

Ecological Transactional Analysis

Allowing the Leopards into the temple

HAYLEY MARSHALL'S keynote address at April's UKATA online conference 2021 embraces the big space of Ecological Transactional Analysis – Eco-TA

I FEEL HONOURED to be speaking at the beginning of this TA open conference. Someone reminded me that in the 'old days' all TA conferences were simply about TA – no titles – so it seems we have returned to a big space that encompasses contemporary TA practice. Embracing this big space, I'm going to cast us off by introducing the expansive world of Ecological Transactional Analysis (Eco-TA).

Introduction

As we begin, a quick nod to my slightly cryptic title. Some of you may know that this is based on an aphorism by Kafka where the leopards keep breaking into the temple and drinking the chalices dry. There is chaos and uncertainty as the leopards keep on disrupting the ceremony. At first the ritual is tightly clung to, but eventually the temple ceremony adjusts, and the leopards become an essential part of the ritual. In the context of this keynote, this very obviously speaks to the fact that Eco-TA is a new approach in TA, launched by Giles Barrow TSTA(E) and myself just last year in *the Transactional Analyst* magazine (Barrow & Marshall, 2020). Our aim is to wake us up as a community, inviting us to re-vision TA at a time when climate change and our relations with our planet are matters of urgent concern. Giles and I have already spoken elsewhere about the need to shift our frame of reference from what we are calling an indoor mind to outdoor mind (Barrow & Marshall, 2020), so we are looking to effect change throughout the TA community by re-calibrating our whole lens to incorporate an ecological perspective. This will involve accounting for the natural world in our sense of how we know things, how we conceptualise that knowing through our theory, and how we practice clinically, as educators, coaches, organisational consultants, counsellors, and psychotherapists.

I will be speaking today from the perspective of my native professional landscape which is the psychotherapeutic. For the past 14 years of my practice, I have been passionately interested in how we can make space for the outdoors in this work. Allowing those leopards in with all their wild magnificence and learning to run with them!

Much of my presentation is based on my own clinical experience and explorations. This has involved working outside week on week, whatever the weather both internal and external. It is, therefore, knowledge gained from my outdoor clients, supervisees, and participants in training groups. It has also come from many outdoor facilitation experiences and peer supervisory conversations with my outdoor colleagues. Essentially though, this learning has come from a deep connection with all the wonderful places that I have worked in.

And of course, this journey is deeply personal – like many ideas in human relations work Eco-TA is strongly rooted in my own story. So, let's rewind a bit and I will share some of my journey to give you a sense of how I have arrived here to be talking with you about leopards and to offer some context for what's to come.

An immersion

My first encounter with ecological work came when I decided that 12 years sat in a chair inside a room was long enough. My body was suffering, and I felt an impulse to get moving. This was coupled with a curiosity about how to help others access and transform deeper aspects of their experience. I was also looking for something in my professional world that could speak to my important relationship with nature. Eventually, my search led me to a Wilderness Immersion experience on Skye.

This trip focused on an experiential exploration of wilderness therapy led by two therapists and an outdoor guide. It involved us living and working as a group all within a majestic Scottish landscape. A classic example of the process was our rather turbulent journey by canoe around a headland where the sea had become a bit rougher than anticipated. A lot of anxiety and anger was evoked as people made more direct contact with some powerful personal processes. In this unpredictable experience, what surfaced for me with intensity was my relationship with my own fear. This took the form of trying to be physically very capable while hiding my deep terror of not living up to the expectations of others.

‘Brim-full of life, both the human and more-than-human varieties, [Lightwood] is a place where stories of all participants can come alive. . . everything that happens here is potentially relevant to the work.’

After the canoe journey we ended up camping at a clearance village. For those that don't know, in parts of Scotland there are the ruins of whole 18th century settlements where people were forced off the land by wealthy landowners to make way for sheep. Even before we knew where we were, members of the group were expressing sadness, the landscape seemed to hold a deep sense of absence and grief, putting people in touch with their own grief about more personal losses.

Alongside this there was anger and distress about the global relationship with the environment as we encountered the stench of fish farming.

So, notice here the full intertwining of the global and personal stories of both human and the more-than-human. An ecology of stories.

Although I was disturbed by the immediacy of this whole experience, I confess I was amazed by its richness, and knew completely that this was the path I wanted to pursue. It was life changing.

What most stood out was the mixture of a strong sense of connectedness, and enlivenment. I really noticed how our personal stories and life-scripts were lived out (embodied) in real time through an encounter with the stories held in the natural world. I witnessed how working out in nature seemed to promote deep interconnection with the setting. It was a process of encounter with aliveness in all its forms. In my mind this appeared to offer a new therapeutic forum for both people and the land to be heard.

All in all, I felt I had discovered an exciting inbetween space whereby the profoundly human internal, and the more-than-human external worlds met – an intensely creative space.

These insights gained were my leopards if you will.

On my return, I set about moving my practice outdoors, with the support of some great minds from the TA world: including Keith Tudor, who catching my fervour for this new way immediately offered me an outdoor supervision (a new departure for him) where the timings went awry, and we ended up doing supervision on a bus back to his office! To be honest, that only added to my conviction!

Brief structure

Before getting much further along the path I want to offer

you some structure. As this keynote unfolds, I will speak with you about Eco-TA focusing on the insights from that immersion trip. Although there is much to say about outdoor working, today I will share my thinking about the themes of interconnectedness and enlivenment and offer you a picture of what my ecological practice looks like.

About halfway through, I will also invite you to take your own pulse around the material by offering some outdoor reflection time. And at the end there will be a short time for questions.

To begin, some more introductions...

Lightwood

The roots of my outdoor practice obviously come from that immersion landscape, and it's true to say that significant places are central to the way I practice and think about ecological TA.

Another very important one is Lightwood, the place I work in with individuals and small groups for both supervision and therapy. It is a large area of open access land in the Peak District in the UK. It is a very varied terrain, and I work there for that very reason. Brim-full of life, both the human and more-than-human varieties, it is a place where stories of all participants can come alive, taking both old and new shapes, developing in whatever way they need to. Everything that happens here is potentially relevant to the work. Into this place I will introduce an outdoor client offering you a short case vignette

Interruption

My client James and I are climbing up to the top of the wood. It is warm but raining quite hard. I am monitoring the terrain as it's quite slippery.

James is talking about meeting the demands of a particular person in his workplace and how overwhelmed he's feeling. He is talking very fast, and we are climbing up at quite a pace. He is saying how unhappy he's feeling.

On the way up we pass a dog walker, who recognises James, saying hello. James stops to engage with the dog and begins laughing with the owner. I witness how quickly he's switched to accommodate this other person and wonder about his script process.

We emerge onto a flat and very open field where there is a large flock of sheep. We now come to a halt amid the sheep, who are grazing, seemingly undisturbed even though James' talking seems to have become louder, as he begins to fantasize about the likely outcomes of his work situation.

A bit out of breath from the climb up I notice some sense of panic rising in me and feel like I should start saying more. I ponder the links between that and James's response to his mother's panicky demands.

At this point, I become more fully aware of where we are

‘Human experience is but one component in a wider system of connections, extending beyond those simply involving other people.’

and who else is there with us. I recognise in that instant that no one else is panicking! We are among the sheep and they are quite calm, steadily moving around just grazing. I really notice the contrast in pace between James and these sheep. I breathe in the smell of grass and sheep, feel my feet on the earth, and then almost seem to feel part of the flock somehow. I notice I’m feeling calmer.

‘I’m just going to interrupt you, James....’ I begin to say, but just in that moment I’m interrupted by a loud cronking as a large raven emerges from the trees and flies out directly over us. We both look up, captivated and interrupted!

James takes a big breath in and out, then turning towards me he begins to cry. The sheep carry on grazing, as I stand with James while he expresses what he’s feeling.

Eco-TA definition

So, alongside this I will now offer you the definition of Eco-TA

Eco-TA is an approach for understanding human and more-than-human experience that is forged in connection with the ecological context in which it occurs. Furthermore, that this inter-connected process incorporates the embodied agency of both human and the more-than-human participants in the encounter. It is, to be more succinct, the practice of Transactional Analysis in alliance with the Earth.

Barrow & Marshall, 2020

In the vignette, the sheep, the raven, James, and me all have our part to play in what unfolds. There are many other significant elements, and notice that as practitioner I position myself not as being apart from, but as being a-part-of the place, we are in. What I want to emphasise at this point is the interconnectedness of all that was present in that place at that time.

The wider embrace

Interconnectedness is my first theme and is fundamental to Eco-TA. It is encapsulated in the definition which you’ll notice is based on a core assumption about the nature of being and existence – an ontological premise – which is that human experience is but one component in a wider system of connections, extending beyond those simply involving other people. In this respect it is systemic, but as it incorporates the more-than-human it is better understood as eco-sys-

temic. In terms of our TA philosophy this represents a shift and immediately offers us something significantly new – an opportunity to expand our range, developing a progressive, planet-inclusive theory and practice.

As we move into what I’m calling the wider embrace, it involves us becoming increasingly ecocentric. This means that we bring our attention to the inescapable fact that we are embedded within the wider web of life. This quote from David Abram speaks to the value of this position

To shut ourselves off from these other voices, to continue by our lifestyles to condemn these other sensibilities to the oblivion of extinction, is to rob our own senses of their integrity, and to rob our minds of their coherence. We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human.

The Spell of the Sensuous

One key element of this shift is that we will need to place our humanistic focus of autonomy alongside that of homonomy, where the expression of *physis* (Berne, 1957) includes the desire to unite with, to belong to, and to participate in the environment (Angyal, 1941).

As we saw with James, from this homonymous perspective we will work from the position of being among all kinds of others rather than being at the centre of things, working not just from but through an ecological space. As I discovered on the immersion trip, this means that we actively work with the fact that our story is intertwined with those of many others including the more-than-human.

The ecological self

I want to dig a little deeper into our sense of this embedment in the natural world and investigate what this may mean for our theories.

At this point, I will offer you another story.

The roots of my interest in working outdoors in fact go way back before my wilderness immersion experience. In my personal history my relating with the outdoor world was incredibly important. I grew up on a farm in rural north Buckinghamshire. As for many small children, the world of the outdoors for me was a deeply animate magical place. Everything spoke to me. My relationships with various creatures in the nooks and crannies of the land were intense and profoundly meaningful. My biggest friends were two Alsatian dogs, so it was just first nature to me that all beings were my kin. Therefore, part of my sense of ‘I’ was a self-formed-through my interactions with animals and nature. I learnt to live among all kinds of other creatures and still have an internalised felt sense of their presence.

Another significant aspect was the fact that when things got tricky in the human world, I could be outside and away. And this I did frequently – there was a huge space available

to me in which I could walk off accompanied by the dogs. Here was a vast solace – certainly a less pressurised relational space. A place where I could feel less fear. There was a lot going in the family at the time centring largely around my father. A charismatic charming figure he dominated the family landscape and could descend into a terrifying rage if things weren't going his way, being especially intolerant of any kind of vulnerability either his own or in us. He took up all the space and so my retreating outdoors was a way of regulating the chaos, a way of removing myself from the trouble. It is clear to me then that the trauma of my childhood is very carefully enfolded in my experience of that natural environment.

An ecological TA perspective supports this notion of an 'I' forged within and incorporating the wider web of life. So here again, we widen our view towards what many ecophilosophers and ecopsychologists name as the ecological self. This term originally from the world of deep ecology (Seed, 2005; Naess, 1973), holds that the self is always experienced as part of the whole – a view that is held in other cultures particularly in indigenous societies.

If we follow this route, we begin to move away from an exclusive emphasis on the ecological self which is about the human intrapsychic formed only in the crucible of the human interpersonal.

Bringing this idea more fully into TA human relations work we will need to understand how a more-than-human world might sit as part of a psychic structure and process, influencing our sense we have of ourselves as we move around in the world.

An ecological past

In terms of existing TA theory, much of the ecological essence of my early story could be closely captured by Berne's protocol concept (Berne, 1961/1972). The real essence of our ways-of-being-in-the-world, protocol is the layer of our experience that precedes script development consisting of deeply nonconscious, subsymbolic (body based), implicit memory knowings.

This is a profound terrain – the root of our core senses of self – and one that I am suggesting involves an internalisation of the atmosphere of the worlds we grow up in with all their aspects, not just the human ones. So, this may involve a felt sense of types of landscapes, plants, animals, smells, etc held in the body mind. These ecological protocol knowings, deeply held in our implicit memory system are so important, because intertwined with experiences of outsidership we can find all the human stories both positive and traumatic. In my story the internalised positive sense of relating with that farm space also holds the brooding clouds of the relational trouble concerning my father.

All of this has significant implications for working out-

doors with people. It has been my experience that working through an ecological space potentially offers a very direct port of entry to stories of the past. If clients have experienced trauma outdoors, used the outdoors as a regulating space in the past, or have relationships that are closely associated with the outdoors, the current outdoor place can become what nature writer Robert Macfarlane calls the 'remembered landscape' (2012) – a transference stand-in for the landscape of old.

In terms of my own process, my deftly folded away childhood trauma reemerged on that immersion trip. The ecological triggers of being in a very active outdoor environment in a farmed landscape began to set those protocol elements on the move. I began to feel that I was again in the unpredictable lands of my childhood, so this time the outdoor space also became a place to encounter the 'trouble' I'd originally moved away from.

The ecological present

The ecological self is also relevant in our more present-centred being in the world – those ways in which we are constantly incorporating the life around us. Once again, our non-conscious implicit knowing system is important as aspects of our self, reach out like tendrils into the world beyond our skin

Part of this process is linked to the fact that through our nervous system we are constantly being regulated or dysregulated by the environments we find ourselves in. In terms of the pandemic more people have sought out nearby nature highlighting the systemic regulatory possibilities to be found there. This is a significant aspect of the human-nature relationship, tapping into our evolutionary heritage as animals who have an implicit fit with the natural world. Research (Wilson, 1984; Ulrich, 1983; Kaplan, 1995; Hartig, 2004) has demonstrated that we have an innate ability to be both soothed and cognitively restored by natural settings.

Another important feature, significant in my work at Lightwood, is the way outdoor spaces are steadily internalised. My clients report feeling deeply held by the land in which the therapy is taking place. This is a psycho-physical and psycho-topographical process that I relate to Thomas Ogden's (2004) interpretation of the Winnicottian concept of holding (Winnicott, 1945) whereby the land becomes a place to bring together aspects of the self. In this the ongoing presence and structures of landscape, function as enduring reference points providing a 'gathering place' for parts of the self. These structures can, over time, be incorporated into the body-mind as an integrating holding environment.

A related process is how people physically locate aspects of their learning, whether it be therapy, supervision, or training. An embodied insight becomes firmly associated with where it was talked about, or where something hap-

pened, like spotting an animal or seeing a person dragging their dog up the hill. These prove to be important anchoring moments located both inside and outside at the same time. A further example of this is where in supervision supervisees often talk about the same client in the same place often quite non-consciously, until we notice why this part of the place may be relevant to the client concerned.

All these features form part of an ongoing powerful attachment process achieved through bringing frequent close attention to what is happening within a patch of land. This happens through ongoing walking around the place, sitting, engaging with trees, plants, animals, water, weather, and other people.

This whole process reflects the centrality of what in Eco-TA are called embodied participatory knowings, an embodied sensory connectivity that offers a physical, emotional, and spiritual investment in the place.

Through these the therapeutic dyad becomes inextricably grounded and embedded in its ecological context, as the space becomes a place where parts of the self reside.

This significance of this attachment is well illustrated by what happened up at Lightwood a few years ago when an international water company gained access to drill into the water table up there. I spent several months working with people in their hurt and anger with many talking about how it felt like a personal attack. Some became preoccupied with what was going to be done to the place leading at times to some direct confrontations with site workers. Disturbance and passion were high, again with personal story interweaving with live events.

With these processes I think we enter the domain of what we in TA call the Adult ego state. Flowing from the dynamic Adult ego state models of Cocreative TA (Summers & Tudor, 2014) and incorporating the capacity of the ecological, I would suggest an even more expansive Adult that is an ecostate (Marshall, 2021).

More an emergent process than a state, the Adult ecostate is inherently fluid, regulating, situating, and flexing within the context of which it is a part. It is deeply impressionable. The ecological Adult provides us with self-aspects that are constantly changing, flowing in and out of what's around us in this present moment.

Nature writers like Robert Macfarlane, Annie Dillard, and Barry Lopez attempt to capture this ineffable experience. And in that tradition, here is a quote from Nan Shepherd (*The Living Mountain*, 1977) writing about her relationship with the Cairngorm mountains of Scotland, 'something moves between me and it. Place and mind may interpenetrate until the nature of both are altered'.

This reflects the Adult ecostate's capacity for various states of consciousness, what Iris Murdoch (1970) called unselfing. A temporary losing of an egoic sense of self within

an aspect of the environment – she speaks of observing a kestrel and temporarily becoming kestrel, and from there a regaining of a new self-perspective. Some authors refer to this as 'inwardly opening out' (Schroeder, 2008)

It would seem then that our sense of I is far more porous to the world than our existing theory would indicate, and so I think that the ecological development of ego state theory calls for what I am naming an outrapsychic theory (Marshall, 2021). This is a theory that allows for a sense of 'I-ness' that is also located beyond the skin of a person; a watery realm where inside and outside are at times less clearly defined. It incorporates the world of what I'm calling the ecological implicit (Marshall, 2021). This is our nonconscious way of embedding in the world through the sensory, animal, other-than-verbal layer of consciousness. A subsymbolic sensate world that stretches right through from the 'there-and-then' to the 'here-and-now'

Enlivenment

At this point I want to offer you an opportunity to reflect on the material covered so far from an experiential perspective. I am going to invite you to go outside and see what your outdoor space has to offer. It's an important opportunity to make room for other voices in our understanding of Eco-TA. This time is not an interruption to the keynote – it is an integral part of it – as here we will be experiencing some of what this approach is about.

Audience outdoor exercise

- Go outside to move or sit and hold this question in your bodymind: Where am I? (inside-outside of you)
In relation to the question, notice what is offered back from the place. Everything is relevant (10 mins)
- Journal or draw to symbolise your experience (5 mins)

Before continuing I will offer a summary. I have introduced you to some conceptual implications of the wider embrace, the theme of interconnectedness. In this I suggested a psychic structure that both includes some existing TA theory and newer suggestions in order to incorporate the outdoor world.

Surfing the winds of your outdoor visit, I would like to shift us to the second half of the definition about embodied agency and into my next theme, enlivenment. Here's a reminder of the definition:

Eco-TA is an approach for understanding human and more-than-human experience that is forged in connection with the ecological context in which it occurs. Furthermore, that this inter-connected process incorporates the embodied agency of both human and the more-than-human participants in the encounter. It is, to be more succinct, the practice of transactional analysis in alliance with the Earth.



The human animal

First, I would like to show you this image of cave painting (see above) just take a moment to allow it to land in your bodymind – notice what sensations, feelings, and words surface for you.

The first word that came to my mind was aliveness. I can almost smell the animals and feel the movement of their bodies. These beautifully rendered creatures of the palaeolithic (in the Chauvet caves in France) speak of a time when our engagement with the more than human was very central. I think they tell us a story of living among these animal others, so they communicate something of what it meant to be human then. This is the symbolic language of the ecological implicit full of the stirrings of life at that time. And please do notice that here we find the ancestors of those leopards of my title.

Returning to the seminal experience I had on that trip on Skye, you may remember that one element that caught my attention was how working out in the natural world invited and supported a sense of enlivenment. With this term I am meaning the experience of aliveness in ourselves and all kinds of others, and the fluid relationship between the two. In ecological terms this is a coming alive of what it means to be a living being amongst other living beings.

Connected with this is our experience of agency, growth, and transformation that in TA we might refer to as *physis*. And in line with homonymy, this includes our interest in these elements in other living things around us too.

My experience is that the natural world is an inherently enlivening space, and that enlivenment is one of the single most important aspects of ecological practice as I think it underpins many others.

Once outside, the physical ‘container’ for human relations work is a range of dynamic and living processes. This

is obviously very different from the more static setting of a room. The setting automatically calls for a sharpening of the senses – an organismic ‘switching on’ – involving a more active level of engagement for both practitioner and client. Many people report a sense of aliveness, as they relate with the world around them through an increased sensory interaction.

The vitality in the outdoor space invites a dynamic resonance inside us that has the power to evoke and support all kinds of important experiences. This then is human relations work in a vitalising space, where I think that all human participants are effectively being ‘tuned up’ to home in on movement and process.

I will share another case example from Lightwood, my client Fiona (Marshall, 2016).

Vitality

It’s mid spring and in a session early in the work, we are walking up the track. Fiona is commenting on how happy she is that there are so many trees in this place, and how loudly the birds are singing. She is feeling excited by the cascading water in evidence, owing to the recent heavy rainfall. She says she feels that she ‘is opened up and alive’ when she’s out here.

I note that, I too am feeling very tuned in to the vigour present in the environment. I am excited about being out here with her today, even though I’ve just had a session with another client in this same place where I’d felt rather flat.

As well as listening to her, I am also aware of her style of movement. She seems eager to keep up with me, yet at the same time not quite certain of where to place herself. She keeps trying to turn sideways and adjust her pace to match mine. I begin to experience a sense of unease and awkwardness in my own body and feel unsure about whether to keep my own pace or try to match hers. As a result, our walk up the path although enthusiastic, is also somewhat stilted.

So here we see a forging of what I term the vibrant alliance (Marshall, 2016) in that being out in nature seems to root both practitioner and client more firmly in their bodies, offering instant access to the immediacy of bodily experience and all that this may hold.

Theoretical support for these experiences comes from Daniel Stern’s (2010) writing about forms of vitality. He elegantly portrays how we relate to and make meaning of the world surrounding us through the cross-modal (multi-sensory) languages of movement. He foregrounds the primacy of movement in our basic sense of who we are, arguing that vitality forms provide the fundamentals of our felt experience. This is part of our non-conscious sensing of others and the world around us, the way we know the movement essence of others.

Interacting with nature stimulates and vitalises this move-

ment domain of our experience, thereby potentially placing the practitioner in a position of not only feeling and understanding but almost living within the 'movement signature' of the people they are working with.

With Fiona, through feeling the vitality of the setting I also felt a heightened sense of her physical style as we walked. As a result, I began to catch her movement process through observing her awkwardness and feeling a resonance with this in my own body. I view all this as an enlivening of my somatic countertransference (my body sensing) through the sensory contact with the setting and find that it opens a powerful channel for really 'knowing' my clients.

It is also important to say that working in this vital realm also means that people can engage with aspects of self that are deadened (as in dissociation or depression) and begin to bring these alive through experiencing them more keenly. Dissociative outdoor processes are particularly intriguing, as with some people the natural world appears to be a dissociative space – again part of a psychic structure. I have written more about this in my chapter in *When words are not enough* (2021), a book about trauma and the creative therapies

In summary, the stimulation of this body and movement domain offers us dynamic access to the ecological implicit which will contain both protocol (past) and Adult ecostate (here and now) elements.

Working through the ecological space

So, as we head in towards the end of this time, I want briefly to shine a closer light on the effect of all of this on the helping relationship.

The helping relationship

Of course, it is possible that working out in nature could easily be a translation of an indoor approach outdoors and many people do practice in this way. But if we embrace the notions of an embedded ecological self and enlivenment, it's clear that there is potential for some expansive shifts in relating. Returning to my opening tale of James, we can see that an ecological practitioner clearly has an expanded role. In that work I was monitoring among other things the physical terrain; our pace; our position in relation to each other and the sheep; other creatures like the raven; other people; my internal process, or countertransference; how James was moving; where his attention was; the weather; what James was saying; and the time. All of these elements were potentially influencing the therapy, with both James and I relating with the other living elements in the setting.

This then is a dynamic ecological relating, where practitioners are working within a complex field of sensation and subjectivities. With this omni-directional approach, it is clear to me that we move well beyond what are known as the relational two person psychologies (Stark, 1999).

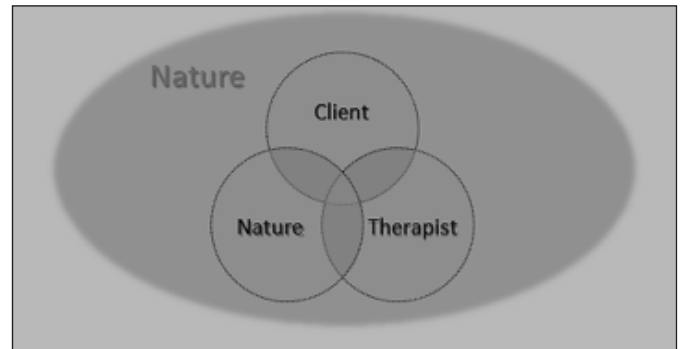


Figure 1: Nature – the living third, Marshall 2016

Put more simply, the helping matrix is expanded by the presence of nature or what I term here the 'living third' (Marshall, 2016). This basic diagram (see above) offers a framework to show that nature is constantly influencing the human elements all the time, much of this on those non-conscious levels already mentioned. It also forms a discrete element in the relational process, where both participants have their own more explicit relationship with it either as a canvas on which to project or as a variety of significant 'others' with which to come into relationship. In my practice many examples of the latter occur with a particular tree. The large beech tree at Lightwood is a significant presence. It brings a powerful sense of 'otherness'. Many clients working out here have formed a distinctive relationship with this being. This tree for some is a stimulus for internal process – like the client who said it reminded her of when she was a small child walking beside a large person who was all height and legs. And the tree is also itself, a self-willed being that is doing its own thing for its own reasons, a being that is very different from us – so it's a being that many have marvelled at; and a being that many have drawn solace from – needing to go and be with this big tree for comfort and support.

Returning to the diagram, the various overlaps may become important at different times or even form the dominant way of working, but that shaded middle symbolises the ecological heart of an Eco-TA practice, where all elements are accounted for. So as an ecological practitioner at any point you could be facilitating the client's relationship with nature; they will also be witnessing yours; you are both being witnessed by the natural world; you will both draw upon a vast animate space that offers rich embodied metaphorical material; and at times as in the story about the water company, all of this could lead to more direct action on behalf of the place that is so dearly held.

In this inherently less predictable space, what is certain is that you, the practitioner, are no longer the only one who has impact on the client's process during a session. As we saw in the work with James nature or the 'living third' is there with its own agency. Things happen in the natural setting that are beyond you and will influence what the client receives.

So, you will be working as part of this broader conversation, always mindful that many parts of this continue even when you and the client are no longer there.

I want to add a brief word on the impact of the added space between the two human participants in this expansive relational field. Many people experience the natural environment as a less pressurized relational space. If you remember that was also my experience in my history. It seems that nature offers a type of relational green cushion concerning the intensity of being with another person. This is why many adolescents for instance, find it easier to engage outdoors. The intensity of the human gaze is ameliorated by the presence of nature. There is someone else there to focus on, an option of face-to-place rather than always face-to-face. This appears to offer space to connect with internal experience that can easily be lost in the indoor human to human encounter. And of course, for some the reverse can also be true.

It should be clear by now that ecological practitioners are a mixture of guide, witness, embodied participant, and steward of the spaces, both internal and external. As a result, we must do our own ecological work to build our capacity to hold such a broad space. And just a quick nod to the practice frame here. Outdoors the therapeutic frame is a uniquely portable one no longer relying on the walls of a room. Contracting for a less predictable space requires a fluid finesse. But the aim I suggest needs to be to develop a practice place that offers some sense of an enshrined space for holding and containing, while at the same time allows for the aliveness of ecological encounter.

This kind of ecological sensibility only comes through a cultivation of personal ecological practice. On my trainings I recommend that practitioners spend a lot of time in the place they intend to work in.

To become embedded in a place takes work – spending time getting to know the place on a small scale, witnessing what lives there, both in us and in the more-than-human realms. Through this we develop our own personal ‘grammar of animacy’ (Wall Kimmerer, 2013) – as we learn the unique punctuation and syntax of the place. Then we re-learn it as each unique working relationship takes up residence.

The broad healing aim of Eco-TA practice is the development of an ecological capacity and of a knowing of one’s place in the scheme of things – to be able to live well in a world of others both more-than-human and human, how we in the West regain the knowledge of those cave painters. This is a healing practice for both Earth and person and so is clearly relevant to the wider issue of our relationship with the planet and climate change.

So, to conclude, TA has developed over the years to attend to more and more complex aspects of our troubles. What Giles and I are hoping will become the ‘ecological turn’ in

TA invites us to turn our gaze outwards and include the fundamental trouble of how we live in relation to our living planet now in crisis. It can’t any longer just be all about us, ignoring the significance of the voices of those more-than-human-others, those leopards.

How we allow them in will involve all sorts of change including considering the ecological in our trainings. We do offer Eco-TA trainings, but rather than it simply being an add on, my hope is that over time we could flush all trainings through with ecological philosophy and include working outdoors as part of the norm.

Other questions going forward include things like how we make space for ecological thinking, ethics, and practice within our exam system, including ecological justice in our written exam questions. I certainly look forward to the day when CTA exam tapes incorporating the voices of the earth are a regular feature.

Currently, Giles and I are writing a book about Eco-TA for the new *Innovations in TA* series by Routledge, and we are co-editing a special issue of the *TAJ* in 2022. So, things are happening and there is a sense for me that we are now pushing on an open door. Which is good, because we really hope you will come and join us in the development of this new approach. This is an exciting urgent time and there is much to discover!

With that I will bring my presentation to a close. It’s been a pleasure to share this with you my TA colleagues, and I look forward to conversations with many of you in the future, possibly around a fire somewhere!

Thank you so much for your attention.

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