SECTION III: A MODEL OF PLANETARY ACTIVISM

RANDY HAYES AND THE RAINFOREST ACTION NETWORK:

THE MAN, THE ORGANIZATION AND THE STRATEGIES

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INTRODUCTION: SOME PERSONAL NOTES

Planetary Consciousness: Taking Care of the Earth and of Life

The Earth is our Mother
We must take care of her
(from song)

Two days ago I came back from a trip to Maui, Hawaii. There, in the region of Hana, I met, for the first time, the rainforest. From the time I arrived on this island, I felt a strong urge to go the forest--into the lush green. "Green energy" became suddenly very meaningful to me--very concrete. I had heard people talk about it before, but it sounded to me like a newly-coined, trendy "New Age" term, and I could not seriously relate to it nor even understand it. It seemed, at best, some sort of metaphor--but still only a vague concept to me.

In the rain forest of Maui, 'green energy' was suddenly real. I experienced it, almost compelling in its attractive power. I felt re-energized physically, my senses alive, awakening. The world was suddenly a world of smell--the flowers, the leaves, the fruits, the ocean! And I heard the silence, and the birds singing in their natural habitat, in their magnificent home. So much abundance and lushness and colors, such shades and depths of green, the types, sizes and varieties of leaves and trees and roots and pebbles and earth...the waterfalls, the rain alive in the earth and in the plants and in my skin. From the depths of my being this dance burst from me...I was safe, I was home, I was a (human) being...Nothing to prove, to formulate...just being alive, with all, all together, in the rain forest.

In simple moments like these, when concepts become, or reveal, their grounding in tangible realities, there is a sense of aliveness, of fullness and of presence in which--to me--life *makes sense*. Again, after years of research about the current planetary situation, interviewing people, finding facts and possible ways of action I was back to my starting point of caring, loving, being alive and feeling truly one with nature.

An unexpected, similarly direct encounter with nature in 1981 in Mexico triggered for me a whole process of self discovery, of a deep sense of knowing and of the recollection that is the basis and inspiration of this work. I felt Nature, I was one with it, even if for a fleeting moment and I felt alive and clear and safe and protected, just a woman where I shall be...Green energy was life force itself.

Throughout this research I have been learning about some of the imminent challenges that not only us humans but also all of life as we know it, are facing today. The same history of exploitation, uncaring and disrespect towards fellow humans that we have displayed through the centuries and millennia has been repeated with nature. The same patriarchal ethnocentrism (including, in this sense, divisions of class, race and gender as well as other existing barriers such as between the privileged and the exploited) so typical of the contemporary materialistic positivistic paradigm in the industrial world has fostered the view that humans are undoubtedly superior to, and dissociated from, nature. This has resulted in a lack of caring for nature (at best) if not sheer abuse and disrespect. In this way all of us, humans and nature, become object-like,[1] losing our own humanity, and thus forgetting our planetary origin and planetary destiny.

Thus we, in the industrial North, seem to have become increasingly lost in our world of ideas--in a reality of exploitation, of objectification and alienation, of a rampant self-serving consumption that has not much relationship to survival nor to true self expression but more to an alienated technology that does not even pretend to serve humanity's, nor life's, true collective interests. This is how we find ourselves today--in an unprecedented planetary situation, where not only 'selected' peoples but also the mere life supporting systems of the

planet are in danger (the air we breathe, the water we drink the soil that feeds us, etc)--uniting all of us, in effect (humans and nature as well), in an unavoidable common planetary fate/ destiny. In this new collective juncture, we are almost dialectically forced, on a planetary level, to recognize our commonalities and to harmonize our endeavors for survival.

Environmental degradation, pollution, and serious ecological imbalances are clearly linked to illness and to other demonstrations of a reduced quality of life for increasing numbers of people, and for animals and plants as well--for the whole planet--without regard to conventional strata. We are endangering not only our physical survival, and that of all life as we know it but also much more than that: the very core of our humanness--our *moral integrity.* We have jeopardized our moral integrity for not living up to our responsibility to be caretakers rather than exploiters of the Earth so that we can pass it on to future generations that which was cared for and passed on to us by our collective human ancestors. The vision of the natural world (and the socio-political world) in which we live in today, and which we are passing on to our children, is so desolate that, rather than inspiring thoughtful and creative action, it produces a degree of apathy and numbness and a sense of helplessness--of being overwhelmed by the enormity and complexity of ecological and planetary disaster.

In the rainforest my search and my worry were spontaneously suspended, the concepts faded into some background, my questions quieted and I was just alive. I was safe and, yes, *absorbing green energy*...being human and, more than that, being a woman...I was home. I was.

I literally remembered, almost at a cellular level, a more ancient self, a dancing woman. I felt the drum on the earth and it felt really good to be communing barefoot with the moist fertile Earth. It was not "dirt" nor "dirty", to be avoided, but it was *Earth*, moist, dark, fertile earth...I danced, to my surprise, with abandonment. I could see things and views from a new perspective, as if from soaring on high.

Words fail, of course, as it is commonly the case with people who have these experiences of communion with nature or with a deeper sense of knowing or of Self that transcends, even if for a fleeting moment, the individual sense of personality or ego.

Traditionally this was the domain of poets, artists, and mystics. And even though sociologists do not tend to care much for accounts of this sort, it is a reality grounded in real peoples' real experiences—with a social basis and social implications. It is relevant to life. More than that, considering our present-day alienation, just to reexperience or reenact our intimacy with nature is an almost revolutionary act in itself with truly transformational implications. Simply put, *I felt at home* in the rainforest. I seemed to find some long-sought roots. I felt a deep sense of gratitude to life for being able to experience such belonging and such safety. I *loved* the rainforest, in Maui, Hawaii.

I danced and felt an incredible exhuberance.

Being in the rainforest I could experience the bountifulness of nature, and the happiness that comes from just feeling alive and in direct contact with the elements... I felt a deep kinship with the trees and the plants, and I knew that we were jointly partaking of life on earth. I felt a strong urge to abandon myself to her , to care for and protect her.

Born and raised in Buenos Aires, a very large metropolis, I did not really know nature as a child. The ground I walked on from birth on was covered with tiles, wood, linoleum, cement or a rug. Anything else was "not clean" and "not safe"--unless in very specifically-defined "vacation" times and places. "Nature" had always a ring of danger, uncleanliness or discomfort—to be avoided as much as possible in daily life. Nature was to be covered, or harvested, or consumed, or chopped down, or painted- always tamed and at a distance. And this is not untypical of urban people.

No wonder then that in our alienation from our origin—the dust we come from and return to--living under the shadow of nuclear holocaust and other contemporary horror scenarios—we are growing insecure, unsafe, and afraid. Uprooted --forgetting our Earth, our home, our mother--we are losing ourselves--losing our simple humanity. We, particularly in the industrial West, are forgetting how safe and joyful simply *being* feels: the joy of running free, barefoot on the ground, vital and vibrant, kind, sensually exploding through all the senses.

As we commodify everything around us, we become commodities ourselves and, in this course, we increasingly forget to take care of our home, the Earth. We forget, even, *how* to do it. We oppress, exploit, and even annihilate the indigenous people who still have that knowledge and who still really care. Is it any wonder then that the home may start to crumble after all?...

The environmental situation on the planet grows more catastrophic day by day. In this section I explore some of these problems and issues--and their possible solutions. Here I appeal to a sense of justice and responsibility for all life and for future generations and, above that, to a sense of caring for our planet simply because we *care*.