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GEOBIOLOGY AS CARE FOR ENERGETIC QUALITIES OF LIVING ENVIRONMENTS AND PLACES

A GEOBIOLOGIA COMO CUIDADO COM AS QUALIDADES ENERGÉTICAS DOS AMBIENTES E LUGARES DE VIDA

Abstract

Geobiology is linked to the culture of caring for the Earth and our living environments. More broadly, geobiology considers the earth as an arc between its daily practice (inhabiting) and its inclusion in the cosmos. It is defined as a healing practice in that it opens the way to understanding and nurturing the invisible energetic links between beings, places and elements. By giving shape and rhythm to the unsuspected interplay of forces that structure the world, geobiology enables us to reconsider our daily cohabitation with the elements, to change our habits, to improve our habitats by modifying, reactivating and repairing them if necessary. We will draw on the results of empirical work in which co-practice or initiation sessions were carried out with practitioners, to show how the art of geobiological care is taking place.

Keywords: Geobiology. Relational Territory. Infrasensibilities. Cosmologies. Eco-habitat.

Resumo

A geobiologia está ligada à cultura de cuidar da Terra e dos nossos ambientes de vida. De uma forma mais ampla, a geobiologia considera a Terra como um arco entre a sua prática quotidiana (habitar) e a sua inclusão no cosmos. É definida como uma prática de cura, na medida em que abre o caminho para a compreensão e o cultivo das ligações energéticas invisíveis entre seres, lugares e elementos. Ao dar forma e ritmo ao jogo insuspeito de forças que estruturam o mundo, a geobiologia permite-nos reconsiderar a nossa coabitação quotidiana com os elementos, mudar os nossos hábitos, melhorar os nossos habitats modificando-os, reactivando-os e reparando-os, se necessário. Basear-nos-emos nos resultados de um trabalho empírico em que foram realizadas sessões de co-prática ou de iniciação com praticantes, para mostrar como se realiza a arte dos cuidados geobiológicos.

Palavras chave: Geobiologia. Território relacional. Infrasensibilidades. Cosmologias. Eco-habitat.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the development of alternative medicine has led to the emergence of practices aimed promoting the health of homes and living environments, including geobiology, which has its origins in magnetism. Long practiced in informal settings, as folk medicine, these practices have developed with the growth of the eco-housing (Fries, 2017) and the wellness market, most often in the form of interventions to individual dwellings, building plots or farms. Our research project, carried out as part of the ANR Sensibilia research programme, brought us to meet regularly with a dozen practitioners in Grenoble and the surrounding mountains.

Geobiology is a healing activity in the sense that it is a therapeutic response to harmful phenomena felt by suffering beings (animals, humans), who are unable to explain the origin of their physical and psychological ailments on a scientific basis and who therefore turn to invisible phenomena; geobiology can also be used as a preventive measure to promote a healthy living environment, for example by identifying qualities of a piece of land to guide the construction of buildings (searching for water, identifying favourable locations, etc.). Our contribution aims to go beyond an interpretation that would make the development of these practices the result of a retreat from science and rationality in contemporary society, or a simple appropriation of esoteric practices by late capitalism, driven by the wellness and personal development market and the individualism of the consumer society.

Our aim is to explore the potential for attention and care, as well as the ethical dimension of the relationship to living beings, places and environments, that these practices activate. In doing so, we place ourselves within the Environmental Humanities approach to rethink these practices in the context of contemporary ecological concerns. In this way, we explore these practices as a *caring for place*, showing how we can move from therapeutic practice - the care exercised by a healer - to the dimension of care in the relationships to places and *milieux* that these practices embody.

2 HEALING PLACES: THE GEOBIOLOGIST AS "PLACE THERAPIST"

In another article (Revol et al., 2023), we showed how geobiology proceeds through a singular form of exercising our capacities to sense and feel the world that we qualify as *energetic* that allow its practitioners to come into contact with vibratory phenomena. We follow how Bastien, a geobiologist in the Trièves region of France, went about detecting these phenomena manifest on a building site of a client - Nicolas - plotting them on a map and then interpreting them in response to a request to guide the orientation of the buildings to be constructed. While forms of detection and mapping seem to be common to all the practitioners we met, there is diversity of forms of interpretation, the breadth of which we have only been able to fathom without studying them systematically. Nevertheless, interpretation is at the heart of the healing relationship established between the geobiologist and the person or persons concerned. In this article, we take up some elements of Bastien's survey of Nicolas's land, which we cross-reference with other elements of our exploratory study, in order to show how the geobiologist is, in Bastien's words, a "therapist of place".

Some phenomena are closely linked to the environment and the elements, and therefore to the influence of landscapes on human settlements, through the quality of rocks, their faultlines, the presence of underground water and its flow, the atmosphere and sunlight, the presence of metals in the earth's mantle. Other phenomena are linked to pollution of human origin: electrical, electromagnetic and chemical pollution. Still other phenomena may seem closer to the realm of fantasy, even if they are considered to be vibratory phenomena linked to nature: cosmo-telluric 'chimneys' that form breathing points between heaven and earth, vortices associated with sacred high places, elementals or nature spirits... There are also a number of phenomena associated with the human occupation of places and their memories, such as the imprinting of certain tensions or emotional charges, the creation of thresholds and energy bubbles associated with the occupation of places by living beings, the presence of entities or energetic remnants of deceased people (ghosts), objects charged with noxious energy...

The way in which the phenomena in question is approached varies from practitioner to practitioner: some, for example, exclude the detection of electromagnetic pollution, which requires specific equipment and technical training. Protocols and their formalisation also vary. 21st century geobiology considers it necessary to reorganise the habitat to avoid harmful phenomena, rather than intervening to transform them; some geobiologists debate the ethics of systematic cleaning or relocation of certain troublesome phenomena, preferring to maintain a form of humility towards what goes beyond the human. A wide variety of corrective actions are practiced, on a physical level (sorting and removing objects), but also through energetic re-harmonisation, each person developing his or her own methods, by placing stones and various object or through sound (drum, Tibetan bowl). Some also set up rituals to treat the problem, involving the patient or client in their own space. Many leave their clients completely free to decide on the corrective action and involve the recipient in the treatment process.

If the geobiologist is a therapist of place, then caring for place means identifying what is at play in the relationship between a place and its inhabitants. It is this relationship that needs to be questioned in order to adapt an intervention to what is meaningful for the person. In the case of Bastien's diagnosis, Nicolas explains: "What really touched me about Bastien's work was that I felt it was really addressed to me (...) [In the construction project], the approach to this plot of land is the practical one of the architect, of a bricklayer. But it's never about what's most important, what makes the inside vibrate. (...) It's the least concrete approach in terms of construction... but the most in tune with feelings, deep analysis, you know... and also to look at this place that speaks to me so much, I have an enormous attraction to this place (...) on the side of the spirit, the spiritual " (Nicolas, 04/07/2022). In the next section, we'll look at how care works through contact with the intimate, inner relationship a person has with the place where they live.

3 GEOBIOLOGY AS THE CARE OF A "RELATIONAL TERRITORY"

For Bastien, the purpose of therapeutic activity is to "bring the place and those that live there, the habitat and the inhabitant, back into harmony" (Bastien, 01/07/2024). In our research, the intimate, inner, psychic and spiritual dimensions of the relationship with place gradually emerged as the core of these care practices. Bringing people into harmony means working on the inner bonds they have with the place where they live and on the affective

dimensions of their relationships with other beings. Diagnostic work is designed to enable people to get in touch with these dimensions and to begin work on inner healing. The psycho-affective and psycho-corporeal dimensions are essential, and the paradigms used are close to the depth psychology of C.G. Jung, since the aim is to consider the psyche in its relationship with the soul, whose healing takes place on a spiritual level. In addition, various spiritual paths are sometimes mobilised (Christianity, Buddhism, various wisdom paths).

We find it useful to situate geobiology within a group of practices that derive from thinking around ecological healing that seeks to reconnect people to themselves, to others and to the earth through their inner selves, even if not all practitioners in our inquiry refer to these streams of thought. In ecological thinking, these theories are part of developments in inner ecology, eco-spirituality and eco-psychology, and their aim is to create caring relationships between humans and living beings, including through restorative practices: "eco-spirituality is rooted first and foremost in a first-person ecology directed towards the direct and irreducible exploration of lived experience. And this explicit practice of conscious activity generates new ways of paying attention to corporeality, elementary material networks and the interdependent links that make up a living being" (Barniaudy and Delorme, 2022). Thus, far from addressing the private individual, separated from the social and living collective, care passes through the self to transform human relations with their environment.

In *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind* (Roszak, Gomes, Kanner, 20-23 [1995]), Theodor Roszak outlines the ambitions of a psychology that no longer limits itself to the private life of the ego but takes into account all the connections between the personal and the planetary, seeing psychic, physical and ecological health as inseparable. The psyche to be cared for extends to the surface of the earth and to relationships with living beings. Roszak traces the links between this ecopsychology and ancestral healing practices: "The world's oldest healers, those whom our society called 'sorcerers', knew no other way to heal than to interact with the environment, to weave relationships of mutual reciprocity (...) human beings must live in balanced, respectful exchange with the flora and fauna, rivers and hills, sky and earth, on which we depend for our physical sustenance and practical education" (Roszak, 2023, 26). Roszak emphasizes the importance of the environment for physical and mental health, from Hippocratic medicine to contemporary approaches to health in relation to the environment.

In practice, contact with the inner dimension is achieved by listening to the person being cared for in a full, multidimensional sense. Bastien takes into account the circumstances of the call for intervention, the way in which it is formulated, the exchanges that precede the visit to the field and the reactions of the people what he detects when he gets there: "Sometimes I have the impression that three quarters of the information is already there, it's already given. Information can be given as well on how I should approach the field". (Bastien, explanatory interview after diagnosis). These are the elements that allow us to interpret the phenomena listed and mapped by the energetic diagnosis and to give them meaning in relation to the person's problems. This delicate task, the dimensions of which we have only just glimpsed, requires the practitioner not to go for hasty interpretation and to be wary of its hunches: for Bastien, he must remain as close as possible to listening to the person in order to make the diagnosis meaningful.

It's a matter of helping a reconsideration – on the part of the client - of the diverse collectives and environments with which they are in contact, reconfiguring the relationships they have with something greater than themselves from the perspective of their own home,

which is often the space in which the geobiologist is called upon for treatment. Geobiology enables us to explore what Bastien calls a person's "relational territories": "I'm called out to houses two-thirds of the time, and the territory is restricted to the notion of a small space of one's own, but in fact, it's just a matter of changing and seeing further afield, how the human being reconciles with a wider territory" (Bastien, 01/07/2024). This relational territory takes in a whole ecology of relationships, of relations to other living beings, to the elements, but also to the human beings with whom we cohabit. Through the home, this territory inscribes the individual in a collective, which also includes ancestors and descendants (transgenerational care). *"Where do we choose to set relational boundaries? This notion of relational territory, it can be applied to... a tree, a bird, a butterfly, the rock, finally, mineral life, plant life, animal life, human life"* (Bastien, 01/07/2024). The aim of geobiological care is to re-establish communication, to re-establish links between occluded or neglected relational spaces, or to re-establish exchanges where modern society operates more on relations of extraction and power:

"(...) Geobiology shows me this. I see people through how they choose the limits of this relational territory. In other traditions and peoples, the limit of the territory is simply the limit of our thoughts. And I like this vision. How does the limit of my consciousness limit my idea of territory? It's a really beautiful question. (...) That's what it shows me. I find it quite fascinating. And in any case, the geobio expertise allows me, through the initial cartography, to question this notion of relational territory" (Bastien, 01/07/2024).

Bastien sees his care work as a way of reconnecting with the different levels of a person's relational territory, leading to changes in their daily life. These changes are not always immediate: he insists on the time and repetition necessary to foster transformations. It therefore seems that the geobiologist, as a healer, does not have the power to transform in an immediate and definitive way: it is the involvement of the person in a work of repetition and duration. Do these ways of involving people in healing foster other relationships with the environment?



Figure 1. Bastien diagnoses Nicolas' building site. Source photo from the authors. June 2022

4 CULTIVATING AN ABILITY TO CARE FOR THE EARTH AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

As we can see, Bastien does not see himself as the bearer of a healing power, but rather as an advocate, a facilitator for reconnecting people with the different levels of their relational territories. This involves getting people to examine their own feelings about their environment. As a dancer and teacher of contact improvisation dance, he guides people to sharpen their perception of their surroundings. This transmission through the body is not limited to therapeutic practice. Bastien also seeks to develop cultural activities to promote environmental awareness for groups of all ages. For example, in June 2024, he led the "Dance with the glaciers" workshop as part of the Ranc'Arts events at the Parc Naturel Régional des Bauges. He combines his expertise as a geologist, which he practiced at the Office National des Forêts, with his experience as a dance contact improvisation teacher. He proposes an exploration of the glacial landscape of the Combe de Savoie and seeks to develop a sensitive understanding of the place.

The development of this type of activity, aimed at a broad public at moderate prices, is a feature of many of the people we met during our research. In other articles, we show how Laetitia Vivot organises mountain excursions aimed at developing awareness of the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms (Revol and al., 2023), in a practice supported by a collective of therapists practicing a wide range of alternative medicines, *Terre d'étoile*. Led by the magnetizer Joel Bécot, this place is located in a working-class district of Grenoble that is the recipient of public policies aimed at alleviating poverty named "Politique de la Ville". Many initiatives are aimed at people on low incomes: low-cost advice during the Covid crisis, discovery workshops at neighbourhood festivals. Patrice Floury, a geobiologist and trainer with the Gaia association in Romans (France, 26), regularly organises free visits to sacred places. Katarina Dugast, storyteller, Qi Gong teacher and geobiologist, organises visits to vibratory sites around the city of Grenoble, combining storytelling, energetic practices and embodied exploration. Peggy Mouthon, architect and geobiologist, took part in the Sillon Biennial of Contemporary Art in Drôme with workshops on the landscape of the Saou forest. The aim of all these initiatives is to sensitise a wider public to the environment and to discover contact with the inner self through the body.

For Bastien, this reconnection with one's own capacities for sensing and feeling is essential to the development of self-care: "When you get in touch with your body, you do a lot of work to allow yourself to take care of yourself; it's already about listening to your body and not relying on an external diagnosis, it's up to you to tell yourself what you feel" (Bastien, 01/07/2024). It's easy to see why these suggestions are aimed at cultivating capacities for energetic sensitivity: by developing attention to one's own sensitivities, individuals can develop care for the different layers of their relational territories and environments.

5 CONCLUSION

In this way, Bastien, like other geobiologists, seeks to draw attention to the energetic fabric of places. We have already shown how this reading of the subtle landscape leads people to appropriate the energetic qualities of a place according to their own logic of use (Revol et al, 2023). This involves developing a sensitive relationality with the living environment at different levels of the territory. We have also shown that they reinscribe sensitive

experience in an "earth/sky" polarity that carries cosmologies (Revol et al, 2023). This approach is the bearer of other relations with nature and the living, marked by other ontologies (Escobar, 2018). In her recent work, in particular *Réveiller les esprits de la Terre* (2021a) and a survey of geobiological practices in the Creuse region of France (2021b), Barbara Glowczewski points to links between the development of these spiritualities and gestures of care for the earth that we have been too accustomed to attribute either to distant populations and their exotic customs.

It thus becomes the site of a re-actualisation - as much in the mode of survival as of *reclaim* - of past and vanished minority forms of our own culture that predate the hegemony of a naturalistic ontology (Descola, 2005), and allows us to re-imagine ways of inhabiting and appropriating landscapes that gave full expression to these perceptions that fell beneath what is usually sensed and felt. This implementation of actions, rituals and gestures constitutes the reinvention of ritual care that connects humans to their environment. Here, the attempt to make these sensibilities shared by wider collectives shows us that care is not just the object of the therapist's practice: it is a broader disposition towards the environment that these practices cultivate. As such, these energetic practices of caring for places can find themselves as 'allies' in the defence and promotion of certain ecologies and can thus be considered as practices of ambient care.

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