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THINKING - LIFE - ORGANIC



“Happiness comes from the world we live in”<sup>1</sup>

### *Introduction*

The question of how body and religion are intertwined and how corporeal experience and transcendence are related adds to my thesis<sup>2</sup> on “simply being there for somebody” as an approach in holistic art therapy. It was the live experience that revealed how being in nature can change the behavioristics of a person in a tremendous positive and joyful way as the whole wellbeing of a person improves. This was proven especially in my work with handicapped and institutionalized clients, as calm returns for the togetherness by just going out into the surrounding eco systems every now and then. The wilder the surroundings the easier and long lasting the experience of wholeness afterwards. Nature itself is healing.

Along the golden thread of asking what nature means to humans and how humans relate to nature, my conclusion asks if the connection between humans and nature can be seen as sacred, and therefore if nature is sacred and if it is possible to seclude and separate mankind from nature over all?

This paper unfolds over a multitude of sections, starting with a short explanation on what art therapy is in general, followed by one specific case study that initiated this paper. Subsequent sections flood the reader with scientific studies on how nature benefits human life. Following that, the question of why there seems to be a disconnection and separation between human and nature is dealt with, bridging the meaning of love, emotion, and connection through the discussion of a specific indigenous perspective. The paper ends with an outlook upon a possible new scientific view and human responsibility.

Moreover, writing this essay out of an art therapeutic perspective brings a certain problem to its scientific purpose. This will not read as scientific papers usually do. The reason is that art is seldom scientific, whereas there tends to be quite a

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<sup>1</sup> First Voices Radio by Ghosthorse, Tiokasin interviewing L Martín Prechtel (21.07.2021), min. 50:00.

<sup>2</sup> Tobias Patry, (2022). Einfach Sein in ganzheitlicher Kunsttherapie. Schriftliche Diplomarbeit zur Ausbildung in ganzheitlicher Kunsttherapie.

lot of that in western therapy. It is like the Italian anthropologist of religion Andrea de Antoni put it in one of his lectures on exorcism at the University of Vienna last year. According to an anthropologist, truth is what the vis-à-vis states as true. There is nothing to prove or disprove. Art therapy is an in-between vehicle, a bridging device. Like an anthropologist, the art therapist describes and collects the stories and processes of the client, whereas the process (creating art), its meaning, and its effect are absolute subjective to the client. They are the client's truth. This subjective universe, this shared experience is intimate, empathic, moving, and poetic.

So is the idea, meaning, and usage of this paper. It tries to be of easy language, filled with scientific proof and a poetic visual language. It is a paper that wants to be of easy understanding, a resonating read that empowers the oscillation of feeling. It intends to find an artistic language that speaks with beauty and enables empathy, weaving together art, science, and indigenous world views, showing that they clearly relate through a plurality of viewpoints.

The reader should be enabled to become moved, to reflect. They are invited to play with the understanding that the world we live in is our true reality. Within nature lies the scientific aspiration of objectivity. Nature is the medium through which our essential, indigenous self can come to life, come into being, enliven the body, incarnate into the body, and embody.

#### *About Art Therapy*

Art therapy is an interdisciplinary field that is composed of a multitude of old and new ideas, approaches, and methods emerging out of psychology, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, theology, philosophy, biology (i.e., neuroscience, epigenetics), psychiatry, sociology, etc., and it asks how it could be different: the name giving, the cosmos of the different art forms. Each branch within the field of various forms of art therapy has their own ideas on ethics, methods, and tools to provide a process that contributes to the well-being, healing, and stabilizing of clients.

Paul Klee, a Swiss-born German painter and leading figure of the art development in the first half of the 20th century, says that art is never something finished, something fixed, but that it is a constant process. It is alive and being alive means to encounter. "Art does not reproduce the visible, but makes visible art is not creation, which is, but first and

foremost genesis, creation, which becomes ... The Genesis as a formal movement is the essence of the creation."<sup>3</sup>

With these three upcoming quotes it is possible to outline a definition on art therapy and its intents. Starting with a famous quote of Edith Kramer, an Austrian pioneer of art therapy and a very active one until her death in 2014: "Art is therapy." A history of quotations show this to be true, as it is true for an uncountable number of famous and not so famous artists. Joseph Beuys, one of the most important German artists and art professors in the 1970's and 1980's (besides being an economist, philosopher, political figure as a founding member of the Green party), provides his famous statement and core concept: "*Jeder Mensch ein Künstler*"<sup>4</sup> (translated as "every human an artist"). While the Austrian cultural historian Manfred Wagner professor emeritus contributes: "Art is the highest development of man's creative potential in the sensualisation of his intellectual, emotional and social capacity."<sup>5</sup>

The essential expression of every being can be called art. It is something that needs to be developed individually. Coming out of economics, Beuys calls art the "currency" in the sense of that one unique and authentic thing of value a person can give to benefit others: the communion. Sharing that means relating, going into connection, co-creating life. "For only art is actually a means that brings the human being to blossoming."<sup>6</sup>

The therapeutic process starts with getting creative, meaning the expressing of oneself. Through the creative/artistic process that is unexpressed, not confronted, or unknown, the material appears. Expressing and sharing these materials brings a relief, a possibility of reflection, and a possibility of growth and change. The biophysician, psychologist, and inventor of Somatic Experiencing Peter Levine finds an apt quotation in the Gnostic Gospels: "If you bring forth what is within you, what is within you will be your salvation. If you do not bring forth what is in you, what is in you will destroy you."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Boris Friedewald, *Paul Klee* (2015, 9. Auflage). *Die Engel von Paul Klee* (Köln: DuMont, 2021), 73, 81.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Beuys (1975 in an edition from 1988). „Jeder Mensch ein Künstler. Gespräche auf der documenta“ 5, 1972. Frankfurt a M/ Berlin/ Wien: Ullstein..

<sup>5</sup> Manfred Wagner (2000). *Stoppt das Kulturgeschwätz!*. Wien/Köln/Weimar: Böhlau, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Beuys, op. cit., 55.

<sup>7</sup> Peter A. Levine, *Trauma-Heilung – Das Erwachen des Tigers* (Essen: Synthesis, 1998), 262.

*Salutogenesis*

Like the understanding of Genesis in the art of Klee, salutogenesis (lat. *salūs* = wellbeing and gr. *gέnesis* = creation (-al process)) implements the idea of Genesis to the medical system. It means that wellbeing is a state of constant motion. It is asking what one can do to improve one's current condition while moving on a loop between good health and terminal illness. Sickness is not a fixation.

Salutogenesis was framed in 1968 by medical sociologist Aaron Antonovsky. While working with survivors of concentration camps post-WWII he wondered if and how a person that underwent such cruelty could return to a joyous, fulfilling life, even though they'd been inflicted by such an unfathomable trauma meant to completely strip off human belonging. An event that was meant to fully and completely eradicate one's being from existence.

He wondered if, returning to a fulfilling life after a trauma as huge as a concentration camp survival, a human was able to experience a joyous life. Salutogenesis was born and implied that being alive also implied overcoming trauma.

Salutogenesis is complementary to the pathological side of western medicine. Pathology (gr. *lōgos* = teaching/science of gr. *pāthos* = transformative experience (simplified) disease) works on understanding cause and effect of diseases, while salutogenesis means searching for tools that make someone's life more worthwhile. Salutogenesis demands of medicine to see that *man is more than the sum of his diseases*, as the Austrian professor of sociology Klaus Zapotoczky puts it.

A simple example of its relevance within the medical system of today is the German word for nurse. *Krankenpfleger* (caretaker of the sick) has been reevaluated to be called *Gesundheitspfleger* (caretaker of health), thereby shifting the focus away from a specific illness towards the whole human being.

*An Art Therapeutic View of Disease*

German psychiatrist and historian of medicine and psychiatry, Klaus Dörner († 09.2022), had found a wonderful way:

A mentally ill person is a person who has reached a crisis and dead-end in solving an age-appropriate life task because his vulnerability and thus his need for protection and his need to explain the unexplainable have become too great and too painful for him. ...  
Because something like this can happen to each of us

every day or, at least to some extent, has already happened, our need for protection is inwardly accessible to us as a self-help path, which (paradoxically) includes respect for the otherness of the other.<sup>8</sup>

He later quotes professor Autenrieth from ~1800:

Conversely, one should distribute the insane as evenly as possible throughout society, so that their burden is spread over a sufficient number of shoulders, because then the citizens could also benefit from the positive (original, seismographic, emotional, or prophetic) peculiarities of the insane.<sup>9</sup>

As stated above, disease is part of life and in one way or another is known to all humans. It is a constant process of work to be well and at peace. While guiding people that seem estranged and different among the universe of normal, healthy members of society, a fundamental question arises. Is it acceptable to alienate people due to their personal lack of insight and understanding into the conception of the counterpart (the so called “ill”)?

There is a vivid memory of a client called Hotzenplotz<sup>10</sup> (his alias is taken from the “*The Robber Hotzenplotz*” by German writer Otfried Preußler). He is standing next to an old tree. (He, under no circumstance, would ever stand still for even a fraction of a second). His right arm is completely elongated, and his body is slightly vibrating and humming. He is pointing his index finger into thin air next to the tree, or gently touching the bark like a person embracing the face of the beloved one. There he stands for minutes, for hours. While waiting for him to continue walking, the question of what he is doing arises. Is he just following a random action or is he acting in accordance to something that is beyond the sensuous experience of the witness?

Klee said:

I often say it, but it is sometimes not taken seriously enough, that worlds have opened and are opening to us,

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<sup>8</sup> Klaus Dörner et. al. Klaus. *Irren ist menschlich* (Köln: Psychiatrie Verlag 2019), 19,

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Patry, op. cit. (2022). Einfach Sein in ganzheitlicher Kunsttherapie. Schriftliche Diplomarbeit zur Ausbildung in ganzheitlicher Kunsttherapie, 33f.

which also belong to nature... I mean... the realm of what can come, wants to come, but does not have to come, an intermediate world... I call it an in-between world, because I feel it between the world perceptible to our senses externally and can absorb it internally in such a way that I can project it in correspondence to the outside. Thither the children, the madmen, the primitives are still able to look or are being able to look again. And what they see and form is precious confirmation. Because we all see the same thing, even if from different sides. It is as a whole and individual the same, over the whole planet, no phantasm, but fact for fact.<sup>11</sup>

What benefits would it bring to build bridges of exchange from a normative world (if that can even be seen to exist at all) into that unexpressed otherness, the experienced cognition of the “displaced” or “moved” (as the German word for mad or crazy *verrückt* would translate to). What would it benefit to get a hunch of these different aspects of perception? As Authenrieth said already over 200 years ago, society could benefit tremendously by being willing to communicate, listen, understand, and live together.

#### *Accompanying Clients in Nature*

It was 2016, a year full of work had passed with disabled, traumatized, and psychiatric-diagnosed children and young adults. This was in the midst of the last institutional internship of art therapy studies. It spanned a broad range of work the accompaniment or the holding of both a therapeutic group and one-on-one sessions with youngsters diagnosed with different spectra of autism, sexual trauma, and genetic disorders.

Some of these children went outside the institution for therapy. Their indoor time was discharged (therapy, school, cooking, and craft lessons as well as meal, reading, playing, and resting times) and replaced with strolls in the park, running after a ball, spending time on a playground, and enjoying the warm luminous sun (at least during the warmer half of the year as the colder one is shrouded in fogginess). Still others were happy to stay indoors.

Following the project of a senior therapist, interesting things occurred. With increasing frequency, the protégés would be taken for walks outdoors, and eventually, longer and longer outdoor hikes. They left not only the building behind, but the whole concrete city and its parks. By trial and

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<sup>11</sup> Friedewald, *Paul Klee*, op. cit., 39.

error, this colleague had come to an understanding that taking them into nature with its all greenery, into the woods, brought an enormous difference compared to simply visiting a park.

The institution was located at the outskirts of the Austrian capital Vienna. Right behind it were moderate hills with vineyards. A bit further back, were the “Vienna Woods.” The forest consisted mainly of beech trees, a few pines, and occasionally an oak. This proximity made it rather easy to quickly access nature.

While on the first walks, something interesting was revealed. Many of these children had never been to the fields or woods and some had never even left a paved road. Going through a plowed vineyard with uneven ground was a totally new sensation that required their physical condition to be trained. It seems understandable that diagnosed children, due to the lack of time, assistance, or resilience of their caretakers, are not taken outdoors. It does not seem like the exception these days. More and more healthy children and adults have never been outdoors. It is a systemic tendency that people are moving away from spending time outdoors. In 2005 the journalist Richard Louv<sup>12</sup> coined his idea of a “nature deficit disorder.” He showed evidence that excluding oneself from nature resulted in a variation of physical and mental problems, starting with anxiety and distraction.

#### *An Analogy to Autism*

The positive effect that nature had on these children could be seen immediately upon arrival, starting with a notable change in their general behavior. A distinct visual example here was Hotzenplotz again. Hotzenplotz had a diagnosis of autism. Factually, that means that he has more synaptic connections than the average human, so his brain receives more and/or stronger information, making him constantly flooded with impulses and sensual information. That could be akin to something like the overwhelming and shocking feeling of putting two wet fingers into an electrical socket.

The received data stream or data flood was so strong for him that he, by his own perception, seemed to not be confined within his own body anymore. In order to feel a sense of physical boundary, to feel embodied, he would squeeze himself between tight things. In his specific situation, the solution was to be sandwiched between two stacked mattresses (sometimes with additional requested weight of other children on top of the mattress sandwich). He would

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Louv, *The last child in the woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder* (New York: Algonquin Books, 2005).

then attain the feeling that he had a physical structure with boundaries, i.e., that he was embodied.

Besides his difficulty to feel himself within his own flesh, his other predicament came from the same source of overload. This source dispersed his mind into a multitude of fast, continuous, focused physical leaps, causing him to have a really hard time starting, maintaining, and finishing a singular action. As soon as he would set a thought into physical motion, his mind was already a few steps ahead doing other things. His physicality was simply unable to cope with his speed of mind, leaving him helpless within a clutter of changing and mixing actions. He would stumble over unfinished actions, leaving him in a loop of short, restless moments and wild leaps throughout the room. The same went for his speech. Volume, words, and sentence structures got mixed in a wild and spluttered way, paired with a scream or a thrown object every now and then.

*An Analogy to the Forest's Affect*

When this exceptionally fast moving, indecisive young man was led for a walk by a supportive hand, rapidly shaking his head right and left entered the “cathedral” of the woods, magic happened. It is as if he entered his personal, sacred archway, comparable to someone that enters a church, mosque, synagogue, temple, or otherwise. Believer or not, upon entering, the overall speed of one’s life is reduced to embrace the vastness and beauty of the atmosphere that such a house carries.

Hotzenplotz’s breathing, heartbeat, and whole nervous system slowed down. He was not able to fully execute his jumping movements that halt mid-motion to make space for new ones, the movements that would normally not fully slow down, get gentler, or stop entirely. In his case, that was a life-affirming feat as his parasympathetic nervous system (the one responsible for resting, recovery and digestion) is usually off for most of his time, leaving a constantly over-stressed body with a far too fast circulation and metabolism. That condition is life-shortening, painful (as the organs cannot work properly), and when not regulated (via diets, routines, or medication), life-threatening.

A simple stroll in the forest has an immediate effect, but this effect is not bound to the moment of walking alone. The positive changes that appear are taken into the whole week of working together. There is more clarity, stillness and sensitivity. Conflicts and tensions between the children disappear. There is less agitation and more aliveness. A healthy appetite emerges within those that otherwise eat little.



In 2018 journalist Florence Williams published her book *The Nature Fix*, a collection of studies around the question of “how much nature do we need to fix ourselves?”<sup>13</sup> while taking reference to R. Louv’s work and his term “nature neurons.” The term aims to clarify the connection between our nervous system and the natural environment (where it evolved out from).

*The Nature Fix on Mood, Stress, and Creativity*

A study by economist George MacKerron showed that “on average, study participants are significantly and substantially happier outdoors in all green or natural habitat types than they are in urban environments.”<sup>14</sup> The change in positivity was bigger than simply having peaceful “me time,” being with loved ones, or doing a joyous activity. While being in nature makes humans happier, psychology professor David Streyer focuses his work on proving that nature also increases creativity, mental capacity, and intelligence.<sup>15</sup>

Daily life in the city and its demands are stressful. Noise volume, emissions, dust, workload, sleep, eating, and drinking habits are all intertwining factors that lead to our so called “lifestyle diseases.” There are voices that claim a decent amount of stress, the so-called eustress (gr. eu- = good) framed by the biomedic Hans Selye, brings better life/work performance than much long-lasting “bad stress.” This bad stress, known as distress, brings us maladies or at least makes it easier for them to appear. High cortisol and blood pressure, heart and metabolism diseases, dementia, depression, burn out, ADHD, and psychiatric illnesses (schizophrenia, anxiety, mood disorder) are known examples.

Roger Ulrich, famous for his work on stress-release models, wondered why people would take several minutes for a car detour on their way to the mall just to pass a tree-lined roadway instead of taking the faster road without trees. His study took 120 students on an EEG unit showing half of them urban images and the other half nature scenes right after watching gory accident movies. All of those that viewed nature images recovered after five minutes, while the others only partially recovered after a full ten minutes.<sup>16</sup>

*The Nature Fix Approach and Findings in Japan*

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<sup>13</sup> Florence Williams, *The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative* (London: W. W. Norton & Company 2018), 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 187f.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 26f.

In 1980, Japan's government faced a serious problem. Their citizens were known throughout the world for being hard office workers, and more and more of them were frequently struck by 過労死 (karō-shi). *Karōshi* simply translates as death through overwork (counted as a work accident) and is a widespread phenomenon. Healthy, young, and middle-aged office workers would collapse over their desk, passing on to the afterlife. This was quite a predicament for the aspiring Japanese economy. One of the solutions was 森林浴 (shinrin yoku), the so called "Forest Therapy" or "forest bathing," introduced in 1982. Japan is a country whose landmass is covered with by 68% forests. It is strongly shaped by Buddhist and Shintoist beliefs that also in a way find application with *shrininyoku*.

The idea of *shrinin* is to let nature in through all the five senses of the body. Over 14 years (between 2003 and 2017) Japan's government spent 4\$ to fund the research and development of forest medicine and forest medicine tourism. Building over 50 trails all over Japan made especially for forest bathing and over 100 centers for forest therapy (where the benefits are evaluated scientifically), they also trained and certified people to be physicians of forest medicine.<sup>17</sup>

Yoshifumi Miyazaki, physical anthropologist and vice director of the Center of Environment, Health and Field Science in Chiba University on Biophilia: "throughout our Evolution, we've spent 99.9% of our time in nature. Our physiology is still adapted to it. ... a feeling of comfort can be achieved if our rhythms are synchronized with those of the environment."<sup>18</sup> Beginning in 2004, in his studies he showed that walks through the forest (in comparison to walks in urban gardens) had a decrease on the cortisol levels (by 12%), the sympathetic nerve activity (by 7%), the blood pressure (by 1,4%), and the heart rate (by 6%).

Qing Li, immunologist at Nippon Medical School, Tokyo, specialized on NK (natural killer) immune cells, a sort of white blood cell that is part of our autoimmune system which helps to cleanse viruses or tumorous cells. In 2008, he took middle aged, city-dwelling businessmen for hiking three days straight, which had an immense result of a 40% increase in NK cells. This increase lasted for over a week without going near another forest. Even after a month without forests, the amount was still 15% higher than the average portion. Turns out that aerosols (fine solid or liquid particles in the air) called Phytoncides (often simplified as "good tree smells" – basically essential tree oils) and Geosmin (simplified as "the earthy

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 18f.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 23.

smell after rain hit the forest floor”), another terpene (the name for these kind of hydrogen-carbon bindings that enfold over 300,000 different compounds, mostly found in coniferous forests) made by soil organisms, (bacteria) are responsible for these unbelievable effects. These can only be found within the forests. No urban landscape can provide that.<sup>19</sup>

### *Holistic Organism*

Why is nature so important for health? Just as with Miyazaki, social psychologist Elisabeth Nisbeth says: “We evolved in nature. It’s strange we’d be so disconnected.”<sup>20</sup> In a set of studies she let students choose to either walk the university campus through the underground tunnel system or overground along a canal, while predicting which choice would make them more happy beforehand.<sup>21</sup> Similar to MacKerron, she found that being in nature makes people happier but, they underestimate how good it makes them feel or do not know that it makes them feel good at all.

1984 Edward O. Wilson († 12.2021), a leading professor for entomology often revered to as the “father of sociobiology,” “father of biodiversity” or simply “antman,” published his book *Biophilia*. “Biophilia” was taken by him from the German psychologist, psychoanalyst, humanistic philosopher, and socialist Erich Fromm defined in 1973 as “the passionate love of life and all of that is alive; it is the wish to further growth, whether in a person, a plant, an idea or a social group” and was reframed by Wilson into the “innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms.”<sup>22</sup> Like Miyazaki and Williams, Wilson says that the correlation between man and nature is an evolutionary one. It is one of survival but also one of bringing fulfillment, to enjoy the plurality of interconnectedness, i.e., enjoying the plurality of life.

Starting in the 1960’s there was a massive social push in seeing nature, wildlife, and preservation as something of importance. People started acting in a way that suggests that it might not be the best choice to simply harvest and deconstruct millions-year old functioning ecosystems over a few hundred years for a short-term boost in wealth. Companies like WWF and Greenpeace were established and there was a shift in politics (such as the emergence of the Green Party in many countries).

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 28f. 63f.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 21.

Two ideas of that time should be mentioned here. One comes from the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss who was shaping a new scientific branch called “deep ecology” in 1973, which was to argue for the importance of “Rights of Non-Human Nature.” Everything has a right to be and live unhindered from human interference. Man is not the only being and is in no way a superior, ruling one.

The other comes from the chemist James Lovelock and the microbiologist Lynn Margulis, called the “Gaia Hypothesis.” They left the realm of organic matter behind. The Gaia Hypothesis states that organic and inorganic matter are living in a synergetic self-regulating system. All matter matters because it is interdependent as one organism called Gaia (from gr. *gaia* as the personified earth or goddess earth) and therefore a living Earth.

What Næss, Lovelock and Margulis have in common is that they pose a convergence of western science at the end of the last millennia and an indigenous approach towards nature.

While seeing the earth as one wholesome interconnected system can be discussed, it is impossible to separate humankind and nature. As seen before, these two go together. Humanity evolved in nature and therefor is embedded in nature. The author, teacher, and indigenous elder Martín Prechtel adds a similar conclusion on this human-nature relation that the scientists mentioned have found: “A person cannot be made well in a vacuum by isolation from sickness. It is being surrounded and inside the natural world that makes us well even with the sickness. What gives us life is that what we are surrounded by and that gives us the beauty and deliciousness of being alive.”<sup>23</sup>

The human is integrated into the world, into the surrounding ecologies, into the vivid wonders this planet has to offer. Forgetting the togetherness, denying a relation by not being in nature, and simply harvesting resources and brutally changing or even destroying ecosystems is making the ecologies sick. And making the ecologies sick means making oneself sick.

### *Segregating Human from its Nature*

You have raped and violated these lands always saying, “Gimme, gimme, gimme” and never given anything back.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ghosthorse, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> John (Fire) Lamedeer and Richard Erdoes, *Lame Deer. Seeker of Visions* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972),108.

Within the 21<sup>st</sup> century a strong need to look after the environment has arisen. In the 1960's there were vast movements of thought and action that are currently expanded upon by new movements and ideas. There is the “energy transition/revolution,” the “vegan revolution,” the “Fridays for Future” movement and a more radical “Extinct Rebellion.” Still, it seems that change - often the changes demanded since over half of a century now - is progressing very slowly. On an individual scale the understanding of a relation between the outer world and the own body is often absent. Is it so hard to understand that this society's approach to engaging with life and in dealing with ecology are those that do tremendous harm to itself? Why do the problems that this society's lifestyle brings seem so far from an individual's life? Why does it feel like the human is a split entity from all other entities, from life, from nature, and from the land?

I don't know how exactly I've been trying to figure this out since years ... where people got this strange idea that somehow humankind was separated from the natural world or that the galaxies that they want to blast off to are not part of the natural world or that their bodies are not natural. When you try to create this synthetic technogarden and put people as component inside this technogarden that has no relationship to the land around, still all the components of the things that the people are making come from somewhere in the land and are unhappy slaves. When people are arrogant enough and think that nature is a resource and that you just go there and take what you want then you are automatically mining your own body and you are mining the body of the future. They are killing themselves, they are killing the earth, that arrogance needs to be recognized. The earth and the natural world is not a resource it is the superior thing that you need to bow your head to and learn how to do that. I don't think many people have really actually realized the scientific reality of that. The oceans are suffering, the ground is suffering, the air is suffering and the people are suffering so hello?<sup>25</sup>

Seeing humanity as the crown of creation, as the one sovereign species, allows us to excavate all available resources no matter the cost of damage done by the harvesting,

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<sup>25</sup> First Voices Radio by Ghosthores, Tiokasin interviewing Martín Prechtel (21.07.2021), min. 20:00.

shipping, processing, and distribution of resources. We propagate to prove that all of nature belongs to humankind, as if humans were the divine power of the cosmos. But nature is far away from being empty, lifeless, and stupid. Nature is far from being simply an object. Humans share a realm with other living organisms, and those organisms communicate, think, and feel. Nature therefore suffers from being treated as a mere resource. More and more studies find that the matter which surrounds mankind is indeed alive as indigenous people claim. It is not only the animals but also the plants, the trees, and the soil, and they make humanity whole, healthy, and happy. This vivid connection asks us to reflect on human action.

Ecology professor Suzanne Simard from the University of British Columbia worked in the surrounding tempered rainforests made of massive old pine trees called red cedars. She found that the trees “talked” with each other over symbiotic organisms, a fungi network between trees that works exactly like the neuronal system in the human brain. That system required old growth to establish itself, for it was not (fully) developed in the forest due to the young trees. The system transferred data and resources like a brain would, and trees are used the information to react upon. She calls this intelligence.

Furthermore, she develops a new idea regarding the idea of plants “fighting for their place within the forest.” Finding that seeds are “waiting” in the soil for hundreds of years until an old tree (she calls the old trees “mother trees,” as they are nourishing and feeding the surroundings) tumbles, it releases the energy it saved through its roots into the surrounding network and soil. This goes straight to the seedlings, helping them to take that space without leafy canopy.<sup>26</sup>

Like her findings on “intelligence,” the German biologist, biosemiotician, philosopher, and journalist Andreas Weber works on feelings. All living organisms feel. Life implies feeling.<sup>27</sup>

### *Life Implies Feelings*

For indigenous people, stories play a crucial role. Embedded in them is the history of their culture and the teachings of their ancestors. This forms their way of being today and their visions of an enlivened, healthy, and whole

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<sup>26</sup> cf. Suzanne Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree. Uncovering the Wisdom and Intelligence of the Forest*. London: Penguin Random House, 2021).

<sup>27</sup> cf. Andreas Weber, *The Biology of Wonder. Aliveness, Feeling and the Metamorphosis of Science* (Bariola Island: New Society Publishers, 2016).

world. Out of that understanding the upcoming story is meant to be seen as an artistic intervention to visualize a feeling upon which further thought is enabled.

A few years back my grandmother died leaving me with a handful of stories before her passing. Stories of me being a child, sweet and fond memories of her, events that I was too young to remember. This particular story took place while one of my many visits to her hometown embedded in the Alps. We would always take huge strolls and hikes staring along a small river, feeding some animals before hiking up into the woods. On this day, the alley I knew, the one beside the gurgling stream had been cut down completely by the local forestry. I was very emotional, not simply agitated or grumpy. I was furious, mad, freaking out, and crying. Seeing this overnight, the clear cutting of these loved old willow and birch trees, seriously hurt my child soul. It pained me. Many years later, I can relate to this story, even though I did not remember it for I was too young. Now, I do not care about cut trees. Where did that feeling go? Where is the grief? Where is the empathy, the resonance? Why do I not mind at all?

Do feelings simply disappear when we grow up? Are these feelings gone through pure numbing? Or was it just the naivety of a child's feelings? Is it ignorance, as Nisbeth has found it to be? Ignorance and a focus on other more important, relevant things?

The famous German-Swiss writer Hermann Hesse wrote: "There is nothing more wonderful and incomprehensible and nothing that becomes stranger to us and is more thoroughly lost than the soul of the playing child. ... Children are broad-minded and, through the magic of imagination, are able to harbor things in their souls side by side, whose antagonism in older minds becomes the fiercest war and either-or."<sup>28</sup> His words are confirmed and enhanced by the Austrian painter, architect, and political figure Friedensreich Hundertwasser: "The adult, who suffers from the creative impotence he was brought up with, has only the possibility to remember his own childhood and to pick up there, to continue where he was torn from his dreams, which were not dreams at all, but his real basis, the roots of his

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<sup>28</sup> Hermann Hesse, *Jedem Anfang wohnt ein Zauber inne* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp/ Insel, 2013), 10.

existence, without which he can never, ever be truly human.”<sup>29</sup>

This little story is one of empathy, of the ability to connect and feel with something different than oneself. An individual is not separated from its surroundings. The surroundings shape the individual and the individual shapes its surroundings. What Wilson called “innately emotional affiliation” in *Biophilia*, his forefather Fromm called love. So does Beuys, referring to the German poet and scientist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe all the way back from the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment, who defined love as the medium of embedded connection that mankind has in nature:

It was already clear to Goethe that this is not possible, that the soul of man cannot be separated from all other souls! He knew that man can no longer recognize himself in himself. In the time in which he lived, this was already clear to him. It was clear to him that man can only recognize himself in the other. Not only in the other, i.e., in the social relation or in the love relation, but also in the love relation to all other realities of the world, to the minerals, to the plants, to the stars, to the animals, to nature: that when man immerses himself in this nature, he then sees himself.<sup>30</sup>

#### *Innately Emotional Affiliation, Love, Connection*

A broad general definition of love can be found in the writings of the psychotherapist Fritz Riemann: “The essence of love reveals itself in an infinite variety of forms; what it has in common, what ultimately constitutes love, is quite simply the desire to do good to another.”<sup>31</sup> “To love originally means to transfer the love for oneself onto others.”<sup>32</sup>

He further elaborates that the development of self-love and therefore the ability to love in general goes all the way back to the beginning of one’s life. “We must first have been loved ourselves in order to be able to love; for those who have never or little experience of this in their childhood, it is much more difficult if not impossible to learn to love, because they would have to give something that they have never received. For them the Christian demand to love their neighbor as

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<sup>29</sup> Friedensreich Hundertwasser(, *Schöne Wege: Gedanken über Kunst und Leben* (München: dtv, 1983), 82f.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Beuys, *Aktive Neutralität – ein Vortrag mit Diskussion am 20. Januar 1985* (Wangen/ Allgäu: FIU, 1994), 27.

<sup>31</sup> Fritz Riemann, *Die Fähigkeit zu Lieben* (München: Reinhardt, 15, 2016).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.



themselves would either be an excessive demand or, taken literally, the passing on of their own unloving nature or the inability to love themselves.”<sup>33</sup> For Riemann love is nothing constant. Rather, it is of constant change. He sees love as a state of constant doing rather than simply being. He does not believe in a being where one is and stays forever. Love is a constant flow, a growing and ebbing, and his idea of “doing” is the conscious development of love and the ability to love.

What does one need in order to develop that easily? Feeling safe. “Security is probably the most comprehensive and at the same time the most appropriate expression for what makes a child feel that it is nice to be there, and what enables him to dare that emotional attachment to a human being which is at the beginning of the development of our own and proper capacity for love.”<sup>34</sup> The same goes for any adult too. Who wants to feel love for the surroundings when the own life is busy, endangered, and defused? Having time, feeling safe, feeling secure, and feeling nourished makes it possible to do beautiful things, to enjoy life. And that joy and connection to life can be shared.

Here Riemann uses the German words *auszeichnende Liebe* (love of display). It is the one “that obliges the one who receives it, because it gives him faith in himself: He feels loved as the one he can become according to his own inner law. Such giving love sees its fulfillment in enabling the other to fully develop his personality in terms of the optimism attainable to him.”<sup>35</sup> And while defining the love of display he manages to find a definition that stands in total coherence to the idea of the salutogenesis. Giving others safe space and time to develop their own inner essence. Or more simply put, allowing others to develop that what they feel to be truly important in their life, their most inner pure wishes, those that make a human being a human being.

#### *Missing Love and Fear*

As if asked directly, Peter Levine finds an answer to Prechtel’s question on why humans believe that they are separated from the natural world.

*Without an intact connection to our instincts and feelings, we cannot feel our connectedness to the earth, to our family, and to all of existence. This is where the roots of trauma lie. Alienation from our holistic inner sense results in our emotions wandering in solitude,*

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 48f.

*causing the rational part of our mind to create fantasies characterized by disconnectedness rather than connectedness. These fantasies force us to compete with each other, wage wars, distrust each other, and undermine our natural respect for life.*<sup>36</sup>

What Lame Deer, Wicasa Wakan (holy man) of the Mineconjulakota Sioux brings to the discussion is what happens when humans become estranged and disconnect. We do this without realizing that cutting oneself loose from that which one is embedded in means cutting oneself off. That which was once part of oneself becomes an unknown debris. Humans fear the alien, or the things not known to man.

*I think the white people are so afraid of the world they created that they don't want to see, feel, smell or hear it. ... Living in boxes which shut out the heat of the summer and the chill of the winter, living inside a body that no longer has a scent, hearing the noise from the hi-fi instead of listening to the sound of nature, watching some actor on TV having a make-believe experience when you no longer experience anything for yourself, eating food without taste – that's your way. It's no good. The food you eat, you treat it like your bodies, take out all the nature part, the taste, the smell, the roughness, then put the artificial color, the artificial flavor in.*<sup>37</sup>

How many people define deep old forests as creepy, dark, and scary? How many people fear the endless appearing depth of the ocean? How many people would bail when asked by a friend to stay for a night in the woods? In central Europe that thought seems hilarious as there are no predator left, nothing that could seriously harm a grown person. Still, for many it is pure horror to simply think about spending a night outdoors. Missing love is missing connection and missing connection implies apathy and fear for the unknown, the disconnected.

But through fear humans grow. We run into personal barriers, wounds, and shame. The (unused) responsibility in people grows as an individual, as a collective, and as a whole. “Thus, in every anxious situation there is always, at the same time a threat and an opportunity: the opportunity to dare to take a new step in development, to overcome a barrier by crossing the boundary set by fear and thus taking a new step in our handling of the world.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Levine, op. cit., 262.

<sup>37</sup> Lame Deer, op. cit., 110.

<sup>38</sup> Riemann, op. cit., 163.

*Indigenism and Indigenous View*<sup>39</sup>

Martín Prechtel gives a beautiful definition of what indigenous means:

The indigenous soul of a person is not only existing inside the person, it exists inside the ground, inside all existence. Indigenous is the original human being and the original beings on earth. I say it's always listening but not everybody knows it's listening and not everybody speaks and acts according to the fact that something is listening. When there is something inside the heart the indigenous soul knows how to be itself, it doesn't need a college course, except it does have to have the context of the beauty for existence in order to develop into what it needs to be, what it is.<sup>40</sup>

The indigenous is the sacred, the *wakan* (the secret, the incomprehensible), the holy. Lame Deer:

Listen to the air. You can hear it, feel it, smell it, taste it. Woniya, woniya waken – spirit, life, breath, renewal – it means all that. Woniya – we sit together, don't touch, but something is there; we feel it between us, as a presence. A good way to start thinking about nature, to talk about it. Rather talk to it, talk to the rivers, to the lakes, to the winds as our relatives.<sup>41</sup>

To explain the indigenous view on life and nature, Lame Deer says that all matter is alive. All is alive and all is the same. In being one unit, either through the togetherness as great spirit Wakan Tanka or as in being individual counterparts, as stones, trees, insects, and humans. All is life together, all is the same, all is sacred and so is life. Life is sacred. Life is nature and nature is life.<sup>42</sup>

When Martín Prechtel gets asked if he fears the “machine spirit,” the scientific push to enable singularity (the merging of organic matter (humans) and technology) or something that seems opposing to indigenous aspirations, he answers with a little analogy. One of his students was once telling a story of a beautiful flower that was miraculously blooming out of a tiny crack in the pavement. He responded:

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<sup>39</sup> a worldview that shares views and promotes interests of indigenous people..

<sup>40</sup> Ghosthorse, op. cit.

<sup>41</sup> Lame Deer, op. cit., 108

<sup>42</sup> Lame Deer, op. cit., 102f.

No, the miracle is the poor enslaved concrete whose components were taken out of the hills, and nobody asked permission to take the lime, nobody asked for permission to take the additives and put them all together, nobody asked for permission to lay it on the sidewalk where it's trampled every day and spit on and run over. And yet, this concrete very delicately can still hold a wildflower in its crack. It's the concrete that is the miracle, not the flower. The vitality of the wild is in the flower but the vitality of wanting, that is still in the machine. All these machines that people create, they didn't ask permission of them to exist or for all their components to be yanked out of the ground unceremoniously like a rape. So, when the people start to say oh the machines are an enemy, the machines themselves are an extension of their arrogance. ... Matter is dead. Not for indigenous people. Everything that is out there is very much alive and not in a metaphorical way. Maybe the breath that they take is a 50,000 years-wide inhale but it's there and very much alive. Look at your bones, they have the exact same composition as the Alps.<sup>43</sup>

Connection is the keyword. The machine and the fear of the machine is based upon the underlying link that the human has with all of life, with all of matter. Violating that relationship violates oneself. What comes around goes around. His answer implies we must be the change we want so see in the world. "I am saying that the indigenous heart can regenerate, I am saying that the ear inside your heart can hear as long as it has something that is worth hearing."<sup>44</sup> Relate, listen, create.

#### *A Paradigm Shift in Science*

A shift in the view of science on ecology is apparent. As Lisbeth defines the interaction of plants and fungi as intelligent, Weber brings in the emotional capacity of nature: "The natural sciences are radically changing their view of life. The origin and behavior of animals and plants can only be explained conclusively if we consider sensation and values as the basis of all life processes. For the tiniest cell as well as for the human being: There is no life without feelings."<sup>45</sup> And just

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<sup>43</sup> Ghosthorse, op. cit.

<sup>44</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>45</sup> Andreas Weber, *Alles fühlt. Mensch, Natur und die Revolution der Lebenswissenschaften* (Berlin: Berlin-Verlag 2007), 2.

like Lisbeth and Weber are working on new views in natural science, there are those that are changing the views in the humanities. One of these is the Italian philosopher and professor Emanuele Coccia. In his book *The Life of Plants* he evaluates this world out of a plant perspective. “We shall find that the world has the consistency of an atmosphere and that the appropriate witnesses to this are the leaves. The roots we shall ask to set forth the true nature of the earth. And finally, the flower will teach us what rationality is - rationality no longer as a universal ability or power, but as a cosmic force.”<sup>46</sup> Coccia aligns himself with Beuys and Goethe in that nature is needed for humankind to relate, to be.

“Only in the face of the world and nature can man truly think. And this common identity of world and nature is anything but banal. For nature denotes neither that which preceded the activity of human reason nor the opposite of culture, but that which makes all coming into being and becoming possible, the principle and force responsible for the genesis and transformation of every object, entity or idea that has ever existed and will exist.”<sup>47</sup>

Weber argues for a nature as the force behind genesis, and genesis as the sacred creational process embedded in nature. Nature as that which enables life. Weber proposes to call modern times the time of enlivenment, where enlivenment is the follow-up to the age of enlightenment, leaving behind the view of the world as a machine with all the tiny cogs. Instead we land in a real and wondrous landscape of living and interconnected organisms. He asks for us to get into life, to be a part of life. He asks for us to be a participant.

### *Responsibility*

“Every man is not only himself, he is also the unique, very special, in any case important and strange point where the phenomena of the world intersect, only once like this and never again. Therefore, every man's history is important, eternal, divine, therefore, every man, as long as he lives at all and fulfills the will of nature, is wonderful and worthy of every attention. In each one,

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<sup>46</sup> Emanuele Coccia, *Die Wurzeln der Welt. Eine Philosophie der Pflanzen* (München: Hanser, 2018), 36

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 31.

the Spirit has taken shape, in each one the creature suffers, in each one a savior is crucified..."<sup>48</sup>

Seeing art as the expressing and striving after an inner truth, the dreams that as Hundertwasser put it are not just dreams but are the sole reason for one's existence. Art as the expressed inner truth is a language, a language that bridges cultures and disciplines and that works on a multitude of approaches to explain and make sense of the plurality of life. It makes science poetic, graspable, empathic, and fun. "The coming art will be the "formative becoming"<sup>49</sup> of our scientific convictions."<sup>50</sup> The coming art is the expression of the enlivenment's full potential in an individual.

"That man, who determines himself as a free individual and shapes the next phase of history.... Precisely his creativity in his self-determination, and that means: I must now take responsibility. I must now participate, contribute. I can no longer live egoistically for myself alone. You have to make it palatable to people that it is interesting to give oneself away completely with all the faults one has. I only want to stimulate people to not wait for an ideal state of consciousness. They must begin with the present means - begin with their faults. After all, I can't do the multiplication alone. ... Everyone has to do it. Everyone! ... Everyone who can already do it in this moment, or who could already know it - you don't need to have genius abilities somewhere. Just that the ability that one has in this moment must come into effect."<sup>51</sup>

Body and religion are intertwined in Genesis, the becoming, the ever-changing process of creation. It is a process an individual can actively engage with through the expression of the transcendental inner universe over the personal corporeal experience that is founded and set in the vastness of nature. Everybody is invited create that which arises from the inner, developing their own personal language, while understanding that all there is, is life. All there is, is sacred, and the outer and inner are conditional to each other. Becoming creative is an act of formal movement in order to overcome, integrate, and represent.

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<sup>48</sup> Hesse, op. cit., 9

<sup>49</sup> Translation of the German word „Formwerdung“=“formative becoming”

<sup>50</sup> C.G. Jung et. al., *Der Mensch und seine Symbole* (Olten/ Freiburg: Walter, 1963), 261.

<sup>51</sup> Beuys op. cit., 5, 18.