

EDITORIAL

# Embodiment and Ecopsychology

Adrian Harris, Lead Editor

I'm delighted to introduce our **Special Issue on Embodiment and Ecopsychology**. The initial impetus came from the online *Embodiment Conference* in 2020, where I served as Manager of the Ecology and Research Channel. Many of the Conference presentations alluded to the close relationship between embodiment and ecopsychology, highlighting the need for deeper exploration. To that end, we invited submissions for this special issue in May 2021, not realising how much this would challenge our editorial expectations. The invitation brought in new perspectives and approaches, leading the Editorial Team to reconsider the purpose of the EJE and ponder on what we mean by ecopsychology. This issue takes us into new territory with an essay from Stephanie Gottlob which is richly illustrated with photographs. We've also chosen to make an exception to our word limit for the opening essay from Charlene Spretnak, Professor Emerita at the California Institute of Integral Studies and author of nine books. In both cases the material demanded a balance between flexibility and rigour; you will be the judge of how well we managed that tricky task.

The term 'embodiment' is in fashion these days and has been co-opted into all kinds of arenas. However, as this Special Issue demonstrates, embodiment is fundamental to ecopsychology. Curiously, the connection hadn't been widely discussed, at least explicitly, until very recently. The work of David Abram (1996), Andy Fisher (2002) and Nick Totton (2007) are notable early exceptions and the embodiment/ecopsychology link is now increasingly highlighted. The timing of this Special Issue is fortuitous and perhaps it can help encourage this burgeoning discussion.

Abram, Fisher, Totton come to my mind because they sit in the mainstream of ecopsychology, but **Charlene Spretnak** has written more extensively than any of them on a wide range of closely related topics including modernity, ecofeminism, green politics and spirituality. The concept of dynamic interrelatedness lies at the heart of Spretnak's oeuvre and in our opening essay she maps out its fundamental role as we enter an "Era of Disasters". Spretnak's essay is wide-ranging and includes subjects some might exclude from the field of ecopsychology like healthcare and education. But it's precisely the breadth of Spretnak's vision that makes *Dynamic Interrelatedness in an Era of Disasters* a perfect opening essay to this Special Issue.

As embodiment becomes more fashionable, clarity around the use of the term sometimes suffers. As Csordas points out embodiment is "not 'about' the body per

se”; it is “about culture and experience insofar as these can be understood from the standpoint of bodily being-in-the-world” (Csordas, 1999: 143). **Stephanie Gottlob’s** essay - *Dancing the Biomes: Co-creating with Nature* - is a beautiful exploration of embodied culture and experience as she engages with nature through movement improvisation. Inner and outer landscapes become “intricately woven together”, echoing perhaps the dynamic interrelatedness Spretnak discusses so eloquently. Gottlob’s language is frequently poetic and the essay is illustrated with powerfully evocative photographs. Do poetry and artistic beauty have a place in a peer-reviewed psychology journal? After some discussion, both reviewers and Editorial Team agreed that it did and I trust that your embodied experience of Gottlob’s essay will convince you too.

Embodiment is a central theme in European phenomenology where it refers to the human experience of having a body. Merleau-Ponty’s work is central and underpins the essay from **Glen Mazis**, *The Animal that I Have Always Been: The Sources of Human Excellence*. Mazis draws on the whole range of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy in his exploration of “our shared embodiment with animals”. He brings remarkable clarity to this task, unpacking Merleau-Ponty’s complex ideas and applying them convincingly in novel ways that illuminate this aspect of ecopsychology.

Abram calls for “a new way of speaking, one that enacts our interbeing with the earth rather than blinding us to it” (2010: p. 3). **Raffaele Rufo** takes up this challenge in *Humans, Trees, and the Intimacy of Movement: An Encounter with Ecosomatic Practice*. In this essay he describes an ecosomatic dance practice which engages with trees “as sensuous partners of movement and inquiry”. In addition to presenting his own experience, Rufo offers a truly embodied engagement with his work. The reader is invited to step beyond the limits of page into lived, embodied experience by engaging in their own ecosomatic practice.

Can the *Scent of Soil* help us to connect more deeply with the more-than-human? **Serena Zanzu** considers the volatile compounds produced by our invisible companions in the soil. We discover that the scent of soil contributes to human wellbeing, but Zanzu goes beyond an anthropocentric ‘public goods’ framework. She proposes that this “microbial aroma” can provide new ways of knowing, inviting us into a “relational embodied encounter” with organisms living in the soil. The scent of soil offers an ancient potential for us to renew ancestral relationships and move beyond anthropocentric and exploitative practices.

Zanzu’s paper concludes this stimulating and important collection which I hope will inspire more interweaving of embodiment and Ecopsychology.

## Acknowledgements

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