

Beyond the Indoor Mind....

The culture of psycho-dynamic practice in the West tends to come from an indoor, inward-focussed perspective. The practitioner's space is often bounded by walls, a closed door, and 'owned' by the practitioner or is otherwise in a professional realm.

The impact of this is that such a space can provide a 'sanitization' - a predictability of space and time, and in addition to conventions such as confidentiality and 'protection', support the notion of a 'safe' space. The roles of practitioner and client are human-centred only, well-defined, with rules of engagement based upon control and predictability; a clear frame, a particularly held and still space which is the default.

In this frame of reference intervention is essentially about human to human concerns at the exclusion of any other dynamic. The focus of intervention is 'inwards', illuminating the interior, the manner in which it has been created, and how it manifests between us as people.

The resultant theories and practices are based on us as 'indoor animals', because they tend only to engage with these human elements and are mostly conducted indoors. *'Indoors and inside-us' are a strongly bonded couple.* To paraphrase Hillman the 'cut' is made at the therapy/classroom door. The outdoor elements of our story are firmly kept out, seemingly not relevant.

All of this supports the development of an 'indoor mind'. It is a Cartesian mind set, entirely suited and adapted to its indoor habitat. But it is important for us as practitioners to be aware of its dominant presence before we move to considering the outside domain. The indoor mind is a powerful feature in how we imagine what practice can look like - so whilst we may want to critique it, the indoor mind also is due respect.

As more and more practitioners have entered the field of working outdoors, it is clear that there are as many different ways of working outside as there for working inside. However, many of these interventions are simply straight translations of the indoors out - in these outdoor practices the culture of the 'indoors & the inside-us' lives on.

'These creatures are not really of the outdoor world, born of the distinct indoor environments in which our practices have evolved in over time' (Marshall, in press)

Working from this indoor standpoint outside, only certain kinds of sensibilities, thinking, responding, and imaginings are possible, and we miss something vital. There is also an element of dissociation from the nature of mind itself - (see Siegel - Mind doesn't stop at the boundaries of the skin) which many would say includes the wider natural world of which we are a part. Paul Shepard, one of the foundational writers, re-frames the function of the fragile skin by referring to 'the self with a permeable boundary... constantly drawing on and influencing its surroundings, whose skin and behaviour are soft zones

contacting the world instead of excluding it... Ecological thinking registers a kind of vision across boundaries.' (in Shepard & McKinley, 1969, p.2)

'...our present ego-feeling is only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive, indeed all-embracing, feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond with the ego and the world about it' (Freud)

To summarise, an indoor mind:

- World is perceived from a static position
- Located within human world
- 'inside-of-us', the cut is made at the skin
- Looking in
- The mind is of the human world only, (and therefore it is an incomplete framework)

Toward an Outdoor Mind

Practicing from an ecological perspective we incorporate the outdoor place as the *ground* for the work in which we then work from, and through, this habitat. We begin to grow an associated mind. One that arises from a particular place, and one that potentially develops a very different kind of practice.

When this ground *informs* my movement, thinking, and feeling I begin to ask:

I move from this place

I think from this place

I feel from this place

I am part of all of this

All of this is me

Then I am *of* this place

So, who then is the *I* that emerges?

Other questions that might be asked include:

- What happens when your's and your clients' minds are infused with this place?
- What changes?
- What becomes possible?
- What does this mean for the 'work'?

And importantly;

- **Who is the *subject* of this work?**
- **What *is* the work?**

Generally, the focus has broadened from exclusively centring on human interiors and social interactions, to include 'exteriors' – elements of the natural world. Although the notion of interior and exterior is to some extent an echo from an indoor mind. An outdoor focus includes:

- World is perceived from movement rather than stasis
- Located in the more-than-human world
- 'Outside-of-us', there is no cut
- Looking out
- The mind is of the earth, and more therefore complete.

Some key features

- **Relational expansivity**

The therapeutic relationship now embraces the natural world.

All of what is here *is* the therapeutic relationship

Me, you, them and this.

- **Fluidity of inner and outer**

A different kind of space/place opens up inside of me and you

A more expansive place – inwardly-opening out

I find more of me out here/in there

A 'changingness' (Rogers)

- **Movement**

Change is happening though moving and interacting – prioritising experience over the verbal – moving & living-together-out-in-the-world

The work is embodied not simply though a focus on the human body, but through a lens of the 'body-in-movement-in-a-changing-environment' (Reeve 2011).

Forms of Vitality (Stern) are an important language for all elements of the work, dynamically shaping the minds of human participants.

- **Embodied psycho-spatial perception**

Space as identity – our relationship with space and our 'use' of it reflects who we are
Psycho-geography

- **Working with different axes (not the chopping kind!)**

Horizontal/vertical

Working with time and space simultaneously – they map onto one another in a felt sense

Working in, through, and with the place

- **The enrichment of the imaginal space**

Reverie – the cultivation of a dreaming space working with the unconscious

Dissociation – outdoors is a place to escape to in the management of trauma (Marshall in press)

Working outside can involve an engagement with the broader, deeper mythology of landscape. This is based on the principle that all land - every place - is storied. People have lived on it, travelled and worked on it, non-human activity has had its role in shaping

it and the climate and geology also creates that particular space. To work outdoors is to be subject to that storied history

Working with an embodied metaphorical process – elements of me located in the landscape

- **The cultivation of peripheral attention**

All of what is happening is potentially relevant to the human work in hand, but also to the place the work is taking place in. This latter aspect matters.

Multi-layered process-lens

- **The extended sensory experience**

The outdoor mind is informed by, expanded by and provoked by a heightened sensory awareness. The sense of self is expanded through the diversity and intensity of sensory arousal created by working outside.

- **Regulatory experience**

Nature as systemic regulator

Management of relational intensity - nature as relational buffer

- **Mind as emergent process**

Working from the less known

Co-creative process – with the natural world as part 'co'

Ecological agency

A re-framing of physics is required in ecological work. Rather than being understood primarily as an internal force of life energy within the individual person, physis was originally conceived as the invisible life force which makes itself manifest through natural expression. This includes individual people, but it is not 'theirs' as such, but an interconnecting energetic quality across all animate material (and in some cultures, includes the inanimate).

Implications

We now have contact with more of me, you, them and this. What do we have to consider?

Ethics of:

- reception
- participation
- commitment in relationship
- belonging
- stewardship

'When we are awakened participants within the processes of the network, we can start to hear what is coherent, what is broken, what is beautiful, what is good. This understanding emerges from a sustained incarnate relationship, becomes manifest in a mature sense of

ecological aesthetics, and gives rise to ethical discernments that emerge from life's network.' (Haskell 2018)

A new frame for a new practice

- The frame is now portable, fluid and emergent
- We still need to think about boundaries, holding, and containment depending on the practice. This is the 'hygiene' of the work.
- The frame is held within the persons of both the practitioner, the client and the place they are working in

Practitioners personal ecological practice is an important part of the work