

Nookification or how to create spaces to experience some magic and mysticism

Nookification: neologism invented at Dan Wheals' workshop '*Chagraculture – Magic spaces to foster a sense of spirit*' at the IPCUK 2015

One year after the *International Permaculture Convergence* in Epping Forest it is this workshop, which I still remember most vividly. Attracted by this word of longing 'magic' did I go in search for this workshop. A small group of people had gathered round Dan Wheals. We sat on the grass between a young tree and a small island of hedgerow. Since it hadn't been easy to locate the workshop Dan reminded us that the right people got together at the right time in the right place. **It makes one wonder if this trusting attitude be** understood as a precondition for something magical to happen?

Dan, a medical herbalist and permaculturalist, tells us that the concept of *Chagra* comes from South American tribes, who describe gardens **or allotments** in the jungle with it. These gardens are often intensively farmed but at the same time they are magical and mystical places, where older generations pass on their knowledge to the young. These are not only places where seeds are sown, plants tended and harvested but also where storytelling cultivates a sense of spirit that connects people to the land.

Here I would briefly like to explain what I mean by the words 'mystical' and 'magical'. A mystical experience describes the encounter with a reality, which transcends our everyday awareness and rational comprehension. We feel connected to something outside ourselves. We can for example experience ourselves as an inherent part of the landscape that surrounds us rather than just being its observer. In these moments something opens up in us, something towards the unknown and through this opening we can experience the feeling of greater freedom as we normally do in our everyday lives. Yet we cannot only feel in line with our immediate surroundings but also with the universe as a whole. Carl Gustav Jung described this as 'mystical participation' meaning that the person suddenly feels in unity with their environment. We often connect this feeling with the presence of something otherworldly, a world that's animated by some higher consciousness. I believe, though, that this other-world is always already contained within the profane and that we only gain access to it for a brief moment through this mystical experience. Jung described this mystical feeling as numinosity. We are deeply touched by something essentially inexplicable, something greater than oneself. This feeling of being touched is in its positive manifestation expressed through the feeling of unity with nature and sometimes even with the cosmos. One gets the sense that everything around is alive. The Swiss Jungian analyst Verena Kast describes this state as follows: 'The strong emotions triggered through the constellation of an archetype are called 'numinosity'. Strong images, which deeply touch us are created in our mind's eye. They make compelling experiences because they leave the impression of importance, of containing a personal message, even of being fate. We notice the constellation of an archetype through the very strong emotions that

grab hold of us and which are accompanied by powerful fantasies, visions and utopian ideas.'

The feeling of numinosity shows us that deep layers of our unconscious have been touched. In such moments a deep connection exists between our consciousness and the collective unconscious. Since the collective unconscious is already part of nature for Jung there also exists a relationship with our environment. The collective unconscious can thus be described as the edge between our inner world and the environment outside. This sense of unity between the two can in turn be seen as the foundation for something magical to happen. Here I would like to characterise magic as the access to some knowledge outside of us. Through this knowledge and through the help of some invisible forces can we alter patterns within ourselves as well as our environment.

Let's return to the field between the tree and the hedgerow now. Dan invited us to lie down and to choose a patch of grass no bigger than the palm of our hands. We should now focus on this tiny space in front of us and soak in all the impressions we can gather through all our senses. In the beginning it seemed that this small piece of earth can be mapped out quickly but the longer I looked the more details became apparent. I began to notice the fine hairs on single blades of grass, thin stalks as they danced in the wind and all the elaborate patterns on different types of leaves. I can smell the damp earth and after some time animals dare to show themselves again. I observe how some ants move through this tiny landscape. I'm amazed how many details I can discover over time and the idea to be able to discover something magical even within the smallest nook of the microcosm begins to unfold in front of my eyes. A feeling of deep amazement ripples through me.

It opens my eyes again for those things, which at first glance seem inconspicuous. It makes me want to pay more attention to those nooks and crannies which don't appear interesting like a patch of lawn or a single plant coming out between some pavement slabs. It makes me happy to think that from now on I can find connection to nature even within a concrete city desert as long as I can find the tiniest patch of green. Nature's resilience shines through even there. Yes, for me this realisation has something mystical about it!

Dan then asks us to imagine that we live in this tiny world: Where would we sleep or play? Where would we feel safe and secure? My view on the scene in front of me changes again. Lines on the earth begin to turn into paths. There, underneath the clover where the leaves form a natural roof, that's where I could feel at home. Suddenly this piece of land feels cosy and homelike. I'm no longer a mere observer but in my imagination I become part of it all. It feels wonderful!

After some time Dan calls us back to the reality of our grown-up size. We had all gotten completely lost within this tiny cosmos and all the people and the busyness around us had been forgotten. We are all filled with wonder about

how you can discover so much without but also within yourself by observing such a tiny area. Dan asks us how we imagined our nook to look like and what qualities it should have? For some it was important to be able to have a good view, others preferred a cave-like refugium (**refuge or haven would work here as well but I like refugium - is it a real word?**) . Colours and shapes within the landscape also played a role if someone felt safe and at home in their nook.

Dan tells us that he likes to incorporate such nooks in his designs in order to create spaces, which invite people to dream. We probably all remember such nooks from when we were young. It might have been a wardrobe, a tree house or underneath an elder bush. Children just seek out such nooks. For one to feel safe and secure but at the same time because bandits, witches, dragons and other mythical creatures really come to life in these places. When we are adults we usually stop building dens. Yet why shouldn't we still create such magical spaces where we feel we can blend in with our environment and where we can be open for the mysticism of small things?

During the whole workshop we keep playing around with the word 'nook' until we come up with the term 'nookification'. I understand two things by it: it describes the ability to find something mystical within the profane. This can happen just about anywhere as long as we open ourselves to our surroundings, not just through close observation but with our heart, too. Nookification also describes the conscious design of niches, which shall increase the chances to connect to the mysterious within the cosmos. In this sense a nook is a place, which invites you to let your thoughts wander, to dream and to get in touch with the deeper layers within your psyche so that a dialogue between conscious and unconscious contents can come about. It shall be a place where we can feel it possible to sense the otherworldly. A place, which opens our mind to the idea that the magical is always hidden in everything around us and that it can be accessed in the here and now. When we look closely and observe the world with child's eyes we might just be able to discover it again.

Since the collective unconscious communicates through symbols with us, Jung described a few of them. The triangle, spiral or waves for example symbolise the dynamic aspect of the psyche, whereas the circle, the square and the cross stand for wholeness and unity. Jung especially liked the mandala as an expression of psychological wholeness and the union of opposites. Through a symbol something external is mirrored within something internal, something invisible within the visible and vice versa. Jung explains: "Our psyche is set up in accord with the structure of the universe, and what happens in the microcosm likewise happens in the infinitesimal and most subjective reaches of the psyche. (...) This is symbolized by objects from which the inner experience has taken its initial impulse and which from then on preserve numinous significance or else it is characterized by its numinosity and the overwhelming force of that numinosity. In this way the imagination liberates itself from the concretism of the object and attempts to sketch the image of the invisible as something which stands behind the

phenomenon' (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*). These symbolic **ur-shapes (what is an Ur-shape?)** can be incorporated into the design of a nook in order to stimulate the dynamic dialogue between consciousness and the unconscious.

This also means to leave room for the unfathomable to unfold. Jung wrote about this: 'It is important to have a secret, a premonition of things unknown. It fills life with something impersonal, a numinosum. A man who has never experienced that has missed something important. He must sense that he lives in a world which in some respect is mysterious; that things happen and can be experienced which remain inexplicable; that not everything which happens can be anticipated. The unexpected and the incredible belong in this world. Only then is life whole' (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*). Sometimes it doesn't take much and some wonderful mystery unravels itself underneath a blade of grass. The nookification of a place may therefore also contain an element of surprise and thus to break with our usual set of expectations in order to throw the doors wide open to something mysterious and magical. **It may also be important for a designer to allow others to nookify a space, even encourage it with spaces and materials that can allow a collective design rather than an imposition of magic.**

Thanks to Lulu (ml@nicepages.de) for her write up of my rather 'snatched from the air' workshop in which I knew what I wanted to explore and took others with me to explore together. What makes a space magic? tShe went on to send me a german permaculture magazine article with this article on Nookifikation in it.....

Im very happy to read this and think a small workshop can continued to resonate and it feeds my curiosity into continuing these thoughts. I suppose the next logical step is to consider cranification (Kranifikation)?

However for now lets stick with Nookification, Its hilarious!

Dano
xxx

<http://chagraculture.weebly.com/>

cranny

noun

plural noun: crannies

a small, narrow space or opening.

"bugs and spiders conceal themselves in crannies of the bark"

synonyms: chink, crack, crevice, slit, split, fissure, rift, cleft, opening, gap, aperture, cavity, hole, hollow, niche, corner, recess, bay, booth, alcove, nook, interstice

"every little cranny was filled with drifted snow"