

## Turn the (global) heating down!

A few threads have been coming together in me about 'the environment' and therapy (how different incidentally if I say 'my environment' or more accurately 'our environment', than the more objectifying 'the'). In this writing I am attempting to articulate something that has been moving in me, which does not feel very coherent, but does feel urgent and emergent.....

Some years ago when I attended Quaker meetings regularly I had a number of experiences of 'ministry', when someone, as George Fox wrote, 'cannot but speak'. In his language this means being so moved by the spirit that you feel impelled to let what is in you, or what is coming through you, out. This is not necessarily a straight-forward experience of relief, the Quakers got their name through their bodies moving, sometimes vigorously, in response to engaging with the spirit. I have sometimes found myself speaking without much engagement of judgement or choice.....I have 'found myself' speaking.

I have a similar experience in relation to this piece of writing. I don't really want to do it, it feels uncomfortable and difficult. Perhaps you won't like what I write, perhaps you will think I'm being superior or preachy or arrogant.....perhaps, worse still, there will be no response at all.

These responses are familiar to me in situations where I feel I'm breaking into something new in myself, forming a new shape or when an organising principle is coming more into awareness. And also when I am in a group and something isn't being said.....so here I am saying what I think is not being said (or at least not loudly or clearly enough), and I am nervous about how it is going to go down.

There is nowhere that Heinz Kohut's oft-quoted remark about our ultimate interconnectedness is more apposite;

*'A move from dependence (symbiosis) to independence (autonomy) in the psychological sphere is no more possible, let alone desirable, than a corresponding move from a life dependent on Oxygen to a life independent of it in the biological sphere.'*

(Kohut 1984:47)

We are completely interdependent, and the current situation shows the folly of our delusion that it is otherwise.

## Language.

I switched on the radio the other day and heard James Lovelock (the creator of the 'Gaia theory' the earth as an interconnected, joined-up entity that has 'mortality') uses the phrase 'global heating'. This struck me as being a more active, urgent phrase than 'warming' which has some easier more pleasant connotations perhaps in line with how people have been thinking a kind of warm complacency. I have been trying to use Lovelock's term rather than the phrase 'global warming', which is more familiar to me, and it has been interesting the responses I have had. Some people have laughed thinking I have done a malapropism and meant to say 'warming', but often are then thoughtful when I explain. Most people seem to be keen to talk about it and have strong opinions and feelings (my nine year old nephew wants to be part of a '*refferlution*' (sic) that would '*get*' people who '*build cars factories and stuff!*') My children are completely outraged by what is happening to their planet and are keen to act. So what can we do?

## Direct Action.

How about making your practice carbon neutral? Does anyone know how to do that?

Perhaps the bcpc conference could become a carbon neutral conference (I saw that 'Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility' ran a recent conference in this way.....I will try and find out about it and pass the information onto our conference organisers).

Could bcpc become a carbon neutral training centre? Can this newsletter become a carbon neutral activity? (As editor Sara what do you think? How about the newsletter being 'delivered' by e-mail?)

A couple of years ago I started running my car on bio diesel (a fuel that doesn't introduce extra carbon into the atmosphere and so is carbon neutral). I still remember the thrill of taking some direct action and neutralising my carbon use in this area of my life. In one way this is very easy to do, most diesel cars require no conversion, however the fuel itself can be hard to come across. You could try [www.purebiodiesel.co.uk](http://www.purebiodiesel.co.uk) to find out your nearest source.

As I was buying my first tank full of fuel I was amazed to hear that if I wanted to make a **big** difference I should convert to sustainable electricity,

*'Not everyone realises the burning of fossil fuels to make electricity is damaging our environment. In fact, it is the single biggest cause of climate change in our country today, responsible for 30% of our CO2 emissions.'*

(Vince '05)

and from environmentalist Adrian Lawton,

*'The backdrop of why Biodiesel is supported lies in the belief that the extinction of species is the gravest of all the environmental issues. This then translates to 2 main culprits that are behind the issue globally, namely: carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels and forest destruction. If both these were sorted out the majority of endangered species would be safe.*

*Tackling carbon emissions: In the UK, transport causes about ¼ of our global warming impact, so by switching to Biodiesel you can eliminate about a ¼ of your own contribution. An even more effective consumer switch is to get your electricity from a company that deals only in 100% renewable energy by switching to a renewable energy company you can effectively eliminate over 50% of your carbon impact! For the rest (the last ¼) your carbon impact is much harder to eliminate, so the easiest way to get rid of the rest of your impact is to let someone else do it for you! So the third and final move (after switching electricity supplier and transport fuel) is to buy **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** (1). In this way any individual or organisation can eliminate their carbon contribution and not be a part of the global warming problem. Not only that but the time it would take to eliminate the last quarter of your Carbon impact would be so extensive that you'd be more effective using that time to convince your friends to make a fuel switch instead.' (Lawton 2001)*

Now this really is easy to do. **Anyone can do it**, there is no difference whatsoever in your electricity service or cost.....but a huge difference in terms of sustainability as the electricity comes from wind farms. All you need do is just fill out a form by post or online to change who you buy your electricity from it would probably be the biggest, and easiest, contribution you could make. (eg. [www.ecotricity.co.uk](http://www.ecotricity.co.uk) 0800 326 100).

### **In the consulting room:**

Does the way you practice and the theory you work with help you to detect and take seriously environmental transference?

Jungian analyst and maverick James Hillman urges us to 'meet', respect and encourage clients when they have feelings of outrage about their environment. In his book 'We've had a hundred years of psychotherapy and the world is getting worse' he challenges therapists to encourage any discontent or anger with the environment rather than interpreting it or seeing it as evidence of regression in some way. He challenges the idea of eternal growth by baldly stating that if we continue growing after a certain age we grow cancer! He sees environmental action as a kind of counterbalance to our grandiose tendencies, a puncturing of our inflationary tendencies! (Hillman 1993).

This idea of challenging limitless growth seems to strike a chord with George

Monbiot also:

*“Whatever your economic position, unless you are a green economist, and unless you realise that the fundamental, physical and biological fact of the world is finitude, all those economics tell us that we just keep growing and keep growing and everyone will be happier and the better for it. This is one of the absolutely fundamental problems driving this issue of climate change.”*  
*Environmental Law Foundation. The Professor David Hall Lecture. By George Monbiot. 5th May, 2005.*

(Norton 2005)

When I first heard Lovelock talking about the earth having ‘mortality’, I felt a shock, similar to that when I read Monbiot’s word ‘finitude’. ‘Eh? What are they on about?’ It reveals in me an objectifying ‘I-it’ relation to the earth and in my ignorance of anything other being possible I make an ‘I-thou’ (Buber 1970) relationship impossible to realise.

I had an encounter with a sleepy (dying?) wasp early in the autumn. In a break I had been to the bakery and was just enjoying a pain-au-raison that had icing sugar sprinkled on it. As I eat it the sugar dusted my beard and must have made for an alluring destination for this wasp. Although I am mostly of the ‘leave-them-alone-and-they-will-leave-you-alone school, I also have a childhood body-memory/experience of putting my hand on a sleepy wasp that was resting on the frame of a slide I was climbing. I got a great shock and it hurt like hell. Despite this previous experience I managed to enter a kind of reverie with this wasp and allowed it to buzz around my beard really quite closely without it bothering me. Infact I felt very safe in the apprehension of the wasps’ purpose. In this moment I did not experience it as ‘coming to get me’, rather that it was simply drawn by the sugar. In that encounter, an ‘I-thou’ experience, I had no need of anything, I was content to be in that moment. Unlike a few moments later when I returned to my fearful state and batted the wasp away with my hand (in writing this it seems a violent act.....previous to the apprehension of the wasp as another being I would not have had this thought so engrossed would I have been in my own experience. Does this sound familiar? So intent can we be on our own needs, wants and fears that we don’t see our impact on others.....and one of these others is the earth.

In the practice of therapy some structures can help, you may recognise the archetypal shape Mythologist Joseph Campbell describes:

*‘Everyone is a hero.*

*This is a given.*

*We have a call to adventure.*

*We refuse.*

*A crisis ensures.  
We cannot turn back-and we answer the call.*

*We collect helpers, teachers, guides.*

*And we cross a threshold into the unknown.*

*We lose our identity and enter an abyss, a nadir,  
the belly of the whale.*

*We emerge.*

*We begin travelling back home to what we have known-  
recrossing the threshold.*

*We return.*

*We have changed.*

(Keleman 1999:xv)

Interestingly Campbell uses the word ‘*changed*’ to describe something that has happened, which seems more phenomenologically disciplined than the notion of ‘*growth*’ that so concerns Hilman.

**How theory can help:** I have detailed here some theory that helps me in this area.

In their groundbreaking critique of psychoanalysis, ‘Contexts of Being’, Bob Stolorow and George Atwood launch a challenge to the dualism they see as present in many aspects of western culture. They write about the ‘myth of the isolated mind’ and how it,

*‘...ascribes to man a mode of being in which the individual exists separately from the world of physical nature and also from engagement from others.’*

(Stolorow and Atwood 1992:7)

They go on to describe three forms of alienation that we suffer as a result of this isolated state; alienation from ‘Nature’, ‘Social Life’ and ‘Subjectivity’. When considering nature they state that we are subject to the conditions of;

*‘...absolute dependence on the physical environment, kinship to other animals,*

*subjection to biological rhythms and needs, and, perhaps most important, man's physical vulnerability and ultimate mortality'.*

(ibid: 8)

Elsewhere I have explored how 'impasse theory' (ibid: 87-123) from 'intersubjective systems theory' might help in dissolving relational trauma states between couples (Slattery 2006). In writing this piece I have wondered about whether this theory might also help in understanding our current impasse with the earth? If we were caught in a massive disjunction what might need to be understood in order to resolve it.

From a dialogical gestalt perspective Lynne Jacobs values highly the notion of contact which,

*'...serves to ground Gestalt therapy in the natural biological rhythms of all organisms, the I-thou attitude transforms contact into the realism of the uniquely human: the interhuman relationship and the development of the person.'*

(Hycner and Jacobs 1995:83)

Although I find much that is helpful here I'm not sure that I agree about '*the realism of the uniquely human*', Buber's first I-thou experiencing was with a horse. Perhaps Lynne Jacobs is here being a little humanocentric in her thinking, like most of us, most of the time! This is exactly what needs to change. How can theory become earth-sensitive?

Perhaps my experience with that wasp holds a clue. My acceptance (perhaps Buber's more active 'confirmation' might be more accurate) of the wasp led to a contented state where I was not motivated by unmet need. I was content to do nothing.....to simply be.

### **Don't forget to do nothing!**

In my exploration of relational trauma states I ended with a brief section on doing nothing;

*'The Power of Doing Nothing!*

*My experience shows me that many couples benefit from being together in a non-active, non-reactive environment. That for a therapist to 'be' in this way, rather than intervene with interpretations or ideas or tasks, is a great achievement and it can be very helpful.*

*'Another Doing Nothing Poem.'*

*There is a bird that flies through the water.  
It is like a whale ten miles high!  
Before it went into the ocean,  
It was just a bit of dust from under my bed!*

*(Bly 1987)*

*This movement from 'bit of dust' to 'whale ten miles high' is what can be revealed if we can apprehend relational trauma states. If not the potential of them remains as unknown and unseen as dust.'*

*(Slattery 2006:46-47)*

Perhaps this movement hints at the potential for change mostly unrealised in us at the moment. Just think how fringe a subject climate change was even two years ago, now it becoming more and more central.

In his quixotic piece for ECOS, the journal of the British Association of Nature Conservationists, David Russell, in talking about *'wilding the psyche'* makes a plea for us to mainly leave nature alone;

*'...for me nature has never been in need of protection because nothing can harm it. Nature encompasses everything, mass extinctions, even annihilation if it is in the nature of the universe to collapse back into a singularity at the end of time. How can such a thing ever be harmed? In fact, we always most hurt **ourselves**, our idea of nature, in the way that we relate to the world around us. Maybe we need to know more about that hurt.'*

*(Russell 2005)*

Exactly! And that is where counsellors and psychotherapists can have an important role.

**And finally.....**

Think about it! When was the last time you talked with your clients about climate change (or allowed them to talk with you? Or with your therapist, or your supervisor or your supervision group or in open group on the training.....where is this issue living in you and in your clients?

I leave the last word to poet and mythologist Robert Bly. This is taken from the essay 'Problems in the ark' from his excellent book 'A little book on the human shadow'. The essay is based on a studio reading from 1971.....so the cost of flying, he refers to be would be probably financial rather than finite as it is today:

*'One could speculate that because ancient Chinese poets, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, tried to reconcile the dark side and the light side, they preserved more feeling for plants and animals than we have preserved. Plants are asleep, and so they live always in the dark side, though their leaves reach out for the light. So we could say that each weed in our back yard unites dark and light as the rose window of charters does, and sitting by them is much cheaper than flying over to France.'*

(Bly 1988:9-10)

So I will endeavour to enjoy my weeds and most importantly notice my relationship to the earth. For if that relationship can become 'thou' then there is hope.

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Other websites:

[www.co2.org](http://www.co2.org)

[www.foe.co.uk](http://www.foe.co.uk)

[www.greenpeace.org.uk](http://www.greenpeace.org.uk)

[www.help.plant-trees.org](http://www.help.plant-trees.org)

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**An invitation:** if you feel moved/interested/outraged (or any response  
actually) please send in ideas, thoughts, responses, experiences, poems, polemic  
etc. Please mark them for 'Lonely Planet' and either:  
e-mail them to [dnslattery@blackbird6.freemove.co.uk](mailto:dnslattery@blackbird6.freemove.co.uk). (as a word attachment).  
Or post to david slattery, 52 george st, nailsworth, GL6 0NP.

I will then include what I can in the next newsletter.