

# Landscapes of the Mind

## Eden Project: 25 – 27 September 2009

### Towers and Landscapes workshop handout

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Alan Garner tells a story of a Prince in a Tower, built by his father the King, in which mirrors alternate with windows: whichever he looks through the most, expands.<sup>1</sup>

Carl Jung built a tower, between 1923 and 1955 and largely with his own hands, right on the edge of the upper lake of Zürich at Bollingen. In *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, he wrote: “At Bollingen I am in the midst of my true life, I am most deeply myself. ... At times I feel as if I am spread out over the landscape and inside things, and am myself living in every tree, in the splashing of the waves, in the clouds and the animals that come and go, in the procession of the seasons.”<sup>2</sup>

Jung’s paradoxical awareness that when he is “most deeply [him]self” inside his tower he also is “living in every tree ...” and in every aspect of nature, is not one cultivated by our modern culture – quite the reverse, it fosters an impression of separation and superiority. Ecopsychology and deep ecology propose that a frame of mind such as Jung’s provides the bedrock for conducting human life in harmony with the Earth’s magnificent systems, rooted in a sense of empathic connection.

Today, as more and more information becomes available as to the scale and difficulty of the problems we face, the pressure is immense. Environmental campaigners of all professions and backgrounds can get caught up in living and working in ways which repeat the kinds of harm that we are trying to influence the corporate and political worlds away from – forcing ourselves to take on too much work and meet unreasonable demands without sufficient or appropriate replenishment. The same words could describe our treatment of the Earth.

In our age of reason, much environmental communication strategy to date has been to present the cogent arguments, believing that our society will make the rational response. We are discovering, late in the day, that there is so much to being human that this approach is not enough. There is more to be understood about how to mobilise, within ourselves and in the collective, a sufficient response to the ecological crisis and we must find new ways to experiment. The workshop *Towers and Landscapes* offers just such an experiment and I outline below some of the underpinning rationale.

#### Summary

Scientists are increasingly acknowledging that the inspiration for their guiding theories arise first from the imagination. When they do, it seems almost to be offered and received as a kind of confession, out of an endemic suspicion of imagination outside of the realm of art. One significant aspect of this is the difficulty many of us<sup>3</sup> in all areas of society have now in trusting in the ‘both-and’, a primary characteristic of the imagination. As honed as we are in ‘either/or’ thinking, too often we mistake and castigate ‘both-and’ thinking for hypocrisy, rather than appreciating the capacity to hold paradox. It may be that an unintended consequence of our ambitions towards pure rationality and its apparent certainties is the hindering of a more subtle and expansive condition which facilitates inclusion and, indeed, empathic connection with the ‘other’ in all its forms. If we consider the main tenets of the prevailing ‘rationalist’ paradigm, which has been constructed over centuries, such ambitions have led us, as a cultural norm, to denigrate and ignore those human attributes which we think risk undermining the objective, scientific and reasoned endeavours of our age, namely embodied sensations, instincts, intuition and emotions, alongside imagination. We deny that all these are equally products of the long evolutionary journey humanity has made. Perhaps they remind us too powerfully of what we might think of as our ‘creatureness’, the assortment of experiences we are

endowed with when born, which in its turn reminds us too powerfully of how we are linked with the rest of life on Earth.

Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess was the first to coin the phrase “the ecological self” to describe a heightened sensibility towards and love for the whole Earth community of life in which we are immersed. The ecological self is motivated by identification with other species in addition to human beings and the resulting empathy facilitates our desire to take care of them and their habitats, which, we forget, also are ours. In this way, our sense of ourselves is enriched, not reduced, by relating with and nurturing the diversity of life around us. He asserted that to limit human experience to the human-centred concerns of the ego is to “seriously underestimate” our capacity, our potential for an expanded sense of self which includes all of life in our feeling of loving responsibility.<sup>4</sup>

I am proposing that, in our rationality-dominated culture, we are disabling our innate capacities which would readily make possible the development of the ecological self. For me, it is not only a matter of spending more time, both practical and contemplative, in nature,<sup>5</sup> as vital and valuable as this is. Feeding imagination and strengthening our connection with and our capacity to listen and respond to the feelings of our bodies can enable a stronger experience of being part of all life on Earth, intrinsic to nature itself. As Theodore Roszak put it: “What the Earth requires will have to make itself felt within us as if it were our own most private desire”<sup>6</sup> and John Seed elaborated: “when I first participated in actions to protect some of the remaining rainforests near my home in New South Wales, Australia ... I was gripped with an intense, profound realization of the depth of the bonds that connect us to the Earth, how deep are our feelings for these connections. I knew then that I was no longer acting on behalf of myself or my human ideas, but on behalf of the Earth . . . on behalf of my larger self, that I was literally part of the rainforest defending herself.”<sup>7</sup>

Towers and Landscapes involves feeding, respecting and listening to the imagination and the body as elements of the natural world. Through the media of listening to, identifying with, drawing aspects of and then enacting Alan Garner’s story of the Prince and the Tower, we will discover more of what the story holds and whether it is relevant to us individually as well as collectively, and we will also allow the unfolding of whatever needs to emerge.

### **More**

Sigmund Freud expressed our dominant culture’s prevailing attitude, shaped over centuries, to the relationship between humanity and nature:

“The principle task of civilisation, its actual *raison d’être*, is to defend us against nature. We all know that in many ways civilisation does this fairly well already, and clearly as time goes on it will do it much better. But no one is under the illusion that nature has already been vanquished; and few dare hope that she will ever be entirely subjected to man. There are the elements which seem to mock at all human control; the earth which quakes and is torn apart and buries all human life and its works; water, which deluges and drowns everything in turmoil; storms, which blow everything before them. ... With these forces nature rises up against us, majestic, cruel and inexorable; she brings to our mind once more our weakness and helplessness, which we thought to escape through the work of civilisation.”<sup>8</sup> With this, he named our fear, inherited through generations and generations since earliest humanity and still as live today; our fear of being overwhelmed and, ultimately, of death. How accurately he described our project of compensating for our smallness and vulnerability by erecting bigger and bigger towers ... for the work of civilisation is twofold: not only does it serve our pragmatic needs and our creative aspirations, it also compensates for our collective, cultural inability to be at peace with our individual, small and finite place within the cycle of life.

Freud’s words describe not only our relationship with nature, but also our relationship with our own minds and, particularly, the unconscious. The powers of the unconscious mind can feel like the tumult of nature, and therapy rooms and great literature across many lands resonate with vivid accounts of quaking and feeling torn apart, buried, deluged, drowned, in turmoil, and blown before the storms of the deep layers of our minds. Here, in this inner landscape, we must civilise ourselves too or be swept away. When we look at how he described the project of building consciousness, we can see how the thread of conquest continues: “Where id was, there ego shall be.”<sup>9</sup> He explicitly equates the

unconscious with nature when describing the intention of psycho-analysis as "to strengthen the ego ... to widen its field of perception and enlarge its organization, so that it can appropriate fresh portions of the id ... it is a work of culture not unlike the draining of the Zuider Zee." <sup>10</sup> With his verb "appropriate", the founding father of psycho-analysis draws attention to our plunder, our taking to ourselves what is not ours to take. Out of its fear of the unconscious, the modern ego<sup>11</sup> does that within the ecology of the mind, aspiring to make itself large and dominant and take all the credit for creativity, order, intelligence and value. Within such a mindset, denying those qualities to the imagination, to the body and to the Earth is a tiny, inevitable step. Domination, oppression and destruction logically follow.

If Freud was naming critical aspects of the underpinning ideology of our civilisation, it can be no surprise that we are now in a state of over-valuing rationality as a collective norm. In this state, we deny how our other human powers serve us: Through the combination of imagination and the sensations in our bodies we feel love, desire and empathy; our bodily systems let us know the richness of feeling sated; instincts underpin our evolutionary drives; and intuition and emotion engage our conscience. This is to identify only a few of the faculties needed at work as greatly as they are at play and which become more available through the interplay between body, imagination and reason. The latter, of course, plays its necessary part. Dialogue between these various qualities facilitates inner checks and balances, mediation and then decisions upon how to act. For such dialogue to yield the best outcomes, all participating elements must be equal in strength. As far back as the 13th century, Persian philosopher, poet and founder of the Whirling Dervishes Rumi captured the essence of the matter: "Love opens my chest, and thought returns to its confines." <sup>12</sup> Even though these aspects of being human actually play a larger part in our daily lives than we credit, they do so often unconsciously and immaturely, precisely because we give them so little status in the cultural stories we tell ourselves today about what it means to be a valid and valuable human being.

Contrast those cultural stories with the perspective of American nature writer and conservationist John Hay who, remembering a teeming rainforest scene, asserts that living with a sense of connection between our inner being and outer nature is our heritage from more elemental times, a heritage which relies upon our innate inner diversity and which we need today:

" The quetzal is a shining facet of the great civilization of nature, where the spirit of human life was once inextricable from birds and flowers and tall trees rising from buttressed trunks with branches smothered in bromeliads and epiphytes, a context of growth and sacrifice reaching through intricate shadows toward the sun. In an open clearing at the edge of the forest where the quetzal and his less extravagantly adorned mate were nesting, a wattled bell bird called with a loud, single "bong", which sounded less like a bell than a metal pipe being hit by a hammer. Inside the forest, nightingale thrushes hauntingly sang, like fine instruments being tuned to some ineffable scale; and the last I saw of the quetzal was a shimmering waterfall of color plunging down off a branch to disappear in the darkness made by endless leaves.

" To think of the dark and tenacious rainforests in terms of the diversity we say is necessary to natural systems is useful to the conservationist, but it is not enough. We who spend our lives guided only by terms and categories, endless facts and numbers, have not yet recognized the depths that would, if they could, help us out of our simplicity, the lack of diversity in ourselves. The great tropical message is inclusion. The forests, with their endlessly varied functions and differences in form, are statements as to the total involvement of life. They are the original grounds of life's inventions, a great drawing in of all kinds of possibilities, over endless time. Without them, we lose not only their incomparable species but the foundation of shared existence." <sup>13</sup>

How can we cultivate the conditions in which such inner diversity can grow and flourish?

## References and Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Garner, A Thursbitch (The Harvill Press 2003) pp.120-121
- <sup>2</sup> Jung, C G Memories, Dreams and Reflections (Fontana Press 1993) p.252 and in Sabini, M The Earth has a Soul, the Nature Writings of C G Jung (North Atlantic Books 2005) p.14
- <sup>3</sup> Throughout this piece I will be addressing cultural ideas and norms of behaviour which constitute the prevailing western industrial growth paradigm and sometimes I will use the words “we”, “our” and “us”. This is not to deny the diversity of human experience or the many people who embrace and live by entirely different ideas and norms
- <sup>4</sup> Naess, A chapter in Seed, J., Macy, J., Fleming P., Naess A. (eds.) Thinking Like A Mountain (New Society Publishers 1988) (chapter title not to hand at time of going to print)
- <sup>5</sup> When referring to nature, the limits of language make it difficult to convey that I consider the human species as integral to it, rather than as separate from or outside it. Occasionally, to illustrate a specific point, it may be useful temporarily for nature to be thought of as outside us
- <sup>6</sup> Roszak, T The Voice of the Earth, An Exploration of Ecopsychology (Phanes Press, Inc) p.47
- <sup>7</sup> Seed, J ‘To hear Within Ourselves the Sound of the Earth Crying’ in Seed, J., Macy, J., Fleming P., Naess A. (eds.) Thinking Like A Mountain (New Society Publishers 1988) p.6
- <sup>8</sup> Freud, S The Future of an Illusion (N.Y. W.W. Norton 1961) as quoted in Dunann Winter, D Ecological Psychology: Healing the Split between Planet and Self (Addison Wesley Longman 1997)
- <sup>9</sup> Freud, S New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis (N.Y. W.W. Norton 1933)
- <sup>10</sup> ibid
- <sup>11</sup> The word “ego” is used to denote our conscious sense of ourselves as “I”
- <sup>12</sup> At the time of sending this to print, the reference is not to hand; it will be available by email after the conference from sandraw@greenspirit.org.uk
- <sup>13</sup> Gardner, J (ed) The Sacred Earth, Writers on Nature and Spirit (New World Library) p.52

## Further Reading

Abram, D The Spell of the Sensuous (Vintage Books 1997)  
Butterfly Hill, J The Legacy of Luna, The Story of a Tree, a Woman and the Struggle to Save the Redwoods (Harper SanFrancisco ISBN: 0-06-251659-0)  
Cameron, J The Artist’s Way, A Course in Discovering and Recovering your Creative Self (Pan Macmillan Ltd ISBN: 978-0-330-34358-9)  
GreenSpirit Journal, Spring 2008 Ecopsychology edition Clarke, C, Hills, D, and White, S (eds)  
[www.greenspirit.org.uk/resources/Ecopsychology.shtml](http://www.greenspirit.org.uk/resources/Ecopsychology.shtml)  
Matthews, P Words in Place, Reconnecting with Nature through Creative Writing (ISBN: 1-903458-69-2)  
Mellon, N with Ramsden, A, Body Eloquence, The Power of Myth and Story to Awaken the Body’s Energies (ISBN: 978-1-60415-028-5)  
Olsen, A Body and Earth, an Experiential Guide (University Press of New England ISBN: 1-58465-010-9)  
White, S also available at [www.greenspirit.org.uk/resources/Ecopsychology.shtml](http://www.greenspirit.org.uk/resources/Ecopsychology.shtml)

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