

Stories in the Land: Community Fieldwork Project

Working the Soul of the World (DP-783), David Bona, Ph.D. and Mary Watkins, Ph.D.

Elizabeth Perluss

Depth Psychology I

Pacifica Graduate Institute

Summer, 1999

Introduction

Everything happens in place - Aristotle

According to geologists, about 25 million years ago most of Southern California and all of Baja California were connected to mainland Mexico. Since that time, this large portion of land has been dragged up 200 miles northward along the San Andreas Fault to its current location. During these movements, earthquakes and the collision of oceanic Teutonic plates uplifted masses of rock and sediment into what are now called the Peninsular Ranges. Refusing to stay submerged, the peaks of these ranges have raised themselves up from the ocean floor creating two small islands off the coast of Southern California. One of these islands is named Santa Catalina. (Schoenherr, 1992). The dramatic action of its formation left the island with a variety of narrow canyons, steep cliffs, slippery landslides, and a few narrow beaches. The dry climate and the scarcity of water designates the island as a semi-arid zone producing plant life such as the prickly pear, scrub oak, and California sage. To the superficial eye, Catalina may look like nothing more than a dry and rocky place, but upon careful observation, it reveals a highly diverse, unique and beautiful bioregion – from the intricacies imbedded in the trunk of the ancient Catalina Iron Wood tree to the most delicate lichen rested on a small rock in the shade.

So, I must believe that, at least to human perception, a place is not a place until people have been born in it, have grown up in it, lived in it, known it, died in it. – Wallace Stegner (1992, pg. 201)

I grew up on Santa Catalina Island, in a small community called Avalon, where my family has lived for nearly three generations. This is not much time in relation to the land, the native cultures and wildlife, but long enough to become endowed with the spirits that inhabit the island and to comprehend the meaning of “place”. I remember that, as a child, I was

deeply moved by nature. Much of my sustenance came from the surrounding hills, the rocks and plants, the ocean and the animals. Speaking about his own childhood experiences, Wallace Stegner writes, “Expose a child to a particular environment at his susceptible time and he will perceive in the shapes of that environment until he dies”(1998, pg. 5). It is certainly my childhood impressions of Catalina Island that have directed me toward this project about place. The sinuous canyons, ravines, and sage covered hillsides make up the topology of my psyche’s map.

Officially, this project began in August 1998 when I received a teaching fellowship from the Orion Society called “Stories in the Land”. The fellowship is designed to encourage educators to teach place-based environmental education about their local region, its literature and cultural history. The location and situation of our school offers students and teachers a unique opportunity to focus on a small, but highly diverse, bioregion. Most of Catalina remains undeveloped since 88 % (or 42,135 acres) of the island belongs to the Santa Catalina Island Conservancy, an organization whose mission includes conserving the land, restoring it to its natural state, and providing educational and recreational uses consistent with conservation. Unfortunately, many of the students don’t take advantage of what the Conservancy has to offer and therefore, grow up without ever learning the names of plants, geology or natural history of the island. One of the goals of this project, therefore, is to strengthen the relationship between local students and the Conservancy.

The thrust for this project came from my work as a school counselor and therapist. From this perspective, I am beginning to see the relationship between intrapsychic dysfunction and cultural and environmental disintegration. For instance, I have noticed that many of the students who complain of depression and/or exhibit “behavioral problems”

complain of feeling disconnected from their surrounding environment. There is a sense of alienation and discontinuity between them and the ‘outside’ environment, as if they are not welcome members of this world. Some of these students perceive the world as a hostile and dangerous place filled with pollution, violence, disease and congestion. James Hillman summarizes this concept, “When I say that the patients’ complaints are real, I mean realistic, corresponding with the external world. I mean that the distortions of communication, the sense of harassment and alienation, the deprivation of intimacy with the immediate environment, the feelings of false values and inner worthlessness experienced relentlessly in the world of our common habitation are genuine realistic appraisals and not merely apperceptions of our intra-subjective selves. My practice tells me that I can no longer distinguish clearly between neurosis of self and neurosis of world, psychopathology of self and psychopathology of world” (1981, pg. 93). In this respect, fostering a sense of place among students is an essential part of my work as a counselor.

The Project

We are shut up in schools and college recitation rooms for ten or fifteen years, and come out at least with a bellyful of words and do not know a thing. We cannot use our hands, or our legs, or our eyes or our arms. We do not know an edible root in the woods. We cannot tell our course by the stars, nor the hour of the day by the sun – Ralph Waldo Emerson (1972, pg. 136).

When the Orion society informed me that I was chosen as one of the recipients of the “Stories in the Land” fellowship, I was struck with doubts about the feasibility to truly incorporate place-based education in a public school setting. As Emerson’s quote above implies, the very nature of our educational system removes us from the natural environment. Public education was developed to produce successful, productive and loyal citizens, not ecologists. Most formal education is conducted within four walls, which clearly imparts the

message that anything worth learning is abstract and mental, removed from the physical world. It is essential, therefore, that this project created the means for students to spend class time outdoors. Through immersion in the local landscape and its cultural history, students strengthen their ties to the surrounding world and nourish a sense of place. It is anticipated that by working toward this objective, students will develop a psychic connection with their home place giving them, in turn, a sense of belonging, an understanding of how they can participate in preserving their community, and an increased sense of self-esteem and dignity.

“Stories in the Land” Curriculum was taught in a high school social science class. The course included the following:

1. Native American history of the Island, including myths, legends and spirituality.
2. The natural history of the island including native flora, fauna, and geography. This also included lessons of the importance of preserving these natural resources.
3. The cultural history, stories and folklore of Avalon.
4. The tourist economy: how to make the best of it while preserving our resources.
5. The future of Avalon and Santa Catalina Island: What can we do to make a difference?

The focus of “Stories in the Land” was specifically aimed at teaching about, and exposing students to, the bioregions of Catalina Island. All of our field trips took place in diverse areas of the island including watersheds, beaches and coastlines, fields and valleys. Although the island is relatively small, each of these regions contains a rich diversity of plant and animal life and geological formations. This project is also participatory in that it invited participants to work closely with community and environmental organizations: to develop reciprocal relationships between the public school, the Catalina Island Conservancy, the Catalina Island Museum, the City of Avalon, and other local private industries.

Activities included fieldwork with the Catalina Island Conservancy, an all day field trip to the Wrigley Marine Institute where students participated in a presentation on eco-tourism, a marine biology dive trip, a coastal kayak expedition, an all day watershed hike, museum trips, the development of an outdoor classroom, interviews and documentation of local 'old-timers', and attendance to appropriate city council meetings and other community events. Class lectures included instructional videos and speakers from the Santa Catalina Island Conservancy, the Santa Catalina Island Company (the major Tourism Company), local city council members, eco-psychologists, and Native American spokes persons. The students responded especially well to a discussion with Avalon city council member John Regalado. Since John grew up on the island, he was able to provide concrete examples of how local students can have an impact on the city's decision making process. He also spoke to our class about the importance of community and cultural preservation. The class concluded with a photojournalism project on "sense of place" in which each student was asked to photograph and document their particular place of interest and to express any concerns they have about the future preservation of that place.

I asked Cindi Alvitre, the high school anthropology teacher, to collaborate with me on the project. Cindi, a descendent of the island's native Tongva tribe was able to offer valuable insight to the indigenous perspective of the island. It is estimated that when the Spanish first arrived on Catalina, the native people had lived on the island they called Pemu'gna for over twenty-five hundred years. They worshiped the god, Chingichnich (Chi-nich-nich), and their highly sophisticated religious practices were well respected by mainland tribes. It is believed that many native people from other islands and from the mainland would travel to Pimu'gna in canoes in order to participate in healing and rite of passage rituals conducted by shamans

on the island. In many respects, the island of Pimu'gna was a sacred religious center for many of the Southern California tribes.

In keeping with the traditions of the native people and in the spirit of “Stories in the Land”, Cindi and I decided to conduct our first class outside. We took the students to an abandoned park located on the outskirts of the school property where we initiated the project through the ceremony of burning sage and retelling of Native American creation stories. The story goes...“Earth is floating on the waters like a big island, hanging from four rawhide ropes fastened at the top of the sacred four directions. The ropes are tied to the ceiling of the sky, which is made of hard rock crystal. When the ropes break, this world will come tumbling down, and all living things will fall with it and die. Then everything will be as if the earth had never existed, for water will cover it. Maybe the white man will bring this about” (Erdoes & Ortiz, 1994, pg. 105).

“The Place That Indians Talk About”—Gregory Cajete.

*every
landscape*

*a wondrous
story*

--Francisco Alarcon – *Listen* in Snake Poems (1992, pg. 97).

For thousands of years, indigenous peoples lived in direct relationship with the land, the animals and the plants. Place, for traditional cultures, has never been objectified, passive or inert, but is rather, an active participant in a reciprocal relationship—sustaining, informing, and renewing. Native educator and spokesperson, Gregory Cajete (1994) speaks of the “place that Indians talk about” as the ensoulment of nature. He writes, “Indian people interacted with the places in which they lived for such a long time that their landscape became a

reflection of their soul”. The relationship of indigenous peoples to their place is so deep that to be torn away from place literally constitutes a loss of soul. A poignant example of this is the Navajo, or Dineh, tribe in northeastern Arizona. As a result of the 1974 Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement act, many Navajo peoples have been forced to relocate apart from the Hopi tribe with whom they have lived peacefully for generations. The story of the Black Mesa coal mine and the long history of strip mining and environmental exploitation on Navajo-Hopi land is one of loss of place and identity. One story reports: “Roberta Blackgoat lives over a syncline. A displaced Navajo woman, Roberta Blackgoat, reports, ‘The church is everywhere’, she said. ‘Land is the repository for religion, economics, sociology, history, and science.’ And that is why she couldn’t leave her land.” (Niles, 1998, pg. 29). Therefore, to be taken away from one’s place is akin to dismemberment, and in many cases, death. According to philosopher and writer, Edward Casey, “The results of the relocation (a notion for which the Navajo say there is no word in their language) have been disastrous. A quarter of those relocated have died, including an unusually high number from suicide” (1993, pg. 35).

Displacement

Thus, knowing who we are and knowing where we are are intimately linked – Gary Snyder, “Reinhabitation” (1995, pg. 189).

For indigenous peoples to leave one’s land, or place, is to leave behind identity, soul, and in some cases, life. And yet, modern people are constantly moving from place to place. Are we so far removed from our indigenous ancestors as to not suffer the same effects from displacement? Modern humans are the most mobile of all creatures. When one place becomes boring, uninteresting, or unsatisfying, we easily move on to another place. But with increased mobility comes increase risk of displacement, memory loss, environmental

destruction and mental illness. In her essay about the psychological effects of displacement, Deborah Tall writes, “The need for a stable, orienting place is deemed by many to be essential to cognitive development and psychic health.... Frequent dislocation, or the sudden destruction of a known environment, can be fundamentally deranging. It means the loss of personal landmarks – which embody the past – and the disintegration of a communal pattern of identity” (1993, pg. 90-91). Although the symptoms exhibited in modern Western peoples appear to be less severe than those of displaced indigenous peoples, their symptoms are nonetheless just as real. One of these symptoms, according to Casey, is *nostalgia*. “Nostalgia, contrary to what we usually imagine, is not merely a matter of regret for lost times; it is also a pining for *lost places*, for places we have once been in yet can no longer reenter” (1993, pg. 37). Any astute observer can see the massive nostalgia in our culture exhibited through books, movies, television and other media. But contrary to common opinion, nostalgia is not just sentimentality, but rather it is a symptom of our displaced condition. “For us, nostalgia inevitably suggests sentimentality, a useless longing for something no longer possible. But we might consider it as part and parcel of our rootlessness, our feeling of not particularly belonging where we happen to be” (Tall, 1993, pg.121).

There are many other symptoms of displacement beside nostalgia that have besieged Western culture. As Casey points out, it is disconcerting to think that these symptoms are similar to the ones presented to us mainly by the Navajo people of Black Mesa: “disorientation, memory loss, homelessness, depression, and various modes of estrangement from self and others” (1993, pg. 38). Although modern psychology attributes these pathologies to etiologies such as chemical imbalances, dysfunctional family systems, and

cognitive distortions, it is not surprising to discover that in intact tribal cultures many of these pathologies rarely exist (Kleinman, 1991).

Indifferent to, or contemptuous of, or afraid to commit ourselves to, our physical and social surroundings, always hopeful of something better, hooked on change, a lot of us have never stayed in one place long enough to learn it, or have learned it only to leave it. In our displaced condition we are not unlike the mythless man that Carl Jung wrote about, who lives like one uprooted, having no true link either with the past, or with the ancestral life which continues within him, or yet with contemporary human society. He ...lives a life of his own, sunk in a subjective mania of his own devising, which he believes to be the newly discovered truth. (Wallace Stegner, 1992, pg. 204-5).

After Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo made first contact with the natives of Pimu'gna in 1542, many changes quickly occurred on the island. In November of 1602, Spanish General Sebastian Viscaino anchored his ships off the coast of the island. At that time he named the island "Santa Catalina" after the Spanish Catholic saint, Saint Catherine. Documenting Viscaino's first meeting with the native people, a crewman wrote, "[Viscaino] found on the way a level prairie where the Indian were assembled to worship an idol. There was a great circle surrounded with feathers...the Indian told the General not to go near it...The General told the Indian that the idol was evil, and placed the sign of the Cross on it. When the soldiers arrived there were two huge crows inside the circle, larger than ordinary crows. One of the soldiers took aim with his harquebus and killed them both. At this, the Indian began to lament and show great emotion" (White, 1997, pg. 18).

Nearly 400 years after Viscaino and his crew interrupted and ultimately destroyed the island's native culture, the exploitation of the land and its communities continue to surmount. Industrial society is marked by progress, and progress constitutes change. "Bigger and better," "more efficient," "cost-effective" are terms all too familiar to us. Unfortunately, what has

developed in Avalon is bigger and worse, congested, and expensive. As a result, we have been inclined to hand over control of our community to transitory professionals who convince us that they know what is best for us. (Currently, there are plans to build a large resort on the edge of town and a large apartment project to house the employees of the resort.) Many of the locals, including the young people, express a sense of fatalism and despair in regard to the future of their home. I wasn't surprised, therefore, when our students began expressing this loss in their writings and class discussions. For example, in an assignment entitled "hope" one student wrote, "As I think back over the happenings of the 20th century, I am amazed at how quickly and unabashedly we have improved upon everything we know from basic mathematics and medicine to technology. Unfortunately, though, with all these advances comes the slow deterioration of what has always been our land, our traditions, our beliefs....as I sit here looking out the window at this beautiful place that I live, I hope that the most important part of me and my history, my home, can be spared from what seems to be such an inevitable doom" – Senior, Avalon High School, 1999. If this is an indication of our cultural crises, than more than ever we need to reestablish a "sense of place."

One goal of "Stories in the Land," therefore, is to give students the tools and insights to help them articulate and deepen the reciprocal relationship they have with the place in which they live. To preserve a place is to love it, and to love a place is to become more aware of it, to learn more about it, and to pay more attention to it. David Abram refers to "falling in love outward." He writes (1996), "We can only know the needs of any particular region only by participating in its specificity—by becoming familiar with its cycles and styles, awake and attentive to its other inhabitants" (pg. 268). In order to do this, we asked each student to reflect upon and creatively document his or her "sense of place." One student aptly wrote,

“It’s hard to explain to people what exactly it is about Catalina that is so important to those of us who live here. It’s a connection, I suppose, with the land that people on the mainland don’t have the opportunity to experience due to the layers of concrete and asphalt between them and the ground. Islanders, on the other hand, are somewhat isolated from the ordinary world. All we have is the land and the water. It’s our livelihood. Without it, well, I’m not sure what would happen. We wouldn’t fall over and die or anything, but something would happen. Maybe we’d all go crazy” – Senior at Avalon High School, 1999.

What Happened to Place?

A depth psychological approach to the crises of displacement will focus on the symptoms rather than the treatment. For instance, what does nostalgia, depression or schizophrenia have to say to us? Where are they leading us? These questions are completely antithetical to contemporary psychology’s attempt to ‘treat’ the symptom through the use of drugs, behavioral modification or humanistic models of therapy. James Hillman writes, “Let us recall here that psychotherapy, in accordance with the root meaning of the words “psyche” and “therapy” means to *serve soul*, not to treat it.... Serving soul means letting it rule; it leads, we follow,” and “Pathologizing the myth onward means staying in the mess while at the same time regarding what is going on from a mythical perspective. (Hillman, 1975, pg. 74). And so, as we follow the symptoms of displacement, we can begin to unravel the cultural myths that have led us to this displaced condition.

To stay in one place for life is usually interpreted as being unambitious, unadventurous—a negation of American values.... Moving up in the world means moving on. —Deborah Tall (1993, pg. 90)

Despite modern American’s affection for mobility, it is difficult to imagine living out of place. Most of our lives center on specific places such as our home, the park, the school or

work place. Usually when we meet someone for the first time we ask them where they are from in order to get a better understanding of who they are, what their likes and dislikes may be, and what their attitude may be like. People commonly travel to arrive at certain places: “We go to Minnesota to visit the old homestead,” “Each year I travel to my favorite beach in Mexico,” “We always rent the same cabin up in the mountains. It’s our family tradition.” But since the beginning of Western civilization there has been a movement away from place-based knowledge and toward a more abstract-conceptual means of perception. Although it is entirely beyond the scope of this paper to give a comprehensive philosophy of “place”, it is important to at least mention some of the major influences Western philosophy has had on our perceptions of place and our move toward displacement.

Placeless events are an impossibility; everything that happens must happen somewhere. -- Keith Basso (1996, pg 86).

David Abram in his remarkable book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, gives a detailed account as to how Western civilization lost its reciprocal and participatory relationship with the natural, or as he calls it, the “more-than-human” world. According to Abram (1996), oral, indigenous cultures that don’t have access to the written word are intimately connected to the land as a means for maintaining traditions, remembering stories, and for daily survival. While many of us turn to books, newspapers and television to inform us of what is happening in the world, oral peoples look to the landscape as their source of knowledge. Therefore, it is essential to have an acute, sensory awareness of the local surroundings to determine how to hunt, forage, and migrate. For oral peoples, it is impossible to think in terms of abstract ideas or unsubstantial concepts. Every event happens in place, and from that moment on, is intricately a part of that place. Thus, we hear oral people recount certain events as, “It happened at “whiteness spreads out descending to water” or it happened at “men stand above

here and there”(Abram, 1996, pg. 156). Place, therefore, is essential to remembering stories, and, thus, it is also essential for the preservation of tradition, ethical imperatives, and culture as a whole. For indigenous storytellers, place provides “permanence, a bedrock basis for situating stories in scenes that possess moral tenor” (Casey, 1991, pg. 277).

When stories first began to be written down, as in ancient Hebrew and Greek texts, there was a shift away from place-bound, oral tradition and toward displaced and detached mental abstractions. The ancient Greeks were the first to create a perfect alphabet entirely removed from land and independent from any particular place. Thus, the Greek alphabet served as a source of freedom and mobility as stories could be transported from place to place without any loss of meaning or significance. With the alphabet in hand, the Greeks were able to create a non-material realm of ideas unrestricted by place. Whereas oral cultures maintained a cosmology based on the natural cycles of the earth, the Greek cosmology was perceived much more esoterically as an “ordered expression of certain primordial essences or transcendent first principles, variously conceived as Forms, Ideas, universals, changeless absolutes, immortal deities, divine *archai*, and archetypes” (Tarnas, 1991, pg. 3). In essence, the modern Western mindset is Greek.

During “Stories in the Land,” in order to recapture the essence of place-based, oral tradition, we asked students to tell personal stories about their experiences of the island or other meaningful places. These stories were told in council where each student, with the aid of a ‘talking stick,’ was given the full attention of the rest of the class while he/she told their story. The students were surprised at how much rich history and information they discovered within their own memories and stories. Even though most of them don’t know the scientific descriptions of the island’s natural contents, the collective storehouse of their personal

experiences proved them to be “experts” in one area or another. For instance, one student’s story is, “I have been camping at Shark Harbor ever since I was a week old, and I have been pushed into the waves ever since I was three or four. I have been surfing and playing in the waters of Shark Harbor since I was born and will be until the day I pass away. Shark Harbor is really just a little part of Little Harbor. No one really knows why they call it Shark Harbor, but there are a couple of myths. One is that they think that sharks used to breed there and others might say it’s because of the way the outside reef is shaped like the dorsal fin of a shark.”- Junior at Avalon High School, 1999.

The eternal silence of these infinite spaces fills me with dread-Pascal (1966, pg. 95).

With the development of the alphabet, the Greek thinkers conceptualized the notions of “space” and “time” as distinct and objective dimensions, completely removed from “place.” Thus, around the year of 300 B.C., the Greek mathematician, Euclid, formulated a concise theory of space as a “homogenous and limitless three-dimensional continuum” (Abram, 1996, pg. 198). Space and time were not only removed from a particular place on earth, but were now conceptualized as completely beyond immediate human experience. With these new tools in hand, astronomers and mathematicians could calculate the abstract formulas necessary for the great Copernican Revolution of 1512 when Copernicus announced that the earth revolved around the sun. Earth was no longer situated in the middle of a well-structured and meaningful universe, but rather, was now proven to be just another planet floating in a vast and infinite space. Philosopher Richard Tarnas writes, “Though it was destined to become an unquestioned principal of existence for the modern psyche, the central tenet of his vision was inconceivable to most Europeans in his own lifetime. More than any other single factor, it was the Copernican insight that provoked and symbolized the drastic,

fundamental break from the ancient and medieval universe to that of the modern era” (1991, pg. 248). Not only were humans more separated from place, but the earth itself became a placeless entity. It is no wonder that Pascal said . . . “these infinite spaces fills me with dread.” The universe, once the source of spiritual meaning and ordinance, was becoming more and more mechanical and impersonal.

There are many contributors to the mechanistic worldview, but the most notable is Rene’ Descartes, the French philosopher who lived from 1596-1650. In Descartes’ view, everything in the universe is similar to a great mechanical clock, except for one thing: mental process. Whereas the subjective human mind is understood as soul substance, the external world is viewed as a supreme machine devoid of human qualities, spirit or purpose. The implication of this mechanistic worldview is that it frees humans from superstitious beliefs and anxieties regarding the unpredictable and devastating forces of nature. But it also sanctions the world as a soulless, lifeless machine, and therefore, permits the control and destruction of nature without any moral considerations. Tarnas (1991) gives a brief summary of the Cartesian split: The *res cogitans*—thinking substance, subjective experience, spirit, consciousness, that which man perceives as within—was understood as fundamentally different and separate from *res extensa*—extended substance, the objective world, matter, the physical body, plants and animals, stones and stars, the entire physical universe, everything that man [sic] perceives as outside his mind (1991, pg. 277-8). The mind/matter dualism is one of Descartes most profound and lasting contributions to science, but, as we shall see, it has also furnished psychology with the foundation for sustaining the perceptual split between human consciousness and the rest of nature.

Issac Newton put Descartes' philosophical ideas into practice. In his great work, *Principa Mathematica* published in 1687; Newton formalized the concepts of absolute time and space in opposition to relative time and space. Relative time and space are merely perceived as carnal relationships between mundane material events (i.e. people and place) and has no existence apart from those events. On the other hand, absolute, true and mathematical time is, for Newton, an independent reality that we *cannot perceive directly*, but which underlies all material events and their relations (Abram, 1996). Time is now imagined as a universal clock that somehow drifts aimlessly in an infinite and unfathomable space.

Although current science has far stretched beyond theories of absolute space and time, it is difficult for the modern person to imagine a world otherwise. Thus we automatically say things like, "time is moving fast" or "time is running out" or "it's just a matter of time" as if time is a completely independent quality removed from our ordinary perceptions. But, where is time moving? What is it running toward? Where is time going? Like the mythological Greek God Kronos, time subdues us with a sense of dread and sobriety about the insignificance of our temporal, place-bound and seemingly insignificant lives. The more we feel trapped by the limitations of time, the more we desire to escape our fragile existence and propel into the infinite space of the universe, into the abstract interiorities of our minds, and away from finite place. Or as Casey puts it, "To be absorbed in a linear time of our own making is to be consumed by the artifact itself" (1993, pg. 8). And yet, every day the sun rises and falls, the leaves on the trees change color with the changing seasons, landscapes change, and migrations come and go according to annual weather patterns. Our common day perceptions tell us that we are intrinsically linked to the cycles of a specific place. We wake up with the rising of the sun, we wear a jacket when the season turns cold, we know that

when the leaves fall off the trees in autumn they will grow back in the spring, and we wait for the full moon to come out to inspire our romantic sensibilities.

Nature is pure pastness, freedom abandoned. Thus nature is everywhere the ground on which history grows, season after season – Novalis, “The Notebooks” (taken from T. Frick, 1986, pg. 78).

“Stories in the Land” tried to bridge the gap between subjective and objective reality by re-connecting students with the places of their childhood memories. By connecting place with memory image, we are able to soften the boundaries between the so-called objective world of time and space, and the interior, subjective world of imagination. Speaking of the natural elements, Gaston Bachelard writes, “We should not underestimate the lessons taught by original matters. They have left their mark on our mind’s youth. They are necessarily a reserve of youth. We discover them in connection with our most personal memories.” (1942/83, pg. 146). By reconnecting to the places of childhood memories, we come to imagine ourselves as intricately connect to that place. As Keith Basso points out, “It is clear, however, that remembering often provides a basis for imagining. What is remembered about a particular place...guides and constrains how it will be imagined by delimiting a field of workable possibilities” (1996, pg. 5).

Ben Weston Beach is a place that many of our students describe when speaking about their childhood memories. Ben Weston is a beautiful beach located on the primitive southern side of the island and is home to many childhood memories of family picnics, parties, swimming, and campouts. Even as I write this paper, I glance up to a photo posted on my bulletin board of me as a child, half-naked, happily running on Ben Weston Beach. The photo stirs up many feelings, thoughts, and memories for me. Since the road washed out in 1995, not too many people visit Ben Weston anymore. For this reason, we decided to take the

“Stories in the Land” class there. The Catalina Conservancy graciously loaned us two passenger vans, which we drove to the trailhead two miles from the beach. It was amazing to see the changes that have occurred in this place over the last four years. The old road had disappeared underneath the growth of sagebrush, foxtails, prickly pear, and oak. The streambed, once covered up by the road, displayed a cacophony of flowers such as the Sticky Monkey, Indian Paintbrush, Lupine and Mariposa Lily. Erosion had sculpted new shapes in the hillsides. The passage of time was clearly evident in the changes that have taken place in this watershed, but the strange thing is, is that it felt as if we were going back in time by observing how this place is reverting to its original and natural state. Time and space enmeshed completely, concentrated in that one place. By narrowing the abstractions of time and space into a specific place, and more importantly into a place that contains our memories, we can re-member our deep connection to place. After returning from Ben Weston, a student wrote this poem:

My place
is my life.
My life is
Catalina Island.
A place of peace
and family affiliations.
A place which sends me an inspiring vibe
and makes me feel pretty eerie.
Freedom is the key to my expression
and my expression gives me faith.
Knowing I'm safe
wherever I go,
I hear my ancestor's sing
when the northeastern winds blow.
Feeling the crashing waves of Ben,
the beautiful setting suns of Shark
and the rising moon of Lover's Cove,
lying on the sands of Cottonwood,
my heart races
my mind wonders...

who was here 200 years ago.

-- Senior at Avalon High School. 1999.

Coming Back Down to Earth

There is no time without place, and this is so precisely by virtue of place's actively delimiting and creatively conditioning capacities.... Time arises from places-Edward Casey (1993, pg. 21).

The scientific revolution has had a tremendous capacity to formulate a quantifiable knowledge of the world. It is because of scientific discoveries that humans have been able to progress technologically, medically, economically and socially. But, undoubtedly, empirical science has also left us with a world devoid of soul, meaning and beauty. It is impossible to quantify the sense of wonder that is triggered by a beautiful sunset or smell the ocean breeze on a summer morning. The Romantics of the twentieth century recognized this and, as a result, created the counter movement to their empirical contemporaries. These philosophers, poets, writers and artists called into question the cool rationality and hubris of the mathematical scientist. "Where for the Enlightenment-scientific mind, nature was an object for observation and experiment, theoretical explanation and technological manipulation, for the Romantic, by contrast, nature was a live vessel of spirit, a translucent source of mystery and revelation" (Tarnas, 1991, pg. 367).

The desire to reconnect to place was especially exemplified by twentieth century philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty who are critical of the abstractions made by modern science. Rather than dismiss sensory perception as a subjective and unreliable source of a greater, more real universal knowledge, the phenomenologists claim that sensory perception is our only source of knowledge. It is, therefore, essential that we pay close attention to the subtle interplay and movements of our sensory experiences. According to phenomenology, it is impossible to perceive of time as inseparable from the

natural cycles of the earth – the seasons, the planets, the horizon continually disclosing the future before us and the past buried deep within the ground we stand upon. Unfortunately, since most of us are so accustomed to ‘living in our heads,’ it is an enormous challenge to pay attention to the present moments that are continuously unfolding before us.

In order to help students focus on their immediate sensory experience, we gave each one a notebook, pens, colored pencils and field journals to record their impressions of the places they visited during class time. Some students reflected on how certain plants or animals made them feel or how the natural world reflected their current emotions. Other students expressed feelings of peace and relaxation as they drew pictures of their natural surroundings. One of our favorite places to visit was the Wrigley Botanical Gardens located a mile up the canyon from our school. The gardens contain a wonderful variety of native and exotic plants from around the world. We asked students to spend at least an hour observing a native plant and to record their observations in their field journals. We were delighted by the students’ capacity to focus and concentrate. Thomas Berry writes, “There is presently no other way for humans to educate themselves for either survival or fulfillment than through the instruction available through the natural world” (1988, pg. 167). Although we didn’t use books, chalkboards, lesson plans or exams, we felt that these enjoyable days in the gardens were some of the most influential and important classes we had.

The phenomenologists postulate that all knowledge is place-bound and that everything we experience is interpreted through our cultural lenses. Even “objective” empirical science rests within a milieu of Western, Euro-centric culture. This notion has great applications for helping reestablish a sense of place. It is a marvelous thing to realize that all our perceptions, experiences and interpretations are fundamentally rooted in the place that we have lived,

including the people who inhabit those places. Everything that we know about ourselves is intrinsically rooted into place. And, conversely, what we know about ourselves determines our perception of place. Keith Basso writes, “For whenever the members of a community speak about their landscape – whenever they name it, or classify it, or tell stories about it – they unthinkingly represent it in ways that are compatible with the shared understandings of how, in the fullest sense, they know themselves to occupy it” (1996, pg. 74). For me, it is impossible to thoroughly know myself without looking at it from the context of Catalina Island, my home, and my place. This was made clear to me when, while struggling to write this paper, I took a walk to help clear my mind. As I stood looking across the channel (facing home) I could see the Island with her hillside curves crested above the ocean like the back of a slender woman lying naked on her bed. At that moment, I realized that I couldn’t conceive of place apart from the place it was conceived. David Abram writes, “We have seen that such a mode of experience is commonplace for indigenous, oral peoples, for whom time and space have never been sundered. The tradition of phenomenology, it would seem, has been striving to recover such an experience from within literate awareness itself -- straining to remember, in the very depths of reflective thought, the silent reciprocity wherein such reflection is born” (1994, pg. 206).

Place, therefore, is not stagnant, nor is it necessarily an empirical “thing,” but rather, it contains the source of knowledge, imagination, creativity and wisdom. “Underpinning the creative process of human invention are the archetypal patterns of the natural world,” writes Stephen Aizenstat in his article about ecopsychology (1995, pg. 97). Even after the many years I spent away from home, I can assuredly say that my archetypal self finds its place on the island. This feeling of “coming home” is much more than seeing old friends, or hanging

out in the same places; rather, it is a feeling that my soul has found grounding in familiar landscapes.

Psychological Dimensions of Place

The archetypes - being born from the earth of a place and the participation of earth spirits in human conception – are universal among Indigenous people. This perception is reflected throughout the myth, ritual, art, and spiritual tradition of Indigenous people because, in reality, our development is predicated on our interaction with the soil, the air, the climate, the plants, and the animals of the places in which we live—Gregory Cajete (1994, pg. 83).

Despite recent research on the adverse effects on mental and physical health due to displacement, modern psychology has done very little to help us move toward understanding the importance of place. If anything, psychology has served to intensify our separation from place. Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, heralded the importance of the Cartesian worldview: “One comes to learn a procedure by which, though a deliberate direction of one’s sensory activities and through suitable muscular action, one can differentiate between what is internal -- what belongs to the ego -- and what is external -- what emanates from the outer world. In this way one takes the first step towards the introduction of the reality principle which is to dominate future development” (Freud, 1961, pg. 14). Freud was deeply concerned with establishing psychoanalysis as a scientific discipline in which he undertook the immense task of formulating a comprehensive, scientific theory to explain the function of the psyche while remaining true to the biomedical model (Capra, 1982).

The consequences of the scientific paradigm under which Freud developed his theories have had a profound effect on the human relationship with the natural world. Like the empiricists of his day, Freud relied on spatial metaphors. He established the location of the psyche “within” and the real world “outside,” thus, reinforcing the mind/matter dichotomy.

From this we observe how Cartesian dualism has had a long and lasting effect on the development of psychological theories: most notably, the implicit, but effectual, belief in the *inner* autonomous self, which is separate from the *outer* world. Freud's dualism is still evident in modern psychology. Psychiatrist Harold Searles questions modern psychology's tendency to focus exclusively on the human personality 'as though the human race were alone in the universe, pursuing individual and collective destinies in a homogenized matrix of nothingness, a background devoid of form, color and substance (1960, pg. 82-83).

Although Jung essentially considered himself a scientist, his extensive work on dreams led him beyond the narrow reduction of modern science. His theory of the collective unconscious may provide us with the most promising avenue for developing a modern psychology of place. For Jung, the psyche has an essential spiritual quality to it and is connected to a larger, universal reality. Thus, Jung's idea of the collective unconscious created a decisive break with Freud's biomedical reductionism: "Jung's concept of the collective unconscious distinguishes his psychology not only from Freud's but from all others. It implies a link between the individual and humanity as a whole—in fact, in some sense, between the individual and the entire cosmos" (Capra, 1982, p. 361).

The "Stories in the Land" project is primarily concerned with this link between individuals, humanity and the more-than-human world. We tried to help students understand their link with the rest of the world by constantly shifting their focus between the world and their individual psyches. For instance, using an excerpt from James Hillman's book, *Dream Animals*, students were asked to record some of their own dreams about animals and to answer the questions that Hillman proposes: "Why do they come to us, the animals? What do they want, inhabiting our dreams? Are they the 'animal guardians' as other, totemic cultures

would say? Are they coming to remind us of our affinity with them, to keep their presence before us? To guard against extinction, both theirs and ours?" (Hillman, 1997, pg. 13). One student responded, "I have had these repeating dreams that I was surfing way out in the ocean and a giant sea turtle would come up under me. The turtle would tell me to grab its shell and then it would take me to a far away land that was not my own with different people and animals. I believe that this turtle is my Amakua, my spiritual animal" – junior, Avalon High School.

If the collective unconscious implies a deeper interconnectedness between humans and the larger universe, then psychotherapy must examine human psychological illness from the standpoint that it is directly related to the damage which has been inflicted upon the world and that healing, both personally and environmentally, requires that we realign our relationship with the world and begin to pay more attention to the interaction between ourselves and the places in which we live. For psychologists, this requires extending their work beyond the therapy room and into the world. James Hillman writes, "The whole world becomes our consulting room, our petridish. Psychology would track the fields of naturalists, botanists, oceanographers, geologists, urbanists, designers for the concealed intentions, the latent subjectivity of regions the old paradigm considered only objective, beyond consciousness and interiority. The wider road is also a two-way street. Besides entering the world with its psychological eye, it would let the world enter its province, admitting that airs, waters, and places play as large a role in the problems psychology faces as do moods, relationships, and memories" (1995, pg. xxii).

Rite of Passage in the Natural World

For a modern person, many of the ritual preparations, encouragements, admonishments, and acknowledgments won't be there. Extreme events will happen

but not in the context of a ritual. There will be life-defining episodes, but the events won't open and close like a ritual. It may close too soon to reveal its secret or stay open so long that it burns too much. – Michael Meade (1993, pg. 223).

One of the greatest satisfactions we had this year is the development of an outdoor classroom. Many years ago, there use to be a little park across a ditch located next to the upper playground. Over time the park has become a trash heap, the bridge across the ditch was washed out in a storm, and for safety purposes, a gate was erected to keep kids from playing in it. On the first day of our “Stories in the Land” class, we decided to reclaim the neglected park and turn it into an outdoor classroom. Student’s cleaned the area and set logs in a circle for seating. They painted stones for decorations and symbols of their new place. Although the outdoor classroom was used exclusively by the “Stories in the Land” class, my dream was to expand the classroom’s availability to all teachers and students at the school. Unfortunately, it was due to a tragedy that my dream was realized. On May 15, 1999, one of our high school seniors, David Ramirez, lost his life after he fell from the fourth story of a hotel room during an after-prom party. David had lived on the island his entire life. Observing the students at school the week after the accident, I learned a great deal about the natural tendency of young people to integrate the natural world into their rituals. A remarkable thing occurred. The day after David’s death, I phoned my friend, Cindi, and asked her to help me collect some stones. I didn’t know what I would use these stones for, but I felt that they would be useful to have at school the next day when the students returned. We collected about two hundred stones, and we hauled them off to school in the back of my old pickup truck. Unbeknownst to me, by 10:00 the next morning, students began taking the stones out of my truck and painting designs and symbols on them. Before I knew it, the school grounds were decorated with beautifully painted stones as a memorial to David. I was

reminded of what Michael Meade had said to us during one of his lectures at Pacifica that when working with ceremony it is important to use lots of elements -- either rock, dirt, water or fire -- because the elements serve as a concrete symbol for personal transformation. Many students and teachers took these stones to our outdoor classroom where they also created art pieces, wrote poetry, and built an altar. The classroom has been initiated not only as a place of academic learning, but also a place that reminds us of our deep connection to nature's rhythms of life and death.

The story of David Ramirez is not a new one. Many young people on the verge of graduating from high school risk and, in some cases, lose their lives in failed attempts to cross the threshold from childhood to adulthood. In traditional cultures, tribal elders sent young initiates into the wilderness alone, without food or shelter, in order to mark the passage into adulthood. The 'vision quest' is as old as our ancestors are, but unfortunately, modern culture has watered down this rite of passage into banal ceremonies of high school graduation, obtaining a driver's license, or turning legal drinking age. Steven Foster and Meredith Little are long time vision quest guides and the founders of The School of Lost Borders in Big Pine, CA. They write, "In modern times, the rise of technological science, the emergence of large nations and cities, the influence and omnipotence of the media, the thickening of the walls between humans and their natural environment, the dawn of the computer age, the threat of thermonuclear annihilation, the breakdown of the basic family social unit, the dehumanizing pressure of modern life, and many other factors, have contributed to the weakening of traditional values, including the various ceremonies of life passage. The careful, ritual footprints left by our ancestors have been paved over by the traffic of modern civilization" (1997, pg. 15).

The story of the outdoor classroom is a small example of how students can create ceremony in an outdoor setting. The natural world not only serves as a source of comfort, peace and solace, but it is also a mirror that helps us ‘see’ where we are in the world. Whether we come across a dead branch, the bare bones of an decomposed animal, the expanse of the sky on a dark night, a rushing stream or a dry creak bed, the natural world speaks to us about our condition and about the human condition. These mirrors may reflect life’s frailty, the cycles of birth, death, and rebirth, or sensuality and fertility. In any case, it is essential that wilderness places are available to young people as a means of growth and initiation. Regarding the power of place for transformation, Foster and Little write, “A place of power is powerful if the initiate considers it to be so...The judgement that some places on the earth are more sacred or more powerful than others is a subjective notion, relative to the perceptions of each candidate. Nevertheless, for her it is truth, and truth carries the power of transformation. We have great respect for this kind of knowing, for we too have our own private places of power in the wilderness, and we go to them whenever we need an infusion of the elan. One area is on the top of a great mountain. The other is seemingly insignificant dry wash near the bottom of a desert valley. High or low, distinctive or humble, every inch of the earth is sacred” (1997, pg. 105). Our outdoor classroom is one small place of power for ceremony, ritual and personal transformation. My hope is to continue to use this place for council groups and for preparing students for the passage into adulthood.

Conclusion

It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value – Aldo Leopold, “A Sand County Almanac” (1949/87, pg. 223).

I end this project with the same question I began it: how do we begin teaching sense of place among a group of high school students? This question raises more questions regarding our education system and the values it upholds. Although, this year of “Stories in the Land” has been an incredible year of growth and learning for both students and teachers, in many ways, I also envision the year as a time of “unlearning” due to the nature of the educational process that this program elicits. It is an unlearning because teachers have become so indoctrinated in the dominate educational methods, that it is necessary to unlearn old worn out educational habits in order to rediscover our true vocation as educators. Naturally, we are concerned that our students learn a great deal, that they somehow demonstrate their knowledge and eventually put it to good use. Although usually unconscious, the emphasis is on progress, upward mobility and competition. The nature of “Stories in the Land,” on the other hand, requests that we slow down and cultivate the capacity to quietly listen to the land and pay attention to a voice that has been drowned out by classroom noise, ringing bells and whistles. This has been a challenge, and yet it has been a marvelous experience for both students and teachers. We have been joyfully surprised by the re-connections we have made with the land and with each other.

Place-based education, therefore, cannot just constitute a change in curriculum, a new lesson plan, or a different set of facts to learn. Rather, it calls for a new educational process -- one that elicits relationship, love and wonderment. Although the “Stories in the Land” curriculum included traditional classroom assignments, the major emphasis was simply to expose the students to the place in which they live. Rather than try to disseminate too much information into students’ heads or to convince them that they ought to agree with our philosophy about place, we simply offered them the opportunity to engage with the natural

surroundings. Rachael Carson, in her marvelous work *The Sense of Wonder* wrote, “I sincerely believe that for the child, and for the parent seeking to guide him [sic], it is not half so important to *know* as to *feel*. If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow. The years of early childhood are the time to prepare the soil. Once the emotions have been aroused – a sense of the beautiful, the excitement of the new and the unknown, a feeling of sympathy, pity, admiration or love – then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response. Once found, it has lasting meaning. It is more important to pave the way for the child to want to know than to put him [sic] on a diet of facts he is not ready to assimilate” (1956/1998, pg. 56). Our class spent a great deal of time outdoors -- walking, sitting, writing and simply observing the world presented before us. As these students began to discover aspects of their place that interested them, they came to us with questions about its history and importance. We simply helped the students cultivate a sense of wonder.

Although it is difficult to measure the success we had in our “Stories in the Land” class, I have noticed significant changes in students’ understanding of their home-place, and I suspect that these changes will continue to develop and express themselves in years to come. I was pleased to hear one of our seniors mention “place” and “land” in her valedictorian speech during the graduation ceremony. I was also touched when I read two unsolicited editorial essays in our local paper about “Stories in the Land” written by one of our students. During the year, I have had numerous students tell me that this is the best class they have ever had. I consider this year to be an extraordinary learning experience for future projects. Although “Stories in the Land” is a one-time fellowship, I am confident that we have set a

precedent for future classes in Avalon School. As a school counselor I am also aware of the subtle influences this class has had on strengthening personal relationships and depth of psychological insight pertaining to humans and place.

*To make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.* – T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding”.

And so, rocks keep moving, the Teutonic plates continue to collide, erosion slowly wears down the island. Possibly 25 million years from now, Catalina will be located near San Francisco as it continues to move along the San Andreas Fault at about a half an inch per year. Perhaps, it will disappear back under the ocean floor until more plates collide, earthquakes push up, or even volcanoes erupt again. But one thing is for sure; a place is always a place and the stories in the land always continue... “In the beginning of the world, all was water. The Great Chief Above lived up in the sky all alone. When he decided to make the world, he went down to the shallow places in the water and began to throw up great handfuls of mud that became land... Someday the Great Chief Above will overturn those mountains and rocks. Then the spirits that once lived in the bones buried there will go back into them. At present those spirits live in the tops of the mountains, watching their children on the earth and waiting for the great change which is to come...(Adapted from Erdoes and Ortiz, 1984, pg. 118).

Resources

Abram, D. (1996). The spell of the sensuous. New York: Vintage Books.

Aizenstat, S. (1995). Jungian psychology and the world unconscious. In T. Roszak, M. Gomes & A. Kanner (Eds.), Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind. (pg. 97). San Francisco: Sierra Club Books

Alarcon, F. (1992). Snake Poems. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.

Basso, K. (1996). Wisdom sits in places: Landscape and language among the western apache. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Berry, T. (1988). The dream of the earth. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

Cajete, G., (1994). Look to the mountain: An ecology of indigenous education: Durango, CO.: Kivaki' Press.

Capra, F., (1982). The turning point: Science, society and the rise of culture. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Carson, R. (1998/1956). The sense of wonder. New York: Harper Collins.

Casey, E. (1993). Getting back into place: Toward a renewed understanding of the place-world. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Eliot, T.S. (1974). The four quartets. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Emerson, R.W. (1839/1972). Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson, S.E. Whicher (Ed.). Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Erodes, R. & Ortiz, A. (Eds). (1984). American Indian myths and legends. New York: Pantheon Books.

Foster, S. & Little, M. (1997/1989). The roaring of the sacred river: The wilderness quest for vision and self-healing. Big Pine: Lost Border Press.

- Freud, S. (1974/1961). The future of an illusion. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Hillman, J., (1997). Dream animals. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.
- Hillman, J., (1995). A psyche the size of the earth: A psychological forward. In T. Roszak, M. Gomes & A. Kanner (Eds.), Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind. (p. xviii). San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Hillman, J. (1981). The thought of the heart and the soul of the world. Woodstock, CT: Spring Publications, Inc.
- Hillman, J. (1992/1975). Re-visioning psychology. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Kleinman, A. (1991). Culture and the DSM-IV: Recommendations for the introduction and for the overall structure. Unpublished manuscript, Harvard University, School of Anthropology and Psychiatry, Connecticut.
- Leopold, A., (1949/1987). A sand county almanac. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Meade, M. (1993). Men and the water of life: Initiation and the tempering of men. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco.
- Niles, J. (1998). The Black Mesa syndrome. Orion, Vol. 17, No. 3., pg. 18-29.
- Novalis (1986). The notebooks. In T. Frick (Ed.), The sacred theory of the earth. (pg. 78), Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.
- Schoenherr, A. (1992). A natural history of California. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Searles, H. (1960). The nonhuman environment in normal development and in schizophrenia. New York: International Universities Press.
- Snyder, G. (1995), A place in space. Washington D.C.: Counter Point Press.

Snyder, G. (1990), The practice of the wild. New York: North Point Press.

Stegner, W. (1998), Marking the sparrow's fall. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Stegner, W. (1992), Where the bluebird sings to the lemonade springs: Living and writing in the west. New York: Penguin Books.

Tall, D. (1993), From where we stand: Recovering a sense of place. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Tarnas, R., (1991), The passion of the western mind: Understanding the ideas that have shaped our world view. New York: Ballantine Books.

White, B. (1997), Santa Catalina Island: Its magic, people and history. Glendora: White Limited Editions.