Meeting at the Edge of the Wild

Ecopsychology edition:

£3. Free for members.
Chair’s Report

This is a particularly rich issue of Transformations, focused around an especially fine event: our summer residential gathering, ‘Meeting At the Edge of the Wild’. This was very well attended, and, I think, much valued by most of the people who were there. It was the culmination of what has been a successful and varied year for PCSR. This included our first AGM for several years last November, and the preceding short conference that morning on the theme ‘The Future of Psychotherapy’; and in May our regular weekend conference on Psychotherapy and Politics, this year on the theme of Dialogue.

PCSR continues healthy, then - in a political environment which increasingly feels anything but healthy. The Steering Group has enough numbers and energy to keep things ticking over, and to take the occasional new initiative; but if only two or three more people joined, we would be able to take a much more proactive role in making connections between the world of therapy and the social and political environment within which we function. The involvement of some PCSR members in the Occupy movement gives us a taste of what that might be like.

So I want to encourage anyone interested to approach the Steering Group about becoming part of it - no previous experience necessary! At the same time, we are saying goodbye and thank you to Tree Staunton, who is stepping down from the Steering Group after several years of active involvement, including until recently editing Transformations.

Nick Totton
Chair of PCSR Steering Group

Transformations
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Transformations is the Journal of Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility:

Transformations has two functions. One is to keep PCSR members informed about what is going on in the various parts of the organisation, and to report on events that interface therapy and politics.

The other is to open up a range of social and professional issues to a wider readership. It aims to do this by bringing new perspectives to bear on old debates, and establishing new debates around existing attitudes and prejudices.

Transformations is your journal as a PCSR member and it will be enriched by your writing for it.

If you have any ideas, news, letters or contributions please email the editor, Kamalamani:

info@kamalamani.co.uk
‘Meeting at the Edge of the Wild’ ecopsychology gathering contents
A reminder of the ecopsychology gathering contents for those of you who were unable to attend or would like a reminder...

Keynote speakers: Chris Drury ‘Embodied Thinking and Experience’ and Isis Brooks ‘Feeling and Thinking with Nature and Landscape’.

Workshops:
Dreaming the Work Onwards: Jung, Nature and Energy, James Barrett and Judith Anderson
Trembling at our Edges: Nature and Soul, Rhona Brandrick and Michael Connors
Environmental Constellations, Zita Cox
Reading Nature’s Open Secret: Opening the Threshold to the Lost Language of Nature and the Soul, Roger Duncan
Wild Awakening: on the Edge of the Dance, Caroline Frizell
This edition of ‘Transformations’ focuses largely upon write ups from this summer’s ecopsychology gathering organised by PCSR and friends. We hoped that this event would be a chance for practitioners from across the UK (and as it turned out, the US) to come together to share practice, listen to key note speakers, participate in: workshops, dream matrix, live music, story-telling, meditation, yoga and wild dancing. The response was very encouraging: an offering of workshops on a wide range themes and practices, a full house in terms of numbers, and an interesting mix of enthusiastic and engaged participants, extending well beyond therapy practitioners.

I found the event very valuable. Living closer to the sky and earth, catching up with friends and meeting new ones was a pretty good starting point! The start of the event was helped by the sudden and timely appearance of the sun after weeks of grey skies and mud. As workshop co-ordinator I was struck by the ease and harmony of working with the workshop presenters and juggling spaces and activities. I most enjoyed the unexpected and unprogrammed things: the conversations and deepening connections (often over delicious ‘Green and Away’ food), pottering by the sides of the River Teme, having the luxury of compost loos, and seeing bodies congregating around the fire after dark: a sense of a timeless village mingling in amongst the greenery and meandering river. These are the impressions that stay with me.

Personally I have less and less appetite for lots of conversation and full programmes and this conference had both of those. On reflection I would have suggested at some point an elemental whole group (or at least, collective) ceremony or ritual in which we acknowledged our human community living with the local earth, wildlife and other beings. And perhaps a more contemplative ongoing collective space—perhaps ideas for next year’s event?

In this ecopsychology edition you will find thoughts from several of the workshop facilitators, followed by overall reflections and appreciation from participants. There are also two ecopsychology book reviews, and a piece from Chris Wilson, a southwest-based PCSR member sharing his experiences of participating on the ‘Shift Bristol’ one-year practical sustainability course. Finally there is the regular work-life piece, this month featuring Mary-Jayne Rust, a long-standing ecopsychology practitioner in the UK, ending with the notices and 2013 dates for PCSR events.

Thank you again to all my fellow organisers for your hard work. There were lots of us, and lots to do before and during the gathering. Thanks to the key note speakers: Isis Brooks and Chris Drury, the workshop presenters, ‘Seize the Day’ - the Saturday night band, all the participants and the friendly, responsive volunteers at Green and Away. And of course, all the other-than-human beings with whom we shared the Green and Away space.

Kamalamani (editor).

(Workshops continued…)

From Affinity to Shapeshift: Ways Humans Converse with the Earth, Kelvin Hall
Growing towards Wholistic Permaculture: Stepping Into the “Wild” of bringing the Whole Self to Permaculture Education, Jilly Hovey and Peter Cow
Embodying the Shambhala Warrior/ess: Exploring how Post-Reichian Character Positions can Help Sustain our Ecopsychology Work, Kamalamani
Deepening Connections – based on The Work That Reconnects, Lisbet Michelsen
Dangerous Margins, Chris Robertson
Facing the Trauma of Ecological Crisis, Nick Totton

Other events:
‘Birthing the New Form’ plenary lead by Margaret Kerr, Dave Keys and Nick Totton.
Dream Matrix lead by James Barrett each morning.
Movement and yoga with Caroline Frizell and Judith Anderson.
It seems to me that one of the central issues of ecopsychology is one of languaging. How do the disciplines of biology and psychology or psychotherapy communicate? Both have clear professional boundaries that are difficult to breach even if we are searching for something as an important as an ‘environmentally based standard for mental health’. (Roszak, 1992).

Outside of these seemingly closed language systems we have, in popular culture, alluring imaginative fantasy narratives about how nature and psyche might connect. It can be seen in the recent popular film ‘Avatar’ and also in the Star Wars movies, where the Jedi knights are able to use the ‘force’, a felt body-based sense, to make intuitive contact with the universal. At the time of making the film George Lucas’s children were at a Steiner school in California and the idea of the force came from Rudolf Steiner’s hypothesised ‘etheric body,’ an energetic force we share with nature which closely resembles the ‘chi’ described by eastern medicine.

Having worked practically with the indications of Rudolf Steiner within therapeutic education and social processes for 25 years, I have been struck by how relevant this work could be to an understanding of ecopsychology. I have also been frustrated by how Steiner’s language is almost completely incomprehensible within contemporary culture.

In order to understand an indecipherable language, such as the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic, for instance, we need some sort of Rosetta Stone to help interpret what we are experiencing. For me this came from comparison with two other more contemporary thinkers, Gregory Bateson and the French scholar of Islamic literature, Henry Corbin. Both thinkers draw on ideas from a time prior to the establishment of the Christian world view. Today this world view might be labelled as Alchemical or Gnostic and was an inspiration not only to Bateson and Corbin but also, Goethe, Steiner, and Jung.

This world view is described by Gregory and Catherine Mary Bateson (2005) as a place where nature and mind meet. To make sense of this we need to “to master ...this curious language that has no things in it but only differences and relationships.” Corbin (Cheatham, 2003) talks of his discovery of a ‘lost continent’ of language in Islam literature that describes what he calls the ‘imaginal world’ which until recently we have had few words to describe in the west. Corbin describes the imaginal world as a place between “sense perceptions and the intuitions or categories of the intellect” which joins the two realms of what would otherwise be subjective and objective.

This is remarkably similar to Steiner’s descriptions of the type of thinking required to understanding living systems, a perception which is not based on a sensory or a cognitive reading of the world, but something in between. Both Steiner (2000) and Corbin identify the organ of perception of this mysterious world as the heart. Perhaps this might be a place where soul and nature can meet and communicate in a curious language without words, a language to explore the complexities of ecopsychology.

A number of contemporary thinkers seem to have...
identified thresholds to this new (or is it very old?) way of experiencing the world. Steven Foster and Meredith Little have used the ritualised solo fasting of vision quest to enable participants to experience direct communication with the more than human world (Foster and Little, 1998.) Bernstein (2005) has named a type emerging ‘borderland’ consciousness that is open to this communication. Romanyshyn (2007) explores the experience of grief and the breaking open of the heart as a threshold to the imaginal world with “the power to break the mind and its will so thoroughly that miracles breakthrough”.

Corbin’s description of the imaginal world closely resembles the reciprocal relationship between therapist and client as well as descriptions of the relationship between indigenous hunters and the land. It is a relationship that enables us to step outside the nihilism of post modernism, and allow new possibilities to emerge within from the potential of every moment.

The second half of my workshop at the gathering involved observing animal skulls and bones based on Bateson’s idea that: “the shapes of animals and plants are messages”. We explored a wide variety of bones as well as a model of an archetypal bone made up of common features from all bones as indicated by Steiner. The question held in mind during this experience being: do animal bones have a common pattern or type as Goethe suggested? And if this is the case, is this pattern useful in understanding the structure of the psyche? At the end of the workshop I was asked ‘does the soul have a map?’ Well, both Steiner and Batson seem to suggest that it does. That it has a language of patterns shared with plants and animals that Jung called the ‘Creatura’. But unlike nature the soul has no territory, no stuff, or to use Jung’s word no ‘Pleroma.’ It has no material substance that has the capacity to hold a form as a message. Both Steiner and Bateson suggest that to understand the soul and its connection with the natural world we need to read the messages written in an imaginal language in the territory of animal and plant forms. A lost language shared by mind and nature, soul and psyche, an ancient language that might teach us how to work with a synthesis of ecology and psychology, an emergent and hopeful language of ecopsychology. I will leave Rumi with the last word on this:

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### Hidden inside

Hiding is the hidden purpose of creation.  
Bury your seed and wait.  
After you die, all the thoughts you had will throng around like children.  
The heart is the secret inside the secret.  
Call the secret language and never be sure what you conceal.  
Its unsure people who get the blessing  
Climbing jasmine, opening roses, nightingales singing,  
These are inside the chill November wind.  
They are its secret. How did you discover mine?  
Your laugh. Only the soul knows what love is.  
This moment in time and space is an eggshell with an embryo crumpled inside, soaked in spirit-yolk, under the wing of grace, until it breaks free of mind to become the song of birds and their breathing.  

Rumi

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(Please turn to page 13 to see references and Roger Duncan’s biography).
The pain, joy and mysteries of humans’ relationship to the other-than-human world have been my consuming preoccupation in recent years. It was, therefore, enormously satisfying to take part in informed and passionate discussions that both valued this sphere but accepted the uncertainties and paradoxes it contains. An example was the exchange following Isis Brook’s talk featuring the Goethean approach; the presenter (in my understanding) advocated a “clear-out” of the individual’s habitual modes of seeing, in order to achieve a more pure perception of nature. A voice from the audience contrasted her premise with one familiar to therapists; that, in the course of an encounter, everything that arises in the mind can tell us something about the relationship. Such dialogue seemed to me to be very fertile; likewise those I also witnessed on our varied assumptions about indigenous cultures, and on the question of whether or not human history represents a loss of some earlier state of balance and harmony with nature.

My workshop (From Affinity to Shapeshift: Ways Humans Converse with the Earth) gave me a much valued opportunity to pursue the search for appropriate form and context for my work. Basically that work is the examination and fostering of intimate exchange - I like the word “conversation” - between humans and other life; to support my fellow humans in welcoming this type of experience so that it becomes more frequent and lucid. One of my keynotes is this quote from Derrick Jensen’s A Language Older than Words:

“Crazy or not, I soon discovered I wasn’t alone. I began to ask people if they experienced these conversations and overwhelmingly they said yes. Pigs, dogs, coyotes, squirrels, even rivers, trees and woods…were speaking and listening if only we too would enter into conversation. Almost without exception, the people I asked said they’d never told these stories for fear that others would think they were crazy.”

I sought to emphasize the variety of such experiences – for some people they happen with a plant, for others with a fly, for others with an elephant. I was able to offer a picture I have been gradually building, of a spectrum of different kinds of connection which humans discover with other life, and to illustrate how central this connection can be to the sense of self. My hope is that the description encourages greater first-hand familiarity with the spectrum, that individuals find greater fluency in its language and feel able to let it become a major aspect of life.

At one end of this spectrum I find the sense of affinity, arousal or attraction in the presence of a particular form of life; many people find this with locality or landscape – a specific place or type of terrain, in which they feel immediately at home – but it can just as easily be with a particular species of animal. I have witnessed therapy clients become mystified or even troubled by the discovery of such affinity; but I would argue that it is basic to human nature and history. A further phase along this spectrum is reflection; other life offering a message which illuminates our hidden feelings, or seems to be a commentary on our character, predicaments or self-understanding. This forms the basis of much equine-assisted therapy – for instance when a horse ignores someone who dreads being ignored, or crowds someone who hesitates to claim their boundaries. It is also central to vision-quest work such as described in Bill Plotkin’s book Soulcraft.

Another phase of the spectrum is mutual recognition, leading to partnership and fluency of exchange. This is when the other shows clear signs of acknowledgment and acceptance, and both responds to, and signals, intentions. One poignant example was the spontaneous procession of wild elephants past the home of “elephant whisperer” Lawrence Anthony following his death earlier this year. Another is the beekeeper recorded in the documentary film Queen of the Sun who strokes a swarm of bees with his moustache, to their evident contentment. Or Jane Goodall exchanging the sublest squeezing of the hand with a forest chimpanzee and writing (in In the Shadow of Man):
“At that moment there was no need of any scientific knowledge to understand his communication of reassurance. The soft pressure of his fingers spoke to me not through my intellect but through a more primitive emotional channel…”

This kind of contact also enables much collaboration and shared endeavour between species (like the fishing partnership between wild dolphins and coastal villagers which Ffyona Campbell described in On foot through Africa). But its basis is the occurrence of meeting and recognising.

A yet further shade of the spectrum consists of various forms of shape-shifting, and takes us to the edge of consciousness. This is when, in some way and to some degree, the human and other become each other”. Linda Hogan (in Intimate Nature: the Bond Between Women and Animals) evokes this when she writes: “Once, people could become animals if they wanted to, and animals could become people…”

This probably represents a very archaic form of consciousness; an anthropologist in Herzog’s film about Palaeolithic cave paintings (Cave of Forgotten Dreams) considers that these paintings arose out of an attitude towards other species characterized by “permeability, fluidity, flexibility”.

But this also happens to “modern” people – who sometimes then forget that it has happened; a dressage rider suddenly discovers that he can “feel every muscle in (the horse’s) body”; a woman confides in a friend that she has just spent some time knowing exactly what it is like to be a fox; David Abrams writes in Becoming Animal about the sensations in his body which seemed to accord with those of the raven he was observing; a friend recounts the time in his teens when watching a raven, he suddenly saw the world through the bird’s eyes. There are many more accounts of such moments, both published and confided in conversation.

This, for me, exemplifies the paradox, that the search for self realisation often takes us beyond self; that the fulfilment of human nature leads beyond mere human-ness.

Indeed another theme I explore is the sense of completion people seem to find when they enter this spectrum. That in becoming more animal, they also find or new landscape of their own spirit, or recover one long forgotten. As Charlie Russell, the bear envoy writes:

“Through their (the bears) acceptance of me, and by following their lead, I had become more than just an observer of the land. I had become part of it.....The subtleties that I had become able to sense were more the norm for an animal than for a human — a modern human at least.” (Grizzly Heart: Living without Fear among the Brown Bears of Kamchatka – written with Maureen Enns and Fred Stenson).

Underlying all such work is a question. What conditions enable the exchanges on this spectrum to occur? Stated very briefly, I suggest that these often include: respect, (or indeed, as is often the case, ardent longing) for the other’s culture, and a readiness to embody it; ability to hold one’s own boundaries; clarity of intention, combined with acceptance that the response to an offered gesture may be other than the one hoped for. Each of these conditions warrants a much fuller exploration than we have space for here.

So much for the content I presented; this was an experiential workshop utilising several group exercises, and I also wished to find a form which would enable the inclusion and intervention of the other life around us on the conference site. Indeed I had originally thought of bringing a companion horse to demonstrate some of my points. I then decided that transport in a lorry jarred with the ethos of the event, and travel by foot and hoof would entail several days journey there and back, for which I didn’t feel able to spare the time. So I reluctantly gave up the idea, and wondered therefore how I would manage to find other-than-human participants to give the workshop some edge.

But spending some time around the site beforehand, and while running these thoughts through my mind, I received a sudden encouragement in the form of a young toad. He was moving purposefully thought the grass and when I slowed my breathing, he slowed his pace. Re-assured that there were creatures everywhere with whom dialogue was possible, I then encountered a second toad, and considered that the point had been underlined for me.

Aware of being in an unfamiliar setting, I felt additional appreciation of my participants’ willingness to engage with these notions, to open themselves to such sensitive processes with so little time for preparation. I do regret that the time was so compressed, and will remember in future to be wary of trying to cover so much ground in limited time. I have no assumption that the event
was satisfying for every participant. But I am nevertheless grateful to all of them for enabling me to take this work just a few steps further. One group member reported how, during the exercise, he had moved through a phase of trying to “force” an experience, then how by letting go of that had discovered an interplay with bees. Another had been able to return to a tree with which she had already established a close rapport. As I’ve also discovered in one-to-one work, people want to talk about this sphere, to understand it, to become more conversant and confident in it.

Such transactions with other life appear in psychotherapy as both content and process. They tend to be excluded only by the limiting assumptions of therapist or client as to what therapy is about – one more area for continuing study. Nick Totton, Jerome Bernstein and others eloquently illustrate this in recent books. I am not pretending that this work can avert the ever more likely ecological cataclysm which may of course wipe out much of the life I’ve celebrated here. But it can perhaps contribute to consideration of what model of human being we wish to cultivate while we are still able to do so, as well as what values we would wish to perpetuate if any form of our society survives.

**Kelvin Hall** has been an integrative psychotherapist for 25 years; also a professional storyteller. A keen rider, his pursuit of the true art of horsemanship led him to investigate inter-species communication and the human bond with nature, on which he recently completed a piece of academic research, and now includes equine-assisted therapy in his practice. He is a contributor to many publications on story, therapy and nature, including "Vital Signs: Psychological Responses to Ecological Crisis". He is married with three children and two grandchildren.

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The lake at ‘Green and Away’

and our senses seemed to have rediscovered their attunement with earth air and spirit. In that finely tuned capacity to listen from the body, the dance had been allowed to creep tentatively into the universe and find a voice in the subtle inner impulses of a body alive with stories.

This wild awakening was a gentle exploration of the language of the wild dance within. To find a way to listen, to attune and to shape to our connection with the Earth, as the earthly creatures that we are. The spontaneous truths with which we’d begun, hung as limp lifeless leaves ready to drop to the ground.

We shifted back into a familiar temporal frame, shared our gratitude for the time we’d spent together and went on our way.

**Caroline Frizell** is a Senior Registered Dance Movement Psychotherapist. An initial training in dance in the 1970s led Caroline to explore the body as a catalyst for the expression of individual and social concerns. She has worked in North London for three decades, extensively with people who are hard to reach in the community. She has recently launched ‘movingdifference’ http://www.movingdifference.co.uk/ in South Devon, involving community work and a small private practice.
Following weeks of rain, the ecopsychology gathering at ‘Green & Away’ was bathed in the warmth of the sun beneath a blue sky. ‘Wild Awakening’ was held at the end of a long and intensive day. Participants arrived at the ‘kids tent’, the venue for ‘Wild awakening’, and with them wafted the fragility of mid-conference, pre-dinner exhaustion. One or two conference participants who had intended to join the workshop came to offer their apologies; they now needed a space to nurture their weary selves far from the madding crowd. The small group of willing participants formed a circle, each sharing some precious gem from the thread that had led them to this particular wild awakening. And in that sharing we caught a glimpse of those connecting threads, shining silver in the sun, weaving criss-cross patterns from one to another and we began to create a universe within the Universe. Time stopped and each wrote an impermanent yet pervasive spontaneous truth on a label, which was hung on the canopy to blow gently in the wind.

So, shall we dance?

Gently and cautiously, I invited the members of the circle to enliven the energies within and to allow a dance to emerge. The soles of the feet came into conversation with the grass below, which covered the soft, well-watered earth. I brushed a slug from my trousers. Toes, heels, insteps feeling their way, transferring weight from one foot to another, sensing the earth beneath, with grass between the toes. Knees and ankles softening as legs began to twist and turn from the hips, this way and that. Short but sturdy blades of grass were yielding to the emerging dance; side to side; forwards and back. The spine joined the dance, bone upon bone rising vertically to the sky, gently bending, twisting and leaning as the head followed the flow on its delicate axil. Shoulders picked up the undulating energy which rippled through the elbows, wrists, hands and out through the tips of the fingers. Like a meandering river, arms moved snake-like through the air.

Each found a way to attune to the many rhythms of the universe, whilst shaping the small moment of our shared wild awakening in a waking dream. Birds sang. Slugs crept through the grass beneath our feet. Flying insects zig-zagged through the air. The dancers went to a place of deep listening to the impulses and energies without and within. The urge to stamp, the urge to wander, to carve shapes and patterns through the air. The urge to lie on the grass and stare, free and open into the blueness of the sky. The senses led the dancers to explore the smallest moments of connection and to discover the wild and authentic calling of the world around, the world above and the world deep down. The voice of stillness called forth the dance of attentive awareness. With the warm air brushing against the skin, half closed eyes peered through flickering lashes to play with the kaleidoscope of shapes, colours and light. Drawn to the ground in a conversation with gravity, a dancer began rolling faster and faster down a slope, finding herself being rolled by the earth and punctuating the dance motif with a peel of laughter, hands lifting to her face in delight. A grasshopper watched, balancing tentatively on a blade of grass, the weight of her body causing the blade to curve and bounce. All of a sudden her powerful jack-knifed limbs propelled her out of sight. A dance of frustration and restriction emerged: of searching for a way out, but finding none, only to find that at the point of resignation a different way of being was offered by another in the group.

And so the dance went on. From roots, to shoots, to blossoming flowers, as creatures of the earth we came together to conclude our stories, sharing patterns shapes and flow; weaving in and out of the web that was created between us. A collective rhythm arose within the group as we synchronised our energies, coming together in the rise and fall of a rhythmic pulse which shifted us from left to right, meeting each other with open-hearted anticipation and curiosity, allowing the moment to shape the choreography as the universe moved towards us and with us and in us. Breaking away slowly, we separated from the dance to find ourselves alone.

We settled again in a circle, to wonder where we had been and what we had created. The warm air was soft and soothing against the skin. The dance had seemed a small oasis in the madness of the world around us. A bird sang from the bushes. Slugs negotiated their slimy route between the short green blades of grass. An insect clambered up the delicate stalk of a wild flower. The immediate world seemed expanded.

(continued on page 10)
Deepening Connections: The Work That Reconnects

Lisbet Michelsen

During the two hour 'Deepening Connections' workshop we were engaging with Joanna Macy’s Work that Reconnects (WTR). The ecological, social and economic challenges facing us in the world today can be hard to look at. The spiral journey of the WTR, with its four stages of Gratitude, Pain/Despair, Seeing With New Eyes and Going Forth give us an opportunity to explore our experiences and feelings, as well as develop our motivation to act for positive change.

My intention for this workshop was to offer an experience of some of these different aspects. The group was offered the choice of being inside or out. We unanimously decided to be inside, in a contained space, and we settled down in a beautiful yurt.

After a brief introduction to the WTR we shared our names and experiences, if any, of the WTR. We then began with the process of Gratitude. Cards were placed in the centre of our circle and everybody was offered to choose one or two cards with their images of nature, animals etc. We did a sharing round talking about what delight and gratitude these images brought to mind.

This led us to speak about the 'other side of the coin': those aspects that may cause us concern, for example, specie extinction, care of the elderly, and damage to wildlife. We went through a process called Widening Circles, during which each participant was given the opportunity to speak about a concern they have, as well as listening to three responses from the other participants. The three responses are offered from the following points of view: opposing/adversarial, a non-human being and a human being in the future. This was a very touching experience where both words and miming actions were used as forms of expression. This process, in my mind, sits on the edge between Pain and Seeing With New Eyes.

Two hours go by very quickly. We ended with a sharing round and an opportunity to shake out of any roles as felt necessary. I gave participants an exercise on a hand-out to take away and complete in their own time. This was taken from the book: 'Active Hope – How To Face The Mess We're In Without Going Crazy' (1). I include this below with thanks to Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone. It is an exercise that also works well if done in pairs.

**Identifying your Goals and Resources:**

- If you knew you could not fail, what would you most want to do for the healing of the world?
- Specify a goal or project you could realistically aim to achieve in the next 12 months that would contribute to this
- List inner & outer resources you already to have to draw on
- Inner include: strengths, qualities, experiences as well as knowledge & skill you have acquired.
  Outer include: relationships, contacts & networks as well as material resources such as money, equipment & places to work/recharge
List inner & outer resources you need to develop, what might you need to learn, develop or obtain
Notice how you might stop yourself – what obstacles might you throw in the way?
How will you overcome these?
What step will you take in the next week, however small, that will move you towards your goal?

Lisbet Michelsen. I have been working with groups in a variety of ways since the mid 1980s. My work draws on a range of disciplines including Positive Psychology, Hypnotherapy and Deep Ecology. I am passionate about The Work that Reconnects, initiated a local practice group and have been co-facilitating the workshops for a number of years. I have trained with Joanna Macy and recently completed the year-long training in "The Work that Reconnects, Inner Transition and Similar Deep Processes" with Chris Johnstone and Jenny Mckewn. For information about workshops please contact: lisbetmichelsen@gmail.com and visit: http://www.lisbetmichelsen.co.uk/

For further information:
(1) Johnstone, C. & Macy, J. (2012) Active Hope: How To Face The Mess We’re In Without Going Crazy, New World Library
www.joannamacy.net
http://www.greatturningtimes.com/
www.activehope.info
Photos taken from Lisbet’s website.

Continued from page 7:

References and biography for ‘Reading Nature’s Open Secret: Opening the Threshold to the Lost Language of Nature and the Soul’ by Roger Duncan.

References

Roger Duncan is a biologist, Waldorf educator and Vision Fast guide, trained with The School of Lost Borders, and a Systemic Family Psychotherapist. Roger was one of the pioneer tutors of the Ruskin Mill Education Trust working for 10 years as the woodland manager and setting up the wilderness experience and transition program. Roger has led vision quest for adults and youth groups in the Devon, Scotland, Spain and the Sinai desert. He has been exploring patterns in nature for 45 years. He is Deputy Principal and Head of Education and Therapy at Ruskin Mill College.
rogerpcd@gmail.com
Wild coming/going; old stories; emptying space 2 meet. Scary edges; wilde or tim’rous beastie; losing wild places = tamed thought; labile to deconstruct; unknowing; liminal dreams; unthought thoughts. What edge? Edge of what? Are you crazy yet?

We came together through touching/being touched, making space to meet; touching into our stories of being at the margins – old stories but with meaning often still burning within them. This wild potency was not easily assimilated by the social norms and demanded a fierce loyalty. Some of us, like Groucho Marx, being suspicious of any club that would have us, were identified at the margins. Still we marginals had found a way through border edges to a new centre, a place to be true to self and function creatively to bring healing and inspiration. Despite not being an easy journey, there were no notes of regret.

Away from this social/cultural dialectic, the inferiority felt at these margins was recognised as a necessary humbling of the ego, a liminal deepening into initiation. Could this challenging process in our personal journeys be reflected in a collective initiation for the human race? We settled for exploration of healing at the collective rather than individual level. I told the rainmaker story:

A certain province in China was suffering a terrible drought. They had tried all the usual magical charms and rites to produce rain but to no avail. Then someone said there was a rainmaker in a distant province who had a good reputation. The local dignitaries invited him and sent a carriage to bring him to the drought area. In time the rainmaker arrived and on alighting from the carriage was greeted by the local officials who beseeched him to produce rain. The rainmaker sniffed the air, looked around and pointed to a small hut on a hill just outside the village. He asked if he could reside there and the elders all agreed. On the first and second day with no rain coming, the agitation of the locals was increasing. Perhaps he could not do anything or perhaps he was a charlatan?

On the third day storm clouds gathered and there was a torrential downpour of rain. The villagers were jubilant and a delegation, led by the dignitaries, went up to the cottage to thank the rainmaker. But the rainmaker shook his head and replied “But I didn’t make it rain”. The officials said he must have done. The rainmaker replied, “No, you don’t understand. When I came here, I felt out of balance. I knew if anything could be done then I would have to first bring myself into harmony. And that is all I have been doing for the past three days!”

The rainmaker did not claim to make the rain come. He recognised that he had been infected by the disorder of the parched society he had entered and that he needed to rebalance or re-attune himself. The rain came by itself. And it needed a little catalysing by his rebalancing at the margins of the village.

We went out to the edges of Green & Away to see what might emerge in that tiny margin of Chronos time. We went to the edges and encountered the shadows of the idealism in the rubbish fly tipped on our fringes. We entered marginal areas within the boundaries (the smokers zone) or stood unseen (or marginalised) close to other groups. We heard the call of trees left at precarious cliff edges.

In this compressed space, I called on Rainer Maria Rilke. He offered us two fragments, the first that beautiful longing that touches all who dwell on the margins:

Ah, not to be cut off, not through the slightest partition shut out from the law of the stars
The inner — what is it? if not intensified sky, hurled through with birds and deep with the winds of homecoming

and more challengingly in his letter to a young poet (Aug 12 1904):

If there is anything unhealthy in your reactions...(just bear in mind that sickness is the means by which an organism frees itself from that which is alien...); so one must simply help it to be sick, to have its whole sickness and to break out with it, since this is the way it gets better.

Chris Robertson has been a psychotherapist and a trainer since 1978 working in several European countries. He is a co-founder and training director of Re•Vision (www.re-vision.org.uk), where he offers an eight month ecopsychology course (now in its second year) and is the author of Dangerous Margins in Vital Signs (ed Mary-Jayne Rust & Nick Totton, Karnac).
Dreaming The Work Onwards: Jung, Nature And Energy

Judith Anderson

James Barrett and I presented this workshop as an experiment, because through working clinically with the methods of Energy Psychology we have come to a greater experience of potential meaning inherent in matter and nature. Linking the deep processes of Jungian Psychotherapy to the body’s energy systems has strengthened our understanding of meaning and spirituality, and we have the sense that this may be one way of accessing matters that are central to the ecopsychology project.

In the workshop we briefly described case material and how methods specifically address resistances to health and spiritual trauma, and embrace a grounded robust and ethical intention to heal - sanatology (1) not pathology.

We offered an experience in an energy method adapted from Kinesiology which enables listening to energy. This was an interesting experience for the group with a variety of reactions, leading to different concepts of what was being experienced.

We had hoped to then use energy methods to address material the group brought including, if relevant, ways in which our creativity in the face of ecological crises can be daunted or closed down. However, the time was taken with individuals having an experience of how energy methods might work for them.

For some the methods seemed like tricks, perhaps superficial. Those who practice, teach and write about these methods in depth e.g. Phil Mollon in the UK find, as we have done, that the processes and effects can be profound.

Notes

Judith Anderson is a Jungian Psychotherapist with a background in psychiatry. She is on the steering group of PCSR, having been Chair for some years, and the newly-formed Climate Psychology Alliance. She has worked with others to create an Environmental, Sustainability and Climate Change Policy for UKCP. She works in Leamington Spa with individuals and couples.

James practises, supervises and teaches Jungian psychotherapy and has done so for over 25 years. He co-founded the training in Jungian Analytical Psychotherapy at the West Midlands Institute for Psychotherapy in 1991. He has chaired the WMIP, the Confederation for Analytical Psychology, and the Training Standards and Membership Committee of the Council for Psychoanalysis and Jungian Analysis at the UKCP. He is now on no committees at all and in a wave of new learning about energy psychology and an assertively positive form of couples therapy.

www.energypsychotherapyworks.co.uk

www.leamingtonspapsychotherapy.co.uk
I arrived at the afternoon 'Wild Awakening' session feeling stirred up, and aware of moving through a transition in myself in exploring how to be open to community whilst trusting my own sense of fertility to be in emergence. I had sensed that I would like to make time to be in non-verbal exploration of being at the conference. Choosing this workshop was one of the choices I had made from that place of knowing. I felt the time and place of being in moving and in stillness. Through the senses I deepened and listened into the rhythms of presence of my being: the breathing, the circulation, feeling my skin, my boundaries, my containment, holding my moving, being to speak about being here. I noticed tensions in my mind and tensions in my body, I explored how I seemed to want to hold on to and also let go of these, and the space in between. I had felt happy when Caroline suggested leaving our thoughts as words or images on paper, anchored, to return to later as needed.

I felt a deepened attunement with the other people moving, more understanding of presence and absence, and also aware of all the other humans moving around the space beyond the frame of this workshop. Another language emerging. I noticed I felt a deep connection with grass, the long grass, the ground, feelings of childhood, and a blessing as the sun came out and brought a feeling of flowering and opening to my awareness. I felt a sadness, akin to a loss that we were not all able to be in this place together, and I let myself move into that in my movement with the group. I felt the emptiness move and that nature could hold this, I could hold this, that nature is held in this and I am held in this matrix of knowing beyond. I could see this and be seen in this, by human, by the green, by the birds, by the insects, by the air, the sky, the clouds, water, sun, ground. I imagined being there in all of nature, I did not need to go anywhere.

I felt that if I were to be here again I would like to offer a movement time for the whole group to be in dialogue with nature in community.

_Helen Edwards is an Integrative Arts Psychotherapist practising in Oxford, particularly working with children with speech and language difficulties, in schools and children's centres. She trained in Butoh Dance and Amerta Movement and followed a movement practice for many years. She is particularly interested in listening to ways in which the voice of the soul may find form through embodied practice._
Reflections from Kamalamani’s: ‘Embodying the Shambhala Warrior/ess’ workshop
by Judith Anderson

Kamalamani’s methodology was very simple, yet profound. She read the myth slowly and contemplatively, inviting us to listen at every level of our being. The effect was of being taken into a deep meditation space where new discoveries could be made, and oneself discovered. (For Judith’s full biography please see page 15).
Green and Away provided a perfect setting for the ecopsychology conference. If I was ever to organise a conference, this is where I’d have it. I arrived tired, hungry and cranky. I’ve pulled a ligament in my knee so the distance from the car park to camping seemed too far. But the second I mentioned this to the lovely woman providing me with a hot drink, she offered to help. That response was typical of the Green and Away volunteers – they could not have been more helpful. The food was delicious if not always as plentiful as I would have wished, and they provided great gluten-free alternatives. On top of that, it was safe to walk barefoot, so I spend the entire weekend shoeless and loved it.

As for the conference itself, I was not particularly impressed by either of the key note presentations. On Saturday the land artist Chris Drury presented slides of large-scale landscape art projects. There was one, a reshaping of a lake on the edge of a town near where he lives which I totally loved. Others I found self-indulgent and pointless. I found myself increasingly uncomfortable with how out-of-step I felt with the rest of his audience. Here’s 80-odd people ‘ohing’ and ‘ahing’ and all I can think is ‘what price the planet?’ as he mentioned country after country he has been to and the costs and consequences of his huge-scale and sometimes ephemeral art pieces. At an ecopsychology gathering I’d imagined I’d find others in tune with my feeling that we need to ‘join up the dots’ and see that what we do has a direct and relevant impact on the planet. In how Chris Drury presented his work there was no acknowledgement or even recognition of how much damage he does or that maybe he should stop and think about the environmental consequences of his choices. His shoulder-shrugging response to the tactfully worded question about this (during the question and answer session which followed his presentation) reinforced the impression that it is not something he cares about. But I was relieved that I wasn’t completely alone in finding this aspect of his work problematic.

The talk on ecophilosophy on Sunday, well, I just didn’t follow the arguments. However I did enjoy the challenge Isis set us of directly experiencing the world around us. I ended up in a place of pure sensation with the realisation that I have no idea how I can describe the sensation of brushing my foot over a patch of grass. I have something here that I can use again – so that’s useful.

I went to the environmental constellations workshop with Zita Cox and relished the experience. There is such magic to constellations work. I was ‘land’ in one constellation. To begin with, I felt that I just couldn’t connect with this and wanted to step backwards. So when the opportunity arose, I said so, and, one step back, I found that ‘land’ had lots to say for itself. A fascinating experience.

I was drawn to Kamalamani’s session because the title included a reference to the Shambala Warrior story I both perform as a storyteller and use in workshops. I expected a talk-shop but instead we were lead through a process of engaging with archetypes, and Kamalamani’s voice in leading that meditation took me into a deeply restful restorative inner space. It contrasted powerfully with the sociability of the rest of the conference and, for me at any rate, provided a much needed balance.

But the highlight of the conference and perhaps of my entire summer was the ‘Irish circle’. One of the truly intelligent things the organisers did at this conference was leave us lots of space to make our own connections, have the conversations that our shared interest in ecopsychology would lead to. That was great. But the best experience of all was when they asked people to suggest discussion topics and split into groups and Neil from ‘home’ proposed that there would be an Irish interest group. To hear other people who grew up...
through the ‘Troubles’ say the things that I feel was such a healing. We, who are oddballs in exile, have so much in common. It was wonderful to hear the poetry of others and to say ‘Speaking of Tongues’ to people who know what a drumlin is and don’t need to be told that the I.R.A. conducted their business in Irish. The only person there now living in Ireland was from the South but had spent time in Belfast this year so could update us on how much remains unchanged. And the love of Donegal runs through us all. At the end Neil says ‘Let’s break all the rules. Let’s hug each other.’ And only we know what he meant when said it, and all of us felt the magic that was in it. Wonderful.

It was also a lot of fun when the band providing the entertainment turned out to be ‘Seize the Day’. As a denizen of Glastonbury who is active in the ‘Stop Hinkley’ campaign I know them well. They played a storm and were, I reckon, the perfect band for this event.

It’s many years since I’ve been to an academic conference and overall that was the most enjoyable conference I’ve ever been to.

**Dearbhaile Bradley** is one of the Elder Bards of Glastonbury. She runs workshops in creativity and ecopsychology.

For more information see her website: [www.dearbhaile.co.uk](http://www.dearbhaile.co.uk)

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**Speaking of Tongues**

I sold out my soul long since to the soft English and lost my right to angry Irishness. But my tongue was stolen from me before I was born, swallowed up by famine’s maw for the price of a bowl of soup in the kitchens was your name, your faith and “Speak in English”.

But a bitterer betrayal by far, the second theft ensured no tang of that lilting sweetness ever found a home in my mouth. Nil Gaelic agum. Nil Gaelic agum.

No Irish on me for the men who twisted the beauty of Gaelic into the unspeakable for which we grew famous.

Twice stolen. Twice lost. Twice gone. Torn from the songlines that sing the drumlins into being by others and me own.

Ach sure, I sold out my soul long since to the civil English who like an after-dinner discussion on the complexities of the Irish question, a conversational ball to toss across a table. They want me to talk intelligently, to discuss the issues rationally.

They just don’t get it. They don’t get the bloody messiness of it. They have never smelt it.

But they push me into talking and then refuse to understand how often the word ‘terrorist’ translates into a terrified teenager with a gun in his hand.

So, you tell me - how can I speak truth in a foreign tongue?

Dearbhaile Bradley © 2009
Reflections from ‘Meeting at the Edge of the Wild’, Tabitha-Jayne

Dawn breaking on a fresh, clear morning. Swallows coming together and flying in unison. The warm caress of the sun on a cold, windy day.

My experience at the ecopsychology conference evokes memories of these and a multitude more. Speaking to a fellow participant a week after the conference I was told something magical happened there. I’d have to agree.

Before the conference I was unsure. Unsure if as a coach I’d fit in with a bunch of counsellors and psychotherapists. Unsure if I wanted to. Unsure if there would be the depth to the ecopsychology that I so desperately wanted. Unsure if others attending would have deep connections to the earth like myself. After the conference I was excited. Excited to see how ecopsychology is developing in the UK. Excited to be involved in this development. Excited to see greater depth than I expected to the conversation. And most importantly, excited to discover others with a deep connection to the earth like myself.

As I currently work towards a PhD in Applied Ecopsychology and Coaching with Project NatureConnect, an organisation in the States, I’ve sensed a deepening of my own connection to nature. Within this is a desire to create and contribute to the community of ecopsychology as a whole especially in the UK. The gathering at Green & Away moved me so much that I’ve offered to help organise the next one. Something wonderful is happening here!

There is space for both dialogue on the theoretical and the experiential aspects of ecopsychology. There is the drawing of different disciplines together. There is the opportunity to create a web that connects those interested in the field. There is the chance to create profound change. And most importantly, there is the recognition that we need bring nature herself into the discussion to do this. This was blatantly apparent within both the workshops I attended.

Chris Robertson led an engaging workshop on ‘Dangerous Margins.’ We immediately moved into those margins as we were asked to say hello to our partners using only our hands instead of the traditional spoken greeting! The conversation that followed on what exactly ‘Dangerous Margins’ were to us was rich, deep and held moments of healing and celebration.

Following this we then went to explore the margins of the site to see what came up for us. As I returned from the activity with my partner (I was lucky enough to get partnered with Chris himself!) a tree called out to me and told me that I had to return and connect with it.

There was no doubt in my mind that nature was working alongside us at the conference. Attending the next workshop with Kelvin Hall: ‘From Affinity to Shapeshift: Ways Humans Converse with the Earth’, we were asked to go and spend time with a non-human being. I knew then exactly why the tree had called out to me! In my time there I received profound personal and professional insights that are still reverberating in my life and work.

What was most powerful about Kelvin’s workshop is that he identified from research four ways in which we communicate with non-humans. It was very reassuring for me to know that his research confirmed my own experiences.

The description of Chris Drury’s ‘Embodied Thinking and Experience’ didn’t do his presentation justice. As a land artist the power of his work is in the story behind it. Throughout his presentation we were offered exactly this. The thought, the detail, the interaction with the place itself and the process of creation combined to offer a rich tapestry of work.

Isis Brook’s presentation: “Feeling and Thinking with Nature in Landscape” offered an interesting approach to engaging with landscape. Complex and detailed in its manner it seemed more appropriate for those who favour a cognitive approach. Nevertheless this was actually the most profound moment for me in the whole conference.

As I listened to her I was hit with the realisation that I’ve learned to do this intuitively from my time spent in connection with nature. Along with this came the awareness that I undervalue my skills and capabilities. I have experience and knowledge of a lot more that I’m currently sharing. Understanding this enables me to deepen my work within ecopsychology further. It also
inspires me to continue on knowing without a doubt that I have something unique to offer the field of ecopsychology with the ‘Tree of Transformation’ process, which inspires profound change within individuals. It also gives me the confidence to fully admit that it’s developed from my communication with trees and motivates me to fully ground this in academic research.

Due to this insight I ended up missing the last presentation by Nick Totton, Margaret Kerr and David Key. Talking to others and to Margaret herself afterwards I learned I missed a rich and varied discussion for which I’m truly grateful that the notes have been put up on the Ecopsychology ning website. Reading these after the event confirmed the power of the gathering and its direction.

The power of the gathering itself was magnified by the location of the event. Green & Away is a fantastic site that clearly demonstrates the power of community and sustainable living. The volunteers running the site were committed and passionate which only contributed to the depth of the gathering. And we were lucky that Nature blessed us with three days of wonderful sunshine!

The only challenging moment for me came on Saturday night. Despite the wonderful songs from ‘Seize the Day’ there was too much overwhelm for me and I ended up feeling disconnected. Disconnected from nature, from myself and from the group. I later found out that I was not alone in this.

Arising from this disconnect came many beautiful moments. I returned to the tree I’d communicated with earlier and attempted to sleep in its branches. On the way I encountered intimate conversation and numerous hugs, which were exactly what I needed to support me in the moment. This is something that sticks out strongly in my mind. The wonderful, caring, warm energy that emanated from all the attendees.

As I sat in the branches trying to sleep music from a nearby wedding blasted out through a sound system. It continued on late into the night and I was left with the question, “How do you stay connected in a disconnected world?” It was only after the conference ended when I went and spent a night alone in Worcester that this questioned was answered. The answer came from an Elder tree at the racecourse that I sat under reflecting.

Connecting with the tree I was told, “You are looking at this wrong. It’s not about staying connected in a disconnected world. The world is connected. What you need to ask yourself is how do you stay disconnected in a connected world?”

This question has continued to influence my work as I look at the ways I unwittingly choose disconnection over connection. Already I am modifying my

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I stopped flying eight years ago. It was a decision that crept up on me. I wasn’t a prolific flyer in the years directly preceding this decision, but I flew enough to feel a sense of dis-ease as I took to the skies, aware of the carbon being pumped into the atmosphere partly on my behalf.

At the ‘Meeting at the Edge of the Wild’ gathering I was reminded of my decision when the Saturday night band ‘Seize the Day’ performed their song ‘Flight’ which thoughtfully raises questions about the ethics of flying. I was glad to hear this theme being raised in the context of an ecopsychology gathering and appreciated that the song highlights the complexity of this decision. I sensed afresh the part of myself which made that final decision to stop flying as well as the part that loves and misses flying. I feel nervous writing about this theme: I realise that I’ve kept quite quiet about my no-flying decision and wonder whether it’s time to enter into more dialogue?

My reasons for giving up flying followed my wish to engage more fully with changing my ‘lifestyle’. Of course, changes at a structural, policy level and shifting consciousness are vital too, but I want to engage with the uneasy realities of climate change and what that means on a practical level, including but not limited to cutting my carbon emissions.

When I stopped flying I knew that I needed to do more (note to self - I still need to do more!) I was doing the obvious stuff: recycling, consuming fewer everyday goods and sourcing things more ethically. Since my youth I’ve been dialogueing - outwardly and inwardly - about challenges we face on a global scale. Those challenges are deepening. Since my childhood I’ve been acutely aware of the tensions created by the threats and reality of airport expansion, growing up a mile away from an international airport, more of which later.

It was dawning on me that the next change I needed to make would need to be significant enough that I’d really feel its effect, to acknowledge the need for change in the way I think and act, and then to reflect on those changes.

I loved flying. I loved seeing the earth from the sky: jagged coastlines, oases in the heart of the desert, miles and miles of white fluffy cloud and the welcome green of home after the golden rich red-yellow of parched earth. I loved the exhilaration of taking off and never stopped marvelling at how aircraft, people, and luggage could rocket through the sky, despite the best attempts of various friends and family members trying to explain to me aerodynamics.

Bizarrely enough, I also loved airports. I was fortunate in travelling alone to and from sub Saharan Africa in my 20s and 30s so would often find myself drinking Earl Grey tea in a quiet corner of this or that airport at unsociable hours. But, of course, airports never sleep: 24-7 time zones and heaven for an inveterate people watcher and tea drinker.

Through my teens I’d become increasingly aware of the destructive effects of air travel: bigger planes and more flights, matching our desire to venture to new lands. Growing up beneath the flight path of Bristol airport, aeroplanes were as familiar to me as the local wildlife. They were so familiar that I didn’t really pay much attention to them and found it odd when visitors leapt up to see the evening flight to Dublin going over.

‘Planes and concrete became more of a local threat as the runway was extended, and, despite our campaigning, I feel sure will be extended again, most likely covering the ancient common land which was my childhood playground.

This ancient common is a special place. It has a Roman fairy ring of rocks, rich ‘wildlife’, atmospheric burial mounds, a lovely view of the Mendips, Dundry Hill

Flying-free. On the Saturday evening of the ecopsychology gathering, ‘Seize the Day’ sang their song ‘Flight’. This prompted me to think afresh about flying-free life.
and the Chew Valley, stories of King John's hunting ground and the ubiquitous headless horsemen myths.

It was particularly special to me because it's where I built dens, hid, sledged, argued with my brother, ran with the dog, cloud-watched, galloped around on borrowed horses, told the dog my troubles, and later stole away to drink Mendip Magic (cider) with friends amidst much hilarity. It was where people had been grazing animals for hundreds of years and more recently walked dogs and played football.

In a different vein I became horribly aware of the destructive power of aeroplanes when I flew on a work trip to Nairobi on September 12th, 2001. The airports were like grave yards and half the flights were cancelled. BBC World news was, for once, unscreened, less we travellers once again see the terrible images of jet planes plunging into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre.

I felt haunted that morning by the thought of hundreds of other ordinary folk stepping onto a 'plane twenty-four hours earlier, their lives ending as human bombs. The tragic misuse of the genuine wonder of modern technology and human invention. Humans taking to the skies in outwitting each other on a dramatic, terrifying scale.

Not flying has had a tangible effect on my life. There are friends abroad – beyond a train trip—even a long one - who I would love to visit again. My work-life is at times a bit limited by my decision not to fly. My life as a Buddhist is limited to the extent that I don’t go to international gatherings or on interesting pilgrimages.

So my flying life – well, aeroplane flying at least – came to an abrupt end in 2004. It was a decision a bit like when I became a vegetarian when I was 15: back then I watched a documentary about the treatment of animals for food production and seeing abject suffering was the final straw in a long decision-making process. Why should animals, fellow beings, suffer that much just so I could eat? I stopped eating meat and fish. Now I've stopped flying for not dissimilar reasons.

What I've been most curious about since is my internal process in making a decision about my outward actions. My decision has brought me right up against my consuming conditioning; much of it out of my everyday awareness until that point. To my horror I must have imbibed, subconsciously, more of the individualistic, consumerist ethic of my formative years in the 1980s than I care to acknowledge. This was an interesting and uncomfortable realisation, as I don't consider myself to be much of a consumer. I'm not big on shopping and have even managed to curb my book habit in recent years.

So it was curious to notice my toddler-like "but if I've got the money I damn well should be able to buy a ticket to Amsterdam" (accompanied by a scowl and stomping foot). I was caught short in seeing how I'd got caught up, unwittingly, in the Western mindset that if you've got the money and the 'leisure' time you can buy the 'experience'. It was pretty humbling and more than a little disconcerting.

My flying-free decision has encouraged me to look afresh at how I journey through life. Not just how many actual journeys I take and my mode of travel - although that's in my awareness more consciously—but my attitude to what constitutes a life well lived.

I am reminded of one of the 'precepts' or training principles I took up as part of my ordination as a Buddhist. This invites stillness, simplicity and contentment in the face of the gravitational pull of intoxication and sensory overwhelm. I've reflected on it repeatedly in watching the way I approach life and in witnessing how many everyday 'leisure' pursuits are designed to stimulate and increase our sensory
pleasures, fuelling our thirst for consumption and acquisition, acting with a blindness to other species and their needs, compared to our wants. The mainstream pleasure-seeking invitation takes place in a beautiful vacuum of air-brushed photos and wall to wall blue sky with little mindfulness of the consequences of our actions. Our craving costs the earth.

For me not flying has been a reality check - an unexpected reality check - in practising this precept and in particular in appreciating the particular resonance and relevance it has for the times in which we are living.

I sometimes feel sad that I no longer visit places which are only accessible by plane. Very often that sadness leads to a fond remembrance of the places I've visited. Fortunately my imagination is alive and well and I can fill in the gaps in remembering - and take flights of fantasy! There's a freedom in living simply.

I am struck by the simple beauty of my immediate environment. It's easy to overlook the city as grey shabbiness. I recently returned from a marvellous holiday in the wilds and noticed how I saw my home city with new, fresh, tourist eyes. The walk to the park, the colour of houses in Bristol, the tone of the brick work, flowers that pop up in unexpected places. It was a useful wake-up call in how often I rely upon the tape-playing story in my head ("I wish we were moving to the country...") rather than engaging with the vivid colours and textures right in front of me at any given moment.

Relationally I find that friends telling me about their latest fly-away holiday plans apologise about flying, or announce it rather defiantly, or enter into a long spiel about the reasons they need to fly. These responses baffle and sadden me.

Why apologise to me, rather than the nearest tree, or sky? I didn't give up flying to stand in judgement of those who fly. I gave up flying to bring home to myself the need for transition in the way I live and the way I am. Going forth from the romance of flying reached the spot in nudging me towards more integrating of inner and outer transition and a greater recognition of all that lives— not just human lives— in a way that other 'going forths' might not have done. Realigning with emerging realities.

In one sense giving up flying is, of course, tokenistic, or could become tokenistic if I did it in the spirit of carbon-offsetting, feeling smug and counting my reward points, continuing in the consumerist groove. I'm acutely aware on a daily basis of how much there's still to do in reducing my own carbon footprint and nurturing the spirit of transition in dialogue with friends and colleagues. And the question of whether or not to fly is but one issue amongst many.

In the words of the 'Seize the Day' song: "What would you do? What will we do?" On an individual and collective level, how do we muddle through figuring out how to engage with climate change, loss of biodiversity, desertification, polarised local and global inequalities etc etc etc, whilst keeping contact with a still, creative, communicative place inside ourselves?

We're a stunningly inventive, resourceful and destructive species. We're full of bright ideas and strategies and the many amazing aspects of humanity. But sadly we've largely lost sight of other Life On Earth. Perhaps the tide is changing in how at least a growing minority of us humans are starting to remember our place as one amongst many interdependent and interrelated species.

Kamalamani is a therapist, supervisor, facilitator and writer living and working in Bristol. She edits 'Transformations' and is a member of the PCSR steering group. www.kamalamani.co.uk
Lyrics from ‘Flight’ by Seize the Day

I have a friend, who lives in Bantry Bay,
His lover lives 400 miles away,
so far by ferry, bus and train it takes all day
He knows flying is a climate crime,
But he doesn't have the money and she doesn't have the time,
And when it's cheaper to fly than to park at the airport.
What would you do? (x 2)

Chorus:
I will recycle,
I'll use my bicycle,
I'll walk into town,
I'll turn the heating down,
I'll fill my kettle halfway,
Listen to everything else you say...
But don't take my freedom away,
Don't take my holidays,
Don't take my time away,
Don't take my wings away..
I always thought I'd be by my sister's side,
When she gave birth to her first child,
And I'd love to see my Grandma again before she goes all the way.
Now they live so far away,
Australia and the USA,
What the hell will I say if they need me?
What would you do? (x 2)

Chorus:
I will recycle,
I'll use my bicycle,
I'll walk into town,
I'll turn the heating down,
I'll wash my car with rags,
I'll never use plastic bags,
My clothes are ethically made,
I drink my tea fair-trade,
I'll offset my carbon debt,
By planting trees in Tibet,
And every 3rd world home will have an energy saving light bulb all of their own!
I'll fill my kettle halfway,
Listen to everything else you say...
But don't take my freedom away,
Don't take my holidays,
Don't take my time away,
Don't take my wings away...
DOESN’T ANYONE GET A BREAK THESE DAYS
DOESN’T ANYONE GET A BREAK.

Chorus:
I will recycle,
I'll use my bicycle,
I'll walk into town,
I'll turn the heating down,
I'll wash my car with rags,
I'll never use plastic bags,
My clothes are ethically made,
I drink my tea fair-trade,
I'll offset my carbon debt,
By planting trees in Tibet,
And every 3rd world home will have an energy saving light bulb all of their own!
I'll fill my kettle halfway,
Listen to everything else you say...
But don't take my freedom away,
Don't take my holidays,
Don't take my time away,
Don't take my wings away...
DOESN’T ANYONE GET A BREAK THESE DAYS
DOESN’T ANYONE GET A BREAK.

Sitting in deserts in the sand,
Nothing and no-one to get in the way, no bills to pay.
I love lying in the sun and swimming in warm sea,
I don't want to think about all the places I will never see,
Living is hard and flying is easy...
What will you do?
What will we do?

Source:
http://www.seizetheday.org/music.cfm?
albumID=4&trackID=55

Seize the Day’s website:
http://www.seizetheday.org/aboutUs.cfm
Ecopsychology: the View from Earth

Moira Lake

I’m looking back from the middle of October to the ecopsychology gathering, ‘Meeting at the Edge of the Wild’ that took place in July this year. My memories are, on one hand, immensely pleasant – beautiful sunshine, warmth, trees, a delicious tent put up all ready for me; the delight of seeing old friends and colleagues; the pleasure of seeing so many people new to me, and seeing that the field of ecopsychology has widened to include many people who aren’t therapists, following many different avenues of work and exploration.

In other ways, I remember the familiar feeling of something lacking, and the sense that perhaps on the deepest levels, nothing much has changed since I found myself moving away from the ecopsychological path some ten years ago.

In the mid 1990s I joined with a group of other psychotherapists to form the first Ecopsychology Group in the UK. We were united by our concern with the obvious changes happening to our Earth, and a belief that human values and behaviour were contributing to the degradation of landscapes, loss of species, abuse of non-human life, climate change etc etc. We also wanted to address the fact that, at that time, relationships between humans and the non-human natural world were left completely out of ‘normal’ therapeutic practice, and were ignored by all therapist training programmes. We thought that exploring the emotions people felt both in relation to the current planetary crisis, and in relation to Earth herself, would lead to greater mental health for humans and a more harmonious relationship between us and the rest of Earth. The story of this group and the developing ecopsychology movement in the UK has been told elsewhere.

What I want now is to make a few comments on what I believe to be some of the shortcomings intrinsic to our understanding in those days, which I see still operating in the present. I’m doing this in a spirit of constructive collaboration. So nothing I say is intended as a negative criticism of anyone, or even of myself. I appreciate and respect the work we are all doing. I’m also aware that there are exceptions to the general patterns I observe. But we all have much to learn, and here are some remarks as a contribution to the common process.

Many of us have commented over the years on the narcissistic bias of our culture. But it’s only when you have a deep commitment to hearing and honouring the non-human, that you fully realise how seemingly inescapably narcissistic we humans are. Almost all discussion within our original group, almost every conversation I had in those years with anybody on the subject, and almost everything I read or heard within the field of ecopsychology, always put humans, Human Needs, Human Feelings, Human Knowledge at the centre. My own work and the work of the few ecopsych-minded therapists I knew, continued to proceed, in effect, as though our concerns about Earth were, after all, only another way of being concerned about ourselves. Of course, it seems natural that any species would have its primary loyalty to its own kind, and maybe our prioritising of ours is indeed inescapable.

But I gradually found it less and less bearable that our discourse, sincere and adventurous though it was, still consistently excluded the natural world we wanted to include, no matter how often we went outdoors to sit with trees in the expectation of receiving insight. And the way we did this, which was so simple and so obvious that I didn’t fully realise it until later, was that we always went to meet the natural world on our own terms - not as grateful supplicants or deferential apprentices, but as consumers. And this was because we never deeply questioned, still less changed – in our actions, I mean, as opposed to occasional verbalising - our human position at the centre of the world. Such a position has a terribly high cost.

Humans, unfortunately, seem to be addicted to talking, and the kinds of mental processes involved in conversation. This means that an enormous amount of
potential wisdom never actually settles into a person’s energetic system, but remains circulating at the verbal/cognitive level as mere ‘information’. This has tended to happen to the insight widely circulating these days, that we are not truly separate individuals but parts of one great creative organic being (whether that being is seen as planet Earth, Gaia, the universe, all universes etc). I repeatedly meet people who ‘know’ this, but in fact don’t know it at all, because they don’t experience it.

I imagine we would all agree that we now live in a wider culture of fear, where fear is engendered, embellished, and distorted into a multitude of destructive activities. Vast amounts of money are made from scaring people, preying on their fear, or distracting them from their fear. The level of fear which I find so often just below the surface among clients and acquaintances in the environmental movement, transition movement, and the professions of psychotherapy and counselling, are at least equal to that in the public generally. Of course, it’s important to feel fear when it arises and to let it flow through us and away. But chronic, disabling fear prevents us from loving the world and creating our world in the image of that love.

If we truly believe, and experience, that we are alone and surrounded by danger, then within that construct there is no remedy for fear. But it is possible to experience the world differently, and much of the work I do these days in healing, earth-centred therapy, plant spirit medicine and shamanic work is intended to facilitate the experience of being utterly embedded within the spiritual force which gives rise to the beauty and vitality of this world. Through this people can find their true creative power, aligned with the divine consciousness within them of which they are one momentary expression. This does not eradicate fear entirely, of course, but fear occupies far less of a person’s emotional space when they deeply know, and really feel, themselves to be just one aspect of a far greater consciousness.

I do not have any religion, nor do I wish to impose any particular set of beliefs and values. I am certainly not suggesting that the ecopsychology movement should become in any way uniform or have any set agenda. I love the diversity of the movement and the very different approaches with which people are doing their work. But I want to say something very clearly. We all know we are living in dangerous times: but part of the danger is that most of us, however ecopsychologically we think, are still living inside some very dangerous and absurd stories. One of the silliest, and most destructive, is the one that goes, “It’s all down to us humans. We’ve messed up the world and we don’t have enough time to put it right. We have to save the endangered species, mitigate climate change, stop radiation leaking all over the world, clean up the polluted waters, prevent the whole financial and technological system crashing and ending civilisation, etc etc etc…”

It’s nonsense because we are not alone, it’s not just down to us, and what is really required of us is to leave our pathetic delusions of power and truly align ourselves with the consciousness of this Earth and her creations. For example, do you think we’d be here now if the trees weren’t on our side? Do you imagine these magnificent and generous spirits are just mechanically going through the motions of the work they do to hold this world in place? Everything alive has its consciousness and its work, and can be available for collaboration with us as soon as we move, with gratitude and humility, out of the nonsense reality we have created.

So, to return to my comments on this summer’s ecopsychology gathering. Yes, I had a lovely time, and appreciated the people present and their valuable work. But what I missed was any sense of honouring our non-human relatives who were also present. This may have happened in a small way in one or two of the workshops, but it was not an integral part of the orientation of our time together, nor did it have any part in the plenary sessions. I want to emphasise that I’m not saying this as a complaint. I’m saying please, both in our gatherings and our work alone, can we, at least, honour the place where we are; thank the plants and trees and birds and animals and other beings of that place who are intensely aware of us, however oblivious we are of them; offer something to them and ask, with gratitude and humility, for their support and cooperation in our work, and for teaching if they wish to give it. It’s a simple thing to do. But it could change everything.

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Photos from Moira’s website (address above).
We Gathered.

The earth is calling us together
And as we listen
We are gently reminded of our true nature
We gathered, we shared and we were deeply moved

Living outside, elements on skin, beings holding us
Beautiful spaces, river flowing by, people sit quietly taking you in
And I take them in, their quiet beauty, aligning with you, this is a delight.

But it is only a weekend, it is short and it is sweet
packed with wild offerings, food and activist songs
We deepen into the conversation
What is this conference asking?
Why are we here?

To connect, to find our place, to inspire and to dream?
It tugged on us

Feeling how parched we are of these gatherings, our tribes
For a short while we quenched this deep hunger
We spoke of birthing a new form
And it was a delight and delicious

Bright minds, each one a bright star
Each one expressing the voices of the dark mysterious world
We saw each other
We felt the interconnected beauty of all beings
And we will return
We are returning.

Rhonda Brandrick
(http://human-nature.co.uk/index.html)
After the financial crash hit us, about four years ago, it gradually dawned on me that this might just be the start of some kind of drastic re-balancing. I thought this might be reflected in my client work, but the gathering dysfunction “out there” seemed hardly to make a difference, or at least, none of my clients gave it more than a passing mention. I wondered if I was reading too much into it, so I decided to try and find out more about the big picture. I began to read about such uncomfortable subjects as Peak Oil, the staggering burden of debt in the global financial system, the appalling damage that is being done to the planet we live on, and the climatic nightmare of global warming.

I soon learned that those who take an interest in these things often take up strong positions, and become very attached to their beliefs. Some believe that we are heading for an apocalyptic crash; others pin their faith on the all-pervasive Myth of Progress (“We'll find a way, we always do.”) Some say that we (or at least, some kind of spiritual elite) will be magically transformed into a new level of consciousness.

It doesn’t take much reading to see just how serious the situation really is, and if you’re not careful, to get really depressed about it, especially when you ask yourself the question - what on Earth can I do about it?

Although I now work as a counsellor, I’ve always been a practical person, so my first reaction to a difficult situation is usually to figure out what to do. This situation is so huge and so apparently intractable that it's hard to see what we can do that isn’t totally insignificant on a global scale. We turn down the thermostat, re-use our plastic bags, take the train instead of driving. It feels a bit like massaging our guilt. We change the small things that aren’t too difficult to change, but we leave the core lifestyle intact. We don’t want to be reborn as an eco-warrior – at least, as St Augustine once said in another context, “not yet”.

I had this awkward, grumbling sense that I was evading the issue. I read ‘Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth/Healing the Mind’ by Theodore Roszak and was curiously unmoved by its earnest worthiness. I went to two CPD workshops with Mary Jayne Rust, and found them emotionally powerful and convincing, but I still didn’t make any real changes. The routines of daily life were simply too deeply entrenched, and whether we like it or not, our values are ultimately embedded in our routines.

Then in April last year I saw something on the Transition Bristol website about a Practical Sustainability course run by an organisation called Shift Bristol. Something in me was immediately interested. What would it actually be like to live “sustainably”?

The Shift Bristol course is built around the practical philosophy known as Permaculture. (Typical 3-part slogan: Earth Care, People Care, Fair Shares. There’s an implied political stance here as well.) The course has been pioneered by three remarkable women: Sarah Pugh, Laura Corfield and Susannah Waters. Sarah is a well-established permaculture teacher with a talent for persuasion, whose contacts have enabled her to assemble a first-class bunch of tutors on the course.

Their expertise includes practical subjects (organic horticulture, woodland management, soil remediation, alternative energy sources, low-impact housing, retrofitting for sustainability, nutrition, herbal medicine, etc.) as well as psycho-social ones (community building, group dynamics, practical activism, and personal resilience).

The students on the course this year were a curiously mixed bunch, 24 people ranging in age from 21 to 70 and including professionals, idealists, dropouts, activists and rebels, both British and foreign (French, Colombian, Spanish, Swedish). I don’t think I ever enjoyed being in a group as much as this one. It had a refreshingly playful, anarchistic feel, but also a remarkably co-operative, mutually respectful ethos, and I’m not sure whether this was just good luck, or the way it was
set up, or the combination of people and subject matter. It’s hard to say.

We also visited some very interesting places, to see first-hand how people are working together to develop truly sustainable lifestyles for a time when fossil fuels will become rare and expensive, and people will be forced to live in a less profligate, environmentally destructive way.

The essence of it is that we were learning to think ecologically. Permaculture takes what Nature gives and asks, “How can we think like Gaia (Nature) thinks? How can we get the productivity we need by enhancing natural processes, rather than pushing them aside and imposing our own, artificial systems? What does this mean for the ways we relate to each other, and to the whole of material existence?” If we try to imagine and feel our way into this, we are forced to re-think everything about the way we live.

This doesn’t mean becoming a Luddite or smashing up capitalism (after all, it’s doing a superlative job of smashing itself up without our help), but it does mean that we stop kidding ourselves that it’s all too big for us and there’s nothing we can do.

If a therapist were to think ecologically, she might pay at least as much attention to the client’s situation as she does to the client. This is well recognised in such concepts as Resourcing, the term used by Babette Rothschild to mean paying attention to the client’s support system before engaging in any difficult trauma work with them.

Gardeners have to think ecologically when they wonder what to do with a plant that isn’t doing very well. They might think “Oh, that’s a poor plant, maybe it wasn’t given enough nutrients when it was a seedling”, or they might think it’s in the wrong place, or the soil isn’t good for it, or it’s not getting enough water – there are a number of factors to take into account. The gardener has to think which of these factors is likely to make the most difference now? In essence, she has to think how best to help the plant to build up its energy. If she can help it get the right conditions, the plant will sort itself out.

For those who think ecologically, therapy is an exactly equivalent process, with the important additional factor that people have the capacity to be self-reflective and thus much more active participants in their own destinies.

What we perhaps haven’t paid enough attention to, is the way in which we (clients and therapists alike) are so easily mesmerised by current Western values. These are perhaps most deeply embedded in the word “happiness”, which readily translates into a pleasant dream full of unrealistically harmonious nuclear family relationships and unrealistically increasing material affluence. Suspiciously like a scenario dreamed up by an advertising agency, in fact.

When we look at the situation from a world-historical perspective, it’s not difficult to see how much these values depend on the unrepeatable historical accident of a temporary abundance of cheap fossil fuels, and that as soon as these start becoming more scarce and expensive, the whole “happiness” dream in its current form will fall down with it, probably in a very unpleasant manner.

Unfortunately this will mean that some of our more altruistic values will also be affected: for example, our aspiration to support a universal welfare system which cares for severely disadvantaged people. This has already been badly stressed, and unless we can eventually return to a paradigm of infinite economic growth – and/or move away from paid provision, towards real community-based support – the outlook can only get worse.

Likewise, the formal process of individual therapy, as conceived of in our current industrialised, narcissistic, self-indulgent society, is not the only model. In Africa, for example, “therapy” is much more likely to mean that everyone sits around a big tree and pays attention to the elders.

So, how has my close encounter with the world of sustainability changed my life? Before the big 2008 credit crunch, I was imagining myself going through the usual winding down process, not quite “retirement” (whatever that means) but doing less, perhaps writing more, becoming a bit like a stereotypical elder. In my fantasy I would become Jung’s archetypal senex, the wise old dude who smokes a pipe and chuckles knowingly from the
depths of his wing-backed chair while the youngsters get into a heated discussion about the Meaning of Life. Now, I find myself looking forward to a more active and probably less comfortable time, going back to my pre-counselling skills as a carpenter as well as finding less conventional ways of doing therapy.

One of the interesting places to which Shift Bristol introduced us is the educational centre deep in the heart of Devon at Embercombe, where they run inspirational courses for young people who want to re-connect with Nature and stretch themselves in a non-academic way.

I hope to soon be living down there four days a week, helping to build the Land-Based Learning Centre, a massive traditional linhay (barn) which will be used for workshops, store-rooms, a kitchen and dining hall. While I’m there, I want to learn about roundwood construction and teach woodworking skills to the apprentices and volunteers who will be working on the project.

I also want to become involved in ongoing therapeutic conversations with some of the students, as an alternative to the formal therapy which I’ll still be doing here in Bristol for the remaining three days a week (an awkward combination, and not very environmentally friendly from the travelling point of view, but I’m going to try to make it work).

I’m looking towards examples like the Street Therapy model which is being developed by Charlie Alcock in Camden (1) or the Eco-Therapy which is being developed in Bristol by Kate Joyner and her colleagues (2).

None of us can be sure of what will happen in the future, but my feeling is that our current model of therapy provision will prove to be less and less viable as our bankrupt society degrades in complexity at an accelerating pace, and our current certainties start to look more and more shaky. In this situation, the survival of mutually supportive communities becomes much more important and self-fulfilment becomes less and less tied to a belief system which emphasises an individualistic striving after “lifestyle”.

If this is the case, we have a paradox. In the increasing chaos of a society in turmoil, therapy will become a vitally important lifeline for disoriented, traumatised people trying to make sense of what’s happening to them. But our present model of therapy, with its individualistic emphasis, together with its accepted costs, regularities and formal protocols, is not going to work in a collapsing world. If we stick to our traditional, heavily professionalised, technique-laden way of doing things, with its tendency to rely more and more on expensive academic trainings, we will become less and less relevant. In the end we will be in danger of becoming a pastime for rich people with too much time on their hands.

Maybe it’s time for us to make a conscious break with our own past, before it’s too late.

References:
(1) http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/apr/10/mental-health-street-smart-charlie-alcock?INTCMP=SRCH
(2) See their blog: http://otrbristol.tumblr.com/.

Photos courtesy of the Shift Bristol website.

Information:
For further information about the Shift Bristol training course and activities at Embercombe please visit:
http://www.shiftbristol.org.uk/
http://www.embercombe.co.uk/

Chris Wilson is a psychotherapist who trained at BCPC (Bath Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling) and a Focusing Trainer certified by the Focusing Institute of New York. In a previous life, he worked as a carpenter and set up a small but moderately successful building co-op in London in 1972. Latterly he has reinstated this long-neglected skill set, and now volunteers at Embercombe in Devon where he is part of a team which is setting up a joinery workshop for the new Land-Based Learning Centre. He is also a member of the Prospect Permaculture Community which is planning to buy a small farm near Hatherleigh in North Devon and run it as a teaching centre on permaculture principles. His favourite authors are Eckhart Tolle and John Michael Greer, and in his spare time he likes to write songs and get people together to sing them.
A major part of Jung’s project was to restore meaning to life to the world, an experience that for him had been lost because of the degradation of formal religions. Jung’s work as a psychologist asserted that matter, psyche and spirit were differing expressions of energy. This perspective led to a fruitful cross-disciplinary correspondence with Wolfgang Pauli - a physicist interested in quantum field theory - and the conclusion that energy was intrinsically meaning-making and intelligent.

Jung held the view that dreams are phenomena of the energy field of the universe, rather than simply possessions of the individual that we might experience; an approach expressed by Wilfred Bion in his phrase, ‘dreams in search of a dreamer’ and picked up by the practice of social dreaming, in which dreams are regarded as belonging to a matrix.

Also Jung would ordinarily include material and physical phenomena as potentially meaningful into his explorations in analytic relationships. ‘…..in the course of a disagreement with Henry Fierz, Jung noticed that his watch had stopped. Checking the correct time with Fierz, Jung concluded ‘You have the right time and I the wrong one. Let us discuss the thing again’.’ (Quoted in Colman, 2011).

Susan Rowland is an academic literary critic and a poet. In her capacity for reading Jung’s writing she has, in her writings, made an extraordinary contribution to enlivening his gifts to us. With great vigour and intelligence her book The Ecocritical Psyche strengthens the perspective of the universe as meaningful and meaning-making, if only we as human kind will listen. One of the ways the book does this is to contribute to dethroning human kind as the centre-piece of nature and discover itself as part of nature and one expression of nature. This, it seems to me, is potentially helpful to the ecopsychology project of raising consciousness of human kind’s suicidal trajectory because it unloosens our inflation, a dynamic generating impotence.

In her opening chapter Rowland writes, ‘An argument that will become crucial to The Ecocritical Psyche is that for Jung something extraordinary happens to writing and images that evokes the deep unconscious. Such cultural signs – Jung calls them symbols – are so imbued with psychic energy that they burn through the systems of communication we believe keep human language separate from nature. Rather that the Jungian symbol gestures towards ecocritical and scientific theories that nature speaks to us through the body and the imagination. This book is dedicated to showing how Jung’s work can aid a revisioning of human creativity as coeval with non-human reality.’

In response to the environmental crises occurring and coming, many argue for paths back to nature. The Ecocritical Psyche provides a deep confirmation of human kind as a branch of nature, not its apotheosis.

Through the book she positions literature as having imaginal presence grounded in nature. One strand (1) of her argument uses the biologist Wendy Wheeler’s book The Whole Creature Complexity, Biosemiosis, and the Evolution of Culture. In this book Rowland argues for relationality and communicativeness and hence the creation of meaning as characteristic of life in all its forms. ‘By drawing on developments in the sciences, particularly complexity science, I hope to show that sociality can be seen as firmly rooted in an account of evolution that sees it as a process of symbiogenetic co-operative communication (from the cells all the way
up), with the consequent emergence of more complex levels of life.’

Using Wheeler, Rowland roots human culture in nature and makes reading literature a contribution to the presence and energy of a collective wisdom mind (as conceived in Buddhism, perhaps), to make real our ability to respond to the depths of life’s processes of evolution ‘... literature is part of psychic evolution at the edge of chaos. To write and/or read is to participate in nature’s evolution. In the literature of the last hundred years is to be found attempts to reconnect deeply and lastingly with nature’s voices’. (p.99)

As an adolescent I fell in love with literature, with the romantic poets; part of a traditional syllabus. I also wanted to study biology at ‘A’ level but this was not possible, the school timetable could not accommodate a science and arts combination. The gulf was a trauma between the arts and sciences, present to us all: teachers, pupils, parents, as well as relevant to the prospects of university and jobs.

With hindsight it is possible to see this trauma as an encounter with an enormous unstoried gulf between the ‘real’ and the ‘non-real’; an emptiness present but not understood. As Wordsworth put it in *Intimations of Immortality* ‘Blank misgivings of a creature moving about in worlds not realised’. The Romantic poets gave me words for my experience, brought me into the world, yet the genre of literature and the arts was relegated to the ‘non-real’.

Times and my understandings have since come a long way. The subject of the gulf in personal, cultural and mythological dimensions has been at the centre of becoming and practising as a psychotherapist, where the work is in asserting and witnessing subjective experience to be as real as matter.

But of course the gulf is still there, which is why so many disciplines are in effect working at it. Physicists theorise how non-being comes into being in equations of quantum mechanics. Psychotherapists work at putting words to experience so that patients’ experience come to matter to them, in effect working as poets in the service of their clients. This takes courage if I am working well; on the edge of my own learning in the present moment with the patient.

It often seems to me that I piggy-back on the courage of leading theoreticians. Their thinking enables my courage to be present, without knowing beforehand, to my patients. It is clear to me that Rowland’s work is the result of both personal and professional courage. I imagine this book is the fruit of a transformative journey undertaken in illuminating Jung’s writing. It is a given in our field that any paper worth its salt has come into being through a tripartite process involving the therapist’s personal insight, his work with patients and theory. Here the patient is Jung’s text.

The presence of my thought process, infinitely small, is made firmer through Rowland’s articulation of language as one tendril of nature’s plenitude.

‘My argument about metaphor and metonym is merely a way of realising language as a nature that includes human beings. That is, to see humans as one way that nature speaks. In particular, symbols to Jung are fragments of language charged with a peculiar depth of psychic energy. They partake of the intrinsically creative and partially unknowable collective unconscious. They are embodied and liminal to non-human nature. So symbols are messages from the underworld of the psyche. They are not decipherable in ego terms.

Symbols are a way we perceive the multiplicity of nature’s animistic voices’. (p.158)

She successfully opens sight so that stories, books, children’s literature, and detective novels populate the mind as surely as do animals in dreams speaking to us in response to our noticing of them, effectively showing up absurd anthropomorphism which has been and is a kind of autistic unrelational enclosure; a psychological colonialism in which life and literature become partitioned off as other.

In this context I have one cavil, which is the use in her writing of the phrase ‘the unconscious’. It is common parlance and I want to question it. It seems to me inconsistent with her thesis because it attributes...
unconsciousness to life-of-which-we-are-unconscious. The devotion of her text is, with Jung, to make evident the autonomous life of what Jung called the objective psyche and the necessity of relationship and conversation with the images, dreams, symbols, stories and impressions. In a colonial metaphor the use of the phrase ‘the unconscious’ forestalls potential meeting, rather as the use of the word ‘native’ does (2).

It seems to me we are being forced by the crises that beset us, human kind, to realise, make real, living as being participation in a flux of relating, as opposed to culturally determined enclosures.

Susan Rowland’s book is courageous and encouraging in the project of living participation. She concludes *The Ecocritical Psyche* with her poetry and dares to assert the potency and relevance of literary criticism (reframed as ecocriticism) to ecological crisis.

**References**


**Notes**

(1) Rowland is a gifted teacher and this shows in her capacity to present arguments from many different sources with clarity, and to weave them together. Inez Martinez expresses this in a beautiful sentence I’d like to share with you.

‘The Ecocritical Psyche is, itself, a model illustrating the intellectually fecund power of reading. Rowland uses as frames for her explorations of literature the research of biological theorists including Charles Darwin, James Lovelock, Roger Wescott, and Carol Yoon; materials from the works of historians from fields as diverse as mythology, medieval studies, renaissance studies, and Native American history; positions of cultural critics on complex adaptive systems and on the political sources of understandings of nature;

expositions by psychological literary critics on the gothic and the trickster; new perspectives by Jungian theorists such as Jerome Bernstein on Borderlanders, Andrew Samuels on political forms, and David L. Miller on the symbolic meanings of descent into hell; and numerous concepts from philosophers—including meanings of nature analyzed by Kate Soper, the ‘field’ as elaborated by N. Katherine Hayles, a phenomenological approach to reading and nature described by David Abram, tacit knowing proposed by Michael Polanyi, imagined vs. perceived images as distinguished and evaluated by Gaston Bachelard, alterity as critiqued by Luce Irigaray, dialogics of language as theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin, discourse and power as articulated by Michel Foucault, and evolution as reformulated by Henri Bergson. If that last sentence seemed dense, may it have succeeded in suggesting the complex interweavings this book achieves between the thoughts of many thinkers in their fields, those of Carl Jung with regard to psyche, and Rowland’s concerning ecocritical readings of literature’ (Martinez 20011)

(2) In Iain McGilchrist’s thesis in *The Master and his Emissary* it is a left brain-hemisphere’s inflation that keeps the mind closed to the right hemisphere’s dreaming.

*James Barrett* practises, supervises and teaches Jungian psychotherapy and has done so for over 25 years. He co-founded the training in Jungian Analytical Psychotherapy at the West Midlands Institute for Psychotherapy in 1991. He has chaired the WMIP, the Confederation for Analytical Psychology, and the Training Standards and Membership Committee of the Council for Psychoanalysis and Jungian Analysis at the UKCP. He is now on no committees at all and in a wave of new learning about energy psychology and an assertively positive form of couples therapy.

www.leamingtonspapsychotherapy.co.uk
www.energypsychotherapyworks.co.uk
Vital Signs is the first anthology from the UK which offers a broad perspective on the rapidly expanding field of ecopsychology. The book is an essential read for those wishing to explore the psychological implications of climate change. How do we reconcile the way we live with the escalating ecological crises of our times? The breadth and diversity of this collection of works is underpinned by an evolving field of therapeutic work which recognises personal wellbeing and the wellbeing of the ecology as intimately connected.

The book initially locates us homo-sapiens in a place where we have lost touch with ourselves as creatures of the earth. I, the reader, find myself meandering through an undulating, sometimes rocky landscape, musing on how these destructive forces and this violence against the earth has arisen.

The writing urges me to consider how we might reconfigure our relationships with the whole-earth community. The book addresses the cultural influences which serve to disconnect us from our roots and the authors consider ways to review our cultural and practice-based norms, which have become embedded in a mainstream, contemporary lifestyle.

Chris Drury’s ‘Heart of Reeds’ (featured on the front of ‘Vital Signs’) was created in spring 2005 in Lewes, East Sussex. Chris talked about its creation at the ecopsychology gathering. Photo: http://chrisdrury.co.uk/heart-of-reeds/
I remember the first meeting of PCSR very well. It was November 1995 when over 500 therapists and counsellors crowded into a dark theatre in Swiss Cottage. It was a strange space for such a meeting, due to enormous interest and a last minute change of venue. “Social responsibility” had clearly captured the imaginations of so many therapists at that moment in time.

I had been working as eating problems co-ordinator at The Women’s Therapy Centre in the 1980s during the development of feminist psychotherapy, inspired by the writings of Susie Orbach. Jungian analyst Andrew Samuels was also writing about politics and psyche and both these visionaries were among the founders of PCSR, bringing together new thinking about gender, race and class in the therapy relationship. Now it seemed possible that a more psychologically informed thinking could seep out of the very private practice of our profession and into social debate. What a difference this could make.

The event is doubly embedded in my memory because I was one year into training as a Jungian analyst, and the meeting time clashed with one of my therapy sessions. Feeling very torn I decided to leave half way through the event. I remember walking up the steps of the theatre, through the audience, cursing that I had to go. I then spent the whole of my session expressing resentment that I had left such a GREAT meeting! My analyst of course questioned why I had left which made me even more mad - and then quite tearful. It was a hard but necessary teaching about letting go of being the ‘good girl’ and following my dream.

After I finished my Jungian training I joined the PCSR Ecopsychology Group, which had been initiated by Hilary Prentice and Tania Dolley—one of a number of small groups to emerge from that first PCSR meeting. It was 1998 and the group was now thriving, with 10 members. It was such a huge relief to find other therapists whose eyes didn’t glaze over at the mention of the word ‘ecological’, who didn’t think I was a scare-monger. Or, worse still, crazy for believing that there was an ecological crisis looming, and who were all, in their different ways, weaving together the ecological, psychological, spiritual and political.

We met over the next five years in each other’s homes, read and discussed what ecopsychology literature was available (mostly from the USA), supported each other in offering workshops and talks, formed a supervision group to look at how ecological material surfaced in our therapy practices, set up an Ecopsychology Network for the UK, and generally delighted in each other’s company.

Our mutual support was vital because we encountered an unexpected number of hostile responses to the ideas of ecopsychology and we spent a good deal of time discussing why this might be. One obvious reason was that in the late 1990s climate change was not yet accepted by mainstream culture, and people were still disputing the fact of ecological crisis. But we also realised that the material we were presenting invited people into an emotional minefield. For example, when we face what modern culture is doing to the fabric of the ecosystem—the destructiveness to OUR HOME—see that we are both victims and perpetrators of abuse. This can trigger overwhelming guilt - as well as hopelessness about our future, impotence in the face of the massive change required, and so on.

It took us some time to name that we are witnessing an ecological holocaust. As therapists we know how silence surrounds holocaust, how hard it is to talk about. I remember presenting my thoughts to a small group of colleagues in the early days. There was a confused discussion and some awkward silences. Then a German woman turned to me and said, angrily, “I’ve looked at race, gender, class and other issues in my practice. And now you’re asking me to look at yet another area where I must take responsibility. It’s just too much”.

We realised the need for more training and attended residential courses with mentors such as eco-philosopher Joanna Macy whose “wide-ranging work addresses psychological and spiritual issues of the nuclear age, the cultivation of ecological awareness, and the fruitful resonance between Buddhist thought
and contemporary science” (1). Rainforest activist John Seed (2) was another mentor who had worked together with Joanna in the 1980s and together they pioneered workshops for activists and those working for social change. This work became known as ‘despair and empowerment work’ and more recently ‘The Work That Reconnects’ (3).

Both John and Joanna had experienced how activists were often caught in needing to be positive ‘onwards and upwards’ heroes; how difficult it was to openly admit to a sense of hopelessness, or a feeling that ‘nothing ever changes’. So they created ritualised experiential workshops for anyone engaged with social change to express their despair, anger, grief, and more, trusting that when all sides of emotional process are brought into the circle, empowerment will emerge, and beautifully strong bonds form as participants share their vulnerabilities. Residentials also included teaching on creative themes such as ‘Deep Time’, ‘Nuclear Guardianship’ and ‘The Ecological Self’. We took part in ‘The Council of All Beings’, a ritual inviting participants to become members of the other-than-human world to speak together about what is happening today. A UK ecopsychology community gradually began to form out of these meetings.

One of the highlights of our group was being invited to make a presentation about ecopsychology at the PCSR AGM in 2000. We took a risk and co-wrote a drama about a therapist working with three different clients on the Titanic as the ship was sinking. Each client brought material which alluded to the danger of the ship in different ways - a feeling that something had died, a dream of being engulfed by a tidal wave, and the evidence that something was seriously wrong on deck – but each time the therapist interpreted this in terms of the client’s internal world.

Luckily this idea worked – in fact as inexperienced actors we found it hard to keep straight faces when the audience descended into hysterical laughter. The drama seemed to sidestep the potential for hostile, defensive reactions, freeing us to think more imaginatively about how we might deal with ecological issues in our practice. The whole show, including script and audience discussion, is still available on the website of the Rainforest Information Centre (4).

As a result of these experiences I began to understand that the non-human world are the slaves on which capitalism is built, resulting from centuries of the (still prevalent) view that humans are superior to the rest of life, that animals apparently don’t feel in the way that humans do, that we are the only conscious beings on the planet. This makes it crystal clear that ecological crisis is a crisis of consciousness and of relationship – that is, it’s not just about making practical changes to our lifestyles, as the media would have us believe. Therapists therefore have a pivotal role to play in this time of what Joanna Macy calls ‘The Great Turning’.

It took some years to notice how these issues were surfacing regularly with clients. I realised, as with so many issues, it was a matter of holding the earth in mind from the first session onwards. I listen out for how my client might speak about the land s/he was born into, about the homelands of mother and father - as well as how family moves may have disrupted attachment with place. What of significant relationships with animals, trees, rivers or mountains? My client who suffered terrible abuse at the hands of her parents made a strong bond with the family dog and the willow tree in the garden; she may not have survived without these relationships. The first experience of death and grief in childhood is often the loss of the family pet. All these relationships form a major part of childhood development; they are important figures in play and imagination; they help us to remain embodied, to learn about our body in relation to “the other” which means not only the human other, but the other-than-human.

Spending time in gardens and parks, or in wilder nature, is deeply healing and many of our peak experiences are in the great outdoors. Witnessing the cycles of spring rebirth, the fecund mating, the late summer harvest, the autumnal shedding of leaves and the death and decay of winter offers us rich metaphors for the journey of the soul. “The Healing Fields” (5) by Jenny Grut and Sonja Linden is a moving book describing psychotherapy with victims of torture on allotments in North London. They show how psychological work in this context can reach those who have experienced the worst of human nature as well as bring cultures together, sharing their diverse foods and ways of celebrating harvest.

Dreams offer another portal to the ecological. A woman recently recounted a dream of force-feeding herself pate de foie gras. This was about her own compulsive eating problem, how she ate until her stomach hurt. But she also needed to unpack her feelings about how humans use and abuse other
animals, and how this is a mirror of how we abuse our own animal body and self.

Major events such as the recent UK floods, earthquakes or tsunamis – as well as apocalyptic dreams – can open the door to exploring fears of planetary crisis. Catching comments made in passing, such as “Oh, we’re all doomed”, may reveal deep anxieties about looming financial crashes, melting of the ice caps, the falling apart of society as we know it, and at worst human extinction. What does it mean to “carry on as normal” while silently carrying this vision of the future?

The same story continues less dramatically in the ongoing destruction of ecosystems. This means that many people have experienced the desecration of special places in their lifetime. The more I managed to air and explore this territory for myself, the easier it became to notice it surfacing in sessions, and to know how to work with it.

More recently in July a small group of us organised an ecopsychology gathering “The Edge of the Wild” at the only tented conference venue in the UK called ‘Green and Away’. The event was a sell out, the most successful PCSR event to date, with a range of workshops, two keynote speakers and the well known band 'Seize the Day' for wild dancing. I particularly liked the talk given by Land Artist Chris Drury (6)) who showed a series of images of his work. For example, “Heart of Reeds” was created on the outskirts of Lewes, the artist’s home town. This is a reed bed inspired by the design of the human heart. He has worked in many parts of the world creating art installations which raise important ecological issues without words or campaigns. Perhaps these artworks can more easily reach behind peoples’ defences to touch hearts in ways that lectures on ecological issues can’t?

I am looking forwards to the PCSR event ‘What is Social Responsibility?’ on November 3rd. Our speaker Adrian Henriques is very experienced in the field of social responsibility within organisations, from small NGOs to the business and corporate world. He will be asking questions such as: how much attention do companies pay to the consequences of what they do? How seriously can we take their protestations of being ethical? What might that mean for PCSR or its members? This seems a good opportunity to revisit the meaning of “social responsibility”, to reflect on how this concept has been developed in our profession, to ask whether our original enthusiasm for this issue is still present in the therapy community, and what of the future of PCSR?

I would like to see more events such as this where therapists can dialogue with other professions. Wouldn’t it be wild if - as a result of such discussions - new posts emerged for “psychotherapists in residence”? Like an artist in residence, it would be the job of the therapist to respond in some way to the given context. Channel Four News, expeditions to the arctic, a major corporation, and the House of Commons are four contexts I can think of right now! We could do with some better quality psychological commentary from the media than the recent example when David Cameron was accused of being a mouse and challenged to ‘find his inner Thatcher’.

If you want to find out more about ecopsychology please come and visit our website www.ecopsychology.org.uk and/or join our thriving online community www.ecopsychologyuk.ning.com which now has over 900 members and many thriving local groups (see advert on right hand page).

Notes
(1) see www.joannamacy.net
(2) www.joannamacy.net. (3) For info on UK events see: www.facilitationforlifeonearth.org
(6) See: www.chrisdrury.co.uk

Mary-Jayne Rust. I began my training as an art therapist in the late 1970s. During the 1980s I worked at The Women’s Therapy Centre with women with eating problems: setting up self help groups, running ongoing art therapy groups and working with individuals. During several trips to Ladakh, India, in the early 1990s I witnessed the ecological and social changes (for the worse!) within a traditional community as a result of their recent opening to tourism. My interest in eating problems expanded into an inquiry into our collective consuming of the earth, and the relationship between mind and body, soul and the land – the field of ecopsychology. Now I practice as a psychotherapist in North London. Alongside this, I lecture and facilitate workshops on ecopsychology in a wide range of settings. http://www.mjrust.net/
Erratum. At the ‘Dialogue’ conference in May, Sissy Lykou lead a workshop entitled ‘Dialogues without words: creative approaches to conflict and conciliation from the perspective of dance movement psychotherapy’. My apologies to Sissy for failing to include her biography after her workshop write up on page 20 of the Summer 2012 edition of ‘Transformations’. I have included it below. Kamalamani, editor.

Sissy Lykou. Sissy trained as a classical ballet dancer before injury intervened. She then changed direction and obtained a Masters in Dance Movement Psychotherapy from Goldsmiths College, University of London. Previously, she had taken a Masters in Psychology from Athens. She is a member of the Association for Dance Movement Psychotherapy in the UK. She has considerable clinical experience with a wide range of mental health and emotional disorders. Sissy has been developing innovative therapeutic-educational projects for under 5s and their parents in several children’s centres in London and has been working extensively with clients who have learning difficulties. Based now in London, where she has opened a private practice, Sissy also works as a Researcher in the Department of Psychology at the University of Heidelberg for a major international project on ‘body memory’ and the effectiveness of body-movement therapeutic interventions. www.lykoucounselling.co.uk

Ecopsychology Gathering 2013: ‘Meeting at the edge of the wild’

1st—4th August 2013
at the Green and Away Tented Conference Centre, Worcestershire (http://www.greenandaway.org)
More details to follow.

If you’ve enjoyed reading this ecopsychology edition of ‘Transformations’ consider signing up to the Ecopsychology UK website. This brings together ecopsychology practitioners and students from all over the world, including many members of PCSR. It includes discussions, groups meeting locally and events listings: http://ecopsychologyuk.ning.com/