

Ecopsychology: The Roots of Change
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**The Transformative Potential of Travel
through Movement & Motionlessness
within Nature**



„Be ever watchful, wanderer,

For the eyes that gaze into yours at the bend of the road

May be those of the goddess herself.

(Oracle of Delphi)¹

Introduction

Since I remember traveling to me is a form of physical (outer) journeys and narrative (inner) journeys. Intuitively and intentionally I developed an identity as traveler, a wanderer between worlds and subcultures.

*What am I to be when I have grown up
so many vocations, voices and choices
and in the end I never really know.
Even within one profession there is much and more
and I again don't know where upon to turn.*

*Questions challenge me with being just – just being isn't any more.
What are you good at? Will this help to find a nest?
Which road is leading you? What does the passage cost?
What is your honest passion? Does this merge with humble ambition?*

*Today her heart-hunters found me sitting still.
No application – just an offer,
no investment – but a commitment of mine,
no books or charts – but webs and eons of wisdom.
No company – but systems and processes as a matter of fact,
no career goal – but a path to rely on,
no boss – but an omnipresence.
My office – here and now,
my salary – the holy seed.*

I am the Earth's Apprentice.

¹ Shearer 1996: ix

As a child i would go out into the neighboring forests seeking connection and healing from nature to ease my pain about domestic disturbances caused by my parents unrest with each other. Coming home afterward i often felt like having been a long way away and perception of time that i had spent outdoors and wandering about seemed stretched and foggy. In my 20s i set off from home to ramble different countries for several good reasons and have been blessed with nurturing journeys and hopeful returns home.

Shaken up by a more-than-real-seeming-dream and the catharsis of a spine injury during a travel (!) I started seeing a Transactional analyst and searching to rekindle my deep-connection with Nature and exploring

Scientific contextualization

This essay explores definitions of Ecopsychology and the development of an ecological self by direct experience, research and reflection on the subject of interweaving the complementarity of movement and motionlessness as transformative process of traveling.

The methodological context is heuristic phenomenology (explorative description of direct experiences in the moment). The methods applied are outdoor/wilderness exposure including solo time in movement and in stillness, self-reflection on personal experiences of traveling, wilderness time, personal mythology and psychotherapy. Literature research and class lectures in provided the theoretical background. Experimental creative and performative activities in various training environments enrichend the finding process p.e. Land-Art, constellation work, human sculpturing, a.s.o.

Definition of Ecopsychology and the Ecological Self

The field of Ecopsychology is connecting ecology and psychology, in order to widen the psychological thinking into the more-than-human world as well as giving the ecological framework new insights on how the current environmental issues are linked with psycho-dynamic and even -pathological processes.

James Hillman: “*By ‘psychology’ I mean what the word says: the study or order (logos) of the soul (psyche).*”² The word *Eco* in Greek means *House* or *Home*. Therefore Ecopsychology is literally *the knowledge of the soul in its home*.³

Ecopsychology considers nature to be the partner in an emergent process of engaging in a relationship and an animated dialogue that has a therapeutic, healing effect on human beings. Vice versa nature is served by ecopsychology since healthy human beings who aware of their interconnection as holistic beings will not as easily violate and harm the integrity of ecological systems. Psychotherapy and even more so Ecotherapy aim on rebuilding relationships and whilst psychotherapy is most often limited to the sphere of human-to-human relationship, its functions and disfunctions.

Ecotherapy - in search for the **ecological self** - seeks to widen “the circle of compassion” towards the more-than-human-world⁴. Mary Jane Rust draws a relation to the Okanaga description of the “*spiritual*

2 Hillman In: Roszak 1995: xvii

3 Session 1, Ecopsychology – Roots of Change, 7.3.2011

4 Session 2, Ecopsychology – Roots of Change, 8.3.2011

self as 'without substance while moving continuously outward' [...] this self requires a great quietness before our other capacities fuse together and subside in order to activate something else”⁵ to describe her understanding of the ecological self: “ Within this indigenous understanding embodying “insights of Jungian, humanistic, Gestalt and transpersonal psychology”⁶ I find my first reference to movement and motionlessness within nature as focus of inquiry.

Traveling as common activity of species and processes of Gaia

As a sort of first definition, I acknowledge traveling as a *movement with intention* shared by most of the species on Earth. Animals and biotic life-forms keep in motion to find nutrition, shelter, mates or symbiotic relationships and avoid threats like undernourishment, extinction etc.

It is an activity also found as a process undergone by other gaian dimensions. Non-Biota, the atmosphere are moving or traveling p.e. the continental plates follow tectonic movements with the intention to reduce friction or tension, different aggregate states and the hydro cycle itself can be considered as travel of hydrogen; Gaia herself and other planets circle around the sun as well as galaxies are not fixed into the universe. To find out about these intentions would require deeper knowledge of science or metaphysical inquiries.

Way back in the history of humanity people were more often than not living a nomadic lifestyle. Out of seasonal conditions, scarcity of resources and therefore arising conflicts among tribes or family clans, human beings changed their locations more or less frequently – specially hunter societies being dependent on hunting grounds constantly followed the movement of the drove/herds. Only much later when agriculture rooted people in a specific location, travels became somewhat alien to the everyday rhythm.

So, traveling as a sort of exceptional event (not as a usual requirement of survival) evolved at the same time than the – real and perceived - split between human settlements as tamed nature and the untamed wilderness beyond the fences of habitats occurred.

*Webster's New Dictionary of the English (1934) provides a list of synonyms for the word *travel* and deepens our awareness about the range of travel modes: “*JOURNEY often suggests somewhat prolonged traveling (now commonly on the land; cf. Voyage), esp. To a particular destination or for a specific object, TOUR implies a circuitous course from place to place, esp. for pleasure; a TRIP is a relatively brief or expeditious journey, whether for business or pleasure; a JAUNT is a pleasure trip, commonly short, often impromptu; EXCURSION suggests rather more formality than jaunt, and frequently implies a number of participants; PILGRIMAGE suggests a destination hallowed by religion or other associations. Journey and pilgrimage are often used figuratively for the passage through life; [...]”⁷**

Motionlessness as a container for creation

Complimentary to movement, motionlessness is the opposite quality that can be found within Gaia on

⁵ Armstrong In: Roszak 1995: 322

⁶ Armstrong In: Roszak 1995: 316

⁷ Nelson 1934:1342

different dimensions of existence. Our human capability of perceiving the “reality of motionlessness” is often quite limited since we are almost imprisoned by the scope of time and location.

Often we observe the manifold forms of Gaia as “without motion” p.e. mountains, stones etc. Even when it comes to Biota we miss out a lot of its motions. So, there is almost never “no motion”, but a big amount of really “slow-motion”. Only by reducing our own speed through sitting still in meditation or mere observance we become receptive to the more subtle movements and travels that occur all the time around us. The intention of meditation as being (e)motionless confronts within us and the only way to calm our motion of mind and breath down is to accept the permanence of the waxing and waning, which enables and softens our path to insight into and development of inner and outer Nature.

Seldomly, but then with great impact Nature seems to hold still. A tree that died or was fallen lies on the ground – motionless – but within his body there is a very lively process of decay going on that provides nourishment to a manifold of other species and feeds the soil with fresh matter.⁸

Looking through the Cultural Window or Traveling within Nature

At the beginning of the 21st century modern western world is mostly far away of seeing itself as part of an animated world. Traveling is pretty much a matter of business and achievement, shadowed by anthropocentric and consumer behavior patterns of tourism and capitalism. The global flows of movement⁹ play an important role in facilitating recreation (!), creating or dealing with identity and providing fertile ground for the financial security of a growing number of peoples.

Nevertheless there is still an intuitive understanding about the physical, narrative (mythological) and integral (metaphysical) impact of traveling as a development process. The above given description in *Webster's Encyclopedia* are still not obsolete, but have grown into a different scale. The fact that **vision quests** have become available to a wider circle of individuals and not being limited any more to a tribal custom one is born into, is a to-be-welcomed step towards an integrated sense of being human in connection with our inner and outer journeys into the wilderness and a return home.

Tourism in form of sightseeing of natural and cultural heritage and adventure trips into the wilderness – if conducted in a “business as usual”-format – not serving the health of humans and other-than-human beings. According to my understanding this has a great deal to do with the way how movement has become a mere goal-orientated function to “arrive somewhere” instead of embracing as well a state of motionlessness in order to “be at a place” and connect on a deeper and wider level with nature – inseparable of oneself. Ecopsychology and its Jungian foundation points out to be aware if and how again consumerism as a Shadow of our society interferes to what extend. For example pilgrimage is not longer something necessarily humble and quiet, which is indicated by the term “pilgrimage tourism”.

Being at a place where holistic science is conducted, it becomes clear to recognize **research** as form of travel. One will go outwards in order to gain new insight and seeks to conceptualize and frame hypothesis. It is again about the balance between movement - outer and the inner – p.e. moving into/within a research field , and “motionless”/neutral during periods of p.e. observation and interviews.

⁸ Personal experience of the author during a fairytale-constellation work, Spring 2006/ Salzburg

⁹ Appadurai ...

Traveling as Rites de Passage

Throughout history and up until now human beings immerse themselves into/onto physical and inner journeys as well as metaphysical vision quests as a combination of travel and motionlessness in forms of Rite de Passage in all cultures. There is a vast amount of literature available covering this field of interest from different cultural backgrounds, extracting and elaborating a diversity of traditions, cosmologies, intentions, techniques and visions. A Rite de Passage is a „*transitional ritual*“, „*a passage between any two life stages amounts to a psycho-spiritual trauma, a death-rebirth experience. There's both a loss and a gain - for the community and the individual.*“¹⁰

Besides established transitive cultural enactments p.e. naming, confirmation, I do consider traveling and exceptional long-term periods away from the everyday rhythm as a form of modern rites de passage p.e. young adults after school/university, adults in sabbaticals or during/after life-changing events, early seniorship/retirement.

Places coming into Place

Traveling in the 21st century is pretty much unlimited – there is no “white spaces” on maps anymore. Still people are highly influenced by their personal “perceptive geography” to rank what is far or near, what is familiar to them or alien. This subjective “description of the earth is continuously shaped by emotional experiences, cultural background, psychological factors, media exposure, range of personal networks etc. The attraction towards certain quality of places is an interesting process to pay attention to since it has the potential to tell about where we come from, how we feel about certain places and where we are heading to.

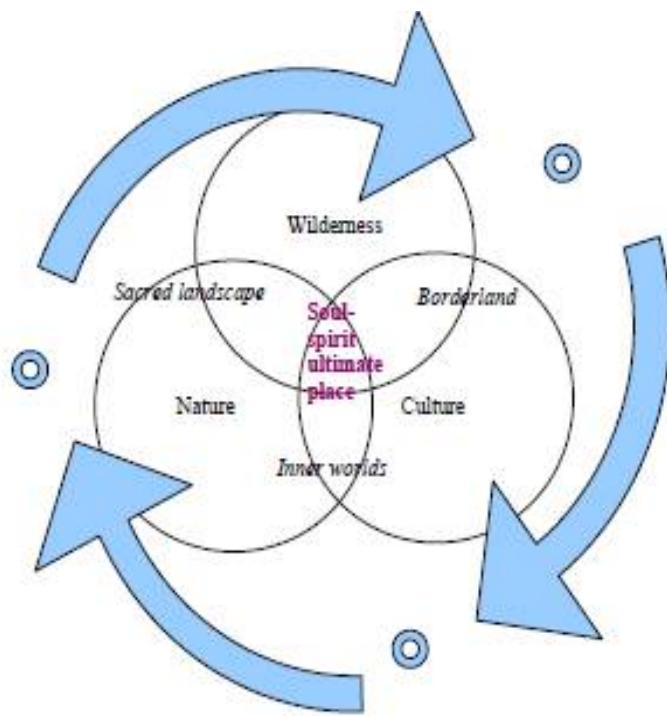
Still, every journey holds a secret to the traveler which emergent process will be triggered by the place-coming-into-place. Not choosing for one place but staying in constant motion – maybe even changing cultures throughout a travel – will have a profoundly different effect on a human being and requires.

There is an ongoing discourse if NATURE and CULTURE are exclusive or interconnected, as well as a struggle for understanding differences and commonalities of NATURE and WILDERNESS. Bill Plotkin reasons in *Nature and the Human Soul* about psyche/soul and its ultimate place in the world – partly referring to Gregory Bateson: “*Notice that, as your ultimate place, your soul is both yours and the world's. [...] Your soul is in and of the world, like a whirlpool in a river, a wave in the ocean, or a branch of flame in a fire. [...] Psyche is not separate from nature, it is part of nature.*”¹¹ This gives an answer to my question “Does nature have a psyche as well as our culture has one?”, which came up throughout the teachings.

The balance of a travel in between movement and motionless – no matter if in nature, culture or wilderness (and aside their “proper” definitions) – creates a gateway to inner worlds and sacred landscapes, that will nourish them and the visitor equally.

10 Plotkin 2008: 13; 64-65

11 Plotkin 2008: 32



Feeling Flows - Connecting with Places – Touching Borderland

Altering ones speed of physical and mental movements and secondly tracing the origin of “where on is speaking from” are powerful approaches towards undertaking conscious and transformative journeys.

Rites de Passage as well as facilitated experiences p.e. conscious walking, meditative or observing practices, experiential immersion through sitting and solo time in nature make use of directions, speed and different dimension of movement and stillness. Direct sensory experiences allow us to develop a personal phenomenology of movement and motionlessness within time and space/place in the wilderness.¹², get the individual in touch with the ecological self and build a bridge into the inner and outer wilderness so that nature can unfold and be served in a mutually grounding and healing process.¹³

As David Key describes it: “*We know that it works when the language starts to change*”¹⁴, verbal and nonverbal communication are a signal and a medium for emergent processes. Narratives and myth indicate the tracing of a flow and even more so does silence enable one to develop sensitivity „from where is spoken“.

Margret Kerr & David Key (2010) on the effect of wilderness work: “*Previously frozen self-constructs can start to thaw, and the possibility of transformation and greater authenticity naturally arises. It is here that we can experience a wider, deeper reality where phenomena that we have never encountered before emerge and present themselves to our conscious mind.*”¹⁵

12 Session 2/3 – Week 1, Ecopsychology: Roots to Change, 8.3.2011; Solo on Dartmoor, 9.3.2011;

13 Personal experiences of the author during wilderness work, walking tours and cooking preparations, Ecopsychology/March 2011 & Walking with the Earth Pilgrim/September 2009

14 Session 2/3 – Week 3, Ecopsychology: Roots to Change, 22.3.2011

15 Kerr & Key 2010:3 in reference to Snyder 1990

Triggered by different intensities of movement and motionlessness, experiences and acknowledgments of boundaries seem like to happen; a heightened sensitivity about a flow through or a withdraw towards and away from borders.¹⁶ We become more aware if and when we cross into “Borderland”.¹⁷ Being in or near borderland does not at all contradict the concept of “being in place”. Spending time with and facing borderland supports the reality and identity about one’s ultimate place in the worlds.

	Landscape Borderland	Wilderness Borderland	Psychological Borderland	Urban Borderland	Narrative Borderland
Quality	stable wilderness	fluid wilderness	Inner wilderness	material wilderness	Metaphysical wilderness
Manifestation	Cliffs, edges, hedges, coastline, riverside;	Reflections, shadows, dawn-dusk, mist, tidal area, muddy underground	Addiction, panic, anger, dreams, solitude, mental disorders p.e. Borderline personality state;	Mirrors/windows, (turning glass)doors, fences, check points, cash desks, (automatic) stairs, vehicles, transport hubs;	Dreams, stories, mythologies, metaphors, models, images, symbols;

Traveling within Narratives – The Journey inside a Journey

The intangible, narrative pool is vast and deep. Ecodiversity holds numerous mythological figures, archetypes and themes that are associated with traveling or crossing borderlands. Hero’s and heroines are on journey, leaving homes, crossing the threshold into their adventures in the wilderness of the unknown and return.¹⁸

The fool, as Mary-Jane Rust narrates, is constantly on a journey and masters exquisitely the art of borderwalk – the whole Tarot being the story of a journey itself.¹⁹ Lewis Hyde (1998) traces the Trickster, who has no real home, but “*makes the world*”: “*The road a trickster travels is a spirit road as well as a road in fact.*”²⁰ Pan, Mercury, Odysseus, Moses and other mythological gods, demi-gods and “ordinary people” invoke the power of traveling or dwelling in sorts of borderlands to enable the whole system of the story to unfold a tale of place and liminality.

Fairytales as well as Myth are mostly about those who walked away, eventually they are never seen again, but actually being on the move leads to the stories climax. Stagnation usually fails its point, the mystery of motionlessness p.e. sleeping females, characters imprisoned in stone has to be first accepted to be released and borderlands are as much a mean of communication/transport or a habitat for evil spirits as for helpers in various shapes. Fairytale that have shoes or feet as a central object are as well considered to be meaningful narratives about movement, freedom, grounding, liberation etc.

16 Model developing since mini-solo, Burgh Island, 15.3.2011

17 See Bernstein 2005

18 See May 1991

19 Session 5: Ecopsychology: Roots to change, 18.3.2011

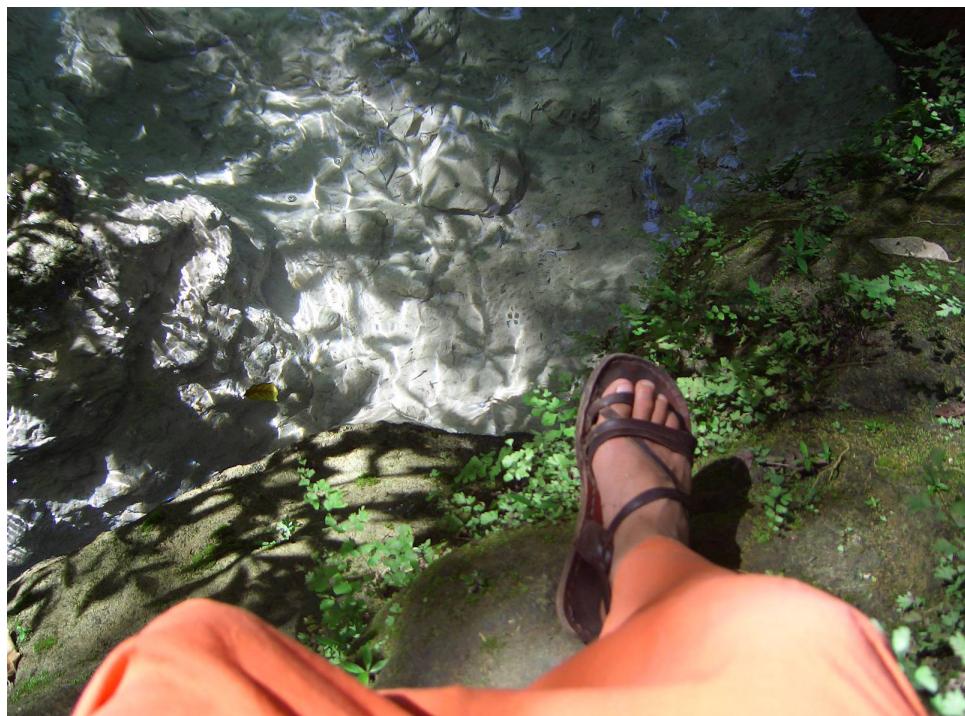
20 See Hyde 1998:title; 6

Conclusion – see ya on the road, beloved companion

The relevance of immersing oneself in traveling usually stays intangible, but inevitably causes ripples in the sea. Having experienced different qualities of place, movement and motionlessness through inner or outer travels into the wild, I would like to point out a list of phenomena to be revisited:

- complementarity of movement and stillness (floating vs. being) spirals off development through insight and confrontation
- process of leaving – being out there – returning creates a sense of belonging to the land and a community that is an integral part of oneself.
- borderland experience evokes chaos holding the potential for maturation and healing
- the Shadow of all systemic aspects must be kept in mind p.e. avoidance, consumerism, exotism, stagnation, delusion, etc;
- traveling the process of movement and motionlessness forms a wider and deeper connection with the land and the people living there;
- if taken as an equal and still mysterious companion nature/wilderness will unfold its healing

These phenomena are equally important and beneficial for human beings, other-than-human being and the wholeness of the ecological system since we are interwoven in a web of life, so that we recognize the place and the place is recognizing us.



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