

TOUCHING EARTH, FINDING SPIRIT: A PASSAGE INTO THE SYMBOLIC LANDSCAPE

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That the world inside and outside us rests on a transcendental background is as certain as our own existence, but it is equally certain that the direct perception of the archetypal world inside us is just as doubtfully correct as that of the physical world outside us.¹

About once a month, I travel from my urban home in Southern California north along Highway 395 and into the heart of the Owens Valley. The Owens Valley, also known as the “Deepest Valley,” is surrounded by towering mountains. Most notably stands Mount Whitney at 14,494 feet, saw-toothed and shadowing the small town below. And, situated across the valley, it is easy to make out White Mountain Peak at 14, 246 feet, weathered and bald, presiding over the populace like an old saturnine god. The word “mountain” is related to the Latin root, *ē-minēre*, which means to stand out, to project, and to be eminent. Emphatically, mountains bend our heads back

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and turn our gaze toward heaven. One *has* to look up to a mountain. Mountains *insist* on being seen and yet, like God, they cannot be fully apprehended. One must walk *around* the mountain to see the mountain, and in doing so the mountain becomes the center.

From the beginning of history, people from around the world have revered mountains as cosmic centers, or the Center of the World. While the base of the mountain outlines the circumference of sacred space, the axis acts as a medium between the upper, middle, and lower regions of existence. This demonstrates that the bright white peaks are inseparable from the shadowy ground below; sky is inseparable from earth, spirit is inseparable from matter, consciousness is inseparable from the unconscious. Essentially, the mountain and its valley below mirror the Self in its most starlit and sultry existence.

Heaven above
 Heaven below
 Stars above
 Stars below
 All that is above
 Also is below
 Grasp this
 And rejoice.

— “The Emerald Tablet”²

How could we possibly comprehend this alchemical treatise if it were not for shimmering mountains and the sultry valleys? How could we differentiate above from below? How could we feel the palpability of the Holy Other, which exists both within and outside of ourselves, if we could not approach and climb the mountain? I dare speculate that it is the landscape that gave us this very archetypal structure in the first place.

By paying attention to the sensations manifest by the landscape, whether it is mountains or valleys, oceans or deserts, I have come to learn that it is nearly impossible to speak about archetypes without making reference to the natural world. Although archetypal motifs are found in myths, fairytales, legends, and dreams, most of these motifs can be traced to the shapes and patterns found in the natural landscape. Thus, *in addition* to being a mass of rock, the archetypal mountain is also the *cosmic* mountain, linking heaven and earth and

fastening the four cardinal directions. Similarly, in addition to being an eroded crevice in the earth's surface, the archetypal valley is the valley of shadow and death or, in other cases, a paradisiacal recess flowing with milk and honey. The archetypal motifs that emerge from the natural landscape are as diverse as the landscape itself, and throughout all cultures and locations we find a vast range of archetypes that take on the appearance of mountains, rivers, trees, oceans, caves, and canyons. Archetypes symbolize the union of soul and earth, and from this union is the birth of a world that is living and sensual, full of character and meaning.

The relationship between archetypes and landscape is most evident in the beliefs and practices of traditional and contemporary land-based cultures where psyche and nature have not yet been split asunder. For instance, Gregory Cajete, a Native American writer and educator from the Tewa tribe, speaks of archetypes as being born from the earth. He writes:

The archetypes—being born from the earth of a place, and the participation of earth spirits in human conception—are universal among Indigenous people. This perception is reflected throughout the myth, ritual, art, and spiritual tradition of Indigenous people because, in reality, our development is predicated on our interaction with the soil, the air, the climate, the plants, and the animals of the places in which we live.³

Cajete uses the term *geopsyche* to describe the landscape's imprint upon the human psyche. He claims that when people live in a particular place for long periods of time, they physically and psychically mimic the characteristics of the landscape. Different landscapes, therefore, produce varied geopsyches. That is, "The development of mountain people as distinct from desert people and as distinct from plains people begins to unfold."⁴ Although the concept of species adaptation is not new to biological science, Cajete is addressing something more here. The term *geopsyche* implies that the psyche, as well as the physical body, shifts and shapes according to the landscape, and that it is from this movement that the archetypes emerge.

Jung makes a similar case when he discusses his observations of how the physical world imprints the psyche with mythic images and archetypes. He writes,

Just as the living body with its special characteristics is a system of functions for adapting to environmental conditions, so the psyche must exhibit organs or functional systems that correspond to regular physical events.⁵

Jung was deeply moved by his experiences among the land-based cultures of the Taos Pueblo Indians in New Mexico and the Elgonis in East Africa, and these experiences led to his interest in the relationship between soul and Earth. Jung makes the case that the natural landscape has a conditioning effect on the psyche, and that particular landscapes give shape to the personality as well as the physique of their inhabitants.

The interaction between the human psyche and the physical landscape is a multifaceted one. Although notions such as projection, *participation mystique*, personification, animism, and anthropomorphism have been used to explain this relationship, I believe that it is far more complex and meaningful than such theories could ever articulate. Taken from a personal experience, the following is a portrait of a common event, which in all its ordinariness reveals the intricacy of interaction between the physical world and the human psyche.

I am in a coffee shop staring out the window. It is a clear day in Los Angeles—a rarity—and I can see the mountains far off in the distance. As I am watching the cumulus clouds forming over the L.A. basin, I drift into reverie. I am completely caught up in the clouds and the sun's rays streaming over the sparkling mountaintops. At this moment, a man walks past the coffee shop window, briefly smiles at me, and continues walking. As his smile catches my eye, I instinctively smile back. Something about his smile, perhaps the simplicity of it, fills me with delight. I muse about how my presence triggered his smile which, in turn, induced mine. He obviously noticed my daydreaming stance and I wonder what, if any, feelings, thoughts, or images my reverie induced in him. Then, I remember the clouds. They, too, provoke a response from me, and I imagine that my presence also has an effect on the clouds, which they mirror back to me, and I to them, and so on.

The above account is simple and mundane, and yet so much occurred between the clouds, the smiling man, and me. Even the coffee shop seemed transformed in that brief moment. What filled

the spaces between us? What *drew* me to the clouds, the mountains, and the man's smile? Hillman suggests that the *anima mundi*—the world soul—is the intermediary from which this interaction transpires. He writes:

Then we realize that what psychology has had to call “projection” is simply animation, as this thing or that spontaneously comes alive, arrests our attention, draws us to it. This sudden illumination of the thing does not, however, depend on its formal, aesthetic proportion which makes it “beautiful;” it depends rather upon the movements of the *anima mundi* animating her images and affecting our imagination. The soul of the thing corresponds or coalesces with ours.⁶

When the soul of one thing corresponds with the soul of another, there is more involved than “meets the eye.” My unconscious, the smiling man's unconscious, and the world's unconscious interact with each other in ways that are largely imperceptible to human consciousness. This is to suggest that psyche is not restricted to the human realm but extends to all phenomena, including the landscape.

Jung, who spent his life observing the movements of psyche, also gives credence to the inner subjectivity of the external world. To fully engage the world, according to Jung, is no less than to delve into the unconscious realm of the human psyche. In the final analysis, the two are the same. Thus, it is impossible to conceptualize the physical landscape apart from the viewpoint of the unconscious. Conversely, we cannot ascertain the unconscious apart from its mirror image upon the physical world. For this reason, Jung writes,

All the mythologized processes of nature, such as summer and winter, the phases of the moon, the rainy seasons, and so forth, are in no sense allegories of these objective occurrences; rather they are symbolic expressions of the inner, unconscious drama of the psyche which becomes accessible to man's consciousness by way of projection—that is, mirrored in the events of nature.⁷

In addition to the statement above, I suggest that the external world is not only a mirror for psychic events, but is also the ground—the *terra firma*—of the soul. Does not psyche need a place for her feet, a mountain to climb, a river to drink from, and a garden to tend? Furthermore, from psyche's viewpoint, is not the unconscious more

than simply imprinted by the physical world but also a participant in its creation? “The psyche is the world’s pivot,” writes Jung, “not only is it the one great condition for the existence of a world at all, it is also an intervention in the existing natural order.”⁸

DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY AND LAND-BASED PRACTICES

I do not intend to promote a sentimental revisit to the premodern world. That would be nothing more than a nostalgic yearning for an irretrievable past—a new age version of *participation mystique*. Secondly, although I’ve lived in Southern California all of my life, my heritage is not indigenous to this landscape. My family immigrated to North America in the early nineteenth century. To assume that my consciousness is related to this landscape in the same manner as the Native Americans would be to replicate acts of colonization, albeit under a friendlier guise. On the other hand, I do follow the lead of poet Gary Snyder, who admonishes those of us who are not native to act and be reborn as inhabitants of this place, as mindful citizens of the land: “Please get to know these rivers and mountains, and be welcome here. Euro-Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans can—if they wish—become ‘born-again’ natives of Turtle Island.”⁹ By being conscious of where we live, of our landscape, says Snyder, we cultivate a deeper understanding of who we are. The two aspects, self and place, are inseparable. “Thus, knowing who we are and knowing where we are are intimately linked.”¹⁰

In the tradition of depth psychology, I adopt the metaphor of going *down* and *below* to unearth a new understanding of psyche and nature. Jung writes:

Its [the unconscious’s] contents, the archetypes are as it were the hidden foundations of the conscious mind, or, to use another comparison, the roots which the psyche has sunk not only in the earth in the narrower sense but in the world in general.¹¹

To consider landscape from a depth psychological perspective involves a downward movement toward the roots of our being and the wellsprings of our soul. Without a living connection to these roots, we are left only with a dried up and withered perspective of nature and of ourselves. The dig begins in the human psyche, through unpleasant complexes, unruly projections, irrational dreams, and finally reaches

down to archetypes and the collective unconscious, to the place where the psyche and the world are the same.

GODS OR COMPLEXES?

It is time for all the heroes to go home
if they have any, time for all of us common ones
to locate ourselves by the real things
we live by.

Far to the north, or indeed in any direction,
strange mountains and creatures have always lurked:
elves, goblins, trolls, and spiders—we
encounter them in dread and wonder,

But once we have tasted far streams, touched the gold,
found some limit beyond the waterfall,
a season changes, and we come back, changed
but safe, quiet, grateful.

— William Stafford, “Allegiances”¹²

Many ancient myths provide portraits of the natural world filled with living beings such as elves, fairies, giants, goblins, ghouls, gnomes, nymphs, trolls, Leprechauns, and a host of earth spirits of all kinds. These creatures are often regarded as strange or frightful beings that lurk in mountains, dark forests, beneath bridges, or murky seas. But they also evoke a sense of wonder and reverence, for such mythic beings connect us to the land, which, in the ancient world was animated by spirits, gods, goddesses, and creatures of every kind. Many of these divine and supernatural beings have continued to live on as characters in our most treasured folktales and stories. For instance, the Green Man, the ancient deity of the natural vegetative world, evolved into the 14th century, post-Christian Celtic figure of the Green Knight. More recently, J. R. R. Tolkien, in his beloved book, *The Lord of the Rings*, has recaptured elements of the Green Man in the form of the Ents, a race of giant, tree-like people whose sole purpose was to protect the forests of Middle-Earth. Even today, we find characteristics of the Green Man in the garden statues and decor of modern homes.

Some ancient philosophers and architects have referred to the notion of *genius loci*, meaning the spirit of place, or a place that contains

spirits. They argued that “divine providence, the gods, had filled the earth with an animating presence,” which bestows places with their unique characteristics and virtues.¹³ If we maintain the perspective that spirits inhabit the land, then it seems likely that where we are born and the landscapes in which we live call us into participation with these spirits. In the tradition of depth psychology, it is when we forget the gods that they become cultural, environmental, and personal pathologies, or as Jung often pointed out, “The gods have become our diseases.”¹⁴ In this respect, the land spirits never die. Rather, they transform into symptoms and pathologies crying out for our attention. Whether a physical or psychological malady, a cultural or environmental crisis, nothing sharpens our attention more than a painful symptom—a warning from the gods.

Marie-Louise von Franz also speaks about the spirits of the land, which inhabit animals and plants and play a decisive role in the life of indigenous communities. She writes:

The spirits that rule over animals and plants are probably the oldest forms in which archetypal contents were imagined; among the Bushmen and the Australian aborigines—that is, in cultures that have remained especially close to their origins—they are actual gods.¹⁵

In these cultures, it is often the tribal shamans who are responsible for maintaining contact with the spirits of the land. Having undergone a powerful initiatory ordeal, which involves a confrontation with these powerful spirits, the shaman is now able to maintain contact with the spirits without becoming possessed by them. The shaman is the chosen mediator between the human community and the larger community of animals, plants, and the land, ensuring that the two retain a sustaining and reciprocal relationship.

As much as modern culture has succeeded in demythologizing the natural world, mythic and spiritual beings continue to crop up in our fantasies, dreams, and imaginations. And, we need to create and practice our own rituals of initiation for maintaining and nourishing ways of entering into living relationship with these nature spirits. This has become evident to me during my work with the School of Lost Borders, a training center for wilderness rites of passage located in Big Pine, California. It is not uncommon to hear participants describe their fears in terms of the mountain lion, scorpion, or rattlesnake

waiting to devour, sting, or bite them during the night. Fears such as these can grip, possess, and freeze a person, leaving him or her feeling helpless. Such fears often take on a larger, mythic quality. They are the psychological demons and dragons which must be confronted before one can be initiated into the next stage of life.

Although wilderness rites of passage, or the “vision quest,” have been most commonly associated with Native American traditions, similar land-based practices are found throughout cultures worldwide. Anthropologists have identified a three-phase archetypal structure in the rite of passage, which includes severance, threshold, and incorporation.¹⁶ The *severance* entails leaving behind the roles and personas held within one’s home and community. Even more so, the severance is a symbolic preparation for death, including the acceptance of loss that heralds the promise of transformation. At the School of Lost Borders, this involves preparing oneself to leave the security of the group and to go into the wilderness without food or shelter for four consecutive days and nights. If this sounds extreme, it is only because in modern society we have become deeply suspicious and mistrustful of the natural world. But throughout Western history, spiritual seekers commonly used solitude in nature as a means for finding connection to God, for confronting demons, and for gaining spiritual direction. Furthermore, fasting as a spiritual practice has been used as a means for radically shifting consciousness and for breaking down the ego barriers that inhibit connection to the more-than-human world.

The *threshold* stage of initiation involves stepping into the wilderness and into the liminal space where the boundaries between psyche and nature, inner and outer, become less defined. Here, birds, animals, plants, and rocks appear like characters in a dream, and all of nature speaks to those who are willing to listen. Steven Foster and Meredith Little, founders of the School of Lost Borders, write:

Maintenance of the relationship between ‘natural’ and ‘human’ (as in the term ‘human nature’) is a basic function of the threshold ceremony. Mother nature needs the ceremonies of humans if she is to reveal her sacred face to us.¹⁷

Finally, when it is time for the initiates to return from their solitude and from the liminality of the threshold, they begin the stage of *incorporation* (literally, to “take on the body”), and return to their

communities with a new and deeper vision of self and their relationship to nature. At this stage, the great task is to *embody* this new vision—to make it *real*. In doing so, the initiates become mediators between the human and more-than-human realms, between psyche and nature, and thus play a role in the health and sustainability of the larger world.

As a depth psychologist, I have been keen to observe the unconscious processes that take place during this wilderness rite of passage. In many cases, the spirits, gods, demons, and dragons encountered can be compared to what Jung termed “feeling-toned complexes.” Jung defines complexes as “splinter psyches” that appear most often as unacceptable bits and pieces of our selves that have become dissociated from consciousness:

The aetiology of their origin is frequently a so-called trauma, an emotional shock or some such thing, that splits off a bit of the psyche. Certainly one of the commonest causes is a moral conflict, which ultimately derives from the apparent impossibility of affirming the whole of one’s nature.¹⁸

When complexes remain unconscious, they can have an enormous effect on our feelings and behaviors—interfering with intentions, blocking memory, and cutting off the flow of creativity. Like the spirits of the natural world, complexes can seize us and make us feel powerless. Complexes, like the gods of antiquity, operate as living and autonomous entities within the psyche. For this reason, Jung writes,

Everyone knows nowadays that people ‘have complexes.’ What is not so well known, though far more important theoretically, is that complexes can *have us*.¹⁹

Essentially, complexes are ancient spirits in modern dress seeking our attention. Hillman succinctly captures this idea when he writes:

Archetypal psychology can put its idea of psychopathology into a series of nutshells, one inside the other: within the affliction is a complex, within the complex an archetype, which in turn refers to a God. Afflictions point to Gods; Gods reach us through afflictions.²⁰

In this respect, just as the shamans must survive a grueling and dangerous initiation ordeal with the spiritual forces of the natural world,

so too do modern people face the task of integrating their complexes (i.e., archetypal and spiritual forces) into consciousness. Through suffering our afflictions we give complexes form, and in doing so, we outlast their possession and gain access to the gods, which, in turn, guide us back to our archetypal roots buried within and also manifested by the natural landscape. To attune one's heart and mind to the spontaneous manifestations of the unconscious in both psyche and nature, is no less than what Jung called "the individuation process." "We need a relationship with nature . . . Individuation is not only an upward but also a downward process."²¹ Rituals and ceremonies in nature, such as wilderness rites of passage, can serve as a portal to our psychic depths.

I can see how these compelling psychic forces, such as complexes, have guided me into the wilderness. Over the last decade, I have developed an annual practice of going out into the desert, usually someplace near Death Valley or the Inyo Mountain Range in California. I go out alone for four days and nights with only a sleeping bag, a tarp, and four gallons of water. I enter into the slow and mysterious pace of desert time. My perceptions twist and turn as large things begin to appear small and small things become large. I begin to see images of myself in the animals, bugs, and plants around me. Often powerful thunderstorms pass over just to remind me of my human fragility. At night I see demons and shadows in the form of mountain lions and scorpions. During the day I muse, paying careful attention to slow movements of the desert. The following is an excerpt from my journal written during one of these occasions. This was a particularly difficult trip, given that three days before I left my father was diagnosed with heart disease.

On the third day I wake up feeling weak and dizzy. I can't go for a walk as planned. The sun is already high, but time seems nonexistent. All the small things look big—the spider webs, each stalk of Mormon tea, and the lizard that visits me. I feel a primordial and instinctual longing. The lizard looks at me and moves closer. I feel a time when we were inseparably one. The lizard is me. I am the lizard. The longing for that oneness hurts deeply. I have flashbacks of camping in the desert with my father. I recognize it as the same longing. The warm breeze, the smell of pinion pine, and the lizard make me ache for my childhood. I realize that my attachment to my father is this yearning to return to the place of wholeness.

My complexes, exemplified by my childhood memories of being in the desert with my father, certainly added the emotional fuel that made this experience so remarkable, but I am also inclined to think that the lizard actually came to me, and that the desert herself spoke to my ancestral soul. This is the living, fully autonomous characteristic of the complexes. When we allow complexes to become personified, whether in the form of a lizard, plant, or a human figure, the complex no longer remains unconscious, but becomes a living being with which we can relate. This process of active imagination is what enables us to integrate our complexes and, in the context of nature, rediscover our inherent connection to the psyche of the land.

Although complexes are fragments of the unconscious projected upon the external world, they can also serve as guides into the archetypal realm of the collective unconscious. Furthermore, having traced a complex through the labyrinth of the collective unconscious, we may catch a glimpse of that most primordial state of existence, which ancient alchemists referred to as the *unus mundus*, the in-between realm where psyche and matter are one and the same. If we can learn to sharpen our focus to observe the subtle movements of psyche, both within and without, momentary glimpses of the *unus mundus* begin to appear to the conscious ego, often in the form of synchronistic events, but, more subtly, through a shift in consciousness which gives equal weight to both psychic and natural events. Within the *unus mundus*, psyche and nature are woven together; psyche glides along mountaintops, and rivers flow deep within the valley of the soul. In this union, psyche speaks to us in the form of desert breeze, lizard, pinion pine, mountain lion, and scorpion. “In our soul everything moves guided by a mysterious hand,” writes the poet Antonio Machado,

The deepest words
of the wise men teach us
the same as the whistle of the wind when it blows,
or the sound of the water when it is flowing.

— “Rebirth”²²

THE TRANSCENDENT FUNCTION AS MEDIATOR
BETWEEN PSYCHE AND NATURE

When Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden, they were separated on the earth, and met only afterwards at a mountain near Mecca called by the Arabs Arafat, or The Recognition.

— “Moslem Legend”²³

Jung refers to the transcendent function as the mediating force between oppositions within the psyche. The transcendent function arises out of intense and concentrated conflicts within the individual. Like the koan of the Zen masters, extreme and painful paradoxes can lead us to a place where we must transcend the ego so that our perception of reality is no longer split into two opposing forces. Jung says that holding the tension of the opposites is essential to bridging the gap between ego-consciousness and the unconscious. If the tension between the opposites can be held long enough without succumbing to the urge to identify with one side or the other, the *third*, a completely unexpected image, one that unites the two in a creative new way, comes into view.

The transcendent function has important implications for an ecological psychology because it can serve as a bridge between rational thinking and archetypal sensibility, thus facilitating a renewed connection between the human psyche and the natural world. The privileging of rational thinking in modern culture characteristically diminishes or rejects the irrational unconscious, hence the archetypal realm, as inferior. The same dismissive attitude prevails in relation to the landscape. The archetypal characteristics of the landscape, such as the *genius loci*, are no longer taken seriously, and therefore remain unconscious. On the other hand, if one can hold the tension between the unconscious psyche and the rational ego, eventually consciousness will expand to accommodate the previously unconscious content. Furthermore, the natural landscape, and all that it contains, will begin to reveal its own psychic nature—its *genius loci*.

Perhaps, the transcendent function is best understood by way of illustration. The following is a story told by a woman who had just returned from a modern day “vision quest,” a four-day-and-night solo in the wilderness without food, shelter, or company. Prior to this event,

she had been engaged in psychotherapy for many years, working through difficult complexes and coming to new realizations about herself. She had been diligent, paying careful attention to her dreams and tending to her spiritual and psychological development. Nonetheless, she was frustrated because no matter how much she worked on herself she felt that no real progress was being made. When it came down to it, she still experienced the conflicts, struggles, and disappointments that had plagued her prior to beginning analysis. After three days in the desert, she had the following vision.

Today I wake up before sunrise. It's a remarkably clear morning. I am enjoying the naturalness of the birds singing, the fresh spring air, and the butterflies that flutter around my sleeping bag. In a state of reverie, I watch the sun slowly rise over the mountains. I'll get out of my sleeping bag when the sun is in full view and I am fully saturated with warmth. But, just as the sun crests the surface of the mountains, I see a monstrous creature, black as the night, attached to the rising sun. He looks like a giant cockroach, dressed in armor with a shield. He flies out of the sun and lands right on my ceremonial circle of stones.

This woman had been carrying great tension between her innate driving force toward individuation and her inability to escape the struggles of her daily life. Essentially, her dilemma exemplified the tension between spirit and matter, between the desire to move upward and skyward (i.e., psychological development) and the powerlessness to escape her earth-bound humanness. She accentuated this tension by embarking on a vision quest, which required her to be alone for four days and nights in the wilderness without the distractions of modern day life. What she received in return was a gift from psyche, the symbolic image of the black bug, which initially left her perplexed. At first sight, symbols are always cryptic and arcane for they point to something that cannot be directly known by ego-consciousness. Jung admonishes us not to jump to interpretation of symbols too quickly, but to first take the time to pay careful attention to the pure image itself. To interpret a symbol prematurely is to deflate it of its feeling tone and mystifying nature; the tension is alleviated and the process is suspended. On the other hand, to pay attention to the image, despite the frustration of not yet knowing what it represents, is an essential aspect of holding the tension of the opposites.

Fortunately, this woman had learned that images are not to be dismissed as trivial, and so she stuck with the image. She drew pictures of the black bug, engaged it through active imagination, and allowed herself to feel its creepy black bug essence until she was no longer so repulsed by it. It wasn't until much later that she realized the dark cockroach resembled the ancient Egyptian scarab which, according to Egyptian mythology, pushes the sun up from the depths of the underworld. At first sight, the scarab is hardly romantic; it is a disgusting black bug! But, as the myth informs us, the rising scarab also symbolizes the shadowy, instinctual forces that lie beneath consciousness. As Jung has pointed out, the development of consciousness is driven by natural instinctual forces. This woman's vision of the scarab indicated a new rising consciousness that integrates both the light and dark aspects of the Self. Not perfection, but wholeness. She then realized that her painful complexes and worldly struggles are a natural aspect of a developing consciousness; just as black bugs and other grubby creatures are an essential aspect of nature. Furthermore, throughout this process, she developed a new appreciation for her own unique humanness, which in turn expanded her capacity to appreciate, and thus connect with, the larger, natural world.

Marie-Louise von Franz writes, "the symbol helps us over."²⁴ Holding the tension of the opposites requires paying careful attention to the symbolic expressions of the unconscious as they appear in dreams, symbols, fantasies, and active imaginations. In terms of psyche in relationship to nature, the practice entails attending to the details presented in the landscape—the highs and lows, rocks and trees—while simultaneously noticing the movements of psyche—dreams, feelings, fantasies, and imaginations. What emerges is a symbolic *and* sensual relationship with the living landscape. By holding the tension between the inner and outer worlds of psyche and nature, one is led to an intermediate space—an imaginal place that Sufi scholar Henry Corbin refers to as the *mundus imaginalis* and describes as

both intermediary and intermediate ... a world that is ontologically as real as the world of the senses and that of the intellect. This world requires its own faculty of perception, namely, imaginative power, a faculty with a cognitive function,

a *noetic* value which is as real as that of sense perceptions or intellectual intuition.²⁵

The *mundus imaginalis* is the soul's terrain, where the countless voices of the living landscape are heard once again by the human heart. It is a liminal space that is spirit and nature, personal and transpersonal, neither side opting for precedence. According to ecologist David Abram,

By acknowledging such links between the inner, psychological world and the perceptual terrain that surrounds us, we begin to turn inside-out, loosening the psyche from its confinement within a strictly human sphere, freeing sentience to return to the sensible world that contains us. Intelligence is no longer ours alone but is a property of the earth; we are in it, of it, immersed in its depths. And indeed each terrain, each ecology, seems to have its own particular intelligence, its unique vernacular of soil and leaf and sky.²⁶

Holding the tension of the opposites is certainly no easy undertaking. To truly experience the split, to acknowledge it and feel its intensity, can be like trying to cross the Grand Canyon on a tight rope—not only is it nearly impossible to see the other side, but the canyon itself is too deep, dark, and terrifying to fathom. Many of us may experience a very uncomfortable paradox in the realization that, despite the desire to obtain an archetypal and ecological sensibility, we find it impossible to tear ourselves from our dualistic roots. And, even more painfully, despite our desire to heal the wounds that have been inflicted upon the Earth, we are inevitably, and by the very fact of being alive, participants in its destruction. Such is the tension. To reject this indisputable paradox would be nothing less than a wish-fantasy to return to a Garden of Eden. But in contrast with the original garden, this one would be isolated and fenced off from the rest of creation. It is no wonder that in our culture we have resorted to notions of “wilderness preserve” or “wildlife refuge,” as if it were possible to manage and organize the wilderness according to our own perceptions of what nature should be. Although preserving our natural resources is an essential undertaking, these metaphors imply nothing less than our attempt to control the wild unconscious, to fence it in, and protect it from outside forces, namely, from *ourselves*. Perhaps the better we come to know our own inner wild natures—i.e., powerful unconscious forces—the less we will destructively manipulate the outer wilderness.

Prior to commencing my doctoral studies, I had the following dream: *I am working on constructing a bridge over a gulch. After a lot of hard work, I manage to build a very nice, solid bridge. I am pleased with my accomplishment.* And so, during my studies, while striving to learn and understand the complexities of depth psychology—which, no doubt, has been essential to my quest—I am having dreams, which each week I quietly take to the therapy room where I discuss the seemingly insignificant events of my life. And each year, I go into the desert for four days and nights to seek visions, and while I sleep at night, I have nonsensical dreams and I ask myself, “How could these dreams have anything to do with anything significant?” These are just dreams and have nothing to do with the important stuff; the big stuff, like saving the world from ecological destruction!

But, as time moves on, I begin to notice patterns in my dreams, and as a result I gradually become more interested in them. I begin to engage in dialogue with a lot of things, such as rocks and trees, and although at times I feel foolish, eventually, quietly, like a faint voice crying in the wilderness, I begin to hear something resonant from deep inside the canyon.

In other words, initially I thought there were only two sides to the canyon needing a bridge, but the depths of the canyon itself were going unseen.

In this respect, the bridge doesn't simply cross from one way of knowing to another; it represents more than just coming to agreement with the other side or finding new remedies to old problems. Rather, this “third space” is totally new. Like a bridge, it is a place on which we can stand and view the wild unconscious that exists both in us and in nature.

THE SYMBOLIC LANDSCAPE

We need new stories, new terms and conditions that are relevant to the love of land, a new narrative that would imagine another way, to learn the infinite mystery and movement at work in the world.

—Linda Hogan²⁷

Any attempt to explain this larger vision of the world through rational language will always result in a partial and inadequate understanding. How can we articulate the depth and width of the

soul? To do so is like trying to slide the universe through the eye of a needle. Our rational egos cannot contain the immensity of the world. For this reason, the symbol provides a fundamental form of expression for the collective unconscious. A symbol is the best possible expression of something that cannot be known directly. And because the relationship between psyche and nature cannot be known directly, this relationship is expressed symbolically. Symbols defy reason. They do not succumb to reductive interpretations but instead point to something greater than themselves. The word symbol originates from the Greek word, *sym-bolon*, meaning *to throw together*. Thus, a symbol is a mixture that is neither purely rational nor purely irrational. Jung writes: “The symbol is neither abstract nor concrete, neither rational nor irrational, neither real nor unreal. It is always both.”²⁸

The creation of symbols is going on all the time within the psyche; symbols appear spontaneously in fantasies and dreams, but we need to adopt a *symbolic attitude* to value them. Jung describes the symbolic attitude as one that “assigns meaning to events, whether great or small, and attaches to this meaning a greater value than to bare facts.”²⁹ From this perspective, everything *matters*—the small lizard, the pungent sage, the faint desert breeze, and dreams.

When we adopt a symbolic attitude, we become more than just the product of our egos, and the natural landscape becomes more than just the inconsequential background to our lives. The symbolic attitude allows for the personal and collective to coexist, creating a sense of “me-ness, personal importance, soul sense, that is not an ego inflation, and at the same time there is an awareness of one’s subjectivity being fluid, airy, fiery, earthy, made of many components, shifting, ungraspable, now close and intimate.”³⁰ This way of being enables us to loosen our sole identification with the heroic ego and embrace a reality that is all-inclusive without losing a sense of individuality. Psyche, like the wilderness, is full of living entities, and the ego is just one character among many. From this perspective, we are not just concerned about saving the rainforest, but at this greater level of awareness we are the rainforest, we are the canyons, we are the oceans and rivers. And we are the buildings and cities. Things no longer exist just *out there*, but they resonate deeply in our bodies and souls. They exist in our bones.

To unite psyche and nature within a symbolic consciousness opens the door to a new awareness of self in nature. This became clear to me during a recent solo excursion into the desert regions surrounding Death Valley. Shortly before the trip, I had a discussion with a friend of mine about the disparity between irrational and rational ways of perceiving the world. According to my friend, to converse with non-human things, such as rocks and trees, is irrational and thus intolerable. I couldn't agree with her logic. I have endeavored to listen to psyche's voice through the world around me via active imagination, dream tending, and wilderness experiences. And, because of psyche's presence in such things, I know quite well that it is possible to listen to and discern the language of stone, tree, river, and wind. Nonetheless, I began my quest with a great debate going on in my head: is there a psychic realm where the world is animated with soul, or am I just fooling myself?

And thus, on this early spring morning, I embark upon a walk within the desert landscape of Eureka Valley. My only intent is to walk as freely and openly as I can, and to pay attention to the sounds and sensations that unfold around me. But, perhaps my intent is not so simple. I want to see what lies beyond the exterior of things. I want to know the spirits that inhabit this land. I meander up the wash, which is sweetly in bloom with creosote and little golden poppies. Eventually, the wash leads me to a great pile of stones, a hundred feet high. Each stone looks like an old face, aged, hardy, and wise, carved out by millions of years of erosion. I sit beneath the stones and listen to the wind that is blowing through the crevices in the rocks. The sound and motion of the wind lulls me. I sit and listen for a long time, intermittently dozing off, falling into dreams, and re-awaking to the sound of wind stirring the creosote. Suddenly, I hear voices, deep and resonate, emanating from the canyon. The sound startles me. I turn to look up the wash, but I don't see anyone. My heart begins to beat hard as if the voices are vibrating within me. I sit and listen for a long time. Eventually, the voices cease, the wind stops, and a great stillness saturates the wash. I feel incredibly calm. I look upward and see the full moon cresting the canyon wall, illuminating the place where I sit.

My experience in the desert wash left me a little perplexed. Did I really hear voices coming from the canyon? Or was I tricked by the sounds of the wind? Certainly, the way wind moves along the rocks

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10. *Ibid.*, 189.
11. Jung, *CW* 10 § 53.
12. William Stafford, *The Way It Is: New and Selected Poems* (Saint Paul, MN: Greywolf Press, 1998), 128-9.
13. Edward Relph, "Modernity and the Reclamation of Place," in *Dwelling, Seeing and Designing: Toward a Phenomenological Ecology*, D. Seamon (ed.) (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 27.
14. Jung, *CW* 13 § 54.
15. Marie-Louise von Franz, *Projection and Recollection in Jungian Psychology* (La Salle & London: Open Court, 1980), 104.
16. See Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).
17. Steven Foster & Meredith Little, *The Roaring of the Sacred River: The Wilderness Quest for Vision and Self-Healing* (Big Pine: Lost Borders Press, 1997), 99.
18. Jung, *CW* 8 § 204.
19. *Ibid.*, 200.
20. James Hillman, *Re-visioning Psychology* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1975), 104.
21. C. G. Jung, "Man and his environment," *C. G. Jung Speaking*, William McGuire and R. F. C. Hull (eds.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 202.
22. Antonio Machado, "Rebirth," *News of the Universe: Poems of Twofold Consciousness*, ed. R. Bly (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), 108.
23. Quoted in Thomas Frick, *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1986), 37.
24. Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Golden Ass of Apuleius* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), 127.
25. Henry Corbin, "Mundis Imaginalis, or the Imaginary and the Imaginal," *Spring 1972*, 1-19.
26. David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 262.
27. Linda Hogan, *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 94.
28. Jung, *CW* 12 § 400.

29. Jung, *CW* 6 § 819.
30. James Hillman, "Peaks and Vales," *Puer Papers* (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1991), 54-74.
31. Jung, *The Vision Seminars I* (Zurich: Spring Publications, 1976), 164-5.
32. Leslie Silko, "Story from Bear Country," in *Intimate Nature*, eds. L. Hogan, D. Metzger, & B. Peterson (New York: Fawcett, 1998), 5.