

# “ET and OT – Keeping in Touch with Touch”

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## Introduction

“ET”, “Boy George”, Harry Butler, the “new” Germaine Greer, Dr Helen Caldicott, Pooh Bear, a commuting cyclist .....

What do they have in common? How do they fit into the theme of this conference?

This paper was originally proposed in the mind of the author as a scholarly presentation about the psychophysical aspects of touch and its importance for the mutual benefit of staff and their multiply-handicapped clients. Twelve months ago the posters for the film “ET” everywhere portrayed what is perhaps the most famous finger-to-finger connection since the “almost” touch of Michelangelo’s Sistine creation.

Touch is now no less significant (Hosler, 1982; Montague, 1980; Simon, 1975) and is becoming more accepted and valued in the clinical facilities familiar to the author. What has changed is her perspective of the place of touch as a component of what is now understood to be part of a much larger “paradigm shift” than that which was taking place at the School of Occupational Therapy in Victoria at the time “ET” was viewed and connected with ongoing philosophical debate and creative problem-solving workshops about the nature of Occupational Therapy.

This paper explains the links between the myth of “ET” and the history and future of the profession of Occupational Therapy (OT), in the context of a current crisis of global proportions which Capra (1982, p 15) maintains is “not just a crisis of individuals, governments or social institutions; it is a transition of planetary dimensions”. The current social changes affecting human services are, according to Capra, manifestations of a much broader, and inevitable, cultural transformation. The return of Occupational Therapy practice to its “health and function focus” in a “joyous rediscovery of the early wide-based health-oriented practices so opposed to our later limited focus within the medical model” (Rerek, 1971, p233) will be supported by the changes predicted by Capra and others (Alinsky, 1971; Burnet, 1970; Cairns, 1982; Capra, 1975; Chilton Pearce, 1971; Dubos, 1968; Ferguson, 1980; Jones 1982; Roszak, 1969; Zukav, 1979). Fidler (1981, p 570) has said that “in old values lie the beginnings of new directions”, and this is especially true for our profession in Australia at this time.

## “ET” - Extra-Terrestrial

Even those who did not see the film could not have escaped the pervasive marketing strategies which established “ET” as a public identity. The great appeal of the ugly character who became so lovable to adults and children the world over may derive from the strong mythical elements of the story.

Our hero, “ET” begins in hardship, of humble origins, which include a strong element of mystery and adventure. He is rejected and feared by some, loved by others. He is “human” and fallible, suffers, is betrayed, destroyed, (at least momentarily) and achieves victory against great odds, leaving others changed by his influence: all the components of a great myth, as described by Gowan (1975, p 204).

The film represents the victory of innocence over sophistication; of loving trusting acceptance of “the child” over fearful paranoia of “the adult”. When threatened by adversity - in the form of a scientifically and potentially sophisticated, greedy competitive male intrusion into the safety, sanctity, and playfulness of the home - the friends of “ET” co-opt a trusted adult ally. Symbolically, this adult aid comes from a woman and mother.

In mythical terms, as described by Gowan (1975), Jung (1964, 1971) and Woodman (1982) masculine and feminine symbols do not, of course, relate to physical or sexual characteristics, and ET is clearly not sexual - being “inhuman” and portrayed as neither male nor female.

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At the same time the character represents the merging of the “masculine” and “feminine” consciousness and of “Eastern” (intuitive) and “Western” (rational) values - all in complementary co-operation (Capra, 1982, Jung, 1971; Radhakrishnan, 1932; Valle, 1981; Woodman, 1982).

The victory of “ET” was dependent upon the combination of several factors associated with the feminine principle, in harmony with others of the masculine principle.

Without intuition, sensitivity to nature, and a love energy that kept the “heart light” glowing; without a clear, goal-orientated strength of purpose, the ability to analyse and yet creatively synthesise unfamiliar parts into a new whole; without the ability to adapt and respond to new “prosthetic” environments in seeking return to a truly compatible environment, “ET” could not have survived the stress and trauma of its earthly adventure. It required science and technology and nurturing, nature, working together with love, “the agent of universal synthesis”, (Teilhard, de Chardin, cited in Ferguson, 1980, p 241) to create the gentle balance necessary for survival.

“ET” thus represented the delicate interplay of the individual system with other systems of its environment and the successful co-operation between forces portrayed as operating in opposition in Earthly society. Johnson (1981, p 589) discussed this conflict as she perceived it pertaining to Occupational Therapy - a choice between the opposites of humanistic caring and scientific objectivity. She perceived a change “toward science and reductionism and away from humanism and holism” and forecast new directions “pointing toward science, rigor, objectification, logic, analysis, dehumanisation and depersonalisation” (ibid, p 589). The author of this paper argues that, fortunately for Occupational Therapy, Johnson was identifying a conflict that need not exist. Now is the time to ensure that such a conflict does not develop in Australia to the extent it has overseas.

Survival of the profession depends, no less than that of our world, on “reshaping pervasive value systems” (Albee, 1982) and developing attitudes which reject the “uncommonly masculine tough-mindedness which thrusts the feelings and the heart aside” (Jung, 1971, p 16). Such attitudes have characterised our patriarchal, rational, intellectual society, in which “economic value is considered the only measure of value” (Dubos, 1968, p 46) and reflect a value system that underlies our whole culture and that has now become outdated (Cairns, 1982, p 7). Capra (1982, p13), discussing Arnold Toynbee’s conjectural studies of the cyclical rise and fall of civilisations, suggests that creative minorities will be the new protagonists in the process of cultural evolution which is beginning at this time.

The “feminist”, “conservation”, “human potential”, “holistic health”, “small is beautiful”, “consumer”, “self-help”, “ethnic liberation” and other movements are part of a rising culture (Capra, 1982, p 30). Perhaps “ET’s” “lovable ugliness” is a symbol of the same shift in values? Perhaps Occupational Therapists, a minority accustomed as they are to rising to fresh challenges which perpetually evoke more creative responses, will appear more prominently on the scene? Or the process of challenge-and-response, may transform some of the old elements into a new configuration - not just of our profession, but of the world?

### “OT” - Occupational Therapy

It is assumed that the history of Occupational Therapy is familiar to the majority of delegates at this conference. The origins of the profession in the evolution of activities (Mocellin, 1982, p 448), the moral treatment era of last century (Bockoven, 1971), and the mass recruitment of willing workers during World War 1 (Woodside, 1971), link it with a holistic philosophy and an intuitive approach to working with the individual, using an integrated systems approach to enhance his/her function and quality of life.

For many reasons, not least because it was predominantly female, the profession sought, after World War 1, “to appear more legitimate through association with a more recognised and powerful profession” (Mosey, 1981).

The biomedical reductionist model was accepted and adopted although its content was “totally inappropriate ... in almost every way” (Ibid). This marked the beginning of what could be described as a “retrograde phase” in the development of the Occupational Therapy profession, as it became “narrowly defined, specialised and controlled” (Diasio, 1981, p 238).

“Incongruencies were readily apparent” (Mosey, 1981) when the profession began to look at itself and its links with the medical profession, which had “praised the therapist’s heart while questioning her knowledge and skills” (Woodside, 1971, p 229). Since the 1960s there have been clear re-statements of our holistic philosophy, and of the intuitive, “commonplace” and effective components of our practice, (Diasio, 1981; Huss, 1981; Jantzen, 1962; Reilly, 1962; Yerxa, 1980) : and yet we have continued to capitulate “to more established and more verbal professions” (Woodside, 1971, p 230).

This seeking after words can be seen as an adaptive response to the dominant “masculine” nature of Western culture and education, which derogates the “feminine” intuitive, creative, metaphoric, synthesising aspects central to the practice of OT, and rewards the scientific, rational, analytic, verbal aspects characteristic of the medical profession (Capra, 1982, Valle, 1981). A feature of the role of any Occupational Therapist is the skill of developing accurate insight, of observing and connecting small details then understanding the whole situation, person, and issue. This is also an aspect of the feminine consciousness, which requires words and language to articulate its perception. Such words and language have not existed until recently (Valle, 1981). Creativity and the subjective “right brain” qualities of the art and science of Occupational Therapy are not easily conveyed to the verbal scientific “left brain” professions and culture from which we have sought approval. In one sense, our whole culture has mitigated against the profession in de-valuing the creative expressive, physical, practical activities upon which it was originally based. “Ever out of step, ever in conflict with the ‘establishment’, the OT has chosen many ways to adjust to this ongoing noxious work situation” (Rerek, 1971, p 233).

The finger of creation, of tender caring touch, of ‘ET heart energy’, has been relegated in our culture in recent times to the status of merely turning switches on and off - the starting and stopping of machines (Assagioli, 1973).

Reilly’s (1962) often-quoted hypothesis of the foundation of OT, states “that man, through the use of his hands as they are energised by mind and will, can influence the state of his own health”. This hypothesis finds support in recent mind-brain research and research into the “placebo effect” (Ferguson, 1980, p 253). The increasing public recognition of the power of the individual in the process of health and illness (Capra, 1982; Ferguson, 1980; Harrison, 1984; Illich, 19 ), - either in asserting needs and rights as a patient or in assuming responsibility for modifying thoughts and lifestyle, - adds a new dimension to the prophecy that OT could be “one of the great ideas of (the) 20<sup>th</sup> Century ....”(Reilly, 1962)!

### **The State of the Art and Science .....**

In 1954 Carl Rogers wrote of a “desperate social need for the creative behaviour of creative individuals” (cited in Vernon, 1970, p 137) and warned of the risk of “international annihilation” as a price to be paid for a continuing lack of creativity. Alvin Toffler (1970) described the syndrome “future shock” as a possible result of technological change too rapid for adaptation and Barry Jones (1982) calls for a “creative approach to the issues of the 1980’s” which will avert the unprecedented social crisis into which linear thinking will otherwise lead us.

In previous periods of history, and in other cultures today, creative expressive art forms have been an integral part of the lives of people (Bernstein, 1972; Feder, 1981). In the USA today expressive and creative activities have been separated into therapeutic specialties to be prescribed in treatment and pursued as personal growth. “Slowly people in industrial societies are beginning to realise what our forebears knew - that engaging in artistic creation is essential not only to

the development of a healthy individual but also to the development of a healthy society, and that experience in the arts is, in effect, therapy for all” (Warren, 1983).

“The arts ..... provide innumerable opportunities for developing skills which aid in learning and growth” (Delaney, 1982). “It is through the arts experience, through the linking of mind, body and soul, that individuals” pursue their rights to express themselves, “no matter what their age or their physical, mental or emotional capabilities” (Warren, 1983).

Occupational Therapists have provided opportunities for such pursuits through the use of creative media throughout the history of the profession, yet must now turn to the publications of “new” professions for resource material (Fidler, 1981).

Having worked so hard to establish dialogue and recognition through the pursuit of science, the profession is now witnessing wide-scale social acceptance of “the arts” it has neglected.

In Australia the OT profession can lead the re-establishment of creative and expressive therapeutic interventions in “traditional” health service settings, thus increasing the range of options available to clients and staff for choosing behaviours and thinking appropriate for a changing culture. The expressive and creative arts do not “belong” to this profession, but we are well-placed strategically to encourage and develop their appropriate use in this country. Occupational Therapists have the scientific knowledge base, the medical, therapeutic, and research language, and the understanding of activity analysis which can facilitate communication about the therapeutic use of the arts. They also have a range of skills and clinical experience which may serve as a base to the development of clear role models for the use of the arts in therapeutic programs.

Our culture is becoming ready to accept what OT has been offering. It remains to be seen if the art and science of OT can respond to existing needs and, anticipating future trends, lead the way in creating new approaches to the solution of old problems.

### An “ET” Perspective

An extra-terrestrial look at Occupational Therapy on the planet earth - the fragile craft “in which all aspects of creation are interdependent” for survival (Dubos, 1973) - may highlight priorities for practice in coming decades.

A view of the development of the biomedical reductionist model with which OT identified early this century recedes back into the 17<sup>th</sup> century and Cartesian and Newtonian mechanical concepts of the world and of man. Even further back the early Greeks also retreated, like our contemporary culture into the mind and away from the body (Capra, 1982; Dubos, 1968; Zukov, 1979).

The current state of world-wide crisis (Cairns, 1982; Ferguson, 1980; Jones, 1982) has facets which “touch every aspect of our lives - our health and livelihood, the quality of our environment and our social relationships, our economy, technology, and politics” (Capra, 1982, p1). The threat of nuclear catastrophe, the deterioration of our natural and social environment, the fact that “the expected benefits of modern health care systems have not eventuated” and diseases conquered are “replaced by health problems which are the result of personal and community life styles” (Binns, 1982, p 24) - all contribute to the human and non-human environment, concern for which is “fundamental to the practice of Occupational Therapy” (Mosey, 1981).

The “scientific method” of research accepted the mechanistic and reductionist views of classical physics, which have gone through several conceptual revolutions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century which “clearly reveal the limitations of the mechanistic world view and lead to an organic ecological view of the world which shows great similarities to the views of mystics of all ages and traditions ..... The fact that modern physics, the manifestation of an extreme specialisation of the rational mind, is now making contact with mysticism, the essence of religion and manifestation of an extreme

specialisation of the intuitive mind, shows very beautifully the unity and complementary nature of the rational and intuitive modes of consciousness” (Capra, 1982, p 32). Modern physics can show a culture, dominated by science, that holistic and ecological views are also scientifically sound.

The development of a holistic approach to health consistent with the new physics and the systems view of living organisms will acknowledge the balance between self-assertive and integrative tendencies which are included in the natural balance of living organisms. “A future system of health care will consist ...of a comprehensive, well integrated system of preventative care” and health and illness will be considered in a framework of life style practices, and a world view which seeks to restore and maintain “the dynamic balance of individuals, families, and social groups” (Capra, 1982, p 364). The paradigm shift which is now taking place will alter profoundly the thoughts, perceptions and values that form a particular vision of reality. Perhaps this new vision is more like “ET’s” view than that of many Occupational Therapists today?

### OT - in touch

To respond adaptively and creatively to the rising culture and new view of the world, the profession can learn from its own history and its links with current and future changes in the world, with which it must keep “in touch”. We in Australia can be “in touch” with the unique features of our national development. As individuals, OT’s who expand their awareness of the present, the “now” of any moment in the daily life of a therapist will be more “in touch” with their intuition and the wisdom of the healer within, which can guide action in positive directions for both therapist and client.

For some members of our profession no change is necessary in thought or behaviour, as they need only continue to do what they have already been doing well - whether or not they are aware of their part in a greater movement. Those gentle conspirators might add to their work the confidence and conviction that the differences which set them apart from the value system and activities of our existing academic, political and economic institutions, (and which also set them apart from their equally maladaptive polar opposites), can be the source of a creative dynamism which will see their “survival into the 21<sup>st</sup> century” on the crest of a rising culture.

### Conclusion

For “ET”, survival was dependent on an adaptive response facilitated by scientific knowledge, technical skill, and rational thought on the one hand, and by awareness of and respect for nature, creative synthesis, love, and intuitive thought on the other.

For OT, an awareness of our need to be in touch with both the art and the science of our profession, and a willingness to accept and participate in other world views, will help us, with our clients, to share in shaping a new and health enhancing reality, through agreement and consensus.

With enough hope, love and positive feelings, heart lights around the globe will shine out and illuminate a better world for all of us.

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