

Ecology and Spirituality:

Ecopsychology and the Ecological Self



Overview

- Origins of eco-psychology.
- Deep Ecology.
- Roszak, Macy and Metzner.
- Critiques of ecopsychology.
- Conceptualisations of the ecological self.

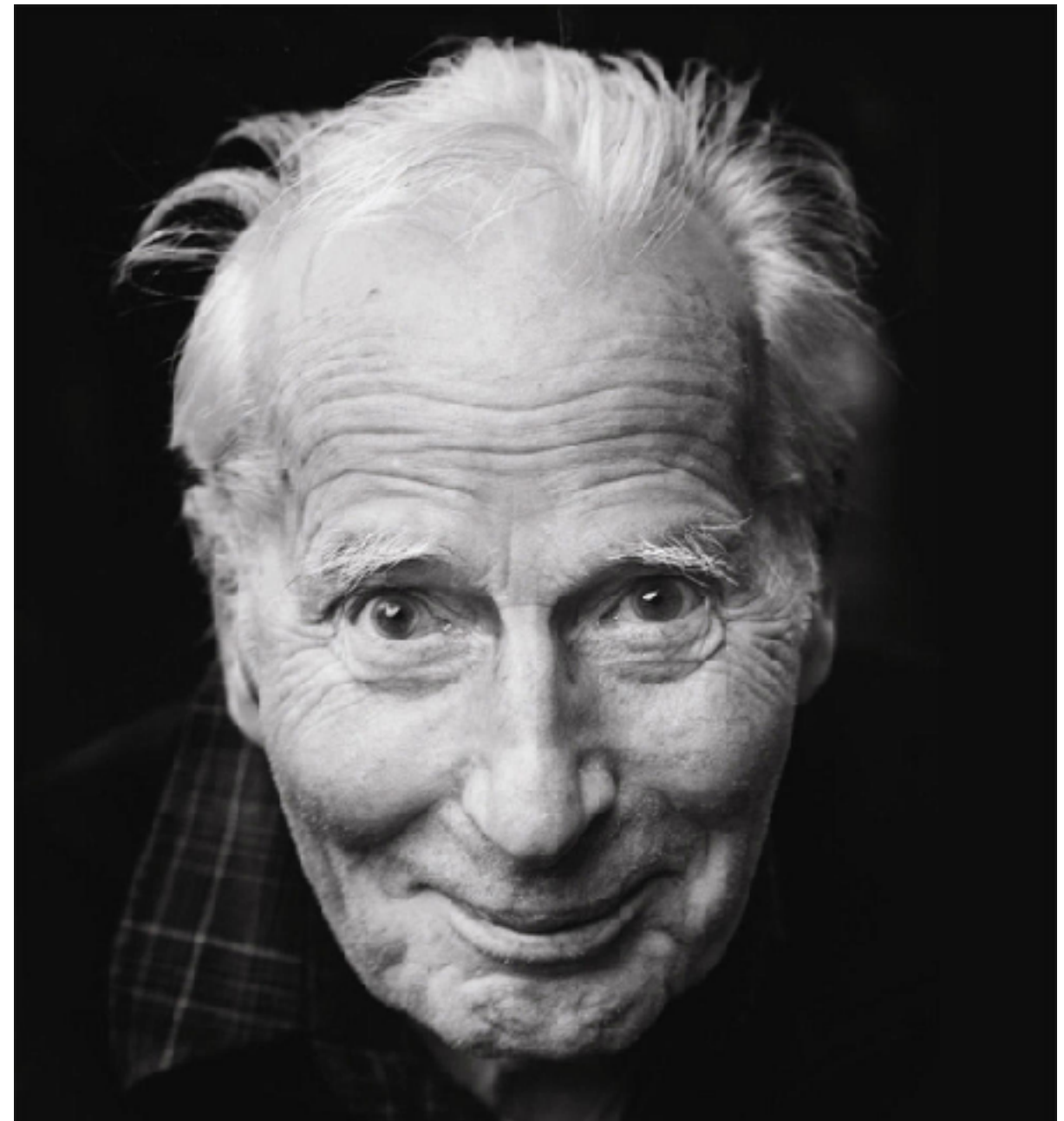
Silent Spring

- Origins of the environmental movement are often traced back to the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1963.
- Raised public awareness about the negative impacts of human beings on the environment.
- Galvanized the environmental movement.



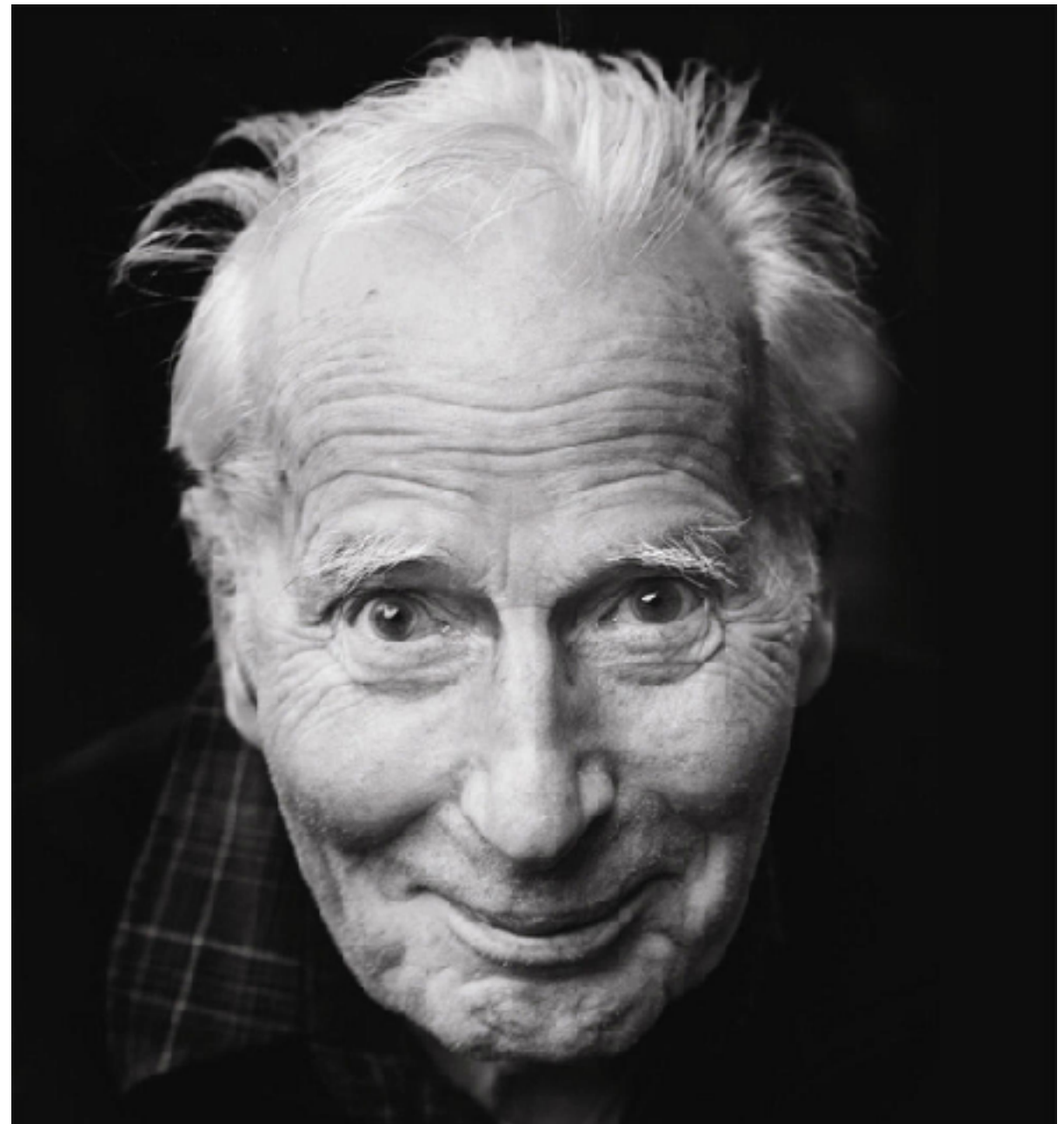
Deep Ecology

- Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (1912-2009) - pioneered a philosophical approach to ecology.
- Naess made a distinction between what he called ***shallow ecology***, on the one hand, and ***deep ecology*** on the other.
- **Shallow ecology** - focussed on quick fix solutions that maintain the status quo, e.g. renewable energy, recycling, electric cars, etc.
- Still maintaining the same 'privileged' Western lifestyle, and the same approach to ecology - as a resource for human consumption.



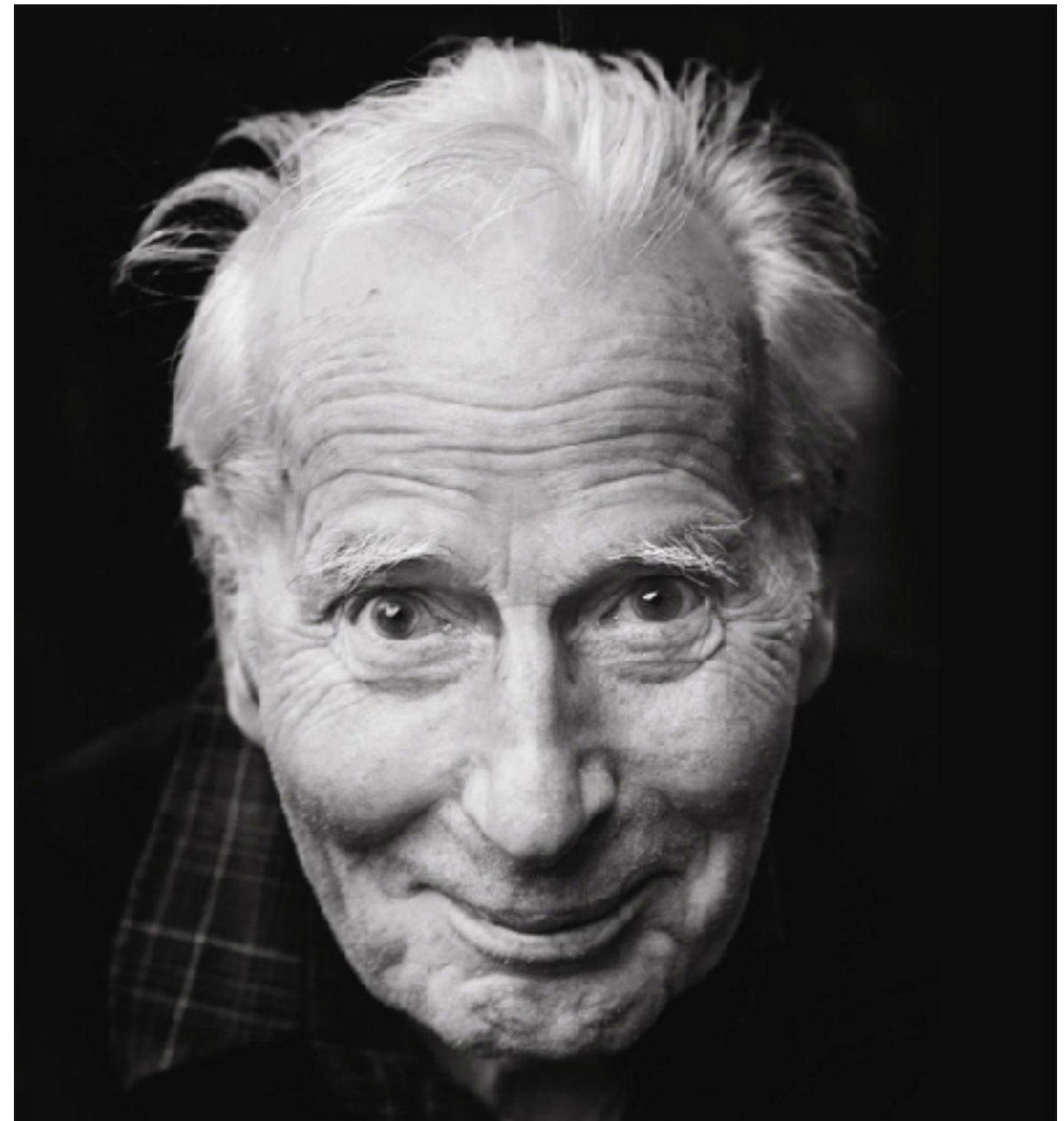
Deep Ecology

- **Deep ecology** - calls for a total transformation of our philosophy and our relationship to the environment.
- In an influential 1973 paper Naess outlines seven key features of the Deep Ecology perspective.



Deep Ecology

- “(1) Rejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of the relational, total-field image...
- (2) Biospherical egalitarianism —in principle...
- (3) Principles of diversity and of symbiosis. Diversity enhances the potentialities of survival, the chances of new modes of life, the richness of forms. And the so-called struggle of life, and survival of the fittest, should be interpreted in the sense of ability to coexist and cooperate in complex relationships, rather than ability to kill, exploit, and suppress.
- (4) Anti-class posture...
- (5) Fight against pollution and resource depletion...
- (6) Complexity, not complication...
- (7) Local autonomy and decentralization...”
(Naess, 1973).



Ecopsychology

- The term was coined by Theodore Roszak (1933-2011), though he credited environmentalist Paul Shepard (1925-1996) as the first ecopsychologist (Hibbard, 2003, p. 27).
- In his book *The Voice of the Earth* (1992), Roszak defines Ecopsychology:

“...its goal is to bridge our culture’s long-standing historical gulf between the psychological and the ecological, to see the needs of the planet and the person as a continuum...”
- Clearly to serve a Western purpose.
- “...the ecological priorities of the planet are coming to be expressed through our most private spiritual travail...” (p. 16).



Joanna Macy

- Joanna Macy:
- “We block it out because it hurts, because it is frightening, and most of all because we do not understand it and consider it to be a dysfunction, an aberration, a sign of personal weakness. As a society we are caught between a sense of impending apocalypse and the fear of acknowledging it. In this "caught" place, our responses are blocked and confused” (Macy, 1995).
- The Council of All Beings.
- Collective grieving ritual for the destruction of life on earth.



Green Psychology

- Psychologist Ralph Metzner (1936-2019) has been a key voice in ecopsychology:

“I prefer the term *green psychology* to *ecopsychology*... those of us in this field...do not mean to advocate...a new sub discipline of psychology...Rather we are talking about a fundamental re-envisioning of what psychology is...a revision that would take that would take the ecological context of human life into account” (1999, p. 2).



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- Ecopsychology, or Green Psychology, is therefore different from other psychological sub-disciplines, such as environmental psychology.
- It is a new paradigm.



Critiques:

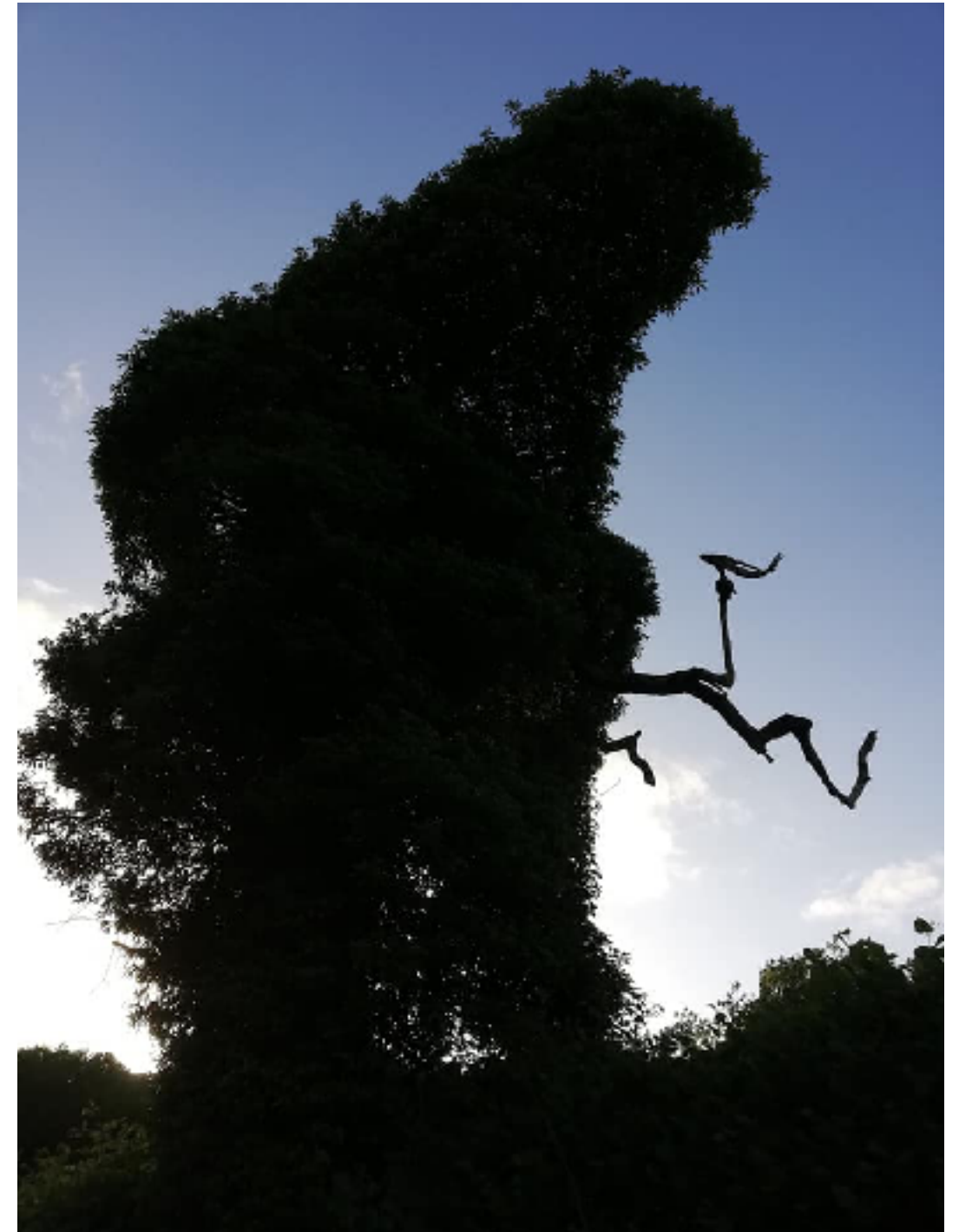
What about the non-human?

- Sewall & Fleischner (2019) argue that Ecopsychology has tended to focus too much on the human, and not enough on the non-human.
- They argue for the need to embrace natural history in Ecopsychology.
- “Natural history — “a practice of intentional, focused attentiveness and receptivity to the more-than-human world, guided by honesty and accuracy”...is a pathway for digging ourselves out of a relentless hall of mirrors. It provides an accessible method for re-engagement with a richly patterned, textured, and animated world, and for becoming more ecologically informed human animals...”



Critiques: Underlying Colonialism?

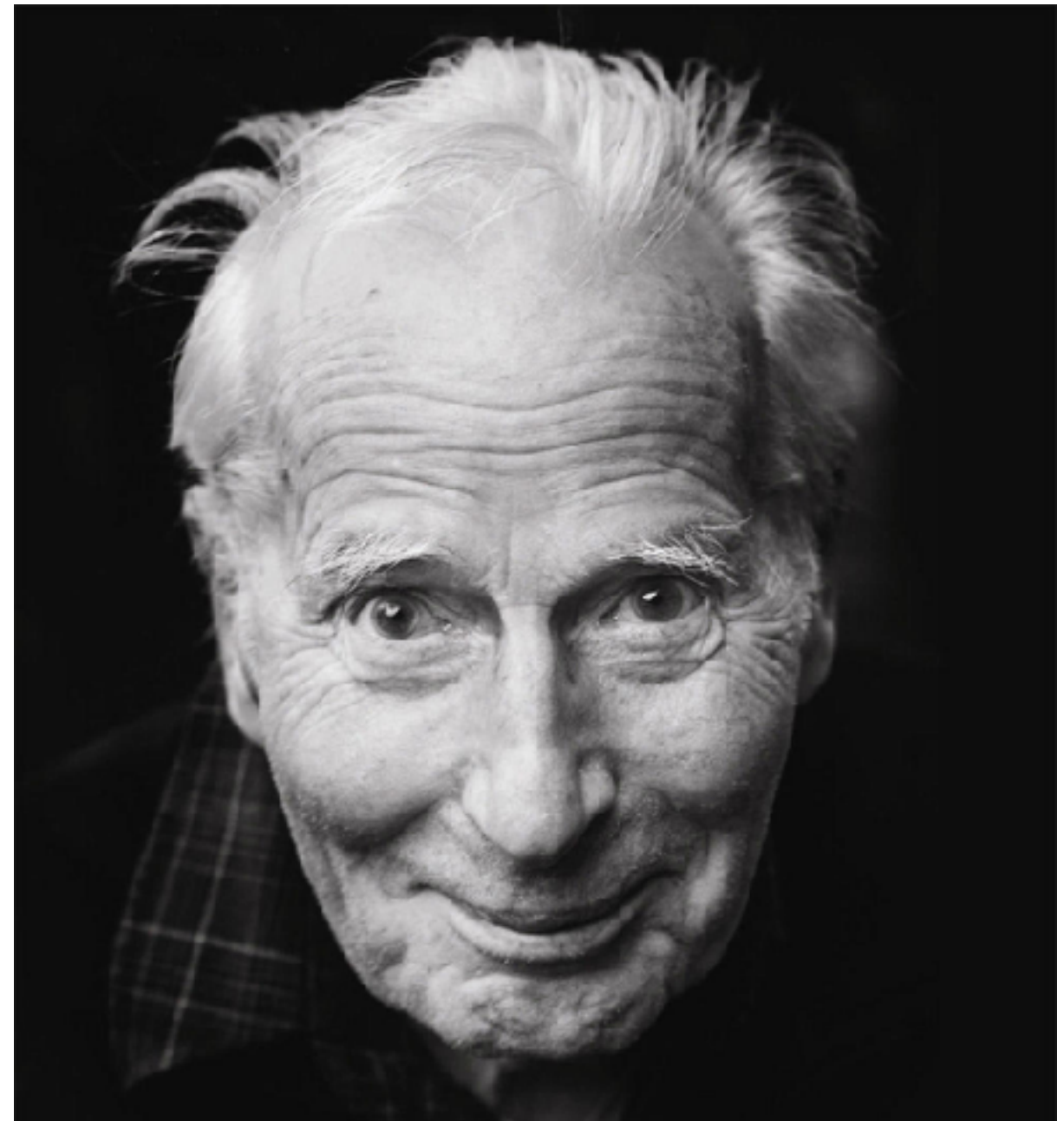
- Alysha Jones & David Segal argue that ecopsychology continues to perpetuate colonial attitudes.
- “This article identifies settler colonialism as a phenomenon existing outside of awareness in the field of ecopsychology and begins to explore what “unsettling” ecopsychology may entail. Unsettling the field is a process of revealing how ecopsychology reproduces and reinforces settler colonialism....”
- “By opening up this dialogue, we (the authors) seek to make a critical contribution to the field of ecopsychology and, as non-Indigenous/settler practitioners, to encourage a discussion of accountability for those doing therapeutic land-based nature connection work as visitors on traditional Indigenous territories” (Jones & Segal, 2018).
- There is a need, then, to take indigenous ecopsychologies seriously, indeed Roszak argues that all psychologies were once ecopsychologies.



The Ecological Self

- Naess suggested that, through the process of what he called self-realization, we will ultimately move away from egoic (bounded, individual) conceptions of the self towards an ecological self.
- Naess does not give an explicit definition of the ecological self, but does offer a brief sentence:

“The ecological self of a person is that with which this person identifies.”
- He further explains:
- “This key sentence (rather than a definition) about the self shifts the burden of clarification from the term ‘self’ to that of ‘identification,’ or rather ‘process of identification’” (Naess, 1995, p. 227).
- The ecological self emerges when we come to **identify the environment with ourselves** to the extent that we realize that conservation of the natural world is simultaneously an act of self-preservation.



The Ecological Self

- Freya Matthews:
- “Holistic nesting of a self in a wider self-system means a relative identification with that system. Because the self stands in relations of ecological interdependence (direct or indirect) with the elements of that wider self, those elements (or its relations to them) are logically involved in its identity...”
- “Individuality in this framework is thus...a relative matter - it is a function of involvement in a wider system, the identity of which is implicated in the identities of each of its participant subsystems. The individual is thus in a very real sense a microcosm of the wider self in which it occurs” (Matthews, 1991, p. 144).



The Ecological Self

- Joanna Macy:
- “Once we tune into our interconnectedness, responsibility toward self and other become indistinguishable, because each thought and act affects the doer as much as the one done to...”
- “Just as an amputee continues to feel twinges in the severed limb, so in a sense do we experience, in anguish for homeless people or hunted whales, pain that belongs to a separated part of our body—a larger body than we thought we had, unbounded by our skin” (Macy, 1995).



Summary

- Ecopsychology emerged as a response from psychology to the environmental movement, which was kickstarted in the 1960s.
- Various psychologists have been influenced by Deep Ecology in trying to formulate an ecological approach to the mind.
- There are several different iterations of the idea of the ecological self:
 - The self is part of wider ecological systems.
 - It is porous and permeable.
 - It is multiple.
 - It breaks down distinction between inner/outer worlds.
 - Emphasis on interdependence.

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Ecology and Spirituality:

Parapsychology and the Ecological Self

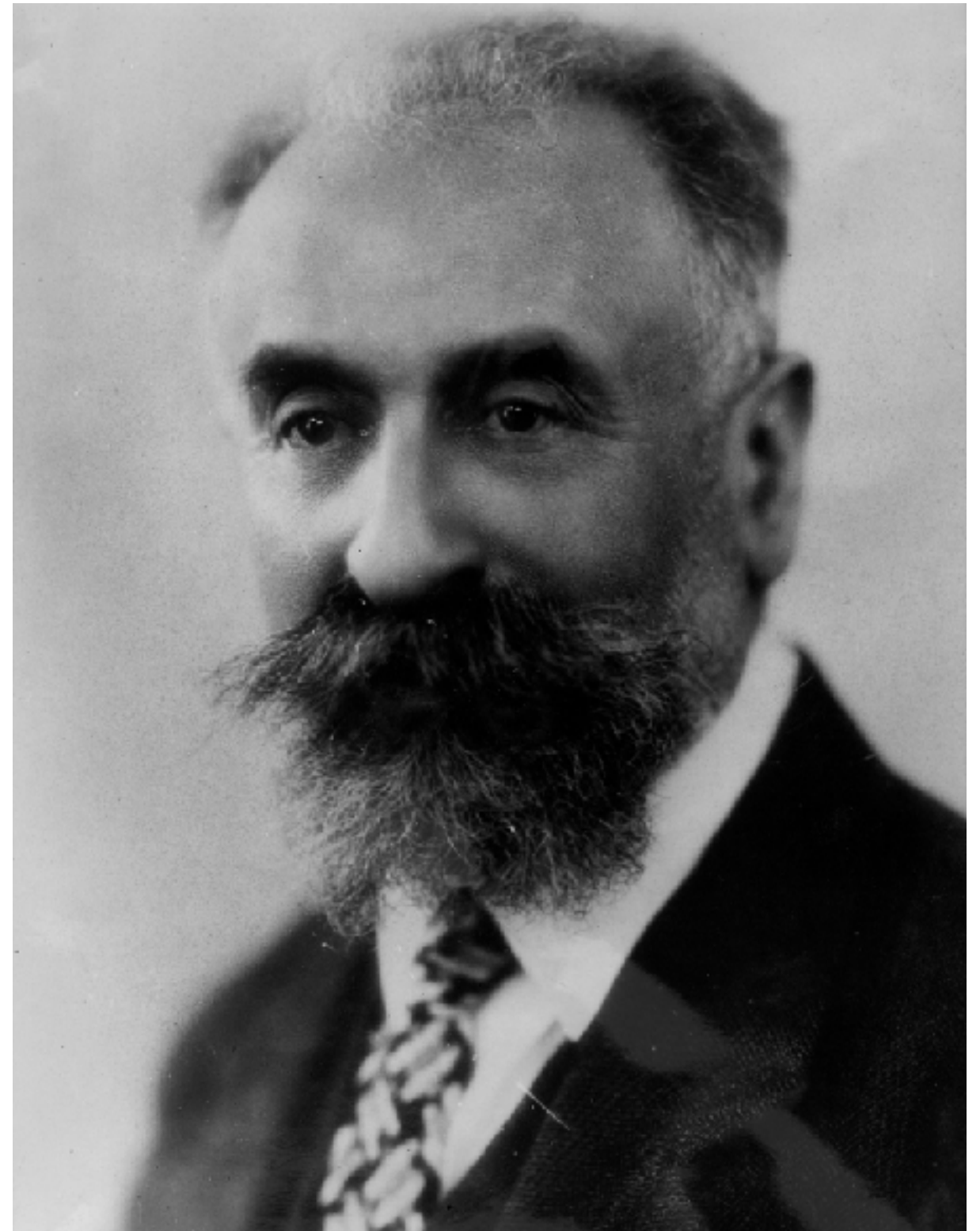


Overview

- What is the Self?
- Cultural Category or Experiential Reality?
- What are psychical research and parapsychology.
- Frederic Myers and Gothic Psychology.
- Psi and the Ecological Self.

Anthropology and the Self

- “A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; The Notion of Self” (1938 [1985]), by Marcel Mauss is frequently used as a starting point in discussions of the anthropology of personhood and selfhood.
- Mauss’ main emphasis is on the evolution of different cultural notions of the ‘self.’
- He begins with the self as ‘**the subject**’ (being the state of human experience as an embodied entity, followed by ‘**the role**’ (being the place and function of the person within a society), the ‘**persona**’ (the character, or moral and legal entity), and onwards to the Christian ‘**person**’ (an individual metaphysical entity - a soul).
- Finally arriving at the person defined as an individual, bounded, ‘psychological being’ in the modern, post-industrial, Euro-American sense (Mauss 1985: 1-23).



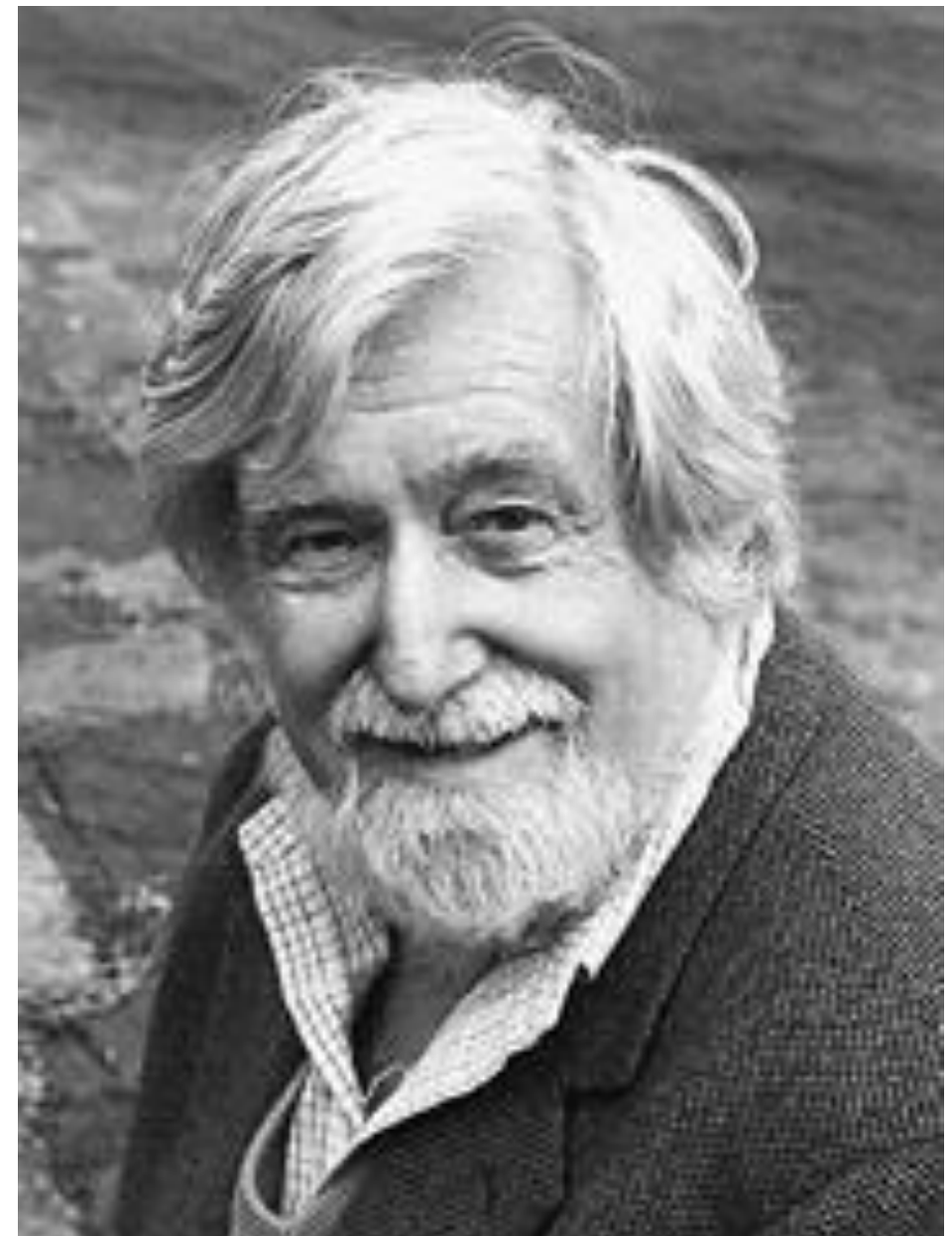
What is the Self?

- Anthropologist Melford Spiro (1993) suggests three possibilities:
- 1) The psychobiological organism - that which is bounded by the skin.
- 2) The individual's mental representation of his own person.
- 3) Some psychological entity (an ego, a soul, an "I") within the person.



Anthropology and the Self

- The 'Western' Individual:
- "[...] a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against its social and natural background" (Geertz, 1974, p. 31).
- In Charles Taylor's terms, the Western self is "buffered" (2007, pp. 37-41), separated from the outside world.



Anthropology and the Self

- By contrast, the **dividual self** is often considered to be made up of several constituent parts, or to be porous with permeable boundaries through which other selves or entities might come and go (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).
- In anthropology attention was drawn to the dividual self through the work of anthropologist Marilyn Strathern on Melanesian personhood.
- “The dividual is considered to be divisible, comprising a complex of separable - interrelated but essentially independent - dimensions or aspects. The individual is thus monadic, while the dividual is fractal; the individual is atomistic, while the dividual is always socially embedded; the individual is an autonomous social actor, the author of his or her own actions, while the dividual is a heteronomous actor performing a culturally written script; the individual is a free-agent, while the dividual is determined by cultural structures; the individual is egocentric, while the dividual is sociocentric” (Smith, 2012, p. 53).

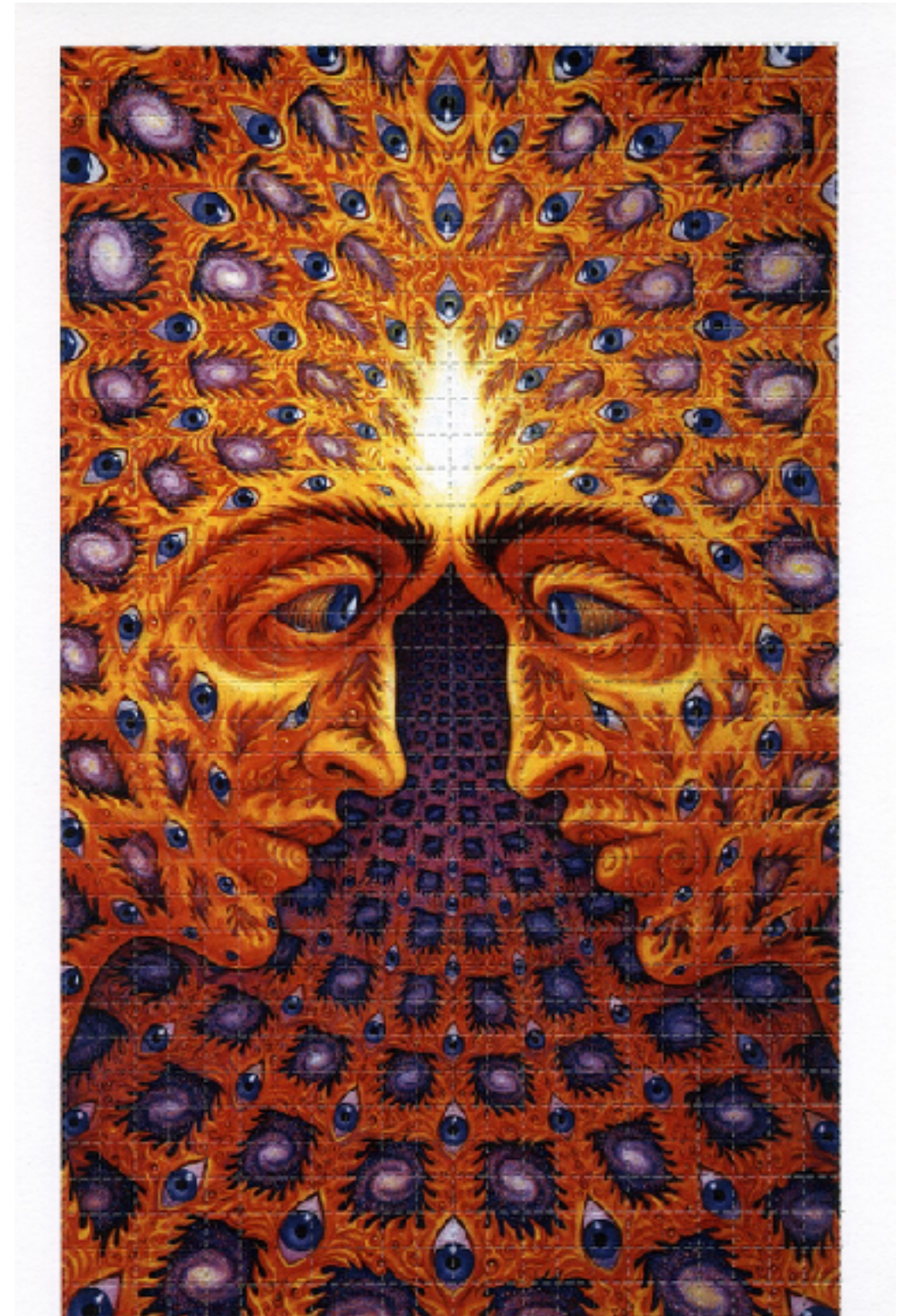


“Non-Western” Self

- “What it means to be a person...in the Japanese sense cannot be understood without reference to the individual’s social ties: the particular, usually tight and limited human nexus to which he or she belongs, from which one derives identity, and to which one is totally committed” (de Craemer, 1983, p. 26).
- “Malays on the island of Langkawi become complete persons, that is, kin, through living and consuming together in houses. Identity and substance are mutable and fluid. These perceptions suggest a processual view of kinship and personhood...” (Carsten, 1995, p. 223)
- The concept of ‘Noman can be glossed variously as mind, intention, will, agency, social conscience, desire, or personality. It clearly covers a wide range of meanings. These meanings have to be seen processually, in terms of the life-cycle and of social interaction" (Strathern & Stewart, 1998, p. 175)

“Non-Western” Self?

- “While probably fairly accurate for the majority of people the majority of the time, this characterisation of [Euro-American] folk psychology certainly has limitations. For example, religious beliefs (e.g. whether nonmaterial sources like spirits or God can directly influence one’s mind) are a source of variation within [Euro-American] culture, but they are rarely considered in discussions of folk psychology...variation in folk psychological thinking has not received adequate attention from researchers...” (Lillard, 1998, p. 3).
- I propose instead that the self is not a cultural category, but an experiential phenomenon - something that we learn and develop through experience - new experiences can reveal new aspects of the self/consciousness that do not necessarily fit into dominant cultural categories (Hunter, 2020).



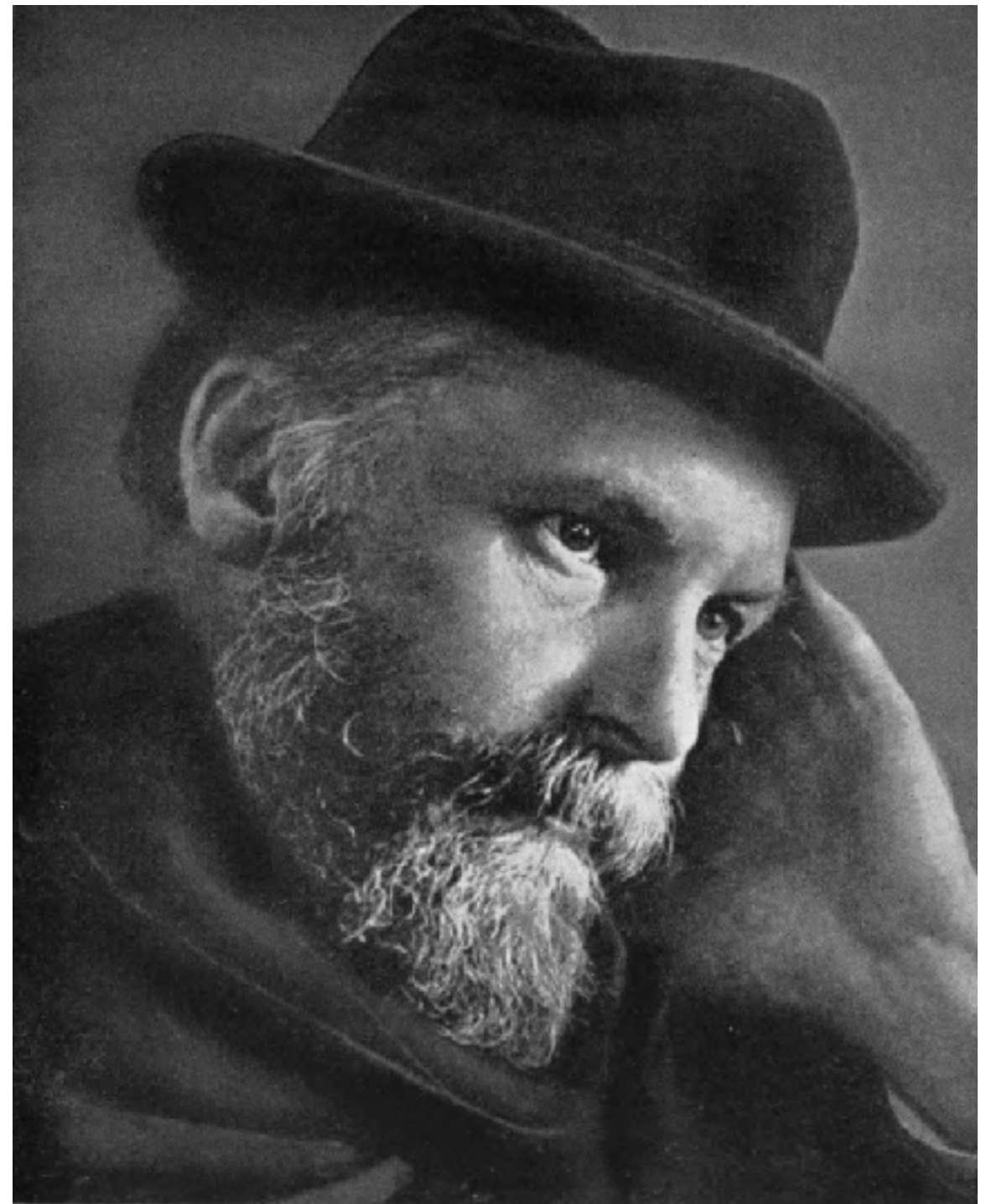
Psychical Research and Parapsychology

- The Society for Psychical Research was established in 1882
- “This organisation was the first in the world to adopt a scientific approach in its investigations of “that large group of debatable phenomena designated by such terms as mesmeric, psychical and Spiritualistic” (West, 2015).
- In the 1930s psychical research becomes parapsychology predominantly under the influence of J.B. Rhine at Duke University.
- Where previously psychical research had been field based research, parapsychology now became a laboratory based discipline.
- The Parapsychological Association was admitted to the American Academy of Sciences in 1969.
- Parapsychological research continues to this day, and continues to produce challenging data.



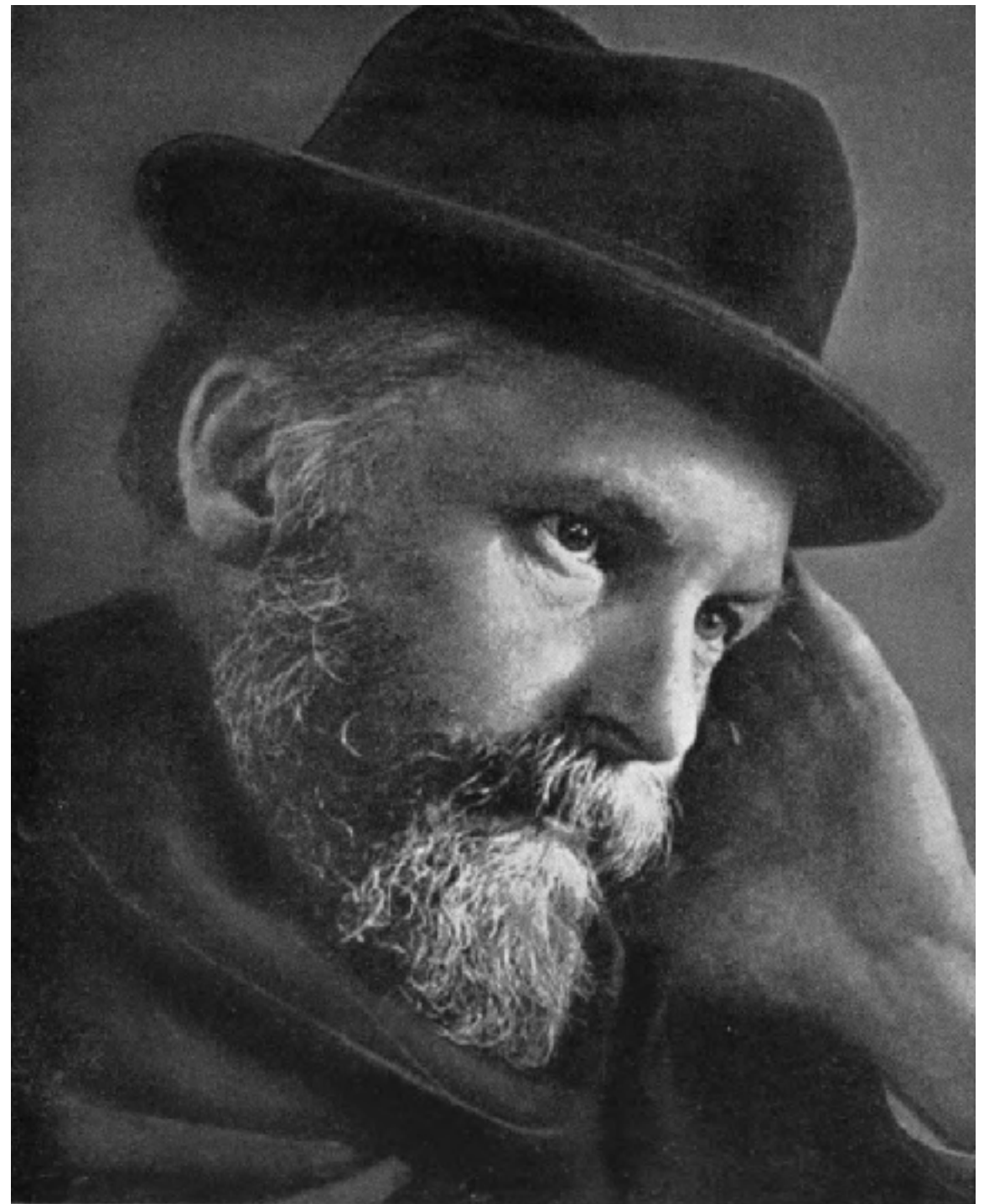
Frederic Myers

- Cambridge classicist F.W.H. Myers.
- A founding member of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in 1882.
- Myers was fascinated by all aspects of psychical research, wrote on apparitions and especially on mediumship and the possibility of human survival after death.
- In 1903 *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* was posthumously published.



Gothic Psychology

- The psychologist and philosopher William James (1842-1910) referred to Myers' work as a 'Gothic psychology' because of its complex and multi-dimensional nature (Shamdasani, 1994, p. xv).
- Myers himself referred to it as 'multiplex' (Myers, 1886).



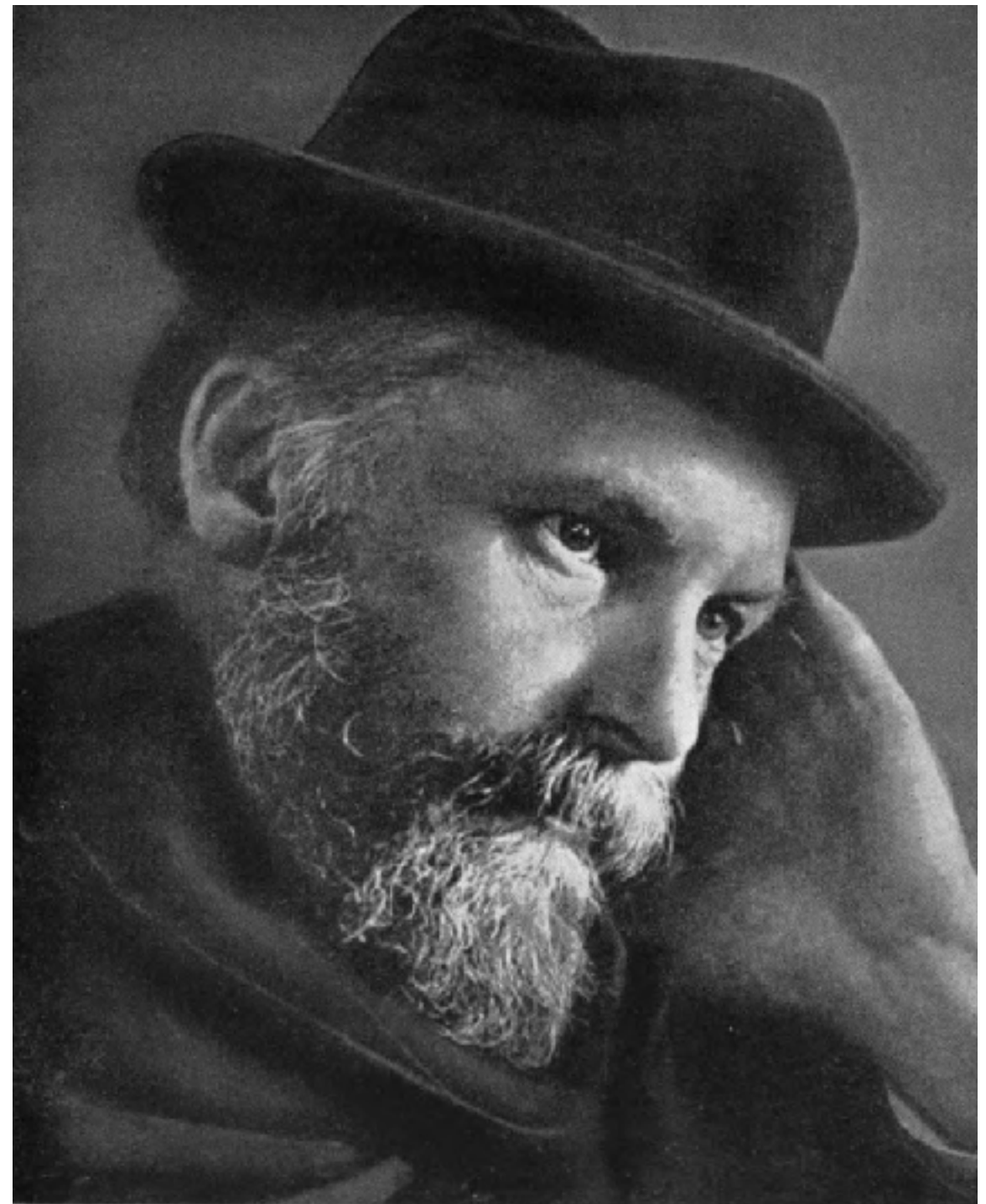
Gothic Psychology

- In an obituary published in the Proceedings of the SPR, James wrote evocatively of Myers' romanticist approach to the study of the mind. He explains:
- "...their work is like going from classic to Gothic architecture, where few outlines are pure and where uncouth forms lurk in the shadows. A mass of mental phenomena are now seen in the shrubbery beyond the parapet. Fantastic, ignoble, hardly human, or frankly nonhuman are some of these new candidates for psychological description... The world of the mind is shown as something infinitely more complex than was suspected; and whatever beauties it may still possess, it has lost at any rate the beauty of academic neatness... But despite the triumph of romanticism, psychologists as a rule have still some lingering prejudice in favour of the nobler simplicities" (James, 1901).



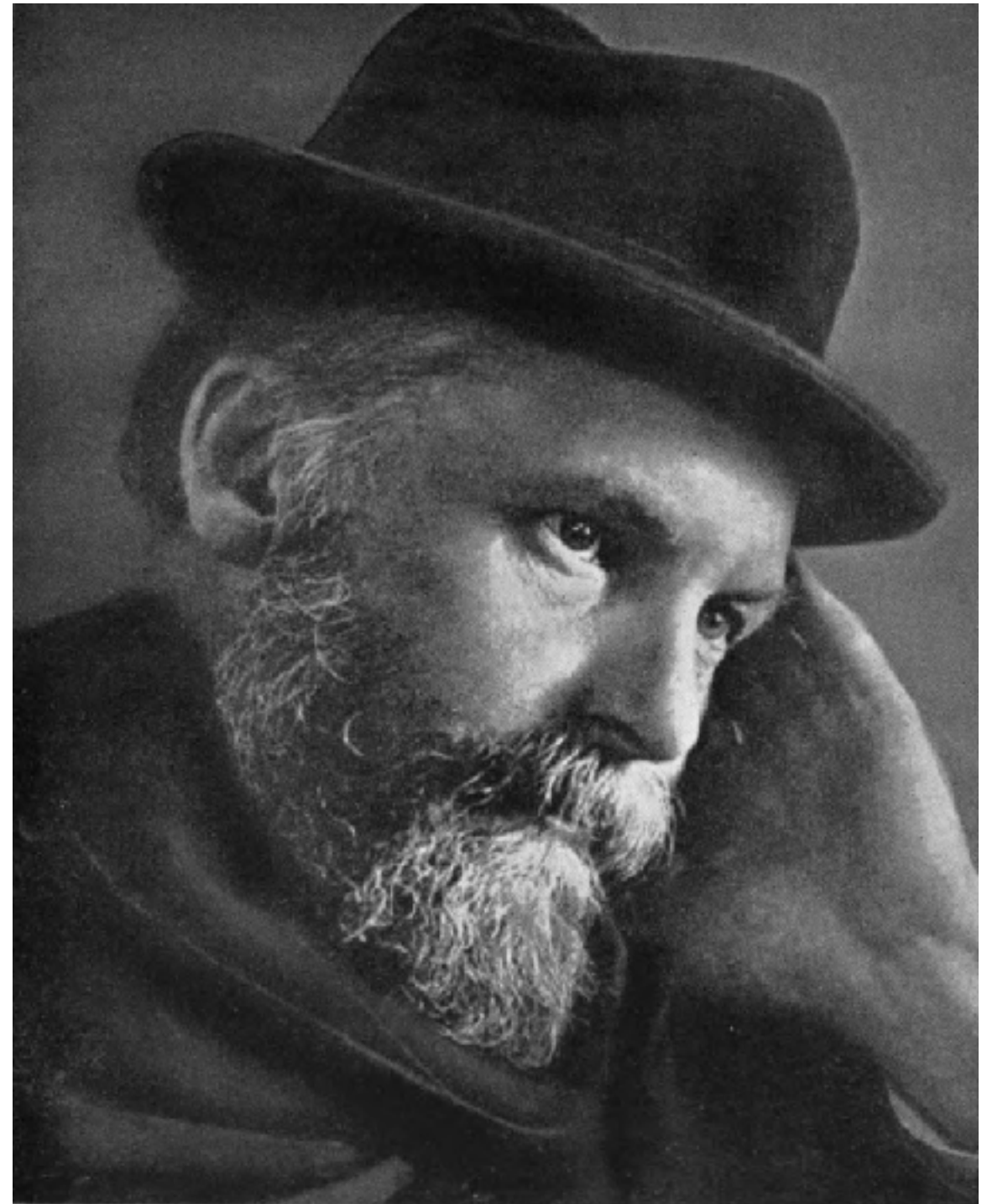
The Subliminal Mind

- Myers developed a two tiered model of consciousness.
- ***Supraliminal*** - waking awareness, above the threshold of consciousness.
- ***Subliminal*** - below the threshold of conscious awareness - emerges in dreams, altered states of consciousness, and could help account for paranormal experiences, mystical states, etc.
- Theory influenced William James and Carl Jung.



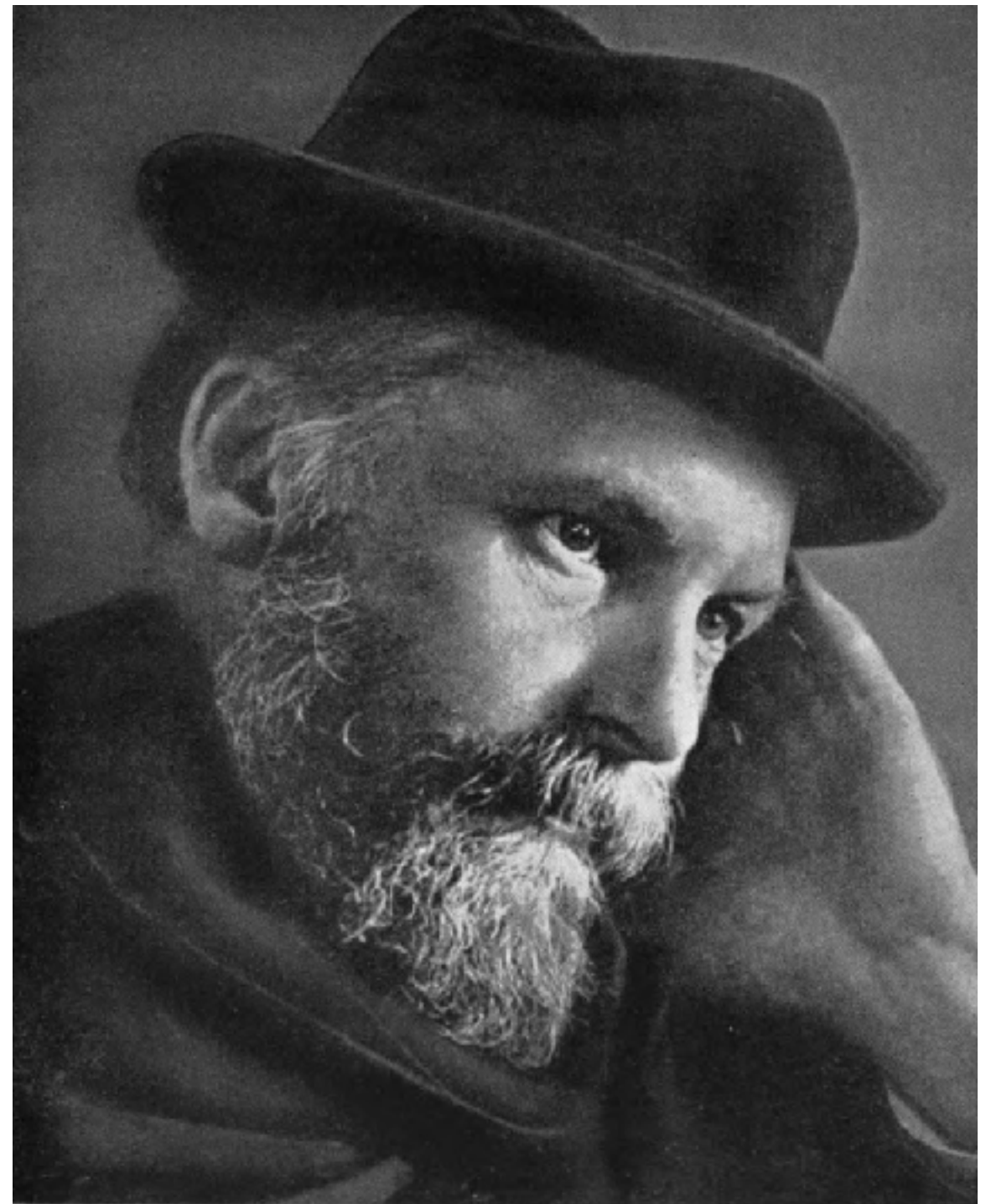
The Multiplex Self

- “The ‘conscious Self’ of each of us, as we call it, - the empirical, the supraliminal Self....does not comprise the whole of the consciousness...within us. There exists a far more comprehensive consciousness, a profounder faculty, which for the most part remains potential only so far as regards the life of earth, but from which the consciousness and the faculty of earth-life are mere selections...” (Myers, 1992, p. 13).
- “I regard each man as at once profoundly unitary and almost infinitely composite, as inheriting from earthly ancestors a multiplex and ‘colonial’ organism - polyzoic and perhaps polypsychic in an extreme degree; but also as ruling and unifying that organism by a soul or spirit absolutely beyond our present analysis - a soul which has originated in a spiritual or metetherial environment... (Myers, 1992, p. 19).



The Multiplex Self

- “...I mean no unreal opposition or forced divorcement of sacred and secular, of flesh and spirit...as our link with other spirits strengthens, as the life of the organism pours more fully through the individual cell, we shall feel love more ardent, wider wisdom, higher joy; perceiving that this organic unity of Soul, which forms the inward aspect of the telepathic law, is in itself the Order of the Cosmos, the Summation of Things” (Myers, 1992, p. 289).



Psi and the Ecological Self

- Parapsychologist William Braud writes that:

“...psi events suggest that these limited identities may be quirks of an unnecessarily limited and habituated attention, self-perception, and self-conception. Such an individual self concept may be, to a large extent, culturally conditioned, because—even without considering psi events—we can find, in other cultures, greater identifications with others (with one’s extended family, one’s community, one’s ancestors; with aspects of the natural world). Even within a Western, Eurocentric culture, we experience expansions of self-identity, beyond their usual bounds, in certain non-ordinary conditions of consciousness. Psi experiences suggest even further, and more profound, extensions of identity” (Braud p. 1).

- “The psi phenomena that we observe appear to require and to reveal this interconnectedness. This connectedness seems more subtle, more extensive, and more profound than are the more familiar, conventional forms.” (Braud, 2000, p. 3).
- Ecopsychologists Kerr & Key have suggested ‘that the human psyche is woven into nature in the same way that psi is interwoven into a larger emotional and physical context’ (Kerr & Key, 2011, p. 52).



Summary

- Anthropologists have recognised different models of the self - individual and dividual.
- This doesn't mean that you won't find dividual selfhood in Western contexts - e.g. subcultures.
- The Self in fact be an experiential rather than social phenomenon, that we learn and add to with experience.
- Psychical researchers and parapsychologists have been investigating dividual forms of self in Western contexts for 150 years or more.
- Myers' multiplex self sounds very similar to some of the models of the ecological self discussed by ecopsychologists.
- Psi data implies that we are connected via invisible networks, and supports the view of an interconnected cosmos.
- Have parapsychologists been researching the ecological self all along?

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