

Nature and Therapy: understanding counselling and psychotherapy in outdoor spaces

Martin Jordan (2014). London: Routledge.

This book is based on Jordan's research around working as a psychotherapist in nature settings. It outlines the practical issues in setting up an outdoor therapy practice as well as the ethical concerns and underlying philosophies around this unconventional practice. It is described as a 'how to' book, the intention of which is to support therapists who desire to understand the relational and practical processes involved in working therapeutically in nature and how to make the shift to set up an effective therapy practice in nature.

The book provides commentary on the suggested human disconnection with nature in the post-industrialised world (see Roszak, 1992) and what this represents for mental health and well-being in postmodern society. This offers a way of conceiving psychopathology beyond the intrapsychic and human-to-human relationships, identifying the destruction of the environment as a major cause of psychological distress. Taking this view, it has been argued that psychotherapy and counselling have a potential role in repairing the division between self and world, and this book relates to this theory by proposing therapy in nature as a valid meeting place, identifying client groups that might benefit from the increased democracy between client and therapist offered in the outdoors, or even lessening the perceived threat and intensity of meeting face-to-face in an indoor clinical setting, whilst engendering greater awareness of the human-nature connection.

The aims of the book are clearly set out and coherently explored using examples from the author's own practice as well as narratives from therapists he interviewed in researching the topic. The book is divided into seven chapters.

Chapter 1. The healing effects of nature – why go outdoors? This chapter examines the rationale behind going outdoors and the philosophical underpinnings for what some might consider to be radical clinical practice, bringing in examples of existing research to support claims of the benefits of nature to emotional and psychological well-being.

Chapter 2. The field of nature-based therapies. This chapter looks at a range of therapies which take place in nature, including arts, horticultural, wilderness and adventure therapies, and exposes a gap in existing literature by examining how one might hold a therapeutic frame outdoors and the impact of such a transition on the relationships and processes of the therapy encounter. He also explains some of the core ideas around ecopsychology and ecotherapy.

Chapter 3. The therapeutic relationship and nature-based therapy.

This is the most theoretical chapter of the book and through the use of psychodynamic theory the therapeutic relationship in the outdoor setting is explored. The author proposes an approach to examining a client's relationship patterns, with nature as a mediator, as well as nature's role in the intersubjective space between the client and therapist.

Chapter 4. Understanding the range of therapeutic processes in nature.

In this chapter Jordan presents three concepts central to understanding therapeutic processes in nature settings, stressing that at different times different processes will be more or less a part of the encounter, depending on numerous factors, not dissimilar to therapy in more conventional settings, such as the therapeutic aims, client presentation on a given day and the less tangible aspects of relationship to self, other and world which are a rich part of the therapy meeting.

Chapter 5. Practice issues in moving counselling and psychotherapy outdoors.

The issues potentially of the greatest immediate concern to the practitioner wishing to take their therapy practice outside of a conventional setting are covered in this chapter. Jordan's outdoor therapy practice takes place in an enclosed willow dome, which he set up in order to mitigate some of his own conflicts around working as a therapist in nature. He shares his reflexions on his experiences to support the points made around practicalities in this chapter. With an emphasis on ethical, safe and professional practice, his considerable analysis of these concerns go some way to providing a counterbalance to the possible criticisms that his approach to working therapeutically outdoors might attract.

Chapter 6. Therapists' stories – taking therapy outside. Presented here are a range of experiences of other practitioners who have taken their therapy work to outdoor settings and interesting insights into how taking a therapy practice out of a conventional setting can both challenge and enhance the work, examining also the purposes and personal processes of the practitioners interviewed in taking therapy out of the conventional setting. The examples are realistic and balanced, showing the successes as well as where and how it could and did go wrong, in both individual and group therapy settings. The general tone appears to be one of experimentation, but without a solid grounding on the part of the therapist it would be a difficult transition, and in this vein Jordan comments on the supportive supervision which has been critical to his outdoor practice.

Chapter 7. Developing your own therapeutic relationship with nature.

What is suggested in this chapter, in providing the reader with a range of exercises aimed at helping them to develop their own therapeutic relationship with nature, is that one cannot feasibly practice in nature without having a personal association with and understanding of the underlying interconnectivity of humanity, nature and the world. Jordan offers some very simple techniques to this end, for example the singling

out of sensual experiences in various different settings, as well as some more involved ritualistic activities aimed at promoting a greater awareness and depth of relating to nature.

Jordan's book is a first of its kind and I suspect more research will be required to convince the wider community of psychotherapists to consider 'experimenting' with practicing therapy outdoors. Jordan pays special attention to the frame of therapy and how practicing therapy outdoors necessitates adaptations and flexibility. Jordan highlights existing literature around the therapeutic frame, and I was pleased to see a reference to Luca (2004) and Madison (2004), for although they do not speak about outdoor therapy or therapy in nature settings, they have addressed aspects related to those presented by Jordan in the consideration of frame issues arising out of a departure from therapy in the traditional consulting-room setting. Although not mentioned, Cohn (1998) has also contributed to literature surrounding the frame of therapy and makes points pertinent to Jordan's work on therapy in nature, indicating the flexibility required to respond to the changing needs of the client, and this speaks to the case of working therapeutically in the outdoors, as the need and skill to adapt is not only as the events of the session unfold but also to do so as the frame modifications of being in nature dictate.

The issue of modalities of practice and compatibility with working outdoors came to the fore for me in reading this book. A lot of the language and supporting theory that Jordan uses understandably relate to his training as a psychodynamic practitioner, which he states clearly. For the existential practitioner, there are many themes in the book which will have resonance, even if they are not explicitly referenced as such. Ideas from Deleuze & Guattari and Whitehead are outlined by way of understanding the dynamism and vibrancy of nature, its processes, various forms and interconnectivity to humanity, which stand apart from dualistic notions. Jordan touches too on Gendlin's (1996) principles of 'felt sense' and in Chapter 7 suggests a focusing technique to encourage the reader to (re)connect to nature. He also refers to several other paradigms such as behavioural models aimed at using nature to aid symptom reduction, Gestalt practice in nature therapy and mindfulness and Buddhist philosophy. I would like to read more about the fit of working from particular training backgrounds to outdoor settings and a future publication more specific to the paradigms of therapy and transition to working therapeutically in nature might provide some use to those working from strict modes of practice wanting to understand more about the role of nature.

There is not a great deal of research on the subject of nature and its implicit and explicit roles in therapy, let alone the matter of taking ones therapy practice into nature settings. It is an unconventional subject and Jordan identifies the near absence of training on ecotherapy concepts in

mainstream psychotherapy courses and considers reasons for that. I regard this book to be a considered, professional and insightful exploration of therapy in nature, and Jordan's reflections about his personal life-long relationship with nature and the consequent transition of his practice into working therapeutically in nature give the reader food for thought about how relationships beyond the intra- and interpersonal affect our emotional and psychological well being. He demonstrates the complexities of therapy and is sensible about the evident boundary complications of taking a therapy practice outside, himself grappling with reconciling his training background with the issues of working outdoors as a therapist, which makes for a responsible and enlightening contribution to the promotion of therapy in nature and, I hope, the first of many.

References

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After Mindfulness: New perspectives on psychology and meditation

Manu Bazzano (ed). (2014). Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Mindfulness is the buzzword. There probably isn't a week that goes by without the word popping up in the media, and most people interested in well-being and psychology will have heard about it in one way or another. What exactly is it though? And how exactly is it meant to work? Surrounding the buzzword there equally seems to be a vague sense of knowing and not knowing what this idea is about and how it can be applied. *After Mindfulness* is therefore a timely publication, as it offers some useful background information and situates the concept of mindfulness in today's world.

After Mindfulness has a particular lens on human existence, looking at