

Bio-whatever

*science, art & life in the public engagement
of complex environmental issues*

Report to BAPSG

August, 1995

“Bio-Whatever”¹

Science, Art & Life in the Public Engagement of Complex Environmental Issues

Report to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group (BAPSG)

Sub-Committee on Public Awareness

¹ Anonymous (1995a) *Informal Telephone Interview*, January 17th, 1995. Respondent is the Director of a nationally representative body, whose published remit covers the conservation of biological diversity in the U.K.

John Pollock

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1. Abstract

There is no substantive research on the U.K. public's understanding of biodiversity *per se*. However, a cohesive body of recent social policy research findings on other environmental issues offers insights of general applicability. These are examined in some detail, and the emerging picture is unusually clear. It suggests that the public is fast losing its faith in institutions, and in their capacity to deliver environmental change. A number of principles are offered which, it is argued, should drive attempts to communicate complex environmental issues to, and stimulate action by, the wider public. These include: the need to redefine the terms in which public environmental discourse is undertaken, the requirement for a populist and culturally-embedded process of explication, and the necessity of re-building trust and agency by encouraging opportunities at the local level. Finally, in addition to a number of suggestions for further work in the area, a primary, specific and immediate area for action is identified: the provision of wide-scale access to Nature to children. This is recommended as both an opportunity for, and a necessity to, the future conservation of biodiversity in the U.K.

2. REMIT

If the Reader should meet here with any thing, which he had not before attended to, it will not be in the Observations upon the Constitution and Course of Nature, these being obvious; but in the Application of them...

Joseph Butler²

This report emerges from a desk-based exercise “to assess current levels of awareness of UK biodiversity and to identify gaps in information and knowledge in relation to biodiversity”.³ It contributes to “the preparation and implementation of a campaign to increase public awareness of, and involvement in, conserving UK biodiversity”,⁴ a task defined by the Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group (BAPSG). As Members of the Group remark, this is “not a small task and would provide a real intellectual challenge.” They continue:

The aim would be to both inform and learn from the general public about what was important to them in terms of their agenda and local priorities.

Furthermore, Members of the Group recognised this was a crowded field, to some extent already addressed by initiatives such as Local Agenda 21, *Going for Green* and the European Nature Conservation Year 1995. In this regard, they concluded that the “main focus should be in assessing activities already in hand, bringing together models of good practice and identifying gaps and opportunities.”

Given the potential width of this brief, coupled with exigencies of both budget and time, this report is inevitably presented as one which is neither definitive nor representative. Indeed, its coverage derives from a process more akin to a partial and exploratory sampling of accessible material. Due to the paucity of research specifically addressing public awareness of biodiversity conservation in the UK, relevant findings from other areas of study have been drawn on. These contribute a wider view of many of the issues *underlying* public engagement with the conservation of biodiversity. In light of this approach, the coherence and clarity of the picture which emerges is particularly striking,- as is the degree to which the findings have direct application to the broad range of environmental issues concerning the public.

² Joseph Butler (1740) *Advertisement to: THE ANALOGY OF RELIGION, NATURAL and REVEALED, TO THE Constitution and Course of NATURE*, Third Edition.

³ Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group (BAPSG)/ Department of the Environment (1995)

⁴ Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group (BAPSG) (1994)

3 Introduction: The Dowager Withdraws

*We've all got some influence...
and we should bring it to bear.*

Participant, 'Communities' Group discussion, BAPSG Research⁵

A BROKEN CONTRACT

The social contract is no longer seen as working, or even workable, and like a dowager whose *amour propre* has been badly shaken, large sections of the public now skitter between withdrawal, non-compliance and demanding elaborate apologies – backed with tokens of improved behaviour. This process is particularly obvious in the environmental arena.

Research in sociolinguistics⁶ suggests that 'withdrawal and non-compliance' are indeed common responses among those who feel the unwritten rules of discourse have been violated. The philosophers Grice make important insights regarding this process. H.P. Grice, with his notion of 'conversational implicature', attempts to tease out the unwritten rules of discourse by generating a number of conversational maxims. Of foremost interest, in terms of the public's reading of the environmental discourse, is the maxim that "normally one has reasons for what one asserts."⁷

The public, and particularly young people, have got the message about the degradation of their environment, both on a local and a global scale. They now look to those who have helped inform them of this state for swift and effective action. This has yet to occur, and the public feels, quite reasonably, somewhat discomposed. For as G.R. Grice says: "the reason for keeping our promises is, quite simply, that we promised."⁸

As to public demand for elaborate apologies and tokens of improved behaviour, those structures and organisations deemed responsible for the public's sense of affront – principally government – are, in a few cases, (usually at a local level), beginning to make progress. The broader polity has seen opportunities to effect change, and some have seized the day. A number of local councils, for instance, now recognise past mistakes and have started trying to rectify them.

⁵ The present paper is part of a package, including qualitative research undertaken by Social and Community Planning Research (SCPR), commissioned by the BAPSG Sub-Committee on Public Awareness/Department of the Environment. The qualitative work comprised a series of depth interviews and group discussions in priority sectors, both of which are covered in a separate report by SCPR.

⁶ Dr. Ivan Leudar (1991), *Pers. Comm.*

⁷ H.P. Grice (1961)

⁸ G.R. Grice (1967)

The grass roots are stirring everywhere. I think people are realising at last that the environment isn't something out there, on the telly, to get depressed about, but is local, immediate and to be celebrated.

John Vidal⁹

In response to a growing body of scientific evidence largely confirming a worldwide decline in environmental quality, the Brundtland report,¹⁰ the United Nations Rio Conference in 1992 and a plethora of other actions placed a range of environmental issues firmly on the public agenda. Growing political awareness of the critical role that *could* be played by 'the public' in shaping and acting on the environmental challenge led to an increase in both the quality and quantity of social policy research in the area.

Starting from a comparatively small base of research, of variable quality, in the late 1980s (some of which was of tangential relevance), a much clearer picture has recently begun to emerge. The leading research in this field follows the general pattern of modern thought. It draws deeply on a range of inter-connected theoretical sources, from philosophy and sociology to cultural and psychological studies, providing an overall picture that remains sensitive to the depth and texture of the complex issues involved.

The resulting insights, buttressed by qualitative findings and quantitative data, combine to paint a picture of environmental discourse which is startling in its immediacy and clarity. A picture which, it is argued, has important implications extending beyond specific environmental issues to touch upon almost every aspect of public debate in the United Kingdom.

UPSIDE DOWN

In exploring the nature of public understanding of biodiversity and related issues, a consistent core theme emerges. One which it may be convenient to reduce (for a limited period only), to binary form. Although the terms 'top down' and 'bottom up' are in common usage, they are largely offered as *ordinal* descriptions. Psychologists of perceptual processes, however, talk of the brain engaging in top-down and bottom-up *processing*, in order to create a picture of the world. It is in this sense that these terms can be seen as applicable to environmental discourse surrounding conservation in the U.K.

In top-down processing, information is gathered, scanned and interpreted according to an organising and extant set of principles. Perception is thus essentially *conferred* or *imposed*. In bottom-up processing, the raw flux of perceptual experience is slowly refined and monitored in a series of feedback loops as it works its way through the brain: perception is *built* or *grown*. The activities of government, institutions and scientists, engaging in what John Zaller has called "elite discourse"¹¹ might be likened to top-down processing.

⁹ John Vidal (1995a)

¹⁰ Gro Brundtland (1987)

¹¹ John R. Zaller (1992)

In terms of biodiversity, top-down processing has meant the entrenchment of a complex concept by those participating in the elite discourse. The concept rapidly achieved functional importance via a series of international conferences, was reified within a structural network of committees and publications – and now attempts are being made to ‘deliver’ it as a percept out into the wider consciousness.

Conversely, ‘the public’, acting in multifold capacities as individuals, dyads, families and part of a community of communities, can be seen as engaged in a kind of bottom-up processing. Processing which occurs in the face of what Walter Lippman described in his classic treatise *Public Opinion*¹² as “the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world.”

Looking at biodiversity from a bottom-up processing perspective, we see a complex concept already nested in a loose web of over-lapping ideas, themselves emerging from different ‘myths of nature’ (Harrison & Burgess 1994)¹³. The concept is here more numinous and fluid, open to change and development, fed by different personal experience derived from the “buzzing confusion of the outer world.” Such experience may arrive via a range of routes, from the mass media and education system to the garden or a walk in the park. The wider public consciousness *already* perceives a version of the conceptual underpinning of ‘biodiversity’, yet generally sees the addition to its vocabulary of a hexasyllabic Graeco-Roman technical term as an impertinence.

The tensions between these two approaches can be seen in the following quotations, taken from the Communities Group Discussion carried out for the BAPSG as part of this research:

If you give something a name it helps to articulate it.

It's created a new barrier...the word itself smacks of science and all things vague and foggy.

However, while language and meaning are of critical importance to public understanding of biodiversity, and discussed at some length below, the linguistic debate should not be allowed to obscure deeper philosophical differences between bottom-up and top-down processes. Differences which concern, among other issues, power, agency, the professionalisation of almost every aspect of late twentieth century life – most particularly that breed of professionals now concerned with the environment – and the yawning gap between apparent concern and realpolitik.

There's a general loss of faith felt by so many people, throughout society, in political systems, authorities and institutions.

John Vidal¹⁴

As ever, it is often the searching eye of younger people which focuses most clearly on the gap

¹² Walter Lippmann (1946)

¹³ Carolyn M. Harrison and Jacquelin Burgess (1994)

¹⁴ John Vidal (1995a)

between 'seeming' and 'being' – as perceived from the bottom-up end of life. A recent report¹⁵ of a study, into why students are becoming voter-shy, cites one participant:

It doesn't matter who you vote for, because whoever gets into power they're going to screw it up anyway.

While another involved in the research remarks:

We don't trust them. They say one thing and do another.

This lack of trust from those outside the elite discourse is a recurrent theme of much recent research, emerging in a splendid, and often splenetic, variety of forms.

Some commentators have argued that much of the recent history of conservation in the UK is riven by these two modes, between the elite 'providers' and the public as passive 'receivers'.

A NEW ANGLE

Concerning biodiversity, the writer and conservationist Paul Evans puts the point thus, as part of a wider case against the balkanisation of the environmental debate:

'Biodiversity', the buzz-word, now comes with a package of concerns and a political impetus forcing it above 'ecology' and 'nature' in the issue stakes.¹⁶

This paper argues that if government, policy-makers, professionals and others wish to assess, interpret and then engage public understanding in complex environmental issues, including biodiversity, it will be necessary for them to understand what is entailed by bottom-up processing perception. Failure to achieve such an understanding will *inevitably* lead to a deeper and more extensive failure, at a time when the gap between 'top' and 'bottom' seems ever widening, and yet paradoxically, when the wider context offers promising opportunities to build bridges.

We've created a world of basically humane people, and the very things that made that, we're taking away, why? It doesn't make sense to me.¹⁷

This paper is unusual in two respects. First, it detects and attempts further exploration of this almost tectonic societal shift. It's an extremely recent phenomenon: not everyone will have felt the shock-waves, and an earthquake may not occur, but seismic movements are not sensibly ignored. The clearest indicators of change now emerge more or less directly from the public itself. Consequently, considerable emphasis is given to those voices that seem to best capture the emerging *zeitgeist*.

¹⁵ Liza Donaldson (1995)

¹⁶ Paul Evans (1993)

¹⁷ Anonymous. Full transcript at Appendix 2

Second, it no longer seems appropriate to continue with what is, after all, a relatively recent academic reporting tradition. This tradition was once, perhaps, driven by a desire for a kind of standardised clarity. However, many people – especially those whose work involves regular reading of research reports – note a bleaching out of style in favour, at best, of ever more arid substance. A loss of diversity which neither improves academia, nor the accessibility of its ‘output’. In aligning itself with an earlier and more open tradition, the report aims to be read, maybe even enjoyed. (And some of the best material is in the Appendices.)

The core of the paper comprises two sections looking at the current state of the U.K. public’s understanding of, and engagement with, complex environmental issues. A section concerned with quantitative social policy research follows. This details some problems inherent in the methodology, rather than simply re-iterating a few percentages together with a polite demur as to their provenance

The vexed issue of the language and meaning of ‘biodiversity’ is addressed with as much humour as possible and, finally, a series of specific recommendations outlined.

4. **Bad News:** *From Blandscape To Corporate Scrub*

*We have all become well informed about the world's ecological crises...
Yet this knowledge has remained curiously remote, not connected in any
obvious way with our ordinary, everyday experience.*

Richard Mabey¹⁸

SHIFTING SANDS

A profound set of changes is occurring among the drifting sands of public opinion that make up the attitudinal coastline. Meanwhile, people argue about whether the movement of these sands is temporary or permanent, shift or drift, natural or man-made, erosion or implosion, good or bad for life on the beach. But as the millennium looms, one thing seems agreed: these changes can no longer be ignored.

They have been reported by a broad spectrum of commentators, from social sciences, political and cultural studies, even economics. They have found expression in popular cultural debate across the mass media. It sometimes seems that in recent years almost everyone has attempted to describe the shape-shifting of public and private landscapes.

LOST HORIZONS

If a single observation were to be used to sum up the recent shift in public perceptions of a range of issues, including environmental ones, it would be this: the public is losing its faith in the will or capacity of formal institutions to make a positive difference to their lives. Put baldly thus, this may be regarded as contentious, yet a wide range of reports studied as part of this desk research report this "loss of faith".¹⁹ These are further backed by almost daily media commentary on one aspect or another of the phenomenon.

As Robin Grove-White puts it, "the assumptions are still those of stability from the top down". He goes on to note:

The processes of fragmentation and other conflicting political, social and economic priorities, in an increasingly unpredictable world, appear to thwart the expression of [environmental concern] in people's lives.

This loss of faith in hitherto respected institutions, coupled with the flight to alternatives, is not confined to the environmental arena. It can be seen in relation to the established church, the medical industry and, to a lesser extent, the judicial system. The extent of this crisis of faith is

¹⁸ Common Ground (1984)

¹⁹ A selection of the more important recent research touching on this phenomenon would include: Jacqui Burgess and Carolyn Harrison (1994), Robin Grove-White (1994), Phil MacNaghten et al. (1995), Andrew Thomas et al. (1994) and Helen Wilkinson (1994)

revealed when Grove-White notes a disturbing development, based on research into the world views of university students:²⁰

the lack of identification with central government in its approach to the environment may now also be attaching to NGOs, as they are seen by the people that we talked to as working increasingly within the same confined political spaces and idioms as government itself.²¹

As MacNaghten and Scott (1994) report:

Perhaps the most prominent common response to a broadly shared agenda of the pervasiveness of current social, political and environmental problems, was the widespread degree of resignation and lack of agency (i.e. the belief that they could personally affect things) perceived by the students.

GROYNES

There have been vigorous attempts to hold back this erosion of certainties along the attitudinal coastline. As the tides of change rush in, new and better designs of groyne are constructed to contest the 'common ground'. Yet this alternative approach to change remains little more than a kind of rump parliament of the disaffected.

The spate of recent books such as *Small is Stupid* by Wilfred Beckerman, *Life on a Modern Planet* by Richard North and *Down to Earth* by Matt Ridley, are good examples of what John Vidal (1995b) has called 'contrarian' thought. Vidal effectively demolishes much of the contrarian case, but the following example, (bizarrely implying that free enterprise will eventually find a way to privatise Nature herself), helps bury it, albeit with praise:

Eco-privatisation, the extension of private rights to the vast range of resources that have been left outside the market place, provides...a robust alternative...behind every tree - as well as behind every whale, aquifer, forest, and stream - can stand a private group or individual empowered to protect that resource. Such stewards, by protecting their resources, would protect the planet for the rest of us.²²

A particularly magnificent example of the potential for such stewardship is to be found in the marble jungle around Liverpool Street. Amid austere sculptures, astonishing suit-diversity and avarnal edifices can be found a few (a very few) trees, set down like the etiolated afterthoughts of irritated architects. It is a curious irony that the very market forces which shaped, and paid for, this blighted landscape, (and so many others), have in turn helped to create the public's loss of faith

²⁰ Preliminary findings are reported in Phil MacNaghten and John Scott (1994)

²¹ Robin Grove-White (1994)

²² Fred L. Smith, Jr. (1994). Mr Smith is "President and founder of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based public interest group dedicated to the principle of free enterprise and individual liberty". The passage continues: "Consider the protection of biodiversity. Some argue that there are as many as ten to one hundred million species of flora and fauna that deserve protection...Do we really think a few hundred governments are going to protect ten to one hundred million anything?"

THE 'SO WHAT?' FACTOR

Repeated surveys show a public utterly unconvinced that market forces will protect the environment. Indeed, a public correctly surmising that the simplistic savageries of the 'free' market require restraint. The recent success of Will Hutton's *The State We're In*²³ is but one reflection of renewed interest in how to control the beast. The wider Public believes, quite reasonably, that primary responsibility for protecting the environment, *as with any other form of collective security*, lies with government. The public further feels that government has abandoned that responsibility, and many have consequently developed what behavioural psychologists call 'learned helplessness'.

What Tam Dalyell has called the "so what?" factor²⁴ prevails. Why bother recycling a few newspapers when, to take but one startling statistic, in 1990-91 there was only one prosecution by H.M. Inspectorate of Pollution? In the face of a seeming indifference to the severity of the rolling environmental crisis, a more familiar term than the behaviourist 'learned helplessness' is useful: *depression*. Thus the institutions which should be encouraging the public to take its share of responsibility risks permanently alienating the very reservoir of potential support.

A wealth of measured evidence supports the complex and interesting picture of widescale changes in values. A recent analysis of several of these trends is to be found in Helen Wilkinson's 'No Turning Back' report for the Demos Institute.²⁵ In an excellent and wide-ranging study, with a particular focus on the changing role and expectations of women, she argues that a dramatic schism is developing between 'the 7 million generation' of 18-35 year olds, and their elders.²⁶ The young, she argues, have largely lost faith in party politics and institutions as a vehicle for change, principally as a result of the failure of these organisations to take account of their concerns.

She cites one study, among a blizzard of statistics, showing that, among those in their thirties, "29% [think] it makes no difference which party is in power".²⁷ In the same study, 20% thought none of the political parties would benefit them personally, and, crucially, a much higher priority is placed on the environment by this generation. 79% said that "we should tackle the problems in the environment even if this means slower economic growth" while 38% agreed that "preserving the environment is more important than any other political issue today".²⁸

The question remains, of course, how to go about preserving the environment? The massive rises in membership of organisations such as Greenpeace (1987: 80 000; 1995: 400 000), Friends of the Earth (1988: 75 000; 1995: 200 000), and Amnesty International (Student/Youth

²³ Will Hutton (1995)

²⁴ Tam Dalyell, M.P. in Gary Murray (1993)

²⁵ Helen Wilkinson (1994)

²⁶ In some ways, particularly in terms of access to political power, this schism reflects a similar set of perceptions and values to that implied by the bottom-up/top-down distinction.

²⁷ Although see section 6, *Counting Chickens*, for remarks on the dubious value of such figures.

²⁸ E. Ferri (1993)

members: 1988: 1 300; 1995: 15 000)²⁹ demonstrates a desire for action of some kind

*There's a craving for accountability, and longer term responsibility.
Together with an appreciation that it's not much use waiting for
others but it's up to everyone to effect change.*

John Vidal³⁰

Age and gender-based differences, however, as remarked above, provide only a crude lens through which to perceive the population at large. Priorities for individual sectors, groups or sub-cultures have too often been defined directly by researchers' ideology and/or indirectly as a result of poor methodology. Consequently, a significant body of recent research has chosen to reformulate both the questions asked and the methodology used. This research is largely qualitative, an approach which provides an effective means of teasing out both complexity and areas of underlying consensus which hitherto have frequently lain unexplored, often due to the crudeness of quantitative attitudinal instruments.

SPIRIT OF CHANGE

Be that as it may, more formal indicators of this widespread loss of public engagement, or what has been called 'civic mindedness', are not hard to locate, as Robin Grove-White has pointed out.³¹ Commentators as diverse as John Gray, David Marquand and Martin Jacques have discussed the phenomenon, which is reflected, for instance, in the loss of membership in political parties.

A study by the Economic and Social Research Council at Sheffield University³² has shown that half Conservative party members are over 66, and only 5% under 35. Losing members at around 66,000 per year, it could halve in size by the end of the decade. The Labour Party may be gaining membership, yet still remains only a fifth the size it was in the 1950's.

In abandoning party politics, many have begun to align themselves with single-issue groups, which are often concerned either directly or indirectly (e.g. vivisection, vegetarianism, cycling) with environmental issues. Thus a significant part of the public is choosing to express its concerns in a more direct and focussed way.

The move is then but a short one towards direct action, whether at Brightlingsea over live animal exports, *Reclaim the Streets* or the once staid Pedestrian Society bouncing cars off pavements. As John Vidal writes, in the context of the recent *Land is Ours Movement* action at the disused Wisley aerodrome:

[The occupation of land] signals a real shift in the British environment/social protest movements -

²⁹ Liza Donaldson (1995)

³⁰ John Vidal (1995a)

³¹ Robin Grove-White (1994)

³² Cited by Robin Grove-White (1994)

away from highly-focused, reactive protest towards the pro-active, collective pursuit of a broad agenda for real social change. Having helped vitalise and broaden the transport debate, the reformers are in a good position to extend their arguments into all kinds of areas.

The mainstream political parties should watch carefully, and the environment groups, having once all but denied support to the road protesters and other fellow travellers (and found themselves out of touch with the spirit of change) should join the debate and consider how they can work together. It could just benefit everyone.³³

As perhaps the most prominent environmental correspondent in Britain, Vidal is as well placed as anyone to tap into this 'spirit of change'. For if those who were young in the 1960s have learned anything in the last two decades, it is the importance of the media in shaping the debate.

SETTLED PESSIMISM

An important new report from the Centre for the Study of Environmental Change (CSEC),³⁴ (referred to in more detail later) provides stark reading. It uses a carefully constructed qualitative study to unpack just how much the sense of personal responsibility has been vitiated by perceived indifference at the institutional level:

Discussions of people's perceptions of central government appeared to reflect a deep sense of distrust, and a general lack of faith in the ability or willingness of government to respond to their concerns.

The report also discusses the fatalism which often meets complex environmental problems. As so often, the great cultural critic Raymond Williams placed an unerring finger on the problem in *Towards 2000*:

The settled pessimism of so much of the culture of the late 20th century is in effect an absolute loss of the future; of any significant belief that it can be both different and better.³⁵

When respondents in the CSEC study were asked to contemplate the future, their responses indicated just such a lack of faith in any improvements to come. Exploring still deeper levels of this malaise were the participants in another study. They were asked to contemplate realistic scenarios of future restrictions on car use, and pushed to translate the feelings which lay beyond a generalised helplessness. Their responses covered a gauntlet of strong emotions, including anxiety, defensiveness, horror, gloom and despondency.³⁶

The authors of the CSEC study make an even more disturbing observation. They suggest that:

³³ John Vidal (1995c)

³⁴ Phil MacNaghten, Robin Grove-White, Michael Jacobs and Brian Wynne. (1995)

³⁵ Cited by John Battle, MP and Labour spokesman for science in *The Guardian* 16th March 1995

³⁶ Sue Robson (1993) Unpublished research undertaken for a client "active in the motoring arena [with] business and policy concerns related to the environmental issues surrounding road transport."

...anxieties about the future may well be a surrogate for major insecurity and uncertainty concerning the present. This dominant pessimism about the future might be interpreted most appropriately as a paralysing lack of confidence in the ability of proposals for shared action to be effective in present circumstances.

The importance of this insight for environmental policy research can hardly be exaggerated.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

As the need for urgent action to repair this loss of faith is manifested ever more clearly, so too is the responsibility incumbent on those who are in a position to effect change. Which is to say, everyone. From landscape designers and ecologists to civil servants and elected representatives. Martin Spray has clearly identified the problem:

How prosaic we so often are! Yet again I am reminded of those early-middle-aged, middle-class, professional men (that is, the masculine parts of us all) prosaically making blandscapes, and sanitising our lives.

Not true of all professionals, fortunately... but they tend to rationalise towards 'solutions', as if rationalising is what is most needed in the face of our problems...It is not that they have no guts (far from it, in many cases); but one wonders if they still have gut reactions. The trend towards a professionalisation of greenness, the influx of pinstripes into the 'organisation' of conservation organisations, the plethora of second-rate learned journals dealing with environmental issues...are not altogether encouraging.³⁷

The passion of protest, the crackle of anger and confusion, the numb and grey indifference of those who feel no more hope, all of these and more contribute to a picture which increasingly concerns policy-makers, politicians and pundits alike. Martin Spray cites Relph³⁸ not only for the term 'blandscapes' but also for the response Gandhi gave when asked what worried him most:

The hardness of heart of the educated.

How else, Spray asks, can we understand how our experiences of the natural world have become "sanitised. And impoverished; and standardised." As he ruefully remarks:

None of this is news; but it may be worth bemusedly rehearsing an example or two. The design specification, for example, intended for children's play sites in the countryside: a 'tree head'; the dead head of a tree, trimmed and guyed, the lower end treated with preservative and set in ground.³⁹ Somehow, it misses the point of trees.

Paul Evans is less rueful, though no less pertinent:

Sometimes I think that landscape designers are only concerned with providing a cynical green-

³⁷ Martin Spray (1993)

³⁸ E. Relph (1981)

³⁹ (From Martin Spray, 1993) "As illustrated in Timothy Cochrane Associates (1984) *Providing for children's play in the countryside*. Countryside Commission for Scotland."

washing service to the construction industry, sugaring the pill of environmentally brutal development...Everywhere has become part of a landscaped design. The homogenous plantings of mixed trees, shrubs, bulbs and grass along roadsides, around factories and public buildings, and throughout housing estates, are now a common feature of Britain, most of Europe and North America. Dumped from drawing boards to smother the potential of nature, these plantings have created a new ecological habitat: Corporate Scrub.⁴⁰

THE GUTTERING CANDLE

This loss of faith, accelerated by a seeming refusal for anyone to take responsibility, is clearly a marker for a deeper problem: a loss of belief in the probity of those engaged in the 'elite discourse'. Martin Spray's example of what might more aptly be termed a 'tree skull' and Paul Evans' excellent new term are but two examples of an officially sanctioned world, ever more bleak, planned to the point of extinction.

Professional scientists find themselves particularly bound up with the problem of the public perception of their work, with the urgent need for a public debate to examine ethical issues created by the philosophy of science, changes in funding practice, recent areas of activity like genetic engineering and bio-technology, as well as with new findings concerning the impact of older technology, practices and chemicals. However, detailed discussion of the penumbra into which the Enlightenment seems to be edging would not be appropriate here.

There is, however, a flip side to the negative picture outlined above, one which emphasises positive elements for *both* sides of the discourse. For instance, at the heart of the Enlightenment's guttering candle lies something which is not science, objective, or rational in any sense, but which drives scientists, just as it does children – enjoyment.

As the philosopher Jacob Golomb would say, this is simply a reiteration of the typical Nietzschean remark that:

knowledge is equally a drive and that in fact there is no Kantian "pure reason" free from a partisan emotional basis. Therefore, the journey along the path of authentic, healthy life must in addition pass through a realisation of the true nature of cognition.⁴¹

THE CONSERVATION BRIDGE

The way these issues interact with the public in conservation terms, together with the potential for conservation to help facilitate change, has been powerfully explored by a number of researchers, most notably in Jacquelin Burgess and Carolyn Harrison's paper "Nature conservation, science and popular issues" (1993).⁴² They note that

the nature conservation movement cannot rely on science alone to carry the day, *especially when it comes to convincing the public* of the importance of their cause. (Italics added).

⁴⁰ Paul Evans (1995a)

⁴¹ Jacob Golomb (1989)

⁴² Dr. Jacquelin Burgess and Dr. Carolyn Harrison (1993)

Assuming that the Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group at least sees itself broadly aligned with ‘the nature conservation movement’, we might re-consider one aspect of the Group’s remit:

The aim would be to both inform and learn from the general public about what was important to them in terms of their agenda and local priorities.

There is, to be sure, that curious lodging of the word ‘inform’, (one doubts the public would take well being ‘informed’ as to their agenda and local priorities). Even assuming that inform floats free of this intention, the *order* implied remains. Nevertheless, the emphasis in this specification on learning from the public seems very well attuned to the currents underlying the latest thinking. A useful caveat, however, is provided in a further observation of Burgess and Harrison, that:

[the] arguments *and practices* used to advance the cause of nature conservation in Britain, privilege scientific arguments above all others. (Italics added)

In response to this problem, which the bottom-up/top-down distinction usefully exposes, Burgess and Harrison propose that:

if the cause of nature conservation were to incorporate other meanings of nature conservation, then it would cease to be the single-issue, scientific concern it has become.

This is a widely held view among almost all the leading thinkers in the area. Returning to the domain of *practices* that might advance the cause of conservation, Paul Evans is one of many who have repeatedly argued for “more direct involvement by people in the way their landscape is shaped.”⁴³ Burgess and Harrison point to how this view might work by noting that:

Facts, values and personal experiences are all bound up together so that nature and its conservation are social and cultural constructs rather than matters of science alone.

They suggest that a potential bridge can be found in “the enthusiasms and concerns of the natural history tradition” and in the urban wildlife movement that emerged from that tradition.

OTHER SONGS

We need to press for a redefining, not assuming that economic values take priority over other values...

Participant in ‘Communities’ Group Discussion, BAPSG Research

As *Common Ground* and others have long argued – and most of the researchers cited recognise – a key role exists for *alternative* viewpoints, particularly writers and artists, to add nuance and depth to our understanding. Indeed, the subjects of concern to writers and artists frequently herald research interest. The writer and naturalist Richard Mabey chose his title presciently

⁴³ Paul Evans (1995b)

when he wrote *'Entitled to a View?'* in 1984. In this introductory essay for *Second Nature*, a collection of art and writing which sets out to deepen the focus of the environmental debate, Mabey writes:

We have all become well-informed about the world's ecological crises, about the destruction of the tropical rain forests, the pollution of the oceans, the profligacy of agribusiness, and even about the economic connections between all these. Yet this knowledge has remained curiously remote, not connected in any obvious way with our ordinary, everyday experience. The fate of the natural world, which is also of course our fate, has been declared the province of specialists.⁴⁴

As Mabey says, we know this. Yet, over a decade later, what has been the response of the specialists, and to what degree is the wider population convinced that the specialists, and the public themselves, are able to effect urgent change?

TO BE AND NOT TO SEEM

Change can only start at home, with ourselves. In the light of this axiom there is a terrible rigour to Kierkegaard's remark, made to his Diary in 1846, some 150 years ago, that:

If a person does not become what he understands, he does not really understand it.⁴⁵

The public perceive an elite discourse, carried out by professionals, and with findings effectively, 'passed down the line' – usually in the form of leaflets. A discourse in which adherence to the most basic of 'conversational maxims' – that we tell and act on the truth – appears to have been steadily eroded, albeit in a lapidary manner, leaving us all worse off.

Speaking ten years after Mabey, the ecologist Joanna Macy puts the collective pall which has emerged concerning apparently intractable environmental issues with even more bite. She talks of "the resistance to painful information," and of how the responses to this resistance manifest as "grief, fear, dread and sorrow". She goes on to say:

Our pain for the world doesn't come out of some private craziness, although the power holders, the corporations and their advertising, and the governments that serve the corporations would have us believe that it's because we're personally maladjusted or unsuccessful that we feel pain for this world.⁴⁶

RENEGOTIATING OURSELVES

The title given to Macey's interview, *Ecology from the Inside Out*, offers a clue as to how it might be possible to deal with this pain, grief and bitterness. The extraordinary testimony of a genuine "member of the public" is cryptic:

The answer...is for us to just look inside...Like I say, there's some people can live all their life and

⁴⁴ Common Ground (1984)

⁴⁵ *Diary of Soren Kierkegaard* (1846)

⁴⁶ Joanna Macey (1995)

not do that. They're still harping on these seeds of the past, to do something for the future. And where's it going? Still bitter. Still angry. Still negative. Think they've done a lot of good out there, to the world they haven't. But they go to their death-beds still angry. You see, the seed has remained negative all along *and* it's been given out to other people... Because all you're doing is feeding more anger, and more negativity, you see. So we're not actually doing anything by just discussing things, and reliving them, over and over and over again, because that just builds more bitterness, more anger, and the negative seed just goes on even further. Unless someone has took it inwards, first, before giving it out, it cannot, it cannot have its reward. And very few people, unfortunately, can do that.⁴⁷

An important aspect, perhaps, of the simple but dreadfully difficult task outlined above – at which the author, for one, has clearly failed – is explained by the Jungian psychoanalyst, Irene Claremont de Castillejo.⁴⁸ She suggests that we must cast away the false comforts of our roles, whatever they might be. By thus abandoning the cardboard wrappings of being a 'civil servant', 'scientist', 'ecologist', 'researcher' or 'teacher', and risking a little discomfort, we are then better placed to perceive, meet and engage with the world *as it is*. Nature in almost any form, but particularly where *variety* is present, can, if we are open to its re-creating force, help us in this process.

As Paul Evans says, "we must engage in a re-negotiation between ourselves and nature."⁴⁹ One could go further, and argue that any such re-negotiation is ultimately one we should undertake with our *selves*; and with the kind of world we wish to live in. The kind of world we wish, presumably, to see as reflecting those selves.

Most people, surely, do not care for the ubiquity of Corporate Scrub, "the privatisation of public space"⁵⁰, dead trees instead of living ones, farming animals as if they were crops, children choking on traffic fumes, blandscapes, and nature as something seen on the telly. If nothing else, it shames us with its poverty of spirit. All of us, each part of the organism that is 'the public'.

The spirit rebels at losing gouts of the life-blood that is nature's *variety* or *diversity*. We are not, by nature, an anaemic species. We wish, as the examined life⁵¹ abundantly demonstrates, our interior landscape to be a rich and varied one. In our complexity, we require an exterior landscape that is alive, vital and differentiated enough to engage our mind, body and spirit.

In attempting this process of re-negotiation, and "establishing a new cultural project based around our relationship with our natural environment",⁵² lies news of better approaches, where it is not true to say:

They keep you in the dark, and come up with words like Sustainability!⁵³

⁴⁷ Anonymous (1995). *Full transcript at Appendix 2*

⁴⁸ Castillejo (1973)

⁴⁹ Paul Evans (1995b)

⁵⁰ Paul Evans (1995b)

⁵¹ "The unexamined life is not worth living." Aristotle.

⁵² Paul Evans (1995b)

⁵³ Anonymous unemployed male respondent in MacNaghten et al. (1995)

5. Good News: *A Forest, A Tree, A Child (& Dangerous Safety)*

Here for the first time appears the significant link (later to be strengthened) between Nietzsche's psychology and the central expression of his thought – 'Umwertung aller Werte' (Revaluation of all Values). From this new perspective he reformulates the book's⁵⁴ primary task:

*To look at science from the perspective of the artist, but at art from that of life.*⁵⁵

If one binary division has characterised the history of ideas in the last century, it is perhaps the most important one: a growing alienation of individuals from their environment. The identification and process of *anomie* has fuelled movements as diverse as Marxism, Freudianism, Modernism and Existentialism. And in the very roots of these ideas lies the better news.

As Jacob Golomb forcefully argues, the above quotation expresses the core of Nietzsche's thought. As a man who predicted many of the developments of this century, from Freud to ultra-individualism, yet who remains largely misunderstood (as a result?), Nietzsche's injunction could act as a model slogan for those who strive for an alternative environmental discourse. One that seeks to genuinely engage the public as equal stakeholders.

A NEW MAP

A range of new approaches, from locally generated indicators (including "rule of thumb" biodiversity indicators⁵⁶) to home-grown small community initiatives, reflect the possibilities inherent in turning the map upside down – and beginning to see the "bottom-up" process as the *real* one. These new projects are happening all over the country, on a local level, usually getting by on little more than enthusiasm, imagination, vision and underpaid or voluntary action. Two examples:

Coed Eryri: *The Forest of Snowdonia*

*The idea is to convince local people, particularly children, that they can shape their future – because for many, the future looks very bleak indeed.*⁵⁷

In *Peaks and troughs*, Paul Evans reports a visionary scheme being developed in Snowdon. He notes that:

Solutions to economic and ecological problems traditionally come from agencies outside local communities

and contrasts this with the approach developed by the Coed Eryri - the Forest of Snowdonia - project. This is a project which "sees itself cracking the old, 'think globally, act locally', chestnut.

⁵⁴ "Attempt" in *The Birth of Tragedy (Die Geburt der Tragödie)*

⁵⁵ Jacob Golomb (1989). *Nietzsche's Enticing Psychology of Power*

⁵⁶ e.g. Red squirrel populations, presence of raptors, numbers and varieties of butterflies &c.

⁵⁷ Paul Evans (1995c)

Globally it is part of an international response to the problem of climate change and reduced biodiversity.”

The anthropologist and ecologist Peter Taylor has formed “a small steering group made up of people native to, or well established in, the...region. They come from backgrounds in the environment, arts, education, theatre, architecture and development and include farmers, landowners and members of the artists community.

Evans’ report could almost provide a ‘green-print’ for an alternative approach, rooted firmly in the ‘bottom-up’ process:

The Coed Eryri project’s “strategic vision” is not so much to sell a complete plan with which the local community and interested bodies either agree with and join, or disagree with and oppose, but to act as a catalyst for communication and embrace dissent and difference... It is, instead, an evolving concept which has grown out of local communal needs and a coalition of initiatives.

These initiatives aim to break down the boundaries between farm and forest, industry and environment and to sell themselves through innovative demonstration projects.

These include linking core areas of biogenetic importance deep within the Rhinog mountains with short-rotation plantations and woodland corridors as a “sanctuary forest” where large herbivores and even predators can be reintroduced; tree nurseries growing plants from locally collected seed involving local schools; educational projects for all ages reviving the connection between the region;s Celtic heritage and the land. The idea is to convince local people, particularly children, that they can shape their future - because for many, the future looks very bleak indeed.

Another voice in Evans’ article is typical of those who want to help engender change:

Iwan Brioc has a background in theatre in education, and sees participatory theatre here, amid the dereliction, as a way of retrieving a battered, oppressed community's imagination.⁵⁸ “This town is closing down, the community is dying”, he says. “Maybe this is the perfect ground to start the regeneration. As the opposite to the trickle-down effect, we offer a vision which grows from the grass-roots up, from a new need to a new link with nature.”

Turning to that most common of barriers, funding, Evans remarks:

Visionary projects such as Coed Eryri...provide innovative and adventurous ways of meeting the new millennium. But they need tangible, effective support from healthy agencies which are there to care about the countryside, its wild nature and human communities. And if these remain at the mercies of government policy as it stands, then Coed Eryri will never be more than a vision – and then, heaven help us all.

⁵⁸ See overleaf and Appendix 3 for worked examples of participatory theatre in education (TIE). TIE is one of the more well-known examples of a successful activity, with enormous potential application to ecology, almost eradicated by funding cuts.

The Tree Project: *Word and Action* (Dorset)

When people have a personal impact, if you link it with a creative activity - and there are masses of choices - you're putting the sense of possibility, of change, back into people's lives, it's not just another council tree. The ecological argument then becomes very powerful. Not only granting people a say in their environment, but the power to do something about it.

Liz Reeve⁵⁹

Trees, as we all know, are special. They are to plants as humans are to animals. An innovative and imaginative project developed by Sarah Dennis and Liz Reeve at *Word and Action* (Dorset), a small community theatre group, provides another example of the power of local and direct engagement in the ecological process. *Word and Action* offer local schools a piece of theatre, devised and performed by children aged 5-14 years old, (although, like other work by *Word and Action*, it could run with equal success with elderly people, those with learning difficulties, prisoners &c.) the highlight being the planting of a tree.

ECOLOGICAL RITUAL

As Liz Reeve, co-coordinator of the project reports,

the response of children to 'ecological ritual' is phenomenal. At one performance, the tree we were planting was replacing a very old tree, which had been chopped down because it was becoming dangerous. Someone had thought to leave it there, because it would be interesting for the children to see what they were replacing. The children touched it and smelled it and could also see what their tree would look like when it was that old. When they were dead...working with children, it's quite magical.

Carl Jung has remarked of rituals that they are:

an answer and reaction to the action of God upon man, and perhaps they are not only that, but are also intended to be 'activating,' a form of magic coercion.⁶⁰

Interest in the role of ritual in the life of individuals and communities has grown considerably of late – as people begin to sense its loss. In any discussion of ritual, aside from Jung, the contribution of the Romanian-born historian of religion Mircea Eliade stands out.⁶¹ Eliade has described in impressive detail the depth and complexity of ritual, and its power to bring one “face to face with the numinous”.

Eliade observes that such themes *are* present in the modern West, but largely unconsciously, in the form of art and literature.⁶² This is not quite true. When Ministers, Mayors or Councillors open a building or public space, they too engage in a precise, if dull, ritual: the plaque, the clod of earth, the local press photographer, the grin.

⁵⁹ Liz Reeve (1995)

⁶⁰ Carl G. Jung (1961)

⁶¹ See, for example, Rosemary Ellen Guiley (1991)

⁶² e.g. Mircea Eliade (1958a, 1958b, 1977)

Yet with what Liz Reeve dubs 'ecological ritual', something more is created than mere observance. She describes working in a school where local conservation officers had already engaged the children in the process of planting trees and designing hedges, recalling that the teacher has remarked: "It's interesting. We've planted 60 trees around this school, but this one's going to be special." The reason it was special, Liz argues, was *because* there was a ritual involved. She adds:

Ritual is simply a form of attachment, a form of acknowledgement. It says 'I was there.' With ecological rituals, the environment then changes – all by itself! Rituals can mark change, mark development, look backwards and forwards. They are not just marking a moment in time, but existence. It's an ongoing process, and therefore becomes creative. It's not stuck.

TO HERE

Bear in mind, however, that only one in ten trees planted in Britain survives to maturity. The solution, of course, is a ritualised planting of *more* trees, shrubs and plants, as part of a programme. Alternatively, a single ritual – which might be anything from a party to a 'tree-dressing' day – can be used to mark the 'completion' of a programme of activities.

Talking of the ritual of "a spade of earth" when dignitaries plant a tree to mark a moment, Ms Reeve remarks: "Ministers should turn up and be involved in something creative. With something living, no one quite knows what's going to happen, but something is. The ritual is that people gather."

BREAD AND ROSES

Turning to the problems of funding, Ms. Reeve makes an extremely important point:

A lot of the ecological stuff that's taking place is amazingly cheap...but when you approach people, they go into almost a catatonic state because it's something they're not familiar with. And also, you get 'How can we possibly spend £300?' There is always this dividing up: 'Is it a service, in which case it's bread, or is it something else and therefore a rose? And we can cut the roses.'

She argues there is growing recognition that activities such as The Tree Project *can* and *should* be regarded as services. Services which are just as vital, if not more so, as the provision of, (for instance), Victorian bollards or a sleeping policeman. Experience suggests that the costs of landscaping a roundabout or other piece of public space – from committees, consultancy, and planning stages to more consultants, execution and publicity - are extraordinarily high when compared to low-tech, locally-driven activities such as The Tree Project.

Projects which could be easily adapted to fulfil the same purpose. If local networks of children, parents, teachers, volunteers, community activists, members of the artistic and cultural community are given sites to landscape and celebrate, they gain a sense of belonging, empowerment and attachment which far outweighs the polite and usually expensive recommendations of the Architects' Journal. Human cultural diversity can thus engage directly with ecological diversity.

"We're doing it, but do more. Make a means for people to do something in local areas...coming back to the earth...the touch gives people something, the touch is very important."

Participant in 'Communities' Group Discussion, BAPSG Research.

The risk with many of the organisations which come to comprise mature infra-structure is that they become sclerotic, and unable to perceive how, with imagination and effort, relatively small sums can be diverted from large budgets - publicity, training, Information Technology, landscaping, highway maintenance &c. – towards small-scale projects. Projects which will almost certainly achieve a far greater impact on a local level than larger sums spent on, say, retro-pastiche Victorian litter-bins.

(Further details of The Tree Project, and three examples of stories generated by children are at Appendix 3.)

AN ANCIENT METAPHOR

These two projects provide a glimpse into the details of how a bottom-up approach can succeed, as well as an indicator of some the accompanying problems: as ever, these are principally bureaucratic and financial in nature. They can be taken as emblematic of a change in the public perspective which is resurgent throughout British society. To more fully understand this process from a generalist perspective, one of the oldest and most powerful metaphors in the book is of considerable help. And as Gregory Bateson was fond of remarking, ritual is simply "metaphor made real."

If we regard the environment as a tree, we can easily see how much of the top-down' response to its ill-health has focussed on the visible. We pollard, coppice and fuss with the crown like a hairdresser. Yet the root structure, invisible, of equal size and importance, implicit to the tree as a whole, is dying, weakened by lack of nourishment, care and good management. Eventually, no matter how much we meddle with the visible part of the tree, it will die. Unless we turn to the roots.⁶³

The educationalist and environmentalist Roger Hammond refocuses this idea: "The appropriate role for the elite providers of information, and the institutions they work in, is one of servants. Servants whose skills should be available to help and inspire the public who...ultimately pay their salaries."⁶⁴

Essentially, then, policy-makers, scientists and other participants in elite discourse should be examining how they, jointly and severally, might begin to help revitalise the roots. It is less than glamorous work – fertiliser usually is – and requires a loosening of some of the reins of power. It is also work that is relatively cheap, invigorating and, as any forester will aver, necessary.

⁶³ Perhaps it is time to talk of, and imagine, root-systems, or tree roots, allowing a well-worn phrase like 'grass roots' a little rest. There has, after all, been a considerable recent loss in grass-diversity, in favour of selected breeds, pesticide-ridden seeds and an 'easy-to-manage' product.

⁶⁴ Roger Hammond (1995)

URBANE NATURE?

Turning to other research, David Goode has noted,⁶⁵ alongside many others, that some of the most exciting – and excited – responses to the environment have emerged in urban contexts. While observing that the "whole approach [to urban nature conservation] involves imagination and creativity", Goode goes further in suggesting that the possibilities in this area are only just beginning to be explored, and that "We need a more radical approach to the landscape of cities."

Although some 80% of the U.K. population live in urban centres, as Goode (1989) writes, "organised programmes of nature conservation in urban areas have only been developed in Britain within the past 10 years, building on ideas generated in the 1970s."⁶⁶ The loose confederation of projects which emerged during that time became known as the Urban Wildlife movement. It is a movement which has provided much of the energy behind effective local action on the environment, repeatedly engaging with the problem of squaring science with the circle of the public.

As Goode (1989), Burgess & Harrison (1993) and others have noted, much of the success of this movement can be traced to roots in largely local, and usually amateur, contributions by natural historians. The linkages conferred by the past, by local area, and by enthusiastic and non-professional involvement are crucial, it would seem, to effective participatory action on the ground. This is a message which developed countries would seem in need of relearning both at home and overseas.

As Jules Pretty and Michel Pimbert ask: "Have we, in the name of conservation, been missing out something important?"⁶⁷ They supply an answer, one of "a strengthening alternative vision that is putting people at the centre of conservation." They continue, reporting that:

There is good evidence to indicate that only the sort of participation that gives power and rights to local people can possibly succeed in the long term. This means that conservation professionals will have to learn to participate with local people in analysis of problems and solutions, the development of plans for joint management of resources, and the handing over of control to local groups and organisations. Only then will people have a stake in maintaining flora and fauna...Fundamental reforms in the governance and structure of conservation organisations are also needed, to shift mainstream conservation from top-down imposed planning, to more participatory approaches that build on local values and priorities.

Their conclusion is unambiguous:

If local people are not completely involved, then both they and conservation will suffer. We will all be the worse off.

⁶⁵ David A. Goode (1993)

⁶⁶ David A. Goode (1989)

⁶⁷ Jules Pretty & Michel Pimbert (1995) They are also co-authors of *Parks, People and Professionals*, a recent discussion paper for the UN Research Institute for Social Development

What is additionally notable about Pretty & Michel's remarks is that they specifically address the global, and particularly African, Indian, South American and South East Asian experience of international conservation efforts. Hardly Ruislip.

GROWING UNISON

We're seeing it happen in our everyday lives. And you've got to be pretty thick now if it isn't sinking in.

Anonymous (see Appendix 2)

The 'good news', then, includes the very unanimity of those voices concerned with conservation. As with the darker side of what's happening on or about the ground, there is no shortage of substantiating evidence. David Goode, for instance, some while ago iterated a crucial observation concerning the role of appropriate criteria in defining urban sites:

Established criteria for assessment of nature conservation value are not, in fact, particularly relevant for urban nature conservation. Criteria such as naturalness, diversity, rarity and size, used to assess the value of sites as potential nature reserves, are measures of intrinsic interest, but do not take account of either social factors or the local context of the site.

In the face of the picture of a potentially 'withdrawn and non-compliant' population painted in the first section, it might seem paradoxical to find that the alternative set of values and actions suggested above growing rapidly among so many sections of the public. Located particularly among the 'tree roots', these actions represent a more positive view of how change can be wrought in the face of perceived institutional indifference. It must be remembered, however, that many of these responses struggle and die, continually marginalised, underfunded and lacking the vocal support of the 'elite discourse'. Man cannot live by bread alone: he needs roses, too.

This more positive view is one in which science is seen as a tool. A tool which can be either too blunt or too sharp for the purposes required of it. The living and breathing elements of nature, with its numinous and re-creational, as opposed to measurable and utilitarian qualities, are regarded here as the true source of value, the real reason why nature contributes to the variety and quality of life.

DIFFERENT HARMONIES

The research indicates that the response evoked in the public by the natural world in its multifold forms is often an emotional one, a concept rarely discussed in the 'elite' or indeed any other English discourse. The American philosopher Edward Gumbine notes:

The upshot of the radical Western split between people and nature is that both resource conservationists and wilderness preservationists, as long as they view nature as a collection of resources for humans, inhabit a world that *categorically denies* [italics added] the full range of

symbiotic relationships that may exist between people and wilderness." ⁶⁸

This emphasis on a category-based denial is one that is particularly well-placed, for confusion over categories, or what Gilbert Ryle called "category mistakes"⁶⁹ lies at the heart of many of the problems associated with establishing an effective environmental discourse.

'Biodiversity' can thus be seen as a potentially powerful tool, in its capacity to act as a crucible for the examination of complex environmental decisions. Gumbine continues:

The biodiversity crisis is challenging the fundamental logic of pristine wilderness set-asides surrounded by intensely managed multiple-use lands.

Among the first to face up to this tension was W.G. Hoskins in his classic *The Making of the English Countryside*.⁷⁰ By detailing quite how pervasive humanity's impact on its environment had been in England, Hoskins forced us to recognise that a true set of responses to "natural habitats" *must* be firmly tied to an understanding of people's involvement with their landscape. Which in turn reminds (or teaches) us of the vital role human life plays, and will continue to, in constructing the 'real' nature of our environment.

WILD!

"An unending pleasure is derived from the exploration of new unvisited and unexplored regions."

H.M. Stanley⁷¹

Research by Carolyn Harrison and her colleagues illuminates many of these themes. Dr Harrison makes a further and forceful observation in arguing that much of the power of nature to evoke responses is located in childhood experiences. In *Nature in the City*,⁷² three dominant themes are explored in examining how the people of Thamesmead "...have an immense and irrepressible desire for contact with the natural world." The three themes are:

- 'wildlife is fun'
- 'wild areas and the desire for adventure'
- 'the search for variety'.

One clearly need not be an African explorer of Stanley's ilk to identify with the "unending pleasure [of] 'wild Nature' ". Although there are many important issues covered in this fascinating paper, one of the most crucial provides a precise focus, for it goes deep into the heart of the matter. Citing the historian Keith Thomas's notion of the 'emblematic tradition', the infinite capacity "to

⁶⁸ R.E. Gumbine (1994)

⁶⁹ Gilbert Ryle (1949). *The Concept of Mind*.

⁷⁰ W.G. Hoskins (1977)

⁷¹ From *The Diaries of H.M. Stanley* cited in Lorenzo & Mirella Ricciardi (1989)

⁷² Carolyn Harrison, Melanie Limb and Jacquelin Burgess (1987)

invest the natural world with symbolic meanings for human life" ⁷³the paper notes that:

in the modern world, it is a tradition which has been displaced, at least in most official justifications for nature conservation, by one which favours a sense of "scientific and educative" purpose. In consequence, the values which have underpinned official strategies for nature conservation have ignored an authentic "cultural purpose" that is rooted in the experience of ordinary people.

A Child's Eye

*"[if] we put [Nature] into the heart...at a young age..not everyone will accept it, but the majority will."*⁷⁴

The capacity of children, in particular, to respond to the natural world openly and directly, is well-known. Wendy Titman's report on young people's responses to their environment, *Special Places; Special People*⁷⁵ is an excellent and affecting examination of the role which school grounds and other spaces play in children's lives. There is far too much good material in this report to do justice to it. It should simply be required reading for those with responsibilities in this area.

The honest and natural responses of some of the children is refreshing, as so often their environment is not:

"It would be nice if they turned it all into grassland 'cos we could play rolypoly and do gymnastics and we wouldn't get cuts."

"If we didn't have no trees we're dead - they do all the air for us and stuff."

"Flowers are pretty. They decorate the place up. They glow and shine and cheer you up when it's a miserable day. They brighten your eyes up. Flowers are nice to touch. They kiss your fingers."

"The thing about grass, well it's not just grass. When you really look at it, study it, you find there's all sorts of other stuff there and it's really interesting."

"If we had trees they would give us leaves and they look nicer on the ground, all shiny."

"Plants and flowers would make the place better. At the moment there's nothing there to make it look good. It looks scruffy and has looked like that for ages so people get used to it. If there was plants they would look at it differently. If they planted the flowers themselves, they would look after it more, they would treat it like their own garden."

"When we go places we see lovely greens and things like that and we think why can't we be there. All we want is a better environment...it's not much to ask, is it?"

"The pond is the most interesting place in the playground – well, it's the only place with living things – but we're not allowed to go there really."

"We've got a pond out there but no-one ever goes to look at it. It's all bogged up now because there's no water in it...nobody cares about it...we're not allowed to go there and so it's just ruined...it's a disaster"

⁷³ Keith Thomas (1984)

⁷⁴ Anonymous (1995). *Full transcript at Appendix 2*

⁷⁵ Wendy Titman (1994)

area, it tells you we need help."

"The bushes aren't pretty but at least with them it's not all plain cement."

"Animals would be good because if you had animals you'd have to have a nice environment which would be more better for us as well, but you couldn't keep animals in a place like this."

A page of quotations might seem excessive, yet consider, as Titman says, the mixed messages concerning the environment we convey, as a society of 'grown-ups', to children. We tell them it is important, yet provide what John Major called "grey, sullen landscapes". Children's voices, clear and to the point, are rarely given recognition in a society which, at least until the Children's Act, had more legislation for its animals than it did for its children. A careful re-reading of the quotations above outlines the importance of biological variety in the world, more eloquently than most research.

Dangerous Safety

One further important point should be noted as it can have a disastrous impact on potential solutions. It is the danger of an excess of 'safety' to the quality of young lives hemmed in by this justification.⁷⁶ A justification which so often seems little more than a projection of one's own fear. There has been much talk among the chatterati recently about the 'risk society', focussing on how the public has increasingly vested government with an invidious responsibility: to control, reduce and preferably eradicate the many risks inherent to the business of life. Not infrequently the mantra "think of the children" is chanted with a culpable irresponsibility. It is to everyone's shame that, as George Walden puts it: "our politics seems to be about the management of illusions...and...soothing and sweet-talking the public like infants."⁷⁷

Although Walden suggests that this culture is driven by confrontational politics, I would suggest that we all bear blame. Particularly timely, given that it is now almost a generation since the Fulton Committee's Inquiry into the Civil Service, would be a direct criticism of the mind-set which seeks, above all else, to avoid embarrassing a minister (or any other dignitary). Such a stance *inevitably* leads to paranoia, a fear of the unknown, an absence of risk-taking. The English are peculiarly susceptible to embarrassment, and the growth of signs in supermarkets asking punters to 'avoid the risk of embarrassment' reflects this.

As Carolyn Harrison's, Jacquelin Burgess' and others' work have clearly shown, the public, and particularly children, *wants* its nature to include elements which are wild, risky, unpredictable. The eradication of this, in the name of safety and reliability, whether in agriculture or landscaping, is one of the key threats biodiversity faces.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Also discussed at some length and in fascinating detail at appendix 2.

⁷⁷ George Walden, M.P. (1995) *Resignation letter*, reported in *The Guardian*, July 24.

⁷⁸ Tracy Clunies-Ross (1995) *Diversity in British Agriculture*. This important report is currently in preparation for *The Ecologist*. It examines the devastating loss of biodiversity in British crops in the last few decades, noting, among many insights, that those wishing to restore diversity are hemmed in by legally-binding lists of "approved" varieties. Growers are therefore criminalised by any attempts they might make to effect a restoration of diversity.

It is probably without irony that many of the more eloquent scientists have repeatedly enjoined their peers to achieve the clarity of a child's response to nature. Karl Pribram, the distinguished neurobiologist, cites Hering, the biologist, in urging that "we should sit down before Nature like a child", arguing that the alternative lies in a pursuit whereby we learn "more and more about less and less".

Luther Burbank, the American horticulturalist, is more evocative, while surely arguing for much the same end:

"In pursuing the study of any of the universal and everlasting laws of nature...before we can become one of nature's interpreters...preconceived notions, dogmas and all personal prejudice and bias must be laid aside. Listen patiently, quietly and reverently to the lessons...which Mother Nature has to teach, shedding light on that which was before a mystery, so that all who will, may see and know. She conveys her truths only to those who are passive and receptive."⁷⁹

An alternative and powerful set of constructs about nature are clearly embedded in popular culture, many of which are drawn on to fuel active engagements with the natural world. Refreshed by a well of childhood experience, still vivid in adult life, as well as more recent connections with nature, a growing section of the public now look at their own children, or those around them, and express real concern at the lack of similar opportunities available to today's young people.

This is the focus of principal concern nowadays.⁸⁰ While it emerges to some extent in the quantitative data, it is rather more clearly demonstrated in qualitative findings, including those of the present package of research undertaken for the BAPSG. It is a concern which is consistently and often very eloquently reiterated: the need to increase access to the experience of nature for today's young people. Tomorrow's public.

⁷⁹ Luther Burbank, *How to Produce New Fruits and Flowers*, Lecture to the American Pomological Society in the 1920s. Cited in: Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird (1974).

⁸⁰ Once again, see Appendix 2 for an interesting discussion.

6. COUNTING CHICKENS : THE COMITY OF ERRORS

Environment. Yes. But how to do it without every eye glazing over as the familiar statistics sound, merry as a leper's bell?

Gore Vidal ⁸¹

CAVEAT EMPTOR

Gore Vidal, as so often, is right. In the face of statistics, or even discussions about methodology, it is terribly tempting to go and make a cup of tea. This is a pity, for it leaves one vulnerable to either an easy acceptance or facile rejection of the numbers, the data, the information which swirls ever more giddily. NASA have admitted that at their current rate of progress it will take a 1000 years to analyse the data they have collected to date. And still they collect more. Over half a million academic journals are now published, and even the British Library finds most of the 20,000 it takes rarely used.⁸² Add in the internet and we can literally be said to be drowning in a sea of data. Like the other seas, it too is polluted.

The rigorous standards we vaguely believe operate have slipped to reveal, as Paul Kline (1988) has suggested, a vulnerable nakedness. Yet even as the errors, distortions and biases build up, still we hear polite courteous demurrals. Almost any graduate will be able to point to the relative rarity of well-designed research executed to the standard we hope for. But on it goes, the steady accrual of data, the counting, the weighting out of neat packages of percentiles in the marketplace of argument.

The present report has made every effort to restrict methodological discussion to a minimum, yet recognises that a number of these issues bear consideration if the wider understanding of the public's say in environmental issues is not to fall prey to insidious fatalism or misplaced hopes. Please try!

Quantitative research, largely in the form of opinion polls and attitude surveys, has dominated UK research into public attitudes towards the environment in recent years. There are four principal sources of this information:

- i) Attitudinal surveys commissioned by the Department of the Environment and undertaken by NOP, (DoE: 1986, 1989, 1993)
- ii) The British Social Attitudes series produced by Social and Community Planning Research
- iii) MORI's environmental research, including tracking trends (e.g. Corrado 1993, Worcester 1993) and
- iv) A variety of market research reports produced by Mintel, Nielsen, RSL Media, Jones Rhodes, BMRB and others.

⁸¹ Gore Vidal (1991)

⁸² "Write Only Memory", The Guardian, 6 July 1995

Much of the research in this last category is under- or partially-reported, as it was undertaken for the private sector for commercial purposes.

This is not the appropriate domain to discuss in detail the many philosophical and methodological problems associated with such survey data: these are covered in depth elsewhere.⁸³ However, a number of the weaknesses of such data are germane to the way in which we have come to 'understand' public attitudes to the environment.

BENCHMARKING

First, it should be recognised that no study series exists that is capable of providing a detailed, 'bench-mark' assessment of public attitudes, values, intentions and activities regarding the environment. A survey which additionally takes into account, for example, disposable income and other 'lifestyle factors'. (MORIs measure of 'green activism' for instance, is predicated on a range including "using unleaded petrol in your car" and the selection of "one product over another because of environmental-friendly packaging, formulation or advertising" (Corrado 1993). Access to appropriate products, bottle-banks, gardens and a model of car suitable for fitting with a catalytic converter (Worcester 1993) are thus all potential forms of (rather loud) "noise" in MORIs data. This is not entirely the fault of poor design. MORI should be commended in committing themselves to providing trend-indicators, and are to some extent stuck with their initial constructs as a cost of taking an early lead in the field!

Social and Community Planning Research (SCPR) have adopted a different approach with their series of studies into British Social Attitudes. Different editions have focussed on a range of issues. The 9th edition, for instance, covered global concern, pollution and nuclear issues. This last has been described by Oliver Murphy, of the Diagnostics research consultancy, as a subject area the findings of which are "wacko and travelling on their own". It serves to underline the extent to which the domain of environmental issues is, in many ways, so broad as to be beyond the remit of smaller scale research of the kind available – or likely to be funded by private sector 'stewards of nature'.

All of which, coupled with the poverty of quantitative findings on biodiversity, goes to support the glaring and obvious need for a serious survey, one which would rank alongside -indeed, be capable of correlation to- the Household Expenditure surveys. The DoE public attitudes survey does not currently fit this bill, and yet only central government can provide the kind of resources such a survey would require, on an annual or biennial basis. The absence of such a rolling 'bench-mark' survey means policy decisions continue to be based on quantitative data which is, at best, patchy.

IN TESTS, NINE OUT OF TEN CATS PREFER...

However, in addition to the need for a deeper and more accurate statistical assessment of actual and reported behaviour, together with a careful examination of which approaches stimulate good

⁸³ There are many such accounts. Both Paul Kline's *The Emperor's New Clothes* (1988) and Gordon Westland's *Current Crises in Psychology* (1978) are particularly entertaining. Neither have dated.

practice, a particular problem arises with regard to quantitative attitudinal research in terms of environmental issues. The breathless presentation of the 'information' that "Britain's favourite dish is the Sunday roast", or "The four top concerns of the British in 1991 are crime, the National Health Service, unemployment and pollution",⁸⁴ is at best of passing interest and, at worst, contributes to a facile world-view based on slots.

The overall evaluation of quantitative attitudinal research is territory which continues to be hotly debated. The debate can be crudely reduced to the difference between espousing a holistic or a reductionist *weltanschauung*, which is perhaps a matter of emotional rather than intellectual disposition. Another example would be more amusing, if the report that "97% of women are concerned about the environment" were an apocryphal joke. It is less so to find same reported in the Daily Mirror, without comment. This figure tells us, at best, that 97% of women know the appropriate response to the question, while up to 3% are not prepared to take such vacuity seriously.

This problem extends to the most august of sources. Social Trends 25 tells us,⁸⁵ on the basis of the DoE (1993) survey, that "85 per cent of adults in England and Wales were either 'quite concerned' or 'very concerned' about the environment", before going on to iterate which issues are of particular concern. Aside from the problem of the modifier "quite" for concern (see below), the wider research picture suggests that there remain fundamental problems with placing too much weight on such 'snapshots' of public opinion.

Nevertheless, a more moderate case can be made. It *is* possible to design and carry out a well-constructed piece of attitudinal research, although this is an expensive and time-consuming process, as detailed pilot studies should be undertaken wherever possible. The resulting data can then contribute to an overall picture of the environmental discourse, particularly if the data is part of a wider package of research. However, if the resulting report is located too firmly in the quantitative camp, then there are, inevitably, a number of hostages to fortune.

Questions may not be asked, or fully understood, and basic or subtle errors of design may skew the results. Simple errors continue to be made in many studies, ranging from the use of double (even triple) negatives, which discriminate against those with less formal education, to the use of Likert scales with inappropriate modifiers such as "quite [concerned]" or "not very [worried]".⁸⁶ No amount of beautifully elegant statistical analysis will compensate for such problems. Angelo M. Cordevilla, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institute says it well:

The Romans used to predict...by hiring guys to read the entrails of chickens or to watch the behaviour of chickens as they were being plucked. Now I think some of our social studies today have about as great an insight...as the Roman chickens. And I bet the chickens were a lot less expensive.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Eric Jacobs and Bob Worcester (1991)

⁸⁵ Social Trends 25 (1995)

⁸⁶ Research produced by Schwartz's group suggests that using "slightly" or "a little" as a modifier generates a more accurate spread of responses across a Likert scale than "quite".

⁸⁷ Reported in Richard Serrano (1995)

PLEASE RATE THE FOLLOWING ITEMS IN DESCENDING ORDER OF IMPORTANCE...

In terms of quantitative environmental research, it can be further argued that pinning out percentages, like so many butterflies, can fundamentally obscure important issues. The CSEC study cited above (Macnaghten et al. 1995) makes a powerful point in this regard. The authors suggest that:

paradoxically, the more politically tractable a particular environmental problem is seen by the public as being, the greater the concern members of the public may tend to articulate. By contrast, where particular problems appear comparatively unmanageable (for example, problems requiring major international collaboration, or radical institutional change for their solution), public responses tend to become correspondingly more fatalistic, and thus apparently more sanguine, in terms of the answers offered in standard attitude surveys.

Examining the DoE surveys (DoE 1986, 1989, 1993), the authors note how, in an open question asking respondents to name issues of concern to them, 8% mentioned the environment/pollution in 1986, 30% in 1989 and 22% in 1993. Asked to look at a range of 27 specific concerns on offer, three strong concerns emerged at rates over 60%: chemicals in rivers and seas; toxic waste and radioactive waste. Rates of strong concern for less tractable issues like global warming, acid rain, and traffic congestion, registered at around a third of respondents:

notwithstanding the fact that when questions were asked subsequently about what would be the main problem in 20 years' time, air pollution, global warming and traffic were this time the top three listed.

Macnaghten et al. note parallel UK survey research showing "the greater sense of the importance of environmental problems when people are invited to conceive them as concrete and local problems than when posed in abstract and global terms."⁸⁸ Thus, for example, in a survey undertaken for the UK response to the World Conservation Strategy (Johnson 1993):

the proportion of respondents who recorded anxiety about environment and resource depletion rose by 50% (16 to 25%) when the question on the issue was asked in relation to daily life activities as opposed to Britain or the world in general.

The authors to use these findings, among others, to make further important points about the need to give incised agency and trust to the public.

WORD AND ACTION

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Cf. Jacquelin Burgess (1993)

⁸⁹ T.S. Eliot (1935)

A recent report from Jacquelin Burgess, Carolyn Harrison and Petra Filius (1995),⁹⁰ which includes statistical data, issues:

a word of warning about the statistics that follow. There is evidence from a number of recent surveys, that respondents are able to identify what are the most 'socially acceptable' ways of responding to environmental questions. So what people **say** they do may not necessarily be congruent with what they **actually do**." [Their emphasis]

Part of the design of the questionnaire stage of this study included "a series of questions... presented [to] respondents [given] alternative options to three environmental scenarios...in each scenario, people could chose one of five options, each of which represented a different kind of rational response to the problem." Options were: a market-led approach, a business-government partnership, government regulation, individual action and 'fatalistic' ("none of the proposed approaches would work"). The authors argue that a more detailed analysis reveals

very little consistency by individuals in their choices across all three environmental problems. This result challenged the assumption that people have a simple and coherent 'green' view about appropriate solutions to environmental problems.

However, it should be recalled that only one choice on each question was allowed, although a chance to record additional remarks enabled the exemplar respondent in their Appendix A, at least, to try splicing his options. A very natural temptation.

This is an example of 'cutting edge' quantitative social research, with the instrument refined through piloting, undertaken by leading researchers in the field. As the authors note at the end of their report of the quantitative data:

Questionnaire surveys, while providing an adequate snapshot of public opinion and a means of comparing aspects of environmental behaviour, do have limitations. [They reiterate the 'halo' or 'right response' effect]. Further, it is clear that questions about people's knowledge and understanding of specific aspects of environmental processes are extremely difficult both to phrase within a questionnaire format, and to answer in the limited context of a household interview. Finally, the closed nature of the interview schedule - where depth is inevitably sacrificed for efficiency in obtaining a statistically representative sample - inhibits explorations of the ambiguities in people's attitudes and values revealed by these results.

Their preferred research strategy, (again, one which is not inexpensive), is to go on to undertake in-depth groups, giving both respondents and researchers the time and space to explore these complex issues.

As mentioned by Burgess et al. above, an enduring problem with much of the extant quantitative research is the way in which 'the public' will read off 'appropriate' responses from the context of the interview-routine. Such response biases are notoriously difficult to eradicate, as pollsters learned to their chagrin during the last general election.

⁹⁰ Jacquelin Burgess, Carolyn Harrison and Petra Filius (March 1995)

THE NATURE OF NATURE

A further difficulty with environmentally complex issues such as biodiversity is what might be called the nature of nature. Nature is a complex, fluid and multi-layered process, a system, an experience, a set of ideas...with personal and public meanings which have evolved since pre-history and continue to grow and change. Nature and the natural world are not the sum of a mass of 'things' or 'issues', any more than a tree is the sum of a mass of leaves, branches, roots, bark and so on.

In attempting to divide up the public response to the environment, quantitative researchers risk falling into a "top-down processing" mode, whereby a limited menu of choices is offered, with any open questions framed by the discourse *already established* by the introduction and closed questions.

Yet if one message emerges clearly from any study of the environment, indeed of biodiversity, it is of "the inter-relatedness of all phenomena",⁹¹ a state which Arne Naess described by coining the term 'deep ecology'. Naess is no iconoclast, for multiple streams of twentieth century thought, from Jung to Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, and quantum physics to modern art, have variously attempted to express this truth by way of wresting life back from the saunter of statistics across the page, the sterility of empiricist dogma.

To ask a member of the public to assess the relative importance of polluted seas, dirty rivers, commercial forestry, fly-tipping, quality of drinking water, oil on beaches and acid rain (to take an almost random selection of frequently asked questions), is to ask that individual to undertake a complex analysis of the relative contribution each makes to the overall level of environmental degradation across a number of domains, and then report their perceptions of same with a neat ranking. A task that defeats the best scientists in the world.

Not least because, as A.J. McMichael points out in *Planetary Overload*,

Scientists and policy-makers are going to have to learn to live with more uncertainty than in the past. This point about uncertainty needs emphasis. Since it is not yet possible to make specific predictions and to forecast actual outcomes, scientists must deal with a range of plausible scenarios.⁹²

Yet we continue to ask the public to construct neat piles of response cards, asking which issue elicit a "very worried" and which a "not worried" response!

The very banality and simplicity of the outputs of many questioning strategies has contributed to an erosion of respect for some social attitudes findings among many scientists, policy-makers and the public. Yet when sensitively designed, thoroughly piloted and correlated to harder measures -all of which is expensive- such research can make a valuable contribution to,

⁹¹ Joanna Macey (1995)

⁹² A.J. McMichael (1993)

(although it should not be allowed to define), our understanding of these issues.

The vagaries, subtleties and rich detail underlying any complex matter are, quite simply, more amenable to qualitative research methods. Such methods can, should and indeed do form the core of the way we generally perceive the world: they are, effectively, a bottom-up process. As Thomas Moore put it, albeit while describing the psychological thought of that key Renaissance player, Marsilio Ficino:

Individual and social culture has a psychological dimension; it is an ecology of soul. ⁹³

NATURE'S BOTTOM LINE

One further source of potential quantitative findings regarding social attitudes to biodiversity should be noted. Economics, in addition to its neo-Classical gifts to humanity, has recently given birth to a litter of contingent valuation or environmental evaluation models. These attempt to provide an economic measure of environmental values which had hitherto been regarded by economics as "externalities", that is, beyond the balance sheet. However, many of the methodological problems outlined above apply even more so here, where the eventual numbers have the additional glamour of being *economic* ones. There is much that is seductive about such work. As David Pearce and Dominic Moran have argued,

There is a strong and pervasive set of links between economy and environment. Failure to understand those links, complex though they are, is a failure to understand the primary forces for environmental destruction. ⁹⁴

While these approaches may have policy-making value, given the prevailing cynicism which meets the pricing of everything, this attempt to literally 'cost the earth' will not necessarily secure widescale public support. Economic arguments of a similar ilk generated by the Department of Transport have failed to reassure the public, perhaps not least because not everyone is so badly brought up as to be entirely driven by financial considerations alone. As Robin Grove-White notes,

the environmental domain now needs something rather different [to the tacit reproduction of Neo-Classical Economic Man and thought], a richer, more sensitive understanding of the moral and cultural mutations at grass roots level which are now taking place. ⁹⁵

Put another way, there is a growing re-cognition that nature is, ultimately, rather unwilling to recognise any 'bottom line' beyond her own.

THE POST-MODERNIST PASS

The present report has gone into such detail about the many problems inherent in quantitative

⁹³ Thomas Moore (1982)

⁹⁴ David Pearce and Dominic Moran (1994)

⁹⁵ Robin Grove-White (1994)

studies of social attitudes, particularly as they affect environmental research, for a singular reason. These problems are well-attested, have been detailed in the literature for over 30 years, and are largely *intrinsic* to the methodology itself. Yet research continues to be commissioned and produced which repeats the same errors. By the time neat percentages have been calculated and reported, albeit beneath a polite caveat, the damage is done. The numbers take on a life of their own, one which may obscure environmental issues, rather than cast light upon them. Environmental issues which other, 'harder', indicators repeatedly suggest are rapidly becoming rather urgent.

You can't mess with [Nature]. You try, you get your knuckles rapped again, don't you?⁹⁶

One of the most thought-provoking comments which emerged from the BAPSG Research occurred as part of the *obiter dicta* during an interview the present author observed. Having campaigned to preserve a site of unique importance in the early sixties, and lost, the interviewee had come to an important conclusion, one reflected in many of the current campaigns. It was simply this: "Don't argue, because there *is* no argument." He suggested that once one begins to shape a debate with numbers, with species, with facts, that debate is already on the slippery slope to failure. "Their QC", as he put it, "was better paid." Arguments were picked off, until nothing was left except a site which is now an industrial, privatised reservoir.

There is now an embarrassing wealth of evidence about the public's understanding of, and engagement with, complex environmental issues. Social policy research can now be said to have reached the Post-Modernist Pass. It has little more to say, having fallen into Pribram's Pit of "learning more and more about less and less". What is wanted is not more information – this, together with the expertise to deliver it, exists in abundance at a local level. What is wanted is action, and the capacity to fund it.

"If they can do something that can actually say, at the end of the day, that we've moved from position A to position B because we decided to do it...the public would say: 'Hey! We can actually do it!'"

Participant in 'Communities' Group Discussion, BAPSG Research.

⁹⁶ Anonymous (1995). Full transcript at Appendix 2

7. 'ALCHEMY IN REVERSE' : A NOTE ON THE NAMING OF THINGS

Alchemy in reverse - we touch gold and it turns into lead; touch the pure lyrics of experience, and they turn into the verbal equivalents of tripe and hogwash.

Aldous Huxley⁹⁷

We live in an age of 'alchemy in reverse' in which the process of language-change has accelerated exponentially in the face of a mass communications revolution. Neologisms do emerge, and always have. Whether they survive is another matter. Thomas Carlyle gave us *environment*; *explain* came from Sir Thomas More. Ben Jonson's successful coinages include *defunct*, *clumsy* and *strenuous*, all of which might describe the term *biodiversity*, a word resembling Jonson's *ventositous*⁹⁸ in its lack of elegance and capacity to *obstupefact*,⁹⁹ another of Jonson's.¹⁰⁰ This report's title, '*Bio-whatever*', encapsulates the lack of the term's ability to register. (Bear in mind that the Director responsible had already heard the researcher use the correct term a number of times in order to introduce the research!)

Aside from its ugliness, one can make a further criticism of *biodiversity*. In one fell swoop the word talks to the public in *precisely* the way people most resent. As Chetwynd and Thomas (1994) report: "While there was some expressed need for conceptual information, respondents were keen to stress that it should be couched in ordinary, non-technical language, which would be easily accessible to all."¹⁰¹

It is not, after all, as if biodiversity were a term which meets universal adulation among those technically proficient in unpacking Graeco-Roman. As A.J. McMichael (1993) remarks, with admirable restraint, "the phrase 'loss of biodiversity' is a bit obscure." This obscurity threatens to disrupt even the professional understanding of the term. As Ludwig Wittgenstein, the philosopher who has done more than any other since Plato to grapple with language, remarks: "philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*."¹⁰²

Any solution to this problem will need to be bold and courageous. If the public is to engage with the concept, and take it to heart, then:

a single definition would be helpful...if [these concepts] could be promoted in a singularly sharp but effective way, that would help. [For example] 'an indicator of the health of the planet.'¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Cited in: de Castillejo (1973)

⁹⁸ **Ventosity**: "attacks of flatulence...The state of being windy...Pompous conceit, vanity or bambast" from: C.T. Onions (ed) *The Shorter Oxford English dictionary on Historical Principles*. Second Edition (1933)

⁹⁹ **Obstupefy**, v.trans. "To stupefy, esp. mentally." Onions, C.T. (1933) Op. Cit.

¹⁰⁰ From an excellent discussion of 'where words come from' in *The Mother tongue: English & How It Got That Way*, by Bill Bryson (1990).

¹⁰¹ Mark Chetwynd and Andrew Thomas (1994)

¹⁰² Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) *Philosophical Investigations* [I,38]

¹⁰³ Participant in 'Communities' Group Discussion, BAPSG Research.

As Wittgenstein puts it, "the meaning of a word is its use in language."¹⁰⁴ The conceptual meaning of biodiversity, in a vernacular sense, already has some currency. People talk of 'the variety of life' and 'the spice of life' without problems. Part of the requirement of the bottom-up/top-down view is that scientists, policy-makers and others *stop* trying to impose higher-order, high-fallutin' terms suitable to those in higher education, and learn instead to communicate in more accessible, if less precise, terms.

A word refers to a particular aspect of reality. The word 'water' will not quench thirst. What is needed is practical experience of what that word denotes, in order to make that word in any way truly meaningful.

Variety show

"Truth comes out of error more easily than out of confusion."

Francis Bacon

Alternatives do exist, and could be deployed as appropriate. The following is but a fraction of the possibilities available, some already in use, showing comprehensible aspects of bio-whatever. Perhaps a competition could be held, with the prize, say, a patch of species-rich forestry currently in Ministry of Defence ownership?

"...the total sum of life's variety on Earth" (Dr Martin Holdgate¹⁰⁵)

"Rare wildlife" ('Villagers win dirt track battle, Guardian, 30/3/95)

"...probably the world's most diverse collection of orchids – covering 5,000 of the world's 25,000 species" (Leaflet advertising Kew Orchid Festival '95, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew)

"a multitude of advantages [which] generate amenity, improve landscape diversity and contribute to the fight against the loss of wetland habitat." (Alan Jones, Letter to The Times, 22/2/95)

"the web of life" Joanna Macy, (1995)

"the living fabric" Ibid. (or "the fabric of life")

"the Divinity in all life" (Findhorn Foundation leaflet)

"Nature's orchestra/symphony/harmony/tapestry" (Present author)

A continuing avoidance of the awkwardness of the term simply racks up unnecessary problems for any future campaign aimed at the public. Someone, somewhere, needs to bite the bullet of *biodiversity*.

¹⁰⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953), *Philosophical Investigations* [I, 43]

¹⁰⁵ Not a bad start. He continues, however, "...expressed at the genetic, species, and ecosystem level. Within this broad definition there are of course many subtleties: groups of plants and animals with relatively few species may nonetheless be very distinct genetically, and ecosystems may be both distinctive and of major importance in the world's system even though they do not display high diversity at either the genetic or species level." Fine for professionals at seminars sponsored by ICI and others, less so for the public. In: Department of the Environment (1991)

8. CONCLUSION

The planet's taken as much as it can...We can destroy us, but we cannot destroy the earth.

Anonymous, See Appendix 2

The answer has to be things that are delivered at the local level.

Participant, 'Communities' Group Discussion, BAPSG Research.

By now, a clear picture should have emerged. The public has, effectively, reached the end of its tether. Government, policy-makers and other professionals involved in environmental issues risk permanently alienating the public if they do not immediately strive to rectify the systemic damage to the tree-roots. This is a simple and straightforward matter, requiring direct and effective support from the polity, delivered to existing and potential local projects. Standing on dignity or hiding behind roles and rules is no longer convincing to the majority of the public, let alone to those obliging themselves to be engaged in this process.

There *is* enormous residual enthusiasm for nature and the natural world, not least among the young. Yet recent research¹⁰⁶ shows children go outdoors less than their parents. In a world made dangerous by excessive traffic, children are driven to and from school, friends, shops, thereby exacerbating the problem. 'Nature studies' is almost a thing of the past, with outings to local or other sites of special interest increasingly unlikely for the want of small sums. The extras which once paid for school visits to the country or Natural History Museum now go on books, another teacher's salary. Mothers who might once have arranged outings in holidays are often working.

Someday someone will explain to me why this system of ours that is supposed to glorify diversity and individual choice becomes instead the vehicle by which everybody ends up choosing the same thing.¹⁰⁷

In concentrating on the technical and complex, the environmental discourse has veered away from the direct experience of most people, and the 'green movement' bears some blame in this regard too. We have somehow assumed that the access we enjoyed to nature -to the wildness, excitement, unpredictability and the sheer fun of it- continues more or less undiminished. This is not so. Hedgerows have been ripped up with an insane abandon for decades. Open space has been sanitised to the point of sterility. City farms have been allowed to close, for the want of tragically small sums. The world has shrunk to something seen behind glass, whether a car window or a cathode ray tube.

There already exist an excellent and thorough set of recommendations, which have run to a

¹⁰⁶ Undertaken by Handel Associates and reported in The Daily Mirror, April 27th 1995. No further details available.

¹⁰⁷ Scott Turow (1993)

second edition, in *Biodiversity Challenge*.¹⁰⁸ The public has almost reached the point of despair, failing to understand, quite reasonably on the basis of recent performance, that the polity *is* capable of demonstrating effective action. It even has the instruments available at hand to do so, including the necessary funding. The only question is whether it has the moral courage to take on Roosevelt's suggestion, to:

Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.

¹⁰⁸ Biodiversity Challenge Group (1995)

9. SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

It is always tempting for the busy executive to turn directly to the list at the back of the report. This is usually a mistake, albeit necessitated by constraints on time. The more interesting material in this report has been deliberately distributed to maximise diversity: much can be found in the Appendices alone. In the interests of satisfying the busy, however, the following sketchy suggestions are offered. It is by no means inclusive, and for that the reader should turn to *Biodiversity Challenge*.

- i) Government should present the Biodiversity Action Plan as an opportunity, instead of a problem, choosing to extend its remit to a wider vision of renewed access to nature for all, nature simple and complex, rare and common, near and far;
- ii) A *Natural World* cross-Departmental working group, with wide-ranging powers, significant Ministerial support, and majority recruitment from outside Whitehall, should be lodged within Cabinet Office and publicly charged with effecting significant environmental change at a local level;
- iii) A Planning Policy Guidance paper should make community involvement in landscaping developments *of any kind* a material planning consideration;
- iv) The Department of the Environment should either take full responsibility for environmental education, or cede responsibility to the Department for Education. Either way, it should ensure Government gives clear instructions to education authorities and schools of the importance it places on same, backed by appropriate funds, with ring-fenced funding devoted to teacher-training;
- v) The Department of the Environment should take responsibility for funding a major, rolling, bench-mark survey of the public's engagement with environmental issues;
- vi) The Department of the Environment should launch a programme of regeneration for urban parks throughout the country, with a PPG to enforce it. Local (and particularly young people's) involvement and enhancement of biodiversity should be priorities in the programme;
- vii) The Department of the Environment should provide for a programme of research which evaluates the successful extant local environmental projects, disseminates the results throughout government, and makes recommendations based on them. It should first undertake this as a genuine in-house exercise across each Department and Ministry, with appropriate transparency and *mea culpa* in reporting;
- viii) Government should place pressure, backed by legislation if necessary, on food-manufacturers and supermarket chains to provide consumers with an improved level of detailed information regarding the origin, variety and environmental impact of food-stuffs;
- ix) A similar engagement should be undertaken with the gardening industry;

- x) Funding should be sought for a programme of *in situ* conservation, for varieties of crops and plants which are under threat, to be undertaken at school and community level, in local farms (“Adopt an Acre”?) public space, school-grounds, allotments and gardens;
- xi) In addition to issuing clear guidance on environmental education, a working party should make specific recommendations across the curriculum to firmly entrench environmental understanding at an early age;
- xii) The Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group should publicly call for a proportion of the lottery funds to be devoted to revenue to fund imaginative small-scale local projects. A much-simplified mechanism for funding-applications should be devised, with rapid administration lodged in the voluntary sector.

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APPENDIX 2:

“SOWING THE SEEDS”

Introduction:

The following is a transcript, lightly edited to maintain anonymity, deriving from an impromptu small group discussion. Without any probing, the main speaker started a discourse on material relevant to the current research. It dawned on the present researcher, regrettably slowly, that taping and transcribing might be sensible.

The main speaker is an unemployed East Ender in her mid-forties. The woman on the Clapham omnibus?

Tape 1:

“... it's just that the seed hasn't been planted.”

... but I think it's very individual, I think it's very individual. I don't think politically we can change it. It's individual ideas, it's individual things of creation that's going to do it. Part of your work, like I say, is going to do it. It's a company, it's an organisation or something that's going to give it back, not politics. Politics won't do it.

The only thing that they might try, where you really can try to hit the head of politicians is on the schools, and try to bring back to the schools what was once there. And I think spending time outside of schools rather than it being all computers, everything worked inside. We're finding out too much from technology now.

We're not actually getting to grips with the earth as we were when we was young.... We all know that, like, fruit makes alcohol, things like this. But to actually go out and actually see the, you know, see it collected and, what happens to it, is something entirely different. And we had these day trips out, and we don't these days. You know like your frogs, your tadpoles and.... different things. But you don't see schools doing it anymore. And I think this is where you're lacking, and I think people are growing up much harder today, than what was before, because and I don't think it's their fault. I think it's just that the seed hasn't been planted.

You know I really do believe that you can't, you can't alter the mistakes of yesterday, I mean the buildings with no grass. I mean the boroughs are trying to do that, they're recognising they made a big mistake, and they are trying to put back. But they can only put so much back anyway, 'cos there's only room for so much to go back. And so I don't see how politically, erm ... we've just reaped what was the seed of yesterday. And that's what we run in that seed.

And we started to try to change it, yes, but I don't think we're going to, you know, erm, because we're still in the reaping, we can't actually change that much about it. And this is a very reaping

stage, isn't it, the whole of the cosmos, the whole of the activities of the planet is reaping. This is not really a seed-sowing stage.

JP: But we must still try and sow seeds.

Of course, yeah, but where they can: at the bottom I think, again, so that the youth of tomorrow can, you know, bring about that balance. 'Cos if the, the world, if the world goes into the degree that some think it can go, it's really going to really start all afresh and a new anyway. And people.... it won't be a matter of a seed planted to make [a change], they'd be forced to do it. So the environment is going to force the issue about. And that's the natural reaping of the seeds of the past. I don't.... if it goes that bad, if it goes that bad, it will be brought in. You can't continue with what you're doing, and everyone will be forced to go backwards, step backwards, and that will be a drastic force back.

"The planet's taken as much as it can.... We can destroy us, but we cannot destroy this earth."

The planet's taken as much as it can.... I don't think this earth is going to go, but I think what is in it will. I don't think we have the law or the power to kill this earth. And the Lord will not let that come about. You cannot just destroy this creation to that degree, you cannot do it. And this is what the ozone layer is all about, so we cannot. We can destroy us, but we cannot destroy this earth. And if we destroy everything that's basically planted or here, that source, that seed will come back again. It will have to. And it does come back, so all it does is regenerate.

And if you've got a society that is coming back to a barren world that it's won, it's going to take fertile, and take seed again, and grow. They're forced to do the right thing, aren't they?

[Laughter] That's what I closely believe the world is heading, they're going to be forced to do the right thing. It's not a judgement for the everyday people anymore. We've done, we're reaping now, and once we've reaped, then the world can start taking off again.

But because all our seeds have gone into this world, the world's gone with it, with all that judgement, the world's got to go with it. It's a bit like Noah's Ark time. And we can do the best we can with what we got, I mean if, you know, the lands that are unaffected, let's hope that they can reap and grow the best they can, to keep everything going. But they will, there's no doubt about that, they will.

And I mean, you know there's going to be a lot of changes, because Spiritually there's \ lot of changes, physically, you know, the whole of philosophy is going to be thrown out, you know, the churches are going to fall. Everything is just going to go down. You know, 'who is Jesus Christ?' we'll be saying in two thousand years time, we won't really know much about him, You know. So it's the move coming home, because most of the old will be old, it will be dead, gone. That's what I think.

"And we could blame society, but it's not society's fault."

Everybody, every human being is going through this speed, you look at relationships. Just *look* at relationships. Just look at life. You know, people can't get things together. You're lucky

today if you can feel and have a decent relationship in today's world, 'cos it's virtually impossible. It's not impossible, it does happen, but what I'm saying is the speed and growth is so vast now that people can't get it together. And we could blame society, but it's not society's fault. These are seeds of yesterday. We're just the reapers of the seed. We're probably the ones who planted the seeds in the first place, trying now to get out of it, you know, and that's why we're here, to see the results of it.

And those that going to live through that time, I wouldn't see, think it was too pleasant. And it goes on, and so it goes, it's all reaping, it's all connected today. The stars are telling us that, the world is telling us that. It's all interlinked, I mean it's a lot. [...]

“to salvage something, you've got to go back to the new beginning again, and start with schools.”

But definitely, to salvage something, you've got to go back to the new beginning again, and start with schools. Get rid of the do-gooders. And the potential do-gooders. We got to go back a bit. We've got to learn from what was back then a bit. There's too many into psychoanalysts these days, isn't there? And kids are so 'cute, they just feed off of it. I mean, you're just giving them a seed to feed off. So they can create as much havoc as they want, but it's all right, he's got a problem, you know? And it's not all right. He might have a problem, but it's still not all right. That's not acceptable. And we've been letting things run havoc like that for a while, and it's no good, it's just no good.

Who's to say we shouldn't have those problems in the first place? I mean, there's loads of people who've had problems, but then they're still all right by it. And you could say they've grown by it. They've become more, better, people by it, you know? Christ, we've had people go through wars and seen such horrific situations, they've grown by it, you know, in their own selves.

And watch the kids of today, you know, they mess about in schools and they go and see a psychologist. They skip school altogether and they come up with, “well, mum's this, and my dad's that” and then everyone's going “oh, what a poor lad you are”. The olden days they give you a clip round the ear and send you back in the classroom, wouldn't they? And let you get on with it.

And you're not stopping anything, there's just as much bullying and things going on today. And I think they.... those things were far less because the teachers were that much more severe. And you wouldn't cause trouble in school because you was frightened of causing. And I knew some hard people, but the teachers were harder. They were very hard and tough. And you just didn't get away with things. And they kept control because of it.

Beautiful seeds, they were, beautiful seeds, and beautiful ideas..... but we all had them, we all had them coming through the fifties: Freedom. Peace. You know, we've been hurt, don't let's hurt the next generation, you know? Keeping back what didn't have, hurt and everything, but we don't understand that we're crying out for this because that's what we believe to be true and right. Because I made the mistake, as well as anybody else has made the mistake, in my own way. Because we believed that that was right, and so those seeds are spread.

But, we wouldn't have come to those assumptions had we not gone through what we'd gone through. And I just believe they're self-assumptions, for us to conduct our individual lives. You get what I mean? Rather than inflict, which we still think-decide to do, to conflict them outwards to other people.

JP: Rather than ourselves?

Yeah. But I think that what's coming up because [of the] spiritual aspects into line with physical, I think is going to do some good, and I think it will come out into the world. And people will be reading about it, and understanding it. And it will come to the daily household, where it should be. And more beauty can arise through this expression. It could be done through art, it could be done through writing.

TAPE 2

"... it's so designed, and it's designed through everything, through the plants, through animal kingdom, through humanity and so on. You can't mess with it. You try, you get ... your knuckles rapped again, don't you?"

JP: I was reading some research which was saying how much nature meant to people, from their childhood. Things like seeing foxes.

Yeah, I saw them at Crayford.

JP: They come in and get very well fed.

They go out again.

JP: Or into parks and things, some of them.

Yeah, But look at the learning potential in it of just daily life. And I do say that, I mean look at that programme that's been out on telly, I know so many people that have been grasped by it, about the plants. And about how they give back to each other, don't they? And also to animal life and they reach out even further than that. That one that amazingly has to be fired before it lets its seed go, you know? The fire actually is the only thing that can make it drop those seeds. I think that's actually amazing, and that just show us, essentially it shows us the Lord. You cannot mess with something so designed, you just cannot mess with it. And it's so designed, and it's designed through everything, through the plants, through animal kingdom, through humanity and so on. You can't mess with it. You try, you get your knuckles, your knuckles rapped again, don't you?

You cannot change what is to be. And those programmes are teaching us that, but bring the other in with it, you can see why this is so. You can actually, I think, come much closer to God in the essence of "yes, God has created, God is here and now, into all these things", and if that message gets across, you think how much better people can be, just in general. Now how many

people will then, and now I'm putting that into young people's minds, how many people who are likely to just ruin things regardless, plants, pull up trees and, you know, I think they would be losing it all around. 'Cos they are not actually thinking of what they're doing, are they?

JP: No

But once they got more understanding, and more of the beauty that's brought in, they will. And I think we can, people can do this through artistic expression. I mean it's always there, it's just hidden at the moment.

"I mean, it's lovely to see it, it just shows how strong everything really is at the end of the day. And we can do it, you know, anything can do it, it's showing us we can do it. Nature shows us that."

JP: Talking of foxes, I saw a fox driving once, trotting along the pavement, crossed the pelican crossing, it went out of its way to cross it, the zebra crossing.

Yeah, I seen that. Brilliant, innit? And look at some of the animals now that are coming vegetarian, you know, feeding of, er, I'm not way up on this, but the birds and that, haven't they, how theirtran, is it transmuting? What they doing?

JP: Evolved?

Trans.... what's transgression

JP: Cross...

Crossing

JP: But a barrier, you know.

Yeah, well, but what about the one's that are now eating seeds of plants and trees, that's why they've come more inland, as opposed to fish and grass and, you know. And their surviving.

JP: Right, they're changing their...

They're changing. I mean, it's lovely to see it, it just shows how strong everything is at the end of the day. And we can do it, you know, anything can do it, it's showing us we can do it. Nature shows us that. I think those programmes are lovely, and I think a lot more are coming out and a lot more is going across now to ordinary everyday people, who are talking about them. And I think to get a society that is more humane and caring, I think we, they have to learn from situations that aren't humane and caring, I think we, they have to learn from situations that aren't humane, you know. Or they learn more in general, like the nature studies. But I'm sure a day up Battersea Dogs Home would do the kids a world of good, don't you?

I mean it's a dreadful thing, but it certainly will put a seed in your mind, of just how much care

you do need for animals, where they end up, and what might happen to them and, you know. While someone's open to it. While they're not closed off to it. And hardened to the world a bit, you know. And, you know, to see.... what happens to unwanted animals, to see distressed animals. What could cause, you know, and what [it] goes onto, what that can create.

JP: Happens faster and faster

Coo-er: much quicker. Actually you can sow something today and get the reap today.

JP: Yeah, and it's much easier in a sense to talk to people about it, because they can see, in their own lives, whereas before it might have happened over lifetimes, but they can actually now see "oh, I did that and then...." and an explanation that helps....

Of course, and it isn't going to come back, and we are in this reaping cycle, there's no doubt about that. But the very fact we are on Earth today, we are very lucky. We've obviously been part of the seed-sower, we must be, to be here for the reaping, but we ourselves as souls are learning from this, and we're seeing it happening in our everyday lives. And you got to be pretty thick now if it isn't sinking in. [Laughter]. Finally, you know, that this is happening to us. You know I think you've got to be pretty erm... [Laughter].

It's in nature, you can see it in nature today, you can see it in human beings. I mean what more.... you got nothing more to see. You plant a seed here and it backfires there, or you come up against something. How many more people are thinking today that, "that's because I had that bad thought this morning and that happened to me"?

"... we will be forced to act correctly. That's what I believe."

There's a lot of everyday people talking like that today. Because now there's part of their inner self it's somehow knowing that this is happening. So we're in a reaping era, we're in a reaping time, but seeds have to be sown all the time. Yeah... I think the world has to do the best it can, although I don't think it's the seed-sowing era, I really don't think it's a seed-sowing, I think this is a God thing now.... we will be forced to act correctly. That's what I believe. I think it's really quite out of our hands.

And I think after this then it's very important as to what the seeds are sown then. After this cycle's come about. But I mean people say the world's getting worse and worse, I mean how can you turn round and say the world's getting more violent? When we was sticking kids up chimneys and chopping off people's arms and everything? How can we actually say the world is getting more violent? Do you really believe it?

JP: No

And these old people. My Mum does it. She sits there saying about the wickedness in the world today. But this is front wickedness, this is frontage wickedness, people really, yesterday it was in every person's daily life wickedness. Kids of twelve and thirteen, eight, working in workshops, working fourteen hour days. Can you turn round and tell me we had a humane world? You

can't, can you?

JP: And it's coming back now, for instance in Afghanistan.

It's coming back, but I don't think it can regenerate far, I don't think it can regenerate that far back. I don't think it can do that, in this world today. I think basically we've seen a lot of *front* crimes today, but the crime of yesterday was daily life crime, daily life existence, what you took for natural. Where the piece of bread that you're going to eat came from. That is actual wickedness in everyday human life daily situations. Sending boys up chimneys and things like that. And that was all taken as everyday life. Now we've got a crime, that people, it's not everyday life, it's a crime, and it stands as a crime, and we're judging it singly, as a crime, and we're saying "what a wicked world we're running today", we're not. It's a much better world today, it that respect, a much better world.

JP: Yeah. The murder rate in medieval Britain was thirty-five times what it is today.

Yeah. I mean I can't connect to it at all, mentally I can't, when you ready these old books, I can't mentally connect to that. Yet I can mentally connect to if someone goes out and shoots someone today because that's a personal crime. That's a personal individual thing. Then it wasn't. I mean how could we be part, which we were, we were part of that, we must have no brains. It just shows you we've evolved from animals, eh? You can't even picture it, can you? "Ere little kid, get up the chimney!" Can you picture it, seeing a child just sitting here, seeing a child go up the chimney? And you've even asked for it to be done, you know. The mentality don't click at all, because they're was so much lower mentality. The humane existence.... we just weren't humane people. Society wasn't humane.

And now, if someone tried to do that, the people'd flock out in their thousands, wouldn't they. And say, "you can't do that!" But the world isn't getting better because of the reaping. But we haven't got wrong attitudes today, we haven't got wrong ways. Things aren't so wrong. But why they can't reflect is because we're in the reaping era. It's sad. And good. Educational.

[...]

"[If] we put [Nature] into the heart..... at a young age.... not everyone will accept it, but the majority will.

You see that's what humanity's done, they've gone out with the importance, instead of leaving it exactly where it's meant to be, which is inside, you know? Like "getting back to the nature" things. It's like your day-to-day actions will grow on what you keep inside. Once you start to share it out, it fails, 'cause it was never meant to be there. And only the lesson is really learnt when it is inside, and that you've dealt with it.

Because everything that the world does, and people do, any right or wrong, is all done by the seed of yesterday. How someone was brought up, whether they were picked on, bullied, raped, whatever situation, violence, whatever situation they have gone through, that they have put their mind towards changing the outer world with that seed, when really, so they inflict that seed,

which was once, which was negative, out of the world.

When really, all it wants you to do is grasp it yourself and come to your own understanding. To make that individual feat. And if humanity can make that individual feat, that's when the world will reflect it. You can't sow that seed onto someone else, it just will not work. It will just backfire time and time again.

Whereas if we take it into ourselves, and learn from it. And we think because of our pain, we got to share that pain, that confliction with everybody else in the world, so that it don't happen again. But it will happen again, unless we inside can come to terms with it. So the answer, the whole motive, the reason for it, is for us to just look inside. [...]

Like I say, there's some people can live all their life and not do that. Their harping on these seeds of the past, to do something for the future. And where's it going? Still bitter. Still angry. Still negative. Think they've done a lot of good out there, to the world they haven't. But they go to their death beds still angry. You see, the seed has remained negative all along, and it's been given out to other people.

And that's the way the world's been going. Because it's believed that by seeing these things, and doing these things on an outward level. That we can make people learn from it. But we can't. Because unless people feel what they've got to feel, they can't learn so well. You know, and it could cause adverse aspects.

JP: Yeah, but in terms of, say, Nature, what we've stopped doing is giving children the opportunity to feel the finer things that they can feel, because they're locked up in front of computers. Because classrooms are.... and playgrounds are just grass with one tree.

Yeah. They are definitely things we can deal with. I'm not talking so much about those sort of things, because I think those things, we put into the heart of them at a young age and not everyone will accept it, but the majority will. I'm talking about the negativity that's inflicted, that can be inflicted to us through our growing age, and we somehow having those negative seeds, and then trying to throw it everywhere, onto other people, without coming to terms with it ourselves. And I don't think that does a lot of good.

I think unless we actually come to terms with it ourselves, then we could make good by it, we could meet a few people.... You see it, you see it in these groups, where, you know, if someone has gone through something horrific, and someone else has gone through the same experience, if one has come to agreement with that in themselves, they can help someone else to try to do the same. But, if we just talk about the thing, it's not helping nothing.

Because all you're doing is feeding more anger, and more negativity, you see. So we're not actually doing anything by just discussing things, and reliving them, over and over and over again, because that just builds more bitterness, more anger and the negative seed just goes on even further. Unless someone has took it inwards, first, before giving it out, it cannot, it cannot have its reward. And very few people, unfortunately, can do that.

Because they always believed that there, I mean, we go along believing we're the hard done by people. In reality, we're not. We deserve, we say that "no one deserves this, no one deserves that", but in truth, if we stick to what is true, of the Universal Law of karma, reaping for what one has done for one wrong, how can we possibly believe that is true? Everything that has happened to us is what we ourselves has asked for, sometime, somewhere, and we're only getting it back.

And so if we try to take that knowledge in and deal with that, and somehow come to some peace of that, and then we can start reproducing good seeds. But if we carry that bitterness with us all our lives, saying that you know "I'm a poor child" or "I'm a poor person" that " my Mother or my Father has hurt, or somebody has hurt me" I mean it's normally always going back in the background of Mothers, Fathers who've done all this. And everyone's blamed, someone's blamed for something.

But the blame shouldn't be going outwards, one should be reflecting inward, and coming to terms with what has happened to me. And letting it go, because there's nothing in this world that can happen to you unless you've asked for it. So it's a matter of just letting that go, and dealing with what you've got inside. And once you can do that, you can produce positive seeds. You can help other people, to come over there. But by simply talking about the same conflict, you can't help. Can it? It's only an end result that can help, an end result of peace within yourself can reflect peace to somebody else.

But that is just talking on a personal level, with personal things. And I think people try to do this, and I think this backfires. And we tend to think right "if only I could have talked to somebody" right? "If only I had had help at this time" "if only I had this" so because we know we've had those faults, we try to build organisations up, to create this for other people. And that sort of seed backfires, because with the intelligence of people today, they just use the system, to abuse it. That's what happens.

We must try and better things, but I think we must start to do that personally, and in our own daily life. And meet it as it comes to us. And if we haven't got the help, the we've got to accept that the help is not there, and we have to go and then try to sort things out for ourself. It comes back to self, er, self, er, what is it?

JP: Realisation.

Realisation! You see. And the more people who can start doing that, with their self, and accepting that, of their self, becoming at peace with that, those are the people that will bring... and those seeds will probably reap to something fruitful. Because it is a positive seed going out there, not a negative one. Because an action has been carried out negatively, and a seed is then sown negatively, **John**. And that's why it doesn't work. Because you're the hard done by boy who wants to make sure no other boy is hard done by in the same way. Or, maybe they might be, "but let's slot in something in here that they can do that I didn't have, the help that I didn't have".

But what are you placing that seed with? The negative of the past, the negative thought from

your past that's created that action to do that seed. You see? Any it doesn't turn round, it doesn't turn round to positive, it only is if it starts with positive.

Tape 3: 'Sowing positive seeds'

JP: ... what you've said is a much more eloquent, precise capturing of what all these long academic research reports have said. And it's very easy to get stuck in these long academic research reports, and forget, that, we just need to listen to ourselves, as you've been saying. And also, those around us, who have listened to themselves, because it's all there, as you've said, and we don't really need to engage in this process of neatly sowing academic in order to make a point, because the justification is there in and of itself [...]

I believe it's true. [...] What it's done, and can create, in a positive [way]. And great understandings within people, and people's day-to-day life, reactions, through experiences like that. [...Extensive analogy with private material...] Because I believed as a young child of the Law of karma, you know, "what you sow, so shall you reap", and it's in philosophy going back to the very beginning of time.

So I believed it when I was young, and there was no way I believed God would ever let anyone hurt a hair on my head unless I deserved it. I couldn't believe that, because I believed too much in, in, the God-head. So if He allowed this to be, there was a reason. So I could not judge upon that. So that's what philosophy taught me, from youth.

"If they feel it instinctively, but they can't see it, you know, then they're wondering why they're feeling these things."

I think it's very sad that, I tell you what I think is sad within schools, is to knock that out. That simple, breath-taking philosophy of the Jesus. I mean, even if they don't want to touch upon the whole Bible, but the Jesus philosophy was so breath-taking, so, erm, you know, just things to live by. Everyday things that we can live by and learn by. You ask kids, like you know, I talked to [...] about Jesus, she don't know nothing about him, and never learnt nothing in school at all. I'm not saying Jesus, it could be anybody, but I'm saying at least bring that back into an area of learning. You know, because I think people's minds need it.

If they feel it instinctively, but they can't see it, you know, then they're wondering why they're feeling these things. And how many spiritual young people have you got today? Lots of them. And they can't understand why they can't see it. It's not reachable, you know. They're frustrated with all these inner feelings they get, and yet no one's actually telling them, "yes, this is the Law that does this, this, this is a room of thought that does exist".

And they'd be much happier to know that at five, six, ten years old, wouldn't they? Rather than getting all frustrated about why they think differently. Or why they've got these thoughts or instincts. Very important. To try to have early understandings of that, because we're underestimating far too much that people are growing up like this. And they need that feedback, and you can't just zap spirituality out of a child's learning, you know, you can't just do that, can you?

They'd be quite confused people. And especially the law of Karma. I mean most of Christ's work is the law of karma. Near enough all the things he's saying is added proof of the law of karma. You know, and the, you know, you could say it many ways: "Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth", "What you sow, so shall you reap", but it means the same. And if the physical world can use it in the courts, right, why not just say it's not originated, I mean how can we believe that it's not anywhere else? That the Creator didn't design it Himself, you know? It's a bit thick and naive to say that He didn't, I think, that's all. You know, I think people are very thick and naive to not understand that this originated, this law exists, it's here with us. But if we take it out of all teaching, how on earth can.... see children need to know this too.

And we'd breed a much better society of children if they had to think about, all of a sudden they know things can come back on them, and they have to think about what they do now, today.

And we're at the right time for it, because the Karma is coming back so quick. If you sowed your seeds, see, we're going back in time, if you sowed a seed, you might not get that back until the next life, it's a much slower drawn out thing. But now it's all sped up. So now you can sow and reap. At the same time. They might be years distant, they might be weeks distant, sometimes there's almost instant Karma reaction coming back, you know. And we can see this now. And so these are when the seeds can actually come out and be treasured, and kept. Because once this whole era ends, we're going to lose it again. We're going to sow a seed today, and we'll reap it in the next life. And how can we learn? We can't learn so much, because we haven't seen our action.

The fact of action coming back, and us being able to see it, I think it's absolutely amazing, it's such a learning thing. And I think if children have this.... It doesn't mean their whole life is going to change, spiritual or religious, it doesn't, but it makes an element of it inside. That's what it does. It creates something inside them that is more thinkable. So that they think more about what they're doing. I mean I live by that, and I've raised two children, now they are not the same as me, but they still know the law of Karma, and so now they, within their everyday situations, they might think of that law. That's all it is.

And they do think of that law. But they are not the same as me, they still live their lives. They still get angry, they still have rows, but after that, they think. And after they will say, I know they do say, "sorry", you know? And they think about themselves and say "I should not have done that." You know? But until we can get people's minds working on that level and that, so we can do it, with this stuff that's here today. We can do it.

"We've created a world of basically humane people, and the very things that made that, we're taking away, why? It doesn't make sense to me."

And this is what we ought to be bringing into the schools, but we've taken it out. I can't believe. I'm not saying everyone's been getting the message on the seed, but I did. Others did. I mean I read the scriptures and the new testament, I got it, I understood clearly what it meant. I'm not saying everyone else would, but at least that's something I carried around with my life. That's how I handled my life, simply by those seeds. You imagine what a life, I'd have ended up in a

mental hospital without those seeds.

And those are the seeds one can find their peace with. One can bring about their own harmony, isn't it? I think they're so important, and I think, I mean really, don't get me wrong, it's being more out now, in the world, and we are lucky to be part of it. Any we're even having it through the stars, we're having it through Boy George, and anyone who likes Boy George getting it, you know he's been on talking on, he's talked a couple of times, expressing views on Karma and things like that. It's coming. But why have we taken something away that's so long and established in our schools?

We've created a world of basically humane people, and the very things that made that, we're taking away, why? It doesn't make sense to me. I was shocked when I found out we did in schools, that what, you know, the things they did in schools. You know [...] who we was talking about? Do you know what, she knew that the psychologists attached to this school, and she knew if she played up that she be sent to the annexe to play with the other naughty children, and that she'd skip all her classes. So she done that all the time. They'd let someone go in, once in a while, and ask them what their problems are. And she said they make up a load of rubbish.

"... that's when the mind is so open.... the youth. With the babe and the child. And that's why it's so important to put positive seeds in then. And past a certain age you can forget it."

And from the very fact she said "who's Jesus Christ?" I mean, my God, you know, that fact that no one.... apart from the fact that the son of God was born, and that his name was Jesus, and he was born in some barn somewhere, [Laughter] I don't think she knew anything more. Now look at children. Look at kids abroad, look at some of the children abroad, like [...]s son, he speaks French and English, it's just natural. And then he's not even school age yet, and he speaks French and English. Because it's part of his life.

But that's when the mind is so open, is, is the youth. With the baby and the child. And that's why it's so important to put positive seeds in then. And past a certain age you can forget it, those people going to have to learn through life experience - and they might never learn and they die bitter, revengeful. If we can get that into the minds of the young then there is hope for them. They can come to some conclusion like [...], to find that peace, that instinct - and [...]s done that by herself. But if we were not giving nothing out how can you expect back.

And that will grow, you see if you put that into peoples' minds today and young minds, that is going to grow within nature and everything, because everyone would start reacting. And they would react on all forms of life because that's what it means, the law of Karma is all forms of life so people will react and start reacting naturally. And they're not going to destroy so much, they're going to grow, they're going to want growth.

And I'll tell you something. When I was young. And I'm out with some villains, right? And I remember talking about Karma. I shut the whole lot of them up, and they all started to think, and they all discussed the matter. And that was not long before the Krays got put away, was

weird, you know, but I made them think, and actually spoke very seriously about it, really. But they'd heard it. They heard it, but they didn't digest it. Of course I don't think all of them had heard it, but some had, but when it was put to them from my understanding of it, they, literally went grey. You know they was fucking scared. But they thought, their old minds were clicking over.

'Cause people think they've got this life, they're dead at the end of it. And that, so look what they done, don't matter. Don't matter what they do. But if everyone believed that they, they, they will have exactly the same back and sometimes more back, depending on the depth of that they acquire, they are going to be less likely to do it, to do those sort of things, aren't they? But maybe not if they're totally.....thingmebob. But you got to start somewhere, you got to start placing these sort of things into the they've always been there throughout time. Why are you taking them away?

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