

Levels of Intensity to the Experience of Presence in Things: (from *The Luminous Ground*, by Christopher Alexander. The Center for Environmental Structure, Berkeley, CA. 2004, pp. 68-69)

Levels of Experience of ... a Waterfall:

I. "In the mildest version of this experience, I look at the waterfall and say I find it pleasing. I may be aware of a relation between me and the waterfall. But I stop short of saying that I identify with the waterfall, or that there is any possible identification between me and the waterfall. It is simply pleasing." p. 68

II. " In a second, also mild, version of this experience, I enjoy the waterfall, and I feel a stirring of some relationship to it. I feel related to it. Virtually all of us, at one time or another, experience this feeling of a mild relationship between ourselves and the waterfall, or between ourselves and the tree." p. 68

III. " A further stage of this experience occurs, if I find the relationship strong. Then I may go from saying that I experience some relatedness to the waterfall to saying that I experience this relationship as somehow interior to me. The relationship is touching to me. It matters. Here I experience a strong emotional linkage between myself and the tree or waterfall." p. 68

IV. "In a fourth version, I may even feel that the waterfall, the tree, or the bush touches the core of me. This happens, for instance, when as a lover, I feel profoundly stirred by the drop of water glistening in the grass, or by the steady pounding of the waterfall. Being there, being filled with the experience, I know that an essential core of me, the best part of me, is stirred, touched by the 'I' [or the presence] which I perceive within the thing." p. 68

V. "In a stronger version yet, I begin to feel some actual identification with the waterfall, or with the tree. I identify with the waterfall. I experience that it is profoundly related to my being. In this kind of experience, the relationship is strong enough so that I *identify* with the waterfall in some fashion. What I experience is not only my feeling, but that my own *self* and the waterfall are somehow related. This does not mean that I actually feel my self to be present in the waterfall. But I am aware that in some refreshing way, the waterfall--more than a hamburger bun, say, or today's morning newspaper--nourishes me, releases me, refreshes

me. In this sense, I become aware of a relation to my self which exists in the waterfall, or in the tree. In our society today, this kind of experience may not be as common as (levels I-IV). Still many contemporary people do have this kind." p. 68

VI. "There is a stronger version yet of the experience which, according to the reports of anthropologists, was common in pre industrial cultures. In these primitive experiences the person experiences the waterfall or the tree as a spirit, that is, as an animate being of some kind. Reports from (so-called) primitive societies describe the way that people not only identified with trees or with the forest, but endowed the entities of the forest, the rocks of the ocean, with spirit. I believe this was an expression of a situation where people felt, or experienced a presence, a being *in* the tree or in the waterfall. As such it is a direct, and even stronger version of the last." p. 68

VII. "A still stronger form of such identification also existed in primitive cultures when it had currency in ritual. This occurred, for instance, when people of the culture reified the identification by giving it explicit substance, as for instance when a California Yurok Indian made an explicit identity between himself and a seal or an eagle at the time of adulthood, and from then on wore that animals' skin, took the name of the animal. Although anthropological texts categorize this kind of experience perhaps too patronizingly as animism, I believe it was simply another way (at a further level of intensity) in which people have asserted the identity they sometimes feel with natural things." p. 69

VIII. "There is even a stronger version of this experienced identity that occasionally occurs in us when we recognize explicitly, and feel that our own self exists *in* the beach, or *in* a wave, or *in* a bush." p. 69

IX. "And a stronger version still -- different again in kind -- is reached when we experience the relationship with the waterfall so that it is not merely that I identify with the waterfall, but that in some fashion I am the waterfall: not merely identification, but actual *identity*. In this case, when I see the waterfall and feel related to it, I experience the relationship as more fundamental, not merely 'I *feel* identified with this waterfall,' but something more like 'There is some kind of an identity between my self, and the waterfall. My I is really in the waterfall. My self and the waterfall are not merely similar, but it feels as if they are the *same*, as if both are parts of one thing.' " p. 69