

**Meet Heinz Droz:  
An All-Too-Real "Fictional" Case Study of Ecopsychological  
Alienation and Singularization**

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**Key terms:** *Ecopsychology, ecopsychological alienation, ecopsychological estrangement, Nature estrangement, Nature dissociation, Nature reality therapists, LIFE interruptible and unintegratable, funneled-semiosis, telluric connection, Estranged Labour, Commodity Fetishism.*

## Abstract

The fictional character "Heinz Droz" is used as a mirror that reflects, more or less, depending on our unique existential situation, the *ecopsychological alienation* and *singularized* semiotic sub-realities of the industrialized man and woman. Purposely described as a fictional character, nevertheless, Heinz Droz stands for an easily confirmable and almost inescapable reality made worse by self-denial, materialistic, consumer-oriented, pernicious, spirit-empty, and pervasive *umwelten*. Successful ecopsychological therapy or counseling includes the clarity of having understood self-denial for what it does: over-protects the Ego and prevents it from maturing. An ecopsychologically successful therapy or counseling goes beyond that: it contradicts, critiques, challenges, and reforms the orthodoxy of and the typical assumptions of both clients and therapists. Ecopsychologically successful practices are eco-centric, cultural transcending, social activism, Paleo-anthropology, community reformist, and deliberate peaceful resistance against seemingly impossible societal odds. These progressive, communal, and self-informing practices are also Deep Ecological. Ecopsychological practice is fighting sub-realities with new and old mythologies. But without meeting Heinz Droz, and seeing "him" as a fatality and a caricature of ecopsychological alienation, our therapy cannot commence.

"My daughter once asked me if I was alive when the world was black and white, because everything she saw that was old on TV was black and white."

--Attributed to Chuck Close by Richard Kehl, *Breathing on Your Own*

## Introduction

As in the film *Pleasantville*, most *Nature reality therapists* who exercise the practice of Ecopsychology believe themselves to be painting the world back to its original pristine rainbow conditions starting with human physiology and its spirit. When our son Jordi was six or seven, he asked us a question very similar to the opening quote attributed to Chuck Close: "Were you guys alive in the Black and White days—when the world was black and white?" My answer today would be that the world is still "black and white" and that our planetary village and biosphere is still a *Pleasantville* that has yet to turn into colors.

For most of the planet, and increasingly so, it is a perpetual psychological winter without red fall colors, the radiant yellow sun of August, or the green energy of spring.

It is not easy to exist, day-to-day, under these clinical conditions or with full awareness that a malignant and cancerous psychological evil permeates the very reality one is a citizen and product of. Cynicism, depression, apathy, anger, anguish, are some of the dark cognitive states and emotions that the therapist, if he/she is, ecopsychologically speaking, fully coherent and deliberate about addressing the illnesses of *Nature estrangement* or dissociation<sup>1</sup>, is apt to encounter or experience. This angst is the price many others and we pay for such awareness.

"Meet Heinz Droz"<sup>2</sup> ([Figure 1](#)) was conceived as an exercise in ecopsychological awakening. In addition to cajoling, caressing, insinuating, reasoning, confronting, embracing, tracking, this ecopsychologist at least finds it necessary to construct a mirror whose reflection may be more revealing, more convincing, and more constructive to the task of assailing self-denial. It is also my exercise in deliberate harassing.

Because I am now writing in Switzerland, the character is named Heinz Droz. But "he" could be man or woman, Swiss or Congolese. "He" could be Joe Smith, or Juan Robótico, or Darth Vader. "He" stands as the condition of a pervasive, easily recognizable malignant and cancerous psychological deterioration waiting to be accepted or treated by most psychologists, counselors, or psychiatrists.

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<sup>1</sup> Used almost interchangeably we shall consider only *ecopsychological alienation*, the condition more likely to produce psychopathies. On the other hand, *ecopsychological estrangement*, *Nature estrangement*, and *Nature dissociation* are less extreme or permanent nature-psyche disconnections, but they too can produce the neuroses most likely to be seen by ecopsychological counselors and therapists.

<sup>2</sup> In my mind, when I say "Heinz Droz," the two names blend together to sound like "android".

## Meet Heinz Droz: Narration, Biography and Eulogy

Heinz Droz *sub-exists* much like the domesticated animals he keeps in bondage for pleasure or food, not recognizing that he is one of them, also in chains (Shepard, 1982). Therefore, he is incapable of true compassion for himself or for the beasts he tortures because this type of inclusive compassion would require a formidable look from without, from outside his senseless condition. Additionally, and because his bondage does not bother him or he is unaware of it, he fails to recognize political or societal dissent or revolutions in oppressed peoples who have such insight: he penalizes their plight and ridicules their courage. The right to dissent or to revolt, peacefully or with blood, against the cancerous, corporate, gluttonous, materialistic ethos seems to him the exclusive enterprise of the hysterical downtrodden (he is not) or the enterprise of some *dinosauric* historical ancestor, "the patriot". Finally, Droz refuses to take responsibility for his freedom, or to be responsible for anything worthwhile and *Good*. True rebellion, righteous rebellion, is seen, alternatively, as bad form, a vice, or only to be employed as a means to insure that the easy and disposable life he is addicted to continues. An animal zoo, he is anxious about the very idea of a cage's door opening for good. He will bite off the very hand of the liberator! Plenty of food and much diversion are nevertheless accepted.

Like in the movie *Groundhog Day*, Droz wakes up each day to the same surreal and alienated life, parrots the expected script and meaningless text, moves from one thermostatically stable environment to another, pushing buttons, moving levers, and punching cards. He is now thoroughly transformed into a wheeled cyborg, half human-half car, for whom walking itself is seen as a form of rebellion, dissent, or a deviant act he won't tolerate.

In a 24-hour cycle, a 7-day period, month after month, year after year passing through developmentally significant periods, Mr. Droz spends very little time outdoors. For the many Drozes of the world, going "outdoors" signifies *building hopping*, or car-to-building-to-bus-to-plane-to-Ipod hopping. He successfully tunes out the rigors of LIFE, the natural tempo of LIFE, the full-fledged atmospherics of LIFE, and the blood of LIFE. He has substituted physical risk with perpetual comfort, or with virtual or menial entertainment, addressing psychological ills with escapism amply provided for by a brainwashing society. Too tired from working in an undesirable workplace, and in Germany or Switzerland, forced to choose his professional future at a young and inexperienced age,<sup>3</sup> unprepared to do anything else, he escapes from one unsavory social condition to another seeking solace in family and destroying the idea of a larger planetary community.

Any morality or sense of duty that he might develop, as Kohlberg suggested (1981), is a commitment to the survival of self or his immediate family or comes from traditional religion, which may not recognize *ecopsychological estrangement*, or if it does, ties it to some formula of eternal salvation that undermines scientific understanding. Without

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<sup>3</sup> From the point of view of human development, at an excessively and unthinkable premature age of 10 or in sixth grade, respectively.

sharing or being an active ecological participant in a better planetary-communal vision for himself and for his family, society and the planet become his enemy. Without communal support, the necessary roots for revolt against the *status quo* are severed. The vision, assuming that he can glimpse it, is more than distant--it is a fantasy. In his case, this vision is seen cynically as science fiction created by some angry ecopsychologist in order to perturb his docile and imploded way of life.

He has substituted moral or righteous indignation with acting-out behavior, violence, passive aggression, incessant complaining, or insufferable whining. In fact, Heinz Droz's speech, no matter what other language he speaks in addition to Swiss French, is punctuated by a tendency, every other sentence, to self-pity and injured ego dramatis. When sober, the crescendo from incessant complaining to insufferable whining extends easily to projection, stereotype, and prejudice. The world is "wrong" because there are too many Turks, too many Italians, or too many Bosnians living and working where he is used to whining about every other thing.

However, there are escapes from these threats. The artificially enhanced, toxic, and distracting complexity of modern life provides ample and necessary opportunities to remain locked-up in its cancerous cocoon. Because modern life is artificially complex or downright meaningless, because it is also manufactured and serviced by others, because social sanctification is politically and economically advantageous to those few who control so much, Heinz is powerless to combat its combined onslaught. The democratic process means simply replacing one set of profit-driven variables and gluttonous representatives with another set of hungrier and more vicious ones, never achieving a revolutionary and medical ecological transformation that can lead to permanent healing. The patient, Heinz Droz, and the entire planet thus slowly bleed. To the extent that profit-driven policies (their economics and heartless bottom lines) and gluttonous representatives control the government machine, Heinz is, all alone, powerless and alienated. Whatever his outward expected behaviors, confident and in control, they are a coping hollow persona-cover of a psychological eunuch or fetal form curled up in a corner of a padded room, because these lack a true ecopsychological grounding.

Fundamentally, and we cannot blame him for this, Heinz lacks an understanding of how his own consciousness is affected by propaganda and ideology: BAD TEXT. He lacks an understanding of how language is crafted by others, of how technical jargons make many important facets of LIFE interruptible and *unintegratable* into a cohesive matrix that could inform in ecological and/or mythical terms. He talks into a cell phone hoping that his alienation will be relieved by a distant voice which is serviced via satellites or booster towers controlled by others--communication and meaning being a costly service. Language itself is fragmented and is the vehicle to talk about the million or so disruptive things that prevent him from integrating the wilder side of LIFE back into his existential equation. When language becomes a distraction, noise, or propaganda, a cost, it is no longer trusted as LOGOS; or even better, it ceases to be a communal function with NATURE and for the intrinsic "reasons" of NATURE.

## ***Singularization as A Restrictive Semiosis***

Elsewhere, I have written about the semiotic process I call *singularization* and described it as *funneled-semiosis* (Conesa-Sevilla, 2005). More specifically:

...*singularization* implies a ... narrowing down, or impoverishment of meaning because the object [natural] being designated no longer exists, or, more importantly, has lost its original *telluric connection*, and because the semiotic triad does not function in its original context [in pristine, natural conditions]. By losing its *telluric connection* I mean that its original denotative and connotative function as part of a hunter-forager and early sustenance agricultural ethos, or, its *hypological* and intra-psychic function<sup>4</sup> is no longer available to conscious mind.

To the extent that I still believe this to be the case, and to the extent that the loss of a *telluric connection* generates a new text that may be referred to as surreal or false, then the more false and surreal a culture is the more it will impact language detrimentally, arriving at not only a state of false consciousness, but at illness. Because the estrangement is away from an original natural dialectics, then ecopsychological well being must be studied semiotically, or biosemiotically as well. At the very least, the ecopsychological therapist or counselor must always be on the alert against using semiotically corrupted text and slipping it in as part of an agreed-upon cure. The ecopsychological therapist or counselor should never say, "Mr. Droz, take a drive to..." or "Take this little blue pill thrice a day," or "Get a hair cut and you will feel better."

It was Karl Marx who said, "Language comes into being, like consciousness, from the basic need, from the scantiest intercourse with other humans." Marx was not an ecologist, thus he could not extend his insight to an original and pristine mind in close dialectical exchanges with raw nature or derive from this insight a more encompassing philosophy leading to ecopsychology. Otherwise, Marx fails us, more often than not, like any other thinker who describes human activity anthropocentrically. Authentic language that signifies meaningfully and profoundly, has its origins in direct experiences,<sup>5</sup> and ideally, in experiences chosen by the individual to enhance LIFE and human development. To update Marx, if we can be so presumptuous, we must say that "Language comes into being," or at least it did in the beginning, "...like consciousness, from the basic need," *of a full-fledged immersion in a grander natural universe that included entire ecosystems and their mythical description when language, authentically, described an ecologically valid reality.*

Both capitalist and socialist philosophies often disappoint us by ending with a bottom line that excludes the WHOLE PLANET and with descriptions of language that arrive at the humanistic phrase "the needs and the wants of a human." In their exclusion of grander natural processes, in their assumption that humanity sits in a parapet above these

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<sup>4</sup> The primary and fundamental function of language that assists self-definition and gives rise to ego-driven and rational assessments of information for the benefit of survival and adaptation

<sup>5</sup> Or in genuine experiences

processes ready to yield utilitarian bottom lines, both ideologies leave humanity's spirit thirsty and a planet in ruins.

As I said earlier, Mr. Droz's experience with TEXT, semiotically defined, is: *chaotic, fragmented, propagandistic, technically alien, created and served by others, and extant from a genuine dialectics of manual dexterity disciplined by patience, apprenticeship, or true craftsmanship in the service of LIFE*. To the extent that behavior, cognition, and language not only inform one another but are shaped to their mature and life-fulfilling forms by a cultural context, then an artificial and fragmented life leads to an artificial being who is fragile in his psychology and oblivious to LIFE's fundamental realities.

It is a much more complicated and dire problem than when Marx and Engels (1844) singled out *Estranged Labour* or the alienation of labor. My previous paragraph describes an extended and perpetual *being* condition *where the laborer can never escape his sub-existence, even when he is removed from the inhuman conditions of repetitive and meaningless labor. The entire horizon of Droz's existence is dominated by false consciousness created by false TEXT (propaganda), false institutions, false meanings, false ideologies, and a host of materialistic narcotics*. Droz is also provided with a false sense of empowerment, an earned and disposable income (and credit as a new form of usury), that allows him to continue on with his slumber from one purchase to another, from one toy to the next.<sup>6</sup> This restricted sense of freedom, *consumer freedom*,<sup>7</sup> cannot be underestimated by the ecopsychologist because the practice taps into earlier juvenile wish-fulfillment trends assisting a pernicious regression.

Marx did reveal a significant element of an ecopsychological equation when he wrote:

To say that man's physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.

Estranged labour not only (1) estranges nature from man and (2) estranges man from himself, from his own function, from his vital activity; because of this, it also estranges man from his species. It turns his species-life into a means for his individual life. Firstly, it estranges species-life and individual life, and, secondly, it turns the latter, in its abstract form, into the purpose of the former, also in its abstract and estranged form.

For in the first place labour, life activity, productive life itself, appears to man only as a means for the satisfaction of a need, the need to preserve physical existence. But productive life is species-life. It is life-producing life. The whole character of a species, its species-character, resides in the nature of its life activity, and free conscious activity constitutes the species-character of man. Life appears only as a means of life.

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<sup>6</sup> Engels' *Commodity Fetishism*

<sup>7</sup> I would grant that "freedom" is relative to begin with, but, at the same time, that we also have the power to stretch the relative conditions of its personal existential form.

The animal is immediately one with its life activity. It is not distinct from that activity; it is that activity. Man makes his life activity itself an object of his will and consciousness. He has conscious life activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life activity directly distinguishes man from animal life activity.

I would argue that the human animal, regardless of the fact that he could make "his life activity an object of his will and consciousness," is equally "immediately one with its life activity" in the same manner and to the same degree that other animals experience this intimacy. If this intimacy were not possible or frequent it would not be reflected, strongly so, in naturalism, animism, Taoism, Shinto, or even Zen Buddhism. If this intimacy did not exist, we could not explain the common feeling of connection obtained while in nature, or after having switched to activities that increase the awareness of new body routines, the feeling that the person is "one with the task," or better, "one with the task of living."

Furthermore, picking up on the last two sentences, and developing Marx's logic a bit further, then one assumes with other ecopsychologist writers that if a human "has conscious life activity" and this awareness originates in a general and fundamental animal ecopsychological intimacy where the non-human animal "is immediately one with its life activity," then that phylogenic connection can be resuscitated. The fact is, according to Marx, that "Man makes his life activity itself an object of his will and consciousness," and thus makes semiotics a significant avenue for this recovery. Understanding and then challenging how language is used and abused against us paves the way for ecopsychological insight. Understanding how language interacts cognitively with the whole of a person and how a person is ecopsychologically changed by it, is an ecosemiotic enterprise. In the drudgery of an ill wanted or hated job, the internal track is definitely not happy. Or this internal text track supposes, rationalizes, and then resolves its *cognitive dissonance* with palatable explanations that never make the task any less poisonous to one's soul. The drudgery of a job that runs counter to Buddhism's "right action" or "right livelihood," could undermine humanity itself where the worker finally becomes the thoughtless and joyless drone.

To reiterate and sum up, to even say that Droz employs a *feral text* is to be kind and generous. The text is thoroughly fictional, thoroughly synthetic, and most of the time, animated by infantile wanting that never ceases and for which a plethora of corporations aim to satisfy it for profit.

Finally, in the semiotic sphere of Mr. Droz there is no *biosemiosis*, no room or time to interpret *natural signs* so that these can inform him of LIFE's processes (Conesa-Sevilla 2005). Imagine that all we know about LIFE came from cartoon TEXT. How could one go from this reality to a reality of public television, A&E docu-dramas, and other quality TV TEXT? Imagine further that ALL TEXT is TV TEXT or TEXT that comes from an artificial and tautologically surreal culture that, more and more, is losing its grip because it is no longer grounded in raw nature. What is the ecosemiotic condition of the lied-to ape? Could this condition lead to illness? Is so, what type of illness?

The condition, to amalgamate meanings, is one of: LIFE interrupted and *unintegratable*, funneled-semiosis, lost telluric connections, estranged labour at the very least, continued commodity fetishism, spiritual pauperism, and over-extended juvenile delinquency in the absence of going hunting to feed the group who prays, sings, or plays under the oak tree.

It is not a new illness, and by different names, for at least 9,000 years, it has been treated with *actions*: simplicity, frugality, discipline, clarity, silence, physical activity, walking more, singing more, devouring less, and recognizing idle divertimentos as the soundtrack to a mad piper who takes you to the river, not to appease your thirst, but to drown you.

### **Heinz Droz Rebels**

Heinz Droz can rebel without thinking he is rebelling, at least at first. That is, Droz can recognize that some elements of culture, the social situation he finds himself in, are not always conducive to happiness or even healthy. Cultural relativism can no longer be used as a valid excuse for prolonging his insanity. Normative psychology, in our case, ecopsychologically testable truths, must be paid attention to. However, he does not have to believe in the cynical or the optimist ecopsychologist before he starts doing something that can immediately address his sense of frustration and forlornness. A more radical approach: Return to the Wild by whatever means necessary, including discarding the ecopsychologist who talked you into embracing wilderness. Short of living "with the red of blood in teeth and claw," there is a large continuum of "back to the wild" scenarios that could fit almost any presently deformed "civilized" living style, that can substitute for it in a long-lasting and meaningful way.

He can walk, bicycle or take a bus. He can try to identify all the birds and plants he sees no matter how small and humble, and learn something about their niche needs. He can walk more often without thinking that walking is a socially deviant action with lewd movements akin to dancing the *Lambada*. He can imagine the benefits of recycling and composting without undue mental effort. He can think seriously about animal bondage and how nutrition, honor, and compassion are diminished or eradicated by it in his own body and soul. If bold, he can hunt to survive or raise "happy, free range chickens" and learn to kill them for communion with compassion and gratitude.

Droz could also resist the easy answers and deals that might buy him some short-lived convenience or "happiness." He decides never to open errant emails with alluring subject lines that pledge "Fuller and harder erections," "Strike it rich," "Guaranteed credit card approval," "One Minute Millionaire," "Free Computers," or "Our store is your cure all." In fact, he pitches all sales pitches and, deliberately, self-imposes frugality by purging consumerism as a way of life.

In terms of his chosen profession, he must think twice or thrice about sacrificing a quality of life for its hypnotic tinsel quanta. He must understand that a collector hoards objects under the guise of a rationalized pretense and that hoarding behavior is not normal.

Whether Droz is a capitalistic fellow by nature or by indoctrination, he is on the mend when he accepts Marx's dictum that *a productive life is "life-producing life"*.

All of these actions, or any other of Droz's actions that foster the integration of LIFE, have something in common. They are *actions*, not idle, self-defeating, pessimistic thoughts, or empty, wishful or confused text. They are also *deliberate*.

In the ecopsychological awakening phase, Heinz Droz takes his clothes off and looks at an animal body and understands that it is an ANIMAL BODY. He knows that his thoughts were once *correctly and authentically singularized* on only one subject and ensuing text that spoke of a *telluric connection* and of a seamless and *integratable* LIFE. After this insight, he ACTS to correct his descent into madness. He 'walks' the real verbs, he is modified by life-giving adjectives, and begins using an appropriate and complex pronoun: Me-Nature--probably, the only pronoun that counts.

What do you seek, My Countrymen?  
Do you desire that I build for  
You gorgeous palaces, decorated  
With words of empty meaning, or  
Temples roofed with dreams? Or  
Do you command me to destroy what  
The liars and tyrants have built?

Kahlil Gibran, *My Countrymen, Book Four*, (1951: 135)

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**Figure 1: Heinz Droz is "Happy" but Confused**



