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A Geography of Grief: An Exploration of the Significance of the Northern New Mexican Landscape in the Grieving process

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A Geography of Grief:

**An Exploration of the Significance of the Northern New Mexican Landscape in the
Grieving Process**

**Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College**

by

Treska Stein

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2017

This Project is Dedicated to:

The Rio Grande Gorge



The Rio Grande Gorge Ted Wiard. Digital Image. Instagram. Accessed May 1, 2017.www.instagram.com

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Preface

I grew up in Taos, and it is a place I know well. When I was five years old, my family moved from Leipzig, Germany to a small adobe house on the high mesa. As children, my sister and I wound our way through the desert landscape, our feet kicking up little clouds of dust, and our hands finding the sorts of treasures borne only of sun and sky. We held rusty barbed-wire fences apart for one another, and scrambled down the sides of arroyos. Our wanderings through abandoned sheep ranches yielded bleached bones, jackrabbit sightings and a visceral sense of potency.

It was only when I moved to upstate New York that I realized how integral the land was to my own sense of self.

This project has given me a new way of articulating what my young self practiced daily: connecting deeply with place. Within these pages I explore the landscape of Northern New Mexico, and by extension, the land—self encounter for the therapeutic potential it can offer individuals whose lives are ravaged by the effects of grief and loss.

In this land that fills our palms with the spines of tender cacti, and purple afternoon monsoons melt our roads into clay slicks with their deluge—I explore how the same intensity of this place, which forces drivers to relinquish their cars to muddy roadside embraces—also shelters within its feral grasp.

Introduction

My project began as an exploration of Wellness Tourism, which can be characterized as a type of tourism in which the privileged elite travel to luxurious retreat centers in exotic locations in order to participate in a neoliberalist project of self improvement (Smith & Kelly 2006). At that time, I set out to challenge postmodern cultural constructions of “nature” and explore how imagined and material relations between bodies and place interacted to create healing or restorative modes of being (sometimes referred to as the therapeutic landscapes concept (Lea, 2008) in the context of the spiritual retreat. Guided by my interest in the therapeutic landscapes concept, my research led to Esalen, one of the premier spiritual retreat centers in the United States, located on the bluffs of Big Sur, California. After receiving the Harry Turney-High research grant to supplement the \$450 cost of attendance, I booked a weekend retreat. In many ways it felt too good to be true: a weekend lounging in the clothing-optional bathhouse overlooking the Pacific Ocean, drying off only to dine in the gourmet, locally sourced, open-air cafeteria, and discover my true-calling among like minded, LuluLemon™-clad individuals.

Having grown up in New Mexico, my childhood was spent farming organic foods, attending home births, and practicing yoga; I felt deeply comfortable with many aspects of the “holistic lifestyle,” which is why I was surprised when I found myself cringing during the workshop. I had come to Esalen to investigate the ways in which the landscape itself was actively enrolled in the retreat experience, giving rise to therapeutic effects, yet from what I could observe, the people around me were not engaging with the landscape aside from relaxing on the lawn, and gazing out across the endless expanse of ocean. Although the retreat location offered a beautiful, and relaxing environment, the focus of the retreat experience was on the

social interaction between participants. Esalen functioned in much the same way as any other resort might. It offered various all-inclusive tuition prices ranging from \$405 for a weekend workshop with “sleeping bag accommodations” (sleeping on a floor in a communal room) to \$2700 for the same workshop inclusive of the “Point House Couple accommodations” (a private suite perched on the cliffs edge). But more importantly, the activities Esalen offered provided those with holistic proclivities the opportunity to network among other, similarly inclined individuals in an admittedly gorgeous spot.

After my two day stay, I left Esalen, evenly tanned, and with the distinct taste of revulsion lingering in my throat. Esalen had delivered what it promised, but I hadn't been prepared for my own distaste for such an exercise of white-privilege. In late June 2016, shortly after the retreat, a personal experience of loss dismembered my world and plunged me into what felt like an impenetrable state of grief. Through my experience of this loss, I became deeply interested in the experience of grief and loss as fundamental to the human experience. Furthermore, during a visit to Taos, New Mexico in late August, I found myself serendipitously house-sitting for family friends, Ted and Marcella Wiard, the founders of Golden Willow Retreat (GWR) while they were away.

Golden Willow Retreat, unlike Esalen, Omega or Kripalu is a retreat center for individuals who are suffering from grief. Grief retreats, unlike spiritual retreats and other destinations for wellness tourists are few and far between. Less than fifty retreat centers exist in the United States, and of them nearly none offer individualized accommodation for individuals of all genders and religious affiliations. GWR, a self-defined “sanctuary for loss, transition, and recovery” stands out among these retreats. Founded in 2001 by Ted and Marcella Wiard, GWR

is located in the rural landscape of Northern New Mexico, less than two hours south of the Colorado border.

During the six weeks of fieldwork that I conducted between August, and December 2016 I resided at GWR in the capacity as caretaker. My responsibilities were to make myself available to GWR clients during their stay should they need anything. In addition to being physically on site, my responsibilities included caring for Ted and Marcella's Koi fish, named Frick and Frack, and two dogs named Bella, and Jasmine respectively. During my time at GWR, I came to understand the experience of grieving and healing as intimately connected to, and entangled within the land of GWR itself.

Methodology

Section 1: Golden Willow Retreat

Within this section I introduce Golden Willow Retreat, and locate it as it within the physical and imagined topography of the American Southwest. I subsequently offer a description of the built and natural environment, the way it functions, and the staff that comprise it.

Section 2: The Internal Place of Grief

I introduce grief through a careful investigation of the lived experience of grief, and relying upon psychoanalyst Robert Bosnak's (2007) theoretical framework for dreaming, I demonstrate the ways in which the experience of grief is similar to the experience of a dream: the images presented are perceived as real, as well as physical, and can be felt within the body. Expanding upon Bosnak's theory of "image as place" I argue that the experience of grief is constitutive of a *place* itself, an internal terrain of grief that I term *griefscape*.

Section 3: Land as body

This section builds upon the geological metaphor of grief, and explores its use in the GWR context. Through an analysis of the built and natural environment of GWR I locate the Rio Grande Gorge as a key material, and symbolic site in the GWR conceptualization of grief. I subsequently explore the gorge in terms of a metaphor for grief, and by extension, understand the land as a metaphor for the fractured body that is the lived experience of acute grief. Employing medical geographer Jennifer Lea's concept of the "connective imaginary"(2015, 95) I explore the ways in which the retreat environment produces these "connective imaginaries,"(2015, 95) and what the significance of imagined interconnectivity is, and how functions in the GWR context.

Section 4: Latitudes of Loss

Utilizing Tim Ingold's concept of lines, and by extension, his philosophical interrogation of the "line that develops freely"(2007, 73) I, through careful analysis of the built and natural retreat environments, identify the emphasis upon the curved "line" that threads itself through the symbolic and material realms of GWR. I subsequently argue that another of Ingold's lines, the "crack"(2007, 45) is good to think with about grief, providing GWR staff the ability to visually anchor, and articulate the complex lived experience of grief within the structure of the landscape itself. Through a discussion of the nature of "cracks" themselves I reveal the fundamental GWR belief that grief *moves*, and by extension that individuals have to move as grief moves in order to heal.

Section 5: A Nest in the Gorge

In this section I identify the symbolic themes of interiority and darkness, as reflected in what I term the internal *griefscape*, GWR therapist John's terminology of "The Cave," and the metaphorical Rio Grande Gorge. Exploring my findings through the Victor Turner's theory, and

textual discussion of rites of passage and liminality, I make links to the liminal themes of darkness, and gestation as well as the “logically antithetical processes of death and growth” as identified by Turner (1967, 99) to draw a parallel to the language and imagery used by GWR and my informants to describe the embodied expression of grief.

Section 6: Resonant Terrain

Using Fred Myers’ theoretical discussion of the Pintupi “Dreamtime” I apply his theory of “embodied meaning” to understand the way in which landscape becomes distinctly non-neutral, and can instead be seen as a physical embodiment of something else. (In the case of the Pintupi, the landscape itself is understood as evidence of the events in the “Dreaming”) (1991, 55). Next I explore and expand Myer’s theoretical framework of “country as frame for action” (1991, 57) to understand the events, and stories that are embodied by the land as *prescriptive*. I then situate my claim within Keith Basso’s concept of “place-making” I then transition to a discussion of Keith Basso’s concept of “place-making,” and his theory of the “reflective capacity” of place.

Employing Keith Basso’s concept of “place-making”(1996, 5), I examine the spatially specific stories of GWR for their significance in imbuing the built structure of the *capilla* (chapel), with particular meaning. I subsequently argue that these stories make legible an imagined world of the transformative power of grief. I conclude this section with a discussion of Basso’s notion of the “reflective”(1996, 108) capacity of the landscape in the GWR context. I argue that the minds of GWR clients become linked to the land through Basso’s concept of “reflectivity,” and argue that the therapeutic potential of this encounter is recognized and consequently facilitated by GWR staff.

A Note on Structure

Through my writing, I came to discover grief as a winding, and shadowy element that continually crept into the structure of my project itself. Initially, I fought to adhere to a three chapter outline, however as the “lines” of philosophical anthropologist Tim Ingold repeatedly pulled at the pages of my writing, undoing the neat seams of my paragraphs, I found myself more interested in unraveling, rather than ironing the fabric of grief that lay bunched within the margins of my screen. As such, I set out to identify the threads of dusty dissolution of grief in the high desert of New Mexico. Once unwound, I found myself somewhat pleasantly ensnared within the intricate snarl of land, grief, dream, body, story, and place. It is my hope that, parsed into the structure of six separate sections, the landscape of loss, can be more easily glimpsed. I found myself compelled to structure this project as a walk through the terrain of grief itself, writing my way down into the gorge where I found grief residing in the interstitial spaces of stone and self; dreaming with the wordless echo of the land.

Section 1: Golden Willow Retreat, A Sanctuary for Loss

Ted Wiard, the founder of Golden Willow Retreat conceived the idea of a grief retreat after experiencing the devastating loss of his wife to brain cancer, and soon after, the loss of his six and nine year old daughters and mother-in-law to a tragic car accident. Reeling from grief, Ted left his home in Taos, New Mexico with the ultimate intention of committing suicide. After traveling through the jungles of New Zealand for several months however he realized that he

“wanted to *want* to live,” but, due to the debilitating effects of his grief, he felt utterly incapable of performing the tasks of everyday living. Turning to the only place he felt he would receive the care, and vigilant support he so desperately needed, he checked himself into the Betty Ford rehabilitation center for drugs and alcohol. Even though Ted, a former Tennis professional, and elementary school-teacher did not struggle with addiction, he found shelter from the acute grief that threatened to consume him entirely, and so and embarked upon the 12-step journey toward recovery that would mark the beginning of a lifelong path of healing. Over the next six years Ted attended ministerial school where he met his second wife Marcella. After receiving his Masters degree in counseling, Ted returned to the Betty Ford Center, this time in the capacity of a therapist, where he guided countless individuals through the agony of addiction.

In 2001, Golden Willow Retreat opened its doors as non-profit, “sanctuary for loss, transition and recovery.” The retreat center defines its mission as, providing, “safe and compassionate refuge and to offer support and education for individuals, families, and communities who are experiencing grief and loss.” The retreat center offers individuals struggling with grief, and loss a space to come for 10 days, during which they receive an individualized program consisting of multiple daily therapy sessions, bodywork, and “spirit care”. A caretaker, a cook, three licensed therapists, and several yoga, meditation, and Tai Chi instructors as well as body-workers staff GWR. GWR sources its practitioners from the Taos community, which it is able to create a program that is structured to meet to each client’s specific goals and circumstances. The caretaker is the only staff member that lives, and works at GWR fulltime, the rest of the staff are a part of GWR on a freelance basis.

Most clients arrive by air, and are picked up from the airport in Albuquerque, NM, where they are met by one of GWR’s therapists, and driven three hours north to Taos. Everything takes

place in the singular GWR building, and clients spend the majority of their time outside, or in the chapel, located on the GWR grounds. Clients are driven by a staff member to any bodywork appointments that take place outside of GWR. The cost of attendance is \$750/ per day, and although GWR offers a sliding scale option, in an effort to accommodate individuals of varied socioeconomic statuses, their client base is overwhelmingly of middle, and upper class backgrounds. Often referred by their personal therapists, or encouraged by concerned loved ones to seek help, individuals make the journey into this rural landscape of in order to grieve their loss.

Swept into the seductive imaginary of the American Southwest, it would be irresponsible to ignore the romanticized discourses that are at least partly responsible for New Mexico's status as "the Land of Enchantment." In his chapter, *The Imaginary Southwest: Commodity Disavowal in an American Orient*, scholar Anthony Alan Shelton, in textual conversation with Arjun Appadurai's theory of "ethnoscapes" (1996, 22-26) argues,

As one of the most intensely anthropologized areas of the globe, it is not surprising that commercial and academic interests often ran very close together—in parallel, overlapping and intertwining— creating hybrid, often romanticized discourses intimately linked and dependent on the area's material cultures, and sharing the same imaginary. It is this essentialized, and exoticized imaginary whose, to borrow a phrase from Edward Said, "sheer knitted together strength" continues to nurture the cultural values on which the region's art and tourist economies now depend (2005, 76).

I highlight New Mexico's, existence as an "essentialized and exoticized" "ethnoscape" (Shelton 2005, 76) to acknowledge the deeply charged cultural and sociopolitical landscape of this place. Indeed, having grown up amidst the throngs of tourists that swept into town every summer, the

aspect commercial element of New Mexican experience is very familiar to me. This project however, while remaining cognizant of the valence that these mesas carry in the social imaginary, does not focus upon the troubling (from an anthropological viewpoint) practices of cultural consumption that fill the cars of eager visitors with dream catchers, cowboy hats, and the quintessential chile ristras (chile garlands). I turn instead toward grief as a radically different catalyst for travel into this landscape, and subsequently focus not on upon New Mexico's arguably deeply powerful existence within the social imaginary, but upon the human—land encounter as it occurs, and is facilitated within Golden Willow Retreat. While I believe my geographical descriptions may fall, at least partially prey to a romantic undertone, it is not my intention to frame the land of Northern New Mexico as possessing an inherent value, therapeutic or otherwise. Instead, through careful attention to the words of my informants, and the specificities of the encounters with this place, I seek to carefully follow the webs of meaning that I perceive spanning the interstices of the land—self encounter at GWR.

I grew up within this landscape, yet I have never tired of the way the elements of stone, dust, and sky seem to writhe and pull away from one another. Alternately piercing through the earth as craggy mountains, or slicing deep canyons into the muted grey green expanses of crumbly earth, this land seems to cower beneath a blisteringly blue sky. As John, one of my informants, and therapists at GWR described it to me,

I do believe that Taos forces you to survive a bit because of the extreme temperatures, the different types of weather, hot and dry, alternately wet and flooding, or freezing with lots of snow, we fight for water. Everything seems to be a little bit on those extremes, that demands me, forces me, and it seems others too, to be sharp, to be clean, or blow out. That's why there is such a high addiction and divorce rate in Taos, and a lot of people

leave, the underbelly of this pressure is quite an underbelly. This alchemy, this heat of the pressure forces someone to do something.

John, a tall, lanky man in his mid 40's had lived in Taos nearly all his life. With chiseled cheekbones and deep crows feet, John had a habit of sweeping his hair underneath his faded, and sweat stained Lakers cap. "It keeps my hair out of my eyes" he explained, to me one day, unprompted. John's description of "Taos" which is loosely used to describe this whole area, including the land of GWR, emphasizes the seemingly ferocious nonhuman elements of the land, attributing "high addiction and divorce rates" to them. John's comment conveys an understanding of what he terms the "extreme" elements of aridity, drought, flooding, and blizzarding as intimately entangled with the social, and interpersonal lived experience of Taos. Compellingly, John frames the presence of these "extremes" as generative of a pressure, which he refers to as "alchemy." Alchemy, a seemingly magical process of transformation, is thus identified as a driving force in people's lives. John's assertion that people "have to be sharp, to be clean, or blow-out" reveals an underlying belief of the land as a central force in shaping peoples lives.

At first glance, John's assertion of the land's mirrored intensity within the lives of Taos residents appeared deeply logical. It seemed sensible that, in a land that sends the giant, dry bodies of tumbleweeds clawing at the screens of people's doors, the people themselves would be like fruit deprived of water on the vine, sweeter, and more intense, their lives reflecting the severe elements around them. Located at 7,500 feet above elevation, in Taos there is, quite literally, less air to breathe. In listening to John's description of this landscape, I found myself wondering at the significance of such an extreme and particular landscape meant for GWR clients.

Having described the effects of the land upon the local population, John asserted that for those unfamiliar within this landscape, the “pressure” is even more palpable. It is for this reason that John finds storytelling to be so important in orienting GWR clients within this striking, new terrain. He explained, “For someone who has just flown in from New York City, the pure vastness can be so overwhelming, the sheer nothingness, is so much that it can take someone down.” Although some individuals are familiar with these expanses of the American Southwest, the vast majority of clients are unaccustomed to the dark-blue mountains that hug the town of Taos, and mesa that stretches infinitely onward, punctuated only by a set of bruise colored peaks, aptly named “two,” and “three peaks.” These individuals do not know that tarantula spiders migrate here annually, emerging from underground and walking hundreds of miles across the desert, weaving their way through the sagebrush. They do not know that we allow them to walk up and over the outsides of our homes, or that traffic slows to a halt to let these throngs of sparrow-sized spiders pass as one might a mother and her ducklings.

John consciously discloses stories from his own life in order to familiarize GWR clients with this land, and mitigate the shock and fear that can come from this change in landscape. Throughout this project I will constantly return to the particularity of this place and explore the interlocking significance of the land, and these stories, subjecting them to rigorous theoretical inquiry through the different frameworks of symbolic and philosophical anthropology as well as anthropology of place, and multispecies anthropology. In doing so I seek to understand the ways in which the elements of grief, story, and place give rise to therapeutic experiences.

Golden Willow Retreat lies to the north of Taos. Located eight miles from the town itself, it sits nestled within Arroyo Hondo, a residential area with the exception of one one tiny gas station-turned dive bar/ convenience store named “Herbs Lounge.” During the light hours of the

day you can buy toilet paper, the odd can of beans and a New Mexican staple: Flamin'Hot limón Cheetos® here. A steal at \$1.24 per bag, this spicy cheese puff snack brings tears to the eyes of those unsuspecting of its heat, and stains red the fingertips of all who consume this absurdly (and some would argue, divine) spicy-sour snack. The empty gas pumps still stand outside, their analog faces frozen. The drive up to GWR from the main road in Arroyo Hondo clients past Herb's, and follows alongside the bright green and orange willows of the burbling Rio Hondo. Huge speed bumps dominate this small road, and small hand painted signs arch; the warped wood appealing to drivers to slow. Graying latilla (peeled branch) fences surround adobe homes, and painted blue doors yawn, their chipped frames slamming in the wind. Further up the winding dirt road, prairie dogs scurry in front of the car, their small golden bodies disappearing into the fields that stretch out on either sides of the road. Magpies scold from the piñon trees, but apart from a pick up truck occasionally revving in the distance, the air is deeply quiet.

GWR is the first driveway on a dead-end dirt road. Unfenced, this light brown building sits within expansive, scrubby alfalfa fields (Figure 1). A flagstone path stretches across the grounds to a small pitch roofed chapel. In front of the chapel a circular fire pit is visible, and a large stone labyrinth. Framed by the dark blue of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, GWR appears small, and distinctly homey. Ida, a therapist at GWR and one of my informants told me that nearly everyone who arrives by car, and not air, gets lost on the drive up. They call her and say "I must be lost because I'm at somebody's home."



(above) (Figure 1) Golden Willow Retreat. Digital Image. Facebook. Accessed May 1, 2017.www.facebook.com



(Figure 2) (Left) Split Golden Willow Tree. Digital Image. Facebook. Accessed May 1, 2017.www.facebook.com



(Figure 3) (Right) Carved Wooden Feather. Digital Image. Facebook. Accessed May 1, 2017.www.facebook.com



(Figure 4) Golden Willow Porch. Digital Image. Facebook. Accessed May 1, 2017. www.facebook.com

A Golden Willow tree used to stand in the circular drive of GWR, but last year its young trunk split in two under the weight of snow (Figure 2). The tree had to be cut down, and the base was carved into a tall wooden feather (Figure 3). In the spring, the remains of this tree shot forth the tender sprigs of new growth; the vibrant green all but eclipsing the form of its previous body. At the door to GWR, flowerpots, swaying from stained vigas (Figure 4) In Summer, the overripe fruits from a current bush in the driveway stain the concrete porch.

I was curious as to where GWR would fall within the literature of Wellness Tourism. On a superficial level, it appeared quite similar; it was located in an aesthetically pleasing, if not striking, landscape, it advertised similar holistic offerings, it had a spiritual element, and its price alone certainly located it within the same price range as other spiritual retreat centers. While the individualized element certainly made GWR stand apart from the vast majority of spiritual retreat centers, it seemed easy to simply point to GWR as a more elitist version of these other,

luxurious, yet communal spaces. Was this yet another space in which the burnt-out elite consumed indigenous ontologies to further a project of neoliberalist self-improvement?

While there is no denying that the practice of booking a grief retreat at \$750/ day plus travel costs is undoubtedly an elite one, GWR is unlike Esalen, in that people do not travel dozens of hours to this remote location in order to socialize or learn about aromatherapy. Instead, as John described, “the people that come to GWR come because they are trying to save their lives.” Suffering from what is termed “acute grief” by therapists, the clients of GWR are often struggling to function after the losses of children, siblings, or partners. I came to understand this element of acute grief as the key distinction between GWR and spiritual retreat centers. Defined in the following, acute grief is,

...intensely painful and is often characterized by behaviors and emotions that would be considered unusual in normal everyday life. These include intense sadness and crying, other unfamiliar dysphoric emotions, preoccupation with thoughts and memories of the deceased person, disturbed neurovegetative functions, difficulty concentrating, and relative disinterest in other people and in activities of daily life [...] bereavement, [or grief, as I will be referring to it throughout this project] can be one of the most gut-wrenching and painful experiences an individual ever faces. Shock, anguish, loss, anger, guilt, regret, anxiety, fear, loneliness, unhappiness, depression, intrusive images, depersonalization, and the feeling of being overwhelmed are but a few of the sentient states grieving individuals often describe (Zisook & Shear 2009, 69-70).

Individuals come here because their lives have been ripped apart, and ravaged by tragedy, and because they can afford to. As such, I became interested, and indeed deeply invested in

understanding the relationship between this retreat center, and the extreme landscape it was situated within, as mediated through the experience of acute grief.

In light of GWR in many ways rejecting the category of spiritual retreat center, I likewise argue that the verb “retreating” does not quite capture the intentionality of this type of travel. I find it helpful to use the concept of “taking *descanso*,” a Spanish word that can be translated as “resting place” to conceptualize this act of traveling to GWR. *Witnessing Ted: The Journey to Potential Through Grief and Loss* (2011) a book coauthored by Carol Poteat, a former client of GWR and friend to Ted Wiard employ the word compellingly. They write,

As Spanish Franciscan missionaries made their way into northern New Mexico, they intermittently took sanctuary in stopping places for rest and recovery. These *descansos*, literally translated as “resting places,” held them, allowing them to return to their daily rituals, tend to their spiritual and physical needs, and connect with others to share their stories. After a time at the *descanso*, they continued with their travels until they reached another and it was time to rest again (2011, 1).

I argue that the concept of “taking *descanso*,” is particularly appropriate in understanding the form of travel GWR clients undertake. Not only is this concept intimately linked the history of resting and taking sanctuary within this particular landscape, I argue that “taking *descanso*” is not a withdrawal from life, but rather an act of conscious attention inward—a tending toward the needs and movements of an interior space within the body. Framed through the concept of “taking *descanso*,” this act of stopping for rest and recovery is not pathological, but conceptualized instead as normal, indeed integral to the experience of living itself. The connotations of “sanctuary” in this context, I believe serves to highlight the sheltering, and protective aspect of the sanctuary space itself.

Section 2: The Internal Place of Grief

In order to understand the ways in which grief is experienced in the context of GWR, I found it imperative to first examine how individuals articulated their experience of grief. Through a careful attention to the language and images used by my informants to describe their grief, I sought to illustrate the debilitating intensity that acute grief is often experienced as. My own experience of grief informed my focus, as I sought to render visible this profoundly alienating, and annihilating, yet completely invisible force. Due to the aforementioned ethical and privacy concerns that prevented me from interviewing multiple GWR clients, I turn to Mirabai Starr's memoir *Caravan of No Despair: A Memoir of Loss and Transformation* (2015) to aid in my inquiry. Starr grew up in Taos, NM and her memoir details her experience of grieving the loss of her daughter, Jenny. Jenny suffered from bi polar disorder, and one evening, at fourteen years of age, she stole her mother's car and drove it to her death, perishing in a car accident in the hills Southeast of Taos. Starr describes her experience,

It was a full-bodied sorrow that took my breath away and dropped me into profound stillness[...] Unable to hold myself up any longer, I let myself down into the arms of my groundlessness, and I found refuge there. It was a relief to know nothing, to be simply sad. In the darkness, I could rest at last (2015, 217).

Starr's description of her grief can be interpreted as constituted by two parts: the experience of grief as a physical sensation within her body, and the experience of grief as images that appear in her mind. Put simply, Starr perceives a *place* that is dark, in which she was able to rest. I argue that what Starr describes is an embodied experience.

There are several definitions of “embodiment” within psychology, however the term I reference above is derived from psychoanalyst Robert Bosnak’s term “embodied imagination”(2007). Bosnak posits, “the most absolute and unmediated form of embodied imagination is a dream.” He subsequently defines “embodied imagination” as the “world-creating power,” of dreams (2007, 9). The theoretical approach that Bosnak applies to his work on dreams is useful to me, because it allows me to theorize the perceived experience of grief as constitutive of *place* through Bosnak’s theory of “image as place”(2007, 9). Bosnak asserts,

From the point of view of dreaming perception, an image is a *place*, an environment in which we find ourselves. While dreaming, the environment presents itself as physical, though at the tail-end of dreaming, in the process of waking, we can observe that this physicality evaporates. Therefore, the image is of a quasi-physical nature, presenting itself as if it were physical. The quasi-physical environment creates strong responses in the body, embodied states (2007, 9-10).

Bosnak describes the “dream *place*” the perceived environment within which the events of the dream take transpire. Similarly, I propose “grief place,” as a useful way in which to understand the image-based environment of the grief experience as constitutive of a *place*, or world, which can be perceived, and viscerally *felt* within the body. To offer an example of what the lived experience of the “grief *place*” I turn to my informant and former GWR client, Carin. A woman in her mid 30’s, Carin sought support at GWR after the sudden death of her mother in April of 2015. After her mother died, she recounted, “sometimes I just felt incapable of moving. I would be exhausted at 7:30 at night. I felt like I was walking though mud. Even if it was warm mud, it just felt like a challenge.”

Carin highlights the physical dimension of her grief, describing it as “exhausting.” To understand the ways that “grief *place*” comes to be experienced within the physical body I turn to Bosnak’s concept of “embodied imagination” (2007, 10). Bosnak elaborates, writing,

...it takes a body to perceive imagination. Disembodied imagination may exist, but even so, while encountering it we are in a body, so we can’t know it in its disembodied condition. Thirdly, there is the fact that we are embodied *by* imagination, that imagination grows itself a physical body. Look at the stooped posture of someone who walks around in a world that permanently feels grey, heavy, and bleak, whatever his current external circumstances might be. He continuously lives in an image environment as real as a dream, and it crushes him. Eventually his spine will have a permanent curve. The curve has become the home the bleak image has embodied for itself (Bosnak 2007, 10).

Bosnak’s description of the “posture of someone who walks around in a world that permanently feels grey, heavy, and bleak” I believe adequately captures what an experience of “embodied grief” might present as in the physical body. His description, in addition to Carin’s, highlights the viscerally experienced, “quasi-physical” topography of “grief *place*” For this reason, moving forward I find it useful to instead conceive of “grief *place*” as instead a *griefscape*. Employing the suffix –scape I make reference to the way Appadurai has utilized this suffix “to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes...and indicate that these are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision but, rather are deeply perspectival constructs (1996,33). For these reasons, and in an attempt to underline the changeable, varied nature of such emotional terrain of the *griefscape*, I have employed Bosnak’s theory of dreaming, “image as place,” and “embodied imagination” in order to frame to frame the experience of grieving as comparable to dreaming. By drawing a parallel between the two, I have

sought to explain the phenomenon of bodily sensation in the absence of a physical event. Moving forward, I consequently rely upon “embodied imagination” in my subsequent exploration of the role of the body, in the expression and healing of grief.

Section 3: Land as Body

In the following I discuss the significance of the Rio Grande Gorge, which, located less than one mile from GWR, snakes through the belly of land, rending it like a scar. The gorge, an 850-foot deep tectonic chasm begins at the Colorado border and extends approximately 50 miles south, through the northwestern tip of New Mexico. The Rio Grande River flows through the gorge on its southbound trajectory, spilling into the Gulf of Mexico, hundreds of miles to the South. John, and Ida, two of GWR’s therapists utilize the physical topography of the Rio Grande Gorge explicitly to metaphorically anchor the experience of grief within the GWR landscape itself. John describes the gorge to clients, saying, “Here is this huge wound, that over millions of years has become a beautiful scar, and within that scar the river of life, the Rio Grande River is carving its path.” John’s description of the gorge draws a metaphorical equivalence between the gorge, and grief. Implicit in this metaphor of the gorge as grief is a second; the metaphor of fractured land, as body. By employing the gorge as a metaphor for grief, and describing it in terms of a wound that has healed into a scar, John conceptualizes grief as something that the body can heal from, but that will never disappear; it can however become a beautiful scar. Furthermore, by enlisting the gorge, and by extension the land as a metaphor for grief and body, respectively, I argue that John highlights the “naturalness” of grief, framing it as the result of geographical movements; normal, not malignant.

Grief can thus be understood as a precarious moment in an individual's life. Despite being a normal, and in many ways, unavoidable part of life, grief if not adequately supported and processed, grief puts individuals at risk for taking their own life. Indeed, individuals who do not transition from acute grief to what is termed "integrated grief," have the potential to develop "complicated grief"(Zisook & Shear 2009, 69). "Complicated grief" affects approximately 10% of bereaved people and is experienced as chronic, and unremitting pain (2009, 69).

Bereaved individuals with complicated grief find themselves in a repetitive loop of intense yearning and longing that becomes the major focus of their lives, albeit accompanied by inevitable sadness, frustration, and anxiety. Complicated grievers may perceive their grief as frightening, shameful, and strange. They may believe that their life is over and that the intense pain they constantly endure will never cease (Zisook & Shear 2009, 69).

Ida, another therapist at GWR expressed, "I believe one of the most important things that we do at Golden Willow is normalize grief, and the grieving process. People come here because they haven't processed their grief, and they think they're going insane. They don't know that this is normal." In light of the vulnerable position that GWR clients find themselves in, I find it impossible to overemphasize the importance role that the retreat center plays in the grieving process.

Ida also describes the gorge in terms of grief. She recounted to me another instance in which she and John describe the gorge to clients,

When we are standing at GWR, and we're on the path to the chapel, we pause and tell clients, "Look across the mesa and into the distance. Several miles away you can see a small dirt road that winds up through the land." We tell clients "do you see that path, that

road over there? That is your future, your life. What you don't see is that there is this huge cliff, this huge gorge between here and there. You are in the gorge now, and that's part of life as well." Clients relate to this feeling of being in the abyss, they absolutely feel as though they are in the gorge.

The Rio Grande gorge can consequently be understood as a place that functions both symbolically and as a meaningful material site within the land. In order to understand why GWR therapists find it useful to use the nonhuman gorge to describe grief to their clients, I turned to other descriptions of grief, searching for analogous descriptions. Compellingly, Mirabai Starr described her grief as a "chasm" writing, "the deepest chasm of all cracked open when Jenny died"(2015, 242).

The image of a chasm is a powerful reference to a space of interiority that has sustained a form of violent change. In order to describe her grief at her daughter's death, Starr found it useful to anchor the ephemeral experience of grief within a deep fissure in the nonhuman landscape. Star also describes her grief in terms of a tree, writing,

And then sometimes— especially when the loss was fresh— denial didn't feel like delusion at all, but like grace. It was as if angels came swooping into the burned-out chamber of my soul, scooping me up and rocking me in their wings. Like spring water filling a redwood trunk that had been hollowed out by a forest fire (2015, 214).

Again, Starr describes her experience of grief in terms of a hollowed out interior. Specifically she makes a link between her felt experience of the "burned-out chamber of her soul" and the image of a redwood trunk ravaged by fire. I find the description of her "burned out chamber" as comparable to the metaphor of the gorge in describing grief. The hollowed-out redwood trunk is an image of an interior space that has been violently violated, and exposed.

In order to understand why Starr, John, and Ida find it helpful to articulate the human experience of grief in terms of the nonhuman, I find it useful to turn to medical geographer Jennifer Lea's concept of "radical connectivity." Lea employs her concept of "radical connectivity" to conceptualize how the non-human was similarly utilized by her informant. During fieldwork at a yoga retreat center in Southern Spain, Lea's informants employed the metaphor of an olive tree to describe their connection to the earth. To address this phenomenon, Lea developed a concept, which she termed "radical connectivity"(2015, 94). She defines "radical connectivity" as an experience in which "the boundary between body and earth [is] undone." Lea writes,

Nicky's [an informant and yoga instructor] description of the connection was one in which there was something in the earth holding onto our feet but still allowing us to move. This opened up a space of imagination in which we could understand and experience the connection in a way that would root us into the earth in the same way as the olive tree- flexibly yet solidly (2015, 94).

What Lea's observations describe is the "imagined" earth being employed to imagine the body in terms of the nonhuman. Lea introduces her concept of "imaginative therapeutic geographies" that she defines as "using imaginations of nature to work embodiment in particular ways" (2015, 95). Lea elaborates upon her concept in relation to the retreat environment, writing,

Being in the retreat environment allowed the kind of focused attention to the small spaces of connection between body and environment demonstrated in the research "instances" above, and gave rise to a "connective imaginary" through which the retreat participants could sense their (specifically interconnected) place in the world, and be in touch with the raw energy of the world, of yourself as part of that world unfolding (2015, 95).

Lea asserts that being in the retreat environment introduced a different kind of awareness (and, I will argue, movement) though “focused attention to the small spaces of connection between body and environment” which she argues, “gave rise to a ‘connective imaginary.’” Put simply, the interaction between retreat participants and the retreat environment, produced a sense of connectedness with “the raw energy of the world,” and gave the yoga retreat participants the sense of themselves “as part of that world unfolding.” While it is likely that this phenomenon was influenced by the yogic teachings of the spiritual retreat center, I find it important to note that Lea emphasizes the role of “focused attention to the small spaces of connection between body and environment” in the production of this sense of interconnectedness, not Hindu ideologies. Her work highlights the importance of the natural environment of the retreat space in the creation of the “connective imaginary.”

I turn in the following to a description made by one of my informants, a young woman named Ananda (pronounced ah/non/da) to investigate how her description of herself and the retreat environment conveys, a similar sense of “connectedness.” Although not officially a GWR client, Ananda stayed at GWR, and cared for John’s dogs while he was away in December. During this time we overlapped briefly. She was grieving the loss of her partner at the time, and she spoke to me about her walks in the land of GWR. I believe that the following description, which she gave to me writings she made in her journal during her time spent at GWR illustrates this sense of interconnectivity, and demonstrates its creation through “focused attention to the small spaces of connection between body and environment.” Her journal entry, dated December 23, 2017 read,

The squishiness of the wet desert earth beneath my feet. The coldness of patches of snow. The air feels wet with the herbaceous, lightly bitter smell of sagebrush. The coldness

across the planes of my face. The quietness. The softness underneath my boots. The way the sagebrush grows guides me to weave through them, moving in a winding way, stepping gently around the low growing, and delicate springiness of their bodies. No snow lies around their bases, and little treasures hug into these spots of ruddy brown. A little puffing mushroom, a nub of white quartz. The wetness upon the stones brings them to life, polishing them and exposing their rich colors. The shriveled fruits of prickly pear cactus poise on the tips of grey green spined limbs, their fruit faded to a light yellow, warm and muted against the deep blue of the mountains speckled with snow. Instinctively my hands reach for these little treasures, and I gather them into my pockets. The small form of a smooth caramel-colored piñon seed clicks softly against dark red stones in the pocket of my coat. I move differently here, without a path, with no footprints before me to guide me, but am drawn through and into this landscape, my attention guided by the shape of the land itself, and the small forms upon it.

The treasures hold my thoughts, my hand holds these objects, and the land holds me.

Ananda describes a way of being in the land of the retreat environment in a way that brought her “into a dialogue, into connection” with it. The rich, and poetic description of her walk in the land cites the lack of a specific path, and “footprints” to guide her, as facilitating an encounter with the land that she describes as being “drawn through, and *into*” the landscape, guided by the shape of the land, and nonhuman forms upon it. Ananda describes the action of reaching for objects: seeds, cactus fruit, and stones that she encounters as instinctive. Furthermore, her encounter with the sagebrush, described as “weaving through” through the “low-growing” “springiness” of sagebrush “bodies,” I assert illustrates a “connective imaginary.” Through this “connective imaginary” the land is reconfigured as agentic, and sentient. Walking through the

land was not simply a way of getting from one place to another, but instead, a way of being *in* the land, and subsequently *in* imagination *with* the land itself, and all the nonhuman elements of seed, stone and snow that comprise it. Understood thus, GWR, offering spontaneous, unrestricted encounter with the land has the capacity to generate a different way of being in, and imagining into place, and quite possibly giving rise to other “connective imaginaries.”

Although not a GWR client herself, Ananda introduces an important element of the encounter between self and land in the GWR context: the practice of gathering objects found in the land, and by extension the practice of natural objects being gifted to clients. This practice of gathering that Ananda describes deepens her experience of the “connective imaginary” by bringing elements of the land into direct physical contact with her. Therapists of GWR refer to the selected objects as “medicine.” Ida explained that when clients encountered an object in the retreat environment that they felt drawn to pick up, GWR staff would encourage clients to think about what this object represented to them, and why it was presenting itself to them. Ida recounted a particular instance to me,

I spent time with one client who was grieving the loss of her son who had died of drug addiction. Together we walked out into the desert by the gorge. There were lava rocks everywhere, and we spent time talking about how sometimes the earth tears apart revealing something beautiful. These lava rocks represent the tearing, the shifting and the changing of transition, and we all come out on the other side as this object of beauty. In our conversation the client teared up in recognition of her own process of grief.

The client in the instance above is encouraged to understand her own process of grief through the language of tectonic shifts. Not only does this invite clients to imagine into a connection between themselves and the land, I argue that by gathering the lava rocks, which have been re-imagined

as the beautiful objects of violent change, clients can feel themselves “in touch with the raw energy of the world, [...] and a part of that world unfolding” (Lea 2015, 95). Through my discussion of Lea’s concepts, I have sought to explore the ways in which the nonhuman is employed by GWR to describe the human experience, through metaphor, and how individuals, guided, in the presence of the open land are guided to move differently. I have argued for the significance of the physical place of the retreat environment itself in facilitating a different mode of interacting with the environment, and understood this way of being in land as fundamental to the experience of felt interconnectivity with the non-human.

Section 4: Latitudes of Loss

Thus far I have focused upon the natural environment of GWR, in particular the structure of the gorge, and have discussed the internal “place” of grief. In the following section I wish to argue that both of these “places” can be linked through the language of “interiority.” Specifically I introduce GWR’s notion of “The Cave” embodied as a built structure of GWR, and as a concept used to link body and land. I then transition to discussion of the concept of “interiority” and seek to contextualize it within Victor Turner’s theory of the liminality.



(Figure 5) Satellite Image of Rio Grande Gorge and GWR. Digital Image. GoogleMaps. Accessed April 25, 2017. www.googlemaps.com



(Figure 6) GWR Courtyard, *Capilla*, and Grounds. Digital Image. GoldenWillowRetreat. Accessed April 25, 2017. www.goldenwillowretreat.com

The building of GWR were built to echo the lines of the land itself, and its thick adobe walls enfold all who pass into their embrace (Figures 6 &7). The brassy wood of the rough-hewn vigas gleam and the rusty cream colors of large Saltillo tiles slosh across even rows of grout.

“The Cave” as a built structure refers to a room in GWR in which clients have most of their therapy sessions. In *Witnessing Ted* (Poteat & Wiard), Carol described,

Standing in the doorway of “The Cave” had a great impact on me. As I descended the three steps into the room, it seemed that I was coming down to meet myself. This room was used for counseling and workshops. This was where you could strip off all masks and be vulnerable (2015, 19).

During my time fieldwork at GWR, I found the walls of “The Cave” to glow. Plastered in a muted creamy gold, this space held an overstuffed brown leather couch. Tall lamps stood in the corners of the room, and coasters lay stacked upon the dark wood of the rustic coffee table, awaiting cups of tea. A large carpet lay sprawled across the tile floor, its red and brown designs dark against the floor. On the left side of the room, light filtered through delicate white cotton curtains that draped before a set of glass doors leading outside. A rocking chair sat in one corner, a deep blue blanket resting across the arm. The sofa’s counterpart: a large armchair, faced away from the door, into the space. Woven-grass baskets floated on the walls, their shallow forms poised, as if straining to gather up all that was spoken within these walls.

Carol’s description of the built structure of “The Cave” conveys the power of this room to elicit a strong emotional response. I wish to highlight the significance of the three steps down into the room, and point to the parallel structure of the natural gorge, which I argue functions as a metaphorical place of interiority in the same way that “The Cave” does.

I argue that the fundamental ideology that undergirds this theme of interiority (echoed in the body, as well as the built and natural structures) is that in order to address grief clients must turn toward their internal *griefscape*. Describing the metaphorical cave, Poteat & Wiard write

To heal, we must step into our metaphoric cave. We find the courage to go within and to sit exposed and in pain. Again and again, we take these steps down but emerge and are lifted up by our tears. That which seems overwhelming is bearable when experienced one step at a time. The guidance for each step is found in the present (Poteat & Wiard 2015, 21). The journey into the abyss is not the end. When the pain becomes too difficult to bear, we return to the surface to gain more emotional infrastructure (Poteat & Wiard 2015, 49).

The description of the “metaphoric cave” is quite rich because it offers an interesting paradox, one in which individuals “go within to sit exposed.” Returning to the imagery of the Rio Grande Gorge, it is possible to see how these two aspects of exposure and interior space are embodied by the deep crack within the earth. The crack, while simultaneously opening up an interior space deep beneath the surface, exposes this space, laying it vulnerable. Thus, through its embodiment of the seemingly paradoxical nature of grief, the land renders grief legible. As if to confirm this link between land and grief, Poteat & Wiard write, “The jagged rocks of grief are dulled as we progress toward healing” (2015, 45).

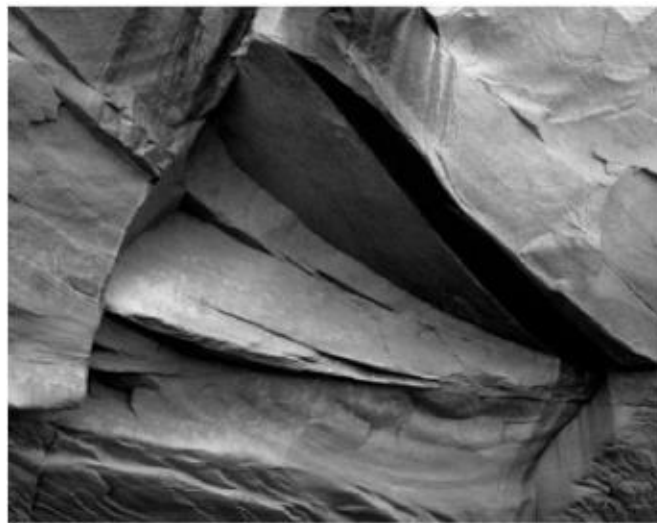
It appears that grief can be well conceptualized through the structures of chasms, and gorges, both of which fall under the category of “lines” that philosophical anthropologist Tim Ingold describes as “cracks.” Ingold writes,

While cuts can be accidental, as in the obvious case of a wounded finger, cracks are usually so. They result from the fracture of brittle surfaces caused by stress, collision, or wear and tear. Because the forces that create cracks are generally both irregular and transverse to lines of breakage, rather than running along them, these lines are typically zigzags rather than curves. [...] Cracks may be commonly observed in nature- in breaking

ice, sunbaked mud, stressed rock, dead wood and the bark of ancient trees. [...] in the landscape, a path of travel may be interrupted by a precipitous gorge in an otherwise level plateau (2007, 45).

Ingold's in depth discussion of the nature of cracks, when used as a metaphor for grief reveals underlying conceptions about grief. Cracks, I argue, are good to think with about complex phenomena such as grief. In particular, grief, conceptualized as a crack reveals the underlying belief that grief *moves*.

To investigate the link between the "crack" as conceptualized within the nonhuman, and the way that loss is described at GWR, I analyze the image and descriptive text within *Witnessing Ted* (2015) that all clients receive during their time at GWR (Figure 7). I argue that the way that the photographs of cracks in stone are paired with definitions of loss serves to explicitly link the experience of grief and loss to the image and concept of a "crack."



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**Loss is a shaking, cracking, or shattering of the
foundation of our personal reality, at times
subtle and at other times, extreme.**

(Figure 7) Scanlon, John M. Grief Crack. 2000. Page 1. *Witnessing Ted*. Golden Willow Retreat. 2011

The photograph that appears on the first page of *Witnessing Ted* (figure 1) depicts a large curvilinear stone that has sustained deep cracks, resulting in the interior space of the rock becoming exposed. Beneath the image is written, “Loss is a shaking, cracking, or shattering of the foundation of our personal reality, at times subtle, and at other times extreme (2015, 4). The image paired with the text makes a direct connection between the experience of a type of grief (loss) and the experience of shattering and cracking that the stone has undergone. I argue that this image serves to normalize the experience of grief, contextualizing it within the natural element of stone.

I find it helpful at this point to turn to more of the language surrounding this aspect of movement of the grief process, which is often referred to as the grief “journey” by Poteat & Wiard.



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(Figure 8) Scanlon, John M. Journey. 2000. Page 22. *Witnessing Ted*. Golden Willow Retreat. 2011

Paired with the image above (Figure 9) they write, “With no road map and no estimated time of arrival, we journey with our emotions, one step at a time”(2015, 22). Through what Poteat & Wiard have written, it is possible to understand the grief “journey” as one that has a different relationship to time and space than other types of movement. To begin to better understand the type of movement that a grief “journey” might entail, I turn to Ingold and his work on “lines.” In his passage cited below, I have taken the liberty of replacing the words “traveling” and “traveler” and ” with “grieving,” and “griever,” respectively, to illustrate the parallels that arise between the type of movement through place that Ingold discusses, and the movements through place brought on by the grief “journey” as discussed by my informants. I believe their apparent interchangeability in this passage is particularly revealing of this connection.

Grieving was not a transitional activity between one place and another, but a way of being ...the act of grieving from or to a particular location plays a part in defining who the griever is. The griever and his line are, in this case, one and the same. It is a line that advances from the tip as he presses on in an ongoing process of growth and development, or of self-renewal (2007, 76).

There are several reasons why I find Ingold’s passage valuable. In replacing “traveling” with “grieving” I wish to demonstrate three things: (1) that grief consists of a particular kind of movement that is akin to this conceptualization of traveling by Ingold; (2) that grieving is an embodied *process* to which movement is integral; and (3) that the grief “journey” produces a “line.” It is useful at this point to define “line” as it is defined by Ingold, and conceptualized within the context of this paper. In his work, Ingold examines two types of lines; “threads” and “traces, ” which he uses to weave together a discussion of how the “line” transformed from a non-linear movement (such as handwriting) and became linear (straight, connecting once point to

another), and later dotted. In the following excerpt, Ingold discusses two different lines that are the result of movements through place.

...the line that develops freely, and in its own time, “goes out for a walk” [...] another kind of line however, is in a hurry. It wants to get from one location to another, and then to another, but has little time to do so. The appearance of this line, says Klee, is “more like a series of appointments than a walk.” It goes from point to point, in a sequence, as quickly as possible, and in principle in no time at all, for every successive destination is already fixed before setting out, and each segment of the line is pre-determined by the points it connects. [...] If the former takes us on a journey that has no obvious beginning or end, the latter presents us with an array of interconnected destination that can, as on a route-map, be viewed all at once (2007, 73).

I argue, that the retreat environment of GWR temporarily forces clients to move in ways that are not “a series of appointments.” Instead, clients are encouraged to embody their grief, and move about in their “own time,” which could be conceptualized as taking their grief “on a walk.” GWR encourages non-linear movement through place; both through its built structures such as the winding flagstone path, and labyrinth but also in its encouragement of clients to spend time outside in the land. Ida, described, “we are always happy when we see clients walking outside, or in the labyrinth- It means they are dropping in, and aren’t trying to avoid their grief.” What Ida describes as “dropping in” is, the shift in attention of GWR clients toward their *griefscape*.



(Figure 9) GWR building. Digital Image. Facebook. Accessed May 1, 2017. www.facebook.com



(Figure 10) Satellite Image of GWR. Digital Image. GoogleMaps. Accessed April 25, 2017. www.googlemaps.com

With the inclusion of Figures 9 & 10, I seek to illustrate the “free,” and curved line as reflected in the curving lines of the built structures themselves. Depicted on the left, the walls of GWR slope gently, on in the satellite image on the right the curving path to the chapel is visible as well as the labyrinth beside the chapel. Carol Poteat, speaking about her first time walking through the built environment of GWR writes,

As we wove our way through the retreat center, I felt a sense of solace and connection through its design as well as its artwork. The community room adjoined the kitchen, creating an open flow. Its many windows looked out on the expanse of the mountains. The well-appointed bedrooms had doors to the outside, reinforcing the idea that visitors could come and go as they wished (2015, 19).

It is possible to see from Carol's brief description of GWR's space that the built structures invite spontaneous, uninhibited, and private interaction with the outdoors. GWR continually emphasizes the agency of clients throughout the retreat experience, and this emphasis is reflected in the presences of the doors. Ida described,

There are doors to the outdoors in every room because we want clients to realize that they are there because they are choosing to be there, and that they are free to go at anytime. I feel like every time I do a tour and I show people the doors, I feel them sinking with a sigh of relief. Letting them know that they are here of their own choice, and that we respect them and trust them is really represented well by the doors in every room.

Ida explained that clients don't know what to expect when they come, and are usually surprised by how "homey" GWR is. She explained that this is intentional, that the biggest thing that GWR does is "normalize the process of grief for them."

The layout of the living space invites clients to move in non-linear ways, winding through the building. Referring back the previous passage, "the griever and his line are, in this case, one and the same." It is possible to see how the lines of these physical movements across place, can be understood as expressions of the grief itself. GWR nurtures the "free" line, that "takes us on a journey that has no obvious beginning or end," and in doing so allows for grief-as-journey to take place, a continuous, unhurried line that weaves through the Northern New Mexican landscape.

Section 5: A Nest in the Gorge

Moving forward, I find it helpful to discuss the significance of "ceremony" in the GWR context. John explained,

We do have people experience ceremony. Ceremony is a time when we drop into a place, to acknowledge, and possibly be acknowledged. So, I believe a big part of our work, is ceremony, so someone can pause, and let the brain stop, and not just go onto the next task, but pay attention when lighting the candle. In the shamanic way it means, “While I’m cooking the broccoli, I’m putting that energy in” because I’m that conscious of the process I’m in. It’s a chop-wood-carry water kind of idea of being that conscious, that mindful of every piece. So ceremony allows someone to take all their experiences, maybe from that day, or maybe from their life, and step into the cave, and glean the wisdom, and have the bravery of stepping out again. Even Nascar, going 200 miles an hour, making left hand turns for 400 laps, well guess what, they have to come into the pit stop, and stop. We could call it the kiva [underground ceremonial space of Taos Pueblo], or ceremony. They come in, they stop, they get realigned, they get their fuel, they get their energy, and then they go back out. So, even in these things you wouldn’t think were spiritual, they’re there. When we breathe out, we actually pause for a second before we breathe in again. So our breath is constantly teaching us to pause, to do ceremony, and then move forward again. So, when we can help someone to simplify it to that, and allow the cognitive to come together with the heart in congruence, and can be aligned, that is where we find serenity.

What I find to be most compelling about John’s definition of ceremony is how he uses “ceremony” as both a verb and as a noun. John’s description of ceremony conveys an understanding of the act of ceremony as a pause, and the practice of ceremony as a shift in awareness, an increased attentiveness to the present moment, and environment. John describes “ceremony” as fundamentally, a “pit stop” in which individuals turn their gaze inward, “coming

In,” “gleaning” their own “wisdom” from their *griefscape* receiving their “fuel,” and reemerging into the world rested, and “realigned.” John emphasizes how the body, enrolled in the action of breathing is “constantly teaching us to pause, to do ceremony.” Conceptualized thus, ceremony is *of the body*, a way of being in the body mindfully thus influencing individual’s experience in the world. I argue that this is what John understands as “spiritual.”

During my time caretaking at GWR, I participated in a closing ceremony for a woman who had lost her mother. Eve had only been able to afford to a four-day program, and in an effort to reduce costs, John also simplified her final ceremony. Her last day fell on a warm and breezy day in late August, and the thunderheads for the evening monsoons had appeared, their billowing whiteness sailing heavy on the horizon. John, Ida, Eve and I set out on a walk, the destination of which was only known by John. Turning right out of GWR’s graveled drive we walked up the dirt road toward the trees. We set out at a swift pace, and John, a fit bit aficionado, remarked on how few steps he had taken that day. We talked as we walked, passing grassy fields, some of which held horses, and others that were densely overgrown with the eager stalks of wild sunflowers and bristling purple thistle (figure 11). The high mountains sloped in the distance, their craggy summits rolling gently under the sky. The dirt road ended, and, stepping across the crumbly banks of the acequia we continued into the trees. A large husky bounded out towards us, and John introduced him as “Oso, the neighbor dog” explaining that the dog comes along on walks. We pressed on, Oso now loping alongside us.

Under the sweet-smelling cover of Piñon trees we wound our way along. We passed a sign covered in sun-bleached bones that read “private property” (Figure 12).



(Figure 11) Dead End Road GWR. Kiersten Figurski Digital Image. Instagram. Accessed May 1, 2017. www.instagram.com



(Figure 12) Private Property Ted Wiard Digital Image. Instagram. Accessed May 1, 2017. www.instagram.com



(Figure 13) Path Leading to the Gorge Kiersten Figurski
Digital Image. Instagram. Accessed May 1, 2017.www.instagram.com



(Figure 14) Path Leading to the Gorge #2 Kiersten Figurski. Digital Image.
Instagram. Accessed May 1, 2017.www.instagram.com



(Figure 15) Rio Grande Gorge Kiersten Figurski Digital Image. Instagram. Accessed May 1, 2017. www.instagram.com

The ground muffled our footsteps with soil not quite forest and not quite desert (Figure 13 & 15). Although there was a trail visibly trodden into the earth, John wove in and out of it, eventually veering sharply to the right. The Gorge stretched out before us, her cleft edges revealing the pulsing artery of grey green waters tumbling over the rocks some 800 feet below us (Figure 15). Walking purposefully towards the rocky edge, John clambered around a few large boulders, and we followed. Beneath us a ledge jutted out above the precipice. Oso lay on the boulder just above our heads, and we settled into a circle around a stone.

The New Mexican quiet is the deepest quiet I have ever experienced. It is the collective hush of hundreds of thousands of acres breathing beneath the sky. Perched upon this ledge within

the gorge lay an even deeper stillness, a silvery silence that reflected off the river below and echoed through this deep chasm. Lifting up a rock at the center of our small circle, John revealed four of what he called “angel seeds,” little terracotta figurines that he described as “watching over” this sacred spot. He spoke for a while, addressing Eve, speaking to her grief over losing her mother. He then asked her if she was ready to release her grief, and passed her two small feathers, instructing Eve to release them when she was ready. After some time Eve held out her hand, and with tears streaming down her face, lifted the feathers up. With a strong gust of wind, the feathers were swept from her hand and into the canyon. We watched them sail until we could see them no longer, Oso panting, the wind drying the tears on Eve’s cheeks. When Eve gestured that she was ready, John concluded the ceremony with a blessing, and we clambered back up the ledge.

In an interview with Ida, who had been present for Eve’s ceremony along with John and I, she referred to the spot of the ceremony as John’s “cliff-side chapel,” she said,

It’s like a nest; doesn’t it remind you of a nest? It’s a place of holding in this really stark landscape. If you think about it, that cliff-side chapel is right there on this side of the gorge. The chapel is perched in this beautiful place, right before, or you can think of it as right after this deep gouging gorge that has just changed your life as you know it before.

From Ida’s passage it is possible to understand several symbolic elements at play. Ida’s likening of the “cliff-side chapel” to a nest perched on the literal cliffs of loss symbolizes several things. Most basically the metaphorical equating of the chapel to a nest conveys and understanding of the people within the nest as eggs. In eggs, the interior space is the source of sustenance, and they must themselves be cracked upon in order for the transformed creature within them to emerge. There is the interior space within the egg, the interior space of the nest, and the nest’s

location within the interior space of the deep gorge. Understood thus, each of these interior spaces are sites of transformation. Eve symbolically releases her grief into the canyon and emerges from the site of the symbolic nest (cave/ gorge) symbolically transformed. The nest then can be understood as located, in a very precarious place, neither deep within the abyss of grief, nor clear of it. In this way, the cliff-side represents a spatiotemporal space within grief, within which individuals can imagine into, and locate themselves.

I find it useful at this point to turn to Victor Turner's symbolic analysis of the liminal. Turner writes,

[...] certain liminal processes are regarded as analogous to those of gestation, parturition, and suckling. Undoing, dissolution, decomposition are accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns. It is interesting to note how, by the principle of the economy (or parsimony) of symbolic reference, logically antithetical processes of death and growth may be represented by the same tokens, for example by huts and tunnels that are at once tombs and wombs [...] (1967, 99).

I argue that in Eve's ceremony, the gorge can be symbolically interpreted as a "tomb," and the nest-like "cliff-side chapel" as womb. Transformation, one of the key themes in liminal processes can be understood as central to the GWR ideology. The theme of interiority I have identified can readily be understood through Turner's discussion of liminal processes. The experience of grief itself, I argue embodies precisely the "logically antithetical processes of death and growth." Speaking to this point, Starr describes, "I had died with my daughter. My old life was over, and I had no interest in cultivating a new one" (2015, 192). As described by Starr, grief can shatter an individual's sense of self, leaving them with an intense sense of dissolution. It is

GWR who guides clients to understand the shattering of their former identity as an opportunity for transformation.

Poteat & Wiard write, “conscious grieving is the ultimate rite of passage and unfolds throughout our time on earth”(2011, 8). Turner defines rites of passage (Van Gennep 1909) as marked by three distinct phases “separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation” (1967, 94). Rites of passage are not limited to the “culturally defined life crises, but may accompany any change from one state to another” (1967, 94-95). Turner’s theoretical framework allows me to understand grief as a liminal rite of passage, and by extension GWR as a liminal site, as individuals, alienated by their grief (separation) come to GWR (limen), and return to society (aggregation).

Section 6: Resonant Terrain

In order to understand the ways in which meaning becomes embedded within the land of GWR, I find it helpful to turn to Fred Myers’ ethnographic work on dreams with the Pintupi people of Australia’s Western desert. Myers’ work explores the ways in which the landscape is understood by the Pintupi as physical evidence of the “Dreamtime.” For the Pintupi, the “Dreamtime” or “dreaming” refers to an Aboriginal ontology in which the features of the land are understood as bearing the evidence of the ancestor’s movements. Relying upon Myer’s work, I explore how place can be understood as the physical embodiment of an event, and in particular, I expand Myers’ discussion of what he terms “country as frame for action” to talk about the ways in which the Rio Grande gorge is framed by the therapists of GWR as a physical embodiment of a “story” of grieving, healing, and, ultimately, transforming. Additionally, I argue that the way the “event” of grief in the landscape is described at GWR by staff introduces a way of thinking

about grief that reformulates clients as agentive individuals capable of traversing their own terrains of grief instead of being crushed by it.

To explore my assertion that the features in the land of GWR embody grief, I find it helpful to discuss Myer's discussion of Pintupi "Dreamtime." He writes,

The actions of these powerful beings—animal, human, and monster—created the world as it now exists. They gave it outward form, identity (a name) and internal structure. The desert is crisscrossed with their lines of travel and, just as an animal's tracks leave a record of what happened, the geography and special features of the land—hills, creeks, salt lakes, trees—are marks of the ancestor's activities. Thus, as the concept by which the Pintupi most frequently appropriate space, *ngurra* always relates demarcated places to activity that gives them meaning (1991, 55).

I find it possible to apply the framework that Myers uses to describe the connection between the land and the dreaming, to describe the way that John and Ida convey a connection between the land and a "story" of grief. Pintupi describe the land in terms of what happened there (which they can perceive as a particular landform) and in the same way, GWR describes the land in terms of what happened there (the transformative power of grief split the land.) Although the "story" that they offers does not necessarily always take the same narrative form as that of the dreaming, it does appropriate place by relating it to an activity or event that gives it meaning. The gorge is not just a gorge anymore, but also a wound, a site of grief.

Myers writes, "This view expresses a fundamental feature of Western Desert thought, as Munn (1970) observed: Sacred objects, country, or songs become the embodiment of events, of activity that has, in a sense, turned into these objects"(1991, 59). I argue that this is precisely what John and Ida's descriptions of the gorge accomplish. The country (in this case the specific

landform of the gorge) becomes, through their descriptions, an embodiment of the event of grief/loss.

This observation of the way that land is conceptualized at GWR— as the embodiment of the events of grief, as well as other stories is key in understanding the particular ways in which clients are urged to participate with the land due to these underlying beliefs. I argue that the land of GWR can be thought of as “prescriptive” in that it is framed by GWR in a particular way that encourages a specific action on the part of the individual. John describes,

If I disclose a story about the land it is to make people feel safe. If they have a story about that ditch [pointing], it isn't dangerous anymore. For someone who has just flown in from New York City [...] the silence can be so loud that they are scared to death. I can tell someone how looking to the West can seem like forever, but when it gets too scary, I can turn around, and tell them a story about these mountains that I'm held by. So all of a sudden the mountains aren't as scary, and the vastness— they know now that they can always turn around and be held. So these sorts of stories help the brain relax, which I believe is key to mindfulness and healing.

From John's description, it is clear that the stories he chooses to disclose to the clients of GWR are intended to both ease the effects of being in a striking, and different landscape, and to encourage a new awareness, and I argue, *attention* to place. By disclosing these small stories to clients, John encourages clients to perceive elements of the retreat environment as thriving embodiments of grief-transformed.

Myers discusses these Pintupi embodiments of stories and events through his concept, “country as a frame for action.” Myer's “country as frame for action” can be defined as a way of understanding physical place as the embodied structure of events that are themselves imbued

with *prescriptive* meaning, by which I mean that they suggest appropriate action based upon the event they represent (1991, 57). The land of GWR isn't described in the same way that the landforms of Pintupi are—as markers of their ancestors' activities, but I argue, it is described in terms of the stories of human and nonhuman grief. Myers observation while very simple, undergirds a fundamental way of thinking about place as non-neutral. Ida offers another example of this in the GWR context. She told me that many of the trees on the GWR grounds have been planted for families and people who have experienced loss. She and John tell clients this, “that tree was planted for a family whose daughter died, this tree was planted for a client whose mother died, and so on.” By describing the trees in terms of the stories attached to them, GWR serves to create a world of meaning in which clients can feel that the experience of grief is reflected in the world around them. Myers writes,

The Pintupi use the visible evidence of the world as a sign to interpret that which happened and is invisible. Country is valuable both for its iconic relationship to The Dreaming (telling a story) and also for the indexical relationship between places and the ancestral power left behind in them (1991, 67).

Similarly, I argue that by describing the “country” of GWR in terms of grief, GWR renders the invisible experience of grief observable. The “country” of GWR is thus valuable for its iconic relationship to the event of grief, and for the indexical relationship between the retreat environment and the power of healing, and transformation within it. Not only is the land not neutral, it is a sign of the event of grief, a visible reminder for something that happened that was invisible, and a source of healing and power. Up until this point I have discussed embodiments of meaning only in the context of the natural environment of GWR. I now turn to the chapel of GWR, and describe the ways in which it too is made to embody meaning.

Beyond the sun-drenched GWR kitchen lies an enclosed courtyard through which an uneven flagstone pathway extends toward the *capilla* (chapel.) The air is profoundly quiet, rippling only occasionally to envelop the braying of a nearby donkey, or the squawking of magpies. As I walk toward the *capilla*, scruffy alfalfa plants brush against my ankles, and catchweed clings to the hems of my trousers. The path takes me in a wide arc, first away from the chapel, and then, after bridging the small *acequia* ditch, past a fire pit enclosed by a low circular wall depositing me at the front doors of the *capilla* (Figures 16-18).



(Figure 16) GWR Acequia Ted Wiard Digital Image.
Instagram. Accessed May 1, 2017.www.instagram.com



(Figure 17) GWR Labyrinth Ted Wiard Digital Image. Instagram. Accessed May 1, 2017.www.instagram.com



(Figure 18) GWR *Capilla*, Fire-Pit, and Labyrinth Ted Wiard. Digital Image. Instagram. Accessed May 1, 2017.www.instagram.com

Once unlatched, the weathered doors open to reveal blonde-wood floors and tall ceilings. The sunlight streams through two small, opposing windows, and dust floats softly in this junction of light. The air within is warmer than outside, and smells of white sage smoke, and melting candle wax. At the other end of the space, facing the door, is the altar. Flanked by Guadalupe candles, a gold encrusted icon of Hindu goddess “Durga” sits, and behind her, a thin cross bears the wedding rings of beloved ones lost. A small menorah stands to the right of Durga, and a photo of a young boy rests on her left. Alcoholics Anonymous chips are stacked in several corners. Several dead butterflies line the front of the alter, and various feathers are tucked between the objects. Below the altar, dozens of tea-light candles burn within a wooden box filled with sand, many of their wicks already spent.

John recounts the story of how the *capilla* was built to every client. He shares with clients the story of how this sacred mud-plastered building was constructed twelve years ago, by eight adolescent boys, each of whom had suffered a loss. Each boy was tasked with designing the chapel, and in the end, each of the boy’s designs was incorporated into its built structure, embodying an aspect of the boy’s grief-story. Some of these young men are no longer alive he tells clients. *Witnessing Ted* contains the story of the chapel,

Every part of this chapel stood for something. [...] The group of children, aged eleven to thirteen, drew the blueprints and participated in every part of the project. They found creative ways to integrate meaning into this sacred space. Made possible by the education fund given to Keri and Amy by the community when Leslie died, the vision for the chapel was to welcome everyone. Always open and heated during the winter, it was free

of rules and not exclusive to any religion. The chapel measured fourteen feet and three inches wide as a tribute to Simon [...] Simon's grief was largely dismissed by the community, as well as by himself. The width of the chapel paid honor to all of the disenfranchised grieverers who feel their story doesn't matter. The girls died in 1996. The significance of the last two digits was not lost on Ted; the top plate or bond beam, measured 9 feet long. Keri was nine when she died. The bottom edge of the cross to the top of the roof measured 6 feet for Amy who was six[when she died].[...] Some belongings of Richard, Leslie, Keri, and Amy were buried under the floorboards in the middle of the chapel, symbolically transforming the physical into the metaphysical. Each student had a special place in the chapel that was sacred. Two boys placed their father's ashes under the floorboards near the altar so that they could "stand" with their father if they later married there. One boy built the hearth for the grandfather who had added much richness and warmth to his family's lives. Another boy used his father's tools to build the chapel. His father was lost in drug addiction, but his tools helped to add something good to the world. [...] The chapel contained 4,320 adobe bricks, and each one was blessed by the boys and members of the Taos community (2015, 58-60).

The telling of the *capilla's* somewhat irreverent origins allows it to become familiar to the client as John evokes gangly boys stacking mud bricks, and sawing two-by-fours while a steady stream of playful obscenities fell from their lips. The *capilla* as an embodiment of grief, reflected through the material ashes and symbolically significant physical dimensions, serves to normalize loss. In this sense, grief is *of* the very place itself, and meaning becomes place. I argue that the story of the *capilla* is central to the experience of the built place itself.

Carin, one of my informants and former client of GWR recounted her experience of the chapel to me. She said,

I remember the altar and all of the photographs. The chapel was plastered with mud, and felt very peaceful and serene. It felt like there was a lot of good energy in there. It was spiritually calming, and I liked being able to leave a photo of my mom there.

I argue that through the stories embedded within the natural, and built environment of GWR, clients are made to feel as though they are part of an infinite lineage of healing and transformation.

To further explore and understand the ways in which meaning becomes embedded in place, I turn to the work of Keith Basso, and his theory of what he terms “place-making.” Basso defines “place-making” as the “world building” practice of linking meaning to place through the “acts of remembering and imagining” (1996, 5). He writes,

It is clear, however, that remembering often provides a basis for imagining. What is remembered about a particular place—including prominently, verbal and visual accounts of what has transpired there—guides and constrains how it will be imagined by delimiting a field of workable possibilities (1996, 5).

I argue that what the therapists of GWR are practicing “place-making” by recounting the “grief stories” that have taken place in the retreat environment or are represented within it. They are creating what Basso terms a “place-world” (1996, 154). Basso writes, “Place-worlds... are not restricted to constructions of the past; they may also be imagined as pertaining to the future (i.e., ‘what will happen here?’)” (1996, 154). GWR describes the built and natural environments in a way that fundamentally reconfigures them, invites clients to imagine themselves as connected to the grief stories of former GWR clients, as well as the landscape around them. There is a future-

looking dimension to the telling of these stories at GWR. Specifically, since the stories told to clients are spatially instead of temporally anchored, (embodied in trees, chapel, and gorges) they create a temporally expansive “place-world.” Clients can thus imagine themselves as intimately participating in an ever evolving embodied story of continual healing and transformation.

I find it helpful to now turn to Basso’s discussion of what he conceptualizes as the “reflective” capacity of place. In textual conversation with philosopher Jean Paul Sartre, Basso writes, “When knowledge and feeling are oriented toward something real, actually perceived, the thing, like a reflector, returns the light it has received from it”(1996, 108). Applying Sartre’s theory to landscape, Basso writes,

Thus, through a vigorous conflation of attentive subject and geographical object, places come to generate their own fields of meaning. So too, they give rise to their own aesthetic immediacies, their own shifting moods and relevancies. So, even in total stillness, places may seem to speak. But, as Sartre makes clear, such voices as places possess should not be mistaken for their own. Animated by the thoughts and feelings of persons who attend to them, places express only what their animators enable them to say; like the thirsty sponges to which the philosopher alludes, they yield to consciousness only what consciousness has given them to absorb[...] As natural reflectors that return awareness to the source from which it springs, places also provide points from which to look out on life, to grasp one’s position in the order of things, to contemplate events from somewhere in particular. Human constructions par excellence, places consist in what gets made of them- in anything and everything they are taken to be-and their disembodied voices, immanent though inaudible, are merely those of people speaking silently to themselves (1996, 108-109).

I find Basso's conceptualization of the reflective quality of place, and land riveting. The reflective capacity of land enables a connection between mind and land, in which the silent thoughts of individuals are rendered perceivable through this process of reflection. To illustrate this in the GWR context, I return to informant Ananda's experience with the land. In the passage that I have previously discussed in terms of illustrating her sense of connection with the GWR landscape, I now find particularly useful in illustrating the "reflective capacity of the land" as it has been described by Basso. Ananda recounted,

The objects in my pockets become small reflections of my thoughts, as I create a small collection of emotion, and thoughts momentarily contained within these seeds, and stones. These treasures hold my thoughts, my hand holds these objects, and the land holds me.

GWR recognizes this "reflective" capacity of the land to echo back the "immanent though inaudible" voices "of people speaking silently to themselves" as possessing deeply therapeutic value, and consequently encourage, and facilitate the result human/nonhuman interaction. In fact, John references this phenomenon explicitly when he told me, "when we start to notice the physical [landscape] we are looking in our own mirror."

I argue that it is for this reason that GWR encourages clients to engage with the land, employing the concept of "spirituality" to facilitate a different kind of awareness that allows for a careful attention, and mindfulness, to what Lea has termed, the "smallest spaces of connection between land and self"(Lea 2008, 95). I argue that "spirituality" in the GWR context is utilized in order to articulate, the experience of "interconnectivity" that the interaction between human and nonhuman within retreat environment gives rise to. John discusses spirituality in the following passage saying,

We are very adamant that we are of no religion, or pushing any religion, or any belief. Spirituality can be God, or a higher power, but it can also be a cognitive process. It can be that all of a sudden I *notice* the birds, so I am *connected* to earth. That's a spiritual experience. At Golden Willow we don't push "Spirituality," I would be really upset at that.

I argue that what John describes as his understanding of "spirituality" is somewhat divorced from the complex indigenous ontologies, and religious practices that the term is generally used to describe. I argue that John employs the word "spirituality" instead to describe a different form of "attention," or mindfulness within the retreat environment. John, I argue, uses the word "spirituality" because it references indigenous ontologies which conceive of "connection" between the human and nonhuman in a fundamentally different way than what Western thought allows. In short, I argue that instead of merely appropriating the practices, of indigenous ontologies, John is instead relying upon them for the theoretical frameworks and vocabulary they offer him to think about interconnectedness in the human/ nonhuman encounter.

In further exploring why John conceptualizes the word "spirituality" in the ways that he does, I find it particularly useful to turn to the work of, indigenous scholar Kim Tallbear and her work, "*Beyond the Life/Not-Life Binary: A Feminist-Indigenous Reading of Cryopreservation, Interspecies Thinking, and the New Materialisms*." Tallbear writes,

Indigenous thinkers have important contributions to make to conversations in which human societies rethink the range of nonhuman beings with which we see ourselves in intimate relation and, precisely because of the varied ways in which indigenous peoples relate, our possibilities for being the world. [...] Now that theorists in a range of fields are seeking to dismantle those hierarchies, we should remember that not everyone needs to

summon a new analytical framework or needs to renew a commitment to “the vitality of [so-called] things.” Indigenous standpoints that never constructed hierarchies in quite the same way can and should be at the forefront of this new ethnographic and theoretical work. We can converse with the existing work and bring additional insights. And by “indigenous thought” I do not mean some static notion of indigenous “traditional” knowledge, but rather engagement with the thinking that living indigenous people do today (2017, 192-193).

I find the therapeutic potential of ideologies in which “interconnectivity” and “relatedness” are central, as practically self-evident: it allows GWR clients who feel deeply alienated, profoundly alone, and disconnected from the world around them a way of reconnecting, and in turn a way of *feeling connected* to the world though the act of simply noticing the environment they are in.

This act of attentiveness, of “noticing” is what John defines as a “spiritual experience.”

TallBear, in textual conversation with the work of scholar David Delgado Shorter, writes, Take, for example, the recent work of another scholar of (Yoeme) indigenous thought, David Delgado Shorter. He provides us language that goes beyond the “spiritual” for capturing the kinds of “interspecies” (perhaps “cross-beings” is a more inclusive term) forms of relating that indigenous peoples have engaged in.

Shorter, in turn, asserts,

Critical analyses of the oral stories and earliest ethnographic accounts continue to reveal that rather than being “spiritual,” native people were relating. ... Less cumbersome than “intersubjective,” “related” might best replace “spiritual” since it neither denies possible theisms or hierarchies. One’s relations are not solely related by blood, or tribal heritage. They are the families chosen and not chosen.

They are the humans and other-than-humans sharing and withholding power. They counter solitude with solidarity. They provide meaning and identity beyond the confines of race, tribe, and species. In these ways, being related offers more than any abstract notion of religion or “spirituality” ever could. (Shorter 2016, 20)(TallBear 2017, 192-193).

I argue that “spirituality” the way it is conceived of, at GWR functions to provide clients with a way of thinking about themselves as connected to the land around them through the language of “relation.” To illustrate this, I find it useful at this point to turn to my interview with Keith, the therapist responsible for “Spirit care” at GWR.

Keith lives halfway between my parent’s home in Arroyo Hondo, and GWR. On the morning of our interview I turned out of my parent’s driveway, and onto the Hondo Seco road, making my way down the corkscrew turns into the valley of Arroyo Hondo. The road wound down, through a small canyon, past the rocks that lined the sides of the road, pocking the sandy cliffs pocked with empty spaces. Emerging from the canyon, I drove into the mouth of valley. On my left, furry sunflower stalks clustered towards each other, and beyond a barbed wire fence, a pair of hazelnut-colored horses picked their way reluctantly through the snowy sagebrush. Turning right, just before the first speed bump, I drove into Keith’s driveway, the sound of my tires muffled against the saturated dirt road. Partially swallowed by tall aspens, Keith home nestles at the edge of this lush valley. I parked my car alongside Keith’s green Subaru Forester, and rusty Toyota pickup truck. Swallowing the remainder of my hash brown breakfast, I stepped my way through the soggy earth to his doorstep.

Keith greeted me at the door, and immediately my nose is filled by the smoky smells of copal, frankincense, sage, piñon, and tobacco. He always smells like this, and as I embrace him I

can smell the spicy, earthy scent of the Osha root that he often chews. Inside, his woodstove pops, and crackles, letting off a deep orange glow against the rich speckled brown of Keith's adobe walls. Wooden vigas grace the top of large windows, and outside the mountains gleam white against a shatteringly blue sky. Keith wears an iteration of what he always wears; well fitting, slightly faded Levis, and a clean muslin shirt of south American origin. Today the shirt he sported was a washed out, light orange hue. His grey and white streaked, shoulder length hair was pulled into a neat ponytail, and tiny beaded bracelets lay against his wrists. His face, although deeply lined was tan, and his bright blue eyes and neat beard made him appear decades younger than his 73 years of age.

I sat on a blue and white dyed blanket on one of the couches facing toward the woodstove, and Keith sat in a wooden rocking chair in front of me. After presenting him with my consent form, I took out my iPhone with which I recorded our conversation. Our interview followed a semi-structured format, and throughout the course of it I occasionally asked Keith to elaborate upon various points as he spoke. He began by saying, "There is no such thing as "the land. We as human beings are [land.] Our makeup as human beings is the same as [land]. We also are made up of earth, air, fire, water." In expressing his belief to me that people are the land, Keith highlighted the connection he believes humans have with the land. He elaborated on this point saying,

If we as human beings are alive, conscious beings, and if we are land, and the land is us, and we are the spirit of the land, there is no disconnection[...]That brings us to the point of non-separation. Because the other part of this is that what is appearing to us in and out of the land, we've actually created. We've dreamed it up. Therefore, if we've dreamed it up, it has that specific meaning to the individual that dreamed it up.

The land in this sense, and the experiences individuals have with the land, be it an encounter with a strong wind, or object that appears in their path, is recognized at GWR as an expression of the individual themselves at that moment. It is possible to perceive Basso's theoretical framework at work within what Keith asserts. Keith's assertion that "what is appearing to us in and out of the land, we've actually created" is precisely what Basso identifies as the capacity for the land to "reflect," and "return awareness to the place from which it springs"(Basso 1996, 109). I argue that what Keith describes as "dreaming up" is comparable to Basso's assertion that "objects generate their own fields of meaning through vigorous conflation between attentive subject and geographical object"(1996, 108). As such, I argue that interaction with the land in the GWR context has the capacity to give rise to meaningful experiences that reflect back the innermost thoughts of GWR clients. In summary, what appears to clients in the land, whether it is animal, plant or stone, is a reflection of the client himself or herself. It is with regard to this belief that the journey through the landscape is seen as a journey through the terrain of the self. The spirit care that Keith offers (therapy sessions with an explicit focus upon these encounters between the land and the individual) then is a way of understanding the experiences had in the physical world, and how they relate to, and perhaps aid individuals in understanding their own internal worlds of grief. The concept of "relatedness" thus can be recognized as a key concept in conceptualizing the nonhuman landscape of GWR, and clients place within it. Pointing to this Keith said,

North American indigenous people- refer to everything as their relative. The deer that comes to me, or the deer that is out there [gesturing towards to outside] is my relative. It's my relation. We might learn from some indigenous cultures how to develop and grow that connection, and wholeness within ourselves, but how we honor and feed the spirit of

the land has to come from the land and from ourselves. So although we may get introduced and find something powerful within other cultures, traditions, ceremonies and ways of life, eventually we, I think, have to develop our own ceremonies, songs, our own things that grow and evolve out of our walks in [the land], and our connection with [the land]. So if we just adopt another cultures practices, we're not getting anywhere.

Remaining cognizant of the problematic ways in which Keith has appropriated, and conflated dozens of indigenous ontologies, I argue that he has done so in order to articulate a way of understanding human beings and the nonhuman world as fundamentally connected.

Conclusion

In concluding this project, I wish to advocate for an anthropological inquiry that further expand the bounds of multispecies anthropology beyond the living "body" to the elements of the land itself, and to the "bodies" that are "not alive." Jane Bennet's work, *Vibrant Matter a Political Ecology of Things* (2010), explores what she refers to as "the vitality of (nonhuman) bodies"(viii, 2010). Bennet asks,

How would political response to public problems change were we to take seriously the vitality of (nonhuman) bodies. By "vitality" I mean the capacity of things- edibles, commodities, storms, metals- not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents of forces with trajectories of their own (viii, 2010).

Expanding upon Bennet's question, I ask how a consideration of the "vitality" of nonhuman entities within the therapeutic context, might be similarly considered for their capacity to function as "quasi agents of force with trajectories of their own," and how such a

conceptualization of the nonhuman landscape might reveal new ways of understanding the human-land encounter in terms of its therapeutic potential. Bennet elaborates,

For some time political theory has acknowledged that materiality matters. But this materiality most often refers to human social structures or to the human meanings “embodied” in them and other objects [...] Dogged resistance to anthropocentrism is perhaps the main difference between the vital materialism I pursue and this kind of historical materialism. I will emphasize, even overemphasize the agentic contributions of nonhuman forces (operating in nature, in the human body and in human artifacts) in an attempt to counter the narcissistic reflex of human language and thought. We need to cultivate a bit of anthropomorphism- the idea that human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature- to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world (xvi)

Although it has not been within the scope of this project, I find myself, at the end of my exploration deeply interested in the “agentic” contributions of the nonhuman, both in the therapeutic encounter, and beyond it.

What can be learned by thinking differently about that which is “not alive”—beyond acknowledging its capacity to simply “reflect” the meaning we endlessly project upon it? Through my project I have explored the significance of a specific place, a land comprised of built and natural structures, and countless, nonhuman, and “not alive” elements. I have explored the land-self encounter within GWR as giving rise to “connective imaginaries.” Now, I find myself turning to a multispecies framework to question the ways in which the nonhuman elements of the land may have been actively enrolled in the creation of these “imagined” spaces of connection, and asking the question of just how “imagined” the “connection” might be?

Multispecies anthropologist Eduardo Kohn's advocates for what he terms , an "anthropology of life" (2007, 17). He writes, "lives are more than bodies, even though they can never fully be disembodied"(2007, 17). Kohn's assertion is powerful because it seeks to undo the assumptions about the experience of living as exclusively predicated, upon the body of the living being itself. In other words, although he is not denying the existence of bodies, and perhaps more specifically, nonhuman bodily differences, he is arguing for an approach that understands the experience of non-human "living" as extending beyond the physical experience, and perhaps into experiences of shared consciousness. In the following passage Kohn argues for "...the kind of anthropology that is possible when we allow the exigencies of a trans species ethnography to break us out of the loop that traps humans as analytical objects within a framework of analysis that is exclusively human (2007, 18). Kohn has argued compellingly (2007) that modes of interacting between species are not always limited by bodies, and can in fact serve to transgress the boundaries of the body and notions of forms of interaction that are limited to bodies (2007, 18).

The focus of my inquiry has been in understanding the land-self encounter in the GWR landscape as it is mediated by the experience of grief. Guided by the somewhat slippery theoretical approaches that I have employed to aid in my exploration of this topic, I allowed myself to slither through the many landscapes of grief in an attempt to capture the multidimensional topography of grief and transformation. My analysis, I believe would have been greatly strengthened, with the addition of several more GWR client voices, and moving forward in my research of this topic, finding a way to include them without compromising ethical or privacy considerations will be a priority. By no means comprehensive, or conclusive, I offer this project as a vignette, illustrating one of the ways that people choose to grieve—through

an embodied wandering akin to dreaming— that weaves a gentle line through the silent witness of the Northern New Mexican desert.

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