

driving down an ordinary day
 I see clearly
 that it is no ordinary day

that sky is lake
 and clouds are long green canoes

I see/hear
 that paddles are pens

that I am writing my way
 deeply silently
 backwards towards
 infinite rhythms
 of loss
 and the unmistakable noise
 of a poem

Mary M. Watkins

MORAL IMAGINATION AND PEACE ACTIVISM: DISCERNING THE INNER VOICES

Psychoanalysis conceives of imagination as an egocentrically oriented preserve for personal wishes, wishes which stand in stark contrast to the harsh realities of the external world, and which, indeed, defend us against them. Often in our popular psychologies, imagination is given over to the solely individualistic, as for example when we are told to entertain packaged images to cure our personal ills and to fulfill our private desires.

We are in the habit of putting to imagination questions of a solely personal nature, forgetting that its figures are intertwined with the world, not just with us ourselves. When we look to the imaginal figures who people our dreams, active imagination and thoughts, we find them already responding to the nuclear crisis that imperils our world. These figures get little time to speak to us, for we either press them on our personal problems or repress them and move toward an activism cut off from imaginal roots.

Now, standing in the midst of a nuclearized world—a world that suddenly seems so fragile and vulnerable—there returns an idea about imagination that does not seek to merely bolster the self against an imposing world. Many psychologically-minded writers are stressing the importance of imagination in preventing nuclear war—Erich Fromm, Robert J. Lifton, John Mack, Joanna Macy, Elise Boulding and others. In this work, imagination is restored to its former association with the heart and with sympathy—to that which allows us to pass beyond the boundaries of ourselves into other situations and beings to experience their reality and feelings.

By virtue of this function of imagination, it was considered the basis for moral action by the early Romantics. According to James Hillman internal and external, imagination and world, were not sundered in this natural movement of heart and mind into the world.

We recognize that much of mental activity is but a conversation of inner voices—questioning, answering, criticizing, advising, praising, expressing. Our action depends on the orchestration of these voices, on which point of view, which character, is in power at a given moment. Is it a "mothering

one" who runs to soothe the other's anxiety or a "working one" who longs for solitude in which he or she can become absorbed in a project; is it a "fun-lover" who looks for ways to lighten, humor, enjoy? Often a single voice becomes so prevalent about an issue that it seems as though there is no other perspective, no second voice that objects or queries. At such moments, we say that one is "identified" with the first voice. To change habitual action or inaction, the relations between voices must shift.

I believe that active imagination is a method that can accomplish this. Since 1981 I have been using active imagination with community groups, churches, and schools for the purpose of exploring the individual inner figures that affect one's responses to the nuclear threat. I would like to describe this method, and what I found in using it, in the hope that it can help us understand the imaginal background to our action, nonaction, and reaction with respect to nuclear war.

In these groups, I asked people to locate the part of themselves that is aware of the nuclear threat, that feels and thinks about it, and that wishes to act in relation to it. They were told to imagine this part of themselves as if it were a character in a book: what was he or she like, how did they spend their time, what was important to the character? On another occasion, participants were asked to imagine the part of themselves that did *not* want to be aware of the nuclear problem, that did not want to talk or think about it, that did not want to take any action.

Although participants ranged in age from fifteen to seventy-five and came from a broad range of jobs and professions, there was an amazing confluence in the imagery and types of characters that arose.* There were six main characters that act to benumb us to the reality of social problems: the innocent child, the worker/specialist, the back-to-nature person, the safe suburbanite, the hedonist, and the gray-lifer or depressed one. And

*Each group met only once for one to three hours, depending on circumstance. With few exceptions the participants had no experience with active imagination, and yet each was able to experience the presence of these voices. The descriptions of these characters are drawn from participants' written reports. Those familiar with imaginal figures will note that they are in the beginning stages of character development, and often lack the complexity and depth of voices one has entertained in imagination over time. Nevertheless it was the characters' closeness to consciousness that allowed us to so easily recognize them in our daily actions and attitudes.

there were four types that sustain our awareness of the nuclear danger: the devastated one, the advocate, and two forms of activist.

The emphasis in this work was on coming to know the voices that inhibit activism and those that sustain it, to work against an identification with a single voice and toward a dialogue. But let me caution. This effort was not to eliminate one voice in favor of another, to kill off the numb part of one in partiality to the activist part of one. First of all, this proves impossible in the long run. The neglected or repressed voice always reasserts itself, often without our awareness. Second, as we shall see, some of the characters unconcerned about nuclear war can be valuable voices when their area of concern is circumscribed. It was the very tendency to isolate these voices we were trying to work against. When split, each presents itself simplistically, black or white, as polar opposites. Each voice sounds trite, stereotypic, uncomplicated, unsophisticated. When a dialogue can be sustained, each voice develops its point of view and becomes more internally complicated. It is less dismissive of the other and thereby less inhibitory.

THE NUMB ONES

Lifton posited that each of us lives a "double life" with regard to nuclear war: one part does not want to hear about the possibility of nuclear annihilation and defends itself through a state of psychic *numbness*, going about "business as usual"; and another part understands and experiences feelingfully that everything precious could be destroyed forever.

If nothing else, the 20th century should have taught us to keep a vigilant eye on the numb one. For Wilhelm Reich, this is the one armored against feeling. Being "shut off from immediate contact with nature [and] people," the numb one acts with false pride, concerns himself with superficial appearances, engages in the banal, the ordinary. For Reich, evil is none other than numbness, as for Jung unconsciousness is the greatest sin. Hannah Arendt, a student of the atrocities of our century, also said evil takes on an ordinary face, the face of banality. Adolf Eichmann exemplified this for her. Unlike our usual notions of how evil people would seem, Eichmann was striking only in his "manifest shallowness." Though the "deeds were monstrous," the doer "was quite ordinary, commonplace, and neither demonic nor monstrous." He presented him-

self with "clichés" and "stock phrases," "adhering to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct." He was not stupid but "thoughtless." So if evil occurs in this mundane, ordinary way, then it is possible for all of us to perpetrate it by sins of omission, by the actions we hold ourselves back from, as well, as by sins of commission.

Grange Copeland, a Black character of the novelist Alice Walker, put it this way to his granddaughter:

"When I was a child," he said, "I used to cry if somebody killed an ant. As I look back on it now, I *liked* feeling that way. I don't *want* to set here now *numb* to half the peoples in the world. I feel like something soft and warm an' delicate an' sort of *shy* has just been burned right out of me."

"Numbness is probably better than hate," said Ruth gently. She had never seen her grandfather so anguished.

"The trouble with numbness," said Grange, as if he'd thought it over for a long time, "is that it spreads to all your organs, mainly the heart. Pretty soon after I don't hear the white folks crying for help I don't hear the black." (Quoted in Bradley, p. 27)

How do we find this numb one that does not hear our cry for help? Is it not in each of us when our eyes skip over the newspaper article dealing with the installation of the MX missile? When we flip the TV channel to avoid hearing the headlines about European protests against the presence of American warheads? When we minimize or deny the possibility of a catastrophe and treat the prophecies of nuclear war like predictions of weather? The numb one does not want to think or feel about the possibility of nuclear war; it moves tropically toward a state of anaesthesia like a snail moves toward the safety of its dark shell. The numb one assumes that war, like weather, leaves no resource to human hands, and therefore goes about "business as usual" without figuring in this "item" of potential upset.

THE INNOCENT CHILD

There is a child who speaks to us who is not immersed in the world of political daily events but in the world of play. Of course, actual children worry quite directly about nuclear war, but many *imaginal* children live apart from the threat.

When asked who inside of him doesn't want to hear about nuclear war, one 30-year old man saw a small, gentle, innocent boy, naked and vulner-

able to the thoughtless whims of others. The boy lives in a dark, warm cave far above the city, on a mountainside in the wilderness, far from the cruelties man inflicts upon his fellows. He avoids others, for contact with them is painful and frustrating. He'd rather be alone, living in harmony with nature and himself, allowing others to do what they may.

We meet another innocent child down by a brook, on a bright summer day. She is 11 years old, lean and graceful with long golden hair. She plays with her friends and rides her horse through the meadows. She cannot comprehend what nuclear war means, what it is. She cannot imagine the possibility of her world being destroyed, for everything seems so peaceful, so completed.

Upon reflecting about this golden child, the woman who entertains her says that it is this innocent child that

blocks me from acting. It is the optimistic inability to comprehend the destruction of my world, the actual horror of the effects of nuclear war. When one part of me thinks it will happen, the child, in all her freshness, says it isn't possible.

Of course, there are other children too: the teenage boy who runs from one baseball game to the next, the spoiled little girl contained in the world of her own desires, and so on.

Besides the imaginal child's self-centered absorption into the world of play and pleasures, besides its innocence and naive belief in the continuation of life, we confront the child's feelings of impotence, inability, and inadequacy. This is the voice within ourselves that stops our potential for activism by saying "this problem is too complex, too big for me." "I don't know what to do about this. I wouldn't know where to begin." "My voice is too small. Nobody would hear me."

There also is an adult within who knows that, in the end, there is no recourse to someone older and wiser to accomplish the things that must be done; that whether adequate to the task or not, one must try or it will never happen. The child within us stills this voice, leaving the tasks for someone older, more experienced to do. In this way, the child's innocence and youthfulness is potentially lethal, breeding as it does an evasion of responsibility, an evasion of trying to do whatever one *can* do.

THE WORKER, THE SPECIALIST

The second type of numbing character is the worker in us, usually the specialist. For the worker, life is narrowed to the confines of the job. All else is experienced as unwelcome intrusion. The worker moves very fast and efficiently, working long hours. He or she is absorbed—monomaniacally—in the task at hand. There are seldom people or family around. If there are, they are experienced as being in the way. The worker's sense of self is sustained by the mastery of a specialized task in a circumscribed world. Let's meet a few of these workers.

A 20-year old woman, concerned about nuclear war but inactive sees imaginably a janitor busily cleaning up the daily messes of everyday life. He feels frustrated, angry. He is picking up rubbish in the auditorium. He is never there for the show; only afterwards, alone. He wants to be left alone to do his work but he keeps hearing a voice over the intercom. He looks over his shoulder as though to tell this authority, this voice, to leave him alone, to stop bugging him and let him live his own life. He lives in a small, plain house in a uniform development.

Do you recognize this janitor? The one who cleans and tidies the mess of our daily life and whose clean-up is *not* a prelude to getting started on a project? The one who makes a life out of straightening the files, emptying the trash, watering the plants, arranging the chairs, balancing the checkbook, whose work is never done and who goes on repetitively each day re-cleaning, re-arranging the same rooms as yesterday.

A 30-year old woman sees another kind of worker character, Holly. Holly runs about frenetically all the time. In her twenties, Holly works as a computer personnel placement consultant for a Boston firm. She loves everything fast, particularly cars. She lives with her husband and children in a pre-fab three-bedroom suburban ranch, but this is not her life focus. She and her family rush past each other all the time, just as Holly rushes to and from work and past people on her job. She's excited by the money she's making, the things she's able to buy, the deals she's able to take advantage of. For Holly, "profit" has utterly lost its original meaning, its meaning in the Bible and in Spinoza, of profit for the soul.

Can we find our own Holly, the part of us on the ladder, moving up, excited by doing well at something, whether or not it means that much to us?

Psychological Perspectives

A different kind of worker character is the scholar. He sits in his library, pouring over leather bound books, pondering specialized questions for long hours. His house is surrounded by a wall, cutting off the hubbub of the city beyond. He wants to be left alone; his project demands it. He works hard at what he does and believes he deserves his remove from the world. He is the one who tells us we must not take time from our pursuits to work on such things as nuclear war. We must stick to what we do well and leave world problems to others who are meant to work these things out. The importance of our projects and our dedication to them gives us special dispensation.

BACK TO NATURE

The third type of character who benumbs us chooses isolation from the world of people and becomes surrounded by nature; most often he or she has taken to the woods, which soon becomes a completed world. There is a dim awareness of outsiders' concerns about nuclear war, but nature soothes and comforts these concerns by its strength, continuity, massiveness.

A mother of two imagines the numb aspect of herself as such a naturalist character, a rugged, individualistic woodsman. He lives alone with his animals in the woods and guides his life by the signs of nature. It is inconceivable to him that anything could destroy his world. It is too precious.

Another character is a woman who has moved to the woods with her children and husband because she wants to avoid hearing about nuclear war. She has no TV or radio, only slight contact with the townspeople to get supplies. She enjoys her isolation and detachment. She is healthy, hardy, cares well for her children. She hikes in the mountains, farms and cooks. Her main concerns are to live off the land and enjoy life. She writes everyday for herself on matters that concern her.

Of course, we recognize these characters in the outer world as back-to-the-land people, as those individualists who will always struggle with their hermit-like proclivities, off on their own. But closer to home, amid the city, we can detect in ourselves a trend toward isolation and detachment, an effort to take comfort in all that's natural (be it health food or flannel sheets) as a refuge against the atrocities and life-defeating technologies of the 20th century . . . in, once again, an effort to live a circumscribed life.

SAFE SUBURBANITE

Isolation happens in the fourth type of character as well, the suburbanite. The world apart from one's own plot of neighborhood is a terrain to pass through quickly, on the commute, windows up, doors locked, on the over- and underpasses of the super highways as much as possible.

A twenty-five-year old graduate student sees a character named Jack building a brick wall. Jack proceeds methodically, one brick and then the next. As the wall gets taller he sees a bomb blast in the distance. He picks up his supplies and moves to the other side of the wall, and continues to lay bricks. From here we see this wall will surround his patio. He is looking forward to finishing so he can lay down on the chaise lounge with a beer and enjoy sitting in the sun with his wife on this gorgeous Saturday.

With their worries about mortgages, taxes, money-market funds and their enjoyment of gardens and barbecue pits, the suburban characters carry that which is uniform, predictable, somewhat anonymous or stereotypic about our lives. The suburbanite does not give himself over to work or hedonistic pleasures but balances each in a circumscribed existence of family, work, and friends. This is the part of us that doesn't want to go too deep, doesn't want to give up the web of expectations that the mess of our lives hangs neatly upon. It is the part that does not want to make a move toward activism if that means moving out of the structure of a secure job, a pleasant home, an average family. Let's face it, Levittown provides a residence for each of us psychically, pond sitter and urban dweller alike.

THE HEDONIST

The fifth character that does not want to think about nuclear war is the hedonist. The hedonist is quite aware of the impending apocalypse but, feeling powerless to avert it, chooses to enjoy the moment. Time is collapsed into a pleasurable present. One is blissed out on drugs, or nature, or the aesthetic pleasures of art, music, literature. Here we encounter the voice who says sarcastically that it doesn't matter what we do (live more frugally, join an anti-nuke group, give up aspects of professional or family life to devote oneself to social change). It simply doesn't matter, because life and the world are going to end anyway. One is reminded of

Psychological Perspectives

the Germans in Hitler's bunker, dancing and drinking until the Russians came. Or more contemporarily, one is reminded of the punk culture that has accepted the inevitability of annihilation and has set to celebrating "the end" in the present. The only solution is to live now, buy the French meal, go to the Caribbean, make a bundle, and retire early. "Go ahead, build a hot tub in the basement. The loan will never come due."

These characters embrace Thomas Hobbes' notion of happiness as the continuous progress from one greed to another. For them the style of life is the radical hedonism Erich Fromm speaks about, where "the aim of life is happiness, that is, maximum pleasure, defined as the satisfaction of any desire or subjective need a person may feel." Not only is such hedonism a response to apocalyptic possibilities, but as Fromm says in *To Have or To Be*, it breeds war, in its establishment of classes within and between nations, further dividing "the haves" and the "have-nots."

GRAY LIFERS

There is a neighboring and last group of these characters whom we'll call the gray lifers, who share the pessimism and sense of impotence of the hedonists. They too are confined to the present, not because they can enjoy its sweetness, but because the difficulties of the daily chain them to the present. Just surviving occupies their energies. These characters are harried with family and work responsibilities, struggles with money and the drabness of their jobs and homes. They are depressed, fearful, apathetic, dull. Unlike the workers, they move slowly and do not enjoy their work. To take on thoughts about nuclear war would be one more burden. For some of these the prospect of nuclear war is actually a relief, a final end to the hardness of daily life.

We find this type inside one's self at those moments when taking up a cause seems too weighty. One is already exhausted, depleted, struggling to meet obligations, responsibilities. And now one is asked to go to more meetings, entertain more phone calls, more letters, more talk of depressing realities. This part of us, burdened down, loses a sense of life's beauty, of what is loved and treasured. Upon thinking of nuclear annihilation, it borders on saying "So what if it happens?" "No great loss." Or "It's what we deserve anyway." The thought of its happening confirms one's sense of life as desperate, unsalvageable.

If I have been successful in describing these to you, you may have been able to find these characters at work in your own relation to nuclear war. There is another way to view these characters, namely as those people who exemplify these voices, who have identified with one or another of them. Adults who speak with the naive innocence and optimism of the child ("It will never happen") or with the child's inability to deal with the world of grownups ("Well, I don't know anything about politics or nuclear warfare, so I can't help on this"). Or those people who confine themselves to the circumscribed world of their work or isolate themselves in the security of nature. Inside the consulting room one hears individuals who speak the voice of the last type we dealt with; who essentially say that life is so hard that nuclear devastation would put them out of misery. Recently in *The New Yorker*, Lawrence Weschler, speaking of Poland, described how Poles look forward to a nuclear war to solve some of their problems. On the one hand, they feel magically that when it happens it will not hit at Polish land; on the other hand, as one Polish woman put it, "But it's strange. Things are so bad that people here are almost longing for it . . ."

Now the scene changes as we turn to the characters who are not numb to the possibility of nuclear war, those who are aware of it, think and feel about it.

THE RESPONSIVE ONES

THE WOUNDED ONES

Once we meet the first group of these characters who respond to the nuclear we can better understand our eager identifications with the numbing voices. Those figures who respond are often envisioned as alone, isolated in their despair, opened irreparably to the sufferings coincident with nuclear war. In the description of one such character, blood streams down the face of a handsome, blond character as he is strapped to the surface of a giant golden coin, arms and legs spread wide, stomach torn open. Blood streams down his face because his eyelids have been cut off, thus condemning him to constant sight, sight without the refuge of sleep or closed eyes. His opened gut has been filled with every disease on earth. The coin turns over and over as if it is being flipped by some giant hand

Psychological Perspectives

beyond the man's control. Another character wanders blind, alone, crying. His eyes have been burnt by the horrific sights of post-war suffering.

The children are no longer playing in the meadows and the baseball fields. They are mongoloid, saddened, lost, wounded or deformed. No longer do they enjoy the protection of pursuing their own concerns and pleasures. As deformed children they carry the awareness bred by wounds. One such child would have become a flower when looking at a flower if there were one around, but now in this post-war world she cries or moans, merging with the victims around her. Indeed, she embodies the Romantic notion of "sympathy"—of become the other.

The rest of the children lie dead around a woman who is all alone, filled with anger at this sight of decaying, mangled and burnt bodies of children. These characters are far from numb. They stand immersed as victims in the images of destruction, as immobilized onlookers to the holocaust. They are passive, overwhelmed by emotion, despairing.

We are understandably afraid of this part of ourselves, which if led to focus on the possibility of nuclear war would lose itself in intense feelings of despair and depression. Anticipating this, Joanna Macy and others have provided "despair groups," places with other people at which one can contact these emotions and gradually go through them to a place of action to avert the holocaust. When the despairing voice is repressed, Macy points out, one experiences a numbing of *all* affects, not just those concerning nuclear war.

ACTIVISTS

This desperate group of characters above are not the only ones aware of and responsive to the nuclear danger. The second group I call activists, though there are two distinct sides to this image. On one side are the peace activists as young, hip, attractive, very busy people. They are confident, successful at movement work, enthusiastic about solving social issues. They've "got their heads together." Living in the city, and surrounded by like minded souls, they go to the museums and films, enjoying their awareness. There was a surprising uniformity and stereotypicality about these characters. Though unlike the suburban characters described earlier, there was no awareness of this by the imaginers. Listening to these characters, I couldn't help but feel that their half-life was very short—limited

as they seemed to be to youth.

On the other side we see a quite different group of inner activists—lonely, depressed, isolated, overworked characters. They, like the gray lifers described earlier, suffer through their responsibilities, without time for enjoyment or family and friends. Though at work in the city, they live in such places as a snow-covered mountain, above the tree line, with no shelter. These characters sacrifice themselves without reward or certainty of success. They are pessimistic non-escapists. One can see these characters as becoming increasingly depressed, burnt out, angry, bitter, although they do carry a kind of selfless dedication and awareness, a desire to persevere in spite of feelings of failure and inadequacy. C. Wes Churchman, a student of world hunger, has stated that it is just such an active *acceptance* of oneself as a failure that is critical to long-term commitment to social action. Those who must succeed all the time cannot take on the tangle of a serious social problem.

ADVOCATES

The last class of such characters are those who do not numb themselves to the possibility of nuclear war because of love, their love of something in particular that they wish to protect. In the previous group one doesn't know if the love of things has been covered by depression or whether the active struggle occurs more on the level of ideals, of the abstract.

For the present group, however, love and enjoyment of what is loved comes first and motivates feeling and action. The loved objects are largely the presence of nature and children. Within this group we find mother and teacher characters. The mothers come from various walks of life and although activism is not their primary occupation, they have a renewable dedication, fed as they seem to be by concern for what is treasured.

THE DIALOGUE

What happens when the side of us that is numb and indifferent to the possibility of nuclear war meets with the side that recognizes, cognitively and affectively, the danger? Each participant imagined and recorded a dialogue between the two characters that had arisen for them. This was

done with the hypothesis that if action can be supported or at least understood by both sides, it is less likely to be undermined or inhibited by only one side.

What I found was that certain kinds of dialogue between these characters seemed destined to fail, end in stalemate, and result in further isolation of the two sides. The most pervasive disaster occurred when the activist voice came on piously, self-righteously, indignantly about the concerns and values of the numb one; the activist side was unable to listen and remained condescending, sarcastic, dismissive.

One character, a self-confident, energetic activist, stands over the bed of a gray lifer, an exhausted one, who was just trying to survive. She stands over the bedside singing exuberantly "Put on a Happy Face," "What the World Needs Now Is Love, Sweet Love," and "Amazing Grace." She tries to get her up, condemning her for her apathy. She does not speak to the depression and the exhaustion, but tries to override them entirely. We all know how unsuccessful this manner of approach is.

It can happen the other way around also. An unconcerned character, involved in her pregnancy and back to nature existence, tells her activist counterpart that she is making a big mistake doing this peace work. She should be getting married and having a family, but instead looks dowdy and overworked, never has any fun.

And sometimes, of course, there is mutual derogation, back and forth, which leads to a quick "So long." Each lobbies to make the other become like itself, as though stubbornly sticking to its own position might succeed.

But what kinds of rhetoric did work in these dialogues? What enabled the dialogue to be sustained, to be picked up again in the future, to not end in further alienation?

In one dialogue the character of a young mother who has entered the anti-nuclear movement to help protect her children meets a woman who has moved to the mountains. The latter says, "I find these nuclear issues quite distressing and my husband and I have moved to the mountains to live our lives in solitude because of this problem." Instead of derogating her for her escapism, the mother acknowledges that she too has thought of doing such a thing, as recently as several months ago. In joining the woman, she lessens the gap between them, and is then able to share what made her stay, her fears for her children if the MX bill passes. The woman who has chosen solitude then confides that she doesn't think

people have the power to change such decisions. The mother again empathizes with her point of view:

Mother: You know, I used to feel the same way; but we do have power to act as a whole.

Country Dweller: Well, I do vote. But that's where my action stops. It's such a hopeless situation to me.

At this point, something remarkable happens in the dialogue. The mother recognizes her partner in dialogue. She realizes she had seen her in Washington, D.C., in 1967, speaking against the Vietnam war.

Country Dweller: Yes, that was me. Perhaps . . . You remember that day . . . my friend with me had been killed that day by the police. That was the end of my radicalism.

Rather than condemn this country dweller for her escapism, the mother recognizes within herself some of the country dweller's feelings, and this in turn locates the activist within the one who escapes. And in this location one is given direction for dialogue. The former activist cannot just bounce into activity; she has feelings of loss, powerlessness and disillusionment to deal with. She could never be a naive activist, for she has already seen war.

These imaginal dialogues show that no set of characters succeeds in allowing and nurturing the movement of the numb character as much as those who identified themselves as mothers or teachers. Their usual tactics are either to find out what their partner in dialogue treasures and appeal to their action to protect that, or to patiently introduce the other to the threat of nuclear war.

In the failed dialogues the supposedly more "feelingful" character takes the inactive one at face value—as indifferent, uncaring, self-centered—and does not respond to hints of deeper feeling. For instance, remember the character of the janitor, trying to do his job while a voice over the intercom bothers him? His counterpart was a determined, powerful, young woman on her way to a rally against nuclear weapons:

Janitor: Why don't you leave me alone? I just want to go on with my work.

Young Woman: You're just going to go about your business and leave the work to us?

Janitor: I don't want to know.

Young Woman: I feel like just walking out on you because there's no communication. Do I have to pull you out the door of this auditorium and push you into the middle of the rally's crowd outside?

Janitor: I'm doing my work. Can't you see? And when I come home I want to find meaning. I can't deal with doing this job and at the same time feeling a pile of jigsaw pieces in my stomach.

Young Woman: You've got to put away your other self and be that part who wants to change things.

Janitor: I am too out of touch with that part. It's buried under some floor boards deep inside. He's pushing to get up, but I don't want to see him.

Instead of asking about the jigsaw pieces in his stomach or about the one pushing up on the floor boards, the young woman terminates the conversation. She fails to attend to his clues that his indifference is not simple-minded, but complex—it is not what it seems. Through his manic, repetitive work, he tries unsuccessfully to nail down the floor boards. She needn't "walk out on him because there is no communication," or tell him what she would do if she were him; she could simply focus him on those floor boards.

It was possible for the activist one to recognize and draw on the strengths of the first, more removed character. The ability to circumscribe a manageable area in which to work and succeed may be a natural instinct to the numb one which the activist badly needs in order not to be overwhelmed by the immensity of the problem.

For example, Billy, a character who is a copyboy in a newsroom, is upset about nuclear war, but is not a strong newswriter. He usually runs from one assignment to the next. He goes to visit character #1, a strong, vital man who lives simply on an island in Maine, close to the earth and sea. He is not an activist himself, but is willing to talk with Billy about war when Billy brings it up. He inspires Billy to write a set of relevant columns, and, perhaps as importantly, gets Billy to do a little fishing before he goes back to the mainland.

Indeed, this invitation "to do a little fishing" seems critical in some of the dialogues. The isolated, overworked activist and the despairing one with eyes fixed open especially could use "a little fishing." As a psychic alternative, fully identifying with these characters would seem to have

a very short future. I am reminded of Robert Coles' "Social Struggle and Weariness about the Civil Rights movement in the South, where such isolated and despairing souls would burn out. Battle symptoms of exhaustion, weariness, despair, frustration and rage would often precede either leaving the movement altogether or becoming "troublesome, bitter, and a source of worry, of unpredictable action, of potential danger to themselves and their 'cause.'"

Individuals may leave movements like the Civil Rights Movement or the Anti-Vietnam Peace Movement because one set of voices dominates—the side that wants to enjoy the pleasures of a profession, of a family, or of a more middle class existence. They grow tired of fighting "big problems" against which they never fully succeed, feeling as though things are worsening despite the devotion of so much time and energy and the sacrifice of so much of what else life offers. One longs for the more circumscribed existence enjoyed by former friends, who enjoy both pleasures and successes and who feel effective within a narrower world.

These observations suggest to those very active in the peace movement that dialogue with the first set of voices, the numb ones, is critical to sustaining a commitment to action over the long haul. It is also critical for others to listen to the second set of voices, the responsive ones, in beginning to become more active.

The nuclear threat is now an irrevocable threat to nature and culture—even if disarmament were achieved. This fact has a consequence for the shape of our activism: it can no longer be relegated to periods of tension around war or possible war. It must be an ongoing, ever vigilant effort, no matter what gains are made in its favor, no matter what side of the ideological spectrum we are on. This means that we must nurture a *lifelong* commitment to action to promote peace.

One way of forming and sustaining our commitment to peace work is to be open to the kinds of imaginal dialogue around nuclear war described above: to allow the various voices to challenge and contradict each other; to stick with them as they struggle toward living with each other; and, most importantly, to follow the path of action that their dialogue points to.

REFERENCES

- Arendt, Hannah. *The Life of the Mind*. New York, 1978.
- Boulding, Elise. "The Social Imagination and the Crisis of Human Futures: A North American Perspective." *Forum for Correspondence and Contact*, 1983, 13, 2, 43-56.
- Bradley, David. "Novelist Alice Walker, Telling the Black Woman's Story." *New York Times Magazine*, January 8, 1984.
- Churchman, C. Wes. Lectures at the Wright Institute, San Francisco, California, Summer, 1981.
- Coles, Robert. "Social Struggle and Weariness." *Psychiatry*, 1964, 27, 305-315.
- Fromm, Erich. *To Have or To Be*, New York, 1981.
- Hillman, James. "Anima Mundi: The Return of the Soul to the World." *Spring* 1982, 71-93.
- Lifton, Robert J. *The Broken Connection*. New York, 1980.
- Lifton, Robert J. "Psychological Effects of Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear War." Proceedings of Harvard Medical School Conference, *The Medical Consequences of Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear War*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1981.
- Mack, John. "Psychosocial Effects of the Nuclear Arms Race." *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 1981, 18-23.
- Macy, Joanna. "Despair Work." *Evolutionary Blues*, Summer/Fall, 1981.
- Macy, Joanna. *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age*. Philadelphia, 1983.
- Reich, Wilhelm. *Ether, God and Devil*. New York, 1973.
- Weschler, Lawrence. "A reporter at large (Poland-Part II)." *The New Yorker*, 4/18/83.

Change of consciousness begins at home; it is an age-old process that depends entirely on how far the psyche's capacity for development extends. All we know at present is that there are single individuals who are capable of developing. How great their total number is we do not know, just as we do not know what the suggestive influence of an extended consciousness may be, or what influence it may have upon the world at large. Effects of this kind never depend upon the reasonableness of an idea, but far more on the question . . . is the time ripe for change, or not?

—C. G. Jung, 1927