem recognizes that “The wilderness has a mysterious tongue/ Which teaches awful doubt...”²⁷ In the grip of this doubt Shelley’s poet is on the other side of this tension between mind and nature, and on this side he falls into despair. No longer is the sea of ice a “Thou.” “Aloof and inaccessible, the icy gulphs strike him as entirely “other.” Now these frozen peaks are, as Wilson notes, “threats not only to his identity but also to all human systems of meaning.” In the face of this threat, a kind of spirit of revenge appears. “Shelley’s poet,” Wilson says, “is on the verge of demonizing the icy peaks.”²⁸

The Spectator Mind was initially born in this spirit of revenge against despair, born as that dream of mind, which, in taking leave of its senses, breaks its bonds with and takes flight from nature. In this sense Shelley’s poem is a diagnosis of and therapeutic commentary on that dream. Shelley’s poem expresses the darker side of that dream, its forgotten origins: what mind cannot subdue and take the measure of, what it cannot control, it fears and must negate. It is worth citing here the following passage of Wilson, which underscores this tension between mind and nature that Shelley at Mont Blanc and his poet in the poem “Mont Blanc” experience:

Going to one extreme of self-admiration, the poet severs his mind from the nourishing flows of things and thus undergoes disorientation and despair; pushing to the other extreme by focusing on natural processes devoid of human significance, he feels diminished as a creative agent, afraid of an environment over which he has no control.²⁹

Shelley’s poem does not resolve this tension. His poet does not exile doubt as a way of silencing anxiety or fear. On the contrary, his poem and the poet in his poem hold this tension of opposites of mind and nature without recourse to splitting it in favor of either the joy of mind

to subdue nature or the defeat of mind in the face of nature's icy remoteness. Throughout the poem Shelley's poet "undulates between elation and despair...arrogance and humility."³⁰ This undulating style is what Wilson calls a negative gnosis, which I have described over the years, most recently in *The Wounded Researcher*, as a metaphoric sensibility.³¹ Wilson's description of Shelley's negative gnosis is an apt one for a metaphoric sensibility. Negative gnosis, he writes, is "a sublime yet skeptical sense that no empirical form or psychic intuition reveals the deep cause of existence."³² Within a Jungian framework I would speak less about the deep cause and more about the deep ground of existence, the deep unconscious of the *unus mundus* world of soul where psyche and matter are one. But this difference aside, I would say that a metaphoric sensibility is the attitude required if one's consciousness is to be responsive to how meaning, undulating between empirical matters of fact and ideas of mind, arises from the unconscious. Susan Rowland makes this point with respect to the style of Jung's writing. She says, "Anything derived merely from rationality risks being profoundly inauthentic unless it also bears witness to the destabilizing influence of the unconscious."³³ The negative gnosis of a metaphoric sensibility is responsive to this de-stabilizing influence of the unconscious. It is a linguistic alchemy, which always dissolves the certitude of "is" in the possibilities of the "is not" and thus holds the tension between the dogmatic arrogance of the fixed mind and the cynical despair of the postmodern mind.

Shelley's poet is both a diagnosis of and therapeutic commentary on the Spectator Mind, which as supremely rational is neither sublime nor skeptical. But his poem, I would argue, is also prophetic, or perhaps I should say, archetypal. Indeed, Shelley's poem is prophetic because it is archetypal. It reaches into the archetypal core of this tension between mind and nature, which, as von Franz has pointed out, is the issue at the heart of alchemy. "The psyche/matter problem," she writes, "has not yet been solved, which is why the basic riddle of alchemy is still not solved."³⁴

Prophetic and archetypal, Shelley's poem anticipates the consequences when the Spectator Mind dissolves the tension between mind/psyche and nature/matter into an opposition and aligns itself on the side of mind split off from nature. Prophetic and archetypal, it anticipates the melting ice as the ecological unconscious of the Spectator

Mind. We will find this same prophetic/archetypal vision in Lord Byron's dramatic poem *Manfred*, Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, and Coleridge's poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

To hold this tension between mind and nature is a difficult and constant effort, and its achievement is never complete. Wilson, I believe, addresses this challenge when he says, "Shelley experiences one primary sensation throughout his glacial vision: vertigo, the simultaneous fear and love of falling through empty space or unlocked time."³⁵ This description captures the two poles of the Spectator Mind's flight from nature at that vanishing point where its despotic vision is turned toward an infinite horizon, a gaze no longer tethered to nature or body. On one hand, there is the narcissistic desire to take hold of that frozen sea of whiteness, to take its measure through that distant vision that knows no bounds. On the other hand, there is that fear of losing one's hold, of falling back into the matrix of that all-embracing *mater natura*, which characterized the pre-linear perspective of the medieval world. The dizziness of Shelley's poet recapitulates this spiritual history of the Polar Regions, which Eric Wilson records so well in his book. The landscapes of the polar ice are and have been both a temptation and a terror. The history of polar exploration, which is at the same time a history of the psyche's relation to these regions, to the *Axis Mundi* of the World-Soul, "is a narrative of the relationships that emerge when the human mind contends with an abyss beyond mental mapping." The Polar Regions are "menacing because they invite and mock man's fantasies of complete order..."³⁶

This narrative of temptation and terror, of desire and fear, of invitation and mockery in relation to the Polar Regions, reads like the narrative of the ego in relation to the Self in Jung's psychology. The two narratives mirror each other, especially when the encounter between ego and Self follows the path opened up by Jungian analyst Stanton Marlan in his insightful and powerful book, *The Black Sun: The Alchemy and Art of Darkness*.³⁷ In that book Marlan re-imagines this encounter through a thorough critique of the emphasis on light not only in Jungian psychology, but also in Western culture. The black sun is a dark light, which is a theme I will consider in the closing section of this paper. It is the *lumen naturae*, the light of nature that overshadows the light of mind, a blackness blacker than black, which, however, shines with its own luminosity. Situated within this image of the black sun,

both narratives, the one an account of mind's encounter with the frozen whiteness of the ice of the world, and the other an account of soul's encounter with the darkness of the icy landscapes of soul, converge toward the same themes of invitation and terror. In the image of the back sun we have a symbol of the darkest regions of the Spectator Mind, now mirrored in the event of the melting ice: the dissolution of a world view, of the fixed beliefs of power, control, and dominant mastery over the forces of the natural world, and the collapse of that distant vision, which, in taking the measure of nature, has taken flight from it. There is terror here, the terror of the Spectator Mind that it will be drowned in the rising waters of the melting ice, the terror that its vision of light without darkness will be engulfed by these rising waters, extinguished by a melting created by its own terrible gaze when, looking at the world from afar, it pushed the world toward oblivion at the vanishing point.

But the black sun is, as Marlan notes, a paradox, because its blackness "also shines with a dark luminescence that opens the way to some of the most numinous aspects of psychic life."³⁸ As paradox, the black sun is not only the possibility of the terror of oblivion, it is also the hope of redemption, and it is that second possibility, held within the first, that gives the black sun in the melting ice its erotic gravity. Its image in the individual psyche, as Marlan so eloquently describes through clinical material as well as through examples from history, literature, and art, and its image in the collective psyche is the temptation to let go, to surrender to the nothing that is everything, to fall into that abyss where soul, waiting as a piece of unfinished business, weighs upon the dream of the Spectator Mind.

Marlan's numerous examples remind us, however, of the danger of this passage from the terror of oblivion to the hope of redemption. The passage requires that the darkness of the black sun not be split off from our images of light, and he reminds us of how Jung saw this split in the figure of Christ. For Jung, Christ represents "the totality of a divine or heavenly kind, a glorified man...unspotted by sin." It is vision that is dangerously one-sided, a vision that is unbalanced and substitutes perfection for wholeness. Quoting Jung, Marlan adds, "As the Gnostics said, [he] has put aside his shadow, and thus leads a separate existence which manifests itself in the coming of the antichrist."³⁹

The Spectator Mind is a variation of this Christian motif. As I showed in *Technology as Symptom and Dream* in the chapter entitled "The

Abandoned Body and its Shadows," in its flight from nature the Spectator Mind identifies matter with what is dark, corrupt, unruly, and feminine and takes leave of all that in Mind that is light, pure, organized, and masculine. In this variation, the melting ice is the technological version of this split-off darkness; it is the face that the Anti-Christ takes in the technological world, the monster, the creature that Victor Frankenstein created in his flight from the sting and stink of death that haunts the flesh. We will meet Victor and his creature later, where they encounter each other for the last time in the frozen northern ice, but for now I want to underscore the presence of this Christian motif in the technological dream of the Spectator Mind.

Both the Christian narrative and the technological narrative are a kind of imperialism, a forced colonization of the natural world by the light of a mind that knows no darkness. Eric Wilson makes this point when he says, "the spiritual imperialism of the Middle Ages—the Christianization of all space—becomes in the early Modern period a material imperialism—a desire to own and exploit 'unclaimed' lands."⁴⁰ In this confluence of a Christian spirituality that splits itself from matter and a technological materialism that takes leave of the flesh, the resurrection takes place at the vanishing point, at that place where the Spectator Mind transcends the body, where it rises above the world, where in a kind of folly it takes leave of its senses. This fantasy of transcendence leaves behind it the melting ice, which is an aspect of the abandoned body of the earth, and forges a dream of an ideal spirituality that in "striving for the heights is sure to clash with the materialistic earth-bound passion of the modern world."⁴¹

Lord Byron's *Manfred*, which was written in that same magical year of 1816 and only a few months after the famed ghost story sessions that led to Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein; Or the Modern Prometheus*, tells the tale of a magus torn between the dualism of spirit and flesh. Like the Spectator Mind, he was distant from the community of men, and from afar he looked upon the world through the cold, detached, unmoved despotic eye: "though I wore the form, / I had no sympathy with breathing flesh."⁴²

Manfred is hounded by guilt, and he seeks the icy peaks in an effort to forget his crime, the death of Astarte, a blood relative whom he loved and with whom he committed the horrible crime left unspoken, but probably incest. In Phoenician mythology Astarte is the goddess of the

moon, and in the Greek world she became Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty, sexual fertility, and love. Manfred's crime, therefore, is a violation of the feminine principle in creation, a crime against lunar consciousness whose dark light is the counterpart to solar consciousness, the bright light of the sun, which for the Spectator Mind is the light of reason that knows no shadows, no darkness. His crime is also one against beauty, whose appeals are the foundation for an aesthetic connection to the world, and as well a violation against the bonds of love, those bonds that deeply connect us to each other and weave us into a history. Haunted by guilt, Manfred seeks the icy peaks and frozen waters where he might cool and still the torrent of his passions and there leave behind the limitations of a guilty conscience, the fate of ordinary men.

Manfred makes four attempts to escape his crime, but each effort fails. In the first instance, he "conjures the 'Spirits of Earth and Air'...to convince them to release him from his destiny: perpetual suffering over the tragedy of Astarte." It is forgetfulness that he seeks, which these spirits are unable to grant. In the second instance, Manfred "commands the ice to crush him." When his magic fails to quicken the glaciers' flow, "he decides to leap from the peaks."⁴³ But at the moment when he leaps, he is restrained by a hunter. Manfred cannot escape his fate either through the willfulness of mind that would rise above matter nor by a suicidal fall into matter in his desire for oblivion. In the third attempt, the Witch of the Alps offers to help, even though she is unable either to return Astarte from death or kill him. But she imposes one condition, which the proud Manfred cannot accept. The arrogant magus to the end, he refuses her demand to obey her will. In the fourth attempt, he calls upon the ruler of earthly fate, Arimanes, who conjures up the specter of Astarte. This image of Astarte, however, does not tell Manfred if he is condemned or pardoned for his crime. He learns only that his earthly suffering will end. Ensnared in his tower, Manfred dies the next day, and while Astarte's presence offers to him a brief vision of eternal beauty that soothes him, he remains at his death the stubborn magus he has been. Not even the spirits that come at the hour of his death to take him to hell can break his will. His death will be his own, and so he asserts that he dies "through the agency of his own will."⁴⁴

From an archetypal viewpoint, Victor Frankenstein is kin to Manfred. They share the same patterns regarding death, guilt, and the role of the

feminine in creation, and each in his own fashion is an exemplar of the Spectator Mind. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is structured as a tale within a tale, as an account of the creation of the creature told by Victor Frankenstein to Robert Walton, the captain of a ship that has become ice-bound in the far regions of the Arctic Circle. Victor has been in pursuit of his creation for the purpose of destroying it, but having become ill, he is spotted by Walton and invited to board his ship.

According to Mary Shelley, the novel originated in a vivid waking dream, and in writing the story her dream is translated as the dream of Victor Frankenstein to banish death from life. The creature that Victor creates emerges from the unconscious, and through that creature we are given an image of the shadow of the Spectator Mind. As Victor tells his tale to Walton, it becomes crystal clear that it is the horror of death, the loathsome specter of corruption that lies nestled within human flesh, which drives his dream and his single-minded and obsessive pursuit to create a creature beyond the reach of death. While he initially hesitates if he should attempt to make a being like himself, he does not ever doubt that he can. Here is the willfulness and fixed certitude of the Spectator Mind whose arrogance allows no doubt, and in this, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is closer in spirit to Byron's *Manfred* than to the poet in Percy Shelley's "Mont Blanc." Victor and Manfred do not possess that capacity for negative gnosis described above, that ability to undulate between the power of mind to convert nature into a double of itself and the unrelenting quality of fate and necessity that marks our condition as incarnated mind. Manfred and Victor are certain of their ability to dominate and transcend the forces of the natural world, to bend them to their will, including the fate of death. Manfred asserts that he dies from his own free will, and Victor will erase death from the equation of life. And so it is no surprise that Victor says to Walton, "Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world."⁴⁵ The polarity of light and dark is to be sundered by a flood of light that will eclipse darkness. The melting polar ice is this banished darkness that threatens to flood the soul of the Spectator Mind and the coastal cities of the world, the flood of rising waters that threatens to re-draw the earth that the Spectator Mind began to map so long ago.

Victor's motive for his work rests within that spirit of revenge discussed earlier in relation to Shelley's poet. The Spectator Mind, I

said, was born in the spirit of revenge against despair, born as that dream of mind, which, in taking leave of its senses, breaks its bonds with and takes flight from nature, and which in this flight anoints itself as superior to nature. For Victor, the despair is rooted specifically in the flesh as "*memento mori*," and in this context Victor raises the mind that is superior to nature to the status of a creator god. "A new species," he says to Walton, "would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me." Here the Spectator Mind has become the Christian father god in the sky, the paternal god who is all light and goodness, and Victor assures Walton that he is owed the same obedience and admiration. "No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs."⁴⁶

In the novel Mary Shelley presents this dimension of Victor's inflated image of himself as a creator god through the creature, Victor's double, that he continuously attempts to banish. The creature educates himself by reading Milton's *Paradise Lost*. But, as Joyce Carol Oates says in her commentary on the novel, the creature "reads Milton's great epic as if it were a 'true history' giving the picture of an omnipotent God warring with His creatures." His education is that of the soul, and it reflects the deeper wisdom of the shadow, the wisdom of the cast-off parts of the Spectator Mind. Indeed, throughout the novel the creature is "far wiser and more magnanimous than his creator."⁴⁷

In this regard, the relation between the creature and Victor is very much like the relation between Job and Yahweh as depicted by Jung.⁴⁸ Like Job, the creature is the one who calls the creator god into consciousness. He does so through his suffering. His suffering is the vehicle that awakens soul. The creature is the symptomatic voice of the unconscious of the Spectator Mind, calling it to remember what it would forget and deny. That the creature has no name is telling. What is unconscious, what lies in exile, has no name until it is made conscious. In telling his story to Walton, the creature speaks through Victor, and, as Oates asserts, this story "is a parable for our time, an enduring prophecy, a remarkably acute diagnosis of the lethal nature of *denial*; denial of responsibility for one's actions, denial of the shadow-self locked within consciousness,"⁴⁹ to which I would add "and frozen in the ice."

Victor's dream of banishing death ends in a nightmare of multiple deaths. Indeed, the death that Victor would banish from life haunts

the novel and fills him with the same unrelenting guilt that haunted Byron's *Manfred*. The creature whom Victor has abandoned first murders William, Victor's younger brother. A peasant girl, Justine Moritz, is falsely accused of the murder and is executed for it. Henry Clerval, Victor's boyhood friend, is also murdered by the creature as is Victor's bride, Elizabeth Lavenza. His father too dies as a result of the shock and grief of these deaths. Finally, Victor himself dies after he has told his tale to Walton. He dies in the frozen Arctic regions, and after his creation has wept over the body of his creator, has felt the deep sting of his solitude, loneliness, and abandonment, he too departs for the farthest regions of the northern ice to die.

But does the creature die? The novel is ambiguous on this point. That he intends to die is clear, since he says he will seek the most northern reaches of the globe and there he will set himself on fire and "consume to ashes this miserable frame, that its remains may afford no light to any curious and unhallowed wretch, who would create such another as I have been."⁵⁰ The novel ends, however, not with this definitive act. We know only that in the penultimate line the creature leaps from the ship as he speaks of his intention. In the final line, Mary Shelley gives us the last view of Victor's dream through the eyes of Walton: "He was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance."⁵¹

We should not miss the ironic twists in the story here. Victor would have flooded the darkness of the world with light, and now his creature will immolate himself to extinguish the light. In addition, Victor's dream, which as exemplar of the dream of the Spectator Mind would have banished that darkness through the distant vision of the despotic eye, now ends in darkness and distance. In these ironic twists, we reach the archetypal depths of the story. The unconscious never dies. It knows neither time nor death. And so this symptomatic personification of the Spectator Mind still lingers there in the frozen Polar Regions, at the farthest boundaries of the world, at the extreme edges of consciousness. The fire of self-immolation is still burning, and it is this fire in the unconscious of the Spectator Mind that is haunting us now in the form of the melting ice, in particular, and the global crisis of climate change, in general. The creature still burns there in the most remote places of the planet, and here in our gardens and within the collective psyche.

Victor Frankenstein and all that he has abandoned lies buried in the frozen ice; and, as the carriers of the Spectator Mind and all that within ourselves that has been abandoned, we lie there with him and beside the creature who did weep at his creator's death. The melting ice is also those tears, feelings locked up and buried deep within that icy cold. Those tears are the tears never shed by the despotic eye.

There is one other aspect of the Frankenstein story that has to be considered. It is the absence of the feminine in the creature's "birth."

Victor's creature is not born of woman. He is a motherless creature, an unnatural being spawned from the mind of man and man alone. Oates says, "he is...a parody of the Word or the Idea made flesh."⁵² This parody of the act of creation, which disowns the feminine, is amplified when Victor demolishes the mate that his creature had begged him to produce in order to assuage his loneliness. At first Victor agrees, but, horrified at what he is doing and fearful that together they will produce a race of hideous offspring, he destroys the second creature and dumps the remains into a deep lake. Victor, as exemplar of the Spectator Mind, repeats his initial banishment of the feminine in this act. Dumped into the deep waters of the lake, the feminine is exiled to the unconscious.

The creature of this unnatural genesis is in his form the disowned and disfigured image of the split between the masculine and feminine in creation. In his form he is, I would suggest, an image that anticipates Jung's *Answer to Job* and which personifies what happens when Yahweh forgets Sophia, when the feminine principle is exiled from the work of creation. Moreover, this splitting of the masculine and feminine amplifies the split between light and darkness that animates Victor's dream to flood the darkness of the world with light. The darkness of the world is the darkness of matter, and the darkness of matter is identified with the feminine, while light becomes the symbol of the masculine mind. Victor's creature arises from the abyss formed from the fissure of these splits between matter and mind, darkness and light, the feminine and the masculine, and indeed he continues to rise from the cracks in the polar ice, its fearful noise the howl of that thing we have made and abandoned, which disturbs the sleep of the Spectator Mind even as it continues its dream.

At the other end of the *Axis Mundi*, in the frozen landscapes of the Antarctic Seas, Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* adds to our

psychological understanding of the melting polar ice. It begins as a tale told by the Ancient Mariner to the Wedding Guest, whom the Ancient Mariner stops on his way to that ceremony. In this respect, Coleridge's poem takes the same form as Mary Shelley's novel. The Ancient Mariner, like Victor Frankenstein, addresses his story to a witness; and, as we read both tales, it is we who are being asked to listen. But the Wedding Guest, unlike the sea captain Walton to whom Victor tells his story, carries a specific archetypal charge. He is on his way to a marriage ceremony, a joining of the masculine and the feminine which the Spectator Mind has sundered, and it is that journey—and our journey—that is interrupted by the Ancient Mariner. The interruption suggests that the marriage of the masculine and the feminine cannot take place unconsciously. The Wedding Guest has to pause. The tale of the Ancient Mariner has to be heard. The wedding ceremony, the joining of Queen and King, has to re-member what has been broken.

The Jungian analyst Thomas Elsner has written a most incisive archetypal amplification of Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and it is his extraordinary work that guides my reflections in this essay. In the early part of his work, he situates Coleridge's poem within the same context of the split that has taken place between mind and nature, and which I have elaborated here in terms of the Spectator Mind, and he emphasizes how this split is a crisis of soul and world. Elsner writes, for example, "The Western psyche is split today, perhaps more than it has ever been, so much so that we are in an extreme environmental and psychological crisis." In addition, he shows how the split Western psyche is a variation of the split in the Christian psyche between Christ and Serpent. The Spectator Mind of Western technological consciousness is a creator god, which, like the Christian god, is a god of goodness and light split off from its own darkness. In this respect Elsner's work offers strong support of the view expressed in this essay that beneath the frozen ice lie the dark aspects of the Christian god, which have been exiled by the creator god of the Spectator Mind. The wedding guest on the way to the wedding is, therefore, also on the way to the resurrection of the sacred. Elsner writes,

Much of Coleridge's terrible suffering, including his opium addiction and his horrendous nightmares, can be explained by the burden of carrying a *deus absconditus*, an unknown god, a

burden which was too much for him, carried at a time which was too early.⁵³

In this respect, Coleridge's poem, like Shelley's novel, is a prophetic diagnosis of the extreme religious and environmental crises of our age, and an early warning of the consequences of their union, when a sense of the sacred, twisted into religious fundamentalism, is married to the technological willfulness of the Spectator Mind.

The Ancient Mariner is a personification of the Spectator Mind, and like Mary Shelley's novel, the poem by Coleridge begins in a dream. While the dream was not one dreamed by Coleridge but by his neighbor, Mr. Cruickshank, its image of a ghost ship that sailed toward the dreamer from out of the setting sun had a profound impact on Coleridge. Elsner says, "this eerie product of the unconscious got under the poet's skin...and became the inspiration for a poem." Indeed, Elsner says, the Rime "was the poem [Coleridge] was born to write."⁵⁴ That Coleridge's poem began with a dream, that Mary Shelley's novel and Ernest Shackleton's voyages to the poles began with a dream, and that Helen Thayer's account of her solo voyage to the magnetic north pole was called *Polar Dream*, suggest that not only have we been dreaming the ice, but also that the ice has been dreaming itself through us. The landscapes of frozen ice are places in the geographies of the world and the soul, and to explore them "outwardly" in journeys to those far places at the top and bottom of the world is also to explore them "inwardly" in journeys to the heights and depths of soul.

The Ancient Mariner, like Shelley's poet on Mont Blanc, Byron's Manfred, and Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein, sins against nature. His specific crime is shooting the albatross, and this act, according to Elsner, is "...the basic problem of the modern West." It is the basic problem because the Mariner's arrow is aimed at a bird that is just an object. For Coleridge, "Objects perceived as objects are soon rendered fixed and dead," and this vision is for him "Satanic" and heralds the "fall of man."⁵⁵

The device that the Mariner uses to launch his arrow is the crossbow, which symbolizes a technological version of the cross. In this convergence we have again that enfolding of the Christian story with that of technology. Both tales, as we have seen, depict a kind of imperialism of mind against the natural world, one spiritual and the other materialistic. Both symbolize attitudes of separation and division.

Elsner writes, "The symbolism of the cross is a division into opposites which symbolizes separation from nature," and he quotes Jung to the same effect when, with respect to crosses, Jung asks, "Do they not mean a sacrifice of the natural?" Christ, nailed to a tree, triumphs over death with his resurrection. Spirit overcomes matter. The Spectator Mind becomes a creator god.

When the Mariner launches his arrow from the crossbow, he is in effect the personification of a mind not only distant but also divorced from nature. Of course, the arrow is an old instrument, and the ability to distance oneself from nature is, as Erwin Strauss has shown in his classic phenomenological essay, "The Upright Posture,"⁵⁶ as old as the ability to stand upright as a subject over against the world as object and say "I." My point, therefore, has not been that only with the development of linear perspective has this ability arisen. On the contrary, my point has been that with that development we have transformed a possibility into a metaphysics, a condition into a method, a way of being into a way of knowing that has transformed distance into separation and has made the world into a double of that "I." In this context, when the Mariner shoots his arrow, he is a personification of the man on the hill depicted in Figure 2. In addition, he is a prophetic image of the increasing distance that the Spectator Mind has placed between itself and the world. The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima is psychologically the same instrument as the arrow. Both kill at a distance, which diminishes and even eclipses one's feeling connection to the action. Elsner's description of the Mariner's arrow is an apt portrayal of the despotic eye of the Spectator Mind:

The Mariner's arrow is the embodiment of Logos, the driving force of power, control, the intellect and will which separates us from nature and breaks our primal bond with the roots of being...It embodies all the virtues of modern progress, the intellect, the sharp, penetrating, clear cutting, and rational willpower. It is the intellectual and egocentric will to power, the impulse to dominate, control, and understand nature.⁵⁷

As the embodiment of Logos, this arrow that flies toward its target is "the modern experience of the devil—a cold, intelligent, efficient rationalism at the root of which is a frozen or retarded feeling function."⁵⁸ This frozen feeling function is a primary characteristic of the despotic eye, the eye that is unmoved by what it sees, the eye that

fixed in its place never takes its eye off the goal, the eye that never blinks and never sheds a tear. In this respect, the fixed and penetrating gaze of the despotic eye is itself an arrow. "An arrow humming through the air is an image of intent, of aiming deliberately towards a goal, and of the power to hit the target, and achieve one's objective."⁵⁹

In achieving its objective, in slaying the albatross, the Mariner commits the "unpardonable sin...a real sin against the Holy Spirit."⁶⁰ As a crime against the Holy Spirit, the murder of the albatross amounts to the destruction of the spirit of nature. The same tension between mind and nature that we saw in Shelley's poet, Byron's Manfred, and Victor's hubris is played out in this violent act. Speaking of the Mariner, Elsner says, "We have ceased to recognize the divinity of nature—and the world is in an ecological crisis."⁶¹ But what he says of the Mariner can be said of the other three personifications of the Spectator Mind we have considered. "We have all of us in the modern West become a crew of trigger-happy Mariners in relation to the spirit in nature." We have all us become trigger-happy cowboys ready to fix our gaze, not blink, and take aim at what is other to ourselves. And as Mariner or cowboy, as the poet dizzy at the abyss or the one ensconced in his tower, or as the creator god in pursuit of his creature in order to destroy him, "we are peculiarly and dangerously oblivious of what we are doing, and of its consequences."⁶² The melting ice protests against this vision and its state of denial.

The albatross is the primary symbol of the poem, and Elsner provides an extensive amplification of its potential meanings without reducing the symbol to any fixed category. For the purposes of this essay, it is important to note that as a symbol the albatross is an expression of the transcendent function, which means that it bridges the gap between consciousness and the unconscious. In killing the bird, then, the Mariner destroys the bridge between conscious and unconscious, the bridge between mind and nature. He kills, as Elsner notes, the symbolic attitude. The consequence of such an action is that the wisdom of the unconscious is replaced by the power of the will. This shift is portrayed in the most explicit way. The Mariner looses his arrow, it hits its mark, the albatross dies, and the Mariner says, "I shot the Albatross." As Elsner points out, this is the first time the word "I" appears in the poem. He says, "before the Mariner fires his crossbow, there is only an anonymous 'crew,' a 'we' or 'us' or 'mariners,' who all think and act alike."⁶³ The

Mariner's crime, then, is, on one side, an act of dis-crimination. Through the crime, he differentiates himself from the collective. The "I" of the Mariner is born in the region of the polar ice. On the other side, however, there is the temptation to forget that the "I" who shoots the albatross is a part of nature and not apart from it.

The Mariner fares no better than the other three personifications of the Spectator Mind we have considered. Elsner says this of the Mariner's action:

In shooting down the bird, the Mariner has killed the unconscious wisdom and Eros by which he might get back home and he has broken his bond with nature. By asserting his power and will over against the living symbol, he has unwittingly started the process of his own destruction.⁶⁴

To solve the problem of the melting ice, the attitudes of the Spectator Mind will have to be dissolved. The melting ice is the way home.

But the Mariner does not find his way home. After he has shot the albatross, the sun rises and blows the fog and mist away. For a time all seems well, but soon the sun, that principle of illumination and consciousness, becomes oppressive. It is the sun at high noon, the time of its maximum brilliance that banishes all shadow from the world, and under its pitiless glare the waters grow still and all movement ceases:

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship,
Upon a painted ocean.⁶⁵

Prophecy is at work in these poetic images. Meditating on these events, Elsner asks, "Looking forward in time, is this not our contemporary predicament?"⁶⁶ It is. The despotic eye of the Spectator Mind is consciousness at its brightest illumination. It is a consciousness whose knowledge is beyond the shadow of a doubt a consciousness that casts no shadows and scrubs the world of its shadows, that kind of vision that Victor Frankenstein embraced when he said he would flood the world with light. In this completely enlightened world the Mariner's ship shrinks to a two-dimensional existence. A painted ship upon a painted ocean, it offers the illusion of depth, just as linear perspective vision, which, in inaugurating the illusion of depth on a two-dimensional plane,

reduced the vertical dimensions of the world to a horizontal domain stretching toward an infinite horizon. That glaring noonday sun, brought into being by the Mariner's eye that loosed the arrow from its bow, still shines upon our world, melting the ice. "Our collective sun has got stuck overhead and is never going down anymore. Contemporary Western culture is stuck in an exclusively conscious world."⁶⁷

I can touch upon only one more element in the poem. It is the moment when the Mariner sees the water snakes. Elsner says, "This vision of the water snakes and the flash of golden fire is the redemptive moment in the poem..."⁶⁸ The Mariner sees the water snakes in the shadow of the ship and in a dark light that shines from the moon. Filled with love for these creatures that earlier he had cursed, he now blesses them, and when he does, the dead albatross, which the crew had hung around his neck, falls away. Seen now in a different light, in the shadow of the ship cast by the dark light of the moon, all that had been banished into the depths by the penetrating glare of the blazing sun now emerges from below. "A new light is born from the darkness."⁶⁹ It is born from the darkness that both the Christian and the Spectator Minds had sundered from their vision. The Mariner's redemption, however, is short-lived. He is, in the end, unable to hold the tension between the light of the sun and the darkness of the moon. He is unable to wed what is above with what is below.

Earlier I said the Mariner does not find his way home, and Coleridge ends his poem in a way that does not augur well for us who are the archetypal descendants of the Ancient Mariner/Spectator Mind. As he finishes his tale, the Mariner and the Wedding Guest hear two different kinds of music. One comes from the bride and her maids singing at the wedding, while the other is the sound of the vesper bell coming from the church. In response to these two invitations, the Mariner says:

O sweeter than the marriage-feast,
Tis sweeter far to me,
To walk together to the kirk
With a goodly company!⁷⁰

The Mariner chooses the church. "Stunned," the Wedding Guest turns away from the Bridegroom's door "forlorn." The journey to the wedding of the masculine and the feminine that was interrupted is not

completed. In the last two lines Coleridge says of the Wedding Guest, "A sadder and a wiser man/ He rose the morrow morn."⁷¹ That wisdom is some rough measure of how difficult it was for the Mariner, who, despite his journey, was unable to choose the song of the wedding instead of the conventional vesper of the church. That wisdom is also an index of how difficult it is for the Spectator Mind, so far removed from the world at the vanishing point, to be addressed by the melting polar ice.

We are all of us today polar explorers, just as we have been, as I wrote in *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, all of us astronauts. Both are archetypal personifications of the Spectator Mind, and as the Astronaut leaves the body behind to depart Earth, the Polar Explorer brings the Astronaut back down to earth, to remind him/her not to forget the melting ice. Astronaut and Polar Explorer hold the tension of the opposites between the mind that takes leave of its senses and the body that is drawn to the frozen poles. And just as the lunar footprint is the trace of the one, the carbon footprint is the trace of the other. They intersect, they tell two sides of the same story. Coleridge understood this connection. Fascinated by the moon, he wrote, "Moon has little or no atmosphere. Its ocean is frozen. It is not yet inhabited, but may be in time." Commenting on this passage, Elsner says, "the barren land of ice and snow is a moonscape."⁷² Moon and ice: as above, so below!

VIII. DARK LIGHT

In this essay, I have described the genesis of the Spectator Mind and have amplified it through discussions of four literary personifications. Each of these personifications presents a diagnostic and prophetic image of the shadow sides of the Spectator Mind. The melting polar ice is the symptomatic expression of these shadows, an event in the world and an experience of the collective soul, the ecological unconscious of the environmental crisis. There can be no solution to this crisis without some radical change in the fixed attitudes of the Spectator Mind, no solution without some sacrifice of its—our—ways of being in the world, no solution without some alchemical dissolution, an ego-cide of sorts,⁷³ a symbolic death in place of the countless deaths that it has brought in its wake. For this transformation to take place we will have to develop new rituals, which make room for

what has been discarded and ignored, rituals that finally make a place for the inconvenient truth of the unconscious aspect of this crisis. In 1946, Jung said the unconscious “is of absolutely revolutionary significance in that it could radically alter our view of the world.”⁷⁴

The melting polar ice is a danger, but it is also an opportunity to radically alter our view of the world. It is a chance to heal the split between mind and nature, a chance to reanimate an aesthetic sensibility that unfreezes the feeling connection that has been lost in the gaze of the despotic eye, a chance to remember the feminine principle in the work of creation, a chance to recover a sense of the sacred within an integrated spirituality that honors the darkness in the light, and a chance to restore the symbolic attitude that bridges the gap between conscious and unconscious, an attitude that is able to witness in the albatross the extraordinary in the ordinary, the miracle in the mundane, the numinous in nature.

But the four literary amplifications of the Spectator Mind do not offer much hope that these changes will or can occur. To cite just one example here, the snakes whose light shines in the shadow of the Mariner’s ship and in the darkness of the moon were not integrated into the Mariner’s life. For him to do so, for Coleridge to have done so, would have required that the Serpent be given its place on the cross alongside the Christ. Moreover, the pace of technology since Coleridge’s day, since the days of Percy and Mary Shelley, since the days of Byron, has exponentially increased. Has technology finally exhausted soul? Is there a place for soul under the gaze of the despotic eye? Is there still a place for depth psychology in this age of technological wizardry where we live at the speed of light, inundated with information from mass media culture and flooded with distractions that invite us to benumb ourselves and renew the Spectator Mind’s desire for oblivion?

The temperature is rising—literally on the planet—and psychologically in fevers of fear and dread. And the waters are rising—literally with the melting polar ice—but also psychologically, in dreams that I have been collecting individually, and, collectively, in dark prophecies about the future. Is there still time to approach the melting ice at the poles of the world as a symptom and dream?

I began this essay in the garden and confessed sorrow over the plight of our climate. And now I have a similar feeling, but also different, more intense, and perhaps even more hopeless. I write from this place

of near despair, perhaps even as a way to silence it. The pull to go numb, to fall asleep, to be distracted, to grasp at fixed and easy solutions is strong. The collective, archetypal unconscious at the core of the melting ice is an inconvenient truth. But it is truth we cannot afford to ignore. Depth psychology has a special obligation to this truth.

NOTES

1. Robert Romanyshyn, *Technology as Symptom and Dream* (London, New York: Routledge, 1989/2000).
2. Quoted in Robert Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher: Research with Soul in Mind* (New Orleans: Spring Journal Books, 2007), p. 343. The second part of the quotation is from Emanuel Levinas as quoted by Beebe in his book, *Integrity in Depth* (New York: Fromm International Publishing, 1995), p. 33.
3. Verlyn Klinkenborg, “Some doubts upon entering a new carboniferous era,” in *International Herald Tribune*, June 25, 2008, p. 9.
4. For a psychological treatment of metaphor, see Robert Romanyshyn, *Mirror and Metaphor: Images and Stories of Psychological Life* (Pittsburgh, Pa: Trivium Publications, 2001).
5. Klinkenborg.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. For an example of cultural therapeutics, see Robert Romanyshyn, “The Despotic Eye,” in *The Changing Reality of Modern Man: Essays in Honor of J. H. van den Berg*, ed. Dreyer Kruger (Cape Town: Juta and Co., 1984), pp. 103-105.
10. Romanyshyn, *Technology*, p. 172.
11. James Hillman and Michael Ventura, *We’ve Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy—and the World’s Getting Worse* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1992).
12. Romanyshyn, *Technology*, p. 33.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
14. Maurice Merleau-Ponty as quoted in Romanyshyn, “Unconscious as a Lateral Depth,” in *Continental Philosophy in America*, ed. Hugh Silverman, John Sallis, Thomas M. Seebohm (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1983), p. 236.

15. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, trans. J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender (New York: W. W. Norton, 1939), p. 75.
16. Romanyshyn, *Technology*, p. 38.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 38, his italics.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
20. See reference cited in note 9.
21. Quoted in Eric G. Wilson, *The Spiritual History of Ice: Romanticism, Science, and the Imagination* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), pp. 141-142.
22. Helen Thayer, *Polar Dream* (Troutdale, OR.: New Sage Press, 2002).
23. Wilson, p. 1.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
31. Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher*.
32. Wilson, p. 112.
33. Susan Rowland, *Jung as a Writer* (New York: Routledge, 2005) p. 23.
34. Marie-Louise von Franz, *Alchemy* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1980) p. 37.
35. Wilson, p. 128.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.
37. Stanton Marlan, *The Black Sun: The Alchemy and Art of Darkness* (College Station, Texas: A&M University Press, 2005).
38. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
40. Wilson, p. 153.
41. Marlan, p.149.
42. Wilson, p. 134.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
45. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein: Or, The Modern Prometheus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 47.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-49.
47. Joyce Carol Oates, "Frankenstein's Fallen Angel," in Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 244.
48. C. G. Jung, *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Vol. 11, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952/1958).
49. Oates, p. 252. Author's italics.
50. Shelley, p. 235.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 237.
52. Oates, p. 251.
53. Thomas Elsner, *Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: A Psychological Interpretation*, p. 9. (This unpublished manuscript was submitted to the Research and Training Center for Depth Psychology According to C. G. Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, Zurich, Switzerland, September, 2005, as his thesis for a Diploma in Analytical Psychology).
54. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
56. Erwin W. Straus, "The Upright Posture," in *Phenomenological Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 1966).
57. Elsner, p. 63.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
65. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), p. 20.
66. Elsner, p. 75.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
70. Coleridge, p. 74.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
72. Elsner, p. 50.
73. The term ego-cide is coined by David Rosen to describe a kind of symbolic death that can result in radical transformation. The melting

polar ice will require this kind of symbolic death of the Spectator Mind if we are to have any chance of transformative healing. David Rosen, *Transforming Depression: Healing the Soul Through Creativity* (York Beach, Maine: Nicolas-Hays, 2002).

74. Jung, *CW* 8, § 369.