

CHAPTER 4

ON THE ECOLOGICAL SELF: POSSIBILITIES AND FAILURES OF SELF- KNOWLEDGE AND KNOWLEDGE OF OTHERS

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*Willst du dich selber
erkennen, so sieh, wie die
andern es treiben, Willst du
dich die andern verstehen,
blick in dein eigenes Herz.
(F. Schiller, *Der Schlüssel*)*

Which Self? Which Others?

Does an "ecological self" really exist? If so, what are its main features? Does the bearer of such a self have a specific individualizing form—a form, that is, that a possible ecological identity must presuppose? Is there a being, in other words, that manifests ecological subjectivity, that is to say, that has a material bodily awareness of this subjectivity and of the correlate (the environment or world) of its own peculiar organism?

According to its Greek origin (*oikos*), "ecology" means "house". In a more general sense, in addition to a more local notion of "house" (niche) and its "proper administration"—the house of the single species or of each living organism—it is connected to a broader notion of "house": that of global nature, in all its layers and regions, and of its proper administration. Nature in this sense can be more or less pleasant; human and non-human animals can live in conflict or in peace and cooperation, and this to varying degrees. Since animals (in this case, human animals) share a layer of nature at least with the species to which they belong, their possible "ecological selves", which are suited to this shared region, are not at base solipsistic: the animal's daily perceptual and operative activities, each regionally and opportunely mentally *constructed* and characterized by relevant biological