

The tree that called my name: on the significance of encountering the constellated symbol in the natural, other-than-human, world

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Abstract: In this paper I explore what it means to encounter the symbol as a meaningful object, or process, within the environment of the other-than-human. Using Jung's account in 'The spirit mercurius' of an enlisted Indigenous soldier who attempts to desert his barracks on hearing a native *Oji* tree calling him, I compare the evolving stages of consciousness theorised by Jung to explain this phenomenon with the progression discussed by him in his commentary on Dorn's *coniunctio*. My aim is to clarify Jung's understanding of the symbolically constellated and 'undifferentiated' worldview of what Jung calls the 'primitive'. I also draw on the work of Spitzform, Searles, Roszak, Fisher, Chalquist, Prentice and Rust in relation to the emerging field of ecopsychology, where consideration of a fundamental link between psychological and material existence – between psyche and *ecos* – has been proposed as an essential component of psychological theory, and in which our alienation from our natural surroundings has been identified as pathological. I include observations from my own experience of working therapeutically with clients in outdoor settings and I ask how a more ecosystemically integrated sense of self might be sought for a psyche that encounters symbolic material within its containing environment.

Keywords: *coniunctio*, Dorn, ecopsychology, indigeneity, Mercurius, *participation mystique*, symbol

Introduction

In these times of dawning awareness, where an understanding of our interdependency with our sustaining environment suggests that we damage the fragile ecosystems on which we depend at real risk of damaging ourselves, what might it mean to encounter the symbolic realm in the natural,

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other-than-human world? In his work, ‘The spirit Mercurius’, Jung (1943/1948) relates the tale of one such encounter where Oji, an enlisted Indigenous tribesman of the Nigerian *Eko*i people, is awoken from his sleep by the voice of a native *Oji* tree (Figure 1) calling to him and, unable to resist the summons, he tries to break out of his barracks. On being detained and taken for cross-examination, Oji attempts to explain that at certain times he would have no choice but to attend to the tree’s call. The story of Oji is taken by Jung from Amaury Talbot (1912), where the story is related as follows:

On my arrival Oji ceased to struggle, and begged to be allowed to go away at once, because his tree was calling. In reply to questions as to what this might mean, he said: ‘...To all who, like me, bear the name of the [*Oji*] tree, there comes a call at certain times of the year. When we hear our trees calling, wherever we may be, we must set out at once, by night or day, and run till we come to the place where they grow. We cannot stay for anything until we reach them. To-night (sic) I was very tired, and lay down on my bed. In my sleep my tree began to call “Oji”, “Oji”! I woke and still heard it call. So I started up to run out into the night When they tried to stop me it called louder and louder. So I fought them to get away and go to my tree. That is all’.

(Talbot 1912, pp. 31-2)

I find myself drawn to this account of the dreamer and the dreamed-of-object, the tree. It suggests to me that there is a place where the psychocultural and



Figure 1. Oji (or Iroko) tree. (Reproduced with permission, © [SirMK]/Adobe Stock.)

the ecological merge in the context of a symbolic encounter, constellated around name, seasonal cycle¹ and tradition, that encompasses both the individual and their containing environment. Additionally, this account is where Jung illustrates the worldview of what he refers to as that of ‘primitive man’ for whom ‘ordinary events constitute ... a coherent whole in which he and all other creatures are embraced’, and where his identification with this whole means that he is ‘completely contained psychically as well as physically’ in the world around him (Jung 1931/1964, paras. 119, 134).

A comparable sense of attachment and convergence of meaning can occur in nature-based therapeutic settings, where certain objects or locations come to take on a symbolic role, for example a certain transitional place will become the point where the work ‘begins’, or a particular habitat will come to represent a specific inner dynamic and will be revisited each time that particular dynamic is to be addressed. Whilst, in my experience, it is rare for individuals to feel themselves vocally ‘summoned’ by other-than-human entities, it is often the case that those engaging in solo practice will find themselves strongly drawn to a particular place, object or natural event which they only subsequently realize has a profound inner significance. My own work suggests that the psychosocial aspects of these experiences may become even more marked in group work, where the site of a particular event or collective dialogue goes on to gain a shared significance that will subsequently affect how that setting is used, internalized, or remembered. For example, a group encounter with the other-than-human in a specific location, such as the discovery of frog spawn hatching in a pond, can see that location become the site of a group ‘mythology’ that holds both a shared sense of awe of transformational processes and, at times without conscious deliberation, can later become a place at which stories of personal change are told.

In order to explore these correspondences further, I will be following Jung’s subsequent discussion to the story of Oji in his essay, ‘The connection between spirit and tree’ (Jung 1943/1948), in which he proposes five different perceptual stages for the phenomenon in question. I will be primarily focusing on this discussion, with reference to Jung’s comments on Gerhard Dorn’s stages of the *coniunctio*, rather than attempting to trace all the variations of Jung’s thinking over time, in the hope that Jung’s own description of an evolution of consciousness in the relationship between psyche and the other-than-human world will provide significant insight into his, and perhaps our, understanding of symbolic contents that emerge from an interaction with the natural environment.

¹ Jung does not tell us this, but in Talbot’s original version of the tale, those bearing the name of the tree would be called to it around the time of the new yams (Talbot 1912).

The stages of perception

For Jung the five progressive stages of the evolution of consciousness with respect to the other-than-human world (the *Oji* tree in this instance) begin with what is described as a 'primitive', undifferentiated, stage. At this initial level Jung sees that the type of 'psychological phenomena observed among primitive peoples' (Jung 1943/1948, para. 247) have a 'notable analogy with primitive animism' (ibid.) meaning that, as seen in the *Oji* tale, there will be a perception of 'the tree and the daemon' (or 'nature deity') as 'one and the same' (ibid.). The phenomenon at this stage appears to the individual as 'a *tremendum*' and as 'morally neutral' (ibid.). The second stage in the progression is one at which perception becomes 'more highly differentiated' and, according to Jung, corresponds to a 'higher level of culture and consciousness' (ibid.). This second stage also 'implies an act of discrimination which splits man off from nature' (ibid.). Beyond the second stage, where the psyche begins to experience itself as independent from the containing environment, Jung lists a third, 'higher', stage in which the phenomenon allows not just discrimination but also a value judgment that in the case of the spirit in the tree 'declares the voice to be an evil spirit' under the 'ban' of a moral proscription (ibid.). A subsequent fourth stage, 'reached by our consciousness today', is one in which the objective existence of the 'spirit' is denied and the 'primitive' is assumed to have 'heard nothing at all, but merely had an auditory hallucination' (ibid., para. 248). Finally, the fifth stage, which we can assume (given the 'current day' nature of the previous stage) is Jung's proposal for a future evolution of thought, brings a perception 'that something did happen after all: even though the psychic content was not the tree, nor a spirit in the tree, nor indeed any spirit at all' (ibid.) and cannot be proved to be a subjective psychic experience it was, 'nevertheless a phenomenon thrusting up from the unconscious' (ibid.).

In his work *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, Jung (1955-56/1963) presents a notably similar developmental series, this being the three-part progression of the alchemist Gerhard Dorn's 'three stages of conjunction' – or 'individuation', as Jung understands them (Jung 1955-56/1963, paras. 669 & 676). The first of these is the *distractio*, that separates the mind from a 'composite' state of being (ibid., para. 671) and in which the goal is to achieve an 'interior oneness' (ibid., para. 670). This step produces 'a state of equanimity transcending the body's affectivity and instinctuality' (ibid.), 'leads ... to a dissociation of the personality and a violation of the merely natural man' (ibid., para. 671) and provides a progression of consciousness through 'discrimination' (ibid.). The separation of the *distractio*, as described by Jung, also means 'withdrawing the soul and her projections from the bodily sphere and from all environmental conditions relating to the body' (ibid., para. 673). It is a turning inward, 'away from sensuous reality' and a withdrawal of 'fantasy-projections' (ibid.). Just as in the second level

development in the Mercurius series, of a position where consciousness becomes ‘more highly differentiated’ (Jung 1943/1948, para. 247), the *distractio* generates a ‘differentiation of consciousness’ (Jung 1955-56/1963, para. 672) and, just as the ‘act of discrimination’ in the Mercurius series ‘splits man off from nature’ and frees the ‘primitive’ from the ‘hallucinations’ of his own projected unconscious (Jung 1943/1948, paras. 247-48), the *distractio* allows a ‘withdrawal of the naïve projections by which we have moulded both the reality around us and the image of our own character’ (Jung 1955-56/1963, para. 739), thus bringing the adept into a ‘realistic and more or less non-illusory view of the outside world’ (ibid.).

In both works the original state of non-differentiation is seen by Jung as equivalent to that referred to as *participation mystique* in the writings of Lévi-Bruhl. According to Jung’s (1955-56/1963) description, it is a ‘half-animal state of unconsciousness’ and a state of ‘singular identity’ (paras. 695-96) which ‘corresponds psychologically to a primitive consciousness’ (ibid., para. 657). In ‘The spirit Mercurius’ it is a ‘primitive state’ in which ‘subject and object are identical’ and the individual is ‘governed by animistic assumptions’ (Jung 1943/1948, para. 253). The implication is clear here that the archaic identity of subject and object is to be regarded as an erroneous perception and that the second stage in the Mercurius series represents an evolutionary advance. Jung (1943/1948) argues: ‘If this theory is correct – and I do not know how we could formulate it otherwise today – then the second level of consciousness has effected a differentiation between the object “tree” and the unconscious content projected into it, thereby achieving an act of enlightenment’ (ibid., para. 248).

Another marked parallel presents itself between the Mercurius progression and the second stage of Dorn’s *coniunctio*. Here, a ‘transition to an attitude of judgement’ – the *unio mentalis* – is made (Jung 1955-56/1963, para. 755), where an ‘overcoming of the body’ (ibid., para. 670) is achieved by a ‘union of spirit and soul’ (ibid., para. 707). In a similar way, at the third level of awareness in the Mercurius series the individual ‘attributes “evil” to the psychic content which has been separated from the object’ (Jung 1943/1948, para. 248), and the mind reaches a place of moral judgment. At this level the relationship with the ‘external’ object thus becomes value-laden and the object becomes imbued with magical or religious significance. According to Jung, the Mercurius series then evolves into his ‘current day’ level of understanding, the fourth stage, that denies the objective existence of the spirit and declares it an auditory hallucination, meaning that an advantageous outlook develops where the whole phenomenon ‘vanishes into thin air’ and ‘sinks into ridiculous insignificance’ (ibid.). This is the stage where an understanding is reached that the mechanism of projection is at work: ‘Since at the present level of consciousness we cannot suppose that tree daemons exist’, Jung explains, we must define what the ‘primitive’ heard as ‘his own unconscious which has projected itself into the tree’ (ibid.).

There appears to be no comparable stage in Dorn's alchemical progression to Jung's 'current day' fourth level of awareness, so when we come to the third stage of Dorn's model we see the alchemist seeking a re-integration of the mind into the manifest world. The previous stage, the *unio mentalis*, has apparently been but a preparation for the third stage: the goal of the *coniunctio*, and from here alone 'can the complete conjunction be attained – union with the *unus mundus*' (Jung 1955-56/1963, para. 679), this being described as the 'background' or 'underlying unity' of the empirical world (ibid., paras. 769 & 767). Jung describes this alchemical goal, the 'reuniting of the spiritual position with the body' as providing 'some knowledge' of a 'paradoxical wholeness' (ibid., para. 679), although presenting a 'great difficulty' in understanding how this 'can ever be realized' (ibid., para. 680).

The final, fifth, stage in the Mercurius series is the one that I consider provides an interesting comparison to the culmination of the alchemical progression. It certainly seems to be similarly problematic, with Jung describing the attainment of this fifth level as a 'conjuring trick that turns what began as a miracle into a senseless self-deception – only to come full circle' (Jung 1943/1948, para. 248). Here the fifth level assumes a reality and existence for the unconscious that means the spirit, too is 'a reality'; once again raising the issue of good and evil (ibid., para. 249). But, if the spirit cannot be proved otherwise, then for Jung the 'crucial point' arises that 'so long as the evil spirit cannot be proved to be a subjective psychic experience, then even trees and other suitable objects would have, once again, to be seriously considered as its lodging places' (ibid.).

Although in 'The spirit mercurius' (and elsewhere in his work²) Jung refers to the *Oji* spirit as an 'evil spirit' or 'daemon', in other places in his works Jung can be seen to lament the loss of the spirits, or *numina*, that once inhabited the natural world, saying 'there are no longer any gods whom we can invoke to help us ... the helpful numina have fled from the woods, rivers, mountains, and animals' (Jung 1961, para. 598). As a result of losing these 'numinous symbols', he says, we have deprived our consciousness of 'the organs by which the auxiliary contributions of the instincts and the unconscious could be assimilated' (ibid., para. 583). Jung, here, is making a clear connection between a symbolic perception of nature and its dynamic aspects – as represented by the spirits or *numina* – and, moreover, seems to be suggesting that through this absence we have lost an important means of accessing the unconscious.

In his original 1920 version of his paper 'The psychological foundation of belief in spirits', Jung said of the 'primitive's' belief in the reality of spirits that it 'forces on him the certainty of a spiritual reality whose laws he must observe as carefully and guardedly as the laws of his physical environment'

² For example, Jung, CW 5, para. 24 or CW 11, paras. 385, 387.

(Jung 1920/1948, para. 572, italics added) thereby placing the realm of the spiritual in a separate location from the realm of the physical. The spirits might be regarded as 'equally real' to the manifest world of matter, but their potential interconnection with the natural world is here unspecified, Jung placing the category of 'elemental demons' in a group to be regarded as having a 'different origin' (Jung 1920/1948, para. 578). Jung is careful, though, to not unequivocally define spirits as the products of delusion, saying that: 'The question of whether spirits exist *in themselves* is far from having been settled' (Jung 1920/1948, p. 309, note 5, italics in original) and, despite defining spirits as, psychologically speaking, 'unconscious autonomous complexes which appear as projections' (ibid., para 585), Jung suggests that this could be understood as the result of them having 'no direct association with the ego' rather than them having no validity in their own right (ibid.).

Significantly, Jung's interactions with those from different cultures and other parts of the world seem to have led him to question his earlier thinking on the subject. In a later revision to his 1920 paper, he questions his own declaration that he sees 'no proof whatever of the existence of real spirits' (Jung 1920/1948, para 600) and, in a footnote, states: 'After collecting psychological experiences from many people and many countries for fifty years, I no longer feel as certain as I did in 1919, when I wrote this sentence' (Jung 1920/1948, p. 318, note 15). In this footnote Jung reveals that he doubts 'an exclusively psychological approach can do justice to the phenomena in question', and states that he now wonders whether the concept of the space-time continuum in nuclear physics might open up 'the whole question of the transpsychic reality immediately underlying the psyche' (ibid.).

Identifying with an animate world

Jung suggests that a psyche which had developed beyond an 'original state of unconsciousness' and 'non-differentiation' (corresponding to the *participation mystique* of Lévy-Bruhl) was 'a relatively late achievement of mankind' and a 'small sector of the indefinitely large field of original identity' (Jung 1928/1953, para. 329). This refined conscious awareness of being a separate self, according to Jung, is that which allows one to tell whether a happening 'belongs or does not belong to oneself' (ibid.), and so by inference, to a personal inner world or an 'outer' environment. Jung also depicts 'primitive man' as existing in a world in which he 'is completely contained psychically as well as physically', and as coalescing with his environment in the manner of 'a fragment' rather than a 'master' (Jung 1931/1964, para. 134). Consciousness, according to Jung, is required to develop beyond these early identifications that result from projection as a prerequisite for 'objective' understanding. 'Civilized' man, he declares, must 'take back all his archaic

projections' in order to see his world objectively. He must 'de-psychize nature in order to dominate her'. (ibid., para. 135).

These descriptions of a 'late stage' development of a 'small sector' of an original state of 'non-differentiation' seem to me, along with Jung's apparent reference to potential future stages of comprehension, to make our 'sophisticated' current day consciousness sound like a relatively fragile, and perhaps transitory, overlay. This leads me to question whether the psychologically advanced stage of consciousness that 'withdraws' its projections (and that is described as an 'enlightenment' by Jung in 'The spirit mercurius') awaits a yet further evolution of thinking – perhaps one in which symbolic interactions with the other-than-human can be understood as expressions of a unifying 'transpsychic reality', rather than the projected overlay of the exclusively inner content of the psyche.

We might consider here the thoughts of Robert Romanyshyn who conjectures that 'at the deepest level of the unconscious, the unconscious *is* nature' and that as we go 'deeper and deeper into the psyche' we descend 'into the soul of the world' or *anima mundi* to discover 'that the unconscious is not just in us, but that we are in the unconscious of nature' (Romanyshyn 2021, pp. 38-9, italics added). This idea is one that also interested Theodore Roszak, an influential early theorist in the field of ecopsychology. In his exploration of *anima mundi* (Roszak 2001, pp. 136-59) Roszak compares the concept to ancient ideas of a 'Mother Earth' and to Lovelock's more recent hypothesis of Gaia (Lovelock 1995). Although he does not discuss Jung's own references to *anima mundi* Roszak does suggest that Jung may have been able to reintegrate the 'remnants of myth, ritual, [and] religious symbolism' belonging to his collective unconscious had he applied a more extensive use of the 'New Physics' to their potential interconnection (Roszak 2001, pp. 303-4). 'Our deepening awareness of the hierarchical systems into which matter organizes itself', Roszak suggests, presents the possibility of 'radically reinterpreting the collective unconscious', with the result that 'mind, far from being a belated and aberrant development in a universe of dead matter, *connects* with that universe as the latest emergent stage on its unfolding frontier' (ibid., p. 303).

The impetus for development of a new ecopsychological approach, that came partly via Roszak and others in America and partly via the Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility group in the UK, was a response to the perceived need for a 'synthesis of ecology and psychology', the applicaphetion of ecological insights to the practice of psychotherapy and the acknowledgement of 'our emotional bond with the planet' (Roszak 1994, p. 8). For psychotherapist and ecopsychologist Hilary Prentice the term ecopsychology itself presents us with the idea of a re-joining of that which has been artificially split (Prentice 2011, p. 2). She suggests that by acknowledging that we are formed out of the stuff of the Earth and therefore share its 'extraordinary creation story' and its heritage, we can begin to

recognize our emergence from and dependence on it, and free ourselves from the paradoxical ‘pseudo-disconnection’ between ourselves and the natural world that forms our ‘consensual, institutionalized and lived, reality’ (Prentice 2003, pp. 33–42).

Ecopsychology theorist Andy Fisher argues that the presumption of a ‘purely interior, personal self’ should be considered a ‘bad fiction’ that fails to allow for the reality of the psyche existing in ‘something larger’ (Fisher 2009, p. 67) and the philosopher and originator of the ‘deep ecology’ movement Arne Naess (1989), speaks of a ‘gestalt ontology’ where our experience of reality is multi-faceted and goes beyond our perception of self as other, or separate, from the surrounding environment. Naess (1987) also describes an ‘ecological self’ – an aspect of self that recognizes its existence within a larger matrix of being, and one that feels itself meaningfully contained in the ecosystem it inhabits. According to Kerr and Key (2010), this ‘ecological Self’ model ‘suggests that we are deeply woven into a complex web of physical and metaphysical relationships’ (p. 2), and they describe how, in their work facilitating wilderness expeditions, the outer journey often initiates an inner one in which the physical and metaphysical ‘become inseparable’ (ibid., p. 4). The issue is one that can be seen to arise as a question in outdoor practice, from taking psychotherapeutic client work outdoors to leading wilderness trails, guiding the practice of mindful nature engagement or establishing horticultural projects for mental well-being – particularly when there is an experience of the symbolic and personally meaningful aspects of an environmental object – where does the internal become external, or the external become internal?

Chalquist (2007, 2009) uses the term ‘terrapsychology’ to denote our intersubjective experience of belonging to our environment and suggests that there is a need to ‘express these deep, symbolically rich, and highly resonant connections psychologically’ and to acknowledge that we exist in an environment that is not ‘dead or inert’ but ‘addressing and informing us continually’ (Chalquist 2009, p. 80). Whilst studying how place could resonate deeply in the psyche, he observed how imaginal personifications of certain locations would often enter his dream life with greetings, warnings or information (ibid., p. 79). He asks whether ‘the metaphoric language of dreams, symptoms and the unconscious’, might provide an opportunity for a phenomenology that allows us to ‘reimagine ourselves belonging to a larger organic field of intelligence ...’ (2014, p. 258). In Chalquist’s experiences of encounters with place, I think we can see the dreamed-of-object interacting in a way that brings the environment into active dialogue with the dreamer just as the tree enters into the dream of Oji and communicates through what appears to be its own agency. Again, there seems to be a call for us to recognize the interwoven continuum of existence in which the psyche can find itself symbolically contained within an ecosphere of meaningful phenomena.

Encompassing the ecological self

So, what happens when an individual brings their relationship with a natural object to the practice room? For Rust and Prentice (2006) the clinical implications of assuming that we merely hear our own unconscious projected onto an object, such as a tree, while ignoring our intersubjective relatedness to the other-than-human, is a significant omission in analytic practice. They tell of a senior analyst who, throughout her years of therapy, found that the painful memory of the cutting down of a favourite tree in the garden of her childhood home had '*always* been interpreted as being about her father, never about the tree in its own right, and her relationship to it' (p. 48, italics added). They wondered how different it might have been 'if her grief – her actual experience – about that beloved being in her young life had been really heard, acknowledged and supported?' (ibid.).

Spitzform (2000) points out that 'experience with the more-than-human-world is often overlooked in clinical work, or simply goes unspoken', and she reflects that 'these affectively charged moments of self-in-relation to the more-than-human world are most likely under-reported by our patients, who expect that we will be uninterested or dismissive' (p. 282). In discussing the notions of the 'ecological self' and 'ecological unconscious' that are found in the literature of ecopsychology she suggests that a clinical relevance needs to be incorporated for our developmental origins – the 'unfolding human experience in relation to the non-human world' (ibid., p. 266).³ In developing her idea of a wider, ecologically relational matrix, Spitzform is in apparent agreement with the argument made by Fisher and others against the presumption of a 'purely interior, personal self' (Fisher 2009). She proposes that the concept of a 'private self' found in relational theory is a 'faulty' one (Spitzform 2000, p. 275), observing that this is something to which 'anyone who has felt attached to an animal or stream or forest will attest' (ibid.). Just as ecology is 'a science of relatedness', and one which 'underscores interdependencies' (ibid., p. 267), Spitzform discusses how the use of systems thinking might help to inform a connection between the self and its containing environment (ibid., p. 274–5), this having been similarly suggested by Roszak (2001, p. 303), perhaps indicating a worthwhile direction for future inquiry.

Spitzform draws on the work of psychoanalyst Harold Searles (1960) who suggests that 'the nonhuman environment, far from being of little or no account to human personality development, constitutes one of the most basically important ingredients of human psychological existence' (pp. 5–6). We ignore this fact, he says at the 'peril' of 'psychological wellbeing'

³ Amanda Dowd (2019) has similarly suggested an implicit developmental 'organizing gestalt' or 'background of meaningful containment' to describe the ways in which the other-than-human world is implicitly interwoven in the development of self.

(ibid., p. 6). Searles describes his personal experience of 'the hills and forests, the lakes and rivers' as well as the built environments of his childhood having 'psychological significance' for him, arguing that despite these being 'inextricably interwoven' with his 'childhood interpersonal relationships' each should be regarded as having 'a significance nonetheless real in itself' (ibid., p. 329). It is as much a mistake, he suggests, to 'deny that the nonhuman environment possesses psychological significance for us *in its own right*' as it is to deny that a tree 'possesses foliage, branches and a trunk' (ibid., italics in original). Due to the fact that these other-than-human elements are interwoven with psychocultural and relational aspects of existence, Searles questions whether the non-human 'stripped of its interpersonal and cultural meanings in our perception of it' would be rendered 'devoid of psychological significance' (ibid., p. 19). He concludes that 'man relates to his nonhuman environment on a dual level' so a cat or tree, for instance, might simultaneously be 'carriers of meanings which have to do basically with people (by way of displacement and projection of his own unconscious feelings onto the cat or the tree, transference of interpersonal attitudes on his part on to them, perceiving them through various cultural distortions, and so on)' but that 'there is also another level on which he relates to them: to the cat *as being a cat* and to the tree *as being a tree*' (ibid., italics in original). In these observations Searles seems to suggest the possibility of encountering the other-than-human object as something having identity, even perhaps selfhood, in its own right. Just as in the dream of Oji, despite clear relational and cultural contexts attaching to and enhancing the significance of the *Oji* tree, it appears as an agency in its own right and, in this instance, one that has the ability to communicate directly to the unconscious of the dreamer.

Some of the questions Spitzform (2000) describes herself bringing to her clinical practice include: 'is this experience primarily intrapsychic or does it illustrate a two-way encounter?', 'what seems to be happening along the lines of integration and differentiation' and 'is the experience in some way pointing to mutuality or reciprocity?' (Spitzform 2000, p. 279). Although she cautions against an automatic reading of natural objects as symbolic or metaphorical, as this may overlook personal experience (ibid., p. 281), she will also ask what the individual impact of the subjective experience is, compared to the 'linguistic, mental representation of the experience' (ibid., p. 279). Rather than restricting the range of interpretation, I would argue that using a symbolic framework to understand meaningful encounters with the other-than-human provides a way to encompass not only personally and culturally associative material, but also the organic sense of existing within a wider underlying reality. As the symbol, being multivalent, exists linguistically within a matrix of meaning, it seems uniquely suited to containing that which moves between what a thing means to me and what it is, in and of itself.

Rust and Prentice note that in nature-based work insights can happen spontaneously at the level of metaphor. They say:

The world around us seems uncannily to mirror what may be going on for us in our inner worlds, and furthermore often seems to have something rather useful to say to us about it. This resonance ... can be healing at many levels; the content of the learning involved being added to by the very magic of the thing; we are part of a world, a universe, that can speak to us in such ways – we are, after all, part of a quite extraordinary web of life, and that web is infused with meaning’.

(Rust & Prentice 2006, p. 45)

My personal moment of awareness came when the clients with whom I worked in nature-based outdoor settings began demonstrating – both consciously and unconsciously – what could only be described as a symbolic interaction with the natural world. This interchange, which I began to think of as an ‘eco-symbolic’ dynamic, was one in which symbolic experiences of the natural environment emerged into consciousness as the symbol might in dream, fantasy or imaginal work. This emergence appeared to bring its own inherent content to the perceiving consciousness and in this way seemed to ask to be understood more as an ‘encounter with’ or ‘recognition of’ something that resonated with the psyche, rather than being regarded as the ‘overlay’ of inner unconscious material onto an otherwise inert environmental canvas. The use of the term ‘dynamic’ here is, I believe, important. Those elements of the natural world that presented as symbolically relevant to the perceiver might carry with them the sense of the movement and flow of the natural world – and it might be specifically through encountering this dynamic patterning that a reparative insight is brought into conscious awareness, or a sense of integration obtained. One client observed that her dreams would follow climactic conditions, in that her particularly ‘bad’ dreams would occur in times of adverse weather, and noticeably ‘good’ dreams after sunny summer days.

Kelly (2016) in her description of working in nature-based palliative care noted how journeys through natural spaces could reflect participants’ movements through life and through the therapeutic process. ‘It seemed’, she says, ‘that a sense of *temenos*, of sacred space, was facilitated by the woods, and by the journey to the woods, and by the journey towards death, with each threshold taking the researchers and group participants into more “sacred ground”’ (p. 95). The experience of walking a path through natural space and paying attention to the horizon is one that I have usefully employed as part of a therapy session. In my experience the metaphor extends ‘naturally’ into the physicality of the environment and observations of the changes that have been seen through the seasons can effortlessly bring to mind the changes that the therapeutic journey has brought. Although sometimes the power seems to lie in leaving them implicit, sometimes the client themselves will delight in recognizing the symbolic relevance. At other times it may be that an object is found in the environment that represents and then resolves an inner state, for example one client observed that a tangle of

branches and brambles at first appeared to reflect the tangled and anxious thoughts within and then, with continued observation, the tangle began to make sense as a harmonious and complex system. This realisation prompted the recognition that an inner state could be equally amenable to patient observation, and thus to ‘untangling’.

Dr Adrian Harris (2016), in a lecture describing the use of nature-related stories and symbols within the University of Copenhagen’s Nacadia⁴ project, observed that ‘the simple practice of caring for plants over a period of time and accepting that some of them will inevitably fail to thrive despite our best efforts’ helped people to ‘get a real sense of acceptance and build that acceptance into their lives’. In my own work I have witnessed how powerful this realization can be: a participant in a therapeutic horticulture programme who had been incapacitated by grief at the loss of an unborn child found a peace that had not been obtained in any ‘talking’ therapy through the hands-on recognition that some seeds that are planted and tended will grow, but others may not. Harris (2016) proposes that the cycle of the seasons can be seen to provide a powerful model for human life that could enable a reconciliation with the forces of change and Kelly (2016), in a study conducted to understand how nature, metaphor and imagination might be used in palliative care, concluded that the ‘multiplicity of metaphors and analogies’ in both the physical turning of the seasons and their ‘associated folklore and myth’ provided significant potential for holding clients acceptance of the cycles of life and death (p. 95). A client at Green Rehab – a nature-based rehabilitation programme at the Gothenburg Botanical Garden – gave this figuratively seasonal description to researcher Eve Sahlin:

The one minute, nature is sparkling with beautiful colours and the next it is rotten and dead. This makes me reflect a lot about that it may be okay to have a period in your life when you are in dissonance with yourself and not feeling so good ... one maybe needs to hibernate for a while in order to bloom again.

(Sahlin 2016, p. 105)

Coming full circle, returning home

Just as my client recognized that her dreaming might follow different weather patterns and participants in nature-based programmes found reassurance and meaning in seasonal change, the dreamer Oji describes the tree with which he shares his name as having the power to summon him from sleep at specific

⁴ Nacadia is an active research and therapy-based garden that promotes mental health rehabilitation for patients, specifically individuals living with post-traumatic stress disorder. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=haPwtuGHZ4Q>.

times in its natural lifecycle. Moreover, he finds himself unable to resist this call as his identity is somehow intimately bound up in their relationship. Jung's retelling of this anecdote is, for me, a powerful example of how an individual might either recognize themselves or discover themselves within their environment (or ecosystem) and of how that environment might symbolically 'speak' – in this instance through dream – to their unconscious being. If we are looking for a way to comprehend this interaction that does not assume the work of 'illusion' or 'fantasy', as proposed in Jung's earlier formulations, then the assumption of 'naïve projections by which we have moulded both the reality around us and the image of our own character' (as withdrawn through the *distractio*, Jung (1955-56/1963, para.739)) no longer provides an adequate descriptor of the full wealth of this relationship. This inevitably means that we are looking for a wholly different paradigm where we might discover ourselves, find ourselves reflected, or perceive ourselves as dynamically contained within a matrix of ecological interdependencies, just as Jung's 'primitive' was 'embraced' in a 'coherent whole' in which he was 'completely contained' both 'psychically and physically' (Jung 1931/1964, paras 119 & 134).

Although in his interpretation of Dorn's *coniunctio* Jung assigns a qualitative difference to the final stage of union, describing a '*unio mystica*' with the 'potential world' – the 'eternal Ground of all empirical being' rather than 'a fusion of the individual with his environment, or even his adaption to it', (Jung 1955-56/1963, paras. 760 & 767) he quotes Dorn himself as saying:

We conclude that meditative philosophy consists in the overcoming of the body by mental union [*unio mentalis*]. This first union does not as yet make the wise man, but only the mental disciple of wisdom. The second union of the mind with the body shows forth the wise man, hoping for and expecting that blessed third union with the first unity [i.e. the *unus mundus*, the latent unity of the world].

(Jung 1955-56/1963, para. 663)

Certainly, if we have been on a journey in which we have separated ourselves from the 'underlying' or 'first' unity we are bound to reconnect in a changed way. For Spitzform, Searles presents a constructive premise in which 'maturity, for the human individual, is marked both by relatedness to the nonhuman world – that is kinship with nature – and simultaneously, a maintenance of our own sense of individuality and difference as a human being' (Spitzform 2000, p. 267). This state of simultaneous kinship and individuality might offer us one way to understand Jung's fifth and future stage of comprehension in the Mercurius series where we have 'come full circle' to find again the 'miracle' (Jung 1948, para. 248) and it can perhaps also provide one way to understand why he thought Dorn's 'blessed' re-union with the *unus mundus* was a significantly different type of integration to that of *participation mystique*.

But I am struck by the fact that in Jung's discussions of the 'primitive' and 'archaic' worldview in the *Mercurius* series and elsewhere, he is referring to the belief systems of aboriginal or Indigenous peoples, some of which, far from being 'archaic' in the sense of 'obsolete', are in continued and current usage worldwide. In some cases, far from being 'unadapted' to reality (and in need of a 'realistic and more or less non-illusory view of the outside world', Jung 1955-56/1963, para. 739), Indigenous lore is gradually being recognized to have irreplaceably valuable ecological knowledge embedded within it (even if a view of mythic-symbolic relationships with the environment being somehow inherently inappropriate or 'unsophisticated' prevails). These considerations bring back to my mind Jung's assertion that it is necessary to 'de-psychize nature in order to dominate her' and that in order to be able to see his world objectively 'primitive man' must 'take back all his archaic projections'. As well as this observation containing a tacit assumption that 'dominating' the natural world is a 'civilized' behaviour, it coincidentally holds the underlying implication that to be in a 'composite state of being' precludes the view of nature as a commodity to be dominated or exploited.

It also feels important to acknowledge here the many Indigenous nations⁵ who, as Jung came to belatedly recognize, hold something precious, maybe even essential in their worldviews which comprise many interconnected elements of reality in a similar way to a symbol which, being multivalent, can contain multiple associative strands of meaning or an ecosphere, where interdependent elements are woven in a complex system. Andy Fisher (2019) addresses the decolonial turn in social theory which moves away from discourses where Indigenous knowledges are seen as fantasy, and non-Western knowledge systems become marginalized or erased (p. 151). He proposes the need for 'place-centred lifeworlds' that 'maintain vital interconnections, honor the intrinsic value of all life, and protect the land' (ibid, p. 153). These requirements, according to Fisher, are bound up with the disentangling of a mechanistic worldview that removed ethical constraint from 'exploiting an animate earth' and thus sanctioned 'the modern scientific domination of nature' (ibid, p. 147). We are left, he says, with the 'very challenging work' of creating 'new relational worlds' and 'just ecologies' (ibid., p. 153). Other developments in the field speak of a process of 'reindigenizing' (Williams 2019, pp. 1-7; Koziol, Track & Saltzman 2016, p. 19) – a process for those individuals raised in Western, industrial cultures who have lost touch with the meaning and symbolic significance of their lands to consider the ways in which this loss impacts on their own psychological state. Alistair McIntosh (1997), writing about his work in the

⁵ See, for example, Nick Estes (Johnson & Shirazi 2019) describing the efforts of First Nations to have their deep symbolic relationship with place respected and understood, rather than regarded as 'primitive' or 'superstitious'.

Hebrides with what he calls a 're-membering' of the lost traditional ways of the islands observes that there is a need to 're-vision' how to restore the 'three-way human ecological relationship between community, nature and the inner self of each person'.

In the final analysis, perhaps we are seeking ways to return to a sense of symbolically meaningful emplacement and ways to evolve our thinking into a genuine recognition of our dynamic interrelatedness with our containing ecosystems, and in many respects these goals are actually one and the same. If, however, we come away from an encounter with the constellated symbol in the other-than-human world anticipating that anything of significance will need to be withdrawn, reclaimed or reintrojected, we deny both the inherent meaningfulness of the other and the intersubjective nature of our relationship. Alternatively, a realization of our implicit dependency can be seen as breaking through what has been, up to now, a fundamental illusion of separateness and of human action on earth being without consequence. We may begin to regard the assumption that the only meaning an environment or its component parts can have is that which we, as humans, project onto it as a narcissistic conceit, or we may begin to value those relationships with the other-than-human that symbolically or meaningfully emplace us and honour them as central to our psychological integration and orientation. I suggest that it is possible to reach an understanding of symbolic perception that acknowledges a recognition of our own being in the wider circle of life, where we can be seen to gather our meanings from the environment in which we have been formed, rather than assume that we are 'only' projecting our private selves onto inert matter. Perhaps here, in the realm of the symbol, we can touch that 'innermost ... numinosum' that Jung relates to an awareness of the *anima mundi* (Jung 1955-56/1963, para. 372), and perhaps in this dialogue of integration between ourselves and the other-than-human we can be led to profound healing experiences of our own.

Interestingly, we do not always have to look to the distant past, or to surviving traditional cultures, to find sentiments of meaningful containment being expressed. Sometimes they are to be found not far below the surface of the industrially developed world. As the church chimes midnight in a small British village in Buckinghamshire an ancient rock known as the Soulbury Boot is said to ease itself out of its place and roll down the hill. Local lore relates that it has done so ever since it turned to stone after being cut from the devil's foot. No one in Soulbury is sure how it gets back up the hill each night, or has witnessed its nightly excursions, but it is invariably to be found in its place at the central junction of the village, where it has stood for perhaps thousands of years. In 2016 an unwary passing motorist crashed into it in whilst navigating the junction and complained to the council that it was an obstruction and should be removed. The resulting furore reached the national press; residents began a protest group and threatened to chain themselves to the rock to protect it. A local councillor was quoted as having

said: ‘to move it, or even discuss moving it ... would be absolute madness’ and, as it was the ‘heart and soul’ of Soulbury, to move it would be ‘absolute lunacy’ (BBC News 2016). A suggestion to relocate the stone nearby was, apparently, met with equally vociferous opposition. It needed to be in the place where it always stood, maintaining what it has continuously *stood for*. Here there are audible traces of an envisaged wound – a traumatic separation – should the ‘soul’ of the village be moved. I wonder if, when we look beyond the dualistic-rationalist manifestations of a contemporary culture that has ‘depsychized nature’ and into the ‘unconscious’ of our own containing environment, it is not so hard to understand the position of Jung’s deserting soldier, after all.

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TRANSLATIONS OF ABSTRACT

Dans cet article j'explore ce que cela veut dire de rencontrer le symbole comme un objet ou un processus plein de sens, et ceci dans l'environnement non-humain. Utilisant le récit de Jung dans « L'Esprit Mercure » sur un soldat autochtone qui tente de désertre la caserne ayant entendu un arbre *Oji* l'appeler, je compare les états de conscience en évolution théorisés par Jung pour expliquer ce phénomène avec la progression dont il traite dans son commentaire sur le *coniunctio* de Dorn. Mon but est de clarifier la perspective de Jung concernant la vision du monde « indifférenciée » et constellée symboliquement et qu'il qualifie de 'primitive'. Je m'appuie également sur les travaux de Spitzform, Searles, Prentice, Roszak, Seed et Rust en ce qui concerne le champ

émergent de l'éco-psychologie, dans lequel la prise en compte d'un lien fondamental entre l'existence psychologique et l'existence matérielle – entre psyché et *ecos* – a été proposée comme élément essentiel de la théorie psychologique. Dans ce champ notre aliénation par rapport à notre environnement naturel est considéré comme pathologique. J'inclus des observations venant de ma propre expérience du travail thérapeutique avec des clients dans des cadres en plein air. Je demande comment un sentiment du soi plus intégré éco-systémiquement pourrait être recherché pour une psyché qui rencontre du matériel symbolique dans l'environnement qui la contient.

Mots clés: éco-psychologie, symbole, « indigénéité », Mercure, Dorn, *participation mystique*, *coniunctio*

In diesem Aufsatz untersuche ich, was es bedeutet, dem Symbol als bedeutungsvolles Objekt oder Prozeß in der Umgebung des Anders-als-Menschlichen zu begegnen. Unter Verwendung von Jungs Bericht in 'The Spirit Mercurius' (deutsch 'Der Geist Mercurius' in GW 13, p. 211ff) über einen angeworbenen indigenen Soldaten der versucht, seine Kaserne zu verlassen, nachdem er von einem einheimischen *Oji*-Baum gerufen wurde, vergleiche ich die von Jung konzeptualisierten Entwicklungsstadien des Bewußtseins, um dieses Phänomen zu erklären, mit dem von ihm diskutierten Fortschritt in seinem Kommentar zu Dorns *coniunctio*. Mein Ziel ist es, Jungs Verständnis von der symbolisch konstellierte und 'undifferenzierte' Weltsicht dessen, was Jung das 'Primitive' nennt, zu verdeutlichen. Ich beziehe mich auch auf die Arbeit von Spitzform, Searles, Prentice, Roszak, Seed und Rust in Bezug auf das aufstrebende Gebiet der Ökopsychologie, wo die Berücksichtigung einer grundlegenden Verbindung zwischen psychologischer und materieller Existenz – zwischen Psyche und Ökos – als wesentlicher Bestandteil der psychologischen Theorie vorgeschlagen und in der unsere Entfremdung von unserer natürlichen Umgebung als pathologisch identifiziert wurde. Ich füge Beobachtungen aus meiner eigenen Erfahrung bei der therapeutischen Arbeit mit Klienten im Freien hinzu und frage, wie ein stärker ökosystemisch integriertes Selbstgefühl für eine Psyche angestrebt werden könnte, die symbolischem Material in ihrer umgebenden Umgebung begegnet.

Schlüsselwörter: Ökopsychologie, Symbol, Indigenität, Mercurius, Dorn, *participation mystique*, *coniunctio*

In questo articolo esploro cosa significa incontrare il simbolo come un oggetto significativo, o un processo, all'interno dell'ambiente del non umano. Usando il racconto che Jung fa in "Lo Spirito Mercurio" di un soldato indigeno arruolato che tenta di disertare la sua caserma sentendosi chiamato da un albero *Oji*, confronto gli stadi evolutivi della coscienza teorizzati da Jung per spiegare questo fenomeno con la progressione discussa da lui nel suo commento alla *coniunctio* di Dorn. Il mio scopo è chiarire la visione di Jung del mondo, simbolicamente costellata e "indifferenziata", in particolare di ciò che egli chiama il "primitivo". Attingo anche al lavoro di Spitzform, Searles, Prentice, Roszak, Seed e Rust in relazione al campo emergente dell'ecopsicologia, in cui la considerazione di un legame fondamentale tra esistenza

psicologica e materiale - tra psiche ed *ecos* - è stata proposta come una componente essenziale della teoria psicologica ed in cui la nostra alienazione dall'ambiente naturale è stata identificata come patologica. Includo osservazioni dalla mia esperienza di lavoro terapeutico con i clienti in ambienti esterni e mi chiedo come si possa ricercare un senso di sé più integrato dal punto di vista eco-sistemico per una psiche che incontra materiale simbolico all'interno del suo ambiente contenitivo.

Parole chiave: ecopsicologia, simbolo, essere indigeno, Mercurio, Dorn, *partecipazione mistica, coniunctio*

В статье я исследую роль встречи с символом как значимым объектом или процессом в среде за пределами социальной. Основываясь на приведенном в работе Юнга «Дух Меркурий» рассказе о солдате-туземце, услышавшем, как его зовет по имени дерево Оджи и пытавшемся сбежать из казармы, для объяснения этого явления я сравниваю стадии развития сознания, выделенные Юнгом, со стадиями, о которых он говорил в комментарии о "coniunctio" у Дорна. Моя цель – прояснить понимание Юнгом символически констеллированной и "недифференцированной" картины мира, которую он называет "примитивной". Я также опираюсь на работы Шпицформа, Серлза, Прентиса, Роззака, Сиды и Руста, которые относятся к зарождающейся области экопсихологии и в которых предлагается учитывать в качестве существенного компонента психологической теории основополагающую связь между бытием психологическим и материальным – между психикой и экосом, а наше отчуждение от окружающей природы называется в них патологическим. Я привожу наблюдения из собственной практики терапевтической работы с клиентами на природе и задаюсь вопросом о том, как помочь психике найти более экологически-системно интегрированный смысл при встрече с символическим материалом в окружающей ее среде.

Ключевые слова: экопсихология, символ, индигенность, *Mercurius*, Дорн, мистическая сопричастность, *coniunctio*

En el presente trabajo, exploro lo que significa encontrar un símbolo como objeto significativo, o proceso, en un contexto otro-que-humano. Utilizando la consideración de Jung acerca del "espíritu mercurius" de un soldado indígena reclutado quien intenta desertar su barraca al escuchar el llamado de un árbol nativo *Oji*, comparo las etapas propuestas por Jung sobre el desarrollo de la consciencia para explicar este fenómeno con la evolución descrita en su comentario sobre la *coniunctio* de Dorn. Mi objetivo es aclarar la comprensión de Jung sobre la constelación simbólica y la cosmovisión 'indiferenciada' del, llamado por Jung, 'primitivo'. También me apoyo en los trabajos de Spitzform, Searles, Prentice, Rozak, Seed y Rust con relación al campo emergente de la eco-psicología, donde la consideración acerca de la conexión fundamental entre la existencia material y psicológica – entre psique y *ecos* – se ha propuesto como un componente esencial de la teoría psicológica y en los cuales la alienación de nuestro contexto natural se ha identificado como patológica. Incluyo

observaciones de mi propia experiencia de trabajar terapéuticamente con clientes en contextos al aire libre, y pregunto si una psique que encuentra material simbólico en su medio ambiente puede ir a la búsqueda de un sentido del self más integrado eco-sistémicamente.

Palabras clave: eco psicología, símbolo, indigenismo, Mercurius, Dorn, *participation mystique*, *coniunctio*

在本文中，我探讨了当我们在非人类的环境中遇见作为有意义的事物或过程的象征时，意味着什么。我利用荣格在《精灵墨丘利》中的描述，即一名土著士兵在听到一棵本地的奥吉树在召唤他时试图逃离他的军营，我对荣格理论中意识的演变阶段进行了比较，用以说明这一逐步发展的现象，荣格曾在其对《多恩的化合》的评论中讨论过这部分内容。我的目的是澄清荣格对象征性的聚集和"荣格所谓原始人的"无分化"的世界观的理解。我还借鉴了Spitzform、Searles、Prentice、Roszak、Seed和Rust在新兴的生态心理学领域的工作，其中特别关注心理和物质存在之间的基本联系，即在心灵和生态之间的联系，它被认为是心理学理论的一个重要组成部分，在这些理论中，我们与自然环境的疏离被认为是病态的。文章还包括了我在户外环境和来访者进行治疗性的工作观察，我寻问，当心灵在其所处的环境中，遇见象征性的事物时，如何寻得更生态系统化的整合的自我感。

关键词：生态心理学、象征、族裔性、墨丘利、多恩、神秘参与、化合