

By Stuart Hill

Spontaneity and being in the present are the most reliable indicators of psychological and emotional wellbeing (Williamson and Pearse 1980), which are prerequisites to genuine progressive change. However, nearly all adults are significantly 'wounded', and are unaware of the extent and effects of this wounding, and are living in unsupportive and challenging conditions (deMause 1982; Hill 1991, 2003; Jackins 1997). As a consequence, most of us exhibit extensive 'compensatory' behaviors, including denial of this. We tend to construct deceptively simple assumptions about the world, and often interact with it in naive ways. One outcome is that the ways in which we explain our experiences, and the past in general, and plan for the future, often miss or downplay key factors that influence our thinking and action (such as the role of fear, particularly fear of loss of control, or conversely our largely untapped collaborative potential), and we tend to elevate minor concerns (such as short-term and superficial 'appearance' considerations). One framework for suggesting how such behaviors might become established involves adaptive processes that result in the construction of sub-personalities or multiple adaptive selves that exhibit broadly predictable (non-spontaneous) behaviors (Hill 2003). Each of these selves is likely to be triggered into action by environmental cues that are generically related to those responsible for the establishment of the original adaptation. Such adaptive processes commonly involve disempowerment, loss of awareness and psychic numbing (Macy 1983), and the development of related compensatory behaviors such as attraction to symbols of power, obsessive control, and distractive activities, along with defensiveness, denial, and underlying feelings of guilt and despair.

The immediate relevance of this to developments in industrial ecology is that unless we are aware of who the 'selves' are who are participating in any discussions and projects, then much energy can be wasted in negotiations with 'selves' who are currently incapable of making empowered and informed decisions. Only empowered, non-adaptive 'selves', ideally operating within supportive contexts, are likely to be able to fully engage in deep critical analysis and creative fundamental redesign initiatives. To achieve long-term success, it is essential that psychological recovery and the nurturing of human development be part of any integrated industrial ecology agendas; in the shorter term, if disempowerment is the limiting factor, it will be more effective to address this before (or at least at the same time as) focussing on other aspects of the change process (Hill 1991, 2001). In working with change, it has been my experience that this is the area that is most frequently neglected or dealt with by denial, yet it is also the area that has most to offer in terms of its potential contribution to sustainable progressive change.