

# Southern TA Conference Feb 2015

## Nature, Growth, and Change - cultivating the inner landscape

### Closing Speech

There have been two 'firsts' in operation for me at this lovely conference today. One is to be asked and to actually be delivering a speech! And the other is to be at a TA conference where the word 'nature' is in the title, (and I am aware that in relation to me these two firsts are connected!) Although I know the word nature is often interpreted in terms of our inner world, it does of course draw our attention to the world around us. Nature in fact is a word that inherently reflects the connection of the inside to the outside. So for it to make an appearance as part of a mainstream conference theme (with us also meeting in a beautiful conference setting such this one) supports my experience that the context of the natural world is very gradually being considered as a potential element in our work as therapists, educators and organisational consultants. And for that reason I feel especially excited, as the natural world is a great personal, (and now a professional) passion of mine. My thanks go to the organisers for taking this step.

And so to our day together - It seems to me that this has involved many different ways of seeking and working with the worlds of others. And I'm happy to see that some of this has involved working with the non-human too! I have been very struck by the rich metaphors from the natural world used in the workshop materials and it reminds me of just how much the natural world layers into our minds/bodies. It has felt like a day brim-full with curiosity, stimulation & vibrancy - a very vital mix. I have especially enjoyed the emphasis on the mix of fields within TA and am particularly delighted to be the closer for a conference where Giles - an educator & cultivator has opened the way.

My sense was that Giles' speech provided us with very fertile & solid ground from which to go off and explore. I think that both his speech and his excellent writings in the TAJ on the subjects of educator as cultivator and natality contain important points about the expression of our desires both to be alive and also to grow....to thrive. Thank you Giles for such an eloquent, heartfelt, and grounded start to our day!

For our final few minutes together today I would like to briefly offer you my personal reflections in relation to the conference theme, and then invite you to take an opportunity to summarize your experience of the day with a very short exercise.

Rather similarly to Giles, over the past few years I have interlinked two important aspects of my life; my personal, spiritual connection to the natural world; and my professional interest in the relational creativity of psychotherapeutic space. By and large I think this has come about very gradually through my exploration and pursuit of how to really live more fully in the world – essentially I see this as an ongoing seeking of vitality.

I consider the notion of vitality to be a key aspect relating to the theme of this conference, and by vitality I am meaning our experience of our sense of aliveness, & allied with this, our capacity for growth & change. This is closely related to Giles' ideas concerning natality and obviously related to our TA usage of the Greek concept of Physis. Since beginning to move some of my therapeutic practice outside in 2007, vitality has become a significant area of interest for me. The question 'how do I support my own vitality and help others to cultivate this in themselves?' is now a central one in my practice as a clinician and now as a supervisor & trainer.

Mapping the development of my relationship with my own vitality; it certainly began as a client in a therapeutic relationship that provided important conditions for me to transform both my inner & outer worlds. What were these cultivating conditions? Well, fundamentally I think my then therapist placed an emphasis on a working with some key elements

- Firstly, a rich relational process where my therapist was willing to work within the transference matrix – a sometimes rocky road where we were at times working with what I would term the vitality of uncertainty!
- Secondly, the importance of paying attention to the body (of both therapist and client) in all of this.
- Thirdly, - she wasn't afraid to be alive in the relationship....and take responsibility for her own experience – she herself had had many years of therapy! I believe the emotional state of the therapist is a significant element in the quality of the therapeutic space offered...Probably all of us know on some level that whatever lives (or lurks) in our inner spaces will also live in some form within the professional relational space & that this will significantly influence the inner worlds of the people we work with.

Through our inner worlds influencing each other this was a co-created vital therapeutic space - and to be clear it also involved facing and dealing with moments of deadening & depression, but these in themselves came alive and took shape.

I think that all of this helped me access the deepest aspects of my inner landscape - what Berne would have called the protocol level – the subterranean landscape if you like. From here I have been able to reclaim my vitality - my aliveness – to enter the walls of my own inner garden (to refer to an image used by Berne). And so that therapeutic relationship really was the ground out of which I grew.

The impact of all of this was for me to eventually begin to know myself as the 'ground' in my own world as well as to feel more alive as a person. As a result, I have instinctively reached for a more vital physical space in my work. It has been no longer enough for me to sit in my chair in a room, although of course I do still do some of that!

So in order to continue to support my own vitality I have now moved from one kind of vital relational space out into another.

It has seemed like a totally intuitive step to begin to move my work out into the natural world... This of course, is a different kind of vital space from the purely human to human version. A natural setting is vibrant, dynamic, brimming with living processes & motion, and so can be a stimulating environment for clients to experience their relationship with their own vitality with a sense of embodied immediacy. My experience has been that it can help the people I work with access those implicit or non-verbal processes that influence 'ways of knowing' in the world. And help them begin to risk opening these deeper (sometimes more fixed) levels of their internal landscapes (protocol) up to the fluidity of the world as it is now. This is then essentially a casting of new relational light from a therapeutic relationship that now includes both me as therapist but also what I would call a 'living third' – the natural setting. I have written more about this in my columns 'The View from Here' in the Transactional Analyst last year.

And, put more simply, I think working therapeutically outdoors can help us experience and work out what it means for each of us to be a living thing amongst other living things – part of the vital world. And this brings me to my final point in relation to vitality, and concerns the significance of our collective vitality as a species. I think that this where the ideas spoken about by Giles in terms of natality – those of surviving and thriving - become more urgent, in that our connection to the world we live in is a fundamental part of developing a collective will to thrive. At the moment, much of ecopsychological thinking outlines that we are on some levels simply 'surviving' - we are using our planet as a resource through our 'desire for commodity'. There is currently a high level of discounting concerning the finite nature of this process. In order for us to really 'thrive' we need to work on our vital connection to the world around us and realise that we are actually only part of the story of the earth. Fundamentally, our future growth in fact depends upon this.

**Exercise - I now invite you to take an opportunity to return to your vital experiences here today and for us to reflect on what has found its way into your inner landscape!**

**In the spirit of connecting the inside and outside I have brought in some items from the natural world but you can also use things you have in your bag, or simply an image that comes to mind if that works better for you.**

I invite you to reach for an object that summarises your day. Turn to person next to you and do a 2 minute each way share

'Air Mandala'! Hold up objects in the air & I will take photo on the iPad so we have a collective vision of the vitality of today...all gathered in a photo frame!

Thank you for sharing your vitality! And warm wishes to accompany you back out into the world outside.