

Vine Deloria, Jr., *C. G. Jung and the Sioux Traditions: Dreams, Visions, Nature, and the Primitive*,
Spring Journal Books

Reviewed by Thomas C. Gannon

As no doubt one of the few who has devoted significant parts of my life to reading and writing about both Carl Gustav Jung and Vine Deloria, Jr., I am perhaps uniquely situated to comment upon Deloria's final book, published posthumously, *C. G. Jung and the Sioux Traditions: Dreams, Visions, Nature, and the Primitive* (Spring Journal Books, 2009). The very title of the book, in fact, had me already much inclined in its favor. I applaud the efforts of Philip Deloria and Jerome Bernstein in bringing this manuscript to press, for the edification and pleasure of students and scholars interested in Jung (and psychoanalysis), or Deloria (and Native American studies), or both.

Carl Jung and Vine Deloria are an especially apt pairing: both of them are certainly on the periphery of mainstream social science (and academia), and they are both "outsiders" precisely because much of their work involves the critique of a left-brain-dominant, rationalist mainstream intellectual culture that has little time for those aspects of the cultural psyche in need of vision, and ceremony, and dream. (Deloria's paraphrases of Jung, for instance, include the telling assertion, "it is not simply by becoming more rational that you become more conscious" [42].) Like many neo-Jungian projects, Deloria's effort is, on a basic level, yet one more effort to revivify Jung's philosophy for a new audience and socio-historical milieu; but (for the lay reader, at least), it is a most unexpected revival. Its method is a close comparison/contrast of Jungian thought with Deloria's own "Sioux" traditions, ultimately privileging the common ground—of dreams and visions—that Deloria perceives both inhabiting. Deloria's intervention here into Euro-analytical depth psychology leads to his imagining of a new syncretic *weltanschauung* that incorporates the best of Jungian psychology and Lakota traditionalism, a synthesis that may serve as a fruitful antidote to a postmodern techno-industrial world gone awry.

In his attempt to offer a balanced critique of Jung's own notions regarding Native Americans, Deloria performs some important moves. Most importantly, the influence of Native thought upon Jung is rightfully diagnosed as largely colored by the lens of Jung's own Western racist primitivism. Deloria further problematizes Jung's ostensibly positive (though ultimately condescending) regard for the "primitive" mind and the non-human "animal" by asserting that Jung's Western primitivism and Western naturism are two wings of the same bird, really, both symptoms of an ideology in which (Western) humankind remains the center of a very insular, Ptolemaic universe, as it were. (This ideology is

frequently contrasted, in Deloria's text, with a Lakota worldview that emphasizes the collective, an aggregate of life forms that necessarily includes other species.) Most seminal to scholars of species alterity is Deloria's brilliant deconstruction of Jung's—and the Western propensity in general of—insisting that other species in dreams must be "mere" *symbols*, and therefore nothing more than pointers and signifiers of the human psyche and its intrapsychic machinations. To think otherwise—as the Lakota do—is simply reflective of a "primitive" mind. Of course, Deloria will (rightfully) have none of this, and he is often eloquent in saying as much. Finally, Deloria is determined to read Jung's psychology—despite the latter's seminal notion of the collective unconscious—as the inevitable Western emphasis on individualism, versus the Lakota privileging of the collective; for at last, Jung (it can be claimed) was ultimately hell bent upon *individuation*—that is, upon the evolution of one individual (Western) psyche. This is hardly, as Deloria convincingly argues, what Lakota ceremonialism is all about. The *raison d'être* of the Lakota *hanblecia* (vision quest) is for the future greater good of the collective, the people, the *oyate*, not for some Western individualist "self-growth." Thus Deloria's critique of Jung's limitations includes the lament that the powerful role of such visions has been lost to Western civilization, for the most part, and this explains Jung's necessary turn to dreams, as rather pale, postlapsarian versions of humankind's "visionary" impulse.

While exceptions will be noted below, Deloria still does a fairly impressive job identifying many of the more fruitful intersections of Jungian thought and Lakota vision, such as his identification of the Six Grandfathers in Black Elk's first great vision as manifestations of Jung's Wise Old Man archetype. Of greatest interest here is Deloria's return to Native concepts he's perhaps most associated with in the public mind, those of "sacred places" and "sacred time"; the non-linear Lakota worldview that leads to such a notion is related to Western quantum physics and the relativity of time and space. In the process, Deloria's (and quantum physics's) deconstruction of the mind-versus-matter binary is fruitfully connected with Jung's own tentative forays into resolving the psyche/body dualism that has permeated Western philosophy for an intellectual eon.

While the book's tone in general is less deliciously trenchant than, say, Deloria's earlier critiques of Western imperialism and Christian proselytizing, there is still the occasional display of his biting wit, as in his description of the traditional Lakota family system: "husbands avoided contact with their mothers-in-law (a custom that would probably be welcomed in Western society today)" (144).

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However: if "Jung's thinking profoundly influenced" Deloria (i), it was not always entirely for the best. And though Deloria does critique Jung's universalist (and ultimately Eurocentric) view of the

archetypes, it isn't too much a stretch to speak of both Jung and Deloria as two of the last major bastions of modernist essentialism. (And thus neither are in especially great repute among current postmodernist/poststructuralist theorists.) This essentialism includes Deloria's implicit and explicit adoption of the oppositional binary of Western and Native worldviews itself. Indeed, Deloria's "Great Cultural Binary" (as I have dubbed it elsewhere) is a central *modus operandi* of Deloria's entire corpus; and yet it is ironically an example of the very analytical dualism that Deloria critiques as fundamental to Western philosophy and theology. Then there is Deloria's still frequent use of the word "theology" as an apparently positively important thing, as if such a problematic Western philosophical category really applied to non-Western ways of seeing and knowing. (Ditto, the word *metaphysics*.) But then, both Jung and Deloria were the sons of Christian clergymen, to be sure.

One also must also inevitably quibble with Deloria's reliance, in his discussion of "Sioux" beliefs and cultural practices, upon Lakota/Dakota texts of mostly an Anglo (and ethnographic) persuasion/reinvention: e.g., Frances Densmore, John G. Neihardt, James Walker, and William Powers. Similarly, actual Native sources like Charles Eastman and Luther Standing Bear represent quite assimilated versions of what the Dakota/Lakota believed. (To his credit, Deloria acknowledges the Western romanticizations of the "Indian" by Eastman, at least. And there is also the obvious rebuttal: where else is an *academic*, Indian or not, going to get this information?!)

But especially problematic is his faith in the cross-cultural transparency of *Black Elk Speaks*, already evident in his well-known 1979 foreword to this work. Deloria even quotes a specific passage describing Crazy Horse's vision life here (88) that, as DeMallie has made clear, is redolent with John G. Neihardt's own Western mystical biases. Indeed, Deloria seems to have blithely insisted on the "authenticity" of *Black Elk Speaks* to the end. This book's editors even point us to De Mallie's scholarly edition of the Black Elk/Neihardt manuscripts as a disclaimer of sorts (207).

To the Jungian scholar, Deloria's presentation of Jungian psychology itself may be said to border on the eccentric. For instance, he spends too much time on the obvious relationship between instincts and archetypes and, in contrast, waits until the last few pages of the book to deal with several of the much more Lakota-relevant notions in Jung: the quaternity—finally relating Jung's infatuation with the mandala (as symbol of the Self) to Lakota four-directional iconography; synchronicity—a Jungian notion that Deloria presents early on, but again waits until the end to bring up its Lakota resonances in any concerted fashion; and the trickster, which is only treated in passing, at best. Moreover, to define "vanity" in Jungian terms as "the presence of an ego or Self" (117) is a misreading of Jung (or at least a misspeaking) since, in Jung's parlance, the ego and Self are more nearly polar opposites than synonyms.

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My concluding quibble is more with Western psychology in general and (Jungian) psychoanalytic theory in particular than with Vine Deloria, Jr. One of the grander "quotable quotes" from the book is the following: "Perhaps the most extravagant pretense of Western civilization is its tenaciously held belief that only humans matter in the scheme of things" (99). And the book's co-editor (and Jungian analyst) Jerome Bernstein deems this book part of a "return to a connection" to "nature," which "has once again begun to speak to and through the western psyche" (xvii). This call for a "return" to eco-wisdom has indeed become a mantra of recent neo-Jungians, and Deloria, too, frequently lauds Jung's various (however intermittent) appreciations of the non-human, the chthonic, the "animal." And yet the reader of the bulk of Jung's corpus per se perceives very much an obsession with the reality of the human intrapsychic realm, symptomatic of the origin of Jung's philosophy in romantic German idealism. To retrieve a veritable eco-conscious message from such an ideological origin seems to be largely wishful thinking.

Deloria does defend Jung in pointing out that the good Swiss doctor lacked the knowledge of the last 50 years of research in ethology ("animal" behavior): Jung never took his own momentary privileges of the non-human far enough, to truly imagine the possibility that "animals may be 'peoples' like us" (102). (As we have seen, he also rightly analyzes Jung as a victim of an evolutionary hierarchism that colored his view, too, of the human tribal indigenous.) In sum, Deloria's most seminal intervention into neo-Jungianism, as I've tried to indicate, may well be his reminders here that there are other cultures that could/can perceive "the clarity of interspecies communication," as a welcome remediation of a Western, including even Jungian, worldview that is "so mistrusting as to experience them ['messages' from other species] as simply the perpetual circling of the Self around the objective existence of the ego" (180). For this alone, the book is more than worth the journey—not *towards* some anthropocentric unconscious Self, but away from it.