

# Consuming the Earth

## Unconscious Processes in Relation to Our Environmental Crisis

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My lecture today is about the parallel process between eating problems and consumerism. I start with a brief story from a session in which Sally is what I would call a composite patient, made up from years of working with women with eating problems.

My bulimic client, Sally, arrives in a dreadful panic. She has had a bad relapse into bingeing and vomiting. This is something she used to do every day, sometimes many times a day, for 20 years. After a period of abstinence, she is more aware of how self-destructive this is, and she is really scared she might die - maybe her stomach will burst, or her heart will fail. Yet she cannot stop, the drive to binge is so strong.

As I listen to her, I can feel the panic rising in my body also. I know that it will take time before she can give up her all-consuming habit, yet she is in a life-death situation.

My mind flips out to our ecological crisis for a second. We are caught in a similar vice, consuming the earth, and causing such destruction to our habitat that we may not survive as a species. This is ecocide. We are warned we have just a few years to reduce our carbon emissions before climate change becomes irreversible. The pressure on us now to change, and fast, feels almost unbearable. Will we make it.....or will we consume ourselves to death?

Back to Sally. I know the only thing to do in the moment is breathe, to listen and to keep centering myself. It's immediately calming. I know there are explosive feelings

that she is trying to plug up and vomit out. She tells me she is full of grief and rage. A small window opens. She begins to understand what has triggered the latest round of bingeing, and it touches on old wounds.

At the heart of all this lies a child who endured abandonment and intrusion. The pain of that was so great, Sally could only endure it by splitting off from the hurt, as well as pacifying herself with food. Food saved her life, but now it's slowly killing her.

Recovery involves peeling back the layers to reach a part of her that is grief stricken, and so hungry she could murder. She's understandably frightened by her feelings.

For many years now I have been noticing the parallels between eating problems and our collective desire to consume. (I am using "consumerism" here in the widest sense – *everything* that we take from the earth: food, energy, material objects and so on.) It's as if we are stuck in a **giant eating problem**.

We've trashed the family home and we've binged on all the reserves; oil and gas may well have peaked already, we overfish, clear-cut forests, and extract everything that can be sold for profit. Then we throw it up, undigested, into landfill sites.

Now we must rein ourselves in, go on a green diet, measure our ecological footprints, count our carbon calories, and watch carefully how much we consume. But this green diet won't work unless we also address the emotional hunger underneath the drive to consume.

**In the first part of this lecture** I will spend some time unpacking this parallel process, to help us to think on a deeper level about the dynamics that underly our giant eating problem as well as thinking about recovery.

**In the second part of the lecture** I will talk a few examples of how our current crisis comes into our work as therapists, and the questions this raises.

## Parallel Process

It was 1978 when *Fat is a Feminist Issue* was first published by Susie Orbach. The book laid out some revolutionary ideas about dieting, eating problems and body image. Let me give you a quick thumbnail sketch of some of the core issues and parallels:

a) Women who compulsively eat **are not greedy**: food is used to try and meet an emotional hunger, as well as a panacea for unbearable feelings. Getting better is about finding **compassion for needy self**.

Parallel: consuming is used to meet an emotional hunger, as well as a panacea for unbearable feelings. Underneath the veneer of our wealthy and abundant culture is a great deal of emotional hunger and isolation.

b) **Diets don't work** because most often they are about the "I" up in the head trying to control bodily appetites. They do not address emotional hunger. Throw away your scales and measuring tape, and start listening to your body for clues about when and what to eat.

Parallel: green diets won't work if they are just about trying to control our appetites for more stuff, more holidays abroad etc. What are the roots of our collective emotional hunger and what is it we are really longing for?

c) A woman's **emotional hunger stems not only from early experience** but also from the **patriarchal culture** we live in, where women are seen as objects, not subjects, and as 'less than', so their self worth is low, and therefore they feel undernourished.

Parallel: our emotional hunger stems not only from early experience but also from the way in which our culture is organised, leaving families and individuals as isolated units, disconnected from body, self, each other and the earth.

d) **Fat and thin hold meanings** within our culture, often associated with power and control. The experience of fat can feel disgusting and messy, out of control and wild, while the experience of thin feels on top of things, in control, perfect. The middle

ground is about listening to the body as nature, trusting the needs of the body, to let it find its 'right weight', rather than allowing the ego and/or culture to dictate the right weight.

Parallel: there is a tension within our culture between wild and domesticated; wild is seen as being out of control, and we have a long history of trying to tame the wild, to bring it under our control. This includes the body and psyche. Where is the middle ground? Our culture has a long history of fighting nature – what might it mean to trust it?

e)**Recovery from an eating problem** involves coming back into our bodies and making the shift from relationship with food to relationship with self and other, with inner and outer nature.

Parallel: recovery from consuming involves coming back into our bodies, and realising the earth is also our collective body; recovery is also making a shift from a relationship with 'things' to a relationship with inner and outer nature; respecting and **living according to the Natural Law; experiencing relationship with all around us as nourishing as well as challenging in growth.**

I'm not saying there is an exact parallel here by any means – the global crisis is so very complex, as the financial crisis we are witnessing illustrates – but perhaps some of these insights can go some way towards understanding the psychological aspects of our dilemmas. I have picked out a few features that I think speak to the question of what underlies our giant eating problem.

### **What are the Roots of This Giant Eating Problem?**

Many of you will have seen the series, 'Century of the Self' where Adam Curtis traces the rise of consumerism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Curtis 2002). Firstly, Curtis suggests, we have been deliberately manipulated into consuming by mass producers in pursuit of

profit. This was done by Bernays, Freud's nephew, who linked products to our deep desires through advertising; **products then become part of our identities.**

What happens, then, when we try to give up consuming? We might feel like we are less powerful or even that we are losing parts of ourselves. For example, a car is promoted as a symbol of sexual power and success. Gaining a car has become a rite of passage into adulthood in our society; giving it up can feel like a regression to adolescence, with a subsequent loss of power.

Alongside this is a fear of losing freedom and nourishment. Especially after such a gloomy summer here in the UK, many people are understandably tempted to fly off to find the sun. How do we respond to this?

Curtis also claims that **consumerism has been deliberately used as an opiate of the people.** The US government was horrified by what had been unleashed during the 1<sup>st</sup> WW, the levels of human aggression. This coincided with Freud's claims that he had unearthed primitive sexual and aggressive forces which were the remnants of our animal past.

So Curtis is saying that mass consumerism came into being as a deliberate policy of pacification, an attempt to satisfy peoples' desires, imagining this would subdue the wild animal within. If he is correct, here is the **deliberate construction of our giant eating problem** – but what's so interesting is that it was not simply the desire to make money, but the fear of a wild and uncontrollable 'animal' part of the human self, that is apparently innately aggressive, bent on sexual and oral desire.

However, the roots of this go back much further into our species early experience. Thomas Berry, Earth Scholar and Catholic Priest, suggests that after the devastating loss and suffering caused by the Black Plague in Europe, people felt **betrayed** by nature. Then, he says, the task of the spiritual person was to withdraw from the natural world, which was seen as the source of contamination, and of seduction. (Berry, 1999 P77)

This pattern is familiar to therapists. When the earth as parent is experienced as an abandoning, unreliable, and punitive parent – (the cruel side of nature, red in tooth and claw) then humans withdraw, either reaching for a transcendent God the father in the sky, or much later on, reaching for mother in matter, mater, material objects – which, like food, are felt to be more reliable. So while we take nourishment in the form of the material, we have withdrawn from the earth as great nourisher in the emotional and spiritual sense.

Going back further still, some writers (see Cashford, J and Baring, A 1993; Tarnas, R 2007) suggest that the Myth of the Fall, the story of how Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, can be read as a description of our separation from an intimate relationship with nature, in the gradual move from hunter-gathering to agriculture.

This was a move from being embedded within the web of life, as we see in the lives of indigenous cultures, to a gradual ability to manipulate the world around us with an understandable wish to have more control, to defend against drought, famine, illness, and the darker sides of nature. But again, in our bid to be separate from the darker sides of nature, we have lost our way back to the Garden, from the original source of nourishment. This leaves us in an ambivalent state, both idealises and denigrating nature, as we see, for example, throughout the Bible where nature is praised but also seen as the place of the Devil.

Freud sums up this psychological attitude of control and domination of nature in the following quote:

“The principle task of civilisation, its actual *raison d’etre*, is to defend us against nature. ....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 .....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” (Freud, 1961, P15-16)

Freud describes how we have battled *against* nature to build western civilisation, a battle that has taken place not only to protect our vulnerable selves from the terrors of nature out there, but also from the wild animal within.

Our dominant western culture has re-written this collective experience of trauma and made it into an epic battle, which we might call “The Myth of Progress” familiar to us all from our education. Suddenly we are no longer traumatised humans, but brave young heroes, battling on a journey from a primitive dark world of ignorance to a brighter world of ever-increasing knowledge, freedom and well-being. This progress was made possible by the birth of the human reason and the modern mind; it’s all about onwards and upwards (Tarnas, R 2007 P12) cutting our way out of the maternal web of life, to be separate from and worse - superior to the “mother” nature at last.

While there may be achievements to celebrate, the tragedies that have resulted from this direction we have taken are far too long to list. Some of the psychological tragedies are about living fragmented lives, living marooned as a cut off “I” in the head, in homage to left brain functioning, afraid of the dark, of the feminine, of the wild, having forgotten that we are just domesticated wild animals, every bit as instinctive, as intuitive, as sensual as our cousins.

Yet it’s precisely this wild animal part of ourselves that has become so misunderstood, so split off and projected onto wild nature, onto wild animals, and onto humans associated with the earth, all of whom our culture then assaults.

This feared ‘wild animal’ aspect of humans is well illustrated by the character of Hannibal Lecter in the film “The Silence of the Lambs”, which many of you may have seen some time ago. Yet wild animals only behave like this under extreme duress. The same could be said of the human animals too – that Hannibal Lecter is not born like this, but has become so through traumatic experience. He is the epitome of the cut off, autistic, unrelated, emotionally un-nourished white man. In other words, this is not an image of a wild animal, but of a starving man.

The poster of the film shows an image of the death's head hawkmoth over the mouth of a woman. This is an important image within the film, as each murder victim was found with the chrysalis of the moth in their throat. I think this speaks to the transformation that is possible when we can own and articulate that most murderous split off part of the self. This is so very relevant for bulimic women, who, I suggest, are trying to communicate something of their murderous rage and grief in their throwing up.

It's very easy, isn't it, to hate the dominant culture for its greed and violence. Michael Moore calls those in power "stupid white men". The beauty of a more psychological understanding is that it helps us to find some compassion for the wounded part of the persecutor. A very moving comment from the Dalai Lama, after all the persecution of the Tibetan culture:

'The most dangerous thing that could happen to the Tibetan people is that we lose our compassion for the Chinese'.

I find that if I can begin to understand the madness of our culture it helps me to return to compassion. Stepping outside our frames of reference, and seeing a view of white people from an indigenous perspective, can foster this understanding. Jeannette Armstrong of the Okanagan in USA/Canada translates what her grandparents say about the arrival of white people as follows:

"The ones down here are all dangerous, they are insane.....they are not of us (as place), they are all self-absorbed, arguing inside each of their heads....their actions have a source, they have displacement panic, they have been pulled apart from themselves as family (in a generational sense) and place (as land, us, survival)" (Armstrong, J in Roszak, T et al P319)

When we become disconnected from the earth, we lose our ground of being, our source of nourishment, it drives us mad.

When we project the wild animal self out we lose an essential part of ourselves.

When the white man projects his wild instinctual self onto black people, all the colour is taken out of the white man, he is left like a monochrome print, cut off from his colour and creativity.

When a man projects his vulnerability, intuition and emotional side onto women, he is left in a cut off autistic world, unable to relate.

When a woman projects out her wild animal self, she becomes afraid of the fur on her face, the hair and flesh on her body. She is no longer in touch with her instincts and intuition, and she resorts to food for mother love, but also for sensual nourishment.

When we idealise wilderness, we feel cut off from our own divinity and beauty, and we fly to unspoilt places in hordes, in search of peace and tranquillity, inevitably spoiling the places we visit.

The danger is that we end up with a monoculture, inside and out, cut off from the source of life itself.

**To sum up:** In long history of culture, we have gradually withdrawn from our intimate relationship with inner and outer nature to protect our vulnerabilities and fears. We end up living fragmented lives, separated from each other, as a disembodied 'I' in the head, no longer aware of ourselves as tiny cells within a whole, living system. Those at the top of the hierarchy have projected out unwanted parts of self onto those further down the hierarchy, many of whom identify with those projections, and feel themselves to be deeply unworthy (women, black people, indigenous peoples and so on). Eating problems are, then, are just one small symptom of a whole range of ways in which our system is severely out of balance. Those at the top suffer too.

What can our therapeutic experience tell us about the process of recovery? How do we find our way back to nourishment?

## RECOVERY

One of the things we know clearly from our work as therapists is that breakdown and recovery happen simultaneously, and that there is often a return of symptoms in full force when recovery is strengthening. The economic crash right now reminds us of how precarious the whole system is. I suspect we have a long way to go down. Those in power will not let go willingly.

At the same time there is an extraordinary awakening happening in our midst, especially in relation to environmental issues. Yet our media seem transfixed by the bad news, and many people are unaware of the millions of green initiatives that are appearing around the globe, like tiny lights of hope connecting up into a web of change. Just as we find in the therapy process, it is our awareness of the tiny changes happening, the healing that is possible in every session, that fosters our faith in the process of change. What a challenge it is to bear the tension of opposites at this time.

**Paul Hawken** describes this awakening as the largest movement in the world to come into being. He says:

We witness an extraordinary leaderless movement rising out of every country in the world which runs across class, religion, race This unnamed movement is the most diverse movement the world has ever seen. The very word movement is too small to describe it. No one started this world view. No one is in charge of it. There is no orthodoxy. It is global, classless, unquenchable and tireless. The shared understanding is arising spontaneously from different economic sectors, cultures, regions and corporates. It is growing and spreading worldwide with no exception.

He adds: A male vertebrate is not in charge.

This is an extract from a speech made by Paul Hawken at the Bioneers conference in California, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1fiubmOqH4>

Similarly, in the UK, an extraordinary grass roots movement is emerging. The **Transition Movement**, which was started just 3 years ago in Totnes by Rob Hopkins,

has now spread like wildfire to 100 towns, while hundreds of towns, cities, islands, are in the mulling stage. Look at the google map to see how this movement is spreading worldwide. [www.transitiontowns.org](http://www.transitiontowns.org). Even Ambridge is getting there.

Of the many important messages within this movement, **local resilience** seems particularly useful, especially in the light of the current financial crash. If we get on with visioning and planning for a future that is possible, one step at a time, we can achieve that resilience. It also seems to me that the therapy community has a great deal to offer in terms of psychological resilience.

The fact that these movements are spreading so fast is a very hopeful sign that people want change, that they are ready and willing to make changes, to take the power into their own hands as whole communities. This counters the very negative view of human nature that abounds right now – “We’re a bad lot – the earth will be a better place without us”. While Bush may still be alive and well, I think Frodo is alive and well too.

Btw, the Transition Handbook was the 5<sup>th</sup> most popular book amongst MPs in their summer holiday reading – a testament to grass roots movements seeping upwards.

### **Hope and Despair**

As I’m writing this, I’m aware of how difficult it is to maintain the tension between hope and despair. I’ve just mentioned two movements which are very inspiring, and yet into my e-mail box popped this message from someone who is very in touch with the hopeful changes, but she says:

The last week or two hasn't been plain sailing. I find myself in a position of being a leader in environmental activities, with the apparent need to bang a gong and say 'wake up! join me!!' when all I've really wanted to do at times this last week was fall to my knees and sob with the scale and apparent futility of our mission.

When we look reality in the face the truth is that no matter how well the Transition Movement does, we have no guarantee what the outcome of our crisis will be. We

may survive as a species, we may not. We have to live with not knowing. In therapy there are no guarantees either. So the question arises, what is our mission? If the mission is to “save the planet” we may indeed feel, at times, that our mission is futile.

But if our intention is more aligned with the therapeutic intention of healing, then perhaps a different picture emerges. Whereas saving implies a mission that will succeed or fail, healing can happen right to the end of life in all of our relationships, human and more. Healing involves all parties, heroes and victims alike. And, most importantly, therapists know that the journey *through* despair is part of the process of recovery, and that our capacity to do this is intimately linked to our capacity to act.

So when my client says, ‘**Oh We’re completely fucked, I may as well carry on bingeing while the ship goes down**’ I think she is telling me she cannot find a way to think through what is going on. It’s too hard to feel, too hard to think about. I suspect a great many people are secretly carrying this, in which case their motivation to act is zero.

I notice many clients report something similar just before a binge, and it’s to do with reaching a point of complete stuckness. There’s an argument going on inside, which is old and seemingly un-resolvable, two parts of themselves at war. There is *intense* build up of frustration. Suddenly, it’s as if a switch goes off, and the binge starts and she says to herself, “Oh fuck it”. This a wipe out of thinking, as well as a longing to go beyond the small self, through an orgy of sensual pleasure, into oneness - a longing to fuck, to bring those warring parts of ourselves together in a meaningful way.

Perhaps this happens within all of us, in little ways, in relation to the choices we make. “I want to fly abroad for a summer holiday, the weather has been grim this summer. I know I shouldn’t fly, I really should go overland, but that’s much more expensive and takes forever.....I haven’t got the time.....Oh fuck it. I’ll take the cheap flight”.

What is the middle ground here? Can we get these two sides of ourselves together to discuss this matter? There are no right answers. What happens when we tease the arguments out a bit?

- One common argument is that we are simply pissing in the wind to give up flying individually. The only route to change is policy change.
- Another argument is that in this transition time, when regulations have not yet come into force to *make* people live within their carbon footprints, it's OK to fly if it's *for* the benefit of the planet, rather than personal gain.
- A third argument is that if we are serious about wanting change, we must embody that change in our lives now.

I'm quite persuaded by the third argument – that if I want change to happen, I need to find a way of “**Being the Change I Want to See**”. The challenge is how we might begin to think in a different way. Rather than ‘How much will this cost me?’ changes into ‘How much will my decision cost the earth?’ Ultimately if something costs the earth then it will end up costing me too. Other forms of travel are possible, but they just take time. So then we have to think differently about time. And time costs. The bottom line is that someone always pays. There is always a sacrifice, as well as rewards.

So too with bingeing. There is always a cost. Either I go for the quick fix sensual pleasure which blocks my thinking, but puts on weight. Or I go for the long term more challenging option of staying with my feelings, and the warring sides of me, which means living with extreme tension at times. This brings insights and great rewards but it takes time.

So is this the therapeutic task for us in this time of transition – not to be on a strict green diet in the superego sense - but to be disciplined in bringing our attention to relationship in the widest sense possible? I'm sure many of you are only too familiar with this daily awareness exercise of listening to the larger body of which we are part. What am I buying now, where has this chicken grown up, how has it been killed, where has this product travelled from, has anyone or anything been damaged it's making? Does it *feel* OK to buy this?

The way in which our society is structured makes it very easy for us to disconnect. The psychotherapy movement has been, and still is, a radical influence on our

capacity to reconnect, to express our feelings, to develop an emotional literacy. We can use these skills to extend our emotional literacy into eco-literacy. But what of a reconnection with nature in a much deeper sense?

### **Borderland Realities**

Jerome Bernstein, in his book, 'Living in the Borderland' suggests that psyche, or the larger living system that we all inhabit, is naturally rebalancing itself. We can see this through the dreams that people are bringing into therapy, and the experiences that some people describe. Many people, he suggests, are becoming more sensitive to animals, plants, rocks, and other life forms, in the same way that we can pick up feelings from other humans when we become more emotionally connected. Having had a close relationship with Navaho peoples for a good 30 years, he knows that such sensitivities are quite natural amongst indigenous peoples, and that in our western retreat from nature, we have lost this capacity to feel with other forms of life.

For example, a woman described being traumatised by the 'sleeping jar' at school. The teacher encouraged pupils to bring in live 'specimens' which were put in the jar which had an ether soaked rag at the bottom. She could hear the bugs dying; "most made gasping and moaning sounds while the butterflies screamed....a high pitched staccato sound". It was obvious to her that no-one else could hear the sounds, but it so traumatised her that she ran to the toilets and put the taps full on to drown out the noises. She was told by her parents to 'get over it' and soon afterwards she began developing respiratory problems and eventually pneumonia, during which time she had a powerful out of body experience of a deeply spiritual nature. She survived to tell the tale, but after this she lost her sensitivities to the world beyond humans until later in life when she returned to the trauma. (Bernstein, J P92)

I suggest that this capacity to connect to the feelings of all others around is available to us all, but it is an old reptilian sense that has become withered in our western culture. For whatever reasons, some people remain more deeply connected than others. It is also possible that many people fear admitting to these kinds of experiences

for fear of being pathologised by society, as well as by therapists. The burning of witches is still recent in our collective memory.

If Jerome Bernstein is right, and these experiences are on the increase, I wonder whether people here are hearing these kinds of tales, and what this tells us about the times we are living in, and our role as therapists?

### **Implications for Therapy**

So this brings me onto my last section, what are the implications of this for our work as therapists? In his book *Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram describes the shaman's role :

By his constant rituals, trances, ecstasies, and "journeys," (the shaman) ensures that the relation between human society and the larger society of beings is balanced and reciprocal, and that the village never takes more from the living land than it returns to it – not just materially but with prayers, propitiations, and praise.[... ] **The medicine person's primary allegiance, then, is not to the human community, but to the earthly web of relations in which that community is embedded.** (Abram, D p7)

In so many ways psychotherapy is supporting the paradigm shift – into emotional reconnection, into exploring and taking back our projections, and the difficult and lengthy task of recovering from trauma. If therapy is successful, it reconnects and re-engages us with life, so that we are more in touch with the pain and joy of our world. This empowers us to act.

But psychotherapy has also grown up within western culture. It is about *human* relationships, and – depending on which school of thinking you come from – it's about *inner world* issues. Many of my colleagues say that their clients do not talk about ecological issues, and when they do, it's often understood in human, inner world terms.

### Therapy Outdoors....in touch with nature out there

In the emerging world of ecopsychology (see Roszak et al), some therapists are working outdoors in order to bring our relationships with the rest of life right into the session. Yet others, including myself, are facilitating wilderness group work, where people can reconnect on a much deeper level, and become more aware of the realities that Jerome describes in *Living in the Borderland*. Then we begin to become aware of the mirroring that nature offers, as well as the synchronicities that come to life when we pay attention out there.

I remember a very moving moment in a session when my client was unable to speak for some time. I could tell she was feeling distressed and cut-off, and I had tried several times to build a bridge with words, but the gap between us remained. In one moment we both glanced down to see the tiniest of spiders weaving a web between our arms. We then grinned at each other, speechless with wonder. A deep connection was made between us without the need for words. In following sessions we spoke of how the spider's web was an affirmation about trusting the connecting processes of life in that most difficult moment.

However, most therapists work in rooms in urban surroundings. I do notice that things in my practice are shifting, people seem keen to see the echoes between the bigger picture and inner worlds. Here is a brief example.

#### **Clare: 'It's *Your Green Agenda*'**

Clare brings a dream: she is standing in the middle of lush rainforest as termites destroy the trees. Finally, she is left alone, all the forest has been consumed and its inhabitants are extinct.

We spend most of the session following Clare's associations. She starts by making a link between the consuming of the trees and her own eating problem. The feeling of emptiness in the dream reminds her of her experiences of abandonment in childhood.

On an internal level the dream describes an apocalyptic wipe out, you might say, where everything in the world has been consumed.

I was also aware of my association to her dream: it brought to my mind the clear-cutting of rainforests and the collective apocalyptic wipe-out we are facing. But Clare made no mention of this and I was unsure whether to raise it.

Since I had worked with Clare for some years, and she had talked on many occasions about various political matters, I eventually decided to share my thoughts. But she responded by telling me that I was bringing my green agenda into the room. I felt angry, and, in my swirl of intense feeling reactions, I could not find a satisfactory response and we didn't return to the issue.

This was some years ago now, before climate change had hit the headlines. With hindsight, I have some thoughts about this interchange which might have helped to open things up.

I now wonder whether voicing my association to Clare's dream had made her feel accused by me of some environmental crime. As she recovered from her eating problem, and she became more successful in her work, she began to fly abroad for every holiday. Was she replacing one form of bingeing with another? Perhaps she felt guilty about this? What if I had made the following comment:

"I wonder if your dream is saying something about our collective desire to consume as if there was no tomorrow?" I am acknowledging, here, that we are all caught in something together, which challenges us all to think about our hungers. We are all guilty. Perhaps this might have been easier for Clare to digest?

The meaning within Clare's dream is multi-layered; it speaks to her eating problem and her inner world, as well as to our collective problem with consuming. Each process mirrors and gives insight to the other, potentially healing to self and world at the same time.

Psychotherapy has become so human-centred, it has forgotten, it seems, that nature shapes our development, alongside and with human relationship. The land we were born into shapes our psyche, many of us form a relationship with a particular element,

such as water or stone; research shows that most peak experiences that people have are in nature; not to mention the importance of childhood relationships with animals, plants, place and so on.

One of my clients, a woman with a painful history of abuse, had a very strong attachment to the willow tree in the garden. This helped her survive. Trauma with animals, with plants, with the land, so often gets missed in the therapy relationship, or interpreted as a substitute for a human relationship.

Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess suggests that the part of ourselves that knows we are part of a greater living whole, a cell within a larger living body, is called the Ecological Self. It is this ecological self through which we are able to identify with other beings, and – like the girl who could hear the screams of the dying butterflies – it is this part of us which can feel the pain or joy of others. Returning, again, to the Okanagan tribe for a vision of a self that is interconnected with the web of life, she says:

“We survive within our skin inside the rest of our vast selves....Okanagans teach that our flesh, blood and bones, are Earth-body; in all cycles in which the earth moves, so does our body..... Our word for body literally means ‘the land-dreaming capacity’ ”. ....The Okanagan teaches that emotion or feeling is the capacity whereby community and land intersect in our beings and become part of us. This bond or link is a priority for our individual wholeness or well-being.”  
(Armstrong, J in Roszak et al, 1996, 320-1)

This is such a brief sketch of an area that is worthy of much greater discussion.

### **Some Final Thoughts.**

We are in the midst of an extraordinary process of transformation; stuckness, defeat and the addictive numbing of despair coexist with a myriad of awakenings, of callings to speak out, of new visions and energies and creative possibilities arising all around the planet.

I have been trying to describe the journey towards sustainable living as a therapeutic journey, every bit as rich and deep as the personal therapy journeys we venture on; that in fact our personal and collective journeys mirror and inform each other, such that ultimately we find that they are totally intertwined as we can see in Clare's story.

The therapy community has a particular piece to offer at this time of crisis. We are aware of the wounding that drives us all to consume, and how we might find our way out of this viscous circle. We know about the insight, creativity and deep satisfaction that comes from sitting with tension between the different sides of ourselves, and each other. We know about simply being, about silence, and about listening, and the riches to be found within darkness. This is crucial wisdom as we attempt to heal our relationships with ourselves, each other and with the earth community – land, creatures, elements, and the rest of life.

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