
REFLECTIONS ON THE AHPP CONFERENCE

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by

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*'And when we were children, staying at the Archduke's
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went
In the mountains, there you feel free.
I read, much of the night, and go South in winter'.*

*from the Wasteland
T.S. Eliot*

I am not sure why I have chosen these words and images as a starting point from which to reflect on the Conference. Intuition guided me and, as I begin to write, reason will no doubt listen and make the connections more clear. It is something to do with November and leaf-fall - a descent which has that intoxicating mixture of excitement and fear, and shock at the unexpected gentleness of the landing. And this November conference began in true seasonal form with the whirl of words blown about in a high wind to form constructs that would not stay still, but danced in everchanging patterns depending upon who was blowing and from where.

No - I'm **not** sending it up. I was as fascinated as I am when I watch a flock of birds getting themselves sorted out in mid-air before a migratory flight. (Going south in winter?) And now I begin to understand my references. Here are

two images - leaves and birds, both visualised in the element of AIR: both destined to descent to EARTH, but in different places and in different ways. And here, of course is the interface between my view of Traditional and Humanistic Psychology, for my image of the birds is quite definitely linked with Patrick Casement and his paper - 'Unconscious Hope'; and my image of falling leaves in November very definitely linked with a here and now reality of descent into winter - a time of change, of decay, of the breaking down of Structures that will re-vitalise the earth, to nourish the next growth cycle. And I now see very clearly why many of us at the conference seemed to have such difficulty in focusing our attention on that interface. If you focus your attention upon both images, you will of course experience an ocular split - as the birds fly south and the leaves fall to the ground. And that is exactly what happened. Patrick Casement delivered his lecture and

then flew off! There was no longer any interface to consider, other than a memory of the constructs presented during the aerobic display.

Now, if I pursue this image, I also begin to understand why I hung on like a terrier to the theme that was inevitably woven into the fabric of 'Unconscious Hope'. It was, of course, the perennial chestnut (autumnal, again!) of the issue that haunts Traditional Psychology like a spectre of the night - to touch or not to touch. (To read, to speak . . . 'I read, much of the night!'). I hung on because the aerial display was too attractive and too convincing from an analytic point of view; well illustrated by case history. A perfectly argued case of the necessity to distinguish between wants and needs and arrive at a clear analysis of repressed traumatic experience. And my 'terrier' wanted to track the quarry to ground and ask - 'And at what point did these insights ground themselves in the body, to facilitate real change? Or was the 'touch-down' postponed until some distant shore was reached? But there was not time to ask these questions, nor to discuss developmental themes of holding and grounding the infant's excitation by way of a well-grounded carer. The issues at the interface seemed to be - not WHETHER to hold, but WHEN and WHERE and how to make contact. There must have been many other issues - But the focus of attention shifted from Interface between two frontiers to a consideration of other boundaries and connections as we continued, like the leaves, to drift or swirl between Workshops, meals, walks, home-groups and circle dancing.

At the plenary Session there was the usual Humanistic raking up of processes - a scrutiny of the harvest and a pondering as to which 'heaps' should be composted for next year's conference and which could be burnt. Some participants grumbled that they had lost sight of the Themes altogether, but perhaps it was difficult to make connections in this season of mists. In unbounded air the mind can transform water into wine, but wine is heavy stuff! It was in the simplest circle dance that I understood more deeply that only by defining boundaries can connections be made. Right foot steps to the right, left foot moves behind (we review the past . . . and move on. It is behind us). Right foot to the side, left foot passes in front (we look to the future . . . it has not yet come to pass and will depend upon . . .). Right foot moves to the side, left foot stays planted and we sway between right and left, between what has been and what will be, in the ever present now. Arms reach out to touch and support ourselves and our neighbours, the music flows from ear to feet and the candle in the centre of the circle lights up the room.

*Marie, Marie . . . Hold on tight . . .
It is not far to fall.
Such a short distance
Between head and feet
Between then and now
Between Fall and Spring.*

And with such a feast of colour, shape, texture, light and shade, jostle and drift. This autumn conference will keep me going all winter, even if I simply continue to marvel at how extraordinary it is to be ordinary and human.