

Eco-anxiety and emotional literacy

Contributed by Centre for Human Ecology
Saturday, 05 April 2008

A recent article in the Independent took an excessively condescending tone towards people's anxieties and fears about the state of the planet, provoking many letters of protest from the international Ecopsychology community. Mary-Jayne Rust, who co-teaches the CHE Ecopsychology option module, was quoted extensively in the article. While she was relieved to have been quoted correctly, she was "very dismayed by the tabloid tone of the piece."

Mary-Jayne writes: It's fascinating to note that The Independent asked the journalist to treat this subject with levity. I think the whole piece highlights how fearful people are about really allowing themselves to respond on a FEELING level to the seriousness of the situation we find ourselves in. It would be very good to try and get another article in that paper, to ask, 'Why the need for the levity on this subject? What are you frightened of?' We live in a culture which is not emotionally literate, and I would suggest that people are very frightened of simply acknowledging fear, anger, despair - and a whole range of responses to what is happening in our world. Not engaging with the feelings blocks the process and we find ourselves disempowered, in a vicious circle of consuming which blocks the journey we need to make. So we hear things like: 'Oh, we're all doomed, I might as well party' - which is much what [James] Lovelock is advocating. And this is a very dangerous line to take. It's suicidal thinking.

So I would advocate the need for as many community spaces as possible which enable people to feel safe to express their feelings about the place we are in - places which can also inspire people, plugging them into the good news that doesn't get published - the good news that a quiet revolution is happening around the globe.