

The View from Here

By Hayley Marshall

Relational by Nature

I have come to a halt.

A static fug has ushered itself into my mind and body, the dispiriting legacy of a morning at the computer. In my etherized state, I half-heartedly decide to head for what might be called some 'nearby nature' (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989). For me this is the local allotments which open out onto a piece of farmland on the south side of town.

With harvest in full swing, this cultivating environment is brimming with conspicuous creaturely activity. Humans and animals alike are engaged with the earth; reaping and replenishing autumn nourishment. I observe all of this, yet remain untouched, and feel detached. So I pass on by, out into the fields.

Drifting along, I resonate with the outdoor therapeutic process for those client groups who are depressed or withdrawn and are experiencing a significant deadening of aspects of their experience. For them, initially, outdoor therapy involves contacting more directly the ways in which that deadening is very much 'alive' for them.

Recalling this on my walk, I am dimly aware that the removed world continues to happen around me, but nothing is happening for me, or so I think. On reaching a stone wall I decide to sit awhile, and wait.

A throaty cawing cuts into the air some way above. Looking up, I notice a vague mistiness in the sky as the inky black of the crow blots its way into the distance. Then, as though emerging from beneath a lifting veil, I gradually sense the autumnal air carrying its augur of chill. Essence of wood smoke unfurling within a lingering dampness brings further awakening.

With these tantalising whispers of scent, the world shifts through me and - finally - I catch the turning of the season. Climbing over the wall, I begin to move on.

In my experience, connection with the web of sentient beings and living processes in a natural environment can help awaken our emotional, psychological, and ecological awareness. Through sustained exposure to the natural world we are prompted to open ourselves to new experience – to breathe the flow of life into our halting script processes. Out in the world 'anything can happen'; and so, both the creative ways in which we hold the world at bay, as well as new prospects can be clearly felt and explored. Nature, it appears,

helps to promote 'movement from fixity to changingness, from rigid structure to flow, from stasis to process' (Tudor & Worrall 2006).

So this is the heart of the relational project in outdoor psychotherapy - promotion of what I would call a process-oriented focus. With this I refer to the fact that the presence of a 'living third' (Jordan and Marshall 2010) in the therapeutic dynamic invites both therapist and client into an active expansive relational dialogue with each other and the non-human world. Potentially far beyond 2 person psychologies (Stark 1999), this is a dynamic 'contextual psychology' (Wachtel 2008), whereby the perpetual relationality in the living context can promote a fully-fledged fluidity between inner and outer experience.

In practice this involves the therapeutic dyad encountering the vagaries of the weather, terrain, animals, plant-life, and other human beings; and attending to the manner in which these are met, along with the associated conscious, unconscious, and non-conscious meanings and experiences evoked. The multidirectional lived world of 'we-in-context' relating (Tudor 2011); and has the effect of imbuing the client's script process with a 'here-and-now' immediacy that, if well caught by the therapist, can promote embodied relational insight, connection and engagement. In effect this is the casting of new relational light into our innermost sanctuary of stasis, and as such, is a fundamental aspect of personal transformation.

Returning to the world in my walk, I am now feeling the need to go back and re visit the vibrancy of the allotments. Along the way, hearing a farmer calling to the nearby slumbering sheep, I stand still as they rise up and sprint across the scrubby field to receive the food he has to offer. Another kind of awakening perhaps, but with the dissipation of my morning torpor I now savour the flow of these constant happenings immediately around me; feeling, quite literally, moved by them.

References

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