

**Relational and Intersubjective Revisions:
Self Psychology in an Age of Environmental Crisis**

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In keeping with current clinical interest in multidisciplinary themes of expansiveness and constraint, this article utilizes abridged narratives from interviews conducted in 2012/13 by the author with analysts and analytic psychotherapists regarding their personal and clinical orientation to the environmental crisis. My conceptual reflections are brief and intended to broadly help frame the narratives within aspects of contemporary psychoanalytic thinking, while pointing towards further needed discussion. The urgent need for the expansive inclusion of the other-than-human world (or Nature) in our clinical theory and practice reflections is proposed. Also highlighted are the implications such contextual expansiveness has for adapting and ushering contemporary psychoanalysis into one of the 21st century's defining issues - the current historical circumstance of environmental crisis as threat to the future of humanity and human civilization.

Keywords: other-than-human; nature; environmental crisis; intersubjective; failed witnessing; moral third.

“The street I grew up on was bordering on undeveloped land in those days where there was a valley with a stream, and frogs and tadpoles. I spent a lot of time there with friends. It's all houses now. I'm not the skeptic that some people I know are who poo-poo it all, but for me the environmental crisis is still in the background.” Jack

“My childhood bedroom backed on to a treed wood. That childhood landscape imprinted itself. And ever since I've been able to choose where I live, I've always chosen somewhere that has backed on to a treed space. However, I have a sense of frustration about the environmental crisis and trying to talk about it. I live in the city. I don't experience it directly. Do I believe there is an environmental crisis? I have no opinion. I'm listening to evidence. I don't think about it much. But I have to tell you, patients are not talking about the environment at all. It is utterly irrelevant in terms of why they're

here. They're here because of what 95% of people are here for, to talk about the problems they're having in their relationships. So it doesn't come up." **Jennifer**

"No rules in this business, but one rule is when an animal talks in a dream, you listen, because it's got something to tell you. I think the purpose of this work is to get us closer to who we are, what our nature is, and to be aware of our nature. Not just nature in its pristine sense, because sharks do bite your legs off, but nature in its elemental form." **Bill**

"An adolescent patient who had been suicidal, said, "what's the point of staying alive and growing older anyway, because the world is not going to be here." **Moira**

Prologue

In May 2001, Jack, a twice a week analytic psychotherapy patient who I'd been seeing for 6 years, told me excitedly that he'd just purchased two jet-skis. Seemingly out-of-the-blue, I became confused. Should I mirror his enthusiasm that assumed a shared understanding between us that his longstanding fear of play, and its' potential for emotional exposure, was perhaps giving way to an increased capacity for autonomous self-expression and pleasure? But what of the implications of his purchases for the nesting shore-birds, the lake-water, and the air to be filled with yet more noise and carbon dioxide? I had been reading about environmental concerns and their implications for psychoanalysis and psychotherapy since the early 90's. My own reflections had remained largely intellectualized...until this session. Now, in these moments between Jack and I, it was shockingly not so clear to me where my allegiances lay. Yes, my professional

responsibility was to serve Jack and his psychological maturation. But what of the Earth in crisis? What of the words of Australian ecologist, John Seed? “I try to remember that it’s not me, John Seed, trying to protect the rain forest. Rather, I am part of the rainforest protecting itself. I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into thinking.”² I chose to mirror Jack and keep the contents of my bifurcated mind to myself. However...these moments opened a fissure in my thinking that has remained open, indeed widened, and through which has poured a steady flow of questions and the unsettling feeling that my clinical meaning-making foundations are being eroded, parameters breached.

A 42 year old married male psychotherapy patient, a criminal lawyer with a 2 year old son, began a November 2014 session with uncharacteristic tears brimming his eyes. He told me of his son calling him “da” for the first time, and the profound associations of innocence and protectiveness it had aroused. He then asked, “how do *you* live with what’s coming...there may be no fish when my son grows up...Toronto could be under water?” This impassioned question had never been offered to me so directly by a patient. Of course it was laden with personal meaning that had nothing to do with the environmental crisis. However...perhaps it is also worth considering that it was doubly laden with legitimate early 21st century alarm, anxiety, and grief. I wonder about this patient’s search for recognition of these particular self states and a search for a witness, not only to what he experiences as a father in these times of unprecedented environmental degradation, but also to the burgeoning societal and cultural apprehension in which he, and I, are both immersed, disavowed, or not.

‘Nature’ is a complex and perhaps flawed concept. There is no ‘Nature’ “out there” beyond the boundaries of our skin-encapsulated self. We are ‘Nature’. Nature is “in here”, through and through. We are embedded within the interdependent sensuality of ecosystems. Our relationship with the air and water mirrors our relationship to our own permeable and fluid bodies, to our selves.

This paper is a contemplation of elemental intersubjectivity: the recognition of unique mind in the other, and including perspectives in this recognition that are other-than-human. Some societies had no word for ‘Nature’ given that there was no need to isolate human flesh from the body of the world, nor deny its’ abundant, unique subjectivities. I use the awkward term ‘other-than-human’ to awaken reconsideration and conceptually position us within our fundamental surround: not superior and separate from all living organisms, nor from the surface of the planet and the portion of the atmosphere and subsurface that is capable of supporting life. This echoes and extends the postmodern psychoanalytic turn towards the symmetry of intersubjective relatedness and away from the asymmetry of Cartesian human exceptionalism that has historically shaped the theory and practice of psychoanalysis. What renders the “analytic dyad” (Geist, 2015, p. 93) more symmetrical, at profound psychological and biological levels, than the mutual dependence upon the other-than-human world shared by patient and analyst?

While writing this paper, the World Meteorological Organization reported (WMO, 2015) that 2015 is likely to be the hottest year on record; and that world surface temperatures are expected to reach 1 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels for the

first time. And, for the first time, the three-month global average concentration of CO₂ crossed the 400 parts per million barrier (WMO, 2015). These measurements are significant for many reasons. The December 2015 COP21 Paris Agreement recognized “that warming above 2C would all but guarantee devastating sea-level rise, floods, droughts, food insecurity, and ecological disruption...[and] that warming above 1.5 C could jeopardize low-lying nations (Wenzlau, 2015, p. 2). Further, scientists believe that for every degree of warming there will eventually be a sea level rise of two metres or more which would submerge more than 400 American cities and towns (Aulakh, 2015).

The Project

Between July 2012 and November 2013, I conducted a series of hour-long recorded interviews with 6 psychoanalysts, a Jungian analyst, and 5 analytic psychotherapists, aged 47 to 72 years. The gender balance was 7 women and 5 men. I wanted to explore 3 themes: experiences in and with the other-than-human (or Nature); thoughts and feelings about the environmental crisis, including the phrase itself; and whether clinicians believe they are seeing signs of the crisis appearing in sessions through patient narratives, anxieties, dreams, dilemmas, and behavioural enactments. The interviews were transcribed and abridged excerpts form the ground of this paper.

My conceptual reflections in this paper are brief and intended to broadly help frame the narratives within aspects of contemporary psychoanalytic thinking, while pointing towards further needed discussion. The narratives speak for themselves, in everyday language. This conversational style may be more apt to engage right brain

activity (McGilchrist, 2009) inviting the reader's affective system into the hearts and minds of analysts, and analytic psychotherapists, as they waded into these unfamiliar, rarely talked about, personal, contentious clinical waters.

I have come to understand that at least a partial motivation in conducting this research was to explore my own "experience of failed witnessing" (Benjamin, 2014, Part 3, p. 2). Particularly following an "unbidden" (Stern, 2014) and bewildering experience in a 2001 session, my clinical-environmental curiosity and concern grew. I wondered what this concern meant for me as a psychotherapist and to my clinical colleagues, to my patients, and whether it meant anything at all to both. Despite my silence in sessions about the crisis, I began to notice more frequent ecological references by my patients. I also increasingly felt that "the social world that ought to care [had] disappeared", (Benjamin, 2014, Part 3, p. 2) not only from the dominant socio-political cultures of city and country, but particularly from the theory and practice worlds encompassed by my clinical homes of relational psychoanalysis, contemporary self psychology, and intersubjective systems theory. Some of this experience of failed witnessing was coloured by a familiar passive-depressive position of mine. I felt like a child waiting for the idealized parent to notice the emergency, take it seriously, be able to hold it in mind, and move towards action on behalf of my safety.

This project has been one of my attempts to emerge from this position, embody a witnessing function, and revive my own "values of a caring world" (Benjamin, 2014, Part 3, p. 2). Such symptoms of the environmental crisis as climate (Flannery, 2005) and sea

change (Mitchell, 2009), and the current sixth mass extinction event (Kolbert, 2014), call out for these values of a caring world to extend beyond the domain of human relations and encompass all other life forms, as well as the air, water, rock, and soil that gave rise to us, and upon which we remain utterly dependent.

How do we 21st century analysts and analytic psychotherapists relate to the rate and scale of such human-caused destruction, increasingly informed, as many of us are, by available science and burgeoning media reports? What has occluded our identification with the “other” when that “other” is other-than-human, and ought that be of any interest to psychoanalysis? Do we have anything to offer our patients, and other professions, who are seeking ways to experience and relate to this “long emergency” (Kunstler, 2005) without becoming paralyzed by intimations of a future burdened with overwhelming loss and uncertainty.

Experiences with the Other-Than-Human

I am viewing the following responses to my first area of exploration through the lenses of “two conceptually distinct but overlapping kinds of intersubjectivity” (Teicholz, 2012, p. xvii) emphasized by self psychology and relational psychoanalysis: regulation (Beebe and Lachmann, 1996) and recognition (Benjamin, 1988, 1990). And I am opening the frame of these relational concepts to include experiences “beyond the [human] dyad” (Shaleen, 2014, p. 2). The expanded frame would then include “those aspects of one’s experience that are tied to, and shaped by” (Shaleen, 2014, p. 2) the context of ecosystems within which we dwell. This is consonant with the I-Thou of Martin Buber,

“philosopher of dialogue, inclusion, and confirmation” (Orange, 2010, p. 15) who believes “we are unique only in our capacity to say Du [you] to the house cat, the oak tree, and to each other” (Orange, 2010, p. 32). In the following narrative excerpts, we can hear evidence of these fundamental self psychological and relational concepts.

Here, then, are the voices of our colleagues.

Mina: *“An experience that comes to mind is when, on a holiday, a tiger flopped down in front of our truck and looked right at us. Tears were coming down my cheeks. I thought, ‘oh my god, he’s looking at me. We’re looking at each other’. I’ve always described this experience as sacred. I’ve never gone further with it. Something about being alive. Being part of life. It engenders a vitality and somehow bolsters my sense of self. It evokes a lot of affect.*

“And when I’m at the ocean, it lends me a tremendous sense of well-being. It inexplicably legitimizes me. It makes my worry somehow smaller and puts it in perspective. I have this feeling that it will all work out. I even touch the trees on my walks sometimes, and say ‘thank you’. Though I somehow feel that communicating with the trees is something to be ashamed of.”

Sandra: *“Swimming in the lake this summer, I remember asking myself for the first time ever, ‘Is this lake conscious?’ ‘Hello, are you conscious?’ Those thoughts are relational and they’re not the level of interchange that is evident. But just because there’s only one human consciousness asking the questions and providing answers, it doesn’t mean that I’m alone in the conversation.”*

Patrick: *“I would have been worried if I was a therapist interviewing me and my family. I was a really good marksman and I’d kill birds for no purpose. Beautiful birds. And I see it now as a desperate expression of helplessness that I displaced on to a helpless creature. I could master its destiny, my cocky little twelve year old giving himself the satisfaction of his great aim.”*

Jill: *“I would always go down to the beach as a sense of solace and comfort and watch the waves. After I became almost fatally ill as an adolescent, and was in hospital for over two months, I was discombobulated, derealized. A big influence in feeling calmer when I got out was going down to the lake and gathering myself from whatever bits I was in.”*

Bill: *“I was this good little white kid teaching this Aboriginal kid how to add things on the ground using stones. This older aboriginal man was sitting there and watching all this, and in a gentle and not critical way, in a curious way, he said, ‘I don’t understand you people, because you’re always using your heads. We use our stomachs.’*

”There is this great Aboriginal experience of the human connection to nature, as nature goes, so the person goes. And so as we violate nature, we violate that very deep layer of our own psyche.

“I’m not philosophical by nature, but I remember as a kid wandering off into this area where there was a sea of tussocks that went to the horizon, flat as a tack. I remember going up and looking at one tussock of grass, and I thought, ‘Now, by looking at this, by witnessing it, have I created it?’ And it’s a question that still resonates for me today: by

bringing something to consciousness, by witnessing it, has one brought it in to the world? Because without witnessing it, and giving it some validity, it stays in the unconscious. And I think that relates a lot to the work I do now.”

Abby: *“People would talk about how messy my dad and brother’s mowed hayfields were and I never understood it until I was on a tractor with my brother. He’d mow along and a meadowlark nest would suddenly appear on the ground. He would lift up the mower sickle and go over the nest, then go on, so these hayfields had all of these pieces of hay sticking up. Experiences like this were part of growing up with a really strong sense of creation and the way that it all fits together.”*

The Environmental Crisis

This section’s narratives continue to open up our analytic field of consideration to include the other-than-human. The following interviewee voices illustrate “our child-like efforts to disidentify with the drowned in order to stave off the terror of sharing their fate (Benjamin, 2014, Part 3, p. 4).” The “drowned” here may be signified by endangered species, or by those humans with environmental illnesses and anxieties who intensely experience the crisis as “in here”, not “out there”. The narratives point to trauma, as “any emotional experience that cannot be processed or regulated” (Teicholz, 2012, p. xx); and to dissociation, as the capacity to split off from the overwhelm of holding in mind our own fate and that of future generations. The narratives also speak to the possibility that such crisis symptoms as extreme weather may represent enactments, that, like in analytic

treatment, “are the ONLY way that not-me [i.e. the dissociated other-than-human] can enter [and become symbolically formulated]...” (Stern, 2014).

As analyst Donnel Stern further stated, “One of the most important goals of treatment...is the expansion of the self by the inclusion of what had been not-me - that is, the symbolization of not-me. Once not-me is articulated as a symbolic representation, it has become part of the self ("me") and one can think about it (which means that one can know it and feel it) (Stern, 2014).”

Sandra: *“I have a problem with using the expression, “the environmental crisis”, in the sense that we are murdering the earth when actually what will be most affected will be us. The earth will recover. The earth will go on as long as our sun exists and when that starts to go, all bets are off! Murder isn’t quite right. It’s more suicide. I actually believe there is a crisis, but the use of the word is hard to locate. As you said, when? Where? What can I do?”*

Kyle: *“I am aware that there is a crisis and there are times, not often, when I reflect on apocalyptic scenarios of heightened temperatures, of vegetation and the fundamentals of human life becoming endangered. But, in my everyday life, what is much more dominant in my consciousness is the invisibility. I am never visually or sensorially confronted with anything that suggests there is an environmental crisis. It is presented to me in a purely abstract, verbal way through either a speaker or a television screen. So I am not thinking about it except when I hear it on the media, unlike other kinds of social issues.”*

Louise: *“I used to be an avid Doonesbury fan and there was one old strip about the oil crisis. Somebody had appointed an Energy Czar and he pronounced that the crisis was over because the crisis had been downgraded to a situation. So, all somebody has to say is, ‘it’s not a crisis’, and it’s not a crisis. It’s hard to see things as critical if they’re not right in front of you. You have to be open to hearing this. And then there’s the guilt. Maybe people don’t want to know. I mostly drive to my office. I’m aware that I could walk a lot of the time, and I could take transit, and I don’t. And many times it’s for convenience. So guilt is something I carry.”*

Patrick: *“I’m more consciously not dissociating the crisis anymore. But I also feel overwhelmed. I just read this moving poem that said something like, ‘I’m awake at 3:23 in the morning because my great great grandchildren won’t let me sleep. My great great grandchildren ask me in dreams, ‘What did you do while the planet was plundered? What did you do when the earth was unravelling? Surely you did something when the seasons started failing, as the mammals, reptiles, and birds were all dying. What did you do once you knew?’ It’s terrifying to think about how our dissociation will manifest itself in generations to come. I can’t quite fathom or let myself feel it. Should I sell everything and make some radical shift?”*

“My family and I were visiting the Columbia Icefields and my son, who’s in his 20’s, saw markers indicating the distance that the glaciers have receded over the years. He was almost weeping. He couldn’t hold the emotions back, that this was going to be gone someday, and what did that mean for the sustainability of the water cycles and

animals. It was bad. He knew it was bad. So he became incredibly morose. We got back in the car and his head was slumped. He was the barometer and he was devastated.”

Bill: *“Oh, it’s happening, and I suspect it’s happening at a much greater rate, like what else do we have to be told? It’s like we’re unconsciously trying to destroy our over-identification with the external world, including the natural world, because we don’t know how to relate to it. It’s like nature is a pain in the ass. There’s something Other that is calling our attention. If we suffered the crisis, and I think that’s the key, how can we collectively suffer?”*

Abby: *“How are we relating to the crisis psychologically? How do we live with that knowing? It really makes me sad when I see how disrespectful we are of our environment and how unconscious we are about what we are doing. I think what keeps me going is when I’m in my garden, and I see the worms and the seeds and the regeneration. That’s what gives me the bigger picture. If I didn’t have that micro experience, I don’t know that I’d have the macro view that gives me a sense of faith and hope.”*

The Environmental Crisis and Clinical Practice

A recurring theme in the majority of interviews was that the clinician’s awareness and concern for the other-than-human would be acted out as advocacy with patients. The compelling ethical and identity dilemmas associated with the effects of our choices upon the other-than-human made this an area of defence, conflict, and confusion.

In relation to nuclear weapons in the 1980's, analyst Hannah Segal wrote, "Even when patients do refer to nuclear issues, psychoanalysts remain faced with an ethical and technical dilemma. On the one hand...we must not collude with the patient's denial of any external situation...On the other hand, we must also be very wary of imposing on the patient our own preoccupations and convictions..." (Segal, 1988, p. 56).

What then is our clinical task and contribution to the "The Great Work" (Berry, 1999)? What can we do? Or, better, who can we be? What form of moral third can we embody? The profound shifts in the stability of environmental conditions, and the resulting personal and socio-cultural changes that are required to mitigate the most devastating effects of the crisis (NY Times, 2014, Apr. 20, p. A20) will increasingly "break into [our patient's, and our own] fragile bubble of emotional survival" (Totton, 2011, p. 208). As with any developmental transition, we, and our patients will be "rendered psychically more vulnerable" (Teicholz, 2012, p. xxiii). We understand developmentally that recognition of a transition and a "transient increase in empathy from caregivers at such times can enable" (Teicholz, 2012, xxiii) the regulation of sometimes unmanageable states of anxiety and loss, while consolidating the selfhood needed to carry the child, or patient, or analyst, into the next developmental stages and challenges.

Facing our own dissociation and disavowal of the crisis that "tends to obscure our vision and muffle our response" (Gerson, 2009, p. 1342) will enable us to embody the acknowledgement of it's symptoms appearing in patient narratives, dreams, and enactments. We may become, in the precise poetics of analyst Samuel Gerson,

“...an engaged witness - an other that stands beside the event and the self and who cares to listen; an other who is able to contain that which is heard and is capable of imagining the unbearable; an other who is in a position to confirm both our external and our psychic realities and thereby, to help us integrate and live within all realms of our experience. This is the presence that lives in the gap, absorbs absence, and transforms our relation to loss. It is the active and attuned affective responsiveness of the witnessing other that constitutes a ‘live third’ - the presence that exists between the experience and its meaning, between the real and the symbolic, and through whom life gestates and into whom futures are born” (Gerson, 2009, p. 1343).

When in the presence of a live third, the shock and grief of the losses of familiar landscapes and treasured species, of ways of life and predictable futures, may be more likely to evolve into recognition of, and concern for, the other-than-human; “vicarious trauma” (Benjamin, 2014, Part 1, p. 6) and apathy transmuting into vibrant memory, emotional meaning, and engaged witnessing.

Mina: *“If I was still in analysis, would I be talking about it? I don’t think so. But what about this is there to talk about in analysis? It is what it is. I feel terrible. Unless I had some indication that my analyst was thinking about it and felt similarly, which was surprising for me to realize, I would put it aside. Now I’m thinking about the enlivening experiences in nature that I described. I might talk about that, though I never did.*

“I think it would only come up if something happened between me and someone else, particularly a family member, like this incident where I was reading about the oil

sands. My kids came over and my daughter-in-law, whose work sometimes touches on the oil industry, said, 'That's all a load of nonsense, and if you want I'll go through the article with you and show you where it's wrong.' And I said, 'I don't think we should talk about this anymore.' I shut it off. I was so agitated. But I did say, 'How your generation can't be concerned about what's going to happen to your kids and your grandkids, and your great grandkids, is beyond me. So no, I don't want to go through the article and find out where I'm wrong.' That I would talk about in analysis, because I had so many feelings about it.

"Something else that might contribute to my not bringing it to analysis: guilt and shame. How can this be so meaningful to me and yet I fly all over the planet? And yet I drive a car everywhere I go. That brings tremendous guilt which might also be a good reason to bring this to analysis. I can imagine there are all kinds of ways that the environmental crisis, and all of our feelings about it, connect up with early experiences of shame, guilt, and helplessness. And this all reflects back to my own childhood where nobody thinks I know anything!"

Sandra: *"We, as a profession, have certainly invested in what we think of as the internal world, and some of us are more theoretically invested in that than others in terms of what we let in. And it's been a theoretical and clinical job for psychoanalysis to even let in something other than the mother, the infant, let's say the father, let's say the family, let's say the culture. It's offensive to some people's whole world view to consider that the*

inner may not be the only or main story, or that the inner may also be the outer, or what about responsibility?

“All of those questions have been arrogantly and defensively denied, put away, side-stepped, viewed as ‘not psychoanalysis’. We are dealing with a huge resistance and that doesn’t do justice to it. Resistance implies that whatever your resistance is about, you at least have the sense that it exists, because you’re resisting it. But at the level of what we may be dealing with in our profession, is that there’s no resistance because it’s irrelevant. It’s, ‘What is your problem?’ And the tables are turned instantly into making it a reverse problem of the person who might be bringing it up.

“I have been aware for a long time that people’s relationships with nature have served really important self-functions. So I’ve always been respectful of those relationships. I say to myself, ‘Well, it’s a self-object. They’re in relationships. Something is happening. It’s sustaining. And the older I get, my feel for what Nature encompasses is deepening and expanding, so that it’s not merely a self-object in that sense. It has dimensions that won’t be captured by any psychological understanding of functions that it serves.

“I’ve worked with a woman, off and on, for the last ten or fifteen years. I do know that she’s a very active environmentalist and bird watcher. She says, point blank, that her relationship with nature has saved her life. And I think it’s probably true.”

Kyle: *“I can’t think of any patients talking about it. If there are references to the crisis or the environment in a bonafide way, let’s say in a dream, I may not be sufficiently aware of*

that because I will be focused on the dream in relation to the patient's internal world. I'll be thinking, 'what is the meaning of this lake or mountain?' And even if there was an image of toxins rising into the atmosphere, I would not initially be thinking of the environmental crisis. I'd be thinking, what is this symbolic of that has already been mentioned in this session, or in the last session, or what I know about what's going on in the patient's life?

"However, it's not peripheral. It has to do with the air that we breathe and the ground that we walk upon. It's fundamental. It has to do with the container. And so, if we are not cognizant of external social and environmental changes in our work, would this not then be detrimental in some way? The problem is that I'm not sure how to deal with it, without it becoming advocacy in the session. However, if, decades ago, a patient talked about physical abuse by a spouse, perhaps the analyst would not have felt and commented about it in the same way that we do now. Maybe it would be just, 'let's talk about WHY you hit your wife.' And I don't think anyone would be surprised or astonished that the 'why' would become the focal point of the session.

"This punctuates the limitations in my own thought because I'm not sure how to bring this environmental awareness in to clinical space. Maybe what we could be doing as analysts is contributing more outside of sessions to a shift in our own consciousness about the environment, and then allow that to naturally restructure priorities of listening in the analytic session."

Louise: *“It’s very rare, in my experience, that patients speak about their concern for the environment. But it has come up with trauma. When patients bring certain kinds of very powerful interpersonal trauma, and are having struggles managing their feelings and reactions on a day to day basis, and we talk about the things that were helpful, or places where they felt safe, being in, or imagining being in Nature, was a frequent response.”*

Patrick: *“One event happened just a few days ago with a mother and her adult daughter and an unresolved conflict. The daughter was, I daresay, in an immature place. Threatening the continuity of the relationship because the mother was so insensitive to her environmental concerns, she said, ‘How could you be so stupid, awful, and insensitive?’ It was around her moral crisis and experiencing her mother as blind to it, and being part of the problem.*

“So, there’s a potential clash between generations. Maybe the younger generation will be a little more alert if my kids are any measure. And then how will the generations work out this greater conflict, because I think younger people likely have a more vivid sense of despair about the future? We who were raised in a period of expansion and under the myth of unlimited resources, why wouldn’t that still be in our fabric? Every youthful generation has a despair about the older generation’s blindnesses and injustices, but this one is so global, and has such depth and destructiveness. I don’t know how that conversation will go between the generations. I’ll be interested to see how I can support

both daughter and mother through this. It's not just some generic issue that they got polarized over."

Bill: *"So many dreams are in human built environments. To put it another way, culture is just out of whack, out of balance. We're all about culture. Whereas the natural environment is so disavowed. I hear many more dreams in which the ego is dominant; the office complex, and so forth. Not so many dreams around the natural. What we're caught up in is so far away from the intrinsic tectonic plates of our problem. It takes a lot of work to go from resolving the issue of the day, which is fair enough - life's falling apart and it's affecting the kids, etc.. To really get in to the deeper patterns and how fractured they are, like when we get in to the danger of losing our environment, we can start to see the horror, and the deep shadow of the problem. I think to look at the shadow of God is terrifying. Terrifying."*

Abby: *"Some kids are quite conscious of the fact that there's an environmental crisis. I sometimes see it in their drawings or paintings. I don't know that I would see it if they weren't painting or drawing. I'm not so sure that they would articulate it. They may say about their drawing, 'The water's too dirty and the frog's going to die.' When a child says this, I believe they're saying that they're afraid of the world."*

"When I was diagnosed with cancer in 2000, I began to hear more from patients, who either were diagnosed with cancer, or had had cancer. I didn't hear so much of that before. And then they would talk about the environmental crisis. I never heard patients talking about cancer and the environment. And that happened often after patients knew I

had cancer. Patients were openly saying, 'I'm afraid of what I'm breathing,' or, 'I'm afraid of what I'm eating', or, 'what's in my food?'"

Conclusion

What of your experiences with the other-than-human? How do you relate to the effects and news of the environmental crisis? Are your patients inviting contemplation of the “voice of the earth” (Roszak, 1993) within clinical space?

We live in the dawn of the Anthropocene (Kolbert, 2014) epoch. The scale of our impact on the other-than-human is unprecedented. The turns in psychoanalysis towards systemic, intersubjective paradigms are bringing our theories and practices symbolically homeward towards “affirming the ‘law’ of interconnectedness” (Benjamin, 2014, Part 4, p. 2). As self psychologists, and relationally inclined analysts and psychotherapists, we are primed to serve witnessing functions that help restore the presence of a live and “embodied moral third” (Benjamin, 2014, Part 2, p. 9) that transcends the binary of Human and Nature, and promotes a “multiplicity of identifications” (Benjamin, 2014, Part 2, p. 9) with the other-than-human.

Epilogue - 38th Annual IAPSP Conference

The lone return seat on my flight to Los Angeles for the 2015 IAPSP Conference accounted for 1.548 Tonnes of Co₂, which is approximately the carbon footprint of supplying my 3-story home with electricity for one year.

In his October 2015 Conference plenary paper, “History Flows Through Us: Psychoanalysis and Historical Understanding”, Roger Frie began with the statement that

there is “...a major challenge facing our profession: how do we account for the contexts of society, culture and history that are central to who we are as individuals, yet are often perceived as being beyond the boundaries of our discipline?” (p. 1)

And at the same conference, Ilene Philipson referenced in her plenary paper, “Fearing the Theoretical Other: The Legacy of Kohut’s Erasure of the Analyst’s Trauma”, a recent article by John Riker that described three ways through which theory stays alive and growthful: “1) by working out its internal tensions and contradictions, 2) by exploring consequences and connections to fields and experiences beyond those that generated the original theory, and 3) by genuinely encountering otherness and in the encounter either complexifying through incorporation or becoming clearer by grasping what the theory is abjecting” (Riker, 2013, p. 344).

An essential and mostly overlooked fourth context, the environmental, must be added to Frie’s “society, culture and history”. In reference to the environmental crisis, prescient analytic “ancestor” (Allured, 2015, p. 1) Harold Searles wrote, in 1972, that “The lack of analytic literature about this subject suggests to me that we analysts are in the grip of this common apathy” (Searles, 1972, p.229). The 38th annual IAPSP conference was noteworthy in its’ inclusiveness of other contexts. This is promising for the future inclusion of our needed explorations of the interface between contemporary psychoanalytic theory and practice and the current environmental crisis.

Let us take up Riker’s encouragement for theory to cast its’ curious eyes towards “fields and experiences beyond those that generated the original theory” (2013, p. 344),

and direct our own eyes, our minds, towards such burgeoning explorations as ecopsychology (Roszak, 1992; Fisher, 2002); philosophy and human ecology (Shepard, 1982); and ecopsychanalysis (Nicholsen, 2002; Dodds, 2011; Rust and Totton, 2012; Weintrobe, 2013). Let us examine what our theories may be abjecting and our “problems being open to otherness” (Riker, 2013, p. 344). The historical necessity of including the intersubjective significance of the human/other-than-human relationship invites such critical examination.

However, it remains, that in spite of the unprecedented scope of the current environmental crisis and the dire future of a possible four degree rise in global temperatures this century (Marshall, 2014), psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts, and analytic psychotherapists alike, remain in the thrall of the “isolated mind” (Stolorow and Atwood, 1992, p. 7) that “represents modern man’s alienation from nature...” (Stolorow, and Atwood, 1992, p. 8). Thomas Kohut’s words, quoted in Frie’s plenary paper, add further prescience: “Philosophically, a failure to appreciate the fact that psychoanalysis is historically determined and that analytic theory and practice reflect a particular cultural moment will render it unable to adapt to changing historical circumstances” (Kohut in Frie, 2015, p. 1).

The 38th Annual Conference closed with Donna Orange’s “Fifteen Minutes for Self Psychology: Concluding the 2015 International Conference” and her opening of the “tent flaps” (Orange, 2015, p. 2)! Her bracing call for engagement by the psychoanalytic community with climate change and the need to “face up to the carbon footprint of our

professional and personal travel” (2015, p. 3) was pointed and timely. She served a vital witnessing function for us all, while potentiating the creation of a “live third” (Gerson, 2009, 1342) and a “moral third” (Benjamin, 2014, Part 4, p. 2) that promote the “values of a caring world” (Benjamin, 2014, Part 3, p. 2). Don’t such values now need to extend beyond the human contexts of society, culture and history to the other-than-human, to Nature?

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STOLOROW AND ATWOOD

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