Considering Deep Green

♦ Perspectives Lecture 2006

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If tinkering will do, then shallow environmentalism is all you need

The deeper the crisis the more radical the solutions needed and the harder it is to be optimistic

I'm putting what I call a phase two Deep Green Perspective:

Towards a Social and Sacred Ecology

Basic Deep Proposition:

To sufficiently reduce our ecological footprint, technological and managerial approaches will not be sufficient to stop the bio diversity holocaust and the decline in the health of the planet

This requires:

Social and cultural structural change to reduce the burden of management and excessive reliance on technology

Cultural regeneration towards a social and sacred ecology, where the accepted values and norms enshrine the need to live within ecological limits.

Ecological limits need to be, first and foremost, ensuring that humans are living as active partners with the rest of nature

A Critique of Northern Shallow Approaches to Sustainability

- Paradoxes of human empowerment fear of us as the new god
- We are in trouble when the few control the many; the individual the group and one species all others
- Limitations of reliance on technological and managerial approaches

Definitions:

Corporate State:

At its core society is managed by an elite that has created a partnership between corporate state interests to the extent that other interests have become marginalised. The society is structured to maximise economic institutions through the size and power of their production, distribution and marketing and through the individualisation of the citizen as consumer

Social Ecology:

The process of regenerating relationships between people and the rest of nature that recognises that human existence and well-being are dependent on being in partnership with human and non-human species

Sacred Ecology:

Spiritual journey of self-transcendence and inner reflection activated through encounter with 'otherness', of other species and their habitat.

Fusion between social and sacred Ecology:

Helps to bridge the gap between human-centredness of the social, the transcendence of the spiritual, and the disconnection from nature we currently experience.

Sustainability depends on developing partnerships on several levels

♦ Between inner and outer life, so that strategy for sustainability addresses the socio-political arenas connected with the psycho-spiritual domains

♦ Between developing eco technology and eco cultures. Partnership for sustainability are dependent on the eco efficiency of management and technology and on rediscovering ways of being with the earth that nourish all dimension of being human

♦ Most importantly, redeveloping a partnership between humanity and the larger ecology of the earth

♦ Roszak (1992) argues that it is our special role to participate in the planet's risky experiment in self-conscious intelligence.

Roots of Deep Green: Phase One

◆ Earth first reaction to human arrogance and exploitation (Sessions ed)

◆ Other species have rights too, legal standing- animal liberation

◆ Thinking like a mountain, council of all beings (Macey & Seed)

◆ First peoples legacy-we are part of nature

Critique of Northern Approaches and Why Shallow isn't Sufficient: Some paradoxes of human empowerment

- For the first time in human cultural history, there is an individualistic culture, which idealizes the individual as the unit of society

- Every person, with the aid of personalised technology, is meant to reflect the range and balance of attributes. This is seen as the process of individual liberation form nature and then from other humans

- Individuals have physical and social mobility which forces them to make more and more decisions

- Technology has given human's an increased understanding and knowledge of nature and the environment

In contrast:

- The individual, while unique, is nearly irrelevant within natural systems

- Individuals are consumed by an array of superficial choices, the fewer, more important life choices are increasingly shaped by impersonal others such as the media

- Increased knowledge about nature does not mean an increase in sustained action for the rest of nature. About 70% of the educated Northern populace express concern about the environment but only about 20% donate time or money towards environmental action (Bean 1998)

Burgeoning human numbers are using resources and generating waste at an unsustainable pace.

- The destruction of the ozone layer and the spread of AIDS are just two examples which illustrate the dual threats to the protective skin of Gaia (Lovelock 1979) and immune system of humans

- Nature's self-generating cycles are increasingly replaced by human intervention (when a river is no longer able to clean itself, we need to repair and sustain it artificially)

- The need for intervention rises with the level of environmental destruction

- We are creating a zoo out of the earth' wilderness, which is more and more dependent on human's

- The public is increasingly separated from the role in regeneration of nature

- The more the earth's ecosystem is being damaged, the more work of prevention and rehabilitation is required

- The fundamental question is, what strategies are needed to address the damaged eco system?

- The current role of environmental management is to control nature rather than human's impact on nature

- Responsibility for environmental management has moved from individual & community to the professional, the state and the corporate sector

Diversity is the touchstone of sustainability.

We are facing a world of diminishing cultural differences.

The corporate state's globalism model of one culture, one world, one paradigm is the opposite of thinking globally, acting locally. We live in a society which is structured to maximise economic institutions through the size and power of their production, distribution and marketing and through the individualisation of the individuals as consumer.

The loss parallels our loss of bio-diversity and all that means for modeling different ways of living.

Limitations of Northern driven technological and managerial approaches

♦ 30 years of environmentalism and environmental management strategies which have focused on the victim and the immediate cause of environmental threat have not been successful

The health and diversity of life of the planet has and still is declining and is far more under threat today (Southwick 1996)

♦ Short-term actions using technical and price fixes and symptom suppression are used to clean up particular issues such as salinity and air and water pollution

♦ Research and investment centers on problem solving rather than prevention

Still little centers on positive initiatives that focus on causes, on our sociology and psychology rather than nature's ecology. While energy is centered on treating the victim there will always be victims, a replication of dominant approaches to social welfare issues.

The wizardry of new technology is a marvel and its capacity, if widely applied, will contribute to significantly clean up pollution, reducing resource use and contribute to making regeneration economically feasible.

As a dominant approach, it risks contributing to increase alienation between humans and the rest of nature.

A risk is, that the burden of decision making and management is increasingly put into the hands of machines. This would increase the alienation further between how we live today and our responsiveness to our environment (Finger 1994)

Dependency on machines leads to a tendency to create a false sense of invulnerability.

Excessive reliance on technology and improving our capacity for management of nature tends to engender arrogance

♦ "although many people are concerned about the state of the environment, environmental engineers are *the* people who do the right things to protect it from future damage and correct existing problems."

(Monash University: Prospective students information, 2001 pg16)

In the North, the environment is a political issue today. Environmentalism has moved from the periphery to the centre.

◆ The protests in the street have become institutionalized as part of the infrastructure of government and corporations.

◆ Consumer demand for green products is now finding expression in the rapid growth of green investment and the promotion of opportunities for the development of industrialised ecology.

The formula for environmental sustainability varies and shifts within the North in its mix of ingredients, their relative weight and effectiveness. Over the last decade there has been an increase in reliance on the market to provide incentives for responsible behaviour and technological innovation.

Leaving decisions to the market is ignoring the manipulative power of the sellers and citizens rights to shape the context within which markets are allowed to operate. Markets have never been free.

Biodiversity will continue to decline if the planet becomes only a human made and controlled world.

♦ We all have an impact on nature and need to be empowered to break out of excessive dependency on 'the experts'

♦ How can we make what is good for the economy good for our ecology?

♦ How can our responsibility to be the Earth's conscious carers be minimised through reliance upon existing or renewable ecological processes?

♦ How can we reorganise society so that policies can be made that put the interest of the whole before the part, all species versus just one and bring the risk to the future into the present?

Honouring our roots of being part of the earth and creating new possibilities:

Partnership transcending stewardship

Involves transformation of social and cultural structures for developing a conscious, deep partnership between humans and the rest of nature.

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Deep Green Phase 2:
Towards a social and sacred ecology:

Effective management for sustainability involves designing ways of minimising the necessity to be pro-active by maximising reliance on known ecological processes

Regeneration of a richer mix of cultural and biodiversity that is in balance

♦ Developing new technologies, social structures and processes that re-weave us into partnership with the rest of the natural world

♦ Reduction of our ecological footprints and keeping our feet firmly placed in the earth

♦ In the urban context this means a human scale of building that reminds us that we are part of the earth rather than above

♦ Provision of diverse forms of open space, city farms, neighbourhood gardens, urban forests, alive creeks so that the loss of backyards are at least provided for through public or cooperative lands.

Deep Construction

♦ We are biological being's born by the earth, constructed by our genetic and earthly history. Most of whom we are, we share with other animals

♦ Our mind is but one part through which we are endowed to work towards constructing a new partnership with the rest of the earth

The challenge is restructuring society instead of changing nature

- ◆ Exploring other, non-material ways of meeting human needs
- ◆ Examining how we have constructed society and reconstructing it in ways that reduce structural demands so we are less dependent on conscious individual decisions
- ◆ Decrease the management burden away from the extreme of the individual/state dichotomy
- ◆ Development of intermediate decision making and management structures at a real community level.
- ◆ Moving towards sustaining elasticity that can adapt to changing circumstances and crises.

Instead of fail-safe, we need an approach that is safe to fail

The challenge is to mirror ecological capacities for regeneration within the structure of society

- When partnership with the rest of nature is achieved the management and cost demands for sustainability will be reduced

- By explicitly allowing room for the rest of nature's capacity to use ecological processes to address an imbalance, we reduce the need for human intervention

- When environmental values and norms are being embedded within our psyches and institutions, environmentally sustainable decisions tend to flow

When human beings feel in partnership with the rest of nature, decisions which hurt nature are being experienced as hurting ourselves.

Movements towards a social and sacred ecology involves

♦ Reconnecting to place through reminders that we are part of and dependent upon our patch of the planet. e.g. growing food, exchanging surpluses, participating in building our shelter, developing relationships with other species

♦ Community redevelopment regenerate social and cultural citizenship through creating social spaces and relationships where people can meet face to face and find expression in creative art, nurturing, healing and recreational activities

♦ Political citizenship time spent in meetings exploring, deciding local matters as well as direct virtual input into national and even global issues

♦ Spiritual connectedness exploration and expression of our part in and partnership with Gaia, through being in slow time, and in active meditation to attune our selves to other voices. Exploring rituals that honor the power and the importance of nature as a vehicle for rediscovery of our sense of the sacred and drawing on nature as a pathway to transcendence and spiritual attunement

LOCAL PLACES MATTER

♦ Global consciousness is but context for honouring uniqueness of local places

♦ Excessive mobility and throughput is destructive of senses of place

♦ The longer and more holistically we live in a place the better equiped we are to act with caring wisdom for that place

Ecological Citizenship

- Becoming more than consumers and clients

- Professionals as servants of participatory democracy

Deep Spirituality

- ◆ Spirituality means the breath of life
- ◆ Soul means the essence of who we are as earthlings and the life and death issues we face
- ◆ Eco spirituality is experience of openness to more than I and more than human through observation and engagement with the rest of nature (see Abram, D 1996)

Social Ecology as Deep Green

- ◆ Community is at the core of who we are
- ◆ Face to face co-operative community is a vital part of reducing out footprint
- ◆ Community extends beyond the human world to include significant relations with other species

Rest of Nature as Healer

◆ We need the rest of nature for our wellbeing as well as for simple survival

◆ Centrality of wild places

◆ Pets, even seeing trees from hospital beds help physical and psychological healing (Katcher and Beck: 1988)

◆ All power and responsibility isn't in human hands

Rest of Nature as Teacher

♦ First people learnt through walking the land, being in places that matter, observing the elements, the characteristics and patterns of other species

♦ We are part of nature and the rest of nature provides rich opportunities for personal discovery of who you are and your own becoming (Roszak, Abram)

Ecological Self

♦ Recognition of being more than just human

♦ Feeling part of the earth as an extension of self

♦ Wild nature connections as an opportunity for self transcendence and affirmation of a larger sense of self

Deep Activism

♦ Shallow activism is when the outcry is 'not in my back yard' and fear is the driving force and anger the emotion

♦ Shallow is when professional and institutional interests overshadow environmental concern

♦ Deep is when activism comes out of self knowledge and love for the earth and all its species, involving a commitment for life in ways that are life affirming

♦ Passion is tempered by valuing diversity of perspectives, positions, strategies.

Deep is Hard Environmentalism

Commitment to a deep ecological perspective involves:

♦ Making hard decisions! Saying no to particular technologies- any suggestions?

♦ Becoming precious about species and habitats

♦ Putting the collective interest ahead of the individual- a person, corporation, government, specie

♦ Bringing marginal social and sacred dimensions into the centre

Deep Learning

- Exploring humans as victims as well as cause of the environmental crisis

- Education that reaches beyond the strictly cognitive and virtual with emphasis on the multi-dimensional human connection to nature – affective, cognitive and behavioral

- It demands education that promotes various approaches for individual, community and ecological well being

- Education needs to acknowledge the dominance of current structures which have adverse impacts on the environment, on community and on individual psyche (Roszak, Gomes & Kanner, 1995)

- Learning that empowers participants to be responsible by equipping them to be reflective about context, passionate about choices, and confident in their abilities, while being responsive to the opportunities that contribute towards a sustainable world

The environmental crisis undermines our legitimacy to be part of the earth, which engenders a crisis of meaning and a deepening alienation between person and planet.
The earth cannot meet the needs of all people today, all life, let alone future generations

♦ The purely technological and managerial approach to sustainability is insufficient

♦ Considering Deep Green means addressing transformation of cultural, social and spiritual approaches to invoke inner work and outer restructuring of society

Sustainability is dependent on the internalisation of an ecological identity and providing a cultural, social and technological context that is supportive.