

THEME INTRODUCTION

Theme symposium: ecopsychology (part 2)

Nick Totton

Guest Editor



This completes a special feature which began in the summer 2014 issue of *Self & Society*. Through a happy misunderstanding of available space, I assembled much more material than one issue could hold. Creatively, the editors invited me to spread it over two issues, with a fortunate by-product: not everyone works at the same speed, and because of this and because of life circumstances that always intervene, some authors were struggling to meet the deadline – which I was able to extend by most of a year! Also, other people had slipped my mind, or I had not yet encountered their work; I was able to include them. An organic process was enabled to take place.

Most of what I might say, I already said in introducing the first tranche (see Totton, 2014), and you should look out for that issue if you haven't already seen it – not for my few words but for the excellent articles that follow. And here, too, it is the articles that matter. These four pieces, together with the earlier six, represent, I think, a modality moving towards maturity, developing a history, a body of knowledge, an array of techniques and processes and a range of theoretical models.

It is also developing – probably equally important for maturity – a set of ongoing arguments and controversies, of approaches which clash and compete, as well as co-existing and co-operating. In any functioning ecosystem, blood, or other fluids, will be shed; the ecopsychology community is no exception. Not that you will notice overt conflict in what follows, but the viewpoints taken *are* diverse, and in fact at points incompatible; in my view this is positive.

As it happens, one initiative features very prominently in what follows: the Natural Change Project. Developed by David Key and Margaret Kerr, this is an innovative approach to catalysing environmental and ecosystemic awareness in a group of individuals 'chosen for their capacity to influence cultural and professional networks in Scottish society'. The project takes groups out into a wild environment and gives them the opportunity to have profound experiences there, facilitating a shift in participants' sense of self.

The work has been described elsewhere; David Key now offers an original and rich theoretical model to describe the process of change in programme participants, using the image of the Triskele or triple spiral. His article is fortuitously supported by a conversation between Key and Adrian Harris which forms the second article in the symposium; when I invited Adrian to contribute I didn't know he would submit an interview with Dave, and so far as I am aware he didn't know Dave's article would be appearing. I think the combination of the two pieces works very well.

Paul Maiteny is something of a pioneer of ecopsychology in the UK. In fact, when he began working in the field he didn't know there *was* a discipline with that name. Paul's article argues that key elements of ecopsychology are already present in the wisdom traditions of both Western and Eastern cultures, and that we can and should look there for guidance on how to proceed.

Finally, Allison Priestman's article is in some ways hard for me to discuss; we are long-term collaborators in training and in writing, and our work runs side by side. In this piece, Allison draws strongly on what I have written in the field, but equally what I have written emerged from the work we have done together over the last decade. What Allison contributes in particular to the concept of Wild Therapy is an emphasis on altered or trance states as a way to access Wild Mind.

Four very different pieces, then – in all, 10 very different pieces; and as you read them you will notice points both of agreement and of conflict. I have the satisfying feeling that, as usual, the whole is more than the sum of the parts; like the image I have used elsewhere – an orchestra without a conductor, where wholeness happens of its own accord.

Notes on contributor

Nick Totton is a therapist and trainer with over 30 years' experience, who practises and teaches Embodied-Relational Therapy (www.erthworks.co.uk) and Wild Therapy (www.wildtherapy.org.uk). Nick has written several books, including *Wild Therapy: Undomesticating Inner and Outer Worlds*; *Not a Tame Lion: Writings on Therapy in its Social and Political Context*; and *Press when Illuminated: New and Selected Poems*. He lives in Cornwall with his partner and grows vegetables. <http://www.nicktotton.net>.

Reference

Totton, N. (2014). Guest introduction. *Self & Society: International Journal for Humanistic Psychology*, 41(4), 6.