The Therapeutics of Subjectivity: Nature, Ethics, and Ceremony in an American Desert

By

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Abstract

The dissertation is an ethnographic investigation of a practice of ceremonial fasting in wild landscapes. For forty years, guides at a small school in eastern California have facilitated the fasting programs in the nearby Inyo mountains and Death Valley. I explore the fasting practice as a therapeutics of subjectivity—a way to soften the experiential and conceptual borders between self and world in order to render them more perceptible and to shift one's experience of self. The dissertation, therefore, engages geographic debates on experimental practices, creative solutions to socio-ecological crisis, the fraught entanglements of so-called Indigneous and Eurocentric worlds, and the geography of psyche. Chapter 2 is an auto-ethnography of the practice. Focused on my own experience in one of the school's programs, I conceptualize the experience as a more-than-humany therapy that shifts one's perception of self into the landscape. Chapter 3 takes up geographic debates on ecosophy—a critical and ethical perspective inspired by the work of Felix Guattari and Arne Naess. I suggest that ecosophical subjectivity be thought of as an identity and sense of self that both understands and experiences being human as arising from multiple nonhuman components of subjectivity and many inter-species relationships. The chapter includes an ethnography of the fasting practice and discusses the ritualized practice of storytelling and listening that is key to the school's work. I argue that the practice represents a complex integration of ancient forms and contemporary contexts. Chapter 4 details the school's history and places that history in the fraught context of the contemporaneous rise of the American counter-cultural environmental movement and the American Indian Movement. Finally, chapter 5 utilizes Jungian and Pueblo concepts of psyche and animate landscapes to theorize the school's work. The chapter meditates on the signifance of thresholds in the practice of fasting and their paradoxical being as borders between worlds that may, in fact, provide an extraordinary experience of everyday space instead of facilitating passage to an extraordinary space. I conclude with a proposed research program for further study of extraordinary

spaces of consciousness and the relationship between time spent in wild spaces and psychological well-being.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On a warm spring morning I sat on a hilltop in Southern Utah and gazed south across a mesa. The mesa itself was incised by a labyrinth of canyons largely hidden from this elevated view. Streams flowing across it patiently cut their way through its soft sandstone core, carrying water and sediment to the river below. I soaked up the desert sun for a while and then walked down to the mesa and canyons below. I spent the next ten days wandering through deep canyons, resting at plentiful springs, and watching riotous plays of light tell a more-than-human story.

I walked to meditate on the questions that unfold in this dissertation and that so many scholars and chroniclers of wild places have asked before me. What part of my psyche lives in this quiet, windswept land? To what extent is that psyche even "mine"? How do I discern a language that speaks in the rhythm of walking, the chatter of birds, and the ineffable presence of previous generations? What is it about wild landscapes that quietly but insistently draw people to them? For thousands of years, people have wandered the quiet corners of desert landscapes to ask these unanswerable questions. It's the asking that matters, of course.

Landscapes and their histories have been described as a "bundle of stories" resembling dreams (Silko 2002). Physical journeys through the landscape are also mythical journeys through the individual and collective psyche, "an interior process of the imagination" that "cannot be reckoned in physical miles" (Silko 2002, 1012). Every myth and every psyche has a shadow, too. Wild American landscapes whisper a numinous tale in the dreams of ravens, humans, rocks, and water, but wild landscapes and their mythologies also tell a story of a dreamed of, but never fully achieved, conquest of people and the more-than-human world. The celebrated landscapes of the American wilderness tradition—the Colorado Plateau, the California Sierra, the Great Basin, Yellowstone—are sites of outrageous violence where many of the continent's Indigenous people were forced off the

land and subjected to centuries of systematic oppression that often continues today (Denevan 1992; Jacoby 2001; Robbins and Moore 2019). Wild lands are Janus-faced, places of healing for some and wounding for others.

Geographers have long struggled with the ambiguous and ambivalent relationship between self and place. Ellen Semple, a pioneer of American human geography and the first female president of the Association of American Geographers, wrote that the land has entered into our "bone and tissue," our "mind and soul," and that "man can't be studied apart from the ground which he tills" (Semple 1911, 3). Her poetics turned sour, however, as she argued that white women were unfit for the cold climates of Canada, the heat and humidity of the tropics led the "native races" to a "dead level of inefficiency," and the only solution was "hybridization" between colonizers and colonized (Semple 1911, 10). Critical reckonings with Semple's and others' environmental determinism as an apologia for "imperial guilt" sparked a 75 year flight from environmental determinism towards theorizing "nature" as mostly a social construction (Castree and Braun 2001; Peet 1985), which peaked with assertions like landscapes are just "flickering text…whose meaning can be created, extended, altered, elaborated and finally obliterated by the merest touch of a button" (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988, 8). While contemporary geographers are still deeply skeptical of places as having any sort of fixed essence or universal impact on people (Kosek 2006; Massey 2005; Wylie 2017), there remains tremendous interest in understanding the relationship between place and self: can places be healing? (A. Williams 1999); to what extent is the self another place, a site where a multiplicity of forces intersect (Woodward, Jones, and Marston 2012; Woodward 2011)?; if nature-society boundaries dissolve, what sorts of worlds emerge (Blaser 2012; Robbins and Moore 2013; Viveiros de Castro 1998)? The array of critical and creative tools available to scholars today for studying the interconnection of place and self is impressive.

The extent and immediacy of unfolding socio-ecological crisis highlights again the urgency of studying the immanent interconnections of psyche and landscape. Recent United Nations reports assert that there are only twelve years left to take decisive action in order to avoid the worst effects of climate change (IPCC 2018) and that more than a million species are at risk of extinction (da Cunha, Mace, and Mooney 2019). Ecological crises are technical and political crises, and they are also existential and conceptual. Scholars have detailed the relationship between ecological crisis and how the world, the self, and their connections are conceptualized since at least the beginning of the industrial revolution (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2016; Buell 1995; Emerson 1849; Hamilton, Bonneuil, and Gemenne 2015; Horkheimer and Adorno 2001; Thoreau 1994; Weber 1946). Writers from traditions as diverse as the social sciences, philosophy, the natural sciences, and psychoanalysis argue that conceptualizing the world as a collection of resources to be managed and consumed has led to the exploitation of both other people and other species (Bateson 1987; Carson 1956; Guattari 2000; Heidegger 2008b; 2008a; Katz 2002; Kovel 2003; Robbins and Moore 2013; Shepard 1982; N. Smith 1984). The material toll is global ecological crisis, and the human psychic toll is loneliness, alienation, and melancholia (Braun 2015; Lertzman 2015; Fisher 2013b; W. Shaw and Bonnett 2016).

As one contribution to inquiries into the rich and enigmatic interrelationship of place and psyche, this research turns to a small non-profit organization located in eastern California known as the School of Lost Borders (SOLB). For forty years, guides from the school have been facilitating solo wilderness experiences they call vision fast ceremonies in the Inyo mountains and the nearby Death Valley (S. Foster 1995; 1989; S. Foster and Little 1996). The school's unofficial motto, "the big lie is that we aren't nature," sums up their ethos nicely. Through sojourns and ceremonies in wild landscapes, guides work to facilitate journeys deep into the psyche, weaving threads that connect one's deepest personal questions with the grand landscapes of the Great Basin in which their programs take place. I think of the school as a practical laboratory of subjectivity, a place where the

conceptual understanding and felt experience of human subjectivity as continuous with the material world is experimented with as a means to confront the existential dimensions of socio-ecological crisis. I was attracted to the school as a research site because of the way the guides blend theoretical and practical inquiry into the psyche and animate landscapes. The school's founders and guides have published on their work, but outside researchers have not (S. Foster 1989; Davis 2005; Perluss 2006). Broader studies on contemporary rites of passage are aware of this type of work but offer little detail (Grimes 2002).

People travel from around the world to participate in SOLB programs. The United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, The Netherlands, and France are the most well-represented countries, but participants also come from South Africa, Ghana, and Eastern Europe. Most participants are white, but not all. Participants range the socioeconomic spectrum, but people who work in education, the helping professions, and creative arts are especially well-represented.

All of the school's programs involve fees, though scholarships are commonly given and the school accepts participants regardless of their ability to pay (School of Lost Borders n.d.). The question of fees and payments in work like that undertaken at the school has a contentious history because of its association with selling ceremonial practices that have been identified with Native American traditions (see Chapter 4). In the 1980's, scholars and activists criticized Native Americans who charged fees to participate in pipe, sweat lodge, or vision quest ceremonies, labeling them "plastic shamans" or "hucksters" (Aldred 2000; Churchill 2003). Guides at the school argue that they work in a political and socio-economic context that necessitates money. Guides are supported by program fees, the school must pay for insurance and permits, and, they argue, the broader economic and social structures that they work within are based on a cash economy. However, the school does seem to make a good faith commitment to making their programs accessible to people regardless of their ability to pay the full tuition (which ranges from $800-$1600 for a vision fast

program). Fees are charged on a sliding scale, scholarships of one-thrid to one-half of the program cost are common and some full scholarships are given. Charitable giving supports these scholarships.

Literatures

The research intersects with several areas of scholarly debate and conversations in geography. Below, I briefly review four overlapping areas where the dissertation intersects with scholarly debates in geography and related disciplines: psyche, subjectivity, wilderness sojourns, and landscape.

Psyche

Psyche is a wonderfully ambiguous and thoroughly geographical term, which I interpret in this research primarily through the Jungian tradition. Jungian scholar James Hillman argues that all inquiries into psyche are geographical, ways of asking, "Where is the 'me'" (Hillman 1995, xvii)? Is the psyche personal, distributed, collective? Where do I end and you, they, or it begin? Psyche is a Latin word, originally meaning breath and referring to an animating principle found in all living things. In the 19th century, dressing room mirrors were sometimes called "psyche glasses," evoking the mysterious and sometimes unsettling feeling that staring into one's own eyes is to look past the known self to some greater depth (Beaumont 2019). Jung describes psyche as a "rhizome," "something that lives and endures underneath the eternal flux" of individual lives, which are the "blossom that passes" (Jung 1963, 4). A key idea here is that the psyche refers to an intimate sense of self that is nevertheless more than personal, that it exceeds the human body, and that one's psyche is only partially their own. Hillman extended Jung's thinking to develop his concept of the "anima mundi" or world soul (Hillman 1992). Though he borrows the name from the Platonic

tradition, he does not mean it in terms of a defining essence or a metaphysical substance distinct from the material world. Rather, he argues that "all things offer soul" (Hillman 1992, 91), that they radiate their own meaning, which has a degree of autonomy from subjectivist interpretations. For Hillman, one can't "distinguish clearly between crises of self and world … to place neurosis and psychopathology solely in personal reality is a delusional repression of what is actually, realistically, being experienced" (Hillman 1992, 93). He writes of the things of the world as "physiognomies to be faced" (Hillman 1992, 102), which extends Levinas' philosophy of intersubjectivity to the nonhuman world and is reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* in which he argues that perception is greater than sensation. For Merleau-Ponty, perception is not a matter of decoding data provided by the senses, but is a participation in an "existential rhythm" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 221). Whereas Merleau-Ponty relied on the transcendence of the subject to reach beyond itself for a sort of communion with the world, Hillman's development of Jungian concepts of the psyche position the self as already in the world with the psyche as "a knotted complexity of strands whose entanglements are also "yours" and the "theirs" (Hillman 1972, 24). Doing so places this conceptualization of psyche somewhere between Merleau-Ponty's transcendent subject and Felix Guattari's radically distributed subjectivity in which the individual is the site where "diverse components of subjectification" come together (Guattari 2000).

Jung's work has not received much attention in geography. Two in-depth engagements with Hillman's ideas were published in geography journals in the 1990's (Bishop 1994; 1992), but awareness of them seems to be limited as they are not cited in prominent reviews of psychoanalytic thought in the discipline (see Kingsbury 2014), even those that note the potential for engagement with Jungian thought in psychoanalytic geographies (Philo and Parr 2003). In the inaugural issue of *Ecumene* (now *Cultural Geographies),* Bishop argued that Jung and Hillman's work can speak to the geographic project of animating the world, of learning to perceive its poetic and mythological depth,

and to move studies of psyche "away from a concern with the individual and into the world of places, environments and things" (Bishop 1994, 56). Bishop aligned his study of Jungian thought with the humanist tradition in geography, especially projects to develop the concept of place (Bachelard 1963; Buttimer 1976; Tuan 1974).

Beyond Jungian thought, there is an active community of geographers engaged in debates on psychoanalytic thought. Geographers have identified in Freud's psychology a map of the psyche—the structures of the id, ego, and superego—that may be interpreted both topographically (Pile 2014) and topologically (Blum and Secor 2011; Kingsbury 2014). Theorized as the "closest space of all," psychic landscapes are thought of as "uncanny" in the sense that they disrupt more transparent understandings of space, evoking "familiar, yet unsettling" feelings (Davidson and Parr 2014, 120). Drawing on psychotherapeutic practice, others have worked to spatialize emotions, thinking of them as produced through interpersonal encounter rather than as internal psychic states (Bondi 2005; 2007b; 2007a). The literature on healing places, discussed below, draws on psychoanalytic thought more obliquely but is interested in the relationship between place and wellbeing. Lacanian thought has also been mobilized to critique ecological thinking as a way to delve into the anxieties that climate change and the concomitant intersections of the ecological sciences and politics produce (Robbins and Moore 2013) as well as to examine how the cultural repression of the genocide of Native Americans manifests in prominent conservation writings (Robbins and Moore 2019).

Subjectivity

The dissertation's focus on psyche is related to broader debates about subjectivity, which I primarily engage through the phenomenological tradition. The use of phenomenology by geographers is caught up in a troubled history of universalizing subjectivity and poor attention to difference (Cresswell 1996; Entrikin 1976; Massey 1994; G. Rose 1993; Tuan 1977; 1971), but more

recent scholarship reconsiders phenomenology with respect to critiques of the tradition (Ash and Simpson 2016; Simonsen 2013). Here, I suggest that the phenomenological tradition be interpreted as a progressive critique of subjectivity that carefully considers questions of both human and more-than-human difference (Marder 2014b).

A brief survey of the tradition demonstrates this progressive critique. Husserl's preoccupation with the "pure phenomenon of knowledge" extended Descartes' dualism that set a disembodied thinking subject apart from the world (Descartes 2008; Elden 2008; Lawlor 2002). Heidegger's critique of phenomenology specifically, and Western metaphysics more generally, shifted phenomenologists' concern from the possibility of knowledge to the existential significance of one's experience of the world (Heidegger 1962). His elaboration of the temporality of being was subsequently developed in order to detail the historical vicissitudes of subjectivity (Foucault 2000; 2012). Levinas then introduced the concept of alterity, insisting that individual uniqueness was necessarily tied to others, creating an ethical obligation to accommodate and care for others whom we can never fully know or understand (Derrida 1999; Levinas 2013; Mensch 2015). Merleau-Ponty (2012; 1968) brought subjectivity back down to earth, the "homeland of our thoughts," through the body, and others have since re-introduced it to its plant and animal others (Abram 2010; 1997; Marder 2014a; 2013).

Earthbound once again (Latour 2013b), many people nevertheless often feel as if they stand apart from the world as they reflect upon it (Avens 1982; Fisher 2013b; Kovel 1988). As earthbound subjects, however, scholars increasingly understand that even this distanced or alienated mode of being is itself constituted from within the world upon which one reflects. Literature on the subjectivity of nonhumans (Buller 2015; Haraway 2003; Viveiros de Castro 1998; Wolch and Emel 1998) and the land itself (de la Cadena 2015; Hogan 2013; Katz 1997; Kimmerer 2013; Plumwood 2013; D. B. Rose 2011; Silko 2002) expands the social world beyond humans and has increased

appreciation of the world as populated by many different kinds of subjects (Panelli 2010). In effect, this declares, "the world is made up of many types of persons [social actors], only some of whom are human," an aphorism that has come to define "new animism" (G. Harvey 2006, xi). This does not flatten difference. Instead, it asserts the erasure of subjectivity as a categorical difference between humans and others. What differentiates human subjectivity from animals, stones, or the earth itself is not the possibility of selfhood, but the perceptual abilities and physical capacities of the bodies through which one comes to have a world and an experience of self (Gibson 1986; Uexküll 2010). "Components of subjectification" (Guattari 2000)—affects, sunlight, social context, political forces—differentially impact how beings come to have an experience of the world (Woodward 2011). Attention to these components of subjectification, rather than an exclusive focus on the subject who experiences them, may allow for a temporary bracketing of human subjectivity in order to better understand how a landscape, for example, is constituted (Woodward, Jones, and Marston 2012).

The critical fracturing of concepts like nature, subjectivity, and the human have helped to generate many of the insights discussed here, but their continued diffusion should not be an end in itself. To say that the subject is more than itself is not an erasure of coherent subjects altogether. Instead, it is an invitation to inquire into its constitution rather than accepting human (or other) subjectivity as an a priori. It is an attempt to take seriously the question, "what can be played" (Foucault 2000, 140) with regard to subjectivity?

Sojourns in wild landscapes

The practices of the School of Lost Borders (SOLB) sit in relationship to a rich American tradition of sojourns to wild places through which identity is formed and contested. The frontier experience was once credited with forming, through contact and struggle with wild landscapes, the

American character as pragmatic, individualist, and inventive (F. J. Turner 2008; Leopold 1998; Stegner 1960), though that notion has now been extensively critiqued, especially because its focus on landscapes devoid of people erases thousands of years of Indigenous history in North America (Cronon 1996; Gessner 2015; Merchant 1980; Nash 1982; Worster 1977). Sojourns have also been a means to contest dominant ideas of American identity and to inform alternatives. Resistance to utilitarian ethics (Muir 1986; Snyder 1990; J. M. Turner 2012), the formation of direct action environmentalism (Abbey 1968; Foreman 2010; B. Taylor 2008; Woodhouse 2018), and anticapitalist politics grounded in defense of the land have all been inspired and informed by the practice of sojourn (Bowden 1995; Cremean 2012; Drake 2013; Peacock 1990).

Sojourns to wild places have also been widely used to investigate the nature and constitution of the human psyche. The transcendentalists, for example, used sojourns as a mutual inquiry into self and nature (Buell 1995; Emerson 1849; Richardson 1986; 1986; Thoreau 1993a). The transcendentalists have often been criticized for reducing nature to metaphor, projecting the "landscape of the psyche" onto the natural world when in fact, critics argue, such landscapes represent the "inner, not the outer world" (Marx 1964, 28; see Garrard 2012). More recently, however, as scholars have begun paying closer attention to nonhuman subjectivity and theorizing the distributed constitution of human subjectivity, as discussed above, and detailing the links between psychic health and access to natural spaces (Atchley, Strayer, and Atchley 2012; Haskell 2013; Kahn 1999), space has opened up to reconsider the conceptual and experiential play between self and world that transcendentalist inquiries began. Thoreau, for example, wrote of the language of the land as a "tawny grammar," writing, there are "other letters for a child to learn than the ones learned in school" (Thoreau 1993a, 69). Reflecting on walking through a stand of pine forest on a neighbor's land, he writes, "I did detect, when the wind lulled and hearing was done away, the finest imaginable sweet musical hum,—as of a distant hive in May, which perchance was the sound of their

thinking. They had no idle thoughts, and no one without could see their work" (Thoreau 1993a, 72; also discussed in Richardson 1986). He understood his own thoughts as cohabitating with the land, but later, when trying to write about the experience, he lamented that the sound of the trees' thoughts "fade irrevocably" and he had to work hard to "become again aware of their cohabitancy." Where an earlier generation of critics understood Thoreau to be projecting his (personal) imagination on to the landscape, recent scholarship, inspired by the materialist turn in humanistic and social scientific theory, sees in Thoreau's writing an effort to perceive the animacy of the land (Johnson 2014).

More recently, sojourns as inquiries into subjectivity have become ways to be in proximity to Otherness, be it the deep time invoked by petroglyphs (J. Turner 1996), encounters with wild animals both spectacular (Childs 2007; Leopold 1949) and mundane (Abram 1997; 2010; Dillard 1982), or the peculiar capacity of stark desert landscapes to pull oneself "out of a self-absorption wary of opening itself to intimacy" (Lane 1998, 27) and to soften the boundaries between self and world in order to transform one's sense of self (Abbey 1968; Austin 1987; Ivakhiv 2003). This last point—the softening of perceptual boundaries between self and world—is of particular relevance to the dissertation. Though theorists working in Eurocentric knowledge traditions have moved far away from Cartesian divides between a largely immaterial self and the material world, the sense of the self or psyche as mostly personal and distinct from the world remains commonsense experience for many of us (see Castree 2003, 204). The persistence of that commonsense border may be one reason why nature writers like Edward Abbey undertook long solo sojourns into the desert that brought them close to death. In Havasupai canyon, a famous canyon that intersects the Grand Canyon, Abbey nearly died after becoming trapped in a pool whose sandstones sides were worn smooth from being polished by running water over millions of years. These sorts of trials led him to dream of a "hard and brutal mysticism in which the naked self merges with a nonhuman world and

yet somehow survives still intact" (Abbey 1968, 6). Mary Austin, whose book, *Stories from the Country of Lost Borders* (1987), is the namesake of the School of Lost Borders, used sojourns into wild Great Basin landscapes to get close to human and more-than-human otherness, which became a way for her to escape the stifling confines of patriarchy. She writes of a "walking woman" who "had begun by walking off an illness," and was "healed at last by the large soundness of nature" (257). But she also found in the world "the ache of a world-old bitterness [that] sobbed and whispered in the spring" (260). Austin called the Great Basin the "loneliest land that ever came out of God's hands" (15) and relished its immensity, feeling "of no account you who lie out there watching, nor the lean coyote that stands off in the scrub from you and howls and howls" (17). In so many artful writings of sojourns to wild places, one reads of the double movement out into a seemingly immense and indifferent physical world that somehow also opens a deeply personal journey into a psyche that is both one's own and always exceeds the individual.

Landscape

In geography, the concept of landscape has often invited scholars to examine how place and self intertwine. Landscape, Jeff Malpas writes, is "where we find and lose ourselves" (2011 22). Landscape has often been understood in terms of representation, from Sauer's understanding of it as primarily "man's record upon" (Sauer 1965, 342) the earth to discursive understandings of landscape as representative of ideology and the flows of power; the ways that a landscape are shaped represent who controls the landscape and how (Castree 2005; Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; R. Williams 1975). Others have argued, however, that landscapes are "revelatory" as well as representative (Malpas 2011, 5). Robert MacFarlane writes that "we are adept, if occasionally embarrassed, at saying what we make of places—but we are far less good at saying what places make of us" (Macfarlane 2013, 27). To get at the revelatory aspects of landscape, MacFarlane suggests

asking the questions: "what do I know when I am in this place that I can know nowhere else? And then, vainly, what does this place know of me that I cannot know of myself?" (27). Some geographers approach such questions with a degree of suspicion, worried "that there remains a danger here of succumbing to national or local romances of landscape and belonging" (Wylie 2017, 5), but also envious of how such inquiries can evoke "the power of a mythopoesis of places and landscapes" (5). Landscape phenomenology has emerged as a mode of inquiry into landscape as emergent through practice, not just representation, that evokes MacFarlane's curiosity but holds closely to Wylie's skepticism (M. Rose and Wylie 2011; Wylie 2007). Informed by Heidegger's (2008a) work on dwelling and Ingold's (2000) elaboration of the concept, the landscape as meaningful through practice has been taken up in studies of archaeology (Tilley 1994; 2004; M. Rose 2010), sports (Lewis 2000), walking (Wylie 2002; 2005), and agriculture (Cloke and Jones 2001), though it has been argued that even this emergent meaning of landscape is dream-like and ephemeral (M. Rose 2006). Landscape phenomenology responds to representational approaches by detailing how the physical landscape and the human experience of it arises through lived experience. Whereas representative understandings of landscape are largely visual, phenomenological landscapes better account for the full array of human perceptual faculties and the way that perception and action are shaped by the physical landscape.

Literature on healing places and therapeutic landscapes goes one step further and attempts to develop a sense of place or landscape as an active agent, a participant who might reveal something of the self that can only be known in a special place (Davidson, Smith, and Bondi 2007; W. Gesler 2005; W. M. Gesler 2003; Lea 2008; M. Smith 2009). Writing on Indigenous worlds goes further by describing a dynamic sense of the landscape as an important element *of* the social world rather than as a natural object that sits in relation to the social. Relevant examples include understandings of landscapes as holding wisdom or knowledge (Basso 1996; Nesper 2011), as

holding the anger, despair, and terror of settler colonialism (Hogan 1994), of humans having a duty to maintain the land by telling its stories (Chatwin 2012), or as landscape being similar to a dream not because of its ephemerality but because of its simultaneous physical and metaphorical being (Silko 2002). Here, the physical landscape is neither the determinant nor the representation of the social world. Instead, in a convergence with contemporary phenomenological scholarship, it is understood as a gathering point from which meanings and possibilities unfold (Malpas 2007).

Methods

To experientially inquire into the questions of psyche and place that guide the dissertation, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork at the School of Lost Borders, based in eastern California. The theoretical explorations of the research are grounded in the experiences of guides who facilitate the ceremonies, participants who allowed me to share in their journeys, and my own time engaged as both an assistant guide and a participant in school programs. For fieldwork, I relied on three research methods: participant-observation, auto-ethnography, and interviews. Data were gathered at a series of site visits ranging in length from one to six weeks. In all, I spent 23 weeks conducting participant-observation in school programs, which included fasting ceremonies, guide training programs, and shorter training programs that focus on a particular element of the school's work. I conducted this participant-observation research as a participant in school programs and later as an assistant guide in order to develop an understanding of the experience of the school's programs and also to inquire into how guides theorize their work and facilitate experiences for participants. I was a participant in a vision fast ceremony (see chapter 1), a 30 day guide training, and a week-long training that focused on the school's practice of reflective listening they call mirroring (see chapters 2 and 4).

After completing the 30 day guide training program, I began to conduct participant-observation research from the position of an assistant guide. Doing so allowed me to occupy a middle ground between the guides and participants, which I considered optimal for conducting research. As an assistant guide, I had the opportunity to participate in interviews before participants fasted as they honed their reasons for participating in the ceremony. The school refers to these interviews as developing "intention" for the fast. I also participated in mirroring participants' stories. As discussed at length in chapter four, mirroring is where participants often begin to make sense of their experiences and to give them some narrative shape. Participating as an assistant guide also allowed me to spend extensive time with guides while participants were on their solos and before and after each day's activities. The conversations I had with guides during these times were invaluable in understanding the history of the school, how guides conceptualize the ceremony, and to build trusting relationships with guides so that they felt comfortable sitting with me for extended interviews. In the role of assistant guide instead of guide, however, I remained more connected to the participants, especially outside of formal parts of the ceremony. Assistant guides camp and share meals with participants and take primary responsibility for helping participants with their camping gear, addressing first aid issues, or simply chatting with participants about their anxieties before heading out on solos. Sharing in these informal activities with participants helped me to build relationships that created opportunities for interviews up to one year after their participation in a school program and for ongoing email conversations. I was also privy to informal conversations during meals or around evening campfires as participants talked about their experience of the ceremony, their impressions of the guides, and their lives outside of the school program. Through these moments, I developed a keen appreciation for the diversity of participants and the circuitous paths that led them to school programs. The school does not advertise their work, so nearly all

participants find the school through word of mouth, by reading one of the founders' books, or, occasionally, through an internet search that leads them to the school's website.

Over the last two years, I have also had the opportunity to conduct participant-observation research at the school's board of directors and annual meetings. In these meetings, school staff and board members manage the tasks that keep the school running, such as negotiating permit and insurance issues, keeping the website functional, and handling the school's finances. I also quickly learned that these meetings are a site where many of the school's internal politics play out, especially with regard to competing visions for the school. A constant tension exists between guides about questions such as growth, whether or not the school should continue, what programs should be run, and how decisions should be made. It is in these conversations that I really began to understand how the guides' differing histories, intellectual and philosophical commitments, and personal experience with the ceremony inform their views of the school and its work. Some of these dynamics are described in Chapter 3. The school's founders and the generation of guides that they mentored, for example, were heavily influenced by influential Native American mentors and early-mid 20th century anthropological studies of rites of passage such as Arnold Van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* (1960). This generation of guides came into the work during a cultural moment in which non-Native people in the US and Europe developed an (often romanticized) interest in Native American spiritualities in which they found an opportunity to blend environmental politics and an earth-based spirituality. A subsequent generation of guides were informed more by psychotherapeutic traditions including Jungian psychology and person-centered psychologies. Finally, the youngest guides at the school tend to be most influenced by the emergence of the professional field of wilderness therapy (Gass, Gillis, and Russell 2012; Hoag, Massey, and Roberts 2014), the academic study of ecopsychology (Fisher 2013b; Roszak 1992), and the "nature awareness movement" that touts the psychological benefits of time spent in wild places (Louv 2005; Young

and Gardoqui 2012). Younger guides are much less likely to have been mentored by Indigenous practitioners and they are more likely to express concern about cultural appropriation and issues of inclusivity in the school's work.

School guides have trained to do their work following an apprenticeship model. For much of the first two decades of the school's existence, Steven Foster and Meredith Little (the founders) were the school's only guides. Emerald and Joseph, who joined the school next, volunteered or worked with Foster and Little for several years as their assistants before beginning to run programs on their own. The same is true for several of the other current school guides. Many guides have participated in month long training program (described below), but that is generally just a first step, which is followed by a lengthy apprenticeship. In the course of my research, for example, I completed the month long guide training program and then worked as an assistant on several fasts. Were I to continue my involvement with the school, it might be several more years before I ran a school program as a lead guide. Apprenticeships involve little formal feedback. Instead, apprentices listen and observe the work of the guides and then slowly become more active in helping participants shape their intentions for their fasts or reflecting on participants' stories. Apprentice guides therefore tend to model their approach on the work of the guides whom they are observing, though there is considerable room for newer guides to develop a personal style. In general, though, guides prioritize affirming participants' experiences, using the nature-based model of human psychology developed by Foster and Little (the four shields) as their philosophical foundation, and emphasizing the agency of the landscape in participant experiences. There is very little turnover in guides who work at the school. Therefore, most students who complete guide training programs (discussed below) do so in order to offer similar programs in their home communities rather than to work at the school.

Effectively conducting participant-observation research at SOLB necessitated that I adopt an "insider" position relative to the school's work. SOLB does not generally allow non-participants to observe their programs out of a concern for maintaining an emotionally supportive milieu. The school's program are intimate affairs in which participants wrestle with deeply personal questions and struggles. Topics such as abuse, divorce, family relationships, substance use, and depression are common. Many participants are surprised at the social intimacy that is an important factor in the work, in addition to the solo fast. In order to gain trust with school guides, I needed to be able to present myself as competent in their work and sensitive to the particular histories and geographies of the school. I therefore drew heavily on my 15 years of experience as a backcountry wilderness guide and seven years of experience in wilderness-based psychotherapy, including graduate training in existential psychotherapy and wilderness-based psychotherapy. I was able to offer specialized skills to the guides with whom I worked and those experiences gave me a knowledge of both the specific context in which SOLB operates and the wider landscape of the American wilderness tradition. Finally, in order to appreciate and empathize with participants' solo experiences, which I could not directly witness, it was important for me to immerse myself as much as possible in the school's world, as others have done with ethnographic research that involves extraordinary states of consciousness (Meintel 2007).

Participant-observation at SOLB does present a methodological challenge because the fast itself, four days and nights during the middle of SOLB programs, takes place in solitude. Therefore, I did not have direct access to fasters' experience during the solos. Even if it were possible to observe fasters, the invocation of ceremonial space and time, the experience of solitude, and the physical effects of fasting all significantly impact participants' sense of self, place, and the experience. This is why I have devoted Chapter 2 of the dissertation to an auto-ethnographic account of one of my own solo fasts in a school program. To an extent, all ethnography is autoethnographic as one of

the challenges that researchers face is to put their own lived experience in conversation with what they observe around them. However, scholars have explicitly turned to autoethnographic methods in recent years to describe and investigate experiences that can be difficult to represent such as sojourns in wild places (Wylie 2005), somatic healing practices (Paterson 2007), yoga (Lea 2008), spiritualism (Meintel 2007), and psychotherapy sessions (Bondi 2005). In each case, the researcher's own experience with the practice in question served as an important vehicle for the theoretical questions being explored. I am not arguing that my experience with fasting can serve as an adequate proxy for others' experience. Each person's experience is unique and the reliability of a researcher connecting their own experience to others has been contested (Johnston and Valentine 1995; G. Rose 1993). Instead, autoethnographic narrative is a way for me to offer a finer description of the solo itself than I am able to do when relying on others stories, which are narratives that are one step removed from the solo itself.

Semi-structured and unstructured interviews complement the participant-observation data used in the dissertation. I conducted interviews with many guides and assistant guides in whose programs I conducted research (n=14) as well as with the school's surviving founder, Meredith Little. Often, a series of interviews helped me to track a particular guide's involvement with the school or to gauge how a concept, ceremony for example, is differentially understood across the school's guiding community. On many occasions I facilitated conversations between several guides and these interviews more closely approximated focus groups. Interviews with guides covered a wide range of topics including the school's relationship to Indigenous practices, how guides understand ceremonial space, what mirroring is and how guides practice it, histories of guides' relationship to the school, and translating the school's work for other audiences including schools and therapeutic settings. Semi-structured interviews generally ranged from one to two hours and

unstructured interviews lasted anywhere from 20 minutes to several hours. Unstructured interviews were more likely to take place over several sessions than semi-structured interviews.

I also conducted some follow-up interviews with participants (n=15) between three and 12 months after completing their school program. My initial intent was to inquire into the "sticking power" of the experience. I wanted to ask whether an SOLB program is a peak experience that fades away or if it continues to resonate with participants and impact their sense of self, relationships, and life choices. Interviews addressed key themes including: striking memories of the experience; sense of nature as alive; impact on personal experience and understanding of nature and ecological crisis. The interviews, however, did not allow me to make any generalizable claims about the efficacy of the school's programs in sparking a long-term shift in one's understanding of nature or other general impacts of the program. I found that participants self-selected for the interviews. In general, the people who chose to respond to my interview requests were those who highly valued their experience with the school and found it particularly meaningful. The few people who responded to my interview requests who felt more ambivalent about their time with the school led me to surmise that many of those who never responded to my interview requests may also have ambivalent feelings, which limited the claims I felt comfortable making.

What I did gain from a subset of participant interviews (n=10) was a detailed account of how the experience of fasting, the relationships they formed with the guides, and the experience of having their story mirrored opened an inquiry into the enigmatic relationship between existential inquiry, immersion in wild landscapes, and environmental ethical commitments. It is from these interviews that chapter four took shape even though the chapter focuses in on one participant's story. For a significant subset of participants with whom I spoke (and for all guides), the practice has sparked a profound and ongoing inquiry into the relationship between self and landscape. This subset of participants, along with the guides, experienced the practice of this ceremony as a way to

perceive an animate world (even if they do not use the word animism), to experience their "self" or "psyche" as emergent from immanent relationships with that animate world, and to develop an ethical commitment that understands human communities as dependent upon the landscape for psychic as well as physical well-being. This conclusion is present in each chapter throughout the dissertation.

What follows here are descriptions of the various programs in which I conducted participant-observation research. Most school programs enroll ten to twelve participants.

Vision fast ceremony: This 11 or 12 day long program is one of the core offerings of the school and it is the most widely attended program. The school offers a dozen of these program each year, and each program is attended by 10 - 12 participants. On the evening before the program begins, participants arrive and set up camp at a campground near town. On day one, guides facilitate welcoming activities and teach what they call the four shields of human nature, a nature-based model of human development and psychology that Steven Foster and Meredith Little (the school's founders) developed in collaboration with Hyemeyhosts Storm, one of their early mentors (see Chapter 3). Guides offer the four shields as a basic framework that participants can use to assess their place in life and to interpret experiences that they have while in ceremony. Days two and three are spent working with participants' "intentions;" their reasons for choosing to fast. Before coming to the program (sometimes several months earlier), each participant writes a "letter of intention" addressed to their guides. During the two days of intention in the program, each participant discusses with the guides their reasons for choosing to fast. The entire group listens to each conversation as witnesses to the process. Most guides strive to help each participant arrive at a single, declarative "I am" statement to summarize their intention. There are two key reasons why guides do this. First, guides understand the fasting ceremony as confirming a passage that has

already occurred in a participant's life rather than helping to facilitate such a passage. Participants are discouraged from using the fast to effect a change in their life and are instead encouraged to mark a shift that has already occurred. Meredith, one of the school's founders, likens this to contemporary wedding ceremonies in the US, which usually are a way for a couple to publicly mark their commitment to one another, rather than stating their intention to begin a relationship. After the intentions have been completed, the evening of day three is spent preparing for the transition to the backcountry basecamp. The assistant guides review each participant's gear—clothing, backpack, first aid supplies, etc—and teach about the physical hazards of the backcountry and the physiological effects of fasting. On day four the group travels from a campground near town to the backcountry base camp. That day, each participant identifies their solo spot and guides teach a class on "self-generated ceremony," which discusses how participants can use their own spiritual and cultural traditions to work with experiences that arise in the course of their fast and to create meaningful personal ceremonies. That evening, the group shares a final meal together. On the morning of day five, the group gathers at dawn and each participant crosses a threshold constructed by the guides to mark the beginning of their fast (discussed at length in Chapter Four). Participants return from their fasts after dawn on day nine. The group then returns to town. Days 10 and 11 are spent in storytelling sessions. Each participant spends around 20 minutes telling the group about their fast and each guide then "mirrors" the participant's story back to them, which is a process of interpretive listening that the school has developed (discussed at length in Chapter Four). The final day, day 12, is for closing ceremonies and discussions about "incorporation;" how to integrate the experience of the fast into one's daily life.

Mirroring the Four Shields of Human Nature: The Art of Story Telling and Listening: This six-day long program is taught as an in-depth workshop on mirroring, the school's

practice of storytelling and listening. Guides at the school value the practice of mirroring as integral to the process of incorporation or beginning to make sense of the experience of the solo fast. Because most participants do not come from a community in which a solo fast in a wild landscape is a well-recognized practice, they will not necessarily return home to a supportive community. Therefore, mirroring has evolved as a way for the ephemeral community that gathers for each program to hear and honor participants' stories. This program uses the framework of the four shields of human nature as prompts for short solos (several hours each). Participants' stories from those solos are then used to workshop the practice of mirroring.

Guide training programs:

Two-week training: The two-week training program is nearly identical to the vision fast program described above. Two days are added to the program length, which allows the guides to work through the process in a slower fashion and create more space for discussion with participants about how they would incorporate the school's practices into their own work. More time is spent teaching the process of mirroring and guides are more transparent about their thoughts and intentions during the mirroring process in order to train participants to mirror stories. Often, participants have an opportunity to practice mirroring stories as part of the training.

Month-long training: This is the longest program that the school offers and the one that sits closest to the school's mission of being a training center for people to take the school's work (or pieces of it) into their own communities. Despite its length, the program makes the least amount of money for the school. The program is broken up into four segments.

Foundations: A one week long section that teaches the history of the school and its practices and spends a day on each of the "four shields of human nature," which offers a far more thorough introduction to the philosophy that undergirds the school's work than other programs.

Two-week training: The two-week training as described above, including a four day fast.

Mirroring and incorporation: Four, instead of two, days are devoted to mirroring stories so that more participants have an opportunity to participate in the practice and more time is devoted to teaching and feedback on the process. Three days are devoted to "incorporation," which includes the personal elements of how to take the experience home that other programs offer as well as teaching and discussions on incorporating elements of the school's work into different settings such as schools, work places, and different experiential education settings.

School Curriculuum

School programs generally offer a curriculum that guides describe as minimal. Their choice to offer minimal structure comes, they say, from an effort to focus on the land as the true facilitator of the ceremony, rather than the guide, and to keep their programs accessible and welcoming to people from as many philosophical and faith traditions as possible. Rather than presenting the fast as a spiritual practice in and of itself, they hope to keep the structure loose enough so that participants can practice their own faith traditions (or lack thereof) in the ceremony without feeling a conflict. Nevertheless, there a several key curricular elements that are present in most school programs, which I briefly discuss here.

The Four Shields of Human Nature

The four shields of human nature is a philosophical and interpretive framework that is dear to the school's founders and guides. It is based on a "medicine wheel" framework, first introduced to the school's founders by Hyemeyhosts Storm (see Chapter 4). The four shields maps human development and psychology on to the passing of the four boreal seasons and the four cardinal directions. For example, south is associated with childhood, summer, the body, feelings emotions directly without interpretation, and being present to immediate experience. The north, by contrast, is associated with adulthood, winter, the intellect, serving one's community, and structure. The west is adolescence and the east is associated with elderhood. What began as a short five minute teaching from Storm, Foster and Little developed into a philosophical system to guide their work (see Foster and Little 1999). Guides use this framework to help participants focus their reasons for participating in a fast and it guides their efforts to reflect on participant's experiences (what guides call mirroring).

On each vision fast program, guides teach the four shields model to participants. It is a fairly brief teaching, usually covered in an afternoon on the second or third day of each program. In the course of my research, I found that the teaching resonates strongly with a few participants, and for many participants it does not seem to strongly factor into their experiences. While most people are struck by the idea of mapping psychological experience on to the physical world, there is so much anxiety related to the upcoming fast and so many preparations to make, that many participants do not seem to hold the teaching close. For guides, however, it is hugely important and frames their understanding of how fasts unfold.

Intention

Each participant is asked to develop an "intention" for their fast. What is they are claiming by going out and fasting? Usually, the intention takes the form a declarative statement. Guides hope that this helps participants focus their fast on acknowledging or claiming a transition that has already

occurred rather than hoping for the fast to facilitate a desired for transition. In the months leading up to the fast, each participant writes a "letter of intention" to their guides that states their reasons for choosing to fast. In the program, two days early in the program are devoted to helping participants refine their intentions. This process is the focus of preparations for the fast. Each participant spends about an hour in conversation with the guides about their intent while being witnessed by the other participants. The entire group sits in a circle, the guides and the participant talk, and the other participants listen to what is being said. The process helps participants focus their hopes for the upcoming fast and it also weaves the group together socially because participants beging to learn about each other's lives in the process.

Self generated ceremony

Before the fast, guides also teach a brief course on what they call self generated ceremony. This brief (one hour) class usually takes the form of the guides offering suggestions to participants on how they might craft their own rituals or ceremonies to guide their fast or to help make it meaningful. Using the four shields as a guide, the the guides offer suggestions on simple ceremonies for each of the four shields. A ritual for the west shield, for example, might be to go on a night walk, while a ritual for the north shield might be to make gifts for people in one's community. This class is often used as a time to talk about blending the spiritual or philosophical traditions that participants bring to the program with the four shields or place based activities.

Mirroring

Discussed at length in chapters three and five, mirroring is a process of reflective listening that guides use to help participants begin making sense of their experiences. In the days following the fast, each participant takes 20 minutes to share the story of their fast with the group. The guides

then spend the rest of the hour reflecting on the participants' story, a process that I often find amplifies affective components of the fast, but that some observers may experience as an interpretive listening process. As with the intention circles, mirroring happens in the presence of the entire group. Participants listen to each other as they share their stories and the guides witness those stories back to them.

Incorporation

On the last day of each program, the guides teach a class on incorporation, or how to begin integrating the experience with daily life. The school's work is inspired by rites of passage traditions around the world, most of which are community based. Rites of passage ceremonies have traditionally been experiences that many members of the community have gone through and therefore recognize the value of those experiences and can empathize with others when they undertake such an experience. This is often not the case with the school's programs. People travel from around the world to participate in the school's programs in part because they often do not have access to such place-based experiences in their own communities. Therefore, when they return home, people in their home communities may not be as able to empathize with participants' experiences or support their incorporation. In this class, guides discuss ways that participants might keep in touch with one another—email lists, social media groups, traditional mail, reunions—as well as daily practices to help keep the experience alive. Such daily practices might involve solo walks close to home, maintaining keepsakes from the experience, establishing a daily meditation practice, etc. Guides also suggest that participants connect with others close to their homes with whom they might do ceremonial walks, discuss their experiences, or even train to facilitate others' fasts.

Beyond these few key curricular pieces, the school offers very little structured teaching. The founders and many of the current guides emphasize that this minimal structure is to move focus

away from the guides themselves and to the experience that participants have on the land. Certainly, the curriculum that guides do teach has a significant impact on shaping participants' experiences, but I did find in the course of my research that the focus largely remains on the landscape itself and the participants' experiences rather than the guides or their facilitation.

Outline of the dissertation

The dissertation unfolds through three additional chapters and a brief conclusion. Chapters 2 and 4 offer the most description of the school's work and tell the stories of fasters' experiences through autoethnography and ethnography, respectively. Chapter 3 steps back to consider the relationships that school guides have had with Native American mentors and to ask broader questions about the relationship between the American wilderness tradition and the United States' colonial past and present.

Chapter 2

"Playing coyote: a ceremony of relationship, distance, and subjectivity," published in *Cultural Geographies,* is an autoethnography focused on my first experience with the vision fast ceremony. I begin the dissertation with an autoethnography because of one of the key methodological limitations of the study. The fasting portion of the ceremony being studied happens in solitude. As a researcher, there is no way for me to directly observe others' experiences without violating the human solitude integral to the experience. Thus, I begin with a description of my own experience because I can offer details of the experience that are not reliant on the storytelling sessions that follow the fast. In conversation with phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, theorists of animism, and geographic scholars of human subjectivity the chapter argues that experiential practices like the vision fast ceremony can be approached as a sort of therapy, a practice-oriented means through which to

experience the constitution of self in ways that diverge sharply from everyday, commonsense (at least for me and many other participants) assumptions of the relative autonomy of the human self. The coyote, as both a metaphor and a physical presence, is a central character in the chapter. I conceptualize the ceremony as a sort of therapy, a way to open a gap in the metaphysical border fence separating human subjectivity from the material and psychic more-than-human world, which leads to one of the central arguments of the dissertation. Despite enormous progress in articulating theories that describe the human self as more-than-human, and members of the more-than-human world (including landscapes) as subjects who participate in a common social world with people, the felt experience of that knowledge remains elusive. The chapter also engages geographic debates on the conceptual diffusion of subjectivity. Contemporary geographic theorizations of self and subjectivity tend to focus on the progressive deconstruction of the autonomous self. While the arguments of the chapter align with many of those arguments, I reorient the debate towards attention to the *experience* of subjectivity, arguing that recovering a sense of the human psyche as existing within a fabric constituted by all of life is both an enchantment of the world and a way to hold closer the fleeting felt sense of an animate, relational world.

Chapter 3

"Cultivating ecosophy: a dialog with the contemporary vision fast ceremony" is written as a contribution to a special issue on ecosophical theory published in *Geografiska Annaler: Series B* (edited by R. Shaw and Aiken 2017). Ecosophy is a term attributed to deep ecologist Arne Naess (2008) and to theorist and psychoanalyst Felix Guattari (2000), whose use of the concept emerged from his reading of Gregory Bateson. Ecosophy argues that "a global culture of a primarily techno-industrial nature is now encroaching upon all the world's milieu, desecrating living conditions … that nature and the nonhuman are valuable independent of their human interaction, and that geography must

contribute to ways of rethinking and practicing subjectivity that recognize this" (Shaw and Aiken 2017, 107). In the chapter, I attempt to address the question, "how can ecosophical subjectivities be nourished and provided space to grow?" By this, I mean, how can subjectivity, as something produced by elements that extend far beyond the human body, be perceived and worked with as such in order to develop felt ethical bonds that tie the human self to the more-than-human world?

Chapter three follows the story of one participant, whom I call Anna. The chapter continues my engagement with contemporary animist theorizing through the work of Val Plumwood. I pivot away from Merleau-Ponty and turn to Felix Guattari to ground my discussion of ecosophy and to better conceptualize the constitution of human subjectivity as comprising many diverse elements. Contrary to some readings of Merleau-Ponty as overly humanist or as relying on a more-or-less preconstituted self who communes with the world via perception, I read Merleau-Ponty as understanding the constitution of subjectivity as emergent from the processes of perception. What Guattari offers that Merleau-Ponty doesn't, however, is a theorization of the experience of subjectivity as an ephemeral product of what he calls "vectors of subjectification" and a sharp critical edge, by which he argues that capitalist social and economic systems flatten and limit the possible experiences of psyche through the widespread environmental damage that they cause. Thus, the ethics of paying close attention to the role that wild landscapes can play in the experience of self emerge more clearly in chapter two. I argue that the fast itself, and the storytelling sessions that follow, re-story subjectivity as an experienced effect of many components, rather than existing within the individual prior to experience. It is a narration of existential inquiry as an applied ethics of naming and tending to the more-than-human nature of human subjectivity and the personhood of nonhumans.

Chapter 4

"A ceremony that speaks across worlds: navigating ecocultural affinity and appropriation" examines the history of the school and its relationship to Native American mentors and practices. The school's non-Native founders and guides have been mentored by several Native teachers, which raises important questions about the meeting of conceptual worlds and the appropriation of knowledge and practice in a colonial context. This chapter considers these questions by examining the influential relationships school guides have had with Native mentors. The chapter discusses recent scholarly attention to creating dialog between Native and non-Native worlds and describes the school as a rich non-specialist setting in which to examine this meeting of worlds. After detailing the school's history, I place that history in the fraught context of the contemporaneous rise of the American counter-cultural environmental movement and the American Indian Movement. Complex ethical issues abound in the work described here, and the chapter aims to demonstrate the compelling texture and depth in a history that some critics have written off as spiritual tourism. The chapter closes by arguing that lines of affinity can connect disparate worlds, even as the specter of appropriation looms.

Chapter 4 was prepared for the *Handbook on Ecocultural Identity* (forthcoming from Routledge) and some of the language in the chapter reflects that project. Ecocultural identity is a concept that emerges from phenomenologist David Abram's work (1997). The handbook's editors interpret ecocultural identity as "materially and discursively constructed positionality, subjectivity, perception, and practice that inform one's emotional, embodied, ethical, and political sensibilities regarding the more than human world." My own interpretation of the term is simply an assertion that identity, culture, and ecology are deeply implicated in one another, though one never strictly determines the other. I argue, therefore, that the conceptual prejudices of Eurocentric traditions that presuppose a split between human and nature are surprisingly sticky and have produced a sort of conceptual madness that assumes the human psyche exists apart from the more-than-human world (see

Guattari 2000; Latour 2017; Shepard 1982). I use the history of the school to demonstrate how dialogues and practices that cross philosophical boundaries can facilitate a way out of that madness of the isolated psyche, even as they highlight the troubling power dynamics that persist in such encounters.

Chapter 5

In "Storytelling, Ceremony, and the Paradox of Thresholds" (unpublished), I return to ethnography and tell the story of Louisa, a woman who participated in two ceremonies that I had the opportunity to witness. The chapter meditates on the work that thresholds do in the school's programs. At first, they appear to mark a break from everyday space and a passage into an extraordinary space. In the storytelling that follows participants' fasts, however, guides often attempt to dissolve that threshold and suggest that participants can maintain an experience of the world as animate in everyday spaces. I connect the development of the perceptive faculty to perceive the world as animate and the self as emergent from that animate world to progressive socioecological movements for the rights of nature. The chapter also more thoroughly explores and develops the concept psyche through dialog with Jungian theory and the work of Laguna Pueblo scholar, Leslie Marmon Silko. Jungian thought has rarely been addressed in geography aside from the excellent papers by Peter Bishop published in the 1990's. I argue that "psyche" allows for dialog with theorizations of distributed subjectivity while maintaining a focus on the animacy of the landscape. Jung's thought was influenced by Pueblo philosophy and by moving between Jung's and Silko's thought I demonstrate one way that so-called Western and Indigenous knowledge worlds—sometimes thought of as opposites of one another—are deeply entwined.

I strive to show that the experience of fasting and the mirroring that follows it develop in participants the ability to perceive psyche, and their personal experience of it, as permeating the

landscape. I argue that the ambivalent ontological status of the threshold—a passage into an extraordinary space or simply a suspension of disbelief—allows one to conceptualize the ceremony not as opening onto a spiritual landscape but as instead resulting in a shift in the perceptual faculties of participants. The argument in Chapter Five resonates with the one made in Chapter One, that experience of the self as more-than-human is a therapeutic as well as deconstructive task.

Conclusion

In the conclusion to the dissertation, I return to the question, what sorts of socioecological futures do we want to create and how do we go about doing so? In the wilderness programs that I studied, I found that guides and participants strived for a socioecological future in which they can perceive the landscape as animate, as holding wisdom, and their own psyches as emergent from those animate landscapes. My research on the school's work ties into a broader geographic focus on experimentation and efforts to shape socioecological futures, and it also returns geographic attention to the American wilderness tradition, a fraught legacy in which scholars and practitioners have found both liberation and the continuing realities of genocide and exclusion. I argue that scholars can think of the nostalgia that many find in the wilderness tradition not as a fantasized past but as a sort of homesickness that can inspire future work. Therefore, I argue that the dissertation may lead scholars back to never-settled questions about the nature of nature. I suggest that future work could more explicitly tie geographic research on therapeutic landscapes to neuroscientific research on the psychological benefits of nature immersion as well as research on extraordinary states of consciousness. In both directions, there remains ample room to combine critical inquiry, creative experimentation, and descriptive prose to sketch the contours of new worlds towards which we might strive.

Chapter 2: Playing coyote: a ceremony of relationship, distance, and subjectivity

Setting the scene, a coyote discourse

Coyote and I have an odd relationship. Occasionally he visits me in my dreams. More often, I see him dashing across a highway, trotting through a field, or I spy tracks and know that our paths have crossed. Many people know Coyote as the trickster, the embodiment of paradox. Native American stories credit him (Coyote usually appears in such stories as a 'he') with stealing fire and besting giants (Dobie 1961; London and Pinola 2013), while scholars playfully name the pursuit of shifting truths a "coyote discourse" (Haraway 1988, 593). Coyote isn't malicious, but if he steps into your life, take a deep breath. Things may not proceed as planned.

While an individual coyote occasionally tosses my world into tumult, the population of North American coyotes have been busy flaunting fantasies of domination and control for over a century. Under the guise of making the west safe for cows and sheep, nearly 100,000 coyotes are killed in the U.S. every year, but coyote populations have exploded under the stress (Childs 2007). When threatened, coyotes change their breeding patterns. More females go into estrus more frequently and they give birth to larger litters. Essayist Craig Childs wrote, "if three-quarters of the world's coyote population were destroyed at once, within a year or two their numbers would return unfazed" (Childs 2007, 38). As both symbol and species, Coyote embodies the trickster.

This is a chapter about playing coyote along the borderlands of ontology and subjectivity. It is not a chapter about the subjectivity of coyotes as such. Instead, what I will offer is a narrative interpretation of human subjectivity—mine in this case—as an intersubjective experience, a sense of self that emerges in relationship with a coyote and the land that we shared for a brief time.

Geographers have largely moved beyond dualist ontologies that insist on strict divisions between nature and culture, human and animal, or mind and materiality, and nondual descriptions of

life and experience, relational ontologies, have swept through geography and adjacent disciplines (Braun 2005; 2006; 2008; Castree 2003; 2004; Castree and Nash 2006). Critiques of the humanist tradition complement this work by dismantling the idea of the human self as preexisting either embodiment or experience (K. Anderson 2007; Braidotti 2013; Castree et al. 2004), and literature on the subjectivity of nonhumans and of the land itself expands the social world expands beyond humans (Buller 2015; de la Cadena 2010; Haraway 2003; Kimmerer 2013; Panelli 2010; Plumwood 2013; Wolch and Emel 1998). Some particularly striking work in this vein is directed towards establishing a more-than-human ethics of care (Fisher 2013b; Plumwood 2002; Whatmore 2002).

And yet, the felt experience of relationality remains frustratingly elusive. For many of us, everyday understandings of life too often remain rooted in dualisms. It can even be a struggle to effectively write the world in a relational way because of the subject and predicate structure of the English language (Barad 2003). Felt experiences of relationality are important both to help further our conceptual understanding of subjectivity and because many argue that effective motivation and commitment to address socio-ecological crisis comes from affective attachments, much more so than from cognitive awareness or "negative" emotions like fear and shame that so often dominate environmental politics (Fisher 2013b; Lertzman 2015; Macy 1995; Milton 2003; D. B. Rose 2011; Schauffler 2003; W. Shaw and Bonnett 2016; B. R. Taylor 2010).

I am not alone in finding the felt experience of relationality elusive. Jane Bennett, for example, writes that even if she is right about her vital materialism, it remains "hard to discern it, and, once discerned, hard to keep focused on. It is too close and too fugitive, as much wind as thing, impetus as entity, a movement always on the way to becoming otherwise" (Bennett 2009, 119). Put another way, perception of our world as relational hides from itself. While many say with confidence that a subject is contingent and ephemeral, a "hollow, or a fold that was made and that can be unmade" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 223), declaring this enigmatic truth is not the same as living it

This challenge calls for experimentation. In this chapter, I narrate one attempt to look beyond the academy in order to engage "practices that amplify other sensory, bodily and affective registers" (Whatmore 2004, 1362; see Gibson-Graham 2008). Through the experience of a vision fast ceremony, a ten day program centered on four days of fasting alone in a wild landscape, I ask, how can practices like this help to connect the necessarily dense language and neologisms of the study of subjectivity and relational ontologies to the rich tapestry of lived experience? Through story and theory, I offer a conversation that explores the vision fast ceremony as a more-than-human therapy, an experiment in cultivating not just knowledge, but experience of the world as enchanted, animate, and relational to its core. To do so, I write from the dual perspectives of a geographer and a psychotherapist (see Bondi 2005).[1]

I have two goals. My immersion in the experience of the vision fast ceremony and the chapter itself are presented as border crossings, movements between story and theory that are presented more as productive experiments with subjectivity than as a critical deconstruction of the practice or of the human subject. I do so in order to consider how dialogs between academic theorizing and experiential practices can nudge us towards experiencing the world and ourselves as always-emerging from within relationships that cross species boundaries. It is an attempt to narrate how a practice, like this fast, offers the potential to experience a relational ontology that may be present in everyday life but remains difficult to perceive or otherwise feel. Second, I argue that there is a therapeutic element to this experimentation with subjectivity. My argument is in affinity with post or more-than human scholarship that critiques the autonomous human subject and theorizes it in increasingly diffuse terms. However, in describing this ceremony as a more-than-human therapy, I argue that scholarship on human subjectivity should also emphasize its felt experience as well as its

[1] Before becoming a geographer, I worked as a psychotherapist. I worked mainly in wilderness therapy programs, which are loosely framed around a similar rites of passage model as the vision fast ceremony.

conceptual deconstruction. The felt experience of the human self as a more-than-human production can help to strengthen ethical bonds with the nonhuman others with whom we share the social world and who help to produce our sense of self.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I begin by introducing two key concepts that enliven the narrative: Merleau-Ponty's writing on subjectivity and new animism. Next, I narrate my experience with the vision fast ceremony. I then offer an interpretation of the experience as a more-than-human therapy. I situate this argument in relation to other studies of subjectivity in cultural geography and argue for the importance of paying attention to the experiential constitution of subjectivity as well as its conceptual diffusion. I conclude with some thoughts on the world-building potential of intertwining theoretical inquiry and experimental practice.

Merleau-Ponty and the ephemeral subject

For the twentieth century French phenomenologist, Maurice Merlau-Ponty, the borders between self and other are shifting and ambiguous, they emerge out of one's experience of living in the world only to fade again as experience proceeds. Neither subject nor object, self nor other, have a definitive outside and each are forever on the verge of coming into being. He writes, "We have the experience of an I, not in the sense of absolute subjectivity, but rather one that is indivisibly unmade and remade by the course of time." To perceive an object in the world, "I abandon myself to it, I plunge into this mystery, and it 'thinks itself in me'" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 228).[2] The "me," in this case, is pre-personal, one who "perceives in me, and not that I perceive" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 223).

[2] Recent scholarship in geography on Merleau-Ponty often focuses on his last work, *The Visible and Invisible (*1968*),* which shifted more explicitly to ontology (see Simonsen 2013; Ash and Simpson 2016; Wylie 2002). I tend to agree with philosopher Taylor Carman (2008) that Merleau-Ponty's later work is an extension, not a radical break, of his earlier thought. In this chapter I emphasize *The Phenomenology of Perception* because of how often Merleau-Ponty explicitly reflects on the experience of subjectivity.

His point is that this work of perception is not that of an autonomous subject who preexists perception, but that the always shifting experience of being a subject arises from this presubjective, embodied, ongoing experience of being in the world. Ambiguous, enigmatic, and immanent to the "continuous birth of the world" (Ingold 2006, 11), this self in whom others think is nevertheless a meaningful center of our experience and a place to return to as we critically reflect on our experience in the world.

Animism

The addition of an animist perspective to Merleau-Ponty's ephemeral subjectivity widens his perspective beyond the human and helps to redirect the human exceptionalism that is still present in some contemporary phenomenological scholarship (see Simonsen 2013; cf Ash and Simpson 2016). Animism offers an ontology that recognizes nonhuman others as intentional subjects with whom we humans share a common social world. It is a "condition of being alive to the world" in which many kinds of beings "continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence" (Ingold 2006, 10). Animism suggests "that humans are but one extension of Earth's ability to know" and that it is our responsibility "to learn to take our place in a community of knowers, only some of whom are human" (Stuckey 2010, 203). It is not just a focus on the relational construction of subjects, but also on their potential for ongoing interaction and communication. For me, animism emphasizes cultivating the willingness and ability to listen and attend to others as soulful creatures who might have something to say.

The term animism has traditionally been associated with indigenous knowledges, but it is increasingly being applied under the monikers "new" or "contemporary" animism as a conceptual frame or guide for people like me who are working their way through the prejudices of Western philosophy. There is a danger here of imposing a fictional unity on the diverse philosophical worlds

upon which animist scholarship draws, but it is useful as an aspirational concept in the sense that it points towards the goal of understanding and experiencing the social world as a lively, more-than-human, place full of soulful beings.[3] This is a far cry from scholars' initial use of the term animism as a "colonial slur," as code for primitive (G. Harvey 2006, 8). Perhaps that history is one reason why few indigenous scholars apply the label to themselves. "We just call it tradition," says Linda Hogan (2013).

Animism assumes a dialogical world so that knowing "always implies [the] possibility of being known as well" (Stuckey 2010, 190). That other knower may be a birch tree, a raven, or a landscape, among others (Perluss 2012; D. B. Rose 2011; Stuckey 2012). If arguments concerning the social construction of nature pointed out the extent to which humans produce natures, animism emphasizes attunement to how others produce us and the relationships that can form across the borders of significant otherness (Castree and Braun 2001). My use of animist philosophy in this chapter is not an attempt to get inside the lifeworlds of others, like coyote (see Uexküll 2010). It is an effort to lay a conceptual foundation whereby the subjectivity of more-than-human others can be assumed and I can explore the constitution of my own subjectivity as arising in dialog with those others.

The Vision Fast narrated

My story starts in Death Valley. I arrived shortly after the winter solstice, coming from my home on the Southern edge of the Colorado Plateau in Utah, a land of piñon pine, juniper trees, sage brush, and a sea of red and white sandstone cliffs, mesas, and hoodoos. A desert, but not a

[3] In order to develop a contemporary philosophy of animism, scholars draw on a plurality of traditions including South Indian hunter-gatherers (Bird-David 1999), circumpolar hunters, Amazonian cultures (Viveiros de Castro 1998), and Australian Aborigines (Plumwood 2013; van Dooren and Rose 2016).

desert like Death Valley where a scrubby bush with waxy green leaves called creosote covers the valley floors. There's not much else. In spring, the creosote bushes improbably explode with little yellow flowers, but at this time of year they simply hang on, their roots keeping the whole place from blowing away.

Ten of us came together to participate in the vision fast ceremony. The others came from as near as Los Angeles and as far away as Germany. It's a rite of passage, a ritual used to mark one's transition from one phase of life to another. Contemporary practitioners of the ceremony draw on both Native American and Western traditions in order to create a unique ceremony tuned for the contemporary task of suturing the experiential gap between human selves and "nature."[4] The heart of the experience is a four-day solo. Four days and nights camped alone, without food. It's a journey out of everyday physical and psychic worlds into a liminal space where the commonsense boundaries between the two tend to dissolve. Not eating tends to nudge you into an altered state. A deep meditation sneaks up, arriving slowly enough that it's difficult to mark its entrance until the altered state has made itself at home, shifting your experience of the world in subtle but powerful ways.

We began with several days of preparation. We adjusted to our temporary home, sheltering ourselves from the infamous Mojave winds by tucking into small coves made by finger-like gypsum ridges that rose out of the campground. Our guides were two women from strikingly different backgrounds. Betsy is a psychologist trained in the Jungian tradition. Emerald found her education way off the grid, living and learning with Cheyenne, Lakota, and Navajo practitioners for years. The contrast between them is typical of this rites of passage community. Since the late 1960's, university professors, mental health professionals, back to the landers, and wilderness guides have been busy

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[4] The interface between so-called Western and Indigenous traditions in this practice is an important topic that I address in-depth in Chapter 3.

working with each other to retune the ancient practice for a contemporary audience. Our guides taught us the four shields, a model of human development interpreted through the passing of the seasons (Foster and Little 1999). It's an attempt to relocate psyche from the confines of the human mind out into the world. It shifts psyche from a deeply personal possession to something more akin to a participatory field.

I use the term psyche in the Jungian sense and embrace its enigma. Jung resists a full and clear definition, writing, "Our psyche is part of nature and its enigma is as limitless. Thus we cannot define either the psyche or nature" (Jung 1964, 23). It is a way to imagine psyche as a collective production (Abram 2010). Hillman extended Jung's work with his concept of the "anima mundi" or soul of the world, suggesting that the distinction between interior psychological experience and material reality was false. Instead he argued that "psyche includes the world—all things offer soul" (Hillman 1992, 91). Psyche then becomes a connective tissue, "the forgotten third between matter and spirit, man and world, inner and outer" (Avens 1982, 183).[5]

Coyote made his entrance while I was sharing my 'intentions' with the group. Each faster has the opportunity to talk through the upcoming fast with the guides and other participants. What question will guide the experience? What do you hope to find or to leave in the desert? I hadn't thought through these questions well. Curiosity had drawn me to the ceremony. I had been hearing about it in personal and academic circles, and a mentor encouraged me to participate. But I needed a better reason to sit in this circle than to be a tourist. So, I spoke about reconnecting with my emotions. I was working as a psychotherapist and my days were filled with the pain, conflicts, and turmoil of others. I had become detached. As a therapist, it's a great skill to be able to work with emotion without actually feeling it oneself. As a human being, it's called being cold, intellectual, out

[5] The dissertation returns to the topic of psyche and its relationship to landscape in Chapter 4.

of touch. It's lonely. I asked to uncover that part of me I had packed away to get my feelings moving again.

As I spoke about this with the group, a coyote walked up the gypsum finger to my right. He paused on the ridge, perhaps a hundred feet away, and we stared at one another. The coyote seemed big. Desert coyotes tend to be small and scrappy, weighing maybe twenty pounds. This one appeared nearly twice that size, perhaps because the dumpsters in the campground provided more protein than the scrawny field mice and jackrabbits that ran through the creosote. My anxiety ticked up at the entrance of this trickster. Certainly, I felt trepidation about not eating for four days, but I was confident about my ability to handle the rigors of the fast. As a wilderness guide, I had weathered all sorts of adventures. I was mistaken and Coyote said as much.

With the specter of Coyote ever present, my fast unfolded as an arduous journey full of sickness and doubt. Once Emerald and Betsy offered me their blessings with sage smoke and hugs, I walked to my camp, which I had picked out the previous day. It sat at the foot of a nob of chunky basalt rising up out of a sea of creosote in an infrequently traveled part of the park. After laying out my sleeping bag and pad, I sat down to wait. For four days. I quickly started to wonder what could have driven me to a choice as foolish as four days and nights alone and without food. The questions and struggles I had been so eager to face came rushing at me with an overwhelming intensity. My anxiety overtook me. My thoughts raced and my stomach turned as waves of undifferentiated emotion poured over me. I began to restlessly wander the stark desert, trying to displace my agitation and anxiety onto the land itself.

Each day, I climbed a ridge above my camp and stared across the expanse of Death Valley, watched the circling hawks, and longed for vision. An insight, a feeling of calm, a flash of understanding. I received none. Instead, I watched the sun slowly make its way across the achingly blue sky while hawks rode the thermals, keeping an eye out for scurrying mice or perhaps simply

enjoying the ride. I had long identified with hawks, admiring their vision and independence. They appeared in my life at timely moments, offering guidance, but now it was as if they were studiously ignoring me. The desert had slowly ceased to be simply the desert and I began to feel as if I were wandering through seldom explored recesses of psyche. Towards the end of each day I retreated back to the valley, still feeling agitated and out of place. I lay through the nights, sleeping fitfully and never feeling rested.

Gradually, my attention shifted to the sparse creosote bushes that surrounded my camp. Sparrows flitted through them each morning and afternoon, and, as I sat and listened, their chatter drew my attention down from the ridge tops and solitary hawks to the sparrows and their community here in the valley. My agitation gradually subsided. I felt calmer in their presence and was struck by the contrast between the vocal community of sparrows that moved together through the brush and the silent, solitary, hawks floating on the distant winds. Coyote, ever the shapeshifter, morphed from canid to raptor, from raptor to passerine.

The paradox and enigma of the ceremony began to unfold. My sense of self had long been caught up in the image of the independent hawk, but the sparrows brought me back to earth, drew my attention to how my own community produced me. Emerald, one of the guides, would later say, "Hawk landed, looked in the mirror, and saw a sparrow staring back."

The fast temporarily separated me from others, but that distance amplified our connections. It helped me better appreciate how Emerald and Betsy held the space for my experience and how Coyote's cautionary jaunt through our circle pricked my awareness so that I could listen to the sparrows with whom I shared the valley for a few days. I rode unpredictable swells of emotion. I felt joy and gratitude for the communities that nurtured me here in Death Valley and in my life at home. Yet, I also plunged into grief as I faced the many ways that I distance myself from others. At times, I've needed the vision and distance of hawks, but in that moment when my own intentions were

upset, a space opened up for me to listen to others whom I would normally overlook. Radically different creatures in our own right, Sparrow, Hawk, Gypsum, Sky, Creosote, Coyote, and Human nevertheless participate in and bear witness to the "continuous birth of the world" (Merleau-Ponty 1964; Ingold 2006).

More-than-human therapy

I want to begin an interpretation of this experience by suggesting that the contemporary vision fast ceremony be thought of as a more-than-human therapy, a way to open a gap in the metaphysical border fence separating human subjectivity from the material and psychic more-than-human world. More-than-human scholarship clearly articulates that as humans we have never achieved an empirical or categorical separation from the rest of life, no matter how far down the humanist rabbit hole certain knowledge traditions may have fallen (Barad 2003; Gane 2006; Whatmore 2002). We do, however, continue to wrestle with how to set aside the anxious bordering processes that have long defined both what it is to be human and attempted to define women and people of color as less human than others (K. Anderson 2007; Griffin 1980; Merchant 1980). Therefore, healing from the loss of relationship brought about by these anxious bordering practices is needed, in addition to the critical deconstruction of "the human." By healing I do not mean to reconstitute an autonomous human self. Far from it. Instead, I mean that a therapeutic experience of the self as emergent from within the more-than-human world helps to weave the critical work of diffusing the human subject with the experiential task of learning to listen and attend to the "others" who constitute "me."

Therapy can mean many things. Here, I use the word therapy in the tradition of existential psychotherapy where the therapist and client cultivate an intentional relationship whose dynamics they persistently investigate. More than the use of any particular therapeutic technique or specific

insights gained in the process, the experience of relationship, vulnerability, conflict, and empathy works to facilitate healing (Rogers 1961). Having walked similar paths with others, an effective therapist in this sense acts as a "fellow traveler," facilitating consistent reflection on the experience of relationship so that vague feelings, twisted thoughts, and dysfunctional dynamics percolate to the surface (Yalom 2009). It is this reflexive conversation, the ongoing investigation of the relationship itself, that differentiates the therapeutic dyad from everyday relationships. While difficult and often fraught with conflict, successful therapeutic encounters exaggerate and draw attention to the dynamics driving the therapist-client relationship. This ongoing reflection allows the client to more consciously attend to the relationship, creating both the space and the capacity to try different, perhaps more effective, approaches to intra and inter personal relationships. The contemporary vision fast ceremony becomes a more-than-human therapy by shifting how the boundaries between the material, psychic, and symbolic worlds are enacted.

Consider coyote. Coyote's reputation as a trickster has a deep social history. The stories of coyote stealing fire and besting giants referenced in the introduction stretch back for centuries. More recently, the proliferation of coyotes across the continent in the face of intense predation by humans is the embodiment of the trickster story across an entire population. When coyote made his appearance in our circle while I prepared for my fast, my understanding of the significance of its presence was clearly influenced by coyote's reputation. So were my guides who registered its entrance as a reason to take pause. They understood coyote as saying something akin to, "Set your intentions, but don't hold them too close." One could understand this as a chance encounter upon which meaning was projected, which would reinforce the boundary between human meaning making and the more-than-human world. In a more-than-human therapeutic space, however, my guides actively encouraged me not to worry too much about discerning between projection and communication. Instead of questioning whether others such as the coyote could "speak" or

otherwise participate in meaning making, instead I was invited to see what arises when that participation is assumed. The ceremonial space was offered as a space of experimentation. By assuming the potential symbolic value of each encounter, I became free to set aside questions such as discerning between projection and communication in order to be present to the experiment.

More subtle than coyote's dramatic entrance, my sense of self shifted in intersubjective encounters with the hawks, sparrows, and the creosote bush landscape. With animism providing a foundational posture of receptivity to consider these others as subjects who participate in the same common psychic field as people, I'll now delve a bit further into Merleau-Ponty's work to think through encountering self and meaning in the world. Asserting that one can be in this sort of relationship with the more-than-human world should in no way diminish the alterity of others. Rather, it embraces Haraway's paradox of always holding relationship and otherness together. The capacity for relationship makes the tangle possible. Significant otherness keeps it interesting.

Merleau-Ponty wrote the well-known phrase that the world is the "*homeland* of our thoughts" in the context of a critique against empiricism as a way of seeing the world that strictly divided materiality and meaning (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 26 italics in original). He argued that meaning and understanding exist in the world, they are not projected upon it or layered on top of it. We find that meaning in relationship with others and with their milieu, what some now call an interworld (Simonsen 2013). Merleau-Ponty was suggesting that knowledge and feeling are encountered and constituted beyond the physical body or mind. One encounters something's sense "not behind appearances," but as "a signification that descends into the world and begins to exist there and that can only be fully understood by attempting to see it there, in its place" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 333–34). As a "knot of living significations" the self arises, dissipates, and is renewed through these encounters in the world (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 153).

Throughout my fast, I wandered the ridge tops feeling lonely, anxious, unsettled and out of place. I looked to the solitary hawks but felt as if they had consciously retreated from me. I found no sense of relationship in their distant flight. However, during the many hours that I spent at my camp sitting amongst the creosote bushes, watching and listening to the sparrows, my world shifted. I found a feeling of community and an awareness of the importance of my community in the world that the creosote bushes, sparrows, and I produced and shared. Self arose out of a communion. As Merleau-Ponty would say, "I deliver over my body…to this manner of vibrating and of filling space named" creosote or sparrow (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 219). Through Merleau-Ponty and the posture of animism I can begin to appreciate how I encounter meaning *in* my experience of the world and to think of the creosote and sparrows as other ephemeral subjects also engaged in this meaningful encounter. Intrasubjective understanding flourished through attention to more-than-human *inter*subjectivity.

Set in the wild landscape of Death Valley and framed as a therapeutic space, the fast allowed me to render the paradoxical movement between self and other strange enough to pay attention to it. Eugen Fink, who worked with Husserl, described the practice of phenomenology as having a "'wonder' before the world" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 14). For Husserl, the idea was to loosen "the intentional threads that connect us to the world in order to make them appear" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 14). To stand in wonder *before* the world, however, suggests that one can somehow adopt the perspective of an outsider looking in on the world. One of Merleau-Ponty's great contributions was to see that wonderment was not the adoption of an outsider's perspective but a painstaking act of immanent attention. Rather than interrupting one's connection to the world he sought to delve into the "thickness of being" to understand the constitution of subjects.

Over and over again, writers have described the capacity of wild places to spark an almost magical sense wonderment not by standing back, but by walking into landscapes that are almost

magical in their ability to produce awe. In the famous essay, "The Trouble with Wilderness," William Cronon writes, "the state of mind that today most defines wilderness is *wonder*. The striking power of the wild is that wonder in the face of it requires not an act of will, but forces itself upon us" (Cronon 1996, 23). Rachel Carson, a guiding light of the American environmental movement, found in wild places the potential to cultivate "a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years" (Carson 1956, 46). This sense of wonder in the face of the wild, the alterity that it presents, and the way that it challenges one's everyday sense of the world lies at the heart of writings on the "wilderness effect" and the "ecological self" (Fisher 2013b; Greenway 1995; 2009; Matthews 2002). Together with the crafting of a ceremonial space, vision fast participants' immersion in a wild space away from human community creates an opportunity to render perceptible the ongoing production of an ephemeral self that is easy to overlook in daily life.

Geographers trained to be skeptical of natures and their essentialist cargo may feel worried at this point. Am I suggesting a return to a romantic imagination of nature through adventure in a constructed wilderness? Important critiques have been made along these lines. Some argue that mourning for an imagined nature is a defining psychic quality of (post)modernity, an era diagnosed as manic-depressive, swinging between feeling nostalgic for a lost idyll or lapsing into technological euphoria (Braidotti 2013; Braun 2002). These are important critiques of colonial constructions of nature; I am sympathetic to the claim that no pristine nature exists and that significant violence has been done in its name (Cronon 1996; Kosek 2006; Sutter 2013; White 1995). We must be cautious in our evaluation of what has been lost. However, I interpret these feelings of loss less as a desire for an imagined pure nature than as a longing for relationship and connection. What I am describing as a more-than-human therapy is working through alienation towards relationship, rather than a retreat to an imagined nature.

A reflection for geography

What I hope this chapter offers to cultural geography is both a sense of why we should reflect on the experience of subjectivity, even as our conceptual understanding of the human self becomes increasingly diffuse and one way that we can go about doing that. Mine is by no means the first attempt by geographers to explore subjectivity through embodied practices. John Wylie's meditations on vision and walking, for example, blend creative writing styles, embodied practice, and critical reflection on phenomenology to consider the relationship between self and landscape (Wylie 2002; see Hawkins 2015). Scholarship in the nonrepresentational vein considers dance, interactions with animals, affects, and more (B. Anderson 2006; B. Anderson and Harrison 2010; Thrift 2008; 2004). Looking further back in the discipline's history, forty years ago Buttimer's work articulated a geography of lived experience and called for giving attention to practices like yoga to understand the self as an embodied self, something much richer than the purely rational subject employed by quantitative approaches at the time (Buttimer 1976).[6] However, sharp critiques were leveled against Buttimer and other humanist geographers for too often assuming a more-or-less intact subject that did not account for difference, and contemporary geographies of subjectivity tend towards the diffusion or deconstruction of the human subject (Massey 1994; G. Rose 1993). Rose's article, "Pilgrims: an ethnography of sacredness," is an eloquent example. He argues for a conception of identity where "there is no abiding interiority, where identity is wholly and primordially called" (M. Rose 2010, 522). In this sense, subjectivity is not something "we have" but that arrives wholly from the outside as a gift, an argument inspired by Levinas.

[6] Buttimer's work is one of several notable contributions to the humanist turn (see Tuan 1976; Relph 1976; Seamon 1979).

I hope this chapter occupies an ambivalent space, one that is indebted to these poststructural deconstructions of subjectivity but that maintains one's "individual" sense of self as an ambiguous center of experience. The critical fracturing of concepts like subjectivity and the human have furthered our understanding of both concepts, but their continued diffusion should not be an end in itself. I want to affirm inquiry into the experience of subjectivity as a way of being. The "astonishing feat" of inquiries into subjectivity is to see that the subject contains "more than it is possible to contain" (Lévinas 1969, 27). Through the inquiry, we establish bonds with the others who help to constitute who "we" are. My sense of myself as produced in community was a gift both from the hawks that seemed to ignore me and from the sparrows who visited my camp and to whom I listened. Recovering a sense of the human psyche as existing within a fabric constituted by all of life is both an enchantment of the world and a way to hold closer to ourselves the fleeting felt experience of an animate, relational world.

Doubt remains, of course. One of my guides writes, "I too have doubts about the intersubjectivity of the outer world. I wonder if I'm just projecting my thoughts onto things, anthropomorphizing, or if I'm just making it all up." However, she also says, "My goal as an instructor is to help students (and myself) suspend, if only for a moment, the culturally bred skepticism that the material world is lifeless, unfeeling, and unresponsive" (Perluss 2012, 181). Practices like the vision fast do not prove that nonhuman others are animate, nor do they discern between imagination and communication, projection and co-constitution. That isn't the point. Rather, as an experiment in "new" or "contemporary" animism, they provide an opportunity to experience a world beyond the rigid enactment of boundaries between so-called natural and social, material and psychic worlds (de la Cadena 2010; Latour 1993; Viveiros de Castro 1998).

Where to from here?

My interpretations are provisional and speculative. I don't know with any familiar kind of verifiable certainty what the coyote's intention was in visiting our circle, nor do I know if the hawks ignored me or what sense the sparrows had of our interactions on the valley floor. The ambiguity of the experience is essential to its richness. As an experiment beyond the bounds of traditional academic inquiry, I can say that the vision fast affords me a different way to dance with the production of self, other, and world in a deeply felt and experiential sense. Similar to the way a good therapist exaggerates interpersonal dynamics in order to facilitate reflection, the experience offered me an exaggerated glimpse of the self in the world, produced in relationship with strange, but accessible, others. In this sense, the contemporary vision fast ceremony offers a way to materialize a relational ontology that can otherwise feel more like a thought experiment than a lived reality. While I am not suggesting that everyone who reads this chapter needs to complete their own, I do ask that as academics we thoughtfully consider the practice as one way to look beyond the academy in order to imagine and experience our world as an animate place.

Further, scholarly descriptions of experimental practices can be thought as "performative ontological projects" engagements with practices beyond the academy that can do much more than critique (Gibson-Graham 2008). Against a sort of "doomed to fail" thinking that begins from a position of strong critique, academics can instead cultivate the "space and freedom" for experiments like this one to flourish (Gibson-Graham 2008, 8). By working to connect practices with academic discourses we can build the paths that allow knowledge to flow more smoothly between sites. Ultimately, ontology can become "the effect instead of the ground of knowledge" (Gibson-Graham 2008, 8). Our analytic work can participate in the creation of the worlds that we inhabit and write about.

In this chapter I sought to weave together Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and animism to offer an interpretive description of the contemporary vision fast ceremony. In doing so, I demonstrated

how engagement with experimental practices can enrich efforts to bring relational worlds to life. I worked to effect a border-crossing between animist and phenomenological traditions, demonstrating that an animist posture helps to cultivate a receptivity to nonhuman others participating in human social worlds. As a more-than-human therapy, I argued that reflection on the constitution of subjectivity in relationship with an animate world can shift one's sense of self and form bonds with the others through whom one is produced. The chapter offers one model for weaving together scholarly work with practices beyond the academy.

I envision a dialog that travels from sites of experimental practice to academia and back again. While critique has an essential place in geographic scholarship, we ought to also seek to identify opportunities to productively nurture experiments geared towards producing the sorts of worlds we want to inhabit. As scholars describe and interpret practices that intersect—albeit in messy and incomplete ways—with our theoretical goals we begin to produce a knowledge that itself crosses borders, enacting the boundaries of the academy in more fluid ways so that those of us who are committed to "the more-than-human project" can take seriously the disciplines, practices, and others who speak different languages. Some of our work is translation, which I've attempted to do here, but much of it is simply cultivating the willingness to actively listen and allowing ourselves to be transformed by what we hear.

Chapter 3: Cultivating Ecosophy: A Dialog with the Contemporary Vision Fast Ceremony

Preamble

This story begins in the Inyo mountains, an ancient range that rises up out of California's Owens valley, marking the beginning of the seemingly endless undulations of basins and mountain ranges that extend all the way to the Colorado Plateau and Utah's Wasatch Range, hundreds of miles to the east. The basins are covered in sage. As the ranges rise up, the sage gives way to pinyon-juniper forest, then white pine and bristlecones at the highest elevations. Basin, range, repeat.

Writer Mary Austin called this place the land of lost borders, a name she learned from Paiute friends. She wrote, it is a place "where the boundary of soul and sense is as faint as a trail in a sand-storm … where the names mean something" (Austin 1987, 3). For the Paiute people who lived prior to white colonization, lost borders referred to how territorial boundaries between groups grew fuzzy in the desert, determined more by access to ephemeral water sources than hard territorial demarcations. Austin added another layer of psychic significance to the name as she chronicled the lives of white miners and settlers along with Paiute people adapting to life under colonization.

I am here to visit the School of Lost Borders (SOLB), a place I have come to understand as a practical laboratory of subjectivity. For 40 years, guides from the school have been facilitating solo wilderness experiences they call vision fast ceremonies in the Inyo mountains and the nearby Death Valley. I will refer to it as the contemporary vision fast ceremony to distinguish it from related practices, especially the Native American tradition of the Vision Quest, which is an important inspiration for the school's work. Participants in their programs travel from across the United States and Europe to take part in SOLB offerings. When the group gathers, the first few days are spent establishing a context and foundation for the approaching fast. Guides offer what they call the "bare bones," a minimal structure for the fast so that participants can engage it through their own cultural,

spiritual, and philosophical perspectives. One element of the bare bones is a model that maps human psychological development as a spiral roughly mirrored by the passing of the four boreal seasons and the four cardinal directions. Mapping human development onto the land provides a frame for participants to guide their experience in relationship to place. Guides teach some basic elements of what they call self-generated ceremony, which are rituals, tasks, or tools that participants might use to shape their own experience, but they generally avoid prescribing how the fast should unfold in order to keep it approachable to people from diverse faith and cultural backgrounds. Participants then trudge into the desert and fast alone for four days and nights. They are without human company unless an emergency arises. In the process, they face traumas and life transitions, play with the boundaries of subjectivity, and learn to experience the land and its more-than-human communities as animate—full of ensouled nonhuman others to whom we owe ethical obligations and who might have something to say. Afterwards, they return to tell their stories and listen to the guides offer an interpretive reflection of each story, a process I will explain below. I have come to the school following a hunch that their work might speak to those of us in the academy struggling to not only describe, but experience, subjectivity as immanent to an animate earth (Collard, Dempsey, and Sundberg 2015; Country et al. 2016; 2015; van Dooren and Rose 2016; D. B. Rose 2013; Whatmore 2002). I intend to encourage a conversation between practitioners and scholars, connecting the methodologies of experiential immersion and critical reflection.

At the moment, I am seated in the sparse shade of pinyon pine and juniper trees, circled up with 15 or so others. The heat of the afternoon sun fills the air with the scent of pinyon sap. The two-note whistle of mountain chickadees blend with the movement of air through the trees, the occasional rumble of a motorcycle travelling down the nearby highway, and the sounds of human conversation. I am absorbed in this place and the story unfolding before me in the circle.

Anna, a participant in this vision fast ceremony, sits rapt with attention, tears streaming down her face as Betsy, one of the guides, touches her shoulder with a piece of Bristlecone pine.[7] The bristlecones grow just up the hill from us. Some are as old as 4000 or 5000 years and they have witnessed the passing of the seasons since before the Greeks started arguing about subjectivity. Anna has just finished telling the story of her fast to our group and she is listening as Betsy 'mirrors' it back to her. Mirroring is a process of interpretive listening through which individual fasters' stories become a collective production of the more-than-human social world, upon which I elaborate below. Anna had experienced her fast as somewhat lonely, lethargic, and "boring." It lacked the "magical charge" that she often associated with ceremonies like these. However, it was punctuated by one "magical" sunrise that she came to understand as a way to claim that she had moved beyond the grief of miscarriage and the death of her mother. Betsy says, "the heart of ordinary magic beats inside of her. The only thing I know for certain is that the sun will rise again. If that's not magic, what is? If it can't be ordinary, it can't be magic."

Introduction

As a contribution to this special issue on ecosophical geographies (see R. Shaw and Aiken 2017), this chapter considers the practice of the contemporary vision fast ceremony at the School of Lost Borders (SOLB), explored here through Anna's story, as an ecosophical practice. Ecosophy is a term I borrow from Felix Guattari (2000) who used it to name the philosophical and activist work needed to confront the material, social, and psychic dimensions of ecological crisis. I will delve into a more thorough definition of ecosophy shortly. I offer this narrative and its interpretation as one articulation of the practice of ecosophy, not as a definitive statement of how ecosophy must be

[7] Anna is a pseudonym. Betsy is not. Real names are used for school guides, who often publish or maintain a public presence with regard to their work. Participants are given pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

practiced. I do so to open a path for exploration rather than to fix a solution. It is my assertion that experiential practices that can encourage the felt experience of the more-than-human world as an animate and enchanted place are an important component of efforts to break free of dominant subjectivities that tend to objectify others. These experiential practices have the potential to cultivate creative ways of becoming alive to intersubjective relationships that traverse the boundaries of species and materiality. Such practices help to develop the ethical commitment and political will to confront the complex entanglements that produce socio-ecological crises such as climate change, species loss, and environmental degradation (Kahn 1999; Macy 1995; W. Shaw and Bonnett 2016).

I have structured the chapter in the following way. I first offer a brief note on methodology. Next, I introduce the two theoretical influences that I will draw upon in my interpretation, Felix Guattari's ecosophy and Val Plumwood's work, which she ultimately termed philosophical animism. I then return to Anna's story, first introduced in the preamble, and offer a detailed account of her experience of the contemporary vision fast ceremony. I interpret Anna's experience through Guattari and Plumwood in order to offer a sense of her subjectivity as arising from immanent relationship with the more-than-human world and a sense of the others with whom she interacts as animate, soulful beings. I hope this leads to an appreciation of both her experience and the practice of the fast as an experiential instantiation of ecosophy. Finally, I consider objections that might construe the practice as a nostalgic yearning for an authentic self rooted in a romantic nature, and respond by showing how the interpretation offered here presents a richer account of the practice that puts it in dialog with understandings of self and nature that do not rely on essential definitions of either.

A note on methodology

This chapter draws upon fieldwork in SOLB programs, which I began in 2014. I focus on Anna's story in this chapter, but my interpretive efforts are also rooted in my observation of dozens of others' experiences, my own time travelling and fasting in wild places, with mirroring others' stories, and having my own stories reflected by fellow participants and guides. Given that important elements of the contemporary vision fast ceremony are undertaken in solitude, it is not possible to fully "be there" in the traditional sense of participant–observation. My ongoing immersion in the school's practices—participation in vision fast ceremonies, mirroring workshops, and working as an assistant guide—affords me the chance to personally take up the questions of subjectivity that the practice raises and to listen to participant stories from a more empathic position (see Carlin 2017b). I also draw upon my professional experience as a wilderness-based psychotherapist. Our experiences, of course, are singular, though the shared process of fasting and telling stories with each other develops our capacity for mutual support and understanding. I strive for an iterative process of experience and critical reflection that builds both a practice and a descriptive scholarship of more-than-human subjectivity rooted in an animate landscape.

Animating theories

I am concerned with the question of how ecosophical subjectivities can be nourished and provided space to grow. By ecosophical subjectivites, I mean identities and senses of self that both understand and experience being human as arising from nonhuman components and interspecies relationships. I use Felix Guattari's development of ecosophy and Val Plumwood's theorizing on the subjectivity of the more-than-human world in order to examine how Anna develops an ecosophical subjectivity in the course of her fast.

Ecosophy is the name that both Guattari and Arne Naess gave to their philosophical projects (Guattari 2000; Næss 2008; Naess 1992).[8] Guattari, whose version I use here as my point of departure, deploys the term ecosophy to refer to the conceptual work and activism that must be employed in order to confront socio-ecological crisis across what he identified as the three ecologies—the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity (Guattari 2000, 28). Guattari's ecosophy argues that solutions to socio-ecological crisis—climate change, species extinction, human displacement, inequities in consumption—will be found not only by confronting the technical challenges posed by the crises, but by facing the social and existential dimensions of the crisis as well. How one imagines what it is to be human, how the production of identity is understood, and whether the more-than-human world can be understood as more than a collection of resources are equally important challenges (see Abram 1997). Writing in the late 1980s, when understanding of global climate change was just coming into focus, Guattari insisted on the urgency of facing the psychic and social damage, as well as the material environmental destruction, wrought by capitalist social and economic systems, what he called Integrated World Capitalism (IWC). He writes that it makes no sense to "make a distinction between action on the psyche, the socius and the environment" (Guattari 2000, 28), as if environmental devastation could be so neatly separated from the rest of life. Instead, he weaves together a critique of the standardizations of culture enabled by mass media, an analysis of how that standardization limits how one can understand themselves and their world, and the consequent material aspects of environmental damage. Ecosophy, for Guattari, is the integrative challenge of learning and implementing new ways of being with the ecologies of self, community, and the world.

[8] For a more thorough introduction to ecosophy, see Shaw and Aiken's introductory essay to this special issue (R. Shaw and Aiken 2017).

Guattari's ecosophy delves into the scalar paradoxes of global socio-ecological crisis, forging intimate links between the world of the psyche and global systems. He writes that socio-ecological crisis calls into question "the ways of living on this planet … [and] the only true response to the ecological crisis is on a global scale" (2000, 28). However, he also argues that the revolution that he hopes for cannot be achieved by working only on the scale of institutions, but must also be struggled for in the "molecular domains of sensibility, intelligence, and desire" (2000, 28). At the level of subjectivity, how one experiences and understands what it is to be a human self, Guattari hoped to foster "dissensus" or "soft subversions" that challenge the deadening objectifications and "infantilizing consensus" of IWC (2000, 33). These soft subversions can unfold at the level of subjectivity through inquiry into how it is that one comes to have an experience of self in the world and through therapeutic experiences that help to produce different subjectivities. I am not arguing that these soft subversions should be privileged above institutional changes. What I am arguing is that they deserve careful attention. Furthermore, I want to make the point that "micro" practices like this fast can play an important role in shifting dominant psychic and social ecologies, creating more possibility for necessary institutional changes to unfold.

When I describe the SOLB, whose guides facilitated Anna's fast, as a practical laboratory of subjectivity, I am approaching subjectivity as something that can be experimented with and molded. The idea of the human subject as autonomous and existing prior to experience has been strongly critiqued for decades (Braidotti 2013; Butler 2011; Merleau-Ponty 2012; Wolfe 2010), and some have argued that practices of attending to subjectivity as a practice of self-care extends back to the Greeks (Foucault 2000). Guattari's perspective on the constitution of subjectivity is important to this chapter because it offers an understanding of subjectivity as comprising psychic, social, and material "*components of subjectification"* (2000, 24 italics in original), the three broad domains of the three ecologies. The boundaries between the three ecologies are ambiguous, but the important point is

that "individual" psychic life is personal, but it is also social and material. "Interiority," the experience of being an I, "establishes itself at the crossroads of multiple components" (2000, 36), and it is an interiority that is always in flux. Therefore, the experience of subjectivity is an effect, not a starting point.

An ecosophical subjectivity is then a subjective praxis that attends to how the different ecological registers overlap in the production of self. All kinds of different materials can be considered as contributing to one's sense of self including, "affect, signification, materiality, intensity and desire" (R. Shaw 2015, 165). An ecosophical perspective on subjectivity broadens the self beyond the individual and opens it to the world. Attention is drawn to how the self through which one experiences the world is itself structured by the overlapping material and social worlds. Given this attention to the diversity of components of subjectification, ecological impoverishment comes to signal not only the obvious threat of undermining the material basis of human life, but also how the possibilities for subjectivity become limited by decreasing the richness and diversity of the available components of subjectification. Furthermore, subjectivity is understood as a site of resistance and liberation; the psyche is where the "revolution begins: you are a fascist or a revolutionary with yourself first" (Guattari 2009, 39). Coming to experience oneself as produced through these many nonhuman components is a crucial step in understanding socio-ecological crisis as more than one affecting the "external" environment.

Val Plumwood's work adds an interspecies ethical focus to ecosophy and draws attention to the other beings with whom one can interact (Plumwood 2002; D. B. Rose 2013). While Guattari has little to say about more-than-human subjectivity, one of Plumwood's central concerns is developing an animate sense of nonhuman others, meaning recognizing others and the earth itself as subjects. Plumwood writes about repairing the "hyperseparation" of mind and matter, human and nature, which she diagnoses as endemic to Western thought. She writes, "when we hyperseparate

ourselves from nature and reduce it conceptually, we not only lose the ability to empathize and to see the non-human sphere in ethical terms, but also get a false sense of our own character and location that includes an illusory sense of agency and autonomy" (Plumwood 2013, 414). What is particularly valuable about Plumwood's work is her persistent focus on the task of learning to see nonhuman others and the world itself as subjects with whom one can communicate and be in relationship. She is trying to find the "kind of stance a human can take that will open her to a responsive engagement in relation to nonhuman others" (D. B. Rose 2013, 97).

Whereas Guattari is concerned with the constitution of human subjectivity, Plumwood is more focused on how to develop awareness that many kinds of beings possess it and to listen to them. Acknowledging the subjectivity of others, even of the land or earth itself, shifts subjectivity from being a unique human experience to a condition of life. Opening oneself to a "responsive engagement" with nonhuman subjects is an acknowledgement and invitation for nonhumans to influence and shape human subjectivity not just as components of subjectification but in intersubjective relationship. With Guattari's perspective that subjectivity is a contingent experience of the coming together of various components, one can begin to appreciate that human bodies, rock bodies, bird bodies, and others will incorporate these components differently, but Plumwood's philosophy reminds readers that those components do come together in their own way in each body, strengthening the ethical commitment of ecosophy to learn to live in community with the more-than-human world, not simply to avoid our own demise. In both Guattari and Plumwood, there is an argument that subjectivity, human or otherwise, is not something that is fixed and waiting to be discovered. Instead, there are a multitude of ways in which the components of subjectivity can come together and in which one's sense of self and world can be shaped in relationship with others.

Framing the contemporary vision fast practice with Guattari and Plumwood's work departs from how nature-based therapies are usually theorized, which is from within the scholarly project

called ecopsychology (Fisher 2013b; Kahn, Jr, and Hasbach 2012; Roszak 1992; Roszak, Gomes, and Kanner 1995). It is a critical project that arose in the late twentieth century to draw attention to the psychological impacts of environmental devastation and to argue that confronting climate change is an existential, as well as technical, challenge. In affinity with Plumwood, ecopsychological scholars asserted that we must understand the world as animate —as having a psyche—and the human psyche as intimately connected to the more-than-human world in order to effectively address socio-ecological crisis. However, key texts in the ecopsychological tradition invoke nature as a universal good, a foil to pathological social structures that warp "natural" human development and our relationship with the world (Plotkin 2010; 2008; Shepard 1982). One influential author, who also facilitates fasting ceremonies, frames the issue by writing, "many modern cultures have diverged from their origins in nature, resulting in billions of modern lives radically alienated from the natural world and cultures devoid of the integrity and survival value implicit in natural systems" (Plotkin 2008, 14). The effect of such a framing is that it reifies the ontological split between nature and culture so that rather than conceptualizing human subjectivity as immanent to earth, readers are instead invited to "speculate that Earth is trying to imagine its own future through us" (Plotkin 2008, 17).

My intention in this chapter is not to engage in a specific debate with the ecopsychological literature. Instead, I want to demonstrate that an interpretation of the vision fast ceremony guided by non-essential senses of both nature and the human self actually offers a richer account of what is at play and at stake in the practice. I hope that my account contributes to the development of ecosophical geographies as a means through which to interpret nature-based therapeutic practices that complement geography's rich tradition of detailing the mutual constitution of nature and society (D. Harvey 1996; Peet and Watts 1996; Robbins 2012; Semple 1911; N. Smith 1984).

I now shift to a detailed discussion of Anna's experience with her fast in order to consider how practices like the contemporary vision fast ceremony contribute to an experience of the human self as produced in immanent relationship with the more-than-human world, and how the practice might contribute to the practice of ecosophy as a therapeutic intervention for the alienation, loneliness, and melancholia that so many people feel when confronted with unfolding socio-ecological crisis (Barrows 1995; Lertzman 2015; Macy 1995).

Anna's story

I met Anna, whose story was first introduced in this chapter's preamble, when she was a participant on a month-long vision fast guide training program. Anna arrived at our campground in the Inyos saturated in grief. In the last year, she cared for her mother as she died, witnessed her mother-in-law's death soon after, and was wracked with the loss of multiple pregnancies. She described herself as feeling "empty and fallow." Asked what brought her here, Anna replied that she came in search of magic, a purpose, a way forward to nurture the life she so desperately wanted to bring into the world.

For our four-day fast, our group left the forest service campground where we had gathered and followed a dirt track southeast towards Death Valley. Maybe 15 miles from pavement as the crow flies, our slow two-hour winding drive into the mountains gave us the feeling of remoteness and distance. We established our basecamp in a large valley covered in scrubby sagebrush. A dry wash led the way back west towards the road. To the east and the north, a steep ridge rose several hundred feet above the valley floor and created a border on two sides. Twelve of us fasters struck out from here to each establish our solo camps.

While my own fast called me to a place far from the others, Anna chose to tuck into a spot on the far side of a small ridge near basecamp. She found this unusual, describing herself as

someone who would usually choose a distant spot far from the others, but she chose to follow her intuition and stayed close. During her solo, Anna felt flat and bored, isolated, like she could not make contact with the other creatures that must be sharing her desert landscape. "Where is everybody?" she asked.

One day, Anna found a pile of tiny white bones lying in a pile of rocks. "Someone has been eating the rodents," she thought. She noted how perfectly clean the bones were. They reminded her of a dream she had shortly before the fast. She had just lost another pregnancy. In the dream, a ball of white light came out of her body, fell to the floor, and cracked open. Anna saw a beating heart that then "desiccated" and turned into the pile of tiny white bones, leaving her with a feeling of awe. She described them as "perfect, so beautifully alive but not."

Anna collected the physical bones she found on her fast and used them as part of a ceremony she designed for herself, what she called a grief mandala,

> I dug a pit, lined it with juniper duff and berries, placed a bird's nest, the bones, and eggshells in the pit. I placed rocks pointing to the four directions around the edge and filled the pit with the dead wood of life. I then named my griefs: miscarriage, loss of a close friendship, my mother's death, not having meaningful work. It was good to name the griefs and let them be there.

On the fourth morning, Anna woke to the howl of a coyote at first light, sparking a feeling of joy. She said, "I felt awoken, but in a much bigger way than simply being roused from sleep." "It's out there!" she thought, not knowing quite what "it" was. Anna walked east full of the energy that had been lacking the last few days, towards the glimmers of first light and where the sun would rise. She felt the "new clear gold light of the dawn, the cool valley floor, the damp smell of dust and the morning dew." Anna found small flowers growing that she had not noticed before. She was taken by their color and allowed herself to be absorbed in their scent. She found heart shaped rocks in her

path that reminded her of similar ones that her mother used to collect, and she saw bees crawling in the flowers. "It felt so different than the other days." Anna said, "I wanted to write a letter to the fairies, to the spirits. A letter to say I want to be a mother, that I believe in magic." While collecting blossoms to make an offering circle for her letter, a bird entered the circle she had constructed. She recalled, "I wanted to feed the bird, so I wrote the letter, made my offering, and read it aloud." The sun rose and Anna felt the magic of the moment passing. The remainder of her fast passed uneventfully.

Mirroring the story

We returned from our fasts on the morning of the fifth day. Those who had stayed behind welcomed us back with hugs and breakfast. We did not talk much, instead savoring the food and the warmth of human company. I knew how deeply affected and puzzled I was by my experience, and I imagined others felt the same. Participants often return from their fasts bewildered by the experience. Fasts can be unexpectedly difficult and few participants have clear moments of epiphany or inspiration. More common are lengthy periods of boredom and anxiety punctuated by moments that stand out but whose significance remains ambiguous. Guides encourage participants to "hold your stories close," to not say too much or try to make sense of the experience right away. Betsy, a school guide, says, "if meaning is rushed, that's just the ego kicking in and imposing meaning."

Over the course of the next three days, we each shared a story from our fast with the group. Each of us took 20 minutes to tell our story and the guides took as much time to mirror it back. In the course of my research I've found that the stories come to life during mirroring. Participants often start their story by saying, "I don't know where this is going to go," or "nothing happened out there," and then proceed to tearfully recount snapshots of their experience on the fast. The apparently simple gesture of being listened to and having one's experience affirmed often turns out

to be an intensely emotional experience. When the guide tells back a portion of the story, the faster then experiences their own story in a new way, what Betsy, a senior guide at the school, describes as the "threshold between two worlds" (Betsy Perluss, Personal interview, June 17, 2016).

Storytelling and mirroring are techniques to help develop the meaning of stories. It is a signature practice of the school, which has slowly evolved as a way to give the experience of fasting meaning and context. Solos deeply affect most participants, but the ability to give the experience language and to place it in a more-than-human existential and ethical context can be elusive. Joseph, another long- time guide, describes mirroring as an attempt to answer the question, "what is it to love and honor people when they return from their fast when we have no agreed upon mythology or social structure? Mirroring then is an improvisational mythology. Our responsibility is to be loving stewards of the land and the people" (Joseph Lazenka, Personal interview, June 18, 2016). Joseph is gesturing at the aspirational nature of this practice. Without a strong cultural context that affirms human identity as rooted in the land, mirroring has developed as one way to draw that connection out and to affirm the participants' experience.

Mirroring is rarely a straightforward reflection. More often, the guide will follow a particular theme or character in the story. They weave myth and narrative, personal experience, the land, and the roles of nonhuman others together as they mirror the story back to the faster. Guides who are mirroring work to both affirm the storyteller as a person and to move the story from the realm of the individual psyche into that of the group and the land. Mirroring can be quiet or dramatic, sweet or confrontational, but it almost always holds the entire group's attention close and this atmosphere feeds the process.

Anna was quiet upon returning from her fast and appeared to take seriously the encouragement to hold her story close. She waited until nearly everyone else had shared their story before offering her own. The narrative of her experience on the fast that I told above is recounted

from what Anna shared in the mirroring circle. When she began to share, she appeared reticent, describing her uncertainty in approaching the fast. As her story unfolded, Anna relaxed, though she remained quiet and matter of fact throughout the telling.

The tone shifted as Betsy rose to mirror Anna's story. Betsy recounted the sunrise of the fourth morning and Anna's tears began to flow when Betsy touched her shoulder with a piece of bristlecone pine from those nearby ancient trees, saying, "if it can't be ordinary, it can't be magic." Through her words and gesture, Betsy invoked the everyday wonder of the rising sun and the idea of ancestry. She went on to animate the bones in the story. Betsy said,

> the heart of magic beats inside you. The bones are the bones of your ancestors. Your children are your ancestors now because they are dead. Just because they never grew up doesn't mean they aren't your ancestors. You wouldn't be sitting here if not for those tiny bones. They brought you to this circle, those bones that came out of your body, they have inspired you. You sat solidly in the circle of grief, you felt deeply into the land.

Betsy's mirroring unfolded in a more-than-human social context. By following an individual thread in Anna's story—the bones she found through to the lifting of her grief with the sunrise on the fourth morning—Betsy's mirroring validated Anna's grief and affirmed her desire for motherhood. Telling the story through the bones, the bristlecone, and the "ordinary magic" of the sunrise wove it through the land, affirming its authorship beyond an internal psychic process projected outward. The attention and empathy of the other participants along with the invocation of the space maintained as sacred through decades of fasts and stories helped to allow the emotional tenor to rise in the way that it did.

In an interview conducted a year after her fast, Anna recounted that she had come to understand that sunrise as central to her experience of the ceremony (Personal interview with "Anna," February 2, 2017). At times during the fast she felt as if she had just been going through the

motions. Even the grief mandala and the letter to the spirits she described as feeling somewhat flat. However, the magic of that sunrise has come to mean the ability to feel the everyday magic of the world and to reconnect with her sense of hope, to let go of grief as a pervasive feeling.

Towards interpretation

Part translation, part interpretive creation, here I offer some ideas about how Anna's story can speak to the special issue's project of beginning to understand and articulate ecosophical geographies. In Anna's story is a narrative of the confusing and challenging process of experimenting with subjectivity as collectively produced in relationship with nonhuman others, many of whom speak in unfamiliar ways. This is an act of interpretation that is not a process of decoding, but is instead about following the "trajectory" of the elements of a story "to see if they can serve as indicators for new universes of reference" (Guattari 2009, 66). The meaning of the more-than-human elements in Anna's story are not fixed but, by paying attention to the ways in which they shaped Anna's experience, their own subjectivity and Anna's can be elaborated in a more specific way. This is to approach subjectivity like "constructing a work of art," something with which to have a "creative rapport" (Guattari 2000, 67). The materials of this work of art are the many components of subjectification in Anna's story and her intersubjective encounters with the landscape and other creatures. My intent here is to draw attention to some of the ways in which an animate more-than-human world, perceputally enlivened by the ceremony, opened up novel ways for Anna to understand and experience her own subjectivity.

Encouraged and given the space to allow her thoughts and feelings to be more than her own, Anna describe an experience of her psyche spilling onto the landscape. The bones, for example, evoke both her loss and the presence of others in her world. "So beautifully alive but not," the bones live in Anna's story as part of her—her grief or perhaps her miscarried children—but also

as alive in their own sense. Betsy's remark that the bones "brought you to this circle" hails their animacy. The bones drew Anna to them, one of countless details in the desert landscape who nevertheless became a central character in the story of her fast. Yet their life is also elusive. What sort of body they lived in, the quality of that being's life, and the terms of its death all remain a mystery. In tending to her grief and inquiring into the life of the bones, Anna offers us a glimpse of the bones both as one part of herself and as a separate subject with whom she is in relationship. Anna's psyche never becomes quite continuous with the land, but difference is not so great as to preclude communication and co-creation.

Anna's experience with the bones demonstrates the tension between continuity and difference at work in her story. In a striking way, Anna's subjectivity is continuous with the bones. They are her in the sense that they live in the story as her children and inhabit her dreams. And yet, the bones act on Anna as well, calling for her attention, shaping her experience by focusing it on themselves, a small detail in a vast landscape that others may never have noticed. They are both Anna and exceed her in mysterious ways. With Plumwood's thought in mind, Anna's effort to listen to the bones, to understand what they have to say, is an acknowledgement of their autonomous being, "mysterious but never mindless"(D. B. Rose 2013, 94). Thus, they signal both how the self can be worked on as continuous with the world but also that, while the borders between self and other are not clear, acknowledging the difference and agency of more-than-human others allows for a more creative shaping of one's own subjectivity.

Beyond the bones, the more subtle play of the relationship between Anna's "own" emotions and what she experiences in the desert landscape gesture towards an awareness of how components of subjectivity come together in individual experience. As Anna experiences lethargy and feels fallow, the desert that she experiences is largely empty and lonely. Later, the coyote's yip, the pre-dawn light, and the flowers that she finds both signal and make possible her shift in energy and her

sense of possibility. The relationships here are ambiguous. There is no neat process of causation in which one element of Anna's story determines her experience, but each component contributes to crafting a narrative of ecosophical subjectivity in which perception, emotion, and personal experience drift beyond the bounds of individuals. If one were to read Anna's story through a more traditional psychological lens, the moods of the desert, the light, and even the flowers' "appearance" might be read as projections, as Anna's subjective emotions displaced onto the landscape. There is likely some truth in that interpretation. "Nature always wears the colors of the spirit" (Emerson 1849, 8), meaning that what one brings to the scene will undoubtedly color what is found.

And yet, individualizing too much what Anna found in the desert landscape assumes that her identity is produced autonomously and denies subjectivity to the other elements. Guattari writes, "the concentration of attention upon a certain kind of object is part of the production of subjectivity"(Guattari 2009, 75). He writes this line in the context of critique, arguing that giving one's attention to mass media, especially television, structures the way that one perceives, and shapes subjectivity so as to be "compatible to social conditions," but the assertion can be turned a bit to open up new possibilities. By turning to the desert and its more-than-human communities, Anna begins to reshape the ways in which her subjectivity is produced. Rather than turning inwards, excavating the psyche as might happen in a traditional counseling relationship, Anna opens her perceptual faculties to the surrounding landscape, and the ceremonial framing allows the "magic" to unfold, for what might be taken as seemingly random events to be held significant. While the lethargic and fallow feeling of the desert are not simply waiting to be found by Anna, they are affects that exceed her own being. Furthermore, experiencing them as material elements of the world affords her a different relationship to lethargy, boredom, and fallowness. They are her own, and she is granted a bit of distance from them; she explores the lonely desert landscape and does not just inhabit her own being as lonely and fallow. As both therapeutic technique and an assertion about the

constitution of subjectivity, working with these components of subjectivity shifted Anna's experience of her interwoven self and the landscape.

Anna's story outlines some of the methods for opening a space to acknowledge and pay attention to nonhuman others as subjects and to human subjectivity as developing through many components that extend beyond the individual. The marking of ceremonial space as a willing suspension of disbelief, temporary retreat from human communities, subtly altering consciousness through fasting, storytelling, and mirroring all form a technique to experience self and world in this animate way.[9] Given how disorienting and enigmatic the experience of the contemporary vision fast tends to be, the shared practices of storytelling and mirroring are essential to this care of ecosophical subjectivity. When Joseph says, "our responsibility is to be loving stewards of the land and the people," he is acknowledging an ethical obligation to re-story the land and human subjectivity as immanent to each other. The disenchantment of the world helped to make possible the ethical justification for its exploitation (Heidegger 2008a; Horkheimer and Adorno 2001; Weber 2015). Attending to its animate nature in the story telling and mirroring circles helps to re-establish the ethical bonds between the land and the people who guide and participate in the vision fast. Mirroring adds a human social component to the constitution of subjectivity. The close attention that guides and other participants give to a story being told helps to validate its importance and to affirm the story as meaningful. When guides follow the trajectory of certain themes or elements in a story, the result is often that the storyteller and the group become more attuned to the way in which enigmatic components of the story participate in who the storyteller has become through the

[9] Other geographers have also begun to elaborate a 'methodology of attending' that they understand as both an ontological project of animating the world and an ethics of care through the tending to experiences of individual subjectivity as arising from this animate world. It is a way to "co-create meaning" with others even though a full understanding of those others may always be beyond reach (Country et al. 2015, 276).

experience. Though the fast itself is experienced in solitude from other people, this social element is crucial to the significance that the fast takes on in the life of the participant.

Mirroring is an always uncertain process. Joseph told me that he once asked one of his mentors how he knew what a nonhuman creature was saying to him. The man replied, "I ask it a question and wait for the first thought that pops into my head. That's usually his answer" (Joseph Lazenka, Personal interview, January 8, 2018). Joseph, despite decades of immersion in this practice, does not share his mentor's confidence. When hummingbirds hovered nearby while Anna was telling her story, Joseph drew attention to their presence in his mirroring and reminded Anna of their role in her story, but he refrained from ascribing any particular meaning to their arrival. Instead, his acknowledgement of them underscored both their importance to Anna and her story as well as their mystery. However, his comments echoed the spirit of Plumwood's writing when he chose to depict their appearance in the "active voice," describing them as participants who may have chosen to be there for particular reasons, and he refused to write off their attendance at Anna's story as "meaningless accident" (Plumwood 2013, 451).

Here, the therapeutic ethos of this ecosophy becomes clearer. The fast itself and the experience of mirroring re-story subjectivity as an experienced effect of many components rather than existing within the individual prior to experience. It is a narration of existential inquiry as an applied ethics of naming and trying to tend to the more-than-human nature of human subjectivity and the personhood of nonhumans. Mirroring weaves together human and nonhuman elements, and it also creates a shared space in which the "reality" of the experience is confirmed in the presence of all participants. Anna's experience appeared to be powerful and moving to her in and of itself, but its meaning clearly blossomed through Betsy's mirroring and the affirmation of her experience by the rest of the group. It helps to affirm one's identity as bound up in the landscape.

Concern for the old ways

Readers familiar with Guattari's work might imagine him having little patience with the practice of the contemporary vision fast or this interpretation of it. After all, he hoped to move ecosophy beyond a "small nature-loving minority," insisting that it is "'too important to be left to some of its usual archaizers and folklorists" (Guattari 2000, 35). Others share his suspicion of the "nostalgic wing" of ecological thinking (N. Smith 1984, 25), and might be inclined to write off the practice as "another dream of Walden Pond" (Genosko 2009, 79), meaning that it could be seen as a utopian retreat with little relevance to the complex realities of contemporary socio-ecological crisis. Guattari writes, "Obviously it would be inconceivable to try and go back to the old formulas, which relate to periods when the planet was far less densely populated and when social relations were much stronger than they are today" (2000, 34). And the practice of fasting alone in wild places is an old formula, one of the oldest known forms of initiation and spiritual retreat (Whitley et al. 1999).

In response, I suggest that there is a dual movement at play in the contemporary vision fast between what practitioners call the "old ways" and a creative drive that incorporates contemporary influences, which is how it thrives. Many, including Plumwood, have argued that leaving behind the old ways or insisting on the novelty of developing a more-than-human understanding and experience of subjectivity effects a further erasure of Indigenous knowledge and traditions (Collard, Dempsey, and Sundberg 2015; Sundberg 2013; Todd 2016). Rather than write off the "old formulas," as Guattari argued, the important task is to learn how to be in conversation with them while constantly retuning both knowledge and practice for contemporary contexts. On a conceptual level, this is what I have tried to accomplish by pairing Guattari and Plumwood. Both were students of the Western philosophical canon. Guattari understood his project as charging forwards, breaking with tradition. Plumwood looked to Indigenous philosophies, steeped in longstanding relationships to particular places, to develop her arguments for an animate understanding of earth and nonhuman

others. By pairing them, I have attempted to show that simultaneous inquiry into long-held philosophies of an animate earth, along with an understanding of human subjectivity as widely diffused, allows for a richer understanding of the practice at hand than either perspective would on its own.

The dual movement of learning from traditions that have been practiced for millenia while situating them in a contemporary context is also evident in the evolution of the contemporary vision fast practice. Though described by the school as a "pan-cultural rite of passage," the significant influence of Native American traditions is evident. Native American nations across the continent have long practiced some form of solo fast as an initiation into adulthood (Benedict 1922), and archaeological evidence suggests people have been performing similar ceremonies in the American West for 10,000 years (Whitley et al. 1999). The school's founders were also mentored by Native American practitioners.[10] This was at a time, the 1970s and 1980s, when interest in Native American spirituality was running high in American culture and contentious Native American politics were frequently in the news. At the same time that local Paiute elders trained the school's founders and gave them permission to run their programs on Paiute lands, the American Indian movement was fighting for recognition and redress of the multiple continued oppressions of Native Americans. Activists frequently pointed out that white culture seemed more interested in Native Americans as an historical object than a contemporary political force. Whites who want to learn about Native American spirituality have then sometimes been dismissed as "new age consumers" commodifying Native American traditions (Aldred 2000). Native Americans who teach beyond the boundaries of their communities have been called "plastic shamans," a mean-spirited insult that can be either an

[10] The influence of Native American mentors on the work of the School of Lost Borders, discussed briefly here, is explored in greater depth in Chapter 3.

accusation of charlatanism or of sharing spiritual practices without permission from the community (Churchill 2003; V. Deloria 2003).

Other important influences, however, also shape the school's work. Several psychologists and psychotherapists work at the school and they utilize the techniques of both Jungian psychology and existential psychotherapy (Jung 1964; Rogers 1961; Yalom 2009). Jungian archetypes offer a treasure chest for inquiries into human nature that go far beyond the cognitive behavioral models that dominate much of contemporary psychotherapy, and archetypes connect well with one of the school founders' academic training in mythological traditions. Existential psychotherapy, furthermore, offers a view of healing relationships based in affirmation of an individual's capacity for self-healing. The American wilderness tradition is also an important influence. Turning to nature for healing, insight, or as a counterweight to society are all American traditions. Figures as varied as Thoreau, Mary Austin, and Edward Abbey undertook solo wilderness trips as both physical adventures and psychic journeys, and the work of SOLB should also be understood in that vein (Abbey 1968; Austin 1903; Thoreau 1993a).

What I have found to be at play in the practice of the vision fast ceremony is the use of a form with deep history that is given further shape by the socio-spatially specific influences of counseling and the American wilderness tradition. To write off ecosophical practices like this fast simply because they can be read as nostalgic would be a mistake. Instead, by bringing to the school's work a perspective on subjectivity that understands it as continually in process, rather than something to be found, scholarly analyses can help to craft it as an effort to develop new subjectivities that can meet contemporary challenges rather than as a nostalgic return.

Conclusion

The contemporary vision fast ceremony is by no means a complete answer to the question of ecosophical subjectivity. As a microsocial exercise, it has the capacity to encourage dissensus—subjectivities that break with the dominant homogenous form—but it has no necessary structural impact. Participants return to lives that might be deeply alienating and the practice can even be co-opted as a refuge, a place and practice to retreat to, but that does not effect a lasting shift in how participants understand and inhabit their world. This is one reason why critical reflections on ecosophical practices ought to contribute to their development. The discourse that circulates will impact both the sense of possibility found in the practice and the type of affirmation participants find in their broader communities.

I close by considering the final words of *The Three Ecologies*:

> The reconquest of a degree of creative autonomy in one particular domain encourages conquests in other domains—the catalyst for a gradual reforging and renewal of humanity's confidence in itself starting at the most miniscule level (Guattari 2000, 45).

I feel comfortable claiming that the contemporary vision fast practice contributes to "the reconquest of a degree of creative autonomy" at the level of subjectivity. It can even be a "catalyst for a gradual reforging and renewal of humanity's confidence in itself starting at the most miniscule level." However, it requires social tending to articulate the practice in relationship to a broader ethics of care and the politics of ecological struggle. This is a delicate task as defining a practice like the contemporary vision fast in relationship to these broader issues risks casting it in a prescriptive tone that could evacuate some of its creative potential. But, given how poorly valued practices that attend to subjectivity are in relation to technological and ideological interventions, practices that care for ecosophical subjectivity will have to be articulated and defended, not simply left to simmer on their own.

In this chapter, I have attempted to offer one answer to the question, how can ecosophical subjectivities be nourished and given the space to develop? Through ethnographic narrative and the theoretical lenses of Guattari's ecosophy and Plumwood's philosophical animism, I have described the contemporary vision fast ceremony as one way to experiment with an earthbound ecosophy lived in relationship with a more-than-human world. Rooted in traditions that gesture towards humanity's deep history, the practice requires constant attunement to contemporary conditions. The contemporary vision fast ceremony is not the answer to ecological crisis. However, as a microsocial practice it challenges the fallacy of the autonomous human self, and it offers a ground upon which to experiment with an ecosophical self in search of a lived experience of animacy.

Chapter 4: A ceremony that speaks across worlds: navigating ecocultural affinity and appropriation

Introduction

"The big lie is that we aren't nature!" Guides at a small non-profit organization in eastern California have adopted the phrase as their unofficial motto, a pithy summation of their effort to explore the inner workings of the human self through sojourns in wild landscapes. Guides at the school facilitate what they call nature-based rites of passage ceremonies, which center on four days and nights of fasting alone in desert landscapes. The school offers nearly twenty programs annually, and each program includes ten or so participants who are drawn to the school from around the world in order to mark major life changes like partnership or divorce, transitions to adulthood or elderhood, or major shifts in the direction of their life. Guides first teach a nature-based human development and psychology model that interprets major life phases and aspects of the human psyche as mirrored by the passing of the four boreal seasons. In this organic philosophy, psyche signifies not only one's deepest sense of self, but that one's experience of self is produced by many nonhuman elements that extend beyond the individual (Carlin 2017a). Participants then scatter across the desert landscape and fast alone for four days. After the fast, the group forms again and each participant tells the story of their experience, which is witnessed and reflected upon by the guides. Native American vision quest ceremonies are one important inspiration for the work (Benedict 1922) along with Jungian psychology, systems theory, and the American wilderness tradition. The school's work experientially weaves together inquiry into the existential questions of life, love, and death with an experience of the world as animate or psychically alive.

For the past four years, I have conducted ethnographic research at the school. I do so from the positions of program participant, apprentice guide, and observer. As an experienced wilderness

guide, I approached my first fast with a confidence that quickly evaporated in the face of anxiety and the unflinching desert landscape (Carlin 2017b). It prompted me to inquire further into how retreating alone into a wild space for a time can spark dialogs that cross species boundaries and foster a sense of self as intimately connected to the landscape. My inquiry is part of a long American tradition of sojourns to wild places to question and experience the immanent interconnection of self and world (Abbey 1968; Austin 1903; Childs 2007; Emerson 1849; Peacock 1990; J. Turner 1996). This study takes its place in an American wilderness tradition that is haunted by a politics of exclusion and dispossession (Collard, Dempsey, and Sundberg 2015; Cronon 1996), but that also recognizes that wild places beckon seekers who "hunger for a kind of experience deep enough to change our selves, our form of life" (J. Turner 1996, 104). For so many people who sojourn to wild places, it is as if the landscape gnaws at the edges of the self, pulling it apart as patiently and insistently as the desert winds wear down mountains.

In the course of my research at the school, I became curious about its history. Certainly, the school's work fits into the long American tradition of sojourns. But there is also its connection to Native American traditions of fasting and retreat, especially the vision quest ceremony. As I learned more about the school's history, I began inquiring further into the school's relationship to Native American mentors and spiritual traditions. Like me, most of the guides and participants are white Americans or Europeans. Are we appropriating Native practices? To what extent does their work participate in romanticizing an imagined Native earth-based spirituality that may look quite different in practice? What does it mean for a group of white people to facilitate a ceremony for mostly white participants that honors life transitions in conversation with an animate landscape? What does it mean to do so in North America, a site of ongoing colonial dispossession of indigenous lands?

I raise these questions as a concerned insider, not as an objective arbiter. As both a scholar and a practitioner, my commitments to experiential wilderness practices are clear. I am, however,

keenly interested in bringing a critical lens to worlds in which I have invested considerable time and energy. But there are significant limitations to the perspective that I can offer. In the course of my fieldwork, I have had the opportunity to learn much about the school's practices and the lives of guides. I have not had the same privilege of close relationship with critics of the school's work or with other approaches to rites of passage. My intention in writing this chapter is not to offer a judgement on the school, but to lay the groundwork for debate. Work like that undertaken at the School of Lost Borders does present a "snake's nest of ethical issues," as one scholar of rites of passage puts it (Grimes 2002, 143). To sort out that snake's nest, however, the story of their work should be told.

In this chapter, I delve into one narrow slice of the school's history in an attempt to answer some of these questions. In particular, I examine the influential relationships Native American mentors had with founding school guides. I have left out many other influences that shape the school's work: Jungian psychology (Perluss 2012); Buddhism (Davis 1998); Christian mysticism; Gregory Bateson's systems theory; various psychotherapeutic approaches; and ecopsychological scholars who theorize the immanent interconnection of human selves and the world (Abram 1997; Fisher 2013b). The chapter, therefore, does not offer a complete history of the school and I make no attempt to adjudicate between the various influences that shape the school's work. What the chapter offers, however, is a close study of how a body of practice that fosters an ecocultural identity—one in which the human psyche and the more-than-human landscape mirror one another—has navigated the complex and never-innocent relationship between the American wilderness tradition and colonialism. I first note trends in contemporary scholarship that draw renewed attention to indigenous philosophies and their potential to inform efforts to address socio-ecological crisis. From places as disparate as Australia, the Brazilian Amazon, and the North American Great Plains, indigenous activists and scholars speak from beyond the confines of

Western environmental philosophy to describe a multi-natural world in which all kinds of beings participate in a single social fabric (Howe and Young 2016; Plumwood 2013; D. B. Rose 2013; Viveiros de Castro 2015). Next, I narrate some of the ways school guides were influenced by Native mentors. To do so, I draw on interviews and historical research. I then consider the broader context in which those guide-mentor encounters occurred by reviewing the parallel rise of the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the largely white countercultural environmental movement. I demonstrate how the concurrent rise of AIM and countercultural environmentalism shaped the school's relationship with Native mentors and its broader perspective on cultural appropriation. Finally, I argue that instead of evaluating work like the school's fasting ceremonies on the question of whether or not they constitute cultural appropriation, as some have done (Bendrick 2000; Grimes 2002), a more productive line of inquiry is to ask how ecocultural movements like this one can reckon with the colonial legacies in which they are implicated while also pursuing lines of affinity that cross borders between so-called Indigenous and Western worlds to support the development of ecocultural identities that insist on going beyond better resource management to reimagining humanity's place in the world.

Ecocultural identity and animating philosophy

Naming identity as ecocultural is an assertion that identity, culture, and ecology are deeply implicated in one another, though one never strictly determines the other. We are material as well as discursive beings, of course. Nevertheless, the prejudices of conceptual worlds that presuppose a human-nature split are surprisingly sticky. For more than a century, scholars working in Eurocentric intellectual traditions have been critiquing the deanimation of the material world (Weber 2015), exposing the mythology that enables the conceptual separation of meaning and materiality (Horkheimer and Adorno 2001), and attempting to stitch discursive and material worlds back

together again. From the American Transcendentalists (Emerson 1849; Thoreau 1882) to European phenomenologists (Heidegger 1962; Husserl 2010; Levinas 2013; Marder 2014b; Merleau-Ponty 2012), from Marxist critics (Katz 1997; N. Smith 1984) to magical realist novelists (García Márquez 1970; Murakami 1997), thinkers struggle to remember and act as if landscapes, nonhuman animals, rocks, spirits, and others inform ecocultural identities and may be subjects in their own right. I side with prominent critics who argue that it is "madness" to think that the human psyche exists apart from the more-than-human world, but escaping that madness has proven to be quite difficult (Guattari 2000; Latour 2017; Shepard 1982).

To escape the madness of the isolated psyche, scholars are turning to various strains of indigenous philosophy. Instead of objectifying others, scholars increasingly ask, "what is it to think Native thought" (Viveiros de Castro 2015, 6), what does it mean to deploy philosophies positioned outside the traditional Western canon, to draw out their consequences? Doing so upends developmentalist approaches to comparing conceptual worlds as arranged in an historical hierarchy to instead imagine those worlds arranged spatially, as a "simultaneity of stories-so-far" (Massey 2005, 2). Turning to philosophical traditions that have generally not fallen into the traps of nature-society dualisms is therefore not looking back in time but asking, what does the world look like from over here?

Scholarly apprenticeships with indigenous mentors offer one way to travel between conceptual worlds (Kohn 2013; Viveiros de Castro 1998). In Australia, scholars and Aboriginal collaborators put animist and European philosophy in conversation with one another (van Dooren and Rose 2016; Plumwood 2013; van Dooren, Kirksey, and Münster 2016). Other scholars, however, argue that there are limits to such apprenticeships and that dialogs across conceptual worlds involve feats of translation and imagination that never quite achieve metaphysical transformation (de la Cadena 2015). One might learn what it is to inhabit another's world, but

experience of that world will always be mediated by an embodied or conceptual interpreter, which suggests a limit to the malleability of one's ecocultural identity.

Non-specialist efforts to travel between conceptual worlds are less well-studied. Even when Native mentors work with tourists as well as ethnographers, for example, the tourists' efforts to experience and appreciate an animate world are categorized as "New Age" (de la Cadena 2015, 25), which is usually code for cultural appropriation or commodification of spirituality (Aldred 2000). There are exceptions, including scholars who describe New Age spirituality as an "attunement" to landscape that softens the Cartesian self (Ivakhiv 2003). Much scholarship to date, however, focuses on the naiveté of participants and derisively labels Native people who share such teachings with largely white audiences as plastic medicine men or white shamans (Aldred 2000; Churchill 2003; W. Rose 1992). In contrast, the history of the School of Lost Borders offers a rich story of one non-specialist setting in which so-called Western and Native worlds come together. I say so-called because while categories like Western and Native are convenient signifiers, their division doesn't hold up under critical scrutiny, a point I'll return to later in the chapter. Delving into the history of the School of Lost Borders reveals compelling texture and depth underneath what might at first look like spiritual tourism or romanticizing indigenous culture as a foil to the failings of contemporary America. The stories told below demonstrate how lines of affinity formed across conceptual and lived worlds to develop a practice that encourages an ecocultural identity that recognizes the world as animate and the self as emergent from that animate world.

The mentors

The school's founders, Steven Foster and Meredith Little, met in the early 1970s and became inspired to lead fasting ceremonies in wild places together after staffing a suicide prevention hotline. Little says:

> a lot of the people that were phoning in, they didn't want to die. They wanted to die to what their life had been. They were caught in the underworld. But, they wanted to move into a new way of being. So we began to talk about meaningful rites of passage ceremonies" (Meredith Little, Personal interview, June 15, 2016).

Foster had already been thinking about rites of passage in other ways. He was an English professor, and he loved epic poems like Homer's *Odyssey* (2012) that told stories of rites of passage and initiation. As Foster and Little began to experiment leading fasting ceremonies, they undertook a years-long research process into rites of passage traditions around the world (Mahdi, Foster, and Little 1994), from which they derived the basic structure of their work. After they had been leading programs in wild places for several years, they and their guides forged influential relationships with Native American mentors who helped to shape their work. Three of those relationships are described below.

Hyemeyohsts Storm

While Foster and Little were developing their practice, accounts of Native American spirituality were receiving increased attention through the reissue of *Black Elk Speaks* (1961), a first person account of Lakota spiritual traditions, and Hyemeyohsts Storm's *Seven Arrows* (1972), which introduced and popularized the medicine wheel as a framework for philosophy and spirituality to white and urban-Native audiences (V. Deloria 2003; Jaeger 1980). Medicine wheels are nature-based models of spirituality or philosophy most often associated with Native nations from the American Great Plains. Storm's book was controversial, to say the least. Critics attacked Storm for "vulgarizing one of the most beautiful but least known religions of Man," but prominent scholars also defended the book as an "important development in Indian literature" (Jaeger, 1980, p. 17). Critics agree that

Storm's biography is "murky," but they diverge on whether his claims to Cheyenne ancestry are true or false (Carroll 2007; Sayre 1994). The controversy over Storm's writing was an expression of ongoing debates about authority, permission, and verification. Storm's description of what he claims are traditional Cheyenne ways ran afoul of the Cheyenne Tribal council, who argued that he was not authorized to speak for the Cheyenne people as a whole (Sturtevant 1973). Storm imagined himself as working in an oral tradition where stories morph and change over time, while his critics pointed to ways that his writing deviated from the written historical or ethnographic record as evidence that his claims were false. Such arguments point to the complexities of agency and voice in a colonial context where tradition has to be defended against appropriation, but in which that same act of defense can lead to policing of who may speak.

Foster and Little reached out to Storm before they published *The Book of the Vision Quest* (1980) because his work had shaped their thinking for that book and they hoped he would write a blurb for the book's dust jacket. Storm was eager to meet them and for the next several years he would often visit Foster and Little. Storm would sit at their kitchen table late into the night teaching countless medicine wheel models. One wheel, called the four shields of human nature, grabbed Little and Foster's attention. In it, major life phases are associated with the cardinal directions and the passing of the boreal seasons. What Storm offered as a brief fifteen-minute teaching, Foster and Little developed into a philosophical system for understanding the human experience of psyche as immersed in an animate world (Foster and Little 1999). Foster and Little later parted ways with Storm when they moved the school to a different part of California, but they have always cited him when they teach the four shields of human nature, despite the controversy that swirls around him.

Grandpa Raymond Stone

When Foster and Little moved the school to a small town called Big Pine, California, tucked between the Sierra Nevada and Inyo mountains, a friend advised them to find the area's Native elders and ask for permission to do their work there. The area is historically Paiute country, and Little and Foster found out that the local elder was Grandpa Raymond Stone. He ran sweat lodge ceremonies in his backyard and described himself as an "Indian doctor." Stone also took people into the mountains to fast. Little and Foster took him some gifts and sat down to talk with him. Little said of that meeting:

> He let us know that it would not be okay to do a sweat lodge, but that we could certainly do our work and take [people] into the mountains [to fast]. He was completely supportive and said to us again and again, 'you do it your way, these are your people. Don't do it my way, you're not a Paiute, you do it your way.' And he liked the way we were doing it (Meredith Little, Personal interview, June 15, 2016).

She went on to say, "Storm had come along at a key moment in our lives, but Grandpa Raymond was the one who taught us about the indigenous way of perceiving the world like no one else" (Meredith Little, Personal interview, June 15, 2016). Stone would sometimes ask her to be the "interpreter" in his sweat lodge. If he had a question for an animal guide with whom he worked, he would ask Little to listen for the answer. This meant, she says:

> If he wanted to speak with Bear, he asked me to ask Bear the questions, and I was to tell him what Bear said. This took an enormous amount of trust for me to get out of the way and listen for what instantly came. This was a big deepening in my relationship with the land around me, and with life itself. Having the opportunity to practice asking and listening, and to do it with someone who immediately took whatever "Bear says" as absolute, and who used it in a good way, really helped me trust that inborn ability to communicate without the mind (Little Foster 2018, 99).

Learning to communicate without the mind, for Little, is about developing an intuitive capacity to listen to nonhuman others and also to set aside one's own need to interpret what is heard before sharing it. Stone's trust of what he heard while in his lodge, and his trust in what Little heard, were essential lessons for Foster and Little as they learned to work with a ceremony that always maintains an element of mystery, even for its facilitators.

Little's experience learning to listen to nonhuman languages in Stone's sweat lodge came to deeply inform the practice of interpretive listening that she and Foster developed to witness participant's stories after their fasts. This interpretive listening, what they call mirroring, has become the guide's way of honoring the participant's experience and helping them meditate on its meaning.[11] Little and other guides insist that mirroring is not about the guide's interpretation but is a practice more akin to "midwifery;" the guide's responsibility is to help the story be born in such a way that the participant can see the magic in their own story (Petra Lentz-Snow, Personal interview, October 16, 2017). "What we really got [from Stone]," Little says, "is that it's not about us, it's the ceremony and it's the land" (Meredith Little, Personal interview, June 15, 2016). The challenge is to reflect the story back to the participant without shaping it too much, just as Little practiced doing with Bear in Stone's lodge.

Stone's work was not without its own controversy. "When he fasted to become an 'Indian doctor,'" as he called himself, Little says, "the spirits told him that he was to let in anyone who came to the door of his lodge" (Meredith Little, Personal interview, June 15, 2016). Many non-Native people came to attend his sweat lodge ceremonies, which angered some members of the local Paiute community who thought the ceremonies should be limited to Native participants. Little and Foster also found their work judged by attendees of Stone's sweats, but the judgement came from his white

[11] See Chapters 3 and 5 for an in-depth discussion of mirroring.

attendees who would criticize them for not running their ceremony in the "traditional" way or for not having Native guides. As Little puts it, the white critics were "way more moralistic than Grandpa Raymond was," which ultimately became part of the reason that they stopped taking their participants to his lodge (Meredith Little, Personal interview, June 15, 2016).

Sun Bear and Joseph

Vincent LaDuke was born in 1929 into the Anishinabe nation on their reservation in northern Minnesota. He worked as an actor in mid-century television shows like *Broken Arrow*, but is perhaps best known as activist Winona LaDuke's father (Silverstone 2001). In 1971, he formed the Bear Tribe Medicine Society in eastern Washington and became known as Sun Bear. The Bear Tribe hosted apprentices and offered workshops to mostly white American and European audiences. Sun Bear's goal was to bring Native American teachings to non-Native audiences, and he argued that doing so was essential in order to inform an earth-based spirituality capable of responding to the environmental crisis (Sun Bear and Wabun Wind 1980; Sun Bear, Wind, and Mulligan 1991). Like Storm, Sun Bear was the subject of sharp criticism, especially from the American Indian Movement, which issued a "declaration of war" against him and other "plastic shamans" for "exploiting, abusing and misrepresenting sacred traditions and spiritual practices" (Churchill 2003, 332–33). The "plastic shaman" epithet refers to the commodification of Native American spirituality—charging money to learn or participate in ceremonies—and also raises concerns about authenticity as Sun Bear was often accused of teaching a form of spirituality that was more attuned to the desires of white environmentalists than it was to any single Native American lineage.[12] Foster, Little, and the School of Lost Borders were not the subjects of the same accusations of being "plastic shamans," but

[12] Lisa Aldred, for example, writes "New Agers romanticize an "authentic" and "traditional" Native American culture whose spirituality can save them from their own sense of malaise." "Plastic medicine people" commodify a real or imagined Native American spiritual practice and sell it for personal profit (Aldred 2000, 329).

understanding Sun Bear's influence on school guides and the school's culture helps to situate their work in the context of broader cultural debates about Native American philosophy, practice, and its intersections with the largely white American counterculture.

Joseph is one of the senior guides at the School of Lost Borders, and he has guided fasts for more than twenty years. He lived and worked at the Bear Tribe for five years where he learned from the Bear Tribe's teachers to lead pipe and sweat lodge ceremonies. Joseph says, "it was hugely opening for me … [The Bear Tribe] represented my first exposure to land-based ceremony," by which he means ceremonies that are grounded in and work through landscapes understood to be both materially and spiritually alive (Joseph Lazenka, Personal interview, June 18, 2016). But his time at the Bear Tribe also sparked grief and doubt:

> The core wound that came out of that for me was that I felt this deep, deep sadness that I didn't know my lineage at all. I felt the richness of what Sun Bear was talking about, the incredible history and connection of the Native people who came there as teachers (Joseph Lazenka, Personal interview, June 18, 2016).

But Joseph felt a certain distance from those teachers:

> I could feel the disconnect when I was having a conversation with somebody who was really steeped in the lineage that they came from. I could love it, I could get excited about it, but I didn't know it in my bones. It was almost as if we were speaking two different languages. And that's a beautiful thing (Joseph Lazenka, Personal interview, June 18, 2016).

In the sadness and the beauty that Joseph felt in his relationships with teachers at the Bear Tribe, one perceives the tension of continuity and difference in the broader effort to develop an ecocultural identity in conversation with land-based traditions, but without that same historical

connection to place. In simultaneously feeling both sadness and beauty, Joseph laments the disconnect with his own lineage while appreciating the perspective of those who can speak from that standpoint. When he went to work with Little and Foster, Joseph began to develop his own ecocultural identity through the practice of ceremony at the School of Lost Borders, which he was drawn to, in part, because he experienced their framework as open enough to engage people from many diverse ecocultural traditions.

By the late 1980's, Foster and Little were recognized as experts in nature-based rites of passage by community leaders, other practitioners, and scholars (Foster and Little 1996; Plotkin 2010, xxii, 124; Squatriglia and Writer 2003). The Bear Tribe sent their teachers, Joseph included, to the School of Lost Borders to train to facilitate fasting ceremonies. It was at the school that Joseph began transforming his experiences with the Bear Tribe into work that he could feel comfortable with in the context of his own ecocultural identity. Doing so allowed him to clarify his own discomfort at the Bear Tribe:

> I got so much healing from learning about the pipe ceremony and being in the sweat lodge, but I also felt the great weight and guilt of permission. Even though I was getting permission [from teachers at the Bear Tribe], I still didn't feel that in my heart (Joseph Lazenka, Personal interview, June 18, 2016).

Joseph was aware of the broader politics of the sweat and pipe ceremonies, which led him to find his own way with land-based ceremony. After he trained with Foster and Little, Joseph stopped practicing the ceremonies he learned at the Bear Tribe and focused on facilitating fasts with Foster and Little. He says, "the only thing I can offer the wounding and the misappropriation [of Native culture] is to just let those ceremonies go." While fasting in the desert, he buried his pipe as a symbol of that severance. With Foster and Little, Joseph could work in the spirit taught by his mentors at the Bear

Tribe—ceremonial practices borne out of a longstanding connection to land—but do so in a way that felt better tuned to his own history and ecocultural identity.

Authority and appropriation

To some readers, these glimpses of the school's history may read as earnest attempts to develop an ecocultural identity that emerges from a ceremonial relationship with an animate landscape. More skeptical readers may wonder about a century of contentious debates about permission, authority, authenticity, and power that lie underneath the specific history of the school. Next, I consider the context in which the school's work arose, which impacted the debates and tensions around permission and cultural appropriation that course through the specific vignettes described above.

When the school was developing in the 1970s and 1980s, there were important convergences and disconnects arising between the mostly white U.S. counter-culture environmental movement and a resurgent Native American politics of resistance. 1970 marked the first Earth Day celebration, and it is also the year that American Indian Movement (AIM) activists and others occupied Alcatraz Island off the coast of California to draw attention to treaty violations and the outrageous impoverishment suffered by Native Americans. Between 1968 and 1978 the US Congress passed landmark environmental legislation that included founding the Environmental Protection Agency. During that same decade, Native activists organized in response to ongoing dispossession of tribal lands from which valuable resources were extracted. AIM was met with violent persecution while environmentalists celebrated policy victories (see Johansen 2013; Matthiessen 1983).

Despite environmental regulatory progress that is nearly unfathomable in the contemporary U.S. political climate, many saw legislative action as an inadequate solution to environmental problems. What was needed, critics argued, was not just effective environmental management but a

reconsideration of what it is to be human, what nature is, and the ethical bonds that tie the two together (Roszak 1969; 1992; Shepard 1982). Interest in Native American spiritual traditions surged (Krech 2000). Sun Bear's mission to "reach out and help all people relate better to the Earth Mother" (1980 p 4), and Storm's message that "all things…have spirit and life, including the rivers, rocks, earth, sky, plants, and animals" (1972 p 5) found an eager audience in the environmentalist counterculture whose adherents longed for cultural change that went beyond regulatory reform.

At the same time, and with far less support from whites, AIM arose as a direct action political movement to confront the ongoing process of colonization that left many Native Americans desperately poor and bereft of vital cultural traditions (Matthiessen 1983). The movement reached a zenith during the 1975 occupation of Wounded Knee in South Dakota, the site of a massacre of Native Americans by white soldiers a century before. AIM activists also sought a spiritual foundation for their work. Founder Dennis Banks said in a documentary interview, "I needed to understand spirituality, I needed something to grasp onto" (Mueller and Salt 2011). Sweat lodge and pipe ceremonies became important spiritual practices for AIM, and those practices helped AIM activists emphasize their difference from white society. AIM leaders also invoked Mother Earth in a more militant way than Sun Bear or Storm. Russel Means, a prominent AIM leader, said, "Mother Earth has been abused…Mother Earth will retaliate, the whole environment will retaliate, and the abusers will be eliminated" (Gill 1987, 1). While Sun Bear spoke of a spiritual awakening that would draw people together in service of an animate world, Means spoke of that same living planet bringing down colonialism. Tensions quickly rose between AIM activists and people who identified with the largely white environmentalist counterculture, including Sun Bear. People like Sun Bear and Storm were also targeted as "hucksters" because they were seen as profiting personally from Native American philosophy and practice with seemingly little concern for the continued impoverishment and persecution of many Native American communities (Owen 2008, 88). As Churchill put it, "The

authors grew rich peddling their trash, while real Indians starved to death, out of the sight and mind of America" (Churchill 2003, 324). Such critiques resonate with contemporary debates about turning to Indigenous philosophies and practices to conceptualize and experience an animate world. Sarah Radcliffe writes, "Indigenous peoples are sought out to illustrate non-western MTH [more-than-human] engagements, enlivening geographical imaginations even as they downplay the colonial modern and settler geographies" (Radcliffe 2017, 225). Approaches that do not actively address the colonial past and present, these critics say, fall short because they romanticize Indigenous thought without engaging the contemporary political struggles of indigeneity.

What further complicates this history is that as each group—the counterculture environmentalists and those allied with AIM— sought authentic and meaningful alternatives to capitalist constructions of nature and colonial politics, they turned to philosophies and practices that are themselves emergent from the endless reflection and diffraction of projection, differentiation, fantasy, and exploitation that have shaped colonial violence and resistance in North America. There is no clear "outside" to colonialism in North America. In addition to orientalism, the projection of one culture's shadow onto an artificially constructed other (Said 2006), white and Native worlds in North America might be better described as "profoundly implicated in each other," the two distinct worlds transformed into "borderland," a place "where Self and Other paw at the ghostly imaginings of each other's powers" (Taussig 1993, 249). That the two worlds are implicated in one another does not suggest equivalence. Rather, it historicizes and spatializes both worlds. Indigenous philosophies and practices are sometimes imagined as timeless, with an "almost magnetic attachment" to place, which can divorce concepts and practices from political conflict (Radcliffe 2017, 223). However, the traditional ceremonies that AIM turned to and that crossover figures like Sun Bear and Storm most often carried with them to white audiences—the pipe ceremony, the vision quest, the sun dance—were themselves travelers, their modern incarnations produced in part by colonial violence and the

Native diaspora that traveled in its wake. A brief foray into how those ceremonies traveled from their Lakota home to far-flung places like Grandpa Raymond's backyard in eastern California offers some additional context for understanding the divergent ways the ceremonies were taken up and defended in the late 20th century.

As the genocide and displacement of Native communities intensified in the second half of the 19th century, a "pan-Indian" ecocultural identity began to emerge (P. J. Deloria 2007). Native people who worked to speak across worlds in order to make their philosophy and spirituality legible and accessible to non-Native audiences sometimes strategically deployed a pan-cultural identity that flattened differences between Native nations by contrasting a land-based Native ecocultural identity to dominant white culture (see Black Elk and Neihardt 1961; Eastman 1914; Gill 1987; Neihardt and Black Elk 1984). Further, citizens of many Native nations experienced similar hardships as they were forced off their land and onto reservations. Shared ceremonial practices became a way to build bonds of solidarity across nations, reflecting common ecocultural identity commitments. The sweat lodge, vision quest, and sun dance ceremonies began to travel beyond the Lakota communities that had stewarded them for centuries, and the ceremonies became emblematic traditions of this new pan-Indian ecocultural identity that arose across the continent. Prominent Lakota practitioners also encouraged non-Natives to practice the ceremonies in an attempt to ensure their survival under colonial rule in addition to a belief that "these ceremonies do not belong to Indians alone. They can be done by all who have the right attitude" and are for the "good of mankind" (Mails and Chief Eagle 1979, 51–52). Colonial violence was thus an impetus for translating the ceremonies for other worlds and a means of preserving and protecting a Native ecocultural identity that crossed national and ontological borders.

In the 1970's, when AIM activists claimed the pipe ceremony, sweat lodge, and other ceremonies as part of their expression of a newly politicized Native identity, they advocated for

limiting practice of the ceremonies to ethnically Native communities, in distinction to some earlier advocates for sharing such practices (Owen 2008). This was not without reason. Less than two decades earlier, when future AIM activists like Leonard Peltier first participated in the sun dance ceremony, practice of the ceremony was still illegal in the United States, so they came to represent resistance to cultural and material death (Matthiessen 1978, 47). There was never consensus among Native communities beyond AIM on limiting non-Native participation in ceremonies, but arguments from AIM and allied scholars about "spiritual hucksterism," and "pathetic" spiritual seekers vulnerable to "every kind of mercenary hustler imaginable" (Churchill 2003, 324–25) came to dominate a discourse about such ceremonies. AIM's adoption of Lakota practices politicized them in a new way, as an expression of "authentic Native American culture" (Owen 2008, 56), in distinction to white counterculture appropriations of those same practices.

Citation and affinity

It is not clear that guides at the school were aware of the history of how and why Native American ceremonies had traveled the continent, but they were aware of, and responding to, the charged debates around cultural appropriation in the 1980's. Gigi Coyle, another long-time guide at the school who continues to serve as an elder adviser to the school, began working with Foster and Little in the early 1980's. At that same time, she also became involved Joan Halifax's work at the newly-formed Ojai Foundation. Many of the School of Lost Borders' guides have been involved with the foundation. Halifax was trained as a medical anthropologist and she has written on death and dying (Halifax 2014) and shamanism (Halifax 1997) among other topics. Halifax worked for a time as a research assistant for Joseph Campbell, whose writings on mythology were an early influence on Foster and Little. At the Ojai foundation, which Halifax shaped as an educational and interfaith center, teachers from around the world ran workshops on spirituality and consciousness.

Hyemeyhosts Storm was among those teachers and Coyle and others report that AIM members would sometimes come to the Ojai Foundation to protest the presence of Storm or others offering Native American teachings. Coyle says, "in those years we were very aware of the controversial stuff going on," meaning the debates about sharing or selling Native American traditions and the arguments over the authenticity of Native American teachings being shared (Gigi Coyle, Personal interview, June 16, 2016).

Part of what attracted Coyle and others to Foster and Little's work was their sense that Foster and Little were offering something very different than an appropriation of a Native practice. They saw Foster and Little's work as getting at something universal that stood at some remove from the debates about cultural appropriation and authenticity that swirled around figures like Storm and Sun Bear. For Coyle, the universal teaching was, "we are all nature and not separate from it." She deeply appreciated that Foster and Little had received permission from Grandpa Raymond to do their work in the Owens Valley, a place that Coyle describes as having "a lot of historical trauma, pain, and injustice" (Gigi Coyle, Personal interview, June 16, 2016). Guides were also attracted to Foster and Little because of their humble approach. Emerald, a guide who joined the school in 1990 after years at both the Ojai Foundation and living in an intentional community run by Storm, says that "after watching a parade of teachers come through the Ojai Foundation and after being with Storm, the contrast with Steven and Meredith was that they sat on the ground with their participants and did not try to own or control the ceremony from a place of ego" (Emerald North, Personal interview, February 15, 2017). Emerald's sentiments are similar to Joseph's feeling of openness and acceptance of many traditions that he found at the School of Lost Borders. Coyle describes Foster and Little in a similar way, saying that they "made room for each person to make it their ceremony and to find their way. Our job as guides became to support them to be safe, to have a place to come back and tell their story, but it was not about teaching medicine ways" (Gigi Coyle, Personal

interview, June 16, 2016). Aware of the anger and concern over cultural appropriation, the School of Lost Borders shaped a fasting ceremony that they believe is distinct from Native American traditions and universal in two important ways. First is the sense that the ceremony can be adapted to many cultural traditions. The second universal is the conviction that guides hold that going out alone on the land to ponder existential questions is a universal human trait, it is "in our bones." In nearly every school program that I have witnessed, I have heard some version of the statement, "this ceremony is in our bones, it's a human ceremony." Coyle says:

> This ceremony is open, it is a ceremony that is there for us all to explore our roots, our connections. Not only our human lineage and ancestral connections but also our connections with the plants, with the animals, with earth, water, fire, and air" (Gigi Coyle, Personal interview, June 16, 2016).

Emerald says:

> The ceremony is in our bones, it comes from within us, and the bare bones of SOLB came from Steven and Meredith's bones, the two of them are one of the bare bones of the ceremony" (Emerald North, Personal interview, February 15, 2017).

Guides at the school almost always include the history of their teachings in school programs: Storm is credited with the four shields; Grandpa Raymond Stone is noted in the history of the school and local politics; guides who learned from Sun Bear give him credit. Guides will also name the many non-Native influences in their work like those mentioned earlier: Jungian psychology; Gregory Bateson's systems theory; and contemplative traditions like Buddhism and Christian mysticism. By situating their work in a global rites-of-passage tradition and attending to local relationships, such as the one with Grandpa Raymond Stone, the school has only very occasionally been pulled into debates about cultural appropriation (see West 2010).

Nevertheless, while guides may be intending to respectfully distinguish their work from Native American traditions and to create a ceremony that is compatible with a plurality of traditions, one effect of doing so seems to be the obfuscation of the specific histories and geographies from which contemporary land-based fasting ceremonies have emerged. An essay on "Cultural Relationships," written by Gigi Coyle and published on the school's website, speaks about respect for the Paiute people who live in the Owens valley but makes no reference to the historical tensions I described above. The essay makes oblique references to money and mentions the fact that the school never turns a person away because they can't pay, but it provides little context for why paying for a fasting ceremony would be a fraught proposition to begin with. In the past few years, I have watched the school begin to more actively work with this history in its training programs, which now often include discussions on cultural appropriation and power. A recent statement on cultural relations published by a school guide states:

> As a group of mostly white people, we are painfully aware of the history of colonization and the subsequent cultural misappropriation that has been forced upon those who are indigenous to the lands where we do our work (Perluss No date).

Meredith Little also recently published a memoir, which is the first written account of which I am aware that details Little and Foster's relationships with Storm and Stone (Little Foster 2018). And yet, the tangled history of the ceremony itself remains poorly examined and that history is largely unknown beyond the school and in the wider community of practitioners of land-based fasting ceremonies.

Beyond the school, while Foster and Little's work has been crucial to launching the field of contemporary rites of passage ceremonies, the specific history and geography of their work has been muted, and the significance of Native mentors in the development of the practice has been obscured. A popular work on nature-based psychology, for example, presents a medicine wheel

psychological model that is strikingly similar to Foster and Little's, whom the author acknowledges along with unspecified "Native American teachings." Readers are told, however, that the author's medicine wheel "bears only cursory similarity to other models I know—Western or indigenous, ancient or modern" (Plotkin 2008, 52). Doing so neatly sidesteps the problem of a non-innocent intellectual heritage. With Sun Bear, Storm, and their controversial history rendered mostly absent, the text is less likely to be drawn into debates on cultural appropriation or the use of inauthentic Native traditions, but the chain of citation is cut. Doing so makes it more difficult to work in the fraught tension of dialogues across worlds that are shaped by ongoing colonial legacies.

Working towards affinity

While the guides at the School of Lost Borders have developed a ceremony that is distinct from other practices, mentorship, history, and landscape connect the ceremony to Native philosophies and practices. Therefore, an important question that remains at the conclusion of the chapter is, can lines of affinity form between non-indigenous practitioners like the guides at the school and indigenous thinkers and activists who are at the forefront of shaping progressive ecocultural identities and socioecological activism? Can those lines of affinity form without needing to erase or resolve this ceremony's complex and never-innocent history?

An approach that focuses on affinity while being mindful of difference may make perceptible the many threads that connect so-called Western and Indigenous worlds. The strong critiques of a generation ago helped to rein in the commodification of Native spiritual practice and served to define AIM and their allies as a political movement grounded in traditional spiritual practices. What may be particularly useful now is a critical posture that is both devoted to facing the violence of colonialism and is open to conceptual and applied practices that move somewhat freely between worlds in order to forge ecocultural identities that share a commitment to experiencing the

human psyche as emergent from an animate world. Some have noted that as environmental humanities scholars working in Western conceptual traditions begin to attend to an animate world that was long ignored, the indigenous philosophies and traditions that articulated and nurtured that animate understanding and experience of the world for thousands of years have often yet again been left out of the conversation (Todd 2016). Some geographers, however, express ambivalence about turning to Indigenous philosophies and communities to reveal an animate world because of the implicit judgements they see in opposing Western and Indigenous worlds; Indigenous worlds may be characterized as a timeless foil to Western ones, which can result in Indigenous philosophies being placed outside of history and intellectual debate (Radcliffe 2017; Sundberg 2013). Others, who also have a deep appreciation of the legacies of colonial violence, emphasize that while their attempts to experience the world as psychically alive owe a debt to indigenous traditions, they try to avoid by appropriation by developing a philosophy of animism grounded in "our own worldly encounters" (van Dooren and Rose 2016, 81). Deborah Bird Rose and Val Plumwood, in particular, have built a conceptual foundation of "philosophical animism" that is informed by their experiences with aboriginal mentors in Australia which they refract through critical analyses of the Western philosophical canon (Plumwood 2013; D. B. Rose 2013).

If scholars who describe and interpret work that travels between conceptual worlds map potential lines of affinity among diverse communities who share a commitment to an ecocultural identity that emerges from an animate world, then ecocultural scholarship can attend to difference, critique appropriation or erasure, and contribute to building a community with shared ecocultural commitments. Problematic histories should be detailed, but they should not necessarily render practices illegitimate. In the practice of the land-based fasting ceremony performed at the school, what is held in common with so many other traditions are its commitments to recognizing earth as psychically alive, to the human self as emergent from immanent relationship with that living earth,

and to accessing sacred space through the practice of ceremony. The school's work will not stand on its own. It does not replace the need for ongoing struggles to address recognition, sovereignty, and exploitation.

As a contribution to the study of ecocultural identity, what narratives like those presented here can do is detail how communities reach beyond the traditions of their own conceptual world for inspiration and mentorship as they work to weave the experience of self together with an animate world. Inquiry into that embodied work allows scholars to map the potential lines of affinity between distinct yet interrelated worlds, even as that mapping also draws attention to how the tensions and violence of ongoing colonial realities must be reckoned with at the same time. The project of describing and theorizing ecocultural identity will require scholars to show enthusiasm for describing new efforts to weave together experiences of identity and place as well as to adopt a generous critical perspective that engages fraught debates precisely because they have the productive potential to shape more just and livable ways of being.

Chapter 5: Storytelling, Ceremony, and the Paradox of Thresholds

Introduction

This final chapter of the dissertation is about thresholds, "ordinary magic," and the geography of psyche, an ambiguous concept that both evokes one's most deeply held sense of self and shrouds that self in mystery. The threshold in question is a simple circle of stones laid out in a desert. For forty years, guides at a small non-profit organization in California have been facilitating a practice of ceremonial fasting as a rite of passage, as a ritualized movement through life transitions. The practice they have developed is unique, but it owes a significant debt to Paiute, Cheyenne, and Lakota traditions, an historical entanglement that I explore at length elsewhere (Carlin forthcoming). The ceremony's form is quite simple. Participants step across the simple stone threshold, walk to a solo spot in the desert, and refrain from food, company, and shelter for four days and nights. Those three abstentions help to turn on and amplify a world that shimmers with psychic resonance, where deeply held existential questions—who am I? What is it to die?—are explored topographically as participants wander a desert landscape in which self and world are understood to mirror one another. The "ordinary magic" of the ceremony, guides say, is that psyche doesn't reside in our heads, it lives in the world. All things participate in psyche.[13]

Psyche is an enigmatic but thoroughly geographical term. To speak of one's psyche is to evoke one's most deeply held and only partially understood sense of "me." Psyche originated as a metaphysical descriptor, an unseen spark that gives things their soul, a different sort of substance than the material body.[14] In Greek mythology, Psyche partnered with Eros, the god of desire, though she could visit him only in a dark cave in the depth of night; fitting imagery for journeys into

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[13] Rather than using the term, "the psyche," I usually choose to use the word, "psyche," in order to frame psyche more as a concept than a noun. Similar to how "landscape" is used in geography to speak about the broader concept, while "the landscape" refers to a specific place.

[14] For an in-depth history of the concept, psyche, from a Jungian perspective, see James Hillman's, *The Thought of the Heart and the Soul of the World* (1992).

the murky depths that explorations of the soul can be. In the 19th century, mirrors in dressing rooms were called psyche glasses, as if looking into one's own eyes was to look beyond or beneath the visible self to a deeper self who resides elsewhere. Geographers have called psyche the "closest of all" spaces; it is an ambiguous space where something felt as deeply personal is also revealed as a "socio-spatial phenomena" (Davidson and Parr 2014, 119). For inquiries into psyche, the central question is geographical: "Where is the 'me?'" (Hillman 1995, xvii).

To explore the geography of psyche, the chapter offers an ethnographic account of the school's practice of fasting alone. I will argue that the ritualized practice of storytelling and listening at work in this ceremony helps to dissolve the threshold that at first made the ceremony possible. It gives body to an experience that might otherwise be submerged into a dreamlike world or float away as an ephemeral flirtation with an animate world that only exists across a ceremonial threshold that separates it from everyday life. The juxtaposition of solitude while fasting with the social exercise of storytelling and listening amplifies the intensity of both aspects of the experience. I begin with a brief review of geographic debates on psyche. Next, I introduce a Jungian-inspired interpretation of psyche in dialog with the work of Laguna Pueblo scholar, Leslie Marmon Silko. I then turn to an ethnography of one woman's experience with fasting program, whom I'll call Louisa. I meditate on the significance of the threshold in her experience of fasting and how it facilitates an experiential inquiry into psyche. Next, I discuss the school's practice of storytelling and interpretive listening in helping to dissolve the threshold. I close the chapter by considering the interplay of loss and recovery in the school's work and in socioecological critique and politics more broadly.

Psyche

A vibrant conversation on psyche is taking place in the geographic literatures on psychoanalytic concepts, emotional geographies, and therapeutic landscapes. While diverse in their

approaches and claims, many psychoanalytic geographies argue that the psyche is intersubjective and has material components. Following Freud's claim that there is a "topography" of the psyche, geographers have explored the unconscious topographies of cities (Mott and Roberts 2014; Pile 2014), while others have turned to the work of Jacques Lacan to push Freud's topographical metaphors beyond Euclidean space to think of psychic space as topological instead of as constrained by conventional geographies (Blum and Secor 2011). Also drawing on Lacan, Robbins and Moore (2013) show how anxieties about the intersections of humans and nature manifest in conservation science, and how the genocide of native peoples in what is now the United States haunts contemporary conservation policy and its legacies (Robbins and Moore 2019). Geographers who write from a psychotherapeutic perspective have conceptualized emotions as existing in a relational space between people and in places, not as internal psychic states (Bondi 2007b; Davidson, Smith, and Bondi 2007). The "therapeutic landscape" concept has been developed as a "geographic metaphor for . . . understanding how the healing process works itself out in places (Gesler in A. Williams 1999, 2). Consistent with geographic scholarship that has long called into question the division between nature and society, each of these approaches recognizes the fuzziness of the boundaries between self and world; the self is more than the individual and place is subjective as well as spatial. In affinity with scholarship on subjectivity that increasingly defines it by its externalities (M. Rose 2006; Simpson 2017; Woodward, Jones, and Marston 2012; Wylie 2010), geographers of psyche are faced with a perplexing question: if psyche does not reside on the inside, if there is no inside, what might be found by looking outwards, looking for depth and the spark of psyche in the things of the world?

Carl Jung and Leslie Marmon Silko on psyche

Jungian concepts of psyche provide a way towards conceptualizing and experiencing the psychic depth of the world. The work of Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung has not often been considered by geographers. Peter Bishop published two thoughtful papers on Jungian work in *Ecumene* (now *Cultural Geographies)*—one on depth psychology more generally (Bishop 1992) and one on Jungian scholar James Hillman's concept of the anima mundi or world soul (Bishop 1994). Those papers, however, are rarely cited in geography and are not even mentioned in recent reviews of psychoanalytic work in the discipline (Kingsbury 2014, 32). Geographers have perhaps been wary of references to "collective" psychic experience in Jung's work that could be read as referencing a universal, humanist subject (Pile in Philo and Parr 2003, 285). Bishop writes in the humanist tradition and argues that Jungian thought can provide insight into geographic scholarship on sense of place, but it would be wrong to assert that Jung, Hillman, or Bishop conceived of the human subject as whole or universal. Instead, Bishop argues that one of Jung and Hillman's most important arguments is that the bulk of the psyche resides outside the individual body and that "interiority" should not refer to individual psychic experience, but to the psychic depth that is a character of all things in the world.

Jung wrestled with how to define psyche throughout his career, and he often insisted that the psyche "as such" was unknowable (Jung 2011, xv). For Jung, the psyche is a symbol that always exceeds its description. "The numinosity of the object," he writes, "makes it difficult to handle intellectually, since our affectivity is always involved" (Jung 2011, 90). He resisted materialist understandings that he worried could reduce psyche to an epiphenomenon of physiological processes, a concern that some contemporary scholars share about efforts to capture the essence of experience through neuroscience (Atchley, Strayer, and Atchley 2012; Fisher 2013a; Martin 2004; Satel and Lilienfeld 2013). Jung sometimes described psyche as a "hidden third" between mind and matter, "that intermediate realm of subtle reality which can be adequately only expressed by the

symbol" (Jung in Bishop 1994, 55; von Franz 2001), which is in some ways quite close to how spiritual landscapes have been theorized as "that realm between presence and absence, material and immaterial" (Henry in Dewsbury and Cloke 2009, 705). Jung wrote that "'psychic' means physical and spiritual…neither mind nor matter, but later, however, he would describe psyche as a rhizome, "something that lives and endures underneath the eternal flux" of individual lives, which are the "blossom that passes" (Jung 1963, 4). It is this last definition that I think best captures a tension in Jung's thought that psyche embodies both a deeply personal sense of self and is also a connective tissue that exceeds the individual, yet makes an experience of self possible. James Hillman, an influential post-Jungian scholar, elaborates on this tension between the personal and impersonal senses of psyche. He writes that "the boundaries of the soul"—a word that he often uses as a synonym for psyche, "are ill-defined." It is a "set of living processes, independent of our notions of personal individuality … but "still the feeling persists that the soul has a personal location." "Paradoxically," he writes, "it is not a private flame but a flowing participation, a knotted complexity of strands whose entanglements are also 'yours' and 'theirs' (Hillman 1972, 22–24). Jung, and Hillman after him, strove to describe and facilitate an experience of psyche as simultaneously personal and flowing through the world, an aim that stems from Jung's charge that one of the key pathologies of 20th century Euro-American culture was the conceptual and experiential retreat of psyche from the world and into the individual.

Jung's work to locate and experience psyche in the world resonates with Native American Pueblo philosophy. In 1925, Jung visited Taos Pueblo and spent two days in conversation with Ochwiay Biano, also known as Antonio Mirabal, whom Jung considered a Pueblo elder (V. Deloria 2009; cf Barton 2016).[15] The visit profoundly influenced Jung and it led him to reflect on the

[15] Barton (2016) argues that Jung was mistaken in identifying Biano as an elder. He claims that Biano was a young man at the time of Jung's visit and had no particular status in the Pueblo community.

"hollowness" of the colonial project and to understand his own limitations of being "trapped in the cultural consciousness of a white man" (V. Deloria 2009, viii, 17). To be sure, Jung both idealized the Pueblo world that he experienced only briefly, and he continued to struggle to break free of the developmentalist prejudices of the analytic psychology that he helped to found, a prejudice that often trapped Jung in hierarchical and evolutionary understandings of psyche that imagined a progression from animal, to primitive, to contemporary people. Nevertheless, Biano became Jung's exemplar of psychological maturity. Sioux scholar Vine Deloria Jr. argues that Jung's psychology is the "only lens through which western culture could come to understand indigenous philosophy" and he wrote a generous critical commentary of Jung's work from the Sioux perspective, arguing that if Jung is taken seriously, "we admit psyche is the world" (V. Deloria 2009, xii, 15).

Jung's visit to Taos and his meeting with Biano was made possible by a community of white intellectuals and artists who settled in Taos in early twentieth century. Mabel Luhan Dodge was a wealthy arts philanthropist who moved to Taos in 1917 (Luhan 1987; Rudnick, MaLin, and Wilson-Powell 2016). There, she divorced her husband and married a Pueblo man, Tony Luhan. Dodge is credited as one of the founders of the Taos Arts colony, which included D.H. Lawrence, Georgia O'keefe, and others (Porter et al. 1999). It is reported that Biano was in regular conversation with members of the arts colony prior to Jung's visit, including extensive conversation with linguist Jaime de Angulo, who was working with Biano to create a written version of the Tiwa language (Barton 2016; see de Angulo 1979; Jaime and Gui 1999). Jungian scholar David Barton argues that Jung's conversations with Biano were not an unmediated encounter with an Indigenous person largely uninfluenced by colonization, but that Biano was a sophisticated mediator between Indigenous and

Western worlds who would go on to be a national political advocate for Indigenous rights (Barton 2016).[16]

Though Jung visited Taos well after he had established the main currents of his psychology, he wrote of the visit's enduring influence on his thought, especially with regards to connections between the human psyche and the more-than-human world (Jung 1963; Bernstein in V. Deloria 2009). To further situate Jung's work and to consider its relationship to Pueblo thought, I'll offer parallel readings of Jung and Leslie Marmon Silko, a contemporary Laguna Pueblo novelist and scholar.

A key theme in Jung's work is a lament for what he diagnosed in himself and his European patients as a lost ability to perceive the numinous being of the world, rendering earth "dry as dust and entirely inhuman." "Man feels himself isolated in the cosmos," he writes. "He is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional participation in natural events, which hitherto had a symbolic meaning for him. Thunder is no longer the voice of a god, nor is lightning his avenging missile" (Jung 1979, Vol 18, 255). Silko, writing from the Pueblo perspective in the American Southwest in the late 20th century, says:

> A bolt of lightning is itself, but at the same time it may mean much more. It may be a messenger of good fortune when summer rains are needed. It may deliver death, perhaps result of manipulations by the Gunnadeyahs, destructive necromancers" (Silko 2002, 1005).

Jung writes that "immediate communication with nature is gone forever, and the emotional energy it generated has sunk into the unconscious" where "this enormous loss is compensated by the symbols in dreams" (Jung 1979, Vol 18, 255), while Silko instead writes that physical landscapes themselves should be considered as similar to dreams:

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[16] Biano's role as a sophisticated mediator between Pueblo and EuroAmerican worlds is similar to that of other well-known translators of Native American worlds for white audiences such as Charles Eastman (1914), Black Elk (1961; 1984), or Frank Fools Crow (Mails and Chief Eagle 1979).

> Both have the power to seize terrifying feelings and deep instincts and translate them into images—visual, aural, tactile—into the concrete where human beings may more readily confront and channel the terrifying instincts or powerful emotions into rituals and narratives which reassure the individual while reaffirming cherished values of the group (2002, 1012).

Both Jung and Silko write from within the wreckage of colonial violence. Jung's lament is a psychological take on similar critiques of the disenchantment (Weber 2015), demythologization (Horkheimer and Adorno 2001), and domination of "nature" (Merchant 1980) in Western knowledge traditions. For Jung, a deep loneliness emerged in Western culture as Nature was reduced to matter. Silko, however, writing in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, recalls and reincarnates a living, animate world that shimmers with emotional, symbolic, and spiritual meaning. In her writing, she is recalling what she terms the "ancient Pueblo vision of the world," and the characters in her novels often strive to connect their own experience with that vision. Jung yearns for a numinous landscape while Silko narrates it. Both writers reach towards an understanding and experience of what I would call an animate landscape, one that emanates meaning as well as reflects it. Critical environmental scholars are often suspicious of narratives of environmental loss, what Neil Smith termed the "'back to nature' wing of the ecological movement" (1984, 372; see Braun 2002; 2015), because they argue that the sense of loss being communicated is an imagined one, a nostalgia for a pure nature that never existed. But other critical geographers argue that "a story of loss is not always and only a lament; it can also be a measure of possibility. What once was may be again" (MacKinnon in Collard, Dempsey, and Sundberg 2015, 327). The characters in Silko's novels often embody that effort to reach towards the past in order to realize a richer future. Her characters suffer from the many violences and indignities of the genocide that swept across the North American continent and whose reality continues to be lived and felt: boarding school programs that tore Native children

apart from their parents, their land, and the culture (2005); soldiers returned from war reeling from post-traumatic stress, alcohol, and traditions largely buried but still hinted at (1977). She narrates a world dimmed by violence, but vibrant and alive nonetheless. Jung instead tries to come to grips with some of the consequences of the violent onslaught of colonization in which he occupied a privileged space. Colonial prejudices haunt Jung's work—he incessantly contrasted the "primitive" and "civilized"—as they also haunt the profound psychic and material losses of modernity. Like many critics who bore witness to two world wars and the first use of nuclear weapons, he understood that the 20th century's culmination of the fantasy of dominating nature was "an uncanny tendency to invent…better and better means for wholesale suicide" (Jung 1979, Vol 18, 260). Jung's writing, collected in 18 separate volumes, went in many divergent directions, but the theme of the conceptual and perceptual retreat of psyche from the world and the individual and collective damage that retreat wrought looms large in Jung's work and its legacy. Silko's words show just how much Jung's thought resonates with Pueblo philosophy and also shows how Jungian criticism might pivot from lament to recovery.

Crossing the threshold with Louisa

To ground this discussion of psyche, I return to that simple circle of stones laid out in the desert with which I opened the chapter. I'll focus on the story of one participant, Louisa, to illustrate the experience of fasting and the effort to experience and represent psyche as permeating an animate landscape. One story never speaks for another, and I make no claim that Louisa's story represents a generalizable case of the experience of ceremonial fasting itself. Instead, Louisa's generosity in sharing her story with me allows readers and I to "walk-with" her experience as a way to keep the conceptual arguments of the chapter close to lived experience (Sundberg 2013, 40).

Louisa is one of thousands of people who have fasted with the School of Lost Borders since the 1970's. The school's founders began their work by trying to craft meaningful rites of passage ceremonies for teenagers on the cusp of adulthood. They ran various sorts of wilderness and adventure trips for young people and, with the help of mentors and the study of anthropological texts on rites of passage, they developed a ceremony centered on fasting alone in a wild landscape (see Carlin forthcoming for a detailed account of the school's history). People come to the school to mark their passage into adulthood or elderhood, to move on from a relationship that has ended, to prepare to welcome children into their lives, to celebrate sobriety, or to lay a trauma to rest, among countless other reasons. Participants do not necessarily come to the school with the explicit intention of experiencing the landscape as animate or of their sense of self as continuous with the landscape. Often, however, participants do arrive at the school with a sense that experiences in natural places can be healing or therapeutic in ways that other experiences can't, and they often have a desire to better understand how such experiences happen or to feel more deeply connected to the land. Louisa, for example, ran a wilderness skills program that trains people to travel and live for short periods in wild landscapes with minimal equipment. Though she was not trained in the school's methods, she came to the school having had many experiences of retreating to wild landscapes for rejuvenation or soul searching.

Foster and Little began leading wilderness trips in the early 1970's and were influenced by the rise of the American counterculture. Foster wrote about his own experiences with psychedelics, for example, which helped to form some of his ideas about nonhuman agency, but also left him hungry for practices that helped to move his sense of self further into the world rather than into the mind as did his experiences with psychedelics (Foster and Little 1980). Participants' experiences do have resonances with contemporary accounts of psychedelic therapy, but the guiding philosophy at the school is that such experiences are informed by learning to listen to the more-than-human

world. This is not incompatible with accounts of psychedelic experiences, but it is a different emphasis (see Metzner 1999; Pollan 2007). They were also influenced by Joseph Campbell's work on mythology and thought of the programs that they facilitated as offering a sort of hero's journey, a difficult experience in which one retreats to an underworld, faces demons or challenges, and emerges better able to serve their communities (Campbell 1972; Foster and Little 1996).

For Louisa's fast, ten participants, two guides, and two assistant guides—the role that I played—gathered together at a campground in the eastern Sierra. Early in the program, the guides teach a nature-based model of psychology and human development that theorizes nature and self as mirrors of one another. In it, the four cardinal directions—south, west, north, east—are associated with phases of life—childhood, adolescence, adulthood, elderhood and qualities that guides associate with each phase. Childhood, for example, is associated with feeling emotions in a reactive way, while the west (adolescence) is seen as a time of brooding or introspection. Adulthood is understood as a time and place of service to others, while the east (elderhood) is associated with occupying a more liminal space between death and birth, a place of inspiration and spirit. The teaching encourages participants to be open to more-than-human encounters as both mundane and full of meaning, and it provides a simple interpretive framework to begin making sense of those encounters. While the framework is quite meaningful for guides and I find that it informs how they understand their own experiences fasting, I found that it is less meaningful as a system or interpretive structure for participants. The framework is introduced only briefly (usually in an afternoon), and it is taught at a time when participants are often preoccupied with anxieties about the upcoming fast, with living with a group, or with the challenges of living outdoors. Thus, in general I find that participants are influenced less by the specifics of the model and more by the encouragement to be open to significant encounters with specific nonhuman others or the landscape in general. It serves as an encouragement to let go (at least somewhat) of doubts about whether

beings or elements of the more-than-human world can share in one's psychic experience to instead simply listen for what is communicated or shared.

This was Louisa's second fast. She had come to Death Valley to fast with the school the year before. I was also present as a researcher and assistant on that program. When asked why she came, she said, "I am at the end of a vision, the end of a place. [I feel] like [I'm] leaving everything in the universe." She was preparing to leave a wilderness school that she ran, but her first fast became much more about the emotional abuse and neglect she had suffered from her mother and her lifelong struggle to feel at home and connected to a community. The fast stuck with Louisa, and for the next six months she felt like her dreams were telling her to return, to fast again. Her first fast had sparked in her an intense curiosity about the ceremony. She said it "cracked her open" in ways she didn't quite understand. She had a sense that the inquiry that began in Death Valley six months earlier needed the place of the ceremony—the desert landscape—to continue. So, having achieved some closure in her relationship with her mother, Louisa returned to fast again.

At dawn on the morning that Louisa's fast began, sixteen of us gathered around the circle of stones we had constructed as a threshold at the edge of the Eureka valley. The Eureka Valley is a remote patch of the Mojave Desert just north of the famous Death Valley in California. West of us lay the Owens valley, which is traditionally Paiute land and is now home to two Paiute reservations. Beyond the Owens Valley the Sierra Nevada mountains rise abruptly out of the desert. They grow a bit taller each day as the Pacific tectonic plate wedges itself further under North America (Meldahl 2011). When all the participants had gathered at the threshold circle, the guides stepped into the circle and struggled to light their incense smudges as the winds kicked up in concert with the sun cresting the horizon. Once lit, Larry, one of the guides, removed a long stick from a pile of stones in the center of the circle that had held it upright, opening the door to the world of ceremony. It would

stay open for the next four days and nights while the participants fasted alone on the land. The guides then welcomed the participants into the circle one-by-one.

Louisa stepped into the circle and the guides began wafting incense over her with bundles of feathers. They whispered prayers and well-wishes, finally sending her off by drawing the bundles of feathers quickly past her ears, which produces an eerie sensation of an actual hawk or owl swooping by one's head. Louisa looked both scared and resolute. There were tears in her eyes. She had a blanket drawn tightly around her shoulders to ward off the chill of the morning, and perhaps the chills that anxiety brings. She then stepped back across the circle of stones, shouldered her backpack, and walked about a quarter-mile away from our basecamp. She would stay at or near that spot for the next 100 hours until she stepped back across this same threshold to mark the end of her fast.

As a researcher, I had no direct access to observing Louisa's time on the land. It was a solo, after all. Once or twice, I saw her from a distance when she climbed a ridge near her camp, but that was it. My understanding of her solo time comes from Louisa's account of her fast in a storytelling session two days after the group had come back together. I'll analyze that storytelling process later in the chapter. For now, I want to share part of Louisa's story of her time alone. She said:

> I had 5000 moments and they all slip quickly away. It's hard to relate what happened. I was hoping that something would happen. Maybe a raven would fly by, nothing fancy. Instead, the totality of the four days was about sitting in total silence, listening, and being still for 5000 moments. I only moved to do the basics, [walk a few steps] to go sit over there and listen and be quiet. And I did that all over [the area]. Otherwise, I sat still, listened, and stayed quiet.

I built an altar. That wasn't part of the plan, but I did it. Part of me thought, this is hokey, but I did say [the fast would be about surrender], so I built this altar. Then I went under a rock for shade, hit my head of the roof of the rock, and I fell apart [and cried.] Then I just lost track of time. That was mostly my day.

The next day, I said to myself, 'listen, be still.' I realized none of this would be comfortable. Once I accepted that…then! The landscape was a woman right there in front of me. It was like a domino effect of being still and quiet. It all came in, the earth spun faster right then. It was really beautiful. It's hard to explain what I saw and felt. I realized that this was going to be about being on the inside, yet it was all right here [in the desert] and I was seeing these things that were on the inside coming out. That night I wept and wept while looking at the stars for their beauty, power, the mystery of it, everything. I still feel that. Also, the darkness of it too, it was a miracle.

On day 3, I sat in the stillness all day long. I realized I'm not going to need to explain myself to know that I am a woman. There is no need to explain myself. I know that I am a woman. Volumes could be written on the silence. I wept for the beauty of it all, and the mystery of it and the power of it. How I'm not in control, and how I'm so small, yet so much a part of all of it. It was overwhelming and intoxicating. I realized then, this might be a creation story, not like one of those Native American stories where things come to be, not that grand, but maybe it has its own meek, simple, regular profoundness.

Louisa closed by sharing a poem that she had written, a sort of homage to the silence:

You crawl down there into the soul of the earth and the ocean and listen.

A fire is burning,

Your soul is in there and in that sweet elixir,

That magic potion of potions, that food served up to you from the gods is silence.

In that fire you will be burned.

Your soul's longing, your hunger, your thirst will be satisfied and then fed to the ancestors.

Listen, no one gets out of this alive.

Thinking with thresholds

How might this threshold crossing and the ceremonial space into which Louisa stepped be conceptualized? Geographers have often thought of place in terms of the borders that thresholds suggest. The juxtaposition of place and space that was central to the humanist turn asked how experience transformed geographic spaces into lived places (Buttimer and Daniels 1994; Entrikin 1976; Relph 1976). Nicholas Entrikin (1991) described the modern experience of place as liminal, caught between subjective and objective conceptualizations of place. Others worried that such liminality left one stuck in a precarious position, writing, "the threshold offers rather little ground on which to take one's stand, let alone live one's life" (Samuels 1992, 604). The conceptual play of the threshold, nevertheless, allows for a continual examination of borders, a reflection on the "shifting threshold of inside and outside" that defines and redefines lived space (Jones 2009). One may then begin to think of boundaries "as origin rather than as terminus" (Malpas 2007, 29). The threshold, by marking a boundary, can open a space of inquiry that can soften the borders between ordinary and extraordinary space.

Here, I turn to school guides to think through how they conceptualize the threshold crossing, the space of ceremony, and the experience of psyche on the land. Meredith Little, one of the school's founders, once said to me that her hope for participants in fasts is that they "literally create a relationship with the land by walking on it because the land is always showing us parts of

our self"(Meredith Little, Personal interview, June 15, 2016). Emerald, a longtime guide at the school, describes ceremonial space as where the "actual and mythological landscapes merge, where inner psyche and the actual desert connect." Rather than moving between worlds, the threshold crossing brings together worlds—in this case the material landscape and the mythological landscape—that are often understood as distinct from one another. For Emerald, the performance of the threshold helps participants become more receptive to that meeting of so-called inner and outer worlds. "Follow an animal, find an interesting rock," she says, "and allow ceremony to come, to be what bubbles up" (Emerald North, Personal interview, February 15, 2017). For her, crossing the threshold serves as an invitation to reflect on the significance of events that might otherwise be ignored or dismissed as mundane. The invitation to be drawn in by animal tracks, the shape of a stone that stands out from the landscape, or a feeling that arises in a particular place allows the "ordinary magic" of the ceremony to happen. What bubbles up is often quite subtle, but it nevertheless blurs the lines of inter and intra subjective encounter.

Louisa's experience was largely about silence and stillness. Her narrative related the few events that punctuated that stillness, but for the most part she sat quietly and took in the desert landscape, and the feelings of awe that arose built slowly over the course of days. This is not to say that Louisa's experience was uneventful. Instead, it is to point out how her time fasting spoke not through a particular peak experience but instead through a gradual building of affective intensity that she reports turned her sense of herself out onto the desert landscape. Louisa's experience resonates with Meredith's (the school founder) understanding of solo fasts. She says that they are usually "so simple. Most of the time there's absolutely no drama at all. And yet, everything's different. It's mystery" (Meredith Little, Personal interview, June 15, 2016). Allowing the ceremony to be what bubbles up is a way of letting the experience of mystery move from metaphor—an imagined significance—to perception of the world. The physical landscape appears much the same as it does

in everyday life, one's experience of themselves may not be markedly different for most of the time, but according to guides the blending of the actual and mythological landscapes allows for a psychic resonance that is not often felt in the daily lives of participants. Meaning and affect emerge in unexpected ways.

Silko writes of the ambiguous give and take between what Emerald calls the actual and mythological landscapes in ceremonial journeys on the land. Silko describes such journeys as an "interior process of the imagination, a growing awareness that being human is somehow different from all other life—animal, plant, and inanimate. Yet we are all from the same source: the awareness never deteriorated into Cartesian duality, cutting off the human from the natural world." The "interior distances" that are also traveled on sojourns "cannot be reckoned in physical miles or calendar years" (Silko 2002, 1012). When Louisa begins the story of her fast by saying she experienced "5000 thousand moments and they all slip quickly away," she is communicating her sense of this strange travel that happens in the "actual desert," in her own psyche, and in the relationship between the two. Though Louisa rarely traveled far in physical steps from her solo site, she nevertheless witnessed the "domino effect of being still and quiet." The "earth spun faster," "it was all right here [in the desert], and things that were "on the inside" came out; the experience was so powerful that all Louisa could do was weep at the beauty and mystery of it.

Storytelling and ordinary magic

Guides at the school often say that the fasting ceremony they facilitate is "ordinary magic." What they mean is that the perceptions that the ceremony facilitates—the personal psyche turning out onto an animate landscape—do not in fact require the extraordinary space of ceremony. Instead, those perceptions require a willingness to be affected and sufficient quieting of one's internal monologue and common-sense beliefs about what is "real" in order to listen to what the landscape

has to say. To bring such perceptual acuity back across the threshold into everyday life, guides turn to a practice of storytelling and listening they call mirroring, a reflective listening process that might be better described as amplification than interpretation. It is their way of ushering the "ordinary magic" of perceiving psyche as immanent to the world back across the ceremonial threshold and into daily life.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider how geographers have become increasingly aware of the power of stories to call worlds into being as well as representing worlds that already exist. Over the last two decades, geographers have directed more attention to the challenges of conveying in prose experiences that speak more clearly in the languages of affect, sensuous experience, and dreams (B. Anderson and Harrison 2010; Cresswell 2012; Lorimer 2005; Price 2010; Thrift 2008). Geographers have also been experimenting with narrative form, writing essays that are speculative or more akin to creative non-fiction than traditional analytic voices (Lorimer 2006; M. Rose 2010; Wylie 2005). Before this turn towards the "nonrepresentational," feminist scholars skillfully crafted narratives to argue for the situatedness of experience, to critique the violence of the detached male gaze, and to provide rich, differentiated accounts of key concepts like home and place that had been flattened first by the quantitative turn in geography and then by humanist geographers who did not adequately account for difference in their explorations of place and subjectivity (Haraway 1991; Johnston and Valentine 1995; Massey 1994; G. Rose 1993). In a move towards "postphenomenological storytelling" (Cameron 2012), scholars are returning to the stories themselves as performances of worlds. The diverse economies literature, for example, tells the stories of already-existing post-capitalist economies and thereby works to undermine the mythology of capitalism's pervasiveness (Gibson-Graham 2008; Roelvink, St. Martin, and Gibson-Graham 2015), while cultural geographic scholarship plays with the challenges of representing absence (B. Anderson and Wylie 2009; M. Rose 2006), spiritual spaces (Bartolini et al. 2017; Dewsbury and

Cloke 2009; M. Rose 2010), and the methodological challenges of perceiving animate landscapes (Country et al. 2016; 2015; van Dooren and Rose 2016). Stories can incarnate worlds, and the ways that they are told and heard help shape the worlds they create.

In a sense, illustrating the numinous being of the world through story is what many Native American oral traditions have done for millennia and Euroamerican chroniclers of wild places have been trying to recover since the 19th century. Coyote, for example, is an ancient character in oral traditions across North America. He appears in Native American stories from diverse nations across the continent as a figure who moves fluidly between coyote, the physical animal, and what many call Old Man Coyote, one of the gods who occupies a realm somewhere between people and the original Creator (Flores 2015). Ravens, turtles, buffalo, salmon, and others occupy a similar place in North American history, their stories weaving together the material and numinous beings of the landscape. Euroamerican chroniclers of wild places have often tried to recover that understanding of nonhuman creatures and landscapes as subjects in their own right. Mary Austin, for example, writing at the turn of 20th century in the same desert landscape where Louisa fasted, writes, "we have fallen on a very careless usage, speaking of wild creatures as if they were bound by some such limitation as hampers clockwork" (Austin 1903, 17), instead of thinking of them more as sorts of people. Thoreau, in his famous essay, "Walking," tries to describe the sound of a forest thinking, saying, "I did detect, when the wind lulled and hearing was done away, the finest imaginable sweet musical hum,—as of a distant hive in May, which perchance was the sound of their thinking" (Thoreau 1993b, 72). And now, scholars working in what can be broadly defined as the more-than-human project work to describe how forests (Kohn 2013), mountains (de la Cadena 2015), and landscapes (Country et al. 2015) participate in the social world that theory for so long limited solely to the human realm.

The school's storytelling circles are shaped by a simple ritual framework. From our campground, we hiked a short distance upstream along a creek that brings snowmelt down from the Sierra Nevada mountains, carries water to the Owens Valley, and eventually on to Los Angeles. We sat in the shade of trees next to the creek. It's a spot the school has used for years and hundreds, if not thousands, of fasters' stories have been told next to the creek. In the middle of the circle sat four stones, one for each of the cardinal directions. Other items people had found on their fasts or other walks were placed there as well: a bit of coyote scat; a bird's feather; small stones; a sheep vertebra. Over the course of two days, each of the ten participants spent about twenty minutes sharing the story of their fast, and the guides took the rest of each hour to witness and reflect their story back to them.

In mirroring, I experience guides and participants struggling with the task of narrating an experience that elides straightforward representation. Participants' experiences are deeply personal, but if it is taken seriously that the threshold crossing invites perception of psyche as permeating the landscape—and the guides do take this seriously—then the stories must be mirrored in a way that depersonalizes them to some extent, that makes the story about more than the individual. The landscape becomes an author as well as character in the story and the stories are often mirrored in a way that evokes their mythological character, their resonance with themes that exceed the important personal dimensions of the story. A second challenge in mirroring is that it is an act in which guides attempt to honor the extraordinary experiences of participants while also dissolving the threshold and suggesting that such experiences are possible in everyday life as well. Mirroring is then an exercise in ontological and representational paradox. Larry, a school guide, describes mirroring as reaching between two worlds, from one in which the psychic continuity between the self and the world is an almost magical event facilitated by ceremony to one in which that magic is ordinary, just the everyday flow of life. In ceremony, Larry says:

> We're going through a threshold into territory that doesn't translate well. [In mirroring], we're reaching back through the threshold to help bring people here. We're saying, 'look what happened there [across the threshold], you can bring it back, it's OK to live in this new way, we're not separate [from nature].' And so the translation of the threshold is a huge issue (Larry Hobbs, Personal interview, October 12, 2017).

The challenge is to both honor the magic and extraordinary nature of participants' experiences while facilitating a translation that allows the experience to shift one's everyday experience of the psyche and the land.

When it was Louisa's turn to speak, she narrated the story of her fast that I described earlier. Louisa has a quiet, but fierce presentation. As she talked of falling into the silence, feeling a burning heat while trying to sleep at night, and watching the desert transform into a woman's body, the group sat at attention, a few people sharing in the tears that rolled down Louisa's face for much of the telling. After Louisa told her story to the group, the guides each took a turn mirroring her story back to her. Ruth, the first guide to mirror Louisa's story, didn't speak. Instead, she stood and gathered up all of the objects in the center of our circle, the stones, feathers, bones and other small items people had found on their walks and that held some meaning for them. Ruth gestured as if she were holding all of them in her hands, then took Louisa's hands and held them as Louisa cried. The two sat quietly, Louisa crying and Ruth looking into her eyes, for several minutes. As I write this passage now, it sounds full of syrupy bathos. But the tone of the moment was quite different. It re-created the awe and affective intensity of Louisa's fast, the sense of the world spinning faster, gathering around her as she sat in silence. Ruth's approach is one of amplification, not interpretation. It evoked the intensities of the ceremonial experience without fixing their meaning.

When Larry mirrored Louisa's story back to her, he said, "you got birthed from the stillness. You know this isn't just about you, something shifted out there." He then proceeded to retell

portions of Louisa's story back to her, emphasizing both the stillness and the discomfort, the weakness she felt and the fierceness conveyed in poems she shared with the group. Such a retelling of the story is one technique for magnifying certain elements of the experience or for allowing a participant to understand themselves as a character in a narrative that is larger than their personal experience. It helps to contextualize the personal story in the larger aspiration of a societal shift towards experiencing the landscape as animate. When Larry says, "this isn't just about you, something shifted out there," I hear him trying to evoke the group's collective effort to understand themselves as part of a psychic fabric that is by no means unitary, but that is so much bigger than the individual.

The way that mirroring amplifies affective components of the fast make mirroring an important event in the ceremony, not simply a coda. Mirroring plays with the tension between solitude and sociality in the school's programs. The fast centers on personal retreat, but guides insist that one should fast in order to better serve their community, not for personal growth. Fasters temporarily retreat from human sociality in order to listen to more-than-human landscapes, but they return to human communities to tell their stories and begin considering how to incorporate their experiences into daily life. The act of mirroring serves as a sort of initiation into a community of people who have shared the hardship of fasting, some of whom will now identify as members of a community who turn to the more-than-human world when existential challenges need to be considered. Because the experience of mirroring and being mirrored—the connection between the guide and participant, the space of attention crafted by all in the circle, the struggle or catharsis to tell the story— tend to be what the experience is about more than the words that are spoken, representing it, as I am trying to do here, can be difficult, and I imagine my written description reads as somewhat flat. Emerald, a long-time guide who is a painter and a sculptor, describes mirroring as an art, "like creating a sand mandala. It's beautiful in the moment, it's improvisational, and can't be

captured in representation, recording, or a transcript." In a related vein, Joseph, another guide, describes storytelling and mirroring as the ongoing telling of a "creation myth" oriented towards "healing the lie of separation [between ourselves and nature]. Mirroring," he says, "brings the unspeakable, undefinable aspect of [the story] more present, though it's not the final answer by any means." The guides believe that the "lie of separation" between the human psyche and more-than-human world is strong enough that one needs mirroring in order to validate their experience, to have it affirmed as true.

Louisa's storytelling and mirroring helped to bring her experience back across the ceremonial threshold, but it is by no means a straightforward act that provides resolution. A few months after Louisa's second fast, she wrote the group with whom she had fasted with, saying, "when I got home, it was [like] a dream what happened. It certainly has not faded, but I am finding it difficult to incorporate" ("Louisa," Personal communication, December 4, 2017). The first time that Louisa had fasted with the school, I had posed two questions from a landscape writer that, to me, were suggestive of the "ordinary magic" of time spent in wild places. Louisa brought that reading up as evoking the questions that stuck with her about how the ceremony had affected her. "What does this place know of me that I cannot know myself? What can I know in this place that I cannot know anywhere else" (Macfarlane 2013, 27)? "Where I fasted in Death Valley," she said, "really did something to me that I am only now realizing the deeper layers of. That place really did a laying on of hands on me." Louisa soon went back to Death Valley to help facilitate a fast for other participants as part of her ongoing inquiry into that landscape and herself. Louisa's experience and comments suggest that this practice of ceremonial fasting opens a path for an experiential inquiry into psyche that is not easily resolved, but that weaves together one's experience of psyche with the places of this ceremony.

An inquiry into loss and recovery

In this final section I return to the threshold, its working in opening a space of inquiry into the geography of psyche, and the dynamic of loss and recovery at work in the inquiry. In this chapter, I have argued that the threshold at work in Louisa's experience—the circle of stones she crossed to begin and end her fasting in a ceremonial space—functions more as an opening to an ongoing inquiry than as a boundary between distinct worlds. Recall the words of Jeff Malpas, quoted above, who writes that a boundary can be a point of origin, an opening, rather than a "terminus," a bordering against what lies beyond (Malpas 2007, 29) . In this way, a boundary like the threshold signifies "that from which something begins in its unfolding as what it is, rather than that at which it comes to a stop" (Malpas 2007, 29). The threshold crossing is then an attempt to "illuminate a place in which we already find ourselves" (Malpas 2007, 34), a marker of an ontological inquiry. By ontological inquiry, I do not mean an effort to ascertain exactly what *is*—what has been termed ontotheology—but instead to reflect on how habits and modes of being in the world shape one's experience and sense of how that world is constituted. The threshold marks a passage to a place of questioning the world in "which one finds oneself thrown in" (Joronen and Häkli 2017, 566). Instead of a passage into an extraordinary space, it facilitates an extraordinary experience of the world in which Louisa and her guides already live.

The school's fasting retreats open a mode of inquiry that invites the numinous being of the landscape to emerge, for it to be revealed as an animate landscape. It is an experiential take on how Isabelle Stengers describes the power of naming: "*To name is not to say what is true but to confer on what is named the power to make us feel and think in the mode that the name calls for"* (Stengers 2015, 43). The invocation of ceremonial space, the physical passage across the threshold, abstaining from food and company, and the witnessing of each story upon the faster's return all invite the question, what would it mean to live as if the world were psychically alive? What would it mean to be bonded to the

world in such an intimate way? In doing so, the practice works against a powerful current in Eurocentric thought that the "basic principle of myth" is "anthropomorphism, the projection onto nature of the subjective" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2001, 6). In contrast, it evokes perception of the landscape as rich with what Jungian scholars would call archetypes—"living entities that make up a great part of the human psyche" (Jung 1979 Vol. 18, p. 256). Louisa's experience suggests that the practice has the power to help one feel and think as if the world is ensouled, can offer intimacy, and reveal often-hidden parts of the self.

This is not to say that the practice would have such a universal effect on any participant who chooses to fast or that simply fasting alone in a wild landscape would produce an experience of the landscape as animate and the self as emergent from that landscape. Such experiences likely depend on the intention of the participant to experience such feelings and on the structure of the program to support the experience and give the participant the means to interpret it and make meaning. In line with Stengers' comment above, the structuring of the experience creates the space to think and feel in the mode of animate landscapes and a more-than-human psyche. It creates an experiential and ontological framework within which to ask, what if we lived as if the world were alive?

In the practice itself, and in the analysis I am offering in this chapter, there is a delicate dance between loss and recovery that plays out across a fraught meeting of worlds. As discussed in the previous chapter, the school's work has been shaped by Native American mentors and practices. Analytically, the dialog between Jung and Silko offered here draws attention to the boundaries and tensions between what are often called Western or Eurocentric and Indigenous philosophies or conceptual worlds. Scholars have persuasively argued that some efforts to animate the world from within Eurocentric traditions spin themselves "on the backs of non-European thinkers…without giving Indigenous people credit or a nod" (Todd 2016, 7–8; see Latour 2013a). Silko's writing helps to demonstrate how Pueblo thought informs Jung's ideas and, more broadly, how the socio-

ecological project of recovering an animate sense of the world presents an opportunity and responsibility to draw on conceptual traditions that have stewarded that sense of animate landscapes as participants in psyche.[17] I'll be clear. The specter of romanticization and appropriation looms large here. Speaking of recovery in ecological thought runs the risk of an invoking a nostalgia for an idealized relationship with an Edenic nature that never existed (Braun 2002; see Denevan 1992) or of making use of Indigenous philosophy without simultaneously attending to the politics of settler colonialsim (Radcliffe 2017; see Country et al. 2015). Wary of such charges of appropriation, some scholars engaged in such projects of recovery explicitly distance themselves from Indigenous philosophy (van Dooren and Rose 2016). To an extent, that approach makes sense as the project of recovering an experience of the landscape as animate emerges from a problem created by Eurocentric traditions. Geographer Juanita Sundberg has argued that beginning from the foundational split of nature and culture—as do Jung and many environmental scholars writing from Western perspectives—enacts a metaphysical violence that assumes that the split between humans and nature is universal rather than specific to particular histories and geographies (Sundberg 2013). In Jung's world, there is a deep grief for what has been lost, and those losses came into focus for him in part because of the contrast he experienced in his conversations with Ochwiay Biano. Silko's writing shows is that in other worlds (many Indigenous), perception of an animate landscape was never lost despite centuries of violence aimed in part at severing those ties. The grief and loss in Silko's world is tremendous, but there remains a thread that ties contemporary experience to an animate landscape that has been dimmed, but which still emanates meaning. Placing Jung and Silko

[17] The effort to recover an animate sense of the world runs through key elements of environmental criticism. For example, Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of the mythology of Enlightenment demonstrated the great psychic losses of demythologizing nature (Horkheimer and Adorno 2001). In the field of ecopsychology, there is an explicit goal to conceptualize the psyche as more-than-human and to foster therapeutic experiences of that more-than-human psyche (Fisher 2013b; Roszak, Gomes, and Kanner 1995). And, developing descriptive and critical tools for animating the world has been an important project in recent environmental humanities scholarship (van Dooren and Rose 2016).

in conversation with one another in order to theorize the School of Lost Borders' forays into the geography of psyche shows the contingent nature of the loss of psyche in the world and draws attention to the conceptual traditions that may aid in recovering perception of animate landscapes.

The dance of loss and recovery I have described here is also playing out in contemporary socio-ecological politics. Indigenous-led socioecological movements have gained considerable strength in recent years, and recognizing nonhuman others as beings with a similar ethical standing as people is central to the movement for the "rights of nature" (Boyd 2017). In New Zealand, Colombia, Bolivia, and Ecuador landforms, rivers, and entire landscapes have been recognized as having the same legal and ethical status as persons and deserving of the same protections (Radcliffe 2018; Roy 2017; Schmidt 2018). Such efforts have begun to shift socio-ecological politics away from resource management to living with non-human others who limit and shape human social worlds. In the United States, similar movements have not had the same success. For example, activists argued that the Dakota Access pipeline at Standing Rock, North Dakota threatened the numinous being of water as well at its material health (American Horse 2016), but the courts ruled that while one may have a religious practice grounded in the belief that water is sacred, that creates no legal obligation to protect the water (Boasberg 2017). Efforts at landscape-scale conservation near the Bears Ears buttes in Utah are based in arguments that identity is intimately tied to the landscape in its entirety (Allen 2016; Robinson, Strom, and Limerick 2018; see Obama 2016), but the current federal administration has ruled that protecting only the buttes themselves is sufficient (Trump 2017). The US-based movements have been hamstrung by legal structures that reduce ontology to belief.

Thus, recovering the ability to perceive psyche as immanent to the world can be a political act in affinity with movements like those at Standing Rock and the Bears Ears, an experiential ethics that asserts psyche is incomplete without its connection to living landscapes. As geographers have found in other experiential practices, there exists in the work of the school an "imaginative and

emancipatory potential" to foster "solidarity with and mutual care for human and nonhuman others" (Moore et al. 2015, 407–8). Such imaginative potential is by no means a necessary outcome of the school's work. Its affective power may be ignored or captured and commodified, one more way to deliver a "dose of nature" (Woodward 2011, 341). But the practice and its representation can also be "a form of play with possibilities and a practice of moving … thought in new directions" (Cameron 2012, 585). What I have tried to do in this chapter is represent and critically engage with an admittedly quixotic practice of retreat in such a way as to draw attention to its potential without shying away from the complicated and never-innocent legacies that it embodies. By doing so, I hope that I have kept my description of the practice in close relationship to the conceptual and ethical issues of learning to listen to animate landscapes.

Conclusion

Louisa's time fasting alone, her story, and its witnessing weave together embodied practice and representation to shift the experience of psyche as immanent to the landscape from accessible only in the extraordinary space of ceremony to a feature of everyday perception. By reintroducing Jungian critique to geography, I have sought to expand the breadth of psychoanalytic resources available to geographers. Through Leslie Marmon Silko's writing on landscape, I worked to contextualize Jung's thought in the entanglement of Western and Indigenous worlds that looms so large in the dance of loss and recovery socio-ecological critique. I argued that a threshold may open an inquiry that ultimately dissolves the boundary between worlds that the threshold first represented. Finally, I worked to relate the experiences made possible by the fasting practice to more explicitly political socioecological concerns. Rather than serving as a declarative statement on practices like the school's fasting programs, I hope the chapter sparks an interest in focusing critical and creative attention on similar practices in order to further conversations on the geography of psyche.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

A strong current running through the dissertation has been shaped by the question, what sorts of socioecological futures do we want to create and how do we go about creating those futures? In the practice that I studied, I found guides striving for a socioecological future in which human psyches are experienced as emergent from an animate landscape. Accordingly, more-than-human landscapes are understood to hold deep wisdom, and the people who contemplate life's unanswerable questions in conversation with those landscapes are also tied to them ethically. Guides and many participants feels that respect, gratitude, and a degree of reverence are owed to psychically alive landscapes.

One of the central tasks I have taken on in this research is putting SOLB's work in conversation with rich theoretical and methodological debates in geography. By working closely with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in one chapter and Felix Guattari's ecosophy in the next, for example, the dissertation lays out the tensions and possibilities in the push and pull between the conceptual diffusion of the human self and the experience of subjectivity as ambiguous, more-than-human, and yet deeply personal. By reintroducing Jungian concepts of psyche to geography and interpreting those concepts through the Pueblo philosophy that helped to inspire them, the dissertation argues for an earthbound conceptualization of psyche. And by narrating some of the ways that SOLB concepts and practices emerged from the messy intersections (and absences) between the US counterculture environmental movement and a renewed fight for Native American sovereignty, the dissertation demonstrates the almost never-innocent cultural complexities in which socioecological praxes operate. Critique is essential, but it should not paralyze experimentation.

My attention to SOLB practices is in line with a broader geographic focus on experimentation and the shaping of socioecological futures, which has very much been on the minds of geographers. Three decades ago, Margaret Fitzsimmons noted a "peculiar silence" on questions

of nature in geography despite the fact that, ten years before her writing, Richard Peet wrote of an "environmental crisis of monumental proportions" (FitzSimmons 1989, 106–7). Geographers heard the call to attend to theories of nature-society interaction, but even today some geographers lament "the discipline's inability to imagine [socioecological] alternatives in its widespread and principled rejection of prescriptive or normative approaches to political or ecological change and its widely held suspicion of utopian thought" (Braun 2015, 239). Braun goes on to discuss the "much needed space for creativity and experimentation" through which "we can potentially open ourselves to events that surprise and disturb, allowing the world to force thought" (Braun 2015, 241). In such calls to experiment, mine included, there is a sense of possibility and hope that challenges the skepticism that runs throughout so much critical geography. The urgency of socioecological crisis calls on geography scholars to participate in experiments to craft more liveable and just futures, but our participation makes it more difficult maintain a skeptical distance from the always-imperfect practice of realizing socioecological hopes. Scholarship can help to give conceptual shape to experimental practices, and in doing so it must take on some of the normative charge that geography has held at arm's length.

In working to craft liveable socioecological futures, there exists a tension between looking to the past or focusing on the future, a debate about the place of nostalgia. In their "Manifesto for Abundant Futures," Felicity Collard, Jessica Dempsey, and Juanita Sundberg argue that though we shouldn't hope for a return to an Edenic past in line with an imagined ecological baseline, but that looking to the past is a way to reckon with the socioecological ruination that we are now living in. "Past abundance," they write, can be a "marker for what might be; looking back shows us what rich socioecological worlds looked like" (Collard, Dempsey, and Sundberg 2015, 327). Looking to the past may not be just the nostalgic longing of modern imaginaries of nature, they argue, it may also be a source of inspiration for ways to move forward (cf Braun 2002). In the dissertation, I have

attempted to narrate how guides at SOLB reach back to traditions that once thrived—and still survive today—while striving towards a new future. It is an uncomfortable process, one that demands a reckoning with past exploitations while insisting on the possibility of a different future. Nostalgia is often used pejoratively in reference to an imagined past. I suggest that it might also be thought of in a more generous, spatial sense. Nostalgia can mean a sense of homesickness, "an acute longing for familiar surroundings," often accompanied by feelings of sadness or melancholy ("Nostalgia, n." 2019). In this sense, nostalgia may be less about longing for an imaginary past than grieving the ecological catastrophe unfolding before us (W. Shaw and Bonnett 2016). Merleau-Ponty wrote of the earth as the "homeland of our thoughts," arguing that all cognition is embodied cognition, and all bodies exist within their milieu, which is ultimately the earth (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 26). That milieu is shifting rapidly. New takes on the alienation and psychic trauma brought about by the fact that environmental and climate change are undermining earth systems play on the relationship between nostalgia and melancholy, labeling the psychic trauma solastalgia (Albrecht et al. 2007), environmental melancholia (Lertzman 2015), or simply madness (Guattari 2009, 69; Latour 2017, 10; Shepard 1982). In each case, the struggle towards a more liveable socioecological future involves finding a path to again experience the psyche and the world as entwined, and to address environmental and psychic traumas as cut from the same cloth.

Future directions for research inspired by the dissertation, therefore, lead right back into never settled debates about the nature of nature. Questions about "nature"—where is it?; is it us or an other?; in what ways do natures act on human psyches?—persist. These questions about "nature" are as vital as ever because in other disciplines—those influenced by neuroscience in particular—the healing powers of "nature" on human bodies are being widely celebrated. A dose of nature, it is said, improves attention and creativity (Atchley, Strayer, and Atchley 2012; Kaplan 1995; Faber Taylor and Kuo 2009; Ohly et al. 2016), alleviates anxiety and depression (Hoag, Massey, and Roberts

2014), treats trauma (Dietrich, Joye, and Garcia 2015; Hyer et al. 1996), breaks addictions (Bettmann, Russell, and Parry 2013), and makes oppositional adolescents more reasonable people to be around (Bettmann et al. 2011; Russell 2000). One popular and irreverent video series on the benefits of time spent in nature begins, "Are you feeling tired, irritable, stressed out? If so, try nature!" Everything has its side effects, of course, and the video's narrator warns, nature may make you "slow down, quit your job, or seriously consider what the fuck you're doing with your life" (NatureRX n.d.). It would seem that the health benefits of time spent in natural spaces would be an ideal topic for geographers, but the conversation is currently dominated by neuroscientists and psychologists. Having descended from the transcendental heights of Emerson and Thoreau, and passed by the pragmatism of William James and Aldo Leopold, the current acolytes of the nature fix prefer a reductionist approach that focuses on "bottom-up neuronal mechanisms" (Gallagher 2005, 2). The material processes at work become a proxy for experience, what some call neuroreductionism (B. Anderson 2006). Synthetic approaches informed by social theory have been supplanted by reductionist ones.

The "nature" that is doing all this remarkable healing of human bodies remains strikingly unproblematized in the literature on the healing capacities of nature, given all that the concept has been through in the last fifty years. A popular work on the subject, for example, light-heartedly sidesteps the complexities of nature, defining it as "a place where birds fly around uncooked" (F. Williams 2017, 11). The critical tools of geographers are sorely needed in these conversations. Following Lacan, geographers have described nature as an "object of anxiety par excellence," "an ever-receding object that generates anxiety through the impossibility of possession" (Robbins and Moore 2013, 10). This anxious desire bears similarity to Levinas' concept, "metaphysical desire." For Levinas, one is always pulled to others because the self is constituted in relationship with others. But that desire to know an other can never be fully satisfied, there is something that remains opaque in

the relationship between self and other (both conceptually and in lived experience). Nature is perhaps that ultimate other, very much entangled with the self but exceeding it in known and unknown ways. One psychoanalyst describes definitions of nature as variations on the theme of otherness, with human nature being the sense of "otherness we experience about ourselves" (Kovel 1988, 375; see R. Williams 1985). In the rush to demonstrate empirically the ways that nature heals, however, a rigorous conceptualization of nature as a concept has been lost.

Further geographic research on work like that of the School of Lost Borders and other practices of sojourn—close to home or far away—could deepen our understanding of the ways that time spent in natural places heals (or doesn't), and simultaneously offer rich conceptualizations of the interplay between self and place that are sacrificed in neuroreductionist explanations. Doing so would require geographers to wade back into debates about nature, and to carefully parse the claims that empirical researchers make about the ways that aspects of the natural world act on human bodies. Theorists of site ontology (Schatzki 2010; Woodward, Jones III, and Marston 2010) and scholars of nonrepresentational theory (B. Anderson and Harrison 2010; Thrift 2008) have laid a sophisticated foundation for describing and analyzing the many facets of natures to which one may retreat and to describing in rich narrative detail the experiences people have there that can only be partially captured and explained in brain scans and questionnaires.

A second, and related, direction for further research that builds on this dissertation would be investigations of extraordinary states of consciousness. Here, I think especially of recent studies of the uses of psychadelics, usually psilocybin, to facilitate psychic healing through the dissolution of traditional ego boundaries (Griffiths et al. 2011; MacLean, Johnson, and Griffiths 2011). Participant narratives of psychedelic healing sessions often share resonances with those of fasters whose stories I witnessed. Placed in conversation with scholarly conversations on the therapeutic effects of nature, such research could significantly broaden our understanding of how subjectivity is constituted and

temporarily dissolved, how thresholds soften borders between the ordinary and extraordinary, and enliven conversations about the ways that the efficacy of healing spaces can inform understandings about the mutual constitution of self and place.

I hope that this research has demonstrated how an experiential practice can serve as a rich practical laboratory in which to blend immersive experience and conceptual experimentation in order to push at the boundaries of the human psyche and living landscapes. Scholarly work that contributes to more just and liveable ways of being in damaged, yet vibrant, worlds will take many forms. My intention in this research has been demonstrate that critical inquiry, creative experimentation, and descriptive prose can work together to sketch the contours of worlds that scholars and practitioners strive towards, but which often feel just beyond reach. In doing so, I have tried to offer a novel interpretation of the School of Lost Borders' practice of sojourn, and to reignite geographers' interest in the broader tradition of sojourn to wild landscapes as a way to enliven landscapes and to explore the depth of the psyche. Happy trails.

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