

**“After All, Anybody is as Their Land and Air Is”
The Environmental Crisis Through a Psychoanalytic Lens: Knowing,
Denial, and Vulnerability**

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THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

The interplay of minds, patient and analysts', is an "...act of shared creativity [that] involves the patient inseminating the analyst's mind with an unprocessed emotional experience that the analyst transforms into a thought reverie...consider the exchange as a 'thought looking for a thinker'...the patient projects an unmentalized experience into the analyst with the expectation that the analyst will "think" the thought for the patient and then return this... transformed thought back through observations, interpretations..."¹ all the while remaining an embodied presence.

Now, consider that humans have evolved to become the embodiment of the other-than-human (or Nature's) capacity to know itself. From this point of view the air is trying to make itself known to us in the disruptive languages of global warming, with the relational systemic expectation that we will transform these elemental messages and interpret their urgency. We have the mentalizing capacities to "think (or transform) the thought" for the air. Will we exercise these capacities and enter this, shall we say, elemental intersubjective relationship with Nature? I suggest that the "voice of the earth"³ through the symptoms of the environmental crisis, is wanting to be "given a place"⁴ in humanity's mind.

As well, contemporary psychoanalysis has been slowly freeing itself from the myth of the isolated mind,¹⁰ which has bred an "inwardness...that we have come to associate with the

personal psyche”.¹¹ We now “know” ‘there is no such thing as a baby: there is a baby-and-her-caretaker-system’. Now it is time to extend this “knowing” outward to include the other-than-human. There is no such thing as a human: there is only a human-and-her-ecosystem. We do not look *out* at a landscape, but are immersed *within* it. We are indeed inside the Mind of Nature.¹²

DOC INTRO

In service to this view of being immersed within the Mind of Nature, what follows is a collage of text elements that will accompany vignettes from 7 documentaries. I invite you to wander dream-like between image and voice, freely associating to your own memories and experiences in Nature. Your fear, wonder, awe: your loss, grief, and concern. It is from remembering and relating to these that we will begin to be of some service to our patients. They will, like us, resist the facts of the crisis and “defend their identity and lifestyle”¹³ with such well-worn strategies as disavowal, minimalization, and splitting. Perhaps our “enormous capacity for deep care and concern”¹⁴ might be awakened when our “anxieties are recognized”¹⁵, attuned to, and space given for us to say, “I feel frightened, overwhelmed, guilty, ashamed, and helpless.”

VIDEO

OPENING

*“You didn’t come **into** this world, You came **out** of it, like a wave from the ocean. You are not a stranger here.”* ¹⁸

The other-than-human, Nature, is on the run towards the Anthropocene, the Epoch of Man, which will geologically record “the peak of destruction that humanity has initiated.”¹⁹ And

as we hasten the Anthropocene, from what are we humans on the run? A dual nature that includes our animal-instinctual selves? From our “[lethal predisposition] to favour self, tribe, and short-term future....”?²⁰ From our violent lower-brain predatory instincts, over which civilization has spread a thin veneer, but breaks through in war, and in the “suicide by self-neglect”²¹ behaviours and attitudes that foster environmental degradation? From the helplessness we feel, the smallness, in light of our often disavowed utter dependence upon fertile soil, clean water, and oxygenated air for our very existence?

CRISIS IMAGES

Are we “petitioning some unknown and slumbering power, trying to stir some vast dragon, striving to invoke some unknown or long-forgotten power that, awakening, might call us back into relation with something other than ourselves and our own designs.”²²

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GOLDSWORTHY

“...culture can impose its patterns only within the constraints set by the biosphere itself.”

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“...we are the organs of this world, flesh of its flesh, and...the world is perceiving itself through us...our sentient bodies are entirely continuous with the vast body of the land...’the presence of the world is precisely the presence of its flesh to my flesh...indigenous...people [have lived] in a world that watches, in a forest of eyes.”²⁴ “...we are the organs of this world, flesh of its flesh, and...the world is perceiving itself through us...our sentient bodies are entirely

continuous with the vast body of the land... the presence of the world is precisely the presence of its flesh to my flesh...

SNOW MONKEY INTO WHALES

*With all its eyes the natural world looks out
into the Open. Only our eyes are turned
backward, and surround plant, animal, child
like traps, and they emerge into their freedom.
We know what is really out there only from
the animal's gaze; for we take the very young
child and force it around, so that it sees
objects - not the Open, which is so
deep in animal's faces....²⁵*

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like traps,*

FOREST

"In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me...I was there, listening...."²⁶

DESERT/BLOSSOMS

“...no words can dispel the power that gravity and rain and the steady need for Earth’s air have upon the form of our bodies, the shape and texture of our thoughts...From this perspective, we could say that the brain itself is an introjection of the earth...27

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WHALEMOTHER AND CALF

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BOREAL/SPACEEARTH/CALIF. DESERT/MTNS./DESERT/POLARBEAR

“...the large scale structures of the brain...have formed themselves in response to the most stable structures of the perceptual field, to the openness of the horizon and the density of the ground on a planet with this specific gravity, to the chill nourishment of rain and the steady singing of birds...the brain is an introjected earth.”28

“...no words can dispel the power that gravity and rain and the steady need for Earth’s air have upon the form of our bodies, the shape and texture of our thoughts...we could say that the brain itself is an introjection of the earth...29

WATERFALLS/DESERT/GLACIER/SPACEEARTH/FLOCKS

For most of my 43 years as a clinician it never occurred to me to ask about a patient's relationship and experiences within the other-than-human. Nor in my own analysis and psychotherapy, which I've been in most of my adult life, has this territory been adequately recognized and explored. However, the stories of how significant Nature has been to my own, and to my patients, psychological, emotional, biological, and spiritual development and well-being, have begun to emerge from the sea of unconsciousness, and personal and cultural dissociation. I believe this is occurring, in part, as my clinically tempered curiosity, recognition, and receptivity to hearing about such significances has grown.

SNOW LEOPARD/GORILLA/ELEPHANT/DOLPHIN/PANDA/ELK/SNOWLEO

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ICELAND/GREENLAND CALVING

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

A 52 year old male patient, in reaction to some environmental reading in my waiting room, said: “Fuck it. There’s nothing I can do about climate change. I’ve worked hard for what I have. Someone will figure this all out, and my kids, and if they have kids, well, they’ll just have to figure it out, like I have. And if it’s all going to fall apart, then, hey, live in the now, have a good time. We can’t predict the future anyway. ”

I noted to myself the possibility of his “discounting the future...” his “live in the now”, which has come to be seen by some, after population, as “the greatest obstacle...to sustainability.”³¹

A 34 year old patient tells me, at the end of a session, that because it’s not “personal”, she’d been afraid to speak about the news of the melting ice caps and how this is “freaking” her out, but that she really needed to tell me about this next week.

A patient in her mid-60s told me of her belief that due to a childhood history of sexual abuse and abandonment she attached more to the animate world of Nature than to people.

A retired professor, not prone to hyperbole, tells me that he believes he would have suicided long ago if he hadn’t been able to restore his body and soul by immersing himself in the other-than-human.

A 73 year old woman asks me if I think climate change is science fiction, and then says that she doesn’t think it is, but is afraid to bring it up with me in case I do. She wondered what

my imagined disbelief would mean for the part of her that wants to deny it, and for her shamed child-self who was told repeatedly that she exaggerated and just wanted attention.

A 42 year old male patient asked me pointedly, “what do you do with the future and the fish disappearing and Toronto under water...how do you live with that knowing...I have a 2 year old son and I am worried...all the time.”

SPACEEARTH

“After all anybody is as their land and air is. Anybody is as the sky is low or high. Anybody is as there is wind or no wind there. That is what makes a people, makes their kind of looks, their kind of thinking, their subtlety and their stupidity, and their eating and their drinking and their language.” 33

“After all anybody is as their land and air is...”

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27. Becoming Animal, p. 128.
28. *ibid*, p. 128.
29. *ibid*, p. 128.
30. Rilke in...p. 23.

31. Here on Earth - Tim Flannery, 2010, p. 211.

32. Unconscious Processes...Searles, p. 233.

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DOCUMENTARIES

Naqoyqatsi

The 11th Hour

Chasing Ice

Planet Earth (BBC)

Rivers and Tides

Baraka

Watermark