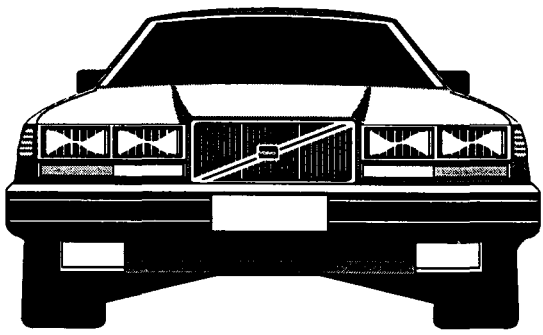
enter and, with open arms, they say, 'Welcome. Well, what vision have you brought to us, what piece of guidance have you received for the immaculate furtherance of our task here? We await the next step with excitement and we honour you in your part'.

Imagine this . . . in every place where woman is: in the home, the organisation, the hospital, this gift is possible, to connect with the divine source every month between menarche and menopause — from when the role enriches further and to share with our community of co-workers the gift we have received, the droplet of knowledge however great or seemingly insignificant; and for every woman, that knowledge to be honoured, valued and used in the world. Well, the opportunities for divine development are boundless.

Imagine this. . . everything we need, we are given. Sometimes my heart aches for how easily we forgot. But we are remembering . . .

Conversations with Cars

Guy Dargert



There is a movement in America which I believe is making some inroads into UK life. Anorexic poodles, hysterical tabbies, depressed bloodhounds (who could tell?) in Hollywood and New York were probably the first to benefit by psychotherapeutic attentions. This is the stuff of late night chat shows and an object of a certain amount of popular amusement and derision. It is also something which attracts dollars and pounds sterling from certain animal owners (anorexic? depressed? hysterical?). Certainly the popular media would be quick enough to imply that it is the owners who are in need of the therapy.

Maybe. But then what really is the difference between a dog with an 'anger problem' and its owner? I know of a good Christian lady who brought her normally well-behaved labrador to work only to find to her horror that one of its first acts was to shit under the vicar's desk. He exercised good Christian restraint and forgiveness. Perhaps it was only the dog who

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knew how to get his shit out. Certainly in my own family of growing up it was our lucky dog who got all the cuddling and fondling and delighted us all with his naughty antics while we did our non-tactile best to be well-behaved.

There is research which demonstrates the soothing and beneficial effects pet ownership can have on owners and I think evidence to show that pets can display the neuroses of their owners. Pets, and their owners it would seem, become a part of the same psychic pool. So maybe the family pets belong there in the family therapy session. If the cat's neurosis is keeping the family together (or apart), maybe there's some point to that.

Perhaps this stuff isn't at all surprising. We all interact and effect one another's behaviours so why should animals not be included? But what if the normally reliable family Volkswagen decides to blow a tyre on the way to mother's for Christmas dinner (with all the mixed emotions that might be around). Is it 'just coincidence'? We're late. Mother is upset. Everyone has been waiting. Dinner is cold. We're embarrassed. Maybe annoyance and irritation are not so far away on the day of 'good will'. Is the car out there in the driveway feeling rather smug and pleased with itself for having put the cat amongst the pigeons? Surely that is anthropomorphism of the most outlandish and outrageous kind. How could a collection of mechanical metallic and plastic bits possibly feel anything?

But then again how can a collection of protoplasm — bones and sinews — possibly feel anything either. I have been told in all seriousness that babies 'don't feel anything'. They can't because their nerves are not yet equipped to relay messages to the brain (there's no myelin coating) so it doesn't really matter if we circumcise them or yank them about with forceps to deliver them. They simply don't feel. Hopefully this is a shocking notion to everyone involved in humanistic psychology.

And if babies 'have no feelings' then certainly those little chicks on the conveyor belts of the factory farms or the cattle queuing up for the stun gun in the abattoir don't feel anything. Much less does a tree feel the winter coming on when it loses its leaves. It is simply reacting to the number of hours of daylight. A bit like a machine perhaps. And of course a machine can't possibly feel anything and has no soul. Do we really know what sentience is? How it works? If it's not about nerves and myelin then what is it about?

When we get into a car we get into a kind of extension of our own bodies. We have to have a sense of our new size and shape in order to back into that parking space without bumping into anything. We have to have a sense of the power available to us if we want to overtake the driver ahead and be back in lane before the distant oncoming lorry arrives. If we can't get a sense of timing and spacing in an automobile then my guess is that we're probably not much good at it in other areas of our lives either. The car can give us feedback. It can be our teacher.

If there is an analogy between car and body it goes at least a stage further. Cars like ourselves are composed of internal components or 'organs' that have specific functions. Head lights, fog lamps, windscreens, windscreen wipers and washers,

and mirrors are there specifically to help us see where we are going (or where we have come from). They clear our muddied vision and help us find our way through the fog or the darkness. If we can't see where we're going, in the car as in life, we'd better slow down. If things break down we need to stop and get them fixed before we travel on.

Some alternative health practices recognise that our physical symptoms can be a metaphor for our approach to life. Short-sightedness, for example, may extend beyond the strictly physical level to that of our attitude toward life. In some way our attitudes or our 'point of view' may also be short-sighted. We might be avoiding looking at something painful or taboo. Many people who are prescribed glasses are able to identify the year of prescription as also a year of particular psychological trauma. From the time of Freud's research on conversion hysteria and George Groddeck's early work on psychosomatics, psychotherapy has acknowledged the symbolic aspect of the physical body's complaints. I am suggesting that the problems of our intimate machinery, especially the car because of our necessary close identification with it, can also fulfil this purpose.

Is it too much to suggest that 'speedy' people speed or that people who find it hard to make commitments 'ride the clutch' and 'refuse to engage' in their cars as in their lives, or that nervous and tenuous types tend to do a lot of braking. Is it not just possible that the companion cars of these people might be more prone to breaking down according to how their drivers have driven them? If this seems plausible then it seems to me that we are talking on a similar level to the 'mechanics' of the body. The smoker wears out her lungs, the drinker wears out his liver and the concert pianist develops arthritic fingers just from sheer wear and tear.

But maybe there is also a more subtle level that isn't so amenable to a causal explanation. Once when I had taken on too much work and had 'driven' myself to near exhaustion I decided to go out and see a favourite musician in concert. I gave a lift to a couple of friends in my car. After the concert the little red battery light on the dashboard came on. I dropped my friends off at their homes and continued on my journey of about three miles as the headlights grew dimmer and dimmer. Eventually the dashboard lights faded away and even the little red warning light disappeared too. I arrived home, reversed into a parking place and the engine died before I had time to switch it off. The timing was perfect and exquisite. Sixty seconds sooner and I'd have been on a main road on double yellow lines. I'd have needed to call out the RAC and had a wait and a hassle. As it was I could leave it all until morning and have a good and badly needed lie-in before phoning in late for work.

The symbolism of exhausted batteries was obvious enough and the timing of the breakdown certainly seemed to call for more of a response than simply dismissing it as a happy but essentially meaningless coincidence. However there seems to me no easy causality about this example.

There is a lovely section near the start of Laing's essay, 'Politics of Experience', where he challenges the whole notion of the psyche being 'inside our heads'. Our experience is not inside us. It is out there

where we find it. If we imagine a car we don't imagine it as being inside our heads. We imagine it out there in the real world where we find it. And if we find an object out there in the real world we can't experience it without imagining it too. We can't experience what we can't imagine. The inside/outside metaphor is just that — a metaphor. Our involvement with the world around us is much more intimate than we customarily suppose.

We could go along for a moment with the notion that our experience or the psyche is not necessarily 'located' in the brain, or in the body, or anywhere in particular, because it is not a physical thing and therefore doesn't need a location. It is perhaps more like a state or a principle. Culturally we would have no difficulty in associating this principle with the brain. Many body psychotherapists work with the principle that the body can carry memory. The muscles themselves hold and recall experience. Systemic psychotherapy recognises how one family member can hold the psychological issue for other members. The 'cure' can lie in 'treating' someone other than the presenting patient or symptom carrier.

These are more or less the limits of mainstream psychotherapy. Jung is an exception. He wrote of a client who saw him anonymously and confessed to a murder. Her world was full of plants that withered and horses that bolted from her. Jung's autobiography too is full of examples of psychokinesis — physical events that occur in association with psychological issues. He writes of doorbells that ring without being pushed, a knife that explodes inside a locked drawer and so on. This stuff is impressive because it is unusual. It is weird and spooky. It is not necessarily all that unusual however. It seems most people can tell such tales of the 'unexplained' occurring at some point in their lives.

What does it take for us to pay attention to the messages and symbolism of the physical world? It seems as if we are as a culture prone to dismiss the physical world as dead. We have a base sort of materialism that preoccupies itself with the physical world but does not really love or appreciate it, much less 'listen' to it. Perhaps until the ecology movement the very idea of listening to the environment was ludicrous to most people. If we are forced into facing what intrudes itself into our awareness as meaningful coincidence we are prone to write things off with physical and causal explanations. These can be rather far-fetched or facile so long as they do the job of denial. Alternatively we can lapse into a primitive superstitiousness slipping into a twilight zone of ouija boards and ghost stories. Surely what we are really dealing with is a denied part of our experience. It is perhaps a bit like an angry person who goes around all clenched and blue, denying anger, until s/he fires off like a pistol and is overwhelmed by what s/he didn't feel. We need a middle ground where we can relate, respond and 'converse' with our environment.

I would suggest that the physical world is as articulate as we are observant. There are at least two analogies here. It is like the experience of 'befriending' the unconscious which takes place in psychotherapy. We learn to relate to our dreams, our physical symptoms and so on. The second analogy is more like befriend-

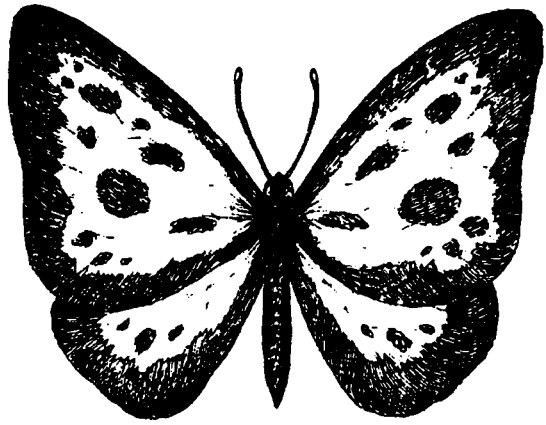
ing our friends, our animals and plants. They may reflect us and our involvement and impact on them but they also have lives of their own and speak of themselves. Knowing what is to do with us and what is to do with them is part of what relating is all about. Psychotherapy might help you to 'understand' a broken clutch cable but it would take a mechanic to fix it.

I would suggest that relatedness takes place in every aspect of our environment but that if we want to learn to 'converse' it is easiest to do it with what we know best. Intimate and complex machinery like cars and computers may in a sense be regarded as extensions of our bodies and minds. We need a certain amount of personal identification with them to operate them effectively. In a modern urban environment this is perhaps for many people the point of greatest engagement and overlap with the mineral world and as such maybe holds some real potential for learning and discovery.

My Father's Death at Home

Pamela Openshaw

Part of this article is a journal entry I made during the time I spent with my father on his 'last journey', as we came to call his transition from life into death. I want first to explain my own attitude to death.



SURBALA MORGAN

Near-Death Experience at Birth

Firstly, I have no fear of it; this happened because of a near-death experience I had in May 1967, after the birth of my first child: a truly wondrous experience whereby I simply left my body on the labour-bed and travelled towards a high-spot on the wall near the ceiling. I was aware that I was looking down on my body; I was also sitting or floating on the labour-ward clock. Then suddenly there was a shaft or tunnel of brilliant indescribable light. I went towards this light, this love. It was blissful — no pain, no fear, just light. A whoosh-

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