

Myth, Cosmology and the Sacred: Transformative Learning as the Bridge Between Worlds



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Abstract Rice University religious studies professor Jeffrey Kripal has defined the humanities as ‘consciousness studying consciousness in the reflecting mirror of culture’ (2014: 368), and indeed he sees the role of intellectuals as a ‘collective prophet’ (2017: 302) who can potentially see behind the veil of our separatist, egoistic illusions and wake up an awareness of our common humanity. This paper focusses on how Kripal’s vision informs the Masters programme in Myth, Cosmology and the Sacred at Canterbury Christ Church University, for in our view, values of sustainability are intrinsically connected to understanding what it means to be a human being making meaning in the world. The MA subscribes to Kripal’s call for a broader perspective which goes beyond the ‘exterior’ world of empirical and historical information to reflect on the question of human cognition and experience—that is, on our *own* nature as interpreters of culture and creators of myth. The MA programme is situated within a transformative learning context, and here the programme director explains its rationale and ethos. Examples of pedagogical methods are described and student feedback included. With reference to key authors, the foundations of the programme in holistic and integrative models of knowing are discussed, together with the importance of calling on esoteric and wisdom traditions for hermeneutic frameworks. Such frameworks combine *mythopoetic* and spiritual insight with critical and reflexive understanding, and thus bridge the subject-object split of the Western Enlightenment which still dominates our intellectual discourse. Finally the programme is linked to sustainability values, and positioned in the context of a new vision of integrative learning for our times which fosters connections between humans, earth and cosmos.

Keywords Transformative · Myth · Creativity · Hermeneutic · Consciousness

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1 Introduction

The author has been programme director of the MA in Myth, Cosmology and the Sacred at Canterbury Christ Church University since September 2014. The programme is extremely popular, with currently (March 2018) 47 students registered over 2 years. The unique focus of the programme is the study of esoteric and spiritual traditions and practices, mythic and symbolic narratives and discourses of the paranormal and sacred through the lens of transformative learning methodologies, so that both ‘learning about’ and ‘learning from’ these so-called ‘non-rational’ knowledge bases are interwoven—a three-way interplay between cultural history, hermeneutics and reflexivity. The MA contributes to the development of holistic and integral thinking within the philosophy and practice of education, and is now at the heart of a growing community concerned with integrating holistic and spiritual dimensions of knowing into rigorously academic frameworks. The programme is situated at the cutting edge of contemporary initiatives which aim to raise consciousness around issues of sustainability and wisdom, initiatives which transpersonal psychologist Richard Tarnas calls ‘heroic communities’ (Tarnas 2013) as they deliberately foster values which run counter to mainstream materialist and bureaucratic thinking (Voss and Wilson 2017). The heroic stance defines a moral vision which fosters the individual’s courage to speak out for change, and in this sense, is in service to what Joanna Macy and Molly Brown have called the ‘Great Turning’ (in O’Sullivan 2012: 165). The Great Turning involves a necessary ‘shift in perception of reality, both cognitively and spiritually’ and requires creation of institutional forms rooted in deeply held values, which are ‘both very new and very ancient, linking back to rivers of ancestral wisdom’ (ibid.)

Reflexivity is central to our methodology, as we encourage students to turn the spotlight back on themselves as it were and critically assess their own assumptions, agendas, beliefs and understandings. For Jeffrey Kripal, reflexive ‘re-reading’ in the fields of religion, the sacred and anomalous experience requires ‘something more’ (2014: 367) than either faith or reason—a third position or ‘both-and’ mode of thinking in which the full spectrum of human experience can be put under examination in a new way, with more awareness of our biological, historical, social and economic (and I would add, epistemological) conditionings (Kripal 2014: 392). Kripal defines this as a ‘third classroom’ space in which binaries are transcended in a further epistemological move which he calls ‘gnostic’ (2007: 22–24; 2015). The author is in complete agreement with his view that

[There] are types of understanding that are at once passionate and critical, personal and objective, religious and academic. Such forms of knowledge are not simply academic, although they are that as well, and rigorously so. But they are also transformative, and sometimes soteriological. In a word, the knowledge of such a scholar approaches a kind of gnosis (Kripal 2001: 5).

The term ‘gnosis’ refers back to the underlying premises of Western esoteric philosophy, as well as depth psychology, both of which place supreme value on a model

of human consciousness which participates in, and mirrors, a greater whole—and may ultimately achieve union with this ‘one world’ or universal mind:

There is a dimension of human experience that is not external to us in the sense that it can be directly and tangibly grasped. Rather, it is within us, but the word ‘within’ must be understood metaphorically. It reflects a depth in us as human beings and also a depth of the universe. Perceiving one, we perceive the other. (Progoff 1973: 13)

This statement suggests that human beings’ inner worlds correspond to how they perceive their outer worlds, and indeed play a vital role in creating their perceptions of what is real and true. The MA makes extensive reference to these holistic metaphors that underpin pre-Enlightenment philosophy (e.g. Platonic, neoplatonic, esoteric), as they illuminate the challenges that the over-dominance of the rational, critical mind may bring to our sense of the sacred, the mythopoetic and the imaginal (Corbin 1976). In this we find inspiration in both Iain McGilchrist (2009) and Kripal (2001, 2007, 2014), whose work promotes the role of the *metaphoric* in transcending the literality that so pervades our culture.

This is the ethos which underlies the MA, to support both a critical, analytic approach to the curriculum, *and* a hermeneutic one of meaning-making and reflection (Struck 2004: 3). Here are some of the ways in which this is achieved.

2 Pedagogy

The pedagogy of the programme is grounded in both entering and understanding *mythopoesis*, defined by educator L. M. English as ‘the ground of our being, which moves us out into the world of human experience’ (2010: 170). She adds that to be mythopoetic is to be ‘spiritually grounded’, and that a spiritually grounded teacher engages with tradition but also sees how our many forms of traditional wisdom have been subject to cultural overlay and interpretation. The MA’s integrative approach is achieved through applying both reflexive and critical methodological frameworks to a mythopoetic epistemology through a variety of teaching methods and assignments.

The MA team¹ has a broad and deep knowledge of classical philosophy, Western esoteric and wisdom traditions and practices, theology, music, art and culture, hermeneutics, ancient and modern divinatory practices, ‘new age’ culture (including studies of the paranormal), and reflexive research practice. We are not interested in a traditional ‘etic’ academic approach to teaching these rich subjects, but wholeheartedly believe in the power, and necessity, of ‘soul-learning’ in tandem with critical discernment (Dirkx 1997; Hunt 1998; Tisdell 2008; Willis et al. 2009). This requires a continual moving back and forth between subject matter and personal meaning, and in this sense, we are ‘both extending knowledge, and illuminating self’ (Moustakas, 1990: 11). We appeal to students’ own deep sense of connectivity and relationship with whatever they feel, or intuit to be ‘the bigger picture’, and engage them in a

¹Currently Dr Angela Voss, Dr Geoffrey Cornelius, Dr Simon Wilson, Dr Wilma Fraser, Louise Livingstone and John Chacksfield (research students).

critical exploration of their own mythic narratives, assumptions, and ways of learning through a variety of reflexive and creative techniques which stimulate and encourage different modes of knowing. These include lecture and seminar format (involving critical debate and argument based on texts, theories, traditions and practices); class and small group discussion and reflection on specific questions related to personal histories or cultural/social/global concerns, personal reflective journaling and sharing, creative project preparation, performance and reflection, creative workshops, and critical essay and dissertation writing. We pay particular attention to how each individual student learns, using intuitive techniques and exercises (e.g. in Anderson and Braud 2011; Fabbri and Lunari 2010), creative collage, and active imagination techniques (Angelo 2004). Students reflect on their learning processes in their Learning Journals, which they share with their peers, and in their Creative Project Review. The four formal essays and dissertation provide the opportunity to engage more fully with the course material through historical, cultural and textual research in an area of their choice.

The MA has always been resistant to an instrumental or consumer approach to education, and one of its challenges is how to marry an imaginative, integrative and often deeply personal set of values to a systematised agenda of aims and outcomes which is often counter-intuitive with respect to the kind of open-ended enquiry the approach entails. In terms of Kripal's model, we encourage an 'initiatory' approach to learning which values leaping into the unknown over consuming neatly packaged facts (Kripal 2014: xii). It is not easy to make a stand against the current model of higher education, where 'one size fits all' and where aims and outcomes take precedence over the unique relationship between each student and each tutor. Indeed we are not so concerned with 'evidence-informed' approaches as with authenticity of voice, responding to student interest, passion and enthusiasm with our own love for our subjects, and we aim to kindle their desire for learning (Voss 2009, 2017). Drawing on interdisciplinary scholarship that promotes these qualities (in religion, philosophy, esoteric traditions, consciousness studies as well as transformative learning literature), we aim to create a soulful learning environment where critical thinking serves a deep sense of the mythic, the imaginal, the intuitive ground of knowledge (McGilchrist 2009).

Our learning community is diverse, the age range extending from 23 to 76. Most students are mature professionals returning to study for personal growth and professional enhancement—very few, if any, are concerned about the MA as leading to a specific career. In this sense, the programme is an example of education for its own sake, embracing the values of traditional adult education where developing deeper self-knowledge is understood as an enhancement to any career. As examples of intuition-led learning, we cultivate research skills through various exercises including meditation on inner 'adversaries and allies', working with 'metaphors of knowledge' cards to generate reflection on the research question, and active imagination visualisation of key source material (Anderson and Braud 2011; Fabbri and Lunari 2010). Here are some of the students' responses to these exercises:

- 'I think the divination exercise was very useful, by presenting a mirror to our question about the dissertation. It is a very imaginative way to engage with the subject matter, a perfect illustration of the ethos of this MA.'
- 'Teaching methods of allowing space for intuitive exercises are very effective. I enjoy the balance between theory and the imaginal. It opens the door for you to also guide yourself to the answers and material being taught. I always enjoy the structure of the day as well. It feels like a safe space to learn and explore.'
- 'My experience of today's seminar was positive and encouraging. I enjoyed the 'embodied' methods used to tap into creative and reflexive ways of approaching the material. Angela's method and delivery of teaching was upbeat and engaging, and also encouraging and open.'
- 'A very refreshing way to approach a process of entering into dissertation working. What could be taken as a very dry and laboured process was entered into in an engaging and provocative way which has given me much to contemplate as I begin to plan my work'.
- 'Allowing space for different points of view or approaches and opinions to be expressed and integrated. Showing a deep knowledge of the subjects we are dealing with. Allowing space for discussion. Use of interesting and engaging materials. Showing personal involvement in the topics/subjects. Appropriate use of examples to explain ideas. I'm quite happy and satisfied.'
- 'Before the lecture, I had a lot of anxiety and pressure about my dissertation, but the lecture today helped me to reduce my fear and connect my heart to explore possible topics. Going back to my own experience and my images is an amazing way to find the passion to write my dissertation, which would make that activity joy rather than suffering. Finding the topic from my own heart could help me to deepen my self-knowledge and understanding of my topic.'

3 Transformative Learning

The programme is situated firmly within the framework of the particular branch of transformative learning defined by John Dirkx (1997) as 'soul work' (as opposed to the social reform dimension initiated by Paulo Freire and others). Essentially, contemporary educational theorists in this field emphasise an integral approach which acknowledges the severe limitations of traditional 'objectivity' by prioritising the subjective life of the learner. As Arthur Zajonc and Parker Palmer point out:

Contrary to the objectivist myth that has dominated higher education, the knower cannot be separated from the known for the sake of so-called objectivity. Given what we now understand about the mutually influential relationship of the knower and the known, objectivism is no longer a viable way to frame knowing, teaching or learning, or the true meaning of objectivity, for that matter. (Zajonc, Stribner and Palmer 2010: 27)

We also support the view of educationalist and poet Peter Abbs, that education should cultivate 'wholeness of being' through including all elements of the human

psyche: ‘thought, feelings, sensation, intuition, imagination and instinct’ (Abbs 1996: 42). For Abbs, the arts are best equipped to contribute to this process, and working experientially with music and image is an integral part of our programme.

We draw on the intuitive and heuristic methods of inquiry mentioned above, whilst adapting them to the contexts of our course material, much of which is historical, cultural and metaphysical. In this way, we build bridges between *methods* and *content*. To apply methods of transformative learning (self-reflection, auto/biographical narrative, mythopoetic and creative forms, artwork and performance) to the subject matter of wisdom and spiritual narratives, traditions and practices, allows students to deeply connect their learning with their own lives, professions and intimate concerns. ‘Method is enacted metaphor’ states depth psychologist Robert Romanyshyn (2013: 212), and another important mentor for us is the transpersonal psychologist Rosemarie Anderson, who defines such intuitive inquiry as ‘an epistemology of the heart that joins intuition to intellectual precision in a hermeneutical process of interpretation’ (Anderson 2004: 308). The rationale for such an approach is rooted in McGilchrist’s research on the appropriate relationship of these two forms of human knowing, characterised as brain hemispheric functions. McGilchrist’s seminal 2009 book *The Master and his Emissary*, provides a cultural context for the vital necessity of the restoration of myth and metaphor in our cognitive repertoire. He describes a healthy human mind as being able to take a stand beyond the dichotomies of ‘reason’ and ‘intuition’ (characterised by the metaphors of left and right brain hemispheres) and consciously create a relationship between them which is mutually supportive and nourishing. The most important factor, however, lies in the balance of power, for McGilchrist demonstrates what two thousand years of esoteric wisdom has always known—that rational thinking is rightfully the *servant* of a much deeper, broader and imaginal understanding of reality, and ultimately it must honour its master. In a healthy co-operative function,

what is offered by the right hemisphere to the left hemisphere is offered back again and taken up into a synthesis involving both hemispheres. This must be true of the processes of creativity, of the understanding of works of art, of the development of the religious sense. In each there is a progress from an intuitive apprehension of whatever it may be, via a more formal process of enrichment through conscious, detailed analytic understanding, to a new, enhanced intuitive understanding of this whole, now transformed by the process that it has undergone (2009: 206).

4 The Curriculum

The mediator between modes of knowing is identified as the imagination (McGilchrist 2009: 199), and an aspect of our unique approach is therefore based on the power of the creative imagination to straddle the worlds of intuitive insight, and ‘meaning-making’ which involves critical reflection and discernment. Creative activities (such as drawing in Canterbury Cathedral, psychogeographical walking,

collage and drama) are always followed by critical reflection on learning processes. Here are four examples of creative workshops:²



Creative Workshop 1: *Learning through art*—A project aimed to illustrate the processes of Renaissance natural magic through making talismans. In this workshop, participants experimented with creating images related to their own astrological birthcharts, having studied the neoplatonic principles of sympathetic resonance through the treatise of Marsilio Ficino, *How to fit your life to the Heavens* of 1489. This enabled them to gain insights about aspects of themselves they wished to develop or heal.



²All photographs are author's own with permission from participants.

Creative Workshop 2: *Learning through myth*—A project aimed at entering into the drama of the ancient mystery traditions to understand the role of mythic ritual. Here, participants re-enacted the myth of Demeter and Persephone using a contemporary play written by one of the students. This enabled them to enter the emotional dimensions of the story and gain insight into the central purpose of the mystery rite—to create a cathartic experience of the universal meaning of the myth and to gain a deeper understanding of the soteriological aspects of the ritual itself.



Creative Workshop 3: *Learning through active imagination*—discussing experiences of active imagination through drawing in the Cathedral. In this workshop, the participants study Jungian theories of active imagination (Chodorow 1997) and then find an image in the cathedral which ‘speaks’ to them in order to construct an inner dialogue and observe any insights which arise. They may draw, paint or write poetry about this experience and reflect on its capacity to reveal ‘unconscious’ elements of the psyche.



Creative Workshop 4: *Learning through embodiment*—recreating Botticelli’s *Primavera* painting to understand its symbolism. A primary emphasis of the MA is on

restoring a 'symbolic attitude' by encouraging the intuition and expression of deeper meanings in symbolic and sacred texts and images. Here, participants create a tableau of Botticelli's painting and discuss their embodied reactions to the characters, prior to studying the neoplatonic and mythic symbolism underlying its original creation.

The Creative Project assignment includes a creative production (non-assessed), which is then subject to a critical Review which evaluates the production in terms of process, reflexivity, theory and new insights (Barrett and Bolt 2007). Examples of projects include paintings, poetry, ritual enactments, sculpture, storytelling, tapestry, collage and fiction. Many of them have a strong emphasis on sustainability and education, for example, 'Bringing Feminine Wisdom into Secondary Religious Education' involved the devising of a syllabus for the secondary school RE curriculum which highlights female wisdom in a variety of religious traditions and therefore draws attention to the current over-emphasis on patriarchal themes. 'The Gordian Knot Oracle', created by a student who is a professional homeopath, used a hermeneutic framework drawn from the theological 'four senses of interpretation' to aid in homeopathic consultations. The student devised a method for her clients to understand the underlying allegorical, symbolic and potentially spiritual factors contributing to their health issues. As a final example, 'The Mighty Oak Tree' is a book for junior school children (key stage 2) which explores the oak tree through multiple perspectives—botanical, mythic and experiential—in order to introduce children to a variety of ways of understanding and participating in the natural world.



In the Learning Journal Write-up, students' ongoing sharing of personal reflections on the course material is organised into a thematic submission, and the dissertation may be written on a relevant topic of the student's choice. The taught syllabus includes coverage of broad topics which offer students a panorama of themes from which to select essay topics, for instance mythic thinking and the Platonic tradition; theories and methodological approaches for the study of the sacred; history, theory and practice of the symbolic imagination; divinatory and oracular traditions, and the relationship of spirit and psyche (including rituals of initiation, sacred geography and mythic landscape, paranormal experience and theories of the unconscious). Students are encouraged to approach subjects generally considered 'taboo' in modern

society, such as spiritualism and afterlife studies, divinatory and magical practices, and instances of paranormal or anomalous encounters or events. Following Kripal (2010), we hold that a new methodology of the imagination is required to enter these topics in the light of the extraordinary capacities of human mind, which appears to participate in a wider, broader and more mysterious field of consciousness than that of our consensus reality.

The success of the programme in promoting values of transformation is reflected in the comments of the programme's external examiner:

The entire programme is an instance of innovation. There is much talk in educational theory of transformative education. This course gets closer to the reality of that concept than perhaps any other I have seen. Within the programme I would again mention as instances of especially good practice: (1) the quantity and quality of feedback on assessed work; (2) the pervasive application of principles of transformative learning, and the variety of teaching and assessment methods involved in this, including some highly innovative essay questions; and (3) the particular way in which the Creative Portfolio Review and the Learning Journal have been designed to enable both creative expression/exploration and robust assessment; and I would add (4) the overall holistic design of the course, in which the different modules cumulatively reinforce one another and build capacity for undertaking the dissertation.³

At this point I would like to include some testimonials from past students on their learning experiences, to demonstrate how forms of transformation have occurred in practice.

5 Student Testimonials

- 'The MA ... works on several levels to raise awareness and provide opportunities for self-revelation. The MA offers a grand feast of ideas, images, music and sacred experiences to support different ways of knowing and foster an integrated intuitive intellect. I am also experiencing the joy of creative empowerment and look forward to the creative project. This MA certainly opens the door for potential psycho-spiritual transformation!'
- 'More than an educational experience the MA has been a journey for me. It has opened so many new pathways, that I hardly know where to go from here: the possibilities seem endless.'
- 'Angela, Wilma and Geoffrey did a fantastic job of structuring the programme content and of helping us as students to immerse ourselves fully in it to great transformational effect—a model for adult education.'
- 'Angela and Geoffrey were wonderful teachers and guides; their support helped me to learn more deeply than I thought possible and to examine the course content in new and creative ways for my learning benefit. This course was truly amazing—transformational, life-changing, inspirational and a joy to attend. I look forward to being an active member of the alumni group.'

³External Examiner's Report, November 2015.

- ‘The quality of the teaching of this MA convinced me to enter postgraduate research with the same teachers at CCCU. The learning process of the MA was truly transformative, generating an understanding in depth while retaining a clear overview over a vast field of knowledge.’
- ‘The content proved to be as broad as it was wide, enabling, in my impression, all the individuals in the cohort to pursue in depth their particular bent of the programme. This in turn enriched my experience through seeing the material through the eyes of the others.’
- ‘MA has been a life changing experience. It has introduced me on a deep level into the study matter.’

6 Sustainability

In our view, sustainability is not just about creating a new vision for environmental concerns and the health of our planet, but must include a new vision for cognitive health through revisioning educational principles to include the full spectrum of human ways of knowing. This includes the imaginal, the enchanted, the magical, the mysterious and the ineffable—qualities evoked by dream, by myth, by symbol, facets of human experience long rejected by the supremacy of rational knowing in our schools and academies (Voss and Wilson 2017: 15). For Plato, the philosophical path (towards a love of wisdom, or *Sophia*) was instigated by awe, when looking up at the canopy of stars above our heads, because the desire to know was intimately connected to the desire to return to the heavens. Desire, from the latin *de-sidere*, means ‘from the star’, a beautiful evocation of our natural affinity with the cosmos that gave us birth. To evoke this deep emotion means to evoke a sense of love and protection for our natural and cosmic environment which reaches far deeper than mere ethical or moral obligation or duty. But it needs to be taken seriously as a primary mode of human cognition, not a sentimental ‘add-on’ to our all-powerful rational minds. There is a deep sense of continuity and interplay in pre-modern conceptions of the cosmos in which the soul or life-principle pervades the entire creation from transcendent intelligences to the stones under our feet, a continuity which was ruptured in Enlightenment cognitive dualism. It is our view that such a holistic vision needs to be reclaimed, but in a new way. The contemporary philosopher Joseph Needleman points to the value of understanding the ancient model as a *symbolic* evocation, seen through a different mode of consciousness. In this way, it reveals the cosmos as what ancient writers call the higher part of the soul, which transcends and yet encompasses the more limited realm of human thought. We return to the esoteric way of seeing, where external reality is also internal, where the human soul is a microcosm with its own internal ‘spheres’ of being which ‘need to be peeled back, or broken through one by one along the path of inner growth, until an individual touches in himself the fundamental intelligent force in the cosmos.’ (Needleman 2003: 21).

In short, we return to the world of imagination, a world where nature is seen as having far more than instrumental or aesthetic value. It is seen as a sacred domain, the

expression of a divine creative principle, to be honoured, contemplated and nurtured. A contemporary movement which is concerned with articulating the unity of humans and cosmos is ‘Green Hermeticism’ (Lamborn et al. 2007), which understands the essence of humans and nature as a ‘primal revelation’ (34) in which all elements of creation reflect an underlying divine principle. Nature in this sense is an extension of consciousness (116) to which we are intimately related—but through an ‘intelligence of the heart’ (117) rather than our rational minds, which tend towards analysis, division and objectification.

This view does not need to be confined to esoteric philosophy; for instance Edward O’Sullivan talks about the importance of an integral development within education which ‘links the creative evolutionary processes of the universe, the planet, the earth community, the human community, and the personal world’ (O’Sullivan 2012: 170). He contributes to a growing scientific understanding that consciousness is not generated by the human brain, but is a universal force in which we participate together with all other life forms. This ‘filter theory’ of consciousness (see Kripal 2014: 390–2) gives rise to the possibility of a true growth in awareness and perception of our place in a vast web of being, and our responsibility to the whole. As O’Sullivan says,

[Integral development] must be understood as a dynamic wholeness, where wholeness encompasses the entire universe and vital consciousness resides both within us and at the same time all around us in the world. The endpoint of all this moves toward a deep personal planetary consciousness that one can identify, at a personal level, as ecological selfhood.

Another important writer who straddles the disciplines of philosophy and science is David Fideler, who in his *Restoring the Soul of the World* (2014) calls not for sustainability, but for ‘ecological restoration and regeneration’ (236) to repair the damage already done to planetary biosystems for future generations. He too calls on the wisdom of the ancient world for whom nature possessed ‘a sacramental, living dimension’ (84), before the primacy of the transcendent, spiritual realm took root via Western Christianity (84–5). In the author’s view, it is vital to reconnect to an animistic sensibility if we are to heal the split which became extreme in Cartesian philosophy—for ‘Descartes would not tolerate the idea of living nature, cosmic sympathies, or vital resonances between spirit and matter’ (Fideler 2014: 117). As McGilchrist would say, the ‘restoration’ is also that of ‘right hemisphere’ knowing, which can see the whole as well as the parts, and which engages the imagination in the act of apprehending reality. This act engages the whole being in the full presence of life, rather than representing it, second hand, as a mental concept.

7 Conclusion

What might be the limitations of the MA’s approach? As with any programme of study, its qualities derive from the strengths and weaknesses of its tutors and researchers, and it might be argued that the core ethos of the tutor team goes against the grain of much contemporary thinking about the function of education in terms of

employability and training, as well as challenging the relativism of postmodern value systems. We do not have expertise in the areas of social science, social justice, politics, equality and diversity or teacher education, and therefore cannot offer a comprehensive view of how our visions for change might be concretely implemented within policy-making structures. However, our Learning Journal method, and our creative workshops which are deliberately designed to foster integration between the ‘two sides of the brain’ and encourage lateral thinking, would enhance *any* educational environment and stimulate imaginative engagement with a wide range of curricula.

The author hopes to have demonstrated that connecting to the imagination as an interior journey of discovery (and re-merging with an enhanced critical awareness) has a profound effect in developing human beings’ relationship to their wider community and the world, and will necessarily inform any social action they undertake. Perhaps most importantly, restoring a hermeneutic of the symbolic in education [i.e. cultivating Jung’s ‘symbolic attitude’ (Jung 1977)] could lead to a reevaluation of therapies and practices which are often condemned or ridiculed by a mainstream consensus, yet which hold profound potential for healing self and others. These might include practices of alternative medicine, astrology and other forms of divination which restore an imaginal connection to the cosmos and establish the role of intuition and ‘sixth sense’ as a basis for rational explication and interpretation (Cornelius 2003, 2010). The author of this paper has been both an academic and astrologer for thirty years, and has experienced on innumerable occasions how interpreting the world *as metaphor* can result in insights which awaken both a deep sense of the sacred, and of participation in a shared moral responsibility to raise conscious awareness of the dangers of literalism, which often result in conflict and deadlock if not violence and destruction.

The modern ‘new age’ movement, in all its facets, is certainly a response to the alienation and mechanisation of the natural world, the problem is that so much of it is also alienated from deep intellectual engagement and communal moral responsibility. On a final note then, our MA programme seeks to understand the impulse behind the growing desire to engage with ‘spirituality’, and to consider what can be gained from the powerful metaphors of our pre-modern traditions and philosophies in the service of O’Sullivan’s ‘ecological selfhood’ and Fiedler’s ‘restoring the soul of the world’. We believe that inner transformation and the cultivation of wisdom naturally results in a growing sense of responsibility to our mother planet as we are all participating in some ‘other’ greater than ourselves. It is this ‘other’ which sustains all living things and which human beings, at their highest potential, may also recognise as residing at the core of their own souls.

To end on an optimistic note, there are a growing number of educational initiatives in the UK with similar concerns, recognising the vital importance of revisioning academic perspectives for a sustainable future. These include the postgraduate programmes in Holistic Science, Myth and Ecology and Ecology and Spirituality at Schumacher College, Devon; the transformative learning programmes of the Aleph Trust; the courses in Transpersonal Psychology at Leeds Beckett and Northampton Universities, the Sophia Centre at the University of Wales, and the postgraduate practice-based programme at the Prince’s School of Traditional Arts. Here at Can-

terbury Christ Church, a BSc programme in Human Development: Mind, Body and Spirit is due to recruit for September 2018. All these initiatives signal a growing demand from students of all ages for a more interdisciplinary and holistic approach to the full spectrum of human ways of knowing, and therefore contribute to the academic vision of a sustainable future.

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