
Sense of Place

An Exploration of the Bridge Between Mind & Matter

**By Gary Caganoff
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**Social Ecology, MAppSci.
University of Western Sydney
Student #: 99703048
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Introduction

‘... there are bridges between the one sort of thought and another, and it seems to me that the artists and the poets are specifically concerned with these bridges.’

Gregory Bateson, 1972

The Winds of Change

The wind is travelling west across the escarpment with a particular purpose, the meaning of which lies at the edge of my mind. Feeling anticipation I relax and let the wind move through me. My mind's horizon moves gently towards my focal centre, towards consciousness. The meaning I am seeking is embodied by the wind and embedded in the movement of the trees, the stillness of the rocks and the sensations I feel upon my skin. By observing the wind I can now tell you that the meaning I am seeking is 'interconnectedness' but the part of my mind that refuses to shift suggests that this is nothing new. However, a contradictory feeling wells up that says that it is. I contemplate this. My mind's horizon settles in the foreground. What now lies at the edge of my mind is something much more profound than a simple human word. The new horizon that takes its place is my new perception of interconnection. It is the detail of this perception that now seems distant. My intuition, which I dearly trust, encourages me to explore. I relax again and feel the wind shift across the landscape.

Orange and pink light dissolves into the cliffs across the valley. The shadow of a high ridge line moves across me and up the gully towards Blackheath. The rock pagodas that I have adopted as my place turn cold and grey. The ripples in the rock that were so highly embossed by the bright light seemingly collapse into two dimensions. I put my journal and jumper into my pack and head for home. Accompanied by the wind, my head full of thought, I scan the horizon for some clues.

Entering my little mud brick studio I look to my book shelf for guidance. Picking up Fritjof Capra's 'Uncommon Wisdom', I climb into my hammock, and open the book to where I left off. I read about Gregory Bateson's view on interconnectedness, or as he calls it, 'relationships', and his concept of the nature of mind. I read about Ilya Prigogine's theory of self-organising systems. The readings confirm the new focus brought to me by the wind; which now

manages to blow leaves beneath my door.

Excited by the smoothness of my mind-shift, I open my journal and review what I have already written in relation to my project aims and see now how they stand in new light:

Q/ What are the core ideas for this project?

A/ To notice more how physical place mirrors spiritual place, by observing symbols and metaphors in the landscape that resonate with my soul.

Q/ Where does this interest come from?

A/ My history of physical journeys through wild landscapes and reflections on my place in the world.

Q/ What else can guide me through this inquiry?

A/ To find out how other people view their own sense of place.

I see these questions are now part of a greater aim. The easterly wind is challenging me to sharpen my sense of place. I am moved to focus on an aspect of interconnectedness that I haven't yet explored. I feel that this focus will become more valuable for me as time moves on and my professional work becomes more intense.

By incorporating metaphor as a vehicle for inquiry, the overall aim of this project now is to document the evolution of my own sense of place in regards to my physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual relationships with nature and to broaden my intellectual understanding of this.

To help broaden my sense of place I must dive down and touch the bottom of my current understanding. I shall do this by using stories and images of landscapes I have journeyed through as mirrors that reflect the landscape of my soul. These stories and images will also serve to chart my metaphorical journey of life which provides a constant source of motivation for me. This 'map' will reflect not only where I am coming from but also where I am presently at. Like all maps it will guide me into unexplored territory - where intuition becomes my compass.

The Place

Less than a week later I return to my chosen place. A short walk through the quiet backstreets of Blackheath brings me to a rough track that turns downhill towards the familiar Blue Mountains escarpment. Before the track plunges

through the cliff line I turn onto a less used track which takes me to three sandstone pagodas at the top of the cliff.

Each pagoda points to different aspects of this place. The south pagoda rises above a deep and narrow canyon. When the air is still and the trees are quiet the creek can be heard running through it. Sometimes I sit on the edge, looking over the side to see the flow, but the canyon is choked with vegetation. This canyon runs into the larger canyon of Porters Creek, where the water can be heard even when the wind is blowing strongly. The north-western pagoda provides the best view of Porters Creek. Across the canyon, cliffs ranging from 50 to about 200 vertical metres fall from the high ridges into the gully below. Giant Eucalypts tower over ferns and bushes embedded in deep soil.

The third pagoda, in between the north west and southern pagodas, lies back from the edge of the cliff. It is surrounded by tough, prickly, weather beaten bushes that have adapted to the thin layer of soil that covers the rock base. This middle pagoda provides the best view of what lies upstream: typical Blue Mountains bush with scatterings of scribbly gums on the ridges. Above the ridge tops only the sky is visible - apart from a house or two and the air-brakes of some trucks on the highway that can be heard in the distance. This is a place where one can watch many birds; gang gangs, cockatoos, rainbow lorikeets, eagles, bush wrens and others I have yet to learn the names of.

In choosing this place I put myself through a simple process of self reflection. I have an analogy for my life that helps me to focus on where I am in the universal scheme of things. Briefly, it is a river system that encompasses everything from the tides in the ocean to the mist in the mountains. At different times of my life I can place myself in any part of this system and find meaning that mirrors my present reality. Experiencing the extremes of wild nature consolidates my thoughts and feelings so I can then put those thoughts and feelings into perspective and then into some form of positive action.

In choosing a place for this project I needed a landscape that would mirror my current spiritual and emotional place. I first explored a dark canyon that I discovered on a bushwalk last summer. Sitting in the canyon for a few hours I reflected on my feelings and the appropriateness of the place. I asked myself how I felt, spiritually, emotionally, physically and mentally. I felt differently to what the canyon metaphorically suggested. and knew my place was further upstream, in sight of the canyon but also in sight of higher ground.

On the same day I visited the three pagodas at Porter Pass. As I sat at each pagoda I knew I was in the right place. My physical and social interaction with the particular place reflected how I was feeling: open, calm and clear. The place mirrors these feelings in a way that invites me to stay, providing me a perfect space to reflect on certain aspects of my life. I feel welcome here. In return, the more I visit the more I welcome the place into my heart and soul.

Interconnection

Today, on the north west pagoda, the air is still. I have been sitting watching the birds all around me - in the bushes, in the gums, across the canyons, playing, searching, feeding, talking. I too am still. Still enough not to interrupt the life around me and cause it concern. I feel privileged that I am trusted by the creatures that live here.

You must come with no intentions of discovery. You must overhear things, as though you'd come into a small and desolate town and paused by an open window. (Lopez, 1990, p17)

It's not just the birds that I observe it is the connection of the birds to everything in this place: their interaction with each other, their acrobatics between places of rest, their exploration across the land for places to feed. It seems that the birds are a manifestation of the wind. For what reason I'm not quite sure. Maybe for the same reason that fish are a manifestation of the sea, the sea a manifestation of the Earth, and the Earth a manifestation of the Universe.

Hearing voices from people walking down the track I sit silent and listen. Above the muffle created by the distance between us I catch a few words. 'Go around,... duck around... you could abseil down...' The people's boots clomp clomp on the sandstone path. The voices fade as they descend into the canyon. Below my place is a rock wall that attracts climbers. These are the first climbers I have seen since I started coming here. My desire to rockclimb wells up inside of me like I haven't felt for a few years. I make an excuse to leave my place and go down into the canyon, to drink from the creek. After I refresh myself I sidle around the base of the cliff to, what is known as, Celebrity Crag. Here I can see and feel the solid mass of rock that lies beneath my place. Millions of tonnes of earth that supports the landscape above the canyon.

I watch the boys climb, wishing I had brought my climbing gear. We exchange greetings. I ask if it is OK if I watch. I respect the boys' space and admire their youthful enthusiasm. In the creek next to the crag I also watch a water dragon watching me. The water of the creek slaps against the rock as it falls into a small pool. When the boys have finished the climb and retrieve their rope I ask if it is OK to ask them a couple of questions. I explain my Sense of Place project for uni. They agree. I first ask what feelings this place reflects for them. They both express, 'peace, tranquillity and calm'. Then I ask if these things, peace,

tranquillity and calm, are missing in the city where they live. 'Yes, definitely'. I could have spent ages talking with them but I felt I had imposed enough. I retreated back up to the pagodas.

Watching a couple of cockatoos tear apart a rotten stump I feel less like the stranger that has 'paused by an open window' and more like a friend who has been invited in to look and listen. I am also a part of it. This place invites me to stay; to interact, to inquire, to contribute to the story. For the first time I wonder about the difference between 'connection' and 'interconnection'. The boys demonstrated a certain connection with wild nature, a connection that seduces them out of the city and shows them something different. Lopez too, has been seduced out of the city into a small town, where he pauses 'by an open window... to hear things'. The boys are aware of the life going on around them, conscious of the lay of the land, the touch of the sun upon their backs, and the feel of the sandstone in their hands. This is a good state of consciousness, this connection, but is there more to it? Does this connection go deeper? Many times, in the wild lands I have visited, I have 'paused by an open window', 'to listen', but what about the times when I have deeply connected with the land and its inhabitants; the times when I have been invited in, to contribute to the story? A few experiences come to mind.

One experience came about on a journey I undertook in late 1989, in the tropical jungle of north-east Brazil. A month of kayaking with a friend, down and up swollen uncharted rivers; fishing and hunting for food, watching and listening to black howler monkeys moving through the canopy, capivara crossing the river, crocodiles checking out the bellies of our boats, hearing a jaguar and a crocodile trying to kill each other under cover of darkness not 20 metres from my hammock, meeting two Indian chieftains who had never seen white people, and uncovering a long abandoned Indian village. I discovered several profound truths on that journey but the one that comes to mind was the realisation of interconnection. I rested for a few days after the adventure at my friends jungle abode. Both Brazilians and Indians inhabit this part of the river where he lives. My journal records the incident,

Down by the river a local Indian boy is plucking a macaw he has just hunted, throwing great clumps of feathers into the water. I walk down to watch him work. The boy notices me sitting on a log above him. To my delight he scoops two handfuls of feathers out of the water and brings them up to me, smiles, then goes about his business. The colours of the largest feathers are stunning - bright blue and orange.

For me, the feathers tell the story of life; but also death. I recall the bow and arrow, complete with poisoned tip, that the chieftains had given me in trade down the river. Yes, they too talk of death and sing of the wonders of life.

See. Everything is connected!

This truth, manifested by the experience, can't be fully expressed in words. This

truth is a feeling, a deep knowing that permeates my heart, soul, mind and spirit which are all interconnected with the environment I experience.

In the unprotected Tarkine wilderness in North West Tasmania I spent eight weeks exploring awesome rainforests, grass lands, mountains and coastal sand dunes. Near the end of my stay, at a time when I had a heightened sense of belonging, I found myself again writing about my connection to the land and my deep knowing of the underlying universal interconnectedness of nature. The following poems from my Tarkine journal illustrate this.

Ode to Mt. Donaldson (pre road)

The other day, on the side of Mt. Donaldson, I lay awake in the tent. The day was creeping on and I should have been up.

A raven alighted near by and called to me,
'Stay in bed. The day is morbid, ominous and quite outstretched'.

So I stayed.

Spirit of the Tarkine

When you go to the forest and hear the screech of the wedge-tailed eagle look around for you shall meet her

When you walk in the forest
When you climb-up-over and duck-on-under the green growth that bars your way
Walk softly through the maze of trees
Look up for you shall touch the light that forms the gentle jade
Which rests upon your face
Remember its warmth

When you stand within the forest breath deeply
Suck in the aromas of the Leatherwood and Sassafras
The dank earthiness of rotting logs
Breath deeper if it pleases you
For you have met the wind

If you desire to know more about the wind
Move up to the mountains
That is where I am

However
If you stay
To stand within the forest
Dig your toes in deep
Soon lie down amongst the leaves and feel the earth beneath
Grasp it with your hands
Feel it against your shoulders, spine and buttocks
Concentrate on each individual leaf that touches your skin
Feel the dampness of the earth
The cool sensations that delight

Roll over
Press your hands, chest and pelvis to the floor
Dig your fingers beneath the humus
Press your ear to it

Listen
Listen beyond your own heart beat
Listen for you will hear me

When you cup the sweet water to your lips
Drink thoughtfully
Not thirstily
For you will miss the singing
All at once the creek sings
Each note perfect
Each octave struck
Like the eternal
Filling of a liqueur glass
Though a hundred times more sensual
Drink thoughtfully
Listen hard
For you can hear me

When you can hear
Then you shall see
If you are so close and still can't see
Then the jaded light will strike you
Slap you across the face to wake you
Here is where I linger most
This is where you'll find me

These writings, like all my work, is an attempt to share my awareness of the natural environment and stimulate others to seek the connections between it and them - to strengthen their relationship with the world outside their normal, everyday life which diverts them from reflecting on such matters. These writings, like all my work, express as best I can, my affinity with nature. So, what is this affinity? What is the 'thing' between me and nature. What is the element that connects me to it and it to me? The answer, I feel, lies in the difference between 'connection' and 'interconnection' - the bridge that spans the gap between the two.

i'nter- pref. w. sense 'between', forming...
(George W. Turner, The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1987)

connectioninterconnection

Before we begin searching for this bridge it is necessary to define 'connection' and 'interconnection' in context to the inquiry. David Abram (1997) gives some clues;

The breathing, sensing body draws its sustenance and its very substance from the soils, plants and elements that surround it; it continually contributes itself, in turn, to the air, to the composting earth, to the nourishment of insects and oak trees and squirrels, ceaselessly spreading out of itself as well as breathing the world into itself...(Abram, 1997, p46)

Abram is talking about give and take - where a 'breathing, sensing body' both receives from and contributes to the environment it encounters. Through a holistic approach encompassing spiritual, mental, emotional and physical nourishment, 'connection' occurs. This in-turn stimulates a similar holistic awareness of the environment. Once aware, 'interconnection' manifests itself through action taken, based upon these holistic qualities. Prayer, thought, laughter and eating are all actions. Action is the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical driving force of evolution, and the most important ingredient of this socially binding force is the Earth; itself an invention of the creative forces of the universe.

Abram (1997), influenced by Edmund Husserl's philosophy of phenomenology writes,

The earth is thus, for Husserl, the secret depth of the life-world. It is the most

unfathomable region of experience, an enigma that exceeds the structurations of any particular culture or language... The earth is the common 'root basis' of all relative life-worlds. (Abram, 1997, p43)

A 'life-world' is the personal collection of spiritual, mental, emotional and physical experiences.

The life-world is the world of our immediately lived experience, as we live it... (Abram, 1997, p40)

Every person, indeed, every being, experiences a different life-world but shares the same foundation on which it is based. That foundation is planet Earth.

An example taken from my own 'life-world' that compliments the insights of Abram and Husserl:

On the 8th July, 1987 I reached the summit of *la pyramida de Alpamayo*, which stands 5,980 metres above sea level in the Cordillera Blanca of the Peruvian Andes. The 500 metre corrugated ice face we climbed was angled at 60 to 75 degrees. Whilst at high camp waiting for the next day's 3 am start, I wrote in my diary:

Roger and Sarah arrived just before sunset and set up camp on the opposite side of the plateau. We all waved and smiled to each other from a distance. Because of the altitude we weren't bothered wasting energy wandering over to chat. I am intrigued by the fact that five very different people coming from different parts of the planet are here on this tiny plateau, to climb this mountain. But why? What is our motivation?

For me... I am on the verge of reaching the summit of this mountain. I'm on my way to try and pry the soul of the mountain out of its being and keep it for myself. Or is the mountain pulling at my soul? Alpamayo just stands there. I have legs to move freely. I have a heart for power and a mind to comprehend the essence of life. Look at these mountains. Really look hard. What would I be if I never touched such greatness?

I cannot say why the others are here. Perhaps for the very same reasons. Perhaps for the challenge. Perhaps only to feed their ego.

On the mountain,

My last glimpse of the summit is of the rope disappearing into the snow and Roger huddled beneath his helmet. My feet sink into the side of the huge summit block, the soft snow flaking off as I abseil though the cloud into a brilliant moonlit night. Fifty metres below the summit, a kilometre and a half above the valley floor, Kevin and Sarah are already clipped onto the side of the mountain. I also clip on then untie myself from the rope and with my ice axe chip out a small shelf to stand on.

As Roger joins us Kevin and I heave on one end of the rope trying to pull it through the snow stake on the summit. It doesn't shift. It has frozen into the snow. Kevin

volunteers to climb back up and free the rope.

I have no idea how much time passes as we wait for Kevin's return. Hours of standing freezing beneath the star filled sky. Not a noise is heard from the infinite earth spread out before us. Nothing rises, nothing falls, nothing moves with the order in which it had done before. My body, my mind and my soul are ordered to something far greater than anything that I had ever felt before.

What is the 'order' I am speaking of here? Could 'order' be the same as 'action', where, 'my body, my mind and my soul' subconsciously take action to order itself, so as to reach 'something far greater than anything I had ever felt before'. If so, where does this 'action' take place in our model of 'interconnection'?

According to Biologist, Gregory Bateson (1979, p11), ideas are the only things that fill the mind. The mind is empty except for ideas. Action comes from an idea that is of benefit to the thinker. This is a selfish, one way action of course but if the idea is shared it becomes of benefit for two or more thinkers. Thus a multitude of actions are initiated by all involved, promoting acts of giving and receiving. This is 'interaction'. Interaction is the 'give and take' of interconnection.

actioninteraction

Interaction between the human body and the earth provides the next thread of investigation.

My Work Place

It is a human's right to work for social change; action is as natural as breathing.'

Fran Peavey (2000)

Aware of it or not, the degree of interconnectedness influences my interaction with the environment and vice versa. My action towards it originates in my spiritual, mental, emotional and physical being. Providing the action is positive, I am constantly contributing to the interconnectedness of the universal social fabric. Naturally, by giving I also receive. The effect is cyclic.

My film making, photography and writing are passionate examples of interconnection in an artistic sense but what good is that in a society that has violently severed the spiritual and emotional from the mental and the physical? What good are these subjective expressions of heart and soul in a world that is so rational in both mind and matter? Ours is a world of contradictions, where, on one hand, we exult nature, and on the other, destroy it. Humans possess the schizophrenic ability to switch between the motives of self-interest and altruism. It is the seemingly incurable psychosis of self-interest that challenges me to communicate my own altruistic concerns. This is because the humans who are governed by their self-interests have become spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically 'stressed', which undermines interconnection with anything outside of their own skin, thus perpetuating the disconnection from the entire universal social fabric - the cosmic material that holds us all together.

David Abram (1997, p21) writes that, 'the source of stress lies in the relationship *between* the human community and the natural landscape'.

Relevant to this 'relationship' is the experience of a journey I undertook to the source of the Amazon in 1987, where, for 5 days, I traversed 50 kilometres of the massive South American continental divide - where the waters to the west flow into the Pacific and the waters to the east flow into the Atlantic. This journey provided a fitting analogy for the purpose of my work.

Picture a whirlpool, which, to me, represents our society. It has a powerful vortex which sucks everything into it. Surrounding the whirlpool is a massive stone wall which society has constructed. Something like Pink Floyd's wall. On the other side of the wall lies the infinite ocean, representing the infinite spiritual space, the creative forces of the universe.

I feel that I have the ability to be able to move from one side of the wall to the other, though I am constantly pulled from both sides by forces greater than myself. I want to stay in the ocean but my love for others keeps me coming back to the whirlpool. When I started working in the environment movement I felt like I was standing on top of the wall, chipping away at the rock with a spoon. I made no dent. Others were up there with me all hacking away at the wall. Slow, if little progress was made. By making my first film I had dived off the wall back into the whirlpool to swim to the base of the wall, drill a hole and plant some dynamite in order to blow the wall to smithereens. The explosion had no effect on the enormous stone wall. After drilling more holes and placing more dynamite, after making more films and creating little impact I swam around the base of the wall for a while. Soon I discovered natural tunnels that penetrated the wall. Water from the infinite ocean travelled through these tunnels into the whirlpool. One tunnel represented the images that I photographed. Another was the words that I wrote. Another was music that touched my soul. Another was the love that I

gave. And so on. I then realised my goal was to expand these tunnels, to increase the flow of water that would eventually fill the whirlpool with the energy of the infinite ocean.

This was the true aim of my film making, to connect these tunnels to create a much more powerful 'interaction' of the spiritual and material worlds. Not simply for my own benefit but to inspire others to expand their own tunnels, to increase their own spiritual flow.

Adventuring in South America at the age of 21, caused me to break the remaining teenage bonds of naivety and challenged me to seriously explore my place in the world. It took several years of hard reflection and contemplation to fully realise the significance of the year I had spent there. The journey to the Amazon's source was definitely the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual climax of the year - an experience that influenced the course of the rest of my life.

The following piece of writing about the journey, which I wrote years after, mixes both fact and symbolic, imagery.

My journey to the source of the Amazon turns epic. Having hitch-hiked into terrorist territory and rumours of danger in the town ahead where I was to gather supplies, I abandon the truck. With no way back I walk into the remote altiplano and begin the traverse of a section of South America's massive continental divide: a five day hike with little food. Reaching the source seems the only way out. The nearest safe town is two days beyond it.

But who is following me? The terrorists? I see no sign of them. I don't know what lies ahead, so I look back. Through the physical pain of this journey I feel the mental pain of my younger years. I keep looking back to navigate the way ahead. I look farther back and am distraught when forced to admit that I never really fitted in.

Lying on a bed of boulders next to a snow drift that is the river's source, I'm convinced I'm dying of altitude sickness and huddle deeper into my sleeping bag to try and survive the night.

I begin to drown. I try to keep swimming but become more tired. Gasping for air my lungs fill with water. Suddenly I find myself on a large stone wall. It is cold and barren. Looking out I see a powerful whirlpool, its vortex dominant. I walk from one side of the wall to the other. It is far. On the other side lies the infinite ocean. I dive in. I swim freely. The friendly waters support my presence. I am a fraction of its existence but at last I know I belong.

Those, like me, who are exploring the boundaries of society, those who have stepped beyond and returned, know that we can never really go back. Abram (1997), writes,

...perhaps we may make our stand along the edge of civilization, like a magician, or like a person who, having lived among a tribe, can no longer wholly return to his own. He lingers half within and half outside of his community, open as well, then, to the shifting voices and flapping forms that crawl and hover beyond the mirrored walls of the city. And even there, moving along those walls, he may hope to find the precise clues to the mystery of how those walls were created, and how a simple boundary became a barrier, only if the moment is timely - only, that is, if the margin he frequents is a temporal as well as a spatial edge, and the temporal structure that it bounds is about to dissolve, or metamorphose, into something else. (Abram, 1997, pp28, 29)

Abram (1997) explains that a, 'traditional tribal shaman... acts as an intermediary between the human community and the larger ecological field', that there is a two way process were the shaman makes sure that 'nourishment' flows from the landscape to the human community and from the human community back to the land. The shaman cannot do this 'without long and sustained exposure to wild nature, to its patterns and vicissitudes' (Abram 1997, p7).

In this light I can see myself as a kind of modern day shaman who's work is dedicated to challenging human perception of place, and who is seeking to ultimately 'tear down the wall' between the whirlpool and the ocean. I am a beginner, an apprentice shaman perhaps, where wild nature is my teacher.

Symbols and Metaphors

Mind and Matter, Heart and Soul

In my school years I had great difficulty fitting into the objective, scientifically structured education system and was encouraged little to pursue artistic endeavours. Sport was the one thing I excelled in. Also, my psychological state was positive, as I would strive to show my parents, teachers, and myself, that I wasn't a complete failure. This psychological state proved to be the foundation of the motivation of my ongoing personal development.

Throughout my late teens and early twenties I had an insatiable appetite for adventure. Given time to reflect, these adventures served as modes of understanding the world and my place within it. My understanding came not from the objective world that I learned at school but the more natural subjective world of life-experience. The camera became my instrument to document the symbols and metaphors of personal change in order to reflect my life-story back to me, in my own quiet time, in case I had missed the meaning when I was there. For me, the outer landscape is a reflection of my inner landscape. My awareness of symbol and metaphor in the outer, physical world is the awareness of the landscape of my soul. Awareness of my soul is an awareness of pure existence, which gives me purpose. Taking this a step further, awareness of my soul is an awareness of my 'connection' and 'interconnection' with, what James Hillman (1995) describes, a 'world soul',

...in this world soul the human soul has always had its home.
(Hillman, Ecopsychology, 1995, page xxiii)

The clear distinction between inner soul and outer, world soul takes me back to the essence of this inquiry of the bridge between connection and interconnection.

Barry Lopez (1989) offers a similar view to mine on inner and outer landscapes;

I think of two landscapes - one outside the self, the other within. The external landscape is the one we see... The second landscape I think is an interior one, a kind of projection within a person of a part of the exterior landscape... The interior landscape responds to the character and subtlety of an exterior landscape...
(Lopez, 1989, pp64-65)

Lopez's description of 'response', that the, 'interior landscape responds to the character and subtlety of an exterior landscape', is the 'action' I referred to earlier. As I discussed, the interaction that takes place between the inner and

outer landscapes is a path across the bridge between connection and interconnection.

So far in this essay, we have seen that the bridge is made up of spiritual and emotional elements. To further our inquiry of the bridge the 'mental' element must also be studied.

One learns a landscape... not by knowing the name or identity of everything in it, but by perceiving the relationships in it - like that between a sparrow and the twig... Similarly, the speculations, intuitions and formal ideas we refer to as 'mind' are a set of relationships in the interior landscape with purpose and order; some of these obvious, many impenetrably subtle. (Lopez, 1989, pp64-65)

Lopez introduces the notion that 'mind' has a set of complex relationships similar to ecosystems. Through our subjective life-world experiences we can easily become aware of our spiritual, emotional and physical relationships with the earth, but what is the relationship between mind and matter? To explore this I now have to turn to Gregory Bateson and his work on the nature of mind, particularly the angle he takes on evolution in his dialogue of cybernetic epistemology. This angle is not only relevant to this inquiry of the bridge between 'connection' and 'interconnection', but more so to mending the bridge, or the 'relationship', as Abram (1997, p21) says, '*between* the human community and the natural landscape'.

Bateson's work is new to my learning however I instantly related to much of his ideas and concepts. To begin with, Bateson states that,

Darwinian evolutionary theory contained a very great error in its identification of the unit of survival under natural selection. (Bateson, 1972, p456)

Bateson (1972) argues quite convincingly that, 'the unit of survival is not the breeding organism, or the family line', not, 'the society... or some similar homogenous set of conspecifics', for that only promotes self annihilation. Focusing only on one's self in order to survive, the organism, 'ends up with a destroyed environment', thus, 'destroying itself'.

A wild population of any species consists always of individuals whose genetic constitution varies widely. In other words, potentiality and readiness for change is already built into the survival unit.

The flexible environment must also be included along with the flexible organism because... the organism that destroys its environment destroys itself. The unit of survival is a flexible organism-in-its-environment. (Bateson, 1972, p457)

'The unit of survival is a flexible organism-in-its-environment.'

Further, Bateson strengthens this argument with the concept of 'the unit of mind'. Here, Bateson uses the analogy of a map as an example of mind. He

argues that it is not the territory that gets onto a map but the *difference* of the territory. 'Be it a difference in altitude, a difference in vegetation, a difference in population structure, difference in surface...'. This 'difference' is the difference between 'connection and interconnection'. Bateson is talking about the bridge. The bridge is the 'difference' between the two shores.

'A difference, then, is an abstract matter.

In the hard sciences, effects are, in general, caused by rather concrete conditions or events - impacts, forces, and so forth. But when you enter the world of communication, or organization, etc., you... enter a world in which 'effects'... are brought about by differences. That is, they are brought about by the sort of 'thing' that gets onto the map from the territory. This is difference. (Bateson, 1972, p458)

Difference is that 'thing' that travels from an object into your retina and is received and processed by the brain. If there was no difference everything would look the same.

Bateson (1970) says that *difference* is synonymous with 'idea', which is information. Bateson turns to the work of Kant and his *Critique of Judgment*, which, 'asserts that the most elementary aesthetic is the selection of fact'. He explains that there are countless differences around and inside any object. There are differences between the object and other objects. There are also differences within the object. Every molecule that makes up the object is different from all the rest. There is even a difference 'between its location and the locations in which it *might* have been' (Bateson, 1970, p459). Of these countless numbers of differences our senses select only a few of them which then becomes the information we mentally process. There are two paths along which this information travels.

The differences between two objects,

... are first transformed into differences in the propagation of light or sound, and travel in this form to my sensory end organs. The first part of their journey is energized in the ordinary hard-science way, from 'behind'. But when the differences enter my body by triggering an end organ, this type of travel is replaced by travel which is energized at every step by the metabolic energy latent in protoplasm which receives the difference, recreates or transforms it, and passes it on.

When I strike the head of a nail with a hammer, an impulse is transmitted to its point. But it is a semantic error, a misleading metaphor, to say that what travels in an axon is an 'impulse'. It could correctly be called 'news of a difference'. (Bateson, 1972, pp459-460)

Bateson states that, 'this contrast between internal and external pathways is not absolute', but it is,

'broadly true that the coding and transmission of differences outside the body is

very different from the coding and transmission inside, and this difference must be mentioned because it can lead us into error. (Bateson, 1972, p 460)

The error is that humans have separated the external, physical world from the internal, mental world. The human mind is not confined within our skin. Bateson's ideas of the nature of mind argues that mind is not simply inherent inside a single being with a nervous system but spans entire systems and pathways that connect those systems. The brain is a matrix of billions of neurons connected by hundreds of billions of synapses. Nature is also a matrix of countless organisms that are all interconnected by countless paths. This interconnection goes far beyond the obvious physical links to include the subtle, but ever-present, nature of mind.

... there is a larger Mind of which the individual mind is only a sub-system. This larger Mind is comparable to 'God', but it is still immanent in the total interconnected social system and planetary ecology. (Bateson, 1972, p467)

Bateson's identification of the links between the 'unit of mind', and the 'unit of evolutionary survival', pose serious ethical questions on the current eradication of non-human life. Bateson is challenging our dominant belief that mind and matter are separate, and when it is realised that we have severely limited the full potential of the mind then 'a number of shifts will occur in our thinking'. (Bateson, 1972, p466)

... the very meaning of 'survival' becomes different when we stop talking about survival of something bounded by the skin and start to think of the survival of the system of ideas in circuit. (Bateson, 1972, p467)

Bateson (1972) was influenced by the 18th Century biologist, Lamarck, who he calls, 'the greatest biologist in history'. Long before Darwin, Lamarck turned taxonomy upside down. In the mid 18th century the biological ladder started at the top, working its way down from God to humans to apes and continued all the way down to the lowest, smallest infusoria. Lamarck claimed that the ladder actually started 'with the infusoria and that there were changes leading up to man' (Bateson, 1972, p433).

Before Lamarck came along, 'mind was the explanation of the biological world'. As soon as he turned the tables the question arose: 'is the biological world the explanation of mind?' (Bateson, 1972, p433)

When Darwin introduced his own Theory of Evolution, the question about the origin of the nature of mind in relation to evolution was all but forgotten up until World War II.

With the founding of the science of psychology in the early 20th Century, the concept of mind expanded greatly. But psychology only explored the inner mind - the mind beneath the skin of the human being; hidden somewhere in the

complex structure of the brain. In contrast Bateson is introducing the complimentary concept of outer mind. Recently, ecopsychologists have been working with this concept, attempting to re-build the damaged bridge between the human connection and disconnection with nature.

Bateson's passionate concern about the destruction of the environment goes hand in hand with his concept of the nature of mind;

If you put God outside and set him vis-a-vis his creation and if you have the idea that you are created in his image, you will logically and naturally see yourself as outside and against things around you. And as you arrogate all mind to yourself, you will see the world around you as mindless and therefore not entitled to moral or ethical consideration. The environment will seem to be yours to exploit. Your survival unit will be you and your folks or conspecifics against the environment of other social units, other races and the brutes and vegetables.

If this is your estimate of your relation to nature and you have an advanced technology, your likelihood of survival will be that of a snow ball in hell. (Bateson, 1972, p468)

Fritjof Capra (1989) influenced by Bateson, suggests that, 'the central aspect of the emerging new paradigm... is the shift from objects to relationships' (Capra, 1989, p80).

In relation to this, Capra (1989) describes a conversation he had with Bateson about logic. Bateson states that logic cannot handle paradox because life wasn't created from logic. In the living world you 'get circular trains of causation... the use of logic will make you walk into paradoxes' (Capra 1989, p78).

Bateson goes on to explain that nature doesn't understand logic. Babies, for example, don't see five fingers and a thumb on their hand. What they see is the relationship between those fingers and thumb, between the fingers and the hand, between the hand and the food it holds, between the food and the mouth. Nature understands only relationships. 'Logic wont do'. Instead, Bateson claims, nature uses metaphor;

That's how this whole fabric of mental interconnections holds together. Metaphor is right at the bottom of being alive.' (Bateson, in Uncommon Wisdom, by Capra, 1989, p79.)

Metaphor, then, according to Bateson, is nature's logic.

Bateson illustrates the importance of metaphor by offering two syllogisms;

Men die.
Socrates is a man.
Socrates will die.

Men die.
Grass dies.
Men are grass.

These two syllogisms demonstrate the difference between the Cartesian, objective, mechanistic, world view, where objects are seen as separate items (Socrates is a man), and the subjective world view where everything is interconnected in diverse and dynamic patterns (Men are grass).

Metaphor expresses... similarity of organization. And this is why metaphor, according to Bateson, is the language of nature. (Capra, 1989, p84.)

This holistic understanding of the make up of the universe is deeply embedded in Eastern culture but it also emanates from the works of artists and poets heavily weighted with heart, soul and intersubjective mind.

Conclusion

From this brief inquiry I have learned that the bridge between connection and interconnection is made up of a number of related factors which generate from my spiritual, mental, emotional and physical relationship with the environment. I see that it is not just action but interaction that helps me walk across the bridge, on my way transforming from an intellectual peeping Tom to a creature who generates trust and deep emotional understanding of my total environmental composition; becoming a creature who not just connects but interconnects with nature.

From a Zen point of view the bridge may not exist at all. From an intellectual point of view the bridge is concrete. From an artist's point of view the bridge is nature in its entirety, and is made of metaphor.

Today on the Pagodas the air is again still. More still than I have ever felt in the Blue Mountains. But the presence of the wind reflects in the flight of the birds and the subtle shake of the leaves in the trees. I feel sensations on my skin, the chill of the coming winter mixed with the warmth of the sun. Most of the sensations on my skin are generating from within me. I slip easily into the meditation technique I have learnt - Vipassana. Where one observes, without craving or aversion, the sensations of the body. I recall what my teacher taught me, how the universal elements of earth, air, fire and water, each generate particular sensations. By observing the body's sensation the meditator goes to the deepest level of the mind in order to purify it of negativities generated by both inner and outer influences. I recall Bateson's radical ideas of the nature of mind and wonder if this deepest level of the mind, the one that is reached not intellectually but experientially, is the same mind that is used by the birds and the trees, the insects and the rocks. Is this deepest part of the mind the same 'immanent' mind that Bateson talks about?

This particular place, high on top of the cliffs overlooking deep canyons, creates the openness, calmness and clarity I spoke of in the introduction. This is a place that symbolises, for me, where I am at in my life. Open, calm and clear. Downstream, the deep dark canyons symbolise a time of deep pain consisting of constant anxiety and frustration generated from loneliness. Before that is the meandering river of childhood innocence. The ocean is the beginning. It is also the end.

Over the years, influenced by my own life experiences, I have created a story that documents, in symbols and metaphor, my life journey. I have done so

simply for the purpose of understanding my life and where I fit into the scheme of things; locally, nationally, globally and universally - spiritually, emotionally, physically and mentally. My stories are a way of understanding my sense of place.

Every person's life-story begins at a certain moment in time in a particular place and ends at a certain time, also in a particular place. In the worldview and mythologies of many cultures, the life-story is thought of as a journey, to and through a series of places: it might be a heroes journey of transformation, or the mystical path to enlightenment, or an exploration of hidden worlds, or the quest of vision in wilderness. The destination of our life journey is the metaphor for our destiny. (R. Metzner, *Sense of Place Book of Readings*, 1999, page 6.)

My own life-story, interpreted in a mythological sense is that of a river system, from the mist in the mountains to the tides of the ocean. Being here, in this place, I have time to explore details, observe things I've never seen before, study other creatures that live day to day in the wild environment. Being in this place that is open, inspires more openness in me. Being in this place that is calm promotes a calmness in me. Being in this place, above the constricted canyon, where I can see mountains and horizons, invites clarity within my being.

It is not that I've never been to a place like this before, not that I have never been open, calm and clear. It is just that now - right now - I feel, deep down, that I can stay here for a while. I have time to explore openness, patience to contemplate calmness and confidence to keep clarity. Exploring the river, as I see it now, will expand these qualities and, no doubt introduce longevity to others qualities that evolve. But now the journey up river, to my metaphorical mountain of enlightenment, doesn't seem so urgent. I am enjoying so much staying still in one place and exploring life's diversity.

The incident at Glastonbell, where I observed the crayfish in the creek making its way up stream, highlighted the patience that has developed in me over the last three years. I no longer need to see what's over the next hill. This patience has amplified with learning how to sit in one place and not move for an hour in order to meditate.

My calmness, openness and clarity was tested on my four day walk down the Grose River, from Blue Gum Forest to Richmond, at the beginning of the summer residential. I undertook the journey as a symbol of travelling from experiential life to academic life. Around the time of developing my whirlpool analogy I also developed an analogy for my learning. It consisted of a spiral, where one side of the spiral was labelled 'experiential learning' and the other side was labelled, 'learning from others'. My learning path spirals from one side to the other. As my knowledge grows so does the spiral expand. Little did I know that the journey down the Grose would become much more. In short the walk became an epic. The track was overgrown, where in many places I had to

undertake some serious bush-bashing and the weather provided the three hottest days of summer. I emerged at Richmond physically feeling like I'd spent a month in the wilds of South West Tasmania. It had been a challenge that echoed my younger days of hard adventure in the Andes and Tasmania. In the Grose Gorge, like on the Amazon Source hike, the only way was forward. I had a deadline to meet. I had to press on, no matter what. As the hike became more and more difficult I observed my attitude. Instead of feeling angry about the situation I had got myself into I just took it as it came. I remained emotionally calm, physically open to what lay ahead and mentally clear as to the lesson that was transpiring. It seemed like my mind was outside of my body. My 34 year old mind was observing and controlling a body that had time warped back 10 to 15 years. Metaphorically speaking I was travelling downstream through places I had already been.

The hike turned out to be a great indication of the mental and emotional progress I had made over the last 15, even 20 years. To make the lesson even more profound, Stuart Hill, in his welcoming lecture at the residential, held up his own model of learning, a spiral that constantly moves from experiential to academic learning. I knew then that I was in the right place with the right people at the right time.

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