

CLIMATE ON THE COUCH

Unconscious Processes in Relation to our Environmental crisis

Annual Lecture for Guild of Psychotherapists

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I invite you all to listen with bodies, which parts of your body are affected by what I say and how it feels.

I'm trying to cover some very big issues here, so please excuse many sweeping generalisations that I will inevitably make.

I also want to say that this is work in progress, it's a very new field, so there's a whole community of people whose ideas are all interwoven in here.

There are three things I want to talk about today:

- 1) **Where we are now and the stories we live by**
- 2) **The psychological task of change**
- 3) **The Climate OF the Couch: Do we need a new climate for psychotherapy?**

PART ONE: Where we are now and the stories we live by

So I will start as I might with a patient on the couch:

What's wrong? Or, the famous grail question what ails thee?

We find ourselves in a global crisis, and there is no doubt that something has gone seriously awry with our relationship to our environment. We witness nothing less than an assault on our life-support systems by humans in industrial growth society.

Over the past two years there has been a massive shift in awareness about this crisis. We hear daily diagnoses on the state of the planet from our scientists, like doctors reading the body of the earth - *our* collective body. Our temperature is set to rise by 2 deg at least in the coming years; our ice caps are predicted to melt within 35 years, our glaciers sooner. Our sea levels are rising as a result, our weather patterns are changing unpredictably.....and that's just a small fraction of our physical symptoms. There is nowhere to escape, and there is no guarantee that humans – and many other species – will survive. We are realising that our earth has limits, we cannot continue to consume it.

The changes to our ecosystems may come sooner than we predict. We are told we have a small window of time within which to act....10 years at most; after that, things will take their own course and we will just have to adapt to the changes as best we can.

Those are the physical symptoms. What of our psychological state? Ecopsychologist Hilary Prentice writes:

Is the human species suicidal? Apparently so – engaging in behaviour that is destructive to everything on which it depends, but apparently in serious denial of this.....Unresolved dependency needs? Absolutely! We act as though we are not totally dependent on these others, as though can afford to abuse everything ..of which our world is made...We seem to have an overweening narcissism, such that

all other species and elements of the world appear to be there to please and gratify our every whim.....” (Prentice, H 2001 P7)

I could go on, but I think you get the picture!

Back to the patient on the couch:

○ **So tell me something of your family history – the stories you live by**

The roots of our crisis go back such a long way, through the history of our western culture. I can only hope to pull out a few strands of this story today.

I’m going to begin by reading two very different descriptions of human relationship with nature. The first is the words of Native American, Jeannette Armstrong of the Okanagan tribe, who describes the human self as inextricably interwoven with the web of life:

“We survive within our skin inside the rest of our vast selves....Okanagans teach that our flesh, blood and bones, are Earth-body; in all cycles in which the earth moves, so does our body..... Our word for body literally means ‘the land-dreaming capacity’ ”.The Okanagan teaches that emotion or feeling is the capacity whereby community and land intersect in our beings and become part of us. This bond or link is a priority for our individual wholeness or well-being.” (Roszak 1996, 320-1)

This second quote is the words of Freud which tells us something about our western perspective:

“The principle task of civilisation, its actual raison d’etre, is to defend us against nature. We all know that in many ways civilisation does this fairly well already, and clearly as time goes on it will do it much better. But no one is under the illusion that nature has already been vanquished; and few dare hope that she will ever be entirely subjected to man. There are the elements which seem to mock at all human control; the earth which quakes and is torn apart and buries all human life and its

works; water, which deluges and drowns everything in turmoil; storms, which blow everything before them.....With these forces nature rises up against us, majestic, cruel and inexorable; she brings to our mind once more our weakness and helplessness, which we thought to escape through the work of civilisation”

(Freud 1961 pp15-16)

Freud describes how we have battled **against** nature to build western civilisation. We might call this our “Myth of Progress”, familiar to us all from our education. It tells the story of an epic heroic journey from a primitive dark world of ignorance to a brighter world of ever-increasing knowledge, freedom and well-being. This progress was made possible by the birth of the human reason and the modern mind; it’s all about onwards and upwards. (Tarnas, R 2007 P12)

What we were not taught at school is the shadow of that Myth: that we once lived sustainably, according to many indigenous societies, for many thousands of years, in a richly sophisticated communion of community, land, culture and spirit, as the first quote shows. But in our gradual withdrawal from this intimacy, western humans began to dominate and control nature, in an effort to escape vulnerability, as Freud describes. Certain groups of humans were also branded as being closer to the earth, seen as having a ‘lower’ more animal nature, and for some this justifies their domination and abuse. The genocide of indigenous cultures, African slavery and the oppression of women are three examples of this.

The end result of our Myth of Progress is that we see ourselves as separate from, and superior to, the rest of life, treating those ‘underneath’ ourselves as resources for us to use as we please – land, creatures as well as peoples. Deep Ecologist John Seed calls this **anthropocentrism**. He writes:

“Anthropocentrism....means human chauvinism. Similar to sexism, but substitute ‘human race’ for ‘man’ and ‘all other species’ for ‘woman’.”(Seed, John 1988 P35)

The ‘industrial growth society’ is about ‘growth’. In terms of systems theory, it is on ‘runaway’. (H Prentice 2001 quoting Macy, J 1988) Perhaps the lack of (visible) panic about our environmental crisis is because

“at least in the West, it is believed that only when the natural world has gone, can the patriarchal one finally be constructed, in all its glory, in its place.”

(Claudia Von Werlhof P148)

Some writers (see Jules Cashford and Ann Baring 1993; Richard Tarnas 2007) suggest that this shadow side of the Myth of Progress is reflected in the Myth of the Fall. The story of how Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden can be read as a description of our separation from nature. But the traditional reading leaves us with unending guilt and punishment for this original sin of separation. The one male God lives in the sky; the earth and all its sensual delights becomes the place of the Devil. Everything has become split and disconnected. This reading offers no way of working through separation, nor any means of return.

When we remind ourselves of the kind of **climate** that we have all grown up in, for thousands of years, it’s little wonder that we find ourselves in such turbulence.

This is the climate that needs putting on the couch today.

I think we would all agree that these two stories, The Myth of Progress and The Myth of the Fall, have run their course in their current form, and that we most urgently need a myth to live by which is about living *with* the other-than-human world.

Where we find ourselves, then, is between stories (see Thomas Berry 1999), in a transitional space, a place of great turbulence, with little to hold onto save the ground of our own experience. Our therapeutic task, you might say, in this space of transition,

is to understand how these myths still shape our internal worlds, our language, and our defences against change; also to challenge our own role in the oppression of others; and that through shedding light on these shadows, how we find renewal: what it means to return to The Garden.

For somewhere in the midst of ‘sustainability’ – a rather uninspiring word - lies an inspiring vision of transformation. But if this journey simply a practical venture about behaviour change it will not appeal to our imaginations. We need to dig deep, to re-read our own myths as well as find inspiration from the stories of others who are outside the box of western culture, and inside the web of life.

Having set the scene, now I want to return to the ways in which we respond to our current crisis, to see how these stories underly the present.

PART TWO: The psychological task of change

- **What are our feelings, responses and fantasies about this crisis?**

Even though we are waking up in a big way to the crisis, there is still a great deal of numbing, apathy and denial. We are having great difficulty in making even the simplest of changes to our lives.

As we come back into our feelings, the scale of our crisis is *very overwhelming*. It's very hard to digest what comes up - anxiety, fear, despair, grief, guilt, rage.....the list goes on; as a culture ‘we don't do feelings’. Blocking the feelings means we don't feel the urgency of the situation.

What do we do with our guilt? It is easy to project guilt into environmental activists and then make fun of them as earnest, bearded, killjoys (Randall, R 2005 P14).

Overwhelming guilt about the damage we have done can block our thinking, and make us very defensive.

Our fantasies about living sustainably are very split. On the one hand, there's the image of some frugal old aunt who shivers in winter because she won't turn her heating on, and re-uses everything. This is an image of deprivation and masochism, as well as guilt and judgement. Or perhaps we imagine becoming one of those angry activists, a finger-wagging eco-missionary. The flip side of these is the fantasy of living the good and virtuous green life, '*back* to nature' made out to be purer than pure. It's seen as an escape from real life.

What's happened? If we look back into history there are at least three very different associations with the green movement, all of which are framed in a negative way. First of all, green is linked with the Garden of Eden and paradise, which is seen as an unrealistic utopia, as if this cannot be found in our everyday life. Secondly, it's linked with paganism, which is still very challenging to our Christian culture, and it's **that** culture who have taken the sexiness out of green life. Thirdly, and much more recently, it's linked with start of the Nazi party, and extreme social control.

Fantasies about sustainable living which appeal to our imaginations are definitely there to be found, but they are lacking in the public arena.

Our fantasies about The Myth of Progress, however, are still heroic. How often do we hear: "Oh well, technology will come up with an answer". We believe our civilisation, with all it's science and technology is omnipotent.

As a result of our 'progress', everything we use and buy is so disconnected from its source. It's so easy to turn a blind eye; the cheap shirt we buy may well be made by

children in sweat shops; or the neatly packaged chicken may well come from animals who have never stood up in their lives. It takes so much time and energy to make conscious choices. And the very thing that is causing our crisis – consuming - has become our palliative, to soothe away our anxieties about our global crisis. It's a vicious circle.

❖ **So does that mean we have a bit of an eating problem?**

Well yes. Actually, we've trashed the family home and we've binged on all the reserves; oil and gas may well have peaked already, we overfish, clearcut forests, and extract everything that can be sold for profit. And then we throw it up undigested into landfill sites.

❖ **How did this giant eating problem come about? Consumerism**

Many of you will have seen the series, 'Century of the Self' where Adam Curtis (2002) traces the rise of consumerism in the 20th century. I will draw out just two of his points:

- ❖ Firstly, that we have been deliberately manipulated into consuming by mass producers in pursuit of profit. This was done using the ideas of Freud, linking products to our deep desires through advertising.

If products are linked to our deepest desires, then they become part of our identities. What happens, then, when we try to give up consuming? We might feel like we are less powerful or even losing parts of ourselves. For example, a car is promoted as a symbol of sexual power and success. Gaining a car has become a rite of passage into adulthood in our society. Losing it might feel like a regression to adolescence, with a loss of power.

Reducing our consuming is not just about a fear of losing power, it's also a fear of losing our individual freedom. There was a good example of this on 'Any Questions', some of you may have heard it. A woman in the audience asked:

“Given that the UN environment programme has painted the bleakest picture yet for the well being of our planet, why has nobody told me I can't drive my BMW turbo diesel?”

The government minister, Barbara Follett, gave a staggering reply: “To tell you not to drive your BMW diesel is an infringement of your liberty and we're trying to leave you an element of choice here”she then confessed to having one herself.

On the panel was Jonathan Porrit, who concluded: Between the two of you I think we can broadly accept that the planet is stuffed. (BBC Radio 4 27th October 2007)

What we see here is a clash between individual and collective freedom gone mad, a clash between old and new stories. The Myth of Progress has sold us a dream of freedom which is about the hero cutting his way out of the web, in the bid to be separate from the maternal matrix. It's all about individual freedom at whatever cost, an adolescent dream.

What of the new story? Quoting eco activist John Jordan:

“Until we are able to see the world as a seamless set of relationships, not objects but innumerable boundless subjects, we are not free.” (www.utopias.eu 2007)

Our own liberation is tied up with everyone else.

The good news is: In the therapy process, there is often a period of time during which someone is conscious of what they are doing, but cannot yet relinquish their familiar habit. Symptoms are often the last things to go, after the deep inner work has been done. At least these two BMW drivers are thinking....more than they were a few years ago.

- ❖ Adam Curtis also claims that consumerism has been deliberately used as an opiate of the people. The US government was horrified by what had been unleashed during the 1st WW, the levels of human aggression. This coincided with Freud's claims that he had unearthed primitive sexual and aggressive forces which were the **remnants of our animal past**. Thus mass consumerism came into being as a deliberate policy of pacification, an attempt to satisfy peoples' desires, imagining this would make them docile.

Perhaps this is one story about how our giant eating problem was constructed! Yet again, it's a story about fighting nature, but this time it's about fighting the supposedly destructive wild animal within.

So far I have been trying to show the different ways in which our culture defends against change.

❖ **Tell me, what of despair in these times?**

There's one last response that I have been hearing a lot lately, that I think deserves a bit more attention. Many people are now waking up to the reality and fearing that it is completely hopeless, and this is the complete reverse of denial. This starts with a story from my practice.

Last year a client of mine, who came into therapy about relationships difficulties, revealed that she and her partner (both 30-somethings) spent their entire leisure time drinking and taking drugs. This was not a problem, she said; all her friends did the same. We circled around this for a while. I was baffled as I could not find the real despair and anger underneath this wipe out. In the midst of a session, I threw in a wild card: 'What do you feel about the future?' she replied 'We're completely fucked'. She talked about our global crisis at length, and she spontaneously made the link to her drinking, saying 'We may as well go down having a good time'.

Now there's a whole lot more I could say about where we went from there, but the point is that this is an understandable response to the information we are receiving. Many people who have immersed themselves in the facts about what is happening in the world, admit to me in private that they see little chance of us getting through this, yet most of them are fearful of discussing this in public for fear of sounding too depressing or nihilistic.

What does it do to a whole generation of 30-somethings who are growing up with this secret view of their future? No wonder we have an epidemic of binge drinkers. Isn't it mind-blowing to imagine a collective who are secretly thinking this but not really sharing it, apart from just in passing – "Oh - I think we're doomed"? It's very reminiscent of: "Don't talk about the war". We cannot deal with death in our culture.

If many people are secretly thinking this, and I suspect they are, their motivation for taking action in the face of climate change will be zero. As therapists, we know that when we face our worst fears, and *feel* the effects, we stand a chance of moving through darkness into enormous creativity. So let's face this response 'we're completely fucked'. What happens?

What would we do in response to a terminal diagnosis? We might be overwhelmed with many different feelings, and go through a difficult period of despair and depression. But such crisis can often wake us up in a radical way, and bring us back to the most important things in life. Things get simple: spend time with those you love, and in places you love. Sort out your unfinished business. People who have had brushes with death don't return wishing they had spent more time in the office. The heart takes over. In the words of Deep Ecologist Joanna Macy:

Whatever happens, this can be a moment of unparalleled awakening. We have a sense of what it means for an individual to wake up. For the collective to awaken, we cannot even imagine what it will be like. The evolutionary pressure on us now,

which can feel so ghastly, pushes us toward this awakening. Life-forms have gone through periods when it must have seemed totally hopeless. For example, when oxygen was a poison, who could have imagined that life would develop the breathing apparatus to use it?I don't think we've been given any absolute guarantee that conscious life on Earth will continue. It might. It might not. In either case, this is a most extraordinary and beautiful moment. Because in this moment we can make a choice for loving life and taking care of each other. Right up to the end, we can make that choice, and that's glorious. So we don't need to ask, "Will it go on forever?" (Macy, J. www.joannamacy.net/html/letters.html)

If we allow ourselves to feel it, crisis opens an opportunity for awakening fully to the present. Then we take action for different reasons. We are no longer the hero trying to save the world. We don't consume too much because it doesn't feel good **now**. We recycle and re-use because there is no 'away' to throw things. Living sustainably is simply about living with integrity now, not for some imaginary future. And if ever we **really** thought we lose power in losing '**things**', we find that living with integrity is where we **find** our power, success and liberation.

Slowing right down, surrendering to despair, and living through darkness without fighting it, is a very different kind of hero myth, one that therapists know a great deal about. The pain of our despair connects us back into the world again, into our bodies; we rediscover compassion for ourselves and for others and then we **feel** the damage that we do. Going slow also brings great joy in the smallest details.

Whether we have a collective terminal diagnosis or not is actually beside the point. The "we're completely fucked" response is yet another layer of the defence system, which gives us licence to give up thinking. The next thing that comes, as my client said, is "Oh fuck it – I might as well drink".

I have heard this so very many times over the years from women with eating problems, and it's to do with reaching a point of complete stuckness. There's an argument going on inside, which is old and seemingly un-resolvable. There is *intense* build up of frustration. Suddenly it's as if a switch goes off and the binge starts. It's a wipe out of thinking, as well as a longing to go beyond the small self, through an orgy of sensual pleasure, into oneness - a longing to fuck, to bring the parts of ourselves together in a meaningful way.

I suspect this mirrors what goes on in the collective. We conclude we're fucked, and there is nothing more that can be done. But when the collective gets stuck like this we have a wipe out that becomes an apocalypse.

Actually, what many people *don't* see is that there's a whole lot of change going on out there. Why? The most exciting initiative I have come across is the Transition Town movement (www.transitionculture.org; www.transitiontowns.org), which began 15 months ago in Totnes, Devon. In their words,

“a town using much less energy and resources could, if properly planned for and designed, be more resilient, more abundant and more pleasurable than the present”.

In a short space of time, this movement has spread to over 30 towns and cities in the UK, (with scores more who are thinking about it) as well as to other countries around the world. Why? Because it enables people to envision a future based on what could happen if we took action now, and using methods to enable people to work together, whole communities are now engaged which of course makes this whole thing possible. Here is sustainable living appealing to peoples' imaginations. And the rapid spread shows how hungry people are for this change.

An extraordinary grass roots movement is growing, involving millions of people around the world, exploring sustainable living in so many different ways, but we don't hear about it on the news. Why? This is what happens when people *en masse* start coming into line with their integrity.

❖ So What next?

Part of our task in this process is to change our relationship with the whole earth community. We know from so many other cultural shifts, such as apartheid or sexism, that it's a painful and humiliating process for the oppressor to give up their place 'on top' and take back their projections. The reward is that we find some of the missing pieces of ourselves, we discover what we had been longing for.

For example, when men project their vulnerability onto women, they become hardened, and they denigrate women who they see as 'soft' or 'weak'. They defend against taking it back, but when they do, they come back into being more human again.

So part of this process is about welcoming back our nature within: recognising that we are domesticated wild animals, and that our wild animal nature is not some lower being who is aggressive, or whose wildness is to be feared, or whose instincts and intuitions are not to be trusted.....but rather **someone** to be respected, indeed, who makes us human. In many ways this is exactly what the project of psychotherapy has been about for the past 100 years, but I wonder how far we have really gone in respecting our bodily wisdom? Do we still see the symbolic as higher and the body as lower?

Working with women with eating problems I often hear the cries of those who are marooned in their heads. When I ask questions like: Do you feel hungry? Do you

know the difference between physical and emotional hunger?’ the answer in most cases is ‘No - I feel cut off from the neck downwards’. They have been taught by our culture that bodies are not to be trusted. What a relief, then, to discover that the body can be trusted; that if we listen to our own nature, it will tell us when we are hungry and when we are full; it will also guide us to meet our emotional hunger. So simple! The difficult bit is undoing all those years of distrust and obliteration of bodily instincts and feelings, knowing which voice to trust and when.

Coming back into our instincts, intuition and sensation is reconnecting with an old part of ourselves, that takes us back through evolution. Jung suggests we have a two million year old person within each of us, and that the challenge for our times is to bear the tension between ancient and modern (Jung 1931). Who is this indigenous self? What does s/he have to say to us? What would it be like to spend a day in dialogue with that person?

We have ended up identifying with just a tiny part of ourselves in our heads, that bit which we say makes us uniquely human. *“Our bodies have become hairless shiny techno automatons, as far away from apes as possible”*. (Anneke Smelik 2007)

Ironically, it is only when we can fully inhabit all of the diverse aspects of ourselves, can we realise our wisdom. Jeannette Armstrong describes the four capacities of humans as the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual selves – similar to Jung’s concept of the self. Her quote at the very beginning describes something of our physical and emotional selves. She writes:

“The spirit-self is hardest to describe. We translate (it)... as ‘without substance while continuously moving outward’.this self requires great quietness before our other parts can become conscious of itthe other capacities fuse together in order to activate this capacity.....this old part of us can “hear/interpret” all knowledge being spoken by all things around us, including our own bodies, in order to bring new knowledge into existence”. (Roszak 1996 P322)

As we slowly come back down into our animal bodies, reclaiming our senses, intuition and instincts, we re-connect with our whole environment. It's our bodily senses that link us to the rest of life. We can feel what's happening to others through our bodies, as the hair rises on the back of our necks.

Deep Ecologist Arne Naess calls the process of moving beyond our human self, finding our **ecological identity**. How far can we go? It's easy to identify with pets, and with charismatic megafauna...polar bears, whales and dolphins. But how about slugs? The further we move beyond the human skin, to reclaim our vast self, the more we inhabit the Ecological Self. (Naess, A 1988 P20-21)

Crossing over this very sharp dividing line that we have made between humans and the rest of life is very taboo. Psychotherapist Harold Searles suggests that our relationship to the non human environment is "*one of the transcendently important facts of human living*" but that it is "*a source of ambivalent feelings to us*" because of our fear of losing our identity as humans (Searles 1960)

Bonding with the rest of nature is as essential to us as bonding with other humans. E O Wilson calls it biophilia, our innate love for the rest of life. He writes:

We are human in good part because of the particular way we affiliate with other organisms. They are the matrix in which the human mind originated and is permanently rooted, and they offer the challenge and freedom innately sought..... (E. O. Wilson, 1984 p139)

Of course we **DO** fall in love with place, land and creatures. How can we possibly **NOT** be connected, apart from in our minds? But it's a huge area of our experience that we hear mostly through poetry.

Wild Geese by Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
 You do not have to walk on your knees
 for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
 You only have to let the soft animal of your body
 love what it loves.
 Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
 Meanwhile the world goes on.
 Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of rain
 are moving across the landscapes,
 over the prairies and the deep trees,
 the mountains and the rivers.
 Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
 are heading home again.
 Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
 the world offers itself to your imagination,
 calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting-
 over and over announcing your place
 in the family of things.

In spending time in the wilds of nature, or just in our back gardens, we reconnect to the oneness of life. Jung describes this beautifully:

“At times I feel like I am spread out over the landscape and inside things, and am myself living in every tree, in the splashing of the waves, in the clouds and the animals that come and go, in the procession of the seasons.....(C.G.Jung 1967)

These experiences are profoundly healing. They are about dissolving and coming back together again, renewing ourselves in the process. We feel part of the larger living body of the universe. Quoting John Seed again,

“Indigenous cultures recognise that humans have a tendency to disconnect from the oneness of life, and the function of ritual is to reconnect us back into oneness.” (personal communication)

Perhaps our binges on food, drink or drugs are a misplaced attempt to experience that ecstatic state of oneness, our consuming of the earth a misplaced longing to re-unite with the earth. As the Buddhist said to the hot dog seller, “Make Me One with Everything.”

Theologian Thomas Berry says that the universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects (Berry 1999). They all have needs and rights that must be taken account of in our decision making. They are ‘stakeholders’ too. How might we take them into account?

One example is a method called environmental constellations, developed by Zita Cox, which facilitates 'joined up' thinking by mapping the environmental system in front of our eyes, a tool which taps into unconscious process and thus enables a group to listen to the needs of the other than human world. (www.environmentalconstellations.org)

In all these ways, and many more, we are returning to the garden, not as some utopian paradise disconnected from real life, but as a living breathing other with whom we share our breath.

In the words of Arundhati Roy, *“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”* (Roy 2003)

PART THREE

What about the Climate OF the Couch?

On the one hand the project of psychotherapy is very much in support of helping us retrieve lost pieces of ourselves. It brings us back down into our emotional bodies, it helps us to *relate* to self and other humans.

On the other hand, psychotherapy has grown up in an urban, western culture and is inevitably shaped by it. Our development is supposedly shaped by human relationship alone, as Searles writes in 1960:

“The nonhuman environment....is,.... considered as irrelevant to human personality developmentas though human life were lived out in a vacuum – as though the human race were alone in the universe, pursuing individual and collective destinies in a homogenous matrix of nothingness, a background devoid of form, colour, and substance.” (Searles 1960, 3)

Perhaps this accounts for the difficulty that many therapists have in seeing the links between psychotherapy and our environmental crisis.

There is a burgeoning field of ecopsychology, wilderness therapy and ecotherapy, in the USA, Australia, and more recently in the UK, in which therapists of many backgrounds are articulating these very links. (eg See Roszak et al 1996)

For example, a woman called Jenny Grut set up The Natural Growth Project within the Medical Foundation for Victims of Torture here in London. She and other therapists worked with asylum seekers and refugees on allotments, using the metaphors of nature in the work of therapy while growing food. People who have suffered great loss and trauma can find great solace in making a safe connection with the natural world, while a more organic connection with humans can grow. I

remember her saying to me that at the end of the day she could walk back past all the allotments and see the state of each persons psyche by looking at their plots. (Grut 2002)

But what of therapy in rooms? Do clients talk about these issues in our practice? If not, why not? If so, how do we work with it?

There are so many ways in which our lives are bound into the world beyond humans: What place can you call home? What of the land of your mother or father? What about special animals who were part of your childhood, or the love of a particular stretch of wild beach? Or a special relationship with rock or water? What of the grief for places, animals, trees that you may have lost? These are stories about love, awe and beauty, as well as of grief, rage pain for the losses in the wider world now.

Jungian analyst Jerome Bernstein describes how a patient in his 30's was talking about his struggles to get his life together, and stopped mid-sentence, with a long silence. Then he said:

“I feel a Great Grief. I feel it inside (points to his heart). It's never not there. It is never not far from me. In Montana I felt connected. (He had just returned from a trip there). Here I am disconnected – in my car, living on top of the land. I'm part of the land; that's my home. But I'm a product of my culture and therefore cut off from my home. I felt expanded there; I feel contracted here. When I was at the fathering in Montana, (a wilderness experience) I was part of a community. Jerome describes how

“the challenge in this instance is not to interpret at all – certainly not in the moment – to hold an experience that can feel between language, that can leave one with the tension of holding ones rational breath for far longer than any of us can imagine doing. To not seek the comfort of rational understanding, but to come to some kind of knowing through a holding and wonderment.” (Bernstein p73)

I find that as I become more aware of the links in myself, it is easier to make those links in session. Consider the following dream from a client of mine:

She is standing in the middle of lush rainforest as termites destroy the trees. Finally, she is left alone, all the forest has been consumed and its inhabitants are extinct.

We spent most of the session following her associations which were linked to her eating problem and the emptiness behind her eating, which links back to her experience of many abandonments in childhood. On an internal level it was about an apocalyptic wipe out, you might say.

As I listened to this, I was aware of my own association to the clear-cutting of rainforests of the world. But my client made no mention of this and I was in two minds whether to raise it. Eventually I tell her my association, at which point she says I am 'bringing my green agenda into the room'. I felt angry with her comment, and my feelings blocked me from finding a satisfactory response. Thinking she is not ready to talk about these issues, I left it.

This was some years ago now, before climate change had hit the headlines. With hindsight, I can see other ways through. What if I had made a comment which linked inner and outer realities, something like: "I wonder if your dream is saying something about our collective desire to consume as if there was no tomorrow?" In this way, I am acknowledging that we are all caught in something together; eating problems are not simply an individual or familial experience.

Kleinian analyst Hannah Segal writes about similar dilemmas regarding the danger of nuclear weapons during the 1980's. She writes,

"Even when patients do refer to nuclear issues, psychoanalysts remain faced with an ethical and technical dilemma. On the one handwe must not collude with the

patient's denial of any external situation that we may guess at from the material and that the patient does not bring out in the open.

On the other hand, we must also be very wary of imposing on the patient our own preoccupations and convictions.....If we do our job properly in dealing with the patient's basic defences, the relevant material will appear, because, in fact, below the surface, patients are anxious, even terrified.” (Segal P56)

This is a just a brief sketch of a complex area.

Some Final Thoughts.

We are in the midst of an extraordinary process of transformation; stuckness, defeat and the addictive numbing of despair coexist with a myriad of awakenings, of callings to speak out, of new visions and energies and creative possibilities arising all around the planet....

I have been trying to describe the journey towards sustainable living as a therapeutic journey, every bit as rich and deep as the personal therapy journeys we venture on. These journeys mirror one another and inform each other so that in the end we find that they are totally intertwined.

As the crisis quickens, and whole communities increasingly wake up to the need for change, the shadow of the myth of progress will become ever more obvious. Ironically it is this that will push us to rediscover the garden, whether this is by choice or whether we are pushed out of our comfort zones into the wilds of nature.

We do have a choice here. We may be living in the last hours of ancient sunlight. What are we going to do with our time? Busy ourselves shopping? Or spend time with those we love, in the places we love, and use the time to sort out our unfinished business with the earth?

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