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To The Woods

Julian Langer

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To The Woods
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Civilisation its Cause and Cure by Edward Carpenter
Walking by Henry David Thoreau
The Living Mountain by Nan Shepherd
Becoming Animal by David Abram
This Present Moment by Gary Snyder
Dark Ecology by Timothy Morton
A Primitivist Primer by John Moore
Man's Search For Meaning by Viktor Frankl

Polecats the dark bandits
Mink prized for their fur

Pre-ancientist

I have lived upon this archipelago for 750,000 years. I am
beyond your ancients.

Body

I am beautiful
in black and grey and white
visually stunning
to see a delight

Cubs

born usually in February
true Imbolc child
each birth today
a revolt against the machines
of annihilation

Culls

Scapegoat
Criminal for existing
Totalitarian agriculture
Must annihilate
Gunshots and cages
Come down and deny life

Recommended Reading

Walking in the Woods: Go Back To Nature With The
Japanese Way Of Shinrin-Yoku by Yoshifumi Miyazaki
Wild Therapy by Nick Totten
Civilisation and its Discontents by Sigmund Freud

Introduction

The writings contained within this document are those that I wrote for my course training as a shinrin yoku guide, through Nature and Therapy UK. These consist of two essays, one “objective” and the other “personal”, the write up for a medicine-walk I engaged in, as well as three plant studies and one animal study presented through poems (previously published in zine form).

The decision to share these writings here has come with two distinct desires. The first is to provide easily accessible information for those interested in shinrin yoku for their personal mental health and wellbeing. The second is affirm shinrin yoku as a therapy of rebellion-as-healing and mind-changing.

There already exists activist therapies to help facilitate rebellion as healing from the traumas and repression people experience living amidst this culture, such as Soma therapy (also known as Anarchist Play Therapy) and Mutual Aid Self/Social Therapy (shortened to MAST). Both Soma therapy and MAST come with their own critiques and challenges of existing social structures and relations, which they try to provide healing from as rebellion. Likewise, shinrin yoku presents immediate counter-cultural qualities that refuse conformity to cultural norms that are harmful, though much more ecologically oriented with its focus on other-than-human presence. The main challenges here are directed towards the cultural norms of ecological alienation and anxiety, as well as the normalisation of harm towards other-than-human living beings and their annihilation.

One of the main qualities of shinrin yoku that differs from both Soma therapy and MAST is that it does not require an activist scene or culture that is open to engaging in the activity, and can be practiced individually, even without a guide, with an understanding of how to do it — though it might be useful to first learn from a guide for some individuals. Shinrin

yoku equally can be done, like Soma therapy and MAST, as a group activity; and potentially include practices that are usual for them both when looking to work with the desire for tribal relationships. The one advantage I see Soma therapy and MAST having for activist therapies is in the context of highly urban environments and/or those locations where there are no local woods, forests or parks with tree coverage, where these other practices might be to the benefit of those looking to engage in therapeutic healing as rebellion. Otherwise, shinrin yoku equals, if not surpasses (in the context of ecological-resistance), these forms of therapeutic rebellion — my personal biases acknowledged!

I came to train as a shinrin yoku guide after many years of activist praxis, focused on ecological defence and preservation. As well as engaging in direct actions, I have written and had published books, short stories and poetry collections, done talks at universities and academic conferences, been invited to talk on podcasts, and have even been seen on TV sharing love for wildlife and woods. This embrace of shinrin yoku praxis has come with my belief that it is through the changing of minds, perspectives and, with this, relationships where ecological healing (which is more and more needed) is to be found, rather than through political programs and systems (here paraphrasing the great environmentalist writer Daniel Quinn).

It is my sincere belief that shinrin yoku is an activity that can help folk lessen the harms of living in this culture and encourage healing, personal and ecological. It is not hidden that many people are living with the experience of depression, post traumatic stress and other psychological struggles, and that this is not going away. It is also not hidden that many, especially young men, are choosing suicide out of a feeling of being unable to live amidst this culture. That support systems and institutions are overwhelmed with years-long wait lists, where people are being lost and dying amidst, is awful. We also live in a culture where it is more and more apparent that matters

Badger Poetry

My love of badgers

I love badgers
Days and nights
Visiting setts
As activist, friend and tribe
The image of one
On my arm for life
I could not bleed ink
And write words
Adequate to express
The depth of this love
With a blood filled pen

Zones

My shinrin yoku practice
Is situated within
Cull zones
And that is somewhat
Horrifying and
Intensely revolting

Nocturnal

night seer
dark breather
star gazer
moon walker

Family

Otters of the water
Stoats who love to hunt
Weasels who are very small
Chocolate coated pine martins

9,000 years ago
& for 4,000 years
This archipelago was
A giant oak forest.
With the neolithic
Totalitarian agricultural-revolution
Wild oak wood fell
& again, as Rome brought
Modernity & the Anglo-Saxons
Continued the revolutionary Cause
I long for reforestation
I love every oak I meet

Oak Medicine

Bark & acorns: traditional
remedies for those who have
been poisoned.

I Want To Become-Oak

I want to become-oak
In life & death
In thought & deed
So my breath
May be breath to others
So I may be hone, habitat and food
To countless individuals
So I may be strong
Through all storms
As I sit
& meditate
Beneath these trees
I am becoming
Oak tree

such as global warming, biodiversity loss and war, are daily norms. Shinrin yoku is not a solution or a fix for all of this, but is possibly something that can help individuals survive, live with greater ease, and encourage healing.

I have chosen to create a therapy practice where shinrin yoku is a large part of the counselling sessions I provide and where I offer individuals the opportunity to learn how to do shinrin yoku as an everyday mental and physical health hygiene practice, for those not looking for psychotherapy. This has been motivated by a personal desire to earn a living that is as ethically whole as possible for me, within the context of living amidst this culture.

This e-booklet is primarily aimed at providing an account of what shinrin yoku involves for those interested in engaging in the practice for themselves or in the context of activist group therapies. The text is largely personal, save for the first essay, and articulates my experience of training as a shinrin yoku guide and practice, which has its differences to those of other guides and practitioners. As such, I will say that this is not intended to be treated as THE-WAY or THE-PHILOSOPHY of shinrin yoku.

The truth is that it is not necessary to read this to do shinrin yoku, as the practice does not require words to be done. It is at its core slow, sensually attentive, walking in forests, woods and parks with tree coverage and plant life; and, while a guide or a book might be able to suggest meditations or activities to help ease the experience, this can be done by anyone who can get to locations that are suitable, without reading materials or a guide.

Shinrin Yoku Science and Evidence

In this essay I seek to provide an objective account of the tradition of shinrin yoku and evidence surrounding it as

an ecotherapeutic approach with significant health benefits. While shinrin yoku has substantial links to religious, spiritual and mystical traditions, such as shinto, animism, pagan religions, taoism and others, and is in experience intensely personal, phenomenological and subjective; I focus here on shinrin yoku in the context of scientific and therapeutic discourses. This is not to disregard those aforementioned other aspects of shinrin yoku, but to not overstep the aims of this essay.

The first matter here is to say what shinrin yoku is. Shinrin yoku as a distinct tradition and term originates in the 1980s, from work developed by The Japanese Department of Forests and Fisheries, and directed by medical scientist Miyazaki Yoshifumi. Shinrin yoku in Japanese script is 森林浴 and directly translates as forest (shinrin – 森林) bath (yoku – 浴)¹. In his book *Walking in the Woods: Go Back To Nature With The Japanese Way Of Shinrin-Yoku*, Yoshifumi states that “(s)imply put, *shinrin-yoku* is the practice of walking slowly in woods, in no hurry, for a morning, an afternoon or a day”. Another researcher into “forest medicine”, Qing Li, has stated that “... Shinrin-yoku means bathing in the forest atmosphere, or taking in the forest through our senses. This is not exercise, or hiking, or jogging. It is simply being in nature, connecting with it through our sense of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch”². For the purposes of this essay, I shall use “sensually attentive slow walking in woods and/or forests” as a working definition of shinrin yoku.

In his aforementioned book, Yoshifumi describes the research into shinrin yoku he has been involved in and the results of this research, as well as suggesting what the future of “forest therapy research” might involve. This research

¹ <https://bureauoflinguisticalreality.com/portfolio/shinrin-yoku-森林浴/>

² <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9665958/>

Philip

Often when thinking
of oak trees
I think of Philip
& the oak by the stream
near our houses
& feel gladness & gratitude
that he is one of my fathers

A Friend

A friend
A beautiful, gentle, loving, caring
friend
Called me an oak tree
& my heart shone
For the gift of this name

Ents

Tolkein’s walking
Talking trees
Inspired by oaks
Such as these

Gods

I can appreciate oaks
As Druidic Gods
While not worshipping them
But meeting them as friend &
tribe
& appreciating time with those
who regard them as divine

9,000 Years

With ice age’s end
Oak made home here

I would need to do battle
With sharp weapons
& harsh skin
In a landscape dominated by a culture at war
Against the living world, holly
Strikes me as a warrior plant.

Wild!

Neither chaotic nor ordered
There is a wildness to holly bodies
That is somewhat incomprehensible
But undeniably there
I sit and gaze
Unable to figure it out
Loving the confusion
This place has gifted me

Bird Berries

I do not eat
These berries
I see them
As food for birds
Not for me

Oak Poetry

Acorn

Tiny acorn
Rain & soil
Earth & death
Sun & wind
Here has become
This giant oak tree

pertains to tracking physiological changes in the bodies of individuals who have undergone shinrin yoku. By measuring brain activity, autonomic nervous activity, stress markers in saliva and immune activity, his research showed a reduction in the physiological signs of stress in participants, as well as other health benefits. Using near-infrared spectroscopy and time-resolved spectroscopy to measure the concentration of oxygenated haemoglobin in the brain, tests on brain activity were conducted. Autonomic nervous system activity was measured by tracking heart rate variability, using a device that recognises pulse waves in blood vessels, through fingers. Cortisol and the enzyme α -amylase, both of which are indicators for stress, were measured through saliva. Finally, natural killer cells, found in the blood and guard against tumours and infections, were measured to test the impact on the nervous system. The field and laboratory tests done by Yoshifumi's teams found the following health benefits from shinrin yoku —

- Improvements in immunity.
- Increased parasympathetic nervous system activity resulting in greater relaxation.
- Reduced stress with less sympathetic nervous system activity.
- Reduction in blood pressure after just 15 minutes.
- Reduced feelings of stress and reported general sense of improved wellbeing.

This research is further supported by that of Li, who states the following benefits from shinrin yoku in his article Effects of forest environment (Shinrin-yoku/Forest bathing) on health promotion and disease prevention —the Establishment of “Forest Medicine” —

“1 Shinrin-yoku increases human natural killer (NK) activity, the number of NK cells, and the intracellular levels of anti-cancer proteins, suggesting a preventive effect on cancers.

2 Shinrin-yoku reduces blood pressure and heart rate showing preventive effect on hypertension and heart diseases.

3 Shinrin-yoku reduces stress hormones, such as urinary adrenaline and noradrenaline and salivary/serum cortisol contributing to stress management.

4 Shinrin-yoku increases the activity of parasympathetic nerves and reduces the activity of sympathetic nerves to stabilize the balance of autonomic nervous system.

5 Shinrin-yoku improve sleep.

6 Shinrin-yoku increases the levels of serum adiponectin and dehydroepiandrosterone sulfate.

7 In the Profile of Mood States (POMS) test, Shinrin-yoku reduces the scores for anxiety, depression, anger, fatigue, and confusion, and increases the score for vigor, showing preventive effects on depression.

8 Shinrin-yoku may apply to rehabilitation medicine

9 Shinrin-yoku in city parks also has benefits on human health.

10 Shinrin-yoku may have preventive effect on COVID-19 by boosting immune function and by reducing mental stress.”

Li’s research into the impacts of shinrin yoku on human immune function and stress hormones showed a key aspect of the improvements individuals engaging in shinrin yoku experience, is the impact of chemicals called phytoncides released by plants, especially trees³. Phytoncides are a part of a plant’s organic defence mechanisms, to protect itself from insects, animals and fungal threats. In his conclusion Li states — “Because NK cells can kill tumor cells by releasing anti-cancer proteins, such as perforin, GRN, and GrA/B, and forest bathing trips increase NK activity and the intracellular level of anti-cancer

³ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2793341/>

Holly Poetry

Evergreen

I do not have adequate words
To express my appreciation
For these plants
Who hold their colour
Whose bodies stay strong
Throughout winter’s harshness
Through darkness and cold
In my-being
I try to find a space
That is evergreen
It is not always visible
And can be hard to find
But within my primal animal
There is a forest that is evergreen
Perhaps shinrin yoku is an attempt
To help others find the evergreen forests
That live within their being

Fight

These are not gentle beings
They are not tender or soft
They are not easily handled
They are strong and tough and harsh
I am fond of those
Who have fight within
& do not hide this
But are who they are plainly
If I were to take
A holly leaf
& try to tear
& smell the phytoncides

Mass produced, as produce
Not living individuals
For consumerist
Consumption
Industrialised hyper-exploitation
Factory farmed
Garlic
I eat this & live with the
Discomfort of no ethical
Options for surviving
Too-fucking-late-krapitalism

Wild

I fucking
Love
Wild garlic!

Diaspora

The garlic crescent
From the Tian Shan Mountains
Brought to Mesopotamia
Then Egypt, China & Greece
Displaced by civilisation
Now growing around the world
I notice my empathy
Thinking of myself as a Jew
Here I sit surrounded by
Ramson garlic
Observing that we are not
Indigenous or native to this land
Yet here we are are
Here we live

proteins, the above findings suggest that forest bathing trips may have a preventive effect on cancer generation and development.”

What Yoshifumi and Li have found in their respected research is in line with research regarding what is called The Biophilia Hypothesis. Biophilia as a term was first used by psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, to describe being attracted to living presence, and was later expanded by sociobiologist and ecologist E. O. Wilson. In his book *Biophilia*, Wilson defines biophilia as “the urge to affiliate with other forms of life”⁴. Wilson states “(m)odern biology has produced a genuinely new way of looking at the world that is incidentally congenial to the inner direction of biophilia. In other words, instinct is in this rare instance aligned with reason... to the degree that we come to understand other organisms, we will place a greater value on them, and on ourselves”. While Fromm and Wilson’s thought is arguably dated, more recent research on biophilia is supportive of the idea of a primary drive oriented towards affiliation with more than human living presence. Meta-analytic research undergone through Deakin University came out in support of The Biophilia Hypothesis, with the affirmation that there are gaps in the scientific understanding⁵. Another more recent example is found through the work of biologist and philosopher Andreas Weber, who articulates a biological basis for the desire to affiliate with other living beings, stating that “(w)e long to connect with an other—be it word, skin, food, or air—in order to become ourselves”, in his book *Matter and Desire*⁶. In summary, the research gone into The Biophilia Hypothesis and the existence of an embodied desire to experience more than human living presence is supportive of research done by forest

⁴ <https://archive.org/details/edward-o.-wilson-biophilia>

⁵ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9186521/>

⁶ *Matter and Desire: An Erotic Ecology*

medicine researchers and their conclusions regarding shinrin yoku.

Research by the UK charity Mental Health Foundation is also supportive of what is being put forward by forest medicine science and shinrin yoku advocates. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, they analysed the statical data from various studies of the impact of being in/with “nature” — which they define as “wild plants, animals, ecosystems, landscapes and water-scapes” — on mood, mental health, stress, connectedness and other factors⁷. The results from this analysis of the data from these studies was overwhelmingly affirming of the positive impact of being with/in “nature”. One of the main factors of their findings was a need to move away from what could be called “tourism” to greater relationship with “nature” in an immediate and local sense — “(o)verall, the most important implication of this research evidence is a need to shift our focus from getting people to visit natural and sometimes remote spaces to giving more attention to the nature around them. This includes focusing on how people can tune in and connect with “everyday” nature close to home through simple activities. Not only does this closer relationship with nature improve mental wellbeing, it helps nature too”.

A report published in 2022, through Nature — titled Bird-songs alleviate anxiety and paranoia in healthy participants — follows this same trend in research findings. A team, lead by E. Stobbe, investigated the impacts of urban (traffic) and natural (birdsong) soundscapes, on mood, cognition and state paranoia⁸. Their research found — “(t)he traffic noise soundscapes were associated with a significant increase in depression (small effect size in low, medium effect size in high diversity condition). Concerning the birdsong conditions, depression exclu-

⁷ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHAW21-Nature-research-report.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-022-20841-0>

global warming

Garlic Breath

I am rarely happier
Than with the smell on my breath
When walking
After eating wild garlic leaves
And tame, overly socialised, ultra-domesticated
featherless bipeds keep their distance
I feel feral and free

Names

Purple strips
Silver skins
Hard necks
Elephant
Bear
Soft necks
Rotambole
&, my favourite, ramsons who grow for miles
around my home

Medicine

Health enriching
Sulphur compounds
Like allicin
Feeding the body
To heal
To be well
What a gift!

Domesticated

Farmed, domesticated,
Captured & assimilated
Into totalitarian agriculture

and the present and I am doing my best to affirm where I have been and where I am now here. What this might change into I do not know, but I have done my best to articulate a description of how this is now. Upon the diagnosis of the ocular tumour I began writing my seventh book on eco-activist philosophy, which I recently sent to a publisher for their consideration — which feels like possibly the end of my explorations into philosophy that began when I was 15, was the focus of my undergraduate studies and has gone alongside of my 11 years of writing in activist discourses. One of the main affirmations of this book, which is very influenced by the Jewish-existentialist philosopher Lev Shestov, is the affirmation of despair being the penultimate word, with love being the last word (in my philosophy). With this, amidst the ecological-despair of global warming and mass extinction, my emerging shinrin yoku praxis is an encouragement of love for life, for our-selves as embodied individuality and differentiation, and for earth, who cries out for healing and recovery from the dis-eases of civilisation.

Garlic Poetry

March 3rd 2023

I arrive in one of my
woods
To find a sea of
garlic
Has risen like a tide &
flooded
The scene with wild
fury
Like the rising seas
visiting
With the song of

sively decreased after exposure to the high diversity soundscape (small effect size). Anxiety and paranoia significantly decreased in both birdsong conditions (medium effect sizes). For cognition, no effects were observed. In sum, the present study suggests that listening to birdsongs regardless of diversity improves anxiety, while traffic noise, also regardless of diversity, is related to higher depressiveness. Moreover, for the first time, beneficial, medium-sized effects of birdsong soundscapes were demonstrated, reducing paranoia⁹. As woods are habitats where birds nest and can generally be heard, this is further evidence to the benefits of shinrin yoku.

The research regarding bilateral stimulation and its impact on trauma processing is also supportive of the findings from forest medicine science, pertaining to the mental health benefits of walking in woods/forests. Research into bilateral stimulation and its role in Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy for individuals living with post traumatic stress has found it to be positive for mental health, though there are still acknowledged unknowns in the research⁹. Bilateral stimulation is not limited to EMDR though. The process can be achieved through running¹⁰ and walking¹¹, and so is already an aspect of shinrin yoku practices and forest medicine.

The idea that the urban environment of “civilisation” is not good for the health of humans is not a new one. In his book *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud affirmed that civilisation is founded upon the renunciation of instinct, the repression of what Nature and Therapy UK call “the savage self”, and that from this neurosis (“mental illness” in contemporary discourse) is born — though Freud encourages this re-

⁹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5061320/>

¹⁰ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-01654-z>

¹¹ <https://www.traumatherapistinstitute.com/blog/The-Science-Behind-Bilateral-Stimulation>

pression, as an advocate for civilisation¹². Prior to this, the 19th century poet philosopher Edward Carpenter had also affirmed civilisation as being harmful to mental and bodily wellness and health¹³. The affirmations of Carpenter and Freud are further substantiated in more contemporary therapy discourses, with embodied relational therapist Nick Totten affirming the harms of civilisation on the health of humans in his research, as well as the healing that can emerge through being with more than human living presence¹⁴. In affirming the negative impacts of civilisation, the positive impacts from forest medicine/shinrin yoku are apparent.

In summary: shinrin yoku, which means forest bathing, is a practice of sensually attentive slow walking in woods or forests that has positive impacts on bodily and mental health. These benefits have most directly been evidenced by the field and laboratory researches of teams directed by the scientists Miyazaki Yoshifumi and Qing Li in Japan. However, these studies are further substantiated by research in biophilia, the impacts of natural soundscapes, the evidence regarding bilateral stimulation and the discourse analysis provided by the charity Mental Health Foundation. Further, the claims of forest medicine science can be emphasised through therapy discourses pertaining to the negative impacts of urban environments. From this, it is entirely fair to state that there is a strong evidentiary basis for shinrin yoku practices.

References

¹² Civilisation and its Discontents

¹³ Civilisation its Cause and Cure

¹⁴ Wild Therapy

and earth (to borrow from Nietzsche's philosophy). This is a huge aspect of my practice with clients and what I want to gift them through shinrin yoku sessions; the embrace of their flesh, earth and to empower them to help them overcome those struggles they experience, however that looks for them.

The two most significant changes to my perspective I have undergone throughout my engagement with this course have pertained to religion and science. Whilst I retain a strong distaste for the political machines of organised institutional religions and much of their repressive teachings; I have found myself more and more aesthetically attracted to tribal and folk religions that are immediatist, sensually intimate and appreciative of ecological co-existence. This has also gone alongside with an increased interest in Jewish philosophy — in part motivated by Abram's writings on YHWH as breath in *Spell of the Sensuous* — with my family background being (non-religious) Jews, and a belief in the primeval histories, comprising the first stories in Genesis and ending with the fall of Babel, being the last surviving stories from the first tribal cultures living alongside Mesopotamian civilisation — something Abram affirms in the aforementioned book. The other change in perspective is an increased appreciation for the scientific aspects of forest medicine, so that the practice might survive politically amidst this culture. It has also proved useful for those clients who are more inclined towards scientific-realism to appreciate the experience as being backed up by research, so that they can settle into the experience more.

To say that I have reached a conclusion to my shinrin yoku journey and philosophy would feel entirely dishonest, unless I were to end my practice here and now, which is not a choice I am making for myself. Like how woods and forests and all living presences/beings are in a continuous process of flux involving creation and destruction, degeneration and regeneration, decay and birth, so feels both this journey and philosophy. This is in process, as am I. There is still presence though

I continued with my counselling training as my focus, along side my day job as a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Teaching Assistant and activist activities, and completed my medicine walk, plant studies and animal study in 2023. In the Summer of 2023 I completed the classroom portion of my counselling training, had begun my placement with counselling clients, and felt a strong urge to integrate shinrin yoku (and wild therapy) into my eventual personal counselling practice. I changed day jobs to one as a peer-mentor in the October, to complete my counselling placement and do shinrin yoku sessions more easily alongside employment. But an unexpected additional matter to contend with presented itself in early November though, in the form of an ocular tumour behind my left eye, which was removed in February 2024 and I am still undergoing reviews regarding. Despite this new health struggle, I kept on with my day job, counselling training and held six 1-to-1 shinrin yoku sessions over the Summer of 2024. I completed my training and qualified as an integrative counsellor in the Spring of 2025, wrote my science of shinrin yoku essay for the course, setup my ecotherapeutic counselling practice and am now, in the June of 2025, over halfway through my five group sessions and set to complete the course within the three years given to do so.

Through this latest health struggle my forest bathing praxis, both as a guide and personal, is a major aspect of my healing process. There are four woods that I am visiting as regularly as I am physically able, with fatigue being an on-going aspect of my life experience that I am healing from. Two of these I am seeing clients in and the other two I am going to for my personal practice. The joys of having met a faun, seeing buzzards, listening to bird song choruses and of being amidst trees — with a new particular attraction to oaks — are wonderful tonics for the pains of enduring this disease of civilisation again. Like with my recovery from the brain tumour, this is part of my overcoming, my will-to-power, and my embrace of my flesh

Meditation Walk Write Up

On the 13th of April 2023 I went on my medicine walk. I woke up early, had a breakfast to try to sustain me through the day and prepared myself for the experience, being sure to have plenty of water ready. I drove to the village Lynmouth in North Devon, parked in the car park and proceeded to make my way to the river.

When I first got to the East Lyn River, I sat on a rock that was safe to sit on and a fair ways into the water. When I felt ready I walked along the riverside, crossing at a bridge. Then I climbed up the hillside, having a wild wee at a spot where I knew was safe to do so, and then sitting on a stone chair for a moment. Then I continued walking up, until I climbed a bank and lay in moss surrounded by holly plants of varying different ages. The weather was sunny and chilly and there was a great deal of bird song. Whilst in this spot my mind moved from thoughts regarding work, coursework, houselife, the here and now of where I was and back around again. There was a road visible between the trees from where I sat, though some distance away, and I saw a plane whilst laying down and looking up at the sky. Through brought my attention to how there is no real separation either way, no separation from the wild or from civilisation, and that, though the world is wild, the illusion of civilisation exists within the wild/wildness. I also noticed with this thought how much more I find myself attracted to dark-ecology thought than deep-ecology thought.

When I continued walking I noticed feelings of gratitude and acceptance as I walked up and along the side of the valley. Enjoying my silliness and ecological absurdity, I sung and joked to myself, imagining the animals and plants finding me strange for doing so. I thought about contact, immediacy and direct action — these have been persistent themes in my thinking as an eco-activist. I walked until I came to a tree full of birds nests, noticing my desires for preservation and life affir-

mation. I sat again, writing notes and noticing that I was not in the shade and feeling more of the sun, meaning that I was in contact and relationship with an explosion in outer space.

I then walked on a little further along the pathway and across to a patch of trees where I felt calling and stopped for a rest. At the mid point of the day, with the sun at its height, I began noticing my desire for food and mild hunger pangs — I am someone who has always appreciated the experience of being well fed, especially after being on dexamethasone during my treatment for a brain tumour in 2012. I lay on my back and meditated, taking notice of the bird song around me, before drifting off to sleep for a short while. After waking, I walked until I reached a tadpole pond. It had been 7 hours since I had eaten and I noticed myself struggling with the break in habitual rhythms of food consumption — which brought to my mind how much habits and habitats are inseparable, and how all living beings need their habitats to meet their food consumption needs. I made the choice to walk and meditate without eating for 3 more hours, and then walk back towards my car and eat the nuts I had brought with me and forage and eat some wild garlic too, of which there was a large amount growing besides the river bank.

The last of the walk towards Watersmeet felt challenging. When I sat down on the other side of the valley I felt physically drained. Stopping to sit and drink helped and I reflected upon how I knew doing the medicine walk would be difficult and this was it proving itself so. The beauty of the river and the sunlight soothed feelings of strain.

I found an upright dead tree with an opening I could sit in comfortably and chose to sit in there for a long while, which felt awesome. Within there was so much, which affirmed the possibility that resides within death. There was so much life moving within the carcass, tiny and still there, and I found this exciting. There were other human-walkers and dogs with them walking past and closer to me at this point of the experience. I

uating my plans for financial stability and multiple friends encouraged me to consider training as a psychotherapist, with my wife suggesting that I pursue ecotherapy as a career. Having come to appreciate the primitivist writer John Moore's affirmation of praxes that are medicine-person oriented and Thoreau's anti-work encouragement of individuals to earn a living through loving, rather than through embracing servitude to industry, I took to these encouragements — my shinrin yoku praxis is very much part of my personal medicine-person praxis and attempt to earn a living through loving. I began training as a counsellor and — in the Summer break between the first and second years of class based training for the Advanced Diploma in Integrative Counselling I enrolled on — during the August of 2022 completed the three day stage 1 basic practitioner course in shinrin yoku through Nature and Therapy UK on Dartmoor.

During the three day course on Dartmoor I struggled to connect with aspects of the taught part that were based in reductive-sciences or spiritual traditions, but intensely appreciated the experiential aspects of the training that were sensually immediate and direct, which were the larger part of the experience. At a steeper part of one of the walks on Dartmoor, I was supported down by two individuals in the group, for my dyspraxia and visual struggles with depth perspective. I am personally drawn to affirming tribal relationality and found this to be a moment of tribalistic support — this somewhat meets Nick Totten's affirmations of tribal relationships as embodied relationships based in interdependency (in his book *Wild Therapy*) and Daniel Quinn's affirmation of tribal economics being based in support, rather than products (in his *Ishmael* books). Another aspect of the course on Dartmoor that I knew I wanted to bring into my sessions was the opportunities to move away from the class-group and observe sensuous experiences with intent and awareness, and then come back and share our experiences.

ical conversations has often seemed to be intolerable — often with the mistaken (or deliberately obscurest) suggestion that I am encouraging something of American style Randian “rugged individualism”. For myself, I have met my experiences with philosophies such as Timothy Morton’s dark ecological philosophy of subscendent-holism/dark-ecology, David Abram’s eco-phenomenological philosophy of embodied sensuality, the radical-individualist philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche and Henry David Thoreau that both encourage (in their own ways) loyalty to the earth, the queer-ecological philosophies of Andreas Weber and Nan Shepherd, as well as others. In my continuing activities as I writer I have affirmed this as “feral individualism” and “eco-egoism” and how I bring this into my shinrin yoku practice with clients is to bring attention to embodied differentiation in a way that is positive to the wholeness of life — I have phrased this as “we often say that we can’t see the woods for the trees, but it seems equally the case in my experience that people don’t notice the trees and all the others who live here, for the woods”. With this, I have embraced an implosive-holism that turns the explosive-holist assertion that “the whole is greater than the sum of it’s parts” upside down, so that “the whole is less than the sum of it’s parts”, as the whole would not exist without the parts, is affirmed; stressing the need to care for individuated and differentiated aspects of wholes for healthy living. In shinrin yoku sessions this is presented in care towards individuals in groups and an appreciation for the individuality of living presences living in the woods.

After a few years of being employed in work situations that were not healthy and elevated my stress levels to near unmanageable intensities, in the summer of 2019 I returned to regularly visiting woods close to where I was living for the purposes of personal recovery. This was done alongside seeing a psychotherapist who encouraged me to engage in personal ecotherapeutic activities as part of my healing. The struggles I had endured in those employments brought me to reeval-

noticed them and ignored as best I could, noticing my feelings of being strange for sitting in a dead tree surrounded by tiny invertebrate animals — this reminded me of Kafka’s story *Metamorphosis*, which I often think about when thinking about the becoming-animal that *shinrin yoku* and ecotherapy frequently pertains to.

As I made my way back towards the direction of my car, eating the food I had brought and several garlic leaves, I noticed the anxieties that the medicine walk had brought my attention to pertaining to food and hunger. A healthy anxiety regarding food and hunger makes sense to me as a primal instinct oriented towards self-preservation, and hunger was a significant aspect of the trauma I experienced during brain-tumour treatment, with food also being one of my lifelong go to comforts and means of self-soothing during periods of intense struggle. In my homelife I take main responsibility for getting food and cooking meals and I have concerns about the likelihood of global food crises, with global warming and other ecological concerns. If this medicine walk was a “vision quest” then perhaps the vision I most intensely attained is how much hunger affirms to me my desire for personal and ecological wellness, both of which hold anxieties that are not overwhelming for me and true. In the language of counselling and psychological theory, I could describe my attachment style towards food as somewhat insecure, which brings to my mind memories from childhood when money and food were problems. The final aspects of my walk along the riverside, with trees thinning out and more and more garlic surrounding me, included a great deal of thought regarding shame and joy about eating certain foods, my carefulness regarding nutrition and the love and care I experience upon receiving food.

My medicine walk lasted 12 hours and I found it physically challenging. There is a certain insecurity that affirming this brings to mind, as I can internally compare myself to personal heroes like John Muir, or indigenous folk, or just other indi-

viduals who are socialised as male within this culture, with a particular feeling of inadequacy. I can meet this insecurity by affirming that they have not had the same life experience nor health struggles that I have and the, despite finding it a challenge, I engaged in the medicine walk as fully as possible for me to do.

My Shinrin Yoku Journey Thus Far and Philosophy

Situating an exact origin for my shinrin yoku journey feels impossible and at best guess work. Memories of exploring the woods in Wimbledon or Box Hill during childhood come to mind, and I question if those experiences count as shinrin yoku — perhaps they do and perhaps not. It is really difficult to say. I can remember being in the sea, when visiting Devon as a youngster on holiday at my grandparents, and attempting to push the waves back, punching and kicking them. I was a very angry child, having experienced more grief and abuse, hurt, harm and struggle than anyone would really want for a child, and can make sense of my pushing back the waves as something of me fighting back against the world in which I had experienced arguably too much. Perhaps it could be said that these experiences, whilst not being the beginnings of my shinrin yoku praxis, where fertile ground for it to grow from; like an autumnal leaf litter that seedlings will grow from.

In my late teens I was diagnosed with a cancerous brain tumour that I finished treatment for on the 31st of July 2012, with my 21st birthday being at the end of October 2012. My recovery from cancer treatment took years before I could be as active as I wanted to be and there are physical impacts and traumas to my body from that I still live with, include dorsal mid-brain syndrome and vertical gaze palsy. In my mid-teens I had

moved into my grandparent's home in the Devon countryside and still lived there then. Short distances from the house were two smaller woods and a couple of miles away was a larger wood, and I took to exploring these regularly, as part of my recovery and healing process. I would walk in these woods as regularly as I physically could.

During this period of recovery I learnt the term “diseases of civilisation” and learnt that cancer is among these, at first through a TED talk I watched and then through further reading. I read academic books like Sigmund Freud's *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation*, and primitivist books like *Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilisation* by John Zerzan, and found myself intensely attracted to the subject of human rewilding — with my first book on the subject, *Feral Consciousness*, being published at the end of 2016. At the same time, I was getting increasingly involved in ecological activist practice, most of all in the context of badger defence and anti-cull rebellion, and was frequenting woods in the British South West for this frequently, as well as attending activist events across these isles in woods too.

The experience of being a brain tumour patient presented me with several truths that feel primal to me and always somewhat paradoxical. The most poignant one for here — and the one that has always seemed least tolerable to many of those I have known who are oriented towards ecological conversation — is the paradox of equally affirming life and being-in-the-world in a holistic way where separation is an illusion, and affirming a radical individuality based in embodied subjective sensuality. My experiences of illness and the pains of hydrocephalus migraines render my individuation and differentiation utterly real to me and, with these, also the truth of my instinctive and animal desire to experience life as fully and wholly as I am capable of doing. To those I have spoken to oriented towards collectivist, deep-ecology and various spiritual traditions, my enthusiasm for affirming individuality in ecolog-