

# Autonomy, mutualistic relationships, sense of place and conscious caring: a hopeful view of the present and future<sup>1</sup>

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I tend to think about my 'sense of place' quite broadly, taking into account my relationship to the present (my home, family and friends, communities and interest groups, work, professions and passions, regions, nations, and the earth), the past (my childhood haunts and special places, *loci* of major events and moments in my life and the people associated with them) and the future (my hopes for more places that are characterised by caring, meaning, equity and respect, social justice, ecological integrity and sustainability, and high 'functional' biodiversity). I think particularly about the stories, myths, rituals and meanings that are associated with each of these. I also think about my relationship to them as a member of the species *Homo sapiens*, being of Caucasian heritage, immigrant status, male, middle-aged, of Christian background with socialist, eco-feminist and green leanings. But in making sense of all of this potentially confusing, paralysing complexity, I also sense a profoundly simple story emerging that seems to have conscious caring at its core. Thinking about 'sense of place' in this multifaceted, multi-layered, interrelated and storied way is one expression of approaching it as a social ecologist.

The development of autonomy, mutualistic relationships and a sense of place are parallel and mutually supportive processes. You cannot have one without the others; and attempting to address problems in (or develop) one will be much more effective if it is part of a 'program' that addresses all areas simultaneously in an integrated way.

*Autonomy is that state of integration in which one lives in full harmony with one's feelings and needs. Commonly we think of autonomy...as the assertion of one's own importance and independence...[a] self composed of abstractions...[but] such a self is merely a reflection of those types of constricting, distorting, selfish qualities that parents, school and society have imprinted within us (Gruen 1986, pp 1–2).*

Tragically the full expression of autonomy, mutualistic relationships and sense of place is rare within industrialised societies; paradoxically rarer than in certain (but not all) so-called less developed cultures. These qualities are commonly denied or neglected, this being a predictable by-product of our distractive compensatory consumption (manipulated by commercial interests), with all its associated impacts and dependencies. This situation is now a threat to our very survival, as well as to all aspects of our wellbeing. Those few with a well-developed sense of autonomy, mutualism and sense of place are often marginalised and, in some societies, persecuted (Gruen 1986). Laing (1971) described our dominant way of being as behaving as if we were hypnotised twice: firstly into accepting pseudo-reality as reality, and secondly into believing we were not hypnotised. That is, we have adapted to living reactively to external stimuli and, because of the inability of these stimuli to provide any lasting satisfaction, we are addicted to the maintenance, or more often the growth, of such stimulation. This occurs through acts of consumption, domination and control over others, and a variety of assaults upon our senses and on the rest of our biology. Such compensatory stimulation, and its cultural acceptance as 'normal', keeps us from:

- acknowledging our woundedness
- confronting our fears, our helplessness and our fundamental disconnectedness and isolation, not just from place, but from all others, and
- deeply investigating and coming to know our own essential nature and biology.

But even more importantly, this compensatory behaviour also separates us from our ability to collaborate in envisioning and creating a more humane and integrated society; and it considerably limits our experiences of connectedness, meaning and wonder.

*I think...it is...because things are so frightening we become hypnotised, and do not notice – or if we notice, belittle – [the] equally strong forces on the other side... (Lessing 1986, p 11).*

At the same time, I believe that we all have an innate ability to relate to our core self, to one another and to place, as well as the valued experiences of doing this. Also, I believe that by becoming more aware of the 'negative' phenomena described here, and by proactively exercising our innate abilities and acknowledging and sharing our experiences, we can become co-authors of the psychosocial evolution of our own species. Indeed, this will be required for us to persist in harmony and wellness on our precious and unique planet.

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<sup>1</sup> Lightly edited 2009 version of my 2003 chapter in JI Cameron (ed), *Changing Places: Re-imagining Australia*, Longueville, Sydney, NSW, pp. 180-196.

In this chapter I will share my view of the autonomy/mutualism/sense-of-place *problématique*. I will describe one framework – certainly not the only one – for understanding their development, and discuss what might be done to support such development. I will reflect on some likely personal, social and environmental benefits of such initiatives, and speculate on how we might get from here to there. Supporting this ‘story’ are some personally meaningful quotes, helpful references and vignettes taken from my own experience.

### **The autonomy/mutualism/sense-of-place *problématique***

Human history has been dominated by experiences that undermine the development of autonomy and of relationship to one another and to place. Opportunities to subsequently recover from these experiences in an integrated way are rare. Indeed, the early movement of our ancestors from defined territories within protected forest environments to a nomadic existence in the more exposed plains could be seen as perhaps the earliest such experience. This was eventually followed for many by slavery, with its cruel external and internal separations. Feudalism, dictatorships and centralised forms of capitalism and communism have also, in different ways, erected barriers to connecting with the depths and complexities of self, others and place (Jackins 1978a, pp 299–306). And now globalisation, with its associated transnationalism, technocentrism, homogenisation, consumerism and loss of meaning, is further impeding the making of these essential connections.

Lloyd de Mause, in his book *Foundations of Psychohistory* (1982, see especially pp 132–146; also his 2002 book), argues that history is largely written in childhood. He describes these disconnecting or ‘separation’ experiences in relation to his proposed six overlapping psychosocial stages in the evolution of childhood. These stages progress from infanticide, to abandoning, to ambivalent, to intrusive, to socialising, to helping/enabling approaches to child rearing. Just the last stage, which, he argues, is only in an early phase of development, is supportive of autonomy and of building mutualistic, meaningful and sustainable relationships with others and place. Such oppressive experiences throughout our history have separated us from ourselves, our homes and our relationships with others. We survive such non-lethal oppressions and intrusions by means of adaptive processes that can, through repetition, eventually result in us believing that what we have become is the norm and, paradoxically, that expressions of our core or primal self are abnormal and often disturbing. Furthermore, when we witness such ‘core expressions’ in others (spontaneous acts of caring, sharing, honesty and so on), we tend to fictionalise them, or deny or repress them. We probably do this largely as a result of subconscious processes that exist to protect us from being reminded of the extent of our often painful maladaptations and of those features of our culture that contributed to their origins and which keep them in place.

*The paradigm is really a simple one: Primal Pain produces neurosis and psychosis, and reliving the Pain is resolving...it is the liberation of Pain which liberates consciousness (Janov & Holden 1975, p xi).*

*...the only way to expand consciousness is to bring what is unconscious forward. But it must be done in a slow, orderly fashion so that each stored feeling can be consciously assimilated. This is not possible when the impetus for release is done mechanically and by external means. To flood consciousness with the use of drugs is simply to produce more unconsciousness (Janov & Holden 1975, p 4).*

*Becoming unconscious is a built-in defense mechanism that has nothing to do with choice or decision-making...it is a disconnecting process which occurs when the connection of feeling-centres with knowing-centres would mean overwhelming Pain (Janov & Holden 1975, p 5).*

Such maladaptations can have negative effects on health. In a study of health and wellbeing (the Peckham Experiment) carried out in a suburb of London prior to the Second World War, Williamson and Pearse (1980, pp 14–15) interestingly found that whereas only 10 per cent of the population were healthy and 30 per cent were sick and knew it, the majority – 60 per cent – were sick but were unaware of their condition. Williamson labelled the 60 per cent ‘compensatory’, because their adaptive and distractive behaviours and perceptions had separated them from being aware of, or able to acknowledge and respond appropriately to their condition.

Most psychotherapy is explicitly or implicitly based on a model of each of us having a true, essential or core self that can be spontaneous and autonomous; and also experience mutualistic and caring relationships with one another and with place. This model also assumes that we have a range of adaptive, distressed, patterned selves (or expressions of self) that are what we have had to become at various times to survive often repeated external ‘insults’. In this adaptive process we give up our consciousness and ability to live proactively (from the inside out). We become increasingly expert at living responsively and, often, fearfully (from the outside in). In such a state we are extremely vulnerable to manipulation, colonisation, and also diverse expressions of violence; and we tend to do to others what has been done, and is being done, to us. This constitutes our negative cultural inheritance or ‘memes’ (Dawkins 1989), and it tragically undermines our positive cultural inheritance:

*...morality does not exist on the deeper levels of human existence...[only] when individuals have lost their internal*

access...[to] feelings...moral principals must be invoked time and again...accompanied by a variety of real and imagined punishments in order to counteract natural feelings and impulses. Thus, when one is allowed [one's] feelings, morality vanishes...Feeling people cannot harm others...because they can feel, they experience the impact of their every act...[they] have no need to be immoral...[to] want more than they need...We have been observing neurosis with its attendant immoral behaviours for so long that we have come to accept loose living as the nature of things. It is only when we finally get [in touch with our] feelings that we see what pure, honest and moral souls [we are] (Janov & Holden 1975, pp 269–270).

...a MEME (or values-attracting meta-meme) reflects a world view, a valuing system, a level of psychological existence, a belief structure, an organising principle, a way of thinking or a mode of adjustment. It represents...a core intelligence that forms systems and directs human behaviour...it impacts upon all life choices as a decision-making framework...[it] can manifest itself in both healthy and unhealthy forms...[it provides a]...structure for thinking, not just a set of ideas, values or cause...[and] it can brighten and dim as the Life Conditions (consisting of historic Times, geographic Place, existential Problems and societal Circumstances) change (Beck & Cowan 1996, pp 4–5).

Although I am presenting some of these ideas in a dualistic way, I am aware both of the dangers of dualistic thinking and that the processes that determine our behaviour are undoubtedly much more complex. Nevertheless, I believe that such comparisons can still help us to think creatively and decide and act responsibly about the issues being discussed in this book.

In *Alternative Futures for Prairie Agricultural Communities*, I traced two contrasting ways of designing and managing agroecosystems (conventionally and ecologically) back to their possible roots in these two expressions of the self (core 'well'/spontaneous versus adapted 'hurt'/patterned), and to their collective manifestations in our institutional structures and processes (Hill 1991, Figure 4). Similar analyses could be done for our political systems, economic systems, technologies, religions and even our psychotherapies. Our multiple selves (core self plus our various adapted selves) have very different interests, priorities, values and ways of relating to others, to place and to problems and issues (Hill 1998, Table 4). Predictably the cost of maintaining these different selves, based on their associated resource requirements and cultural and environmental impacts, may often differ by orders of magnitude. Because our core selves have no need for compensatory consumption, or for impressing others, they are likely to be less expensive to maintain and more effective and efficient. As we are all made up of these multiple selves it should not surprise us that much of our lives have a grey and contradictory quality, this being the result of our various selves constantly competing for centre stage. Because of this psychological complexity it is impossible to accurately identify the specific roots of any observed action. Yet the implications of this psychological understanding are clear. There would be enormous benefits – personally, socially and environmentally – from doing whatever it takes to live as much as we can from the core self end of our psychological spectrum.

Lest it be assumed that I am unaware of the social aspects of the *problématique* I have been discussing, let me say a word about that. I am certainly not implying that all that is required 'to change the world' is for each of us to reconnect more with our core selves. Such connected individuals would still be stuck with having to live within cultures that are often largely the product of adapted selves. These cultures are characterised by compensation, oppression, regulation, judgement, fragmentation, exclusion, power hierarchies, and adversarial and uncaring relationships (Hill 1999). Acting in contradiction to these 'norms' alone, or even as a member of a mutually supportive group, may still result in marginalisation, ridicule, persecution and, in some societies, even death. Certain thresholds of 'enough active core selves' and 'enough mutualistic relationships' have to be reached to start to be effective in deconstructing and redesigning our various maladaptive institutional structures and processes.

I am presenting these ideas partly as a caution to those postmodernists who seem to not distinguish between core and adaptive constructions. I suggest that the process of core construction is mostly concerned with filling in the gaps between the fragmentary information that we have, in order to make a reasonable 'story' upon which to act in a connected – internally and externally – caring and responsible way. In contrast, adaptive construction is likely to be burdened with many more functions, including those concerned with denial, defence, protection, control, appearance and compensation. The likely result is a much greater distortion of 'reality' than actually exists. Although in every shared situation we each experience our own unique realities, I suspect that the difference between the unique core constructions of individuals would be much less than between our adaptive ones. Similarly, the more distorted our constructions of place, the more difficult it becomes to relate to place in caring, responsible and sustainable ways. For example, whereas adapted selves would be more likely to construct competitive projects to use (and so consume) place in their efforts to compensate and substitute for their past unmet needs, core selves would be more likely to construct collaborative projects to conserve, care for, work and create with and sustain life-enabling places. Of course in practice, both individually and collectively, our interactions with place are always influenced by both our core and adapted selves. The resultant qualities and characteristics of place reflect those influences, which are in turn mirrored back to us.

### **One framework for understanding the development of autonomy, mutuality and sense of place**

Based on my experience of working on myself and with others, it seems to me that our autonomy, mutuality and sense

of place develop when our experience (both internal and external) is accommodated, supported and validated. Conversely, they are undermined when one is forced to live according to the intrusive agendas, fears and distortions of adapted/maladapted others, or under the influence of one's own adapted selves. Although most therapists – or rather, their adapted selves – tend to overemphasise the differences between their theories for explaining their practice, I notice much more similarity than is generally acknowledged. Indeed, I think there is much benefit from acknowledging the commonality as well as the difference. If we paid more attention to acknowledging such common qualities, I believe that there would be much less violent conflict and more collaboration in the world. This common practice of making one's constructions appear more different than they actually are may, paradoxically, be compensating for a lack of connection to one's actual difference, including one's unique connections with place. The different ways in which therapists who prefer intuitive, sensing, thinking or feeling ways of being in the world (Keirse 1997) describe their theory and practice is particularly interesting to me. I believe that failure to acknowledge such personal preferences has been a major barrier to the recognition of the commonality needed for mutual respect and collaboration.

The primary barrier to the healthy development of autonomy, mutuality and a sense of place in children is that those who influence us, particularly our parents, and the environments in which we live, are to some extent maladapted and designed for compensation, respectively. This maladaptation generally accommodates our loss of autonomy, mutuality and sense of place, and regards as normal a comprehensive range of compensatory behaviours, accommodating social structures and processes. In other words, it is difficult to give what one has not received, does not have or is unfamiliar with. Our common inability to pay loving attention to children while they cry and recover from their hurts – the crying being a necessary part of their healing process – illustrates this point. The deprivation of such opportunities for recovery leaves residues of unhealed hurts in our subconscious, which is uncontrollably awakened by the sound of a child's cry. It is predictable that we would try to stop children crying, driven by our subconscious, which is protecting us from painful memories (an adaptive response), while we consciously reason that we have solved the hurt problem by making the crying stop (Solter 1984, 1989). This is just one example of numerous similar adaptive patterns of behaviour that, in the face of crises, get established as deceptively simple solutions to problems that are beneficial in the short term, but that have considerable, largely hidden, longer-term multi-faceted costs (including personal, social and environmental). A parallel process to this at the physiological level has been labelled by some in the field of environmental medicine as the 'adaptation, addiction, allergy, degeneration syndrome' (for example, Rea 1992–95). When our potentially beneficial and necessary capacity to adapt in the short term becomes overloaded, it results, over the longer term, in maladaptations. These may eventually result in immune system breakdown, chronic fatigue, isolation, severe depression and other expressions of system overload and degeneration.

*At one time or another, most of us feel some degree of emptiness, loneliness, inadequacy, idealism or spiritual longing. We recognise the...desire to escape pain, and...seek answers in activities, substances or relationships. The irony is, no external activities or substances satisfy the initial craving or the feeling of emptiness. This intense and at times painful craving is deep thirst for our own wholeness, our spiritual identity...or core...this fervent thirst for wholeness, as well as the discomfort with it, is the underlying impulse behind addictions (Grof 1993, pp 12–17).*

I have mentioned the examples of children crying and system breakdown to acknowledge how challenging it is for most of us to think clearly about what might actually be required to develop a framework for understanding and supporting the development of autonomy, mutualism and sense of place, especially in children. I believe that the framework recently proposed by Ruthellen Josselson (1996) for the development of 'relationship competencies' can also be used to deepen our understanding of the development of these three qualities. Based on an extensive review of the literature, Josselson recognises eight overlapping and mutually supportive processes, four that are sensory grounded (holding, attachment, passionate experience and eye-to-eye validation) and four that are cognitive (identification and idealisation, mutuality and resonance, embeddedness, and tending and caring). I have summarised these in Figure 1 and extended them by proposing that they may equally serve as a basis for understanding the development of our relationships with the natural environment and place. Because both my dominant experiences, and those of Josselson, have been gained within industrialised societies, this framework may need to be modified for other cultures. The examples given in italics are taken largely from my own experience, and should be regarded as illustrative rather than prescriptive.

I remember childhood expeditions with my cousins to a local trout stream, across the *commons*, in the village where I lived (Chorleywood in Hertfordshire, England). This, along with other special places, served so many functions. It was where I learned about nature; it was a place to go to dream and sort out what I felt and thought and believed; and it was a sanctuary I could retreat to when things threatened to disconnect me from myself and others. My two-year study of a bat-inhabited cave in Trinidad taught me so much more about how nature works and set me on a journey to better understand the amazing world of the soil, and also of insects and their relatives. In my extensive food garden (and later on during a project to help the community of a small island in the Seychelles become self-sufficient in food and energy) I was able to apply all of this understanding in ways that were life-affirming and deeply meaningful. In all of these experiences there was, and still is, a powerful awareness of the absolute amazingness of it all, and an acknowledgment of how limited my understanding is. I have an enormous reverence for, and sense of wonder about, the infinite 'rest' that continues to do its thing without my knowledge of it. I think that it is this awareness that helps me to be less controlling than I might be without having had these experiences of nature and place.

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## Sensory grounded experience (from the beginning of life)

**Holding:** Provision of safety, security and assurance; someone being there for you.

Safe, non-frightening early experiences lay a foundation for expectation of support, feeling secure, at home and physically connected with nature and place.  
*Helped by time spent lying on the grass looking at the clouds and leafy branches and listening to the birds, with a carer nearby.*

**Attachment:** Acknowledged; reliable emotional (and material) connection(s).

Recognition of primacy of our dependence on, and relationship with 'nature'; emotionally connected; beginning of 'sense of place'; nature as 'sanctuary' with also a therapeutic role; special and favourite places, basis for subsequent familiarity with physical and bioecological characteristics of particular environments.  
*Helped by ritual, childhood haunts, bushwalking and camping.*

**Passionate experience:** Encounter intense pleasure, for example through respectful physical contact.

Experience of multifaceted, holistic pleasure of nature; fascination and joy with its diversity, mystery and 'otherness'; stimulation, excitement and deep love of nature; basis for development of sense of stewardship and responsibilities.  
*Helped by intense experiences such as rock climbing, white water canoeing, backpacking, sleeping under the stars and skinny-dipping.*

**Eye-to-Eye Validation:** Communication of authenticity; confirmation, encouragement, understanding and empathy for one's 'being'; and later also conditional approval of one's 'doing'.

Positive (and negative) feedback from interactions with nature (pets, other domesticated animals, wildlife and plants); becoming aware of both the predictable and knowable, as well as the spontaneous, emergent and mysterious properties of nature.  
*Helped by spending relaxed time with nature, including eye-to-eye contact with other primates and domesticated species.*

## Dependent on meaning-making and cognitive processes

**Identification and Idealisation:** Recognition and respect for others' desirable qualities (and of the undesirability and repulsion of others); key drive for personal development and transcendence; basis for attraction to mentors and partners.

Recognition of the amazingness, wonder and power of nature, and of the value of the models in nature; its use in metaphors and mythology; basis for respecting its limits and working with its potential; needed for managing one's desire to contain, control, own and domesticate nature; and for designing and redesigning with nature.  
*Helped by totems, sacred sites, mentors, cultural stories, vision quests, sweat lodges and other intense and special experiences; and by opportunities to interact responsibly.*

**Mutuality and Resonance:** Simultaneously recognising similarities in one another's experiences, thinking and feeling and being willing to share them openly, thereby experiencing connectedness, communion and a sense of 'we'; finding oneself in 'the other'.

Through awe, compassion, integration and collaboration, learning to recognise synergy, synchronicity and mutuality in nature; further deepening of respect of limits and realisation of diverse possibilities and opportunities; involves letting go of competition and desires to control; deepening one's connection with 'the other'; described well in some nature poetry.  
*Experienced through playing with and taking responsibility for pets, horse riding, swimming with dolphins, witnessing thunderstorms, torrents of water, mountains and glaciers; also through shared creative expression.*

**Embeddedness:** Identification with our connectedness, and also recognition of our being a small part of a larger grouping; enables us to speak from our particular roles, groups and places, and also to contribute to them and feel that we belong; basis for interest in history, and a concern for intergenerational and global equity, 'others' needs, and for meaning in one's life.

Deep connectedness to the planet and its other inhabitants; spiritual and soulful experiences in nature, and sense of our lineage and place within it; deepens our evolving sense of meaning, and of the wonder of life.  
*Helped by our ongoing relationships with nature, journaling these and trying to convey them in poetry, creative writing, music and art.*

**Tending and Caring:** Our experience of this enables us to choose to offer ourselves in the service of others; being there for them, particularly in times of need; involves diverse expressions of empathy and sensitivity to boundaries.

Recognition of the joy experienced in caring for nature, specific habitats, biodiversity, ecological cycles and processes, and protection from invasive species and materials.  
*Helped by diverse expressions of caring for nature and place: from recycling to fundamental redesign of one's lifestyle and ways of interacting with nature and others.*

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Figure 1: A framework for understanding the development of autonomy, relationship and sense of place within Western Cultures (modified from Josselson 1996). Material in italics relate to experiences of the author.

Access to the various experiences listed in Figure 1 need to be supported by political and institutional initiatives, such as the conservation and maintenance of green spaces, protection of biodiversity, and regulations that conserve and set standards for quality of place (including the built environment) and access to place; and by redesigning our educational systems to enable learning and transformation, rather than by imposing the learning agendas of others.

In working therapeutically with clients to resolve relationship problems and develop relational competence, Josselson finds that she can recognise deficiencies in one or more of these developmental stages. She finds that by addressing them, rather than accommodating (adapting to) them, she is able to help her clients resolve their relationship problems and deepen their experiences of relationship. A compatible and equally impressive approach is that of Shem and Surrey (1998), who, when working to improve relationships, emphasise focusing on a separate 'we', rather than just on 'you and I' and on our deficiencies. Others using a variety of different frameworks claim to have achieved similar successes (Moreno & Moreno 1959–85; Pessó 1969; Assagioli 1971; Schultz 1971; Steiner 1974; Janov & Holden 1975; Lowen 1975; Frankl 1978; Gendlin 1978; Jackins 1978a; May 1983; Grof 1985; De Lozier & Grinder 1987; Mahrer 1989; Stettbacher 1991; Rowan 1992 – these being references to a range of therapies in which I have had some training).

I have found Josselson's stages to be most helpful in understanding the developmental processes involved in relating to multiple selves, others and place, and in understanding the approaches used by other therapists. I favour an eclectic approach to working with change, and I suspect that insistence on taking a narrow approach may paradoxically be indicative of an internalisation of some of the distresses that these therapies purport to address. Let me also re-emphasise my belief that such change-work is likely to be most effective if it is part of an integrated approach that includes both personal and political components. If either personal or political change is conducted in isolation it will sooner or later be limited by barriers associated with the other.

Awareness of Josselson's eight expressions of relationship (Figure 1) could help parents, teachers and others to design and make available experiences (such as those advocated by Van Matre 1990) that are conducive to relational development. This might involve:

- modelling and mentoring
- proactive planning and the setting aside of time and resources to make such experience possible
- co-experiencing (where the experience is new for all involved), and
- delegation (when additional expertise is needed).

Community and special interest groups, clubs, educational institutions and commercial service providers can play important supportive roles in this area, as can an empathetic media. For the necessary development to take place, the boundaries around what constitutes effectiveness (parenting, media, public policies, education and so on) need to be extended, as do those around responsibilities within the health system.

### **Some likely personal, social and environmental benefits of populations having a well-developed autonomy, mutuality and sense of place**

It is interesting that Thoreau (1854) noticed that when families came to visit him at Walden Pond, only the small children seemed to really enjoy being there and accept his being there, whereas the 'socialised' (adapted) adults tended to challenge his decision to be in that place in nature. They were concerned what he might be missing and were anxious to get back to town.

As mentioned above, individuals with high levels of autonomy, mutuality and sense of place who are living as a minority in society are likely to be marginalised and persecuted by the adapted majority. So, until these three qualities reach a certain threshold of commonality within a society, the necessary changes in institutional structures and processes will be difficult to implement, and the associated benefits will only be partially experienced. Understanding this non-linear relationship between personal change and social change is essential if we are to avoid the counter-productive arguments of those who regard psychological and political solutions as incompatible. Because the personal and social are mutually related, effective programs of change must involve both in integrated ways. It is also helpful to remember this non-linearity when feelings of doubt about the likely improving effects of one's small individual contributions arise. Without such small contributions, thresholds for larger-scale changes will never be reached.

It is important that all of us take time to imagine what society might be like if most individuals were autonomous, in mutualistic relationships and well grounded in place (Janov & Holden 1975, pp 269–273 and 449–461). I expect that there would still be a great diversity of opinion. We would, however, be less likely to inflexibly defend our ideas, against those of others, as if our whole being was under threat, for we would know that they would just be our time-specific and space-specific (contextually relevant) provisional opinions. I believe that in such a society we would be more conscious, empowered and imaginative. I believe we would be clearer about our values, more responsible, collaborative and fully in the present. From moment to moment, life would have more meaning. Rather than obsessively worrying about them, our decisions would be clearer and our actions more confident. I suspect that we would be more soulful and 'spiritual' (having a sense of wonder about life and the cosmos, a reverence for the unknown and a sense of connectedness) and less religious. As found in the Peckham Experiment (Stallibrass 1989), we would be less competitive, more relational, less violent and isolated, and more internally directed, spontaneous, sharing and celebrational. We would probably be more proactive in:

- maintaining significant connections with nature and others
- becoming more familiar with our own internal nature, and
- taking responsibility for the health and wellbeing of ourselves, and also of others and the planet.

When we recall that over half of the world's natural resources and over half of the world's scientists and technologists are currently devoted to violence and war, it is clear that having a majority of the population autonomous and connected (to one another and to place) would considerably reduce this incredible waste and misuse of humanity and resources. We might also witness a gradual decline in adversarial political systems, professional competitive sport, and dependence on the vast range of compensatory products and services. Also likely to decline would be most advertising, media idols and, indeed, most commercial media (which is currently largely devoted to compensatory agendas).

We would still continue to develop and use complex technologies, but we would weigh their benefits and costs fairly. We would not discount negative external factors and the cost to marginalised and distant populations and future generations. Our technologies would be more durable, repairable, recyclable, resource efficient and have less of an impact on nature (Hill 2005; Papanek 1995; Todd & Todd 1984; Trainer 1995; van der Ryn & Cowan 1996; von Weizsacker, Lovins & Lovins 1997). We would be more respectful of limits (Meadows, Meadows & Randers 1992) and more imaginative about opportunities. More of the population would be employed in service activities as we increasingly substituted the use of knowledge and skills for dependence on products (for example, when faced with having to solve problems). This is well illustrated in the slow shift from the development and use of pesticides to kill pests to preventative approaches based on the ecological redesign of managed ecosystems (Hill 1998, 2004; Hill, Vincent & Chouinard 1999). Examples of initiatives along these lines from around the world, with a discussion of how to extend them further, have recently been documented by Kossoff (1997). The growing number of magazines devoted to ecologically sensitive and 'green' ways of doing things are full of ideas and inspiring stories of local initiatives relating to this transition. Because these are being written during what is still an early stage in this process of cultural evolution, most, however, still contain material that will probably not be part of caring, socially just, humane and ecologically sustainable futures. For example, much print is still devoted to 'shallow' ecological (efficiency and substitution) initiatives, which tend to protect and perpetuate unsustainable designs and processes (Hill 1998; Hill & MacRae 1995), and make it difficult to gain support for more complex integrated 'deep ecological (design-based) approaches (Hill 2003).

With these cultural changes will come a significant reduction in the pressures and impacts on the natural environment, and an associated reprieve for the world's biodiversity (Dale & Hill 1996). By designing and living with nature we will find better ways to cohabit with the great diversity of wildlife with which we share this planet. It will be easier to develop and maintain our connections with nature and with place because doing this will be part of our moment-to-moment living rather than something one has to plan for during holidays and weekends, or postpone until retirement. Because we will be working much more closely with natural and ecological processes, we will be more aware of the intricacies of nature and the wonders of place, and of the bio-ecology of ourselves and other species. This will involve working proactively and consciously with diversity and difference, mutuality, symbiosis and synergy, and with the complex processes involved in self-regulation, regeneration and maintenance, as opposed to our current overemphasis on production, manipulation, domination, regulation and control by means of intrusive technologies, products and processes. As we do this, the wisdoms of nature will become more accessible and people will develop a much higher level of bio-ecological, sustainability and cultural literacy (Hill, Wilson & Watson 2004; Orr 1992, 1994). Also, our levels of presence in different ecosystems – our 'ecological footprint' – will be adjusted in response to our greater sensitivity to changes in the 'carrying capacity' of those ecosystems over space and time (Wackernagel & Rees 1996).

I believe that if more of us had a deeper sense of place, we would also be enabled to experience greater autonomy, meaning, connectedness, caring and creativity, as opposed to colonisation, confusion, isolation, monotony and apathy. Communities would be more vibrant and co-evolving, as opposed to dead and decaying, and nature and the other species with which we share this planet would be better supported. Politics would become more collaborative and participatory, as we progress from democracy to cooperacy (Hunter, Bailey & Taylor 1997).

### **Getting from here to there**

The transition being discussed here is well underway. There is now an abundance of information and literature on living in harmony with one another and nature. There are numerous initiatives that have been taken that can act as 'demonstration and inspiration models'. There are even some compatible political, legislative and regulatory incentives (taxes, codes, grants and so on). There are educational programs, research projects, developments of alternative technologies, and designs and management systems for working with nature in more ecologically sustainable ways. The process of greening and humanising business, economics, religion, politics and our lifestyles and relationships, while still at an early stage, is making significant progress. This is all occurring, however, within the context of a dominant culture that is still significantly resisting most of these initiatives. Also, most of these initiatives are still being

constructed, largely subconsciously, within the framework of the dominant world views and paradigms, thereby – to some extent – perpetuating the very ways of being and doing that need to be changed. It is indeed a time of abundant contradiction. One trap (which I suspect has its roots in our disempowerment and associated dreams of being saved by others; or, conversely, of wanting to be a hero or to control others) is the persistent attraction to mega-projects and solutions, such as a world government (with powerful international laws and the means to police them) and numerous other global-level 'control' projects. Although there is a place for global collaboration, I believe that to be most effective in bringing about the needed changes, we must focus more on 'small meaningful local actions that individuals or small groups can guarantee to carry through to completion' (Hill 1998). By publicly celebrating these, when appropriate, we can enable their spread and contagion. In contrast, the focus on mega-global-projects excludes most of us and tends to postpone effective local personal and community action.

Some of those reading this may wonder if I am sufficiently aware of the seriousness of the current state of humanity and the world, with thousands dying every day from starvation and violence, species being lost, deserts created and essential ecological processes being undermined. It is because I am aware of these horrendous situations that I dare to imagine other ways forward that can address these existing devastations and prevent their re-occurrence. For too long our tendency has been to study and measure problems and to take curative action, instead of examining the underlying causes, imagining how they can be avoided and embarking on the necessary integrated programs of personal and political change. Indeed, most research funding is still only available for 'measure and cure' studies. I am not advocating that those who are starving need therapy rather than food, or empowerment rather than access to land and political power. But I do think that those living in the so-called developed parts of the world, whose lifestyles, political systems and ways of doing business are largely responsible for this starvation and other oppression, would benefit from doing whatever it takes (including effective therapy and transformative experiences of place) to give up their maladaptive, compensatory, disconnected, irresponsible and oppressive behaviours. By doing so, more of us would be enabled to reclaim our autonomy, connection, sense of wonder and place, caring and imagination. I believe that the challenge facing all of us is to take those small, meaningful personal and political steps, both individually and collectively, to publicly celebrate taking them, and to learn from them as we go. This is something that we can start right now. Focusing on mega-projects, however, keeps us in a state of disengagement, postponement, anger, frustration, hopelessness and fear. Re-connecting with place and nature (internally and externally) in small meaningful ways is something that each of us can do. Out of this, I believe, will gradually flow the kind of understanding, ideas and actions that can start to bring about a world characterised by health, wellbeing, equity, humane behaviour, caring, mutuality, meaning and sustainability. Paradoxically, because we have hardly scratched the surface of doing this, I am extremely hopeful for both the present and the future.

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Originally published as: Hill SB 2003, Autonomy, mutualistic relationships, sense of place and conscious caring: a hopeful view of the present and future, *in* JI Cameron (ed), *Changing Places: Re-imagining Australia*, Longueville, Sydney, NSW, pp. 180-196.

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