

Critical Herbalism

HAYDEN OSTROM

MONAD

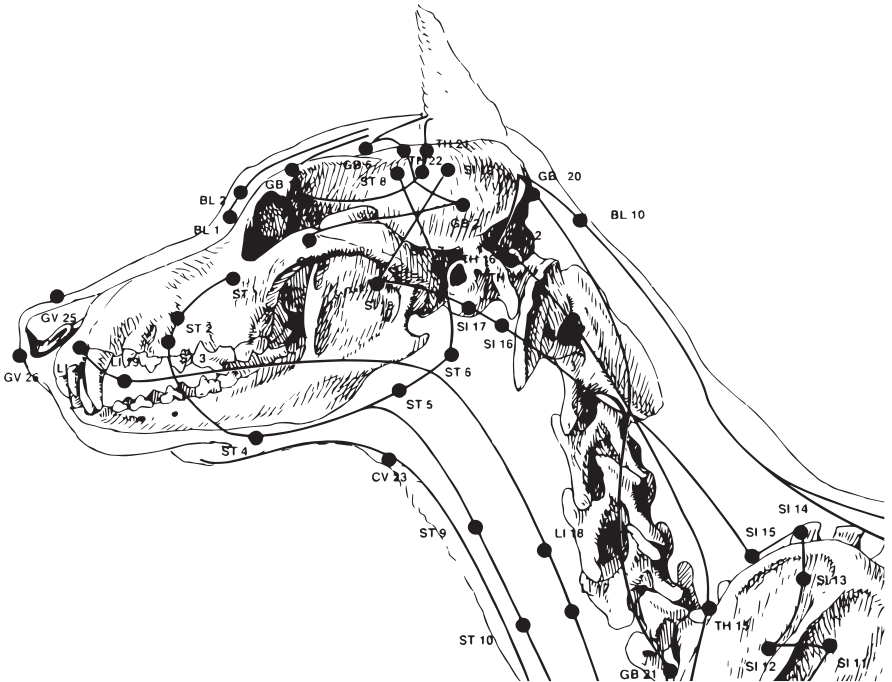
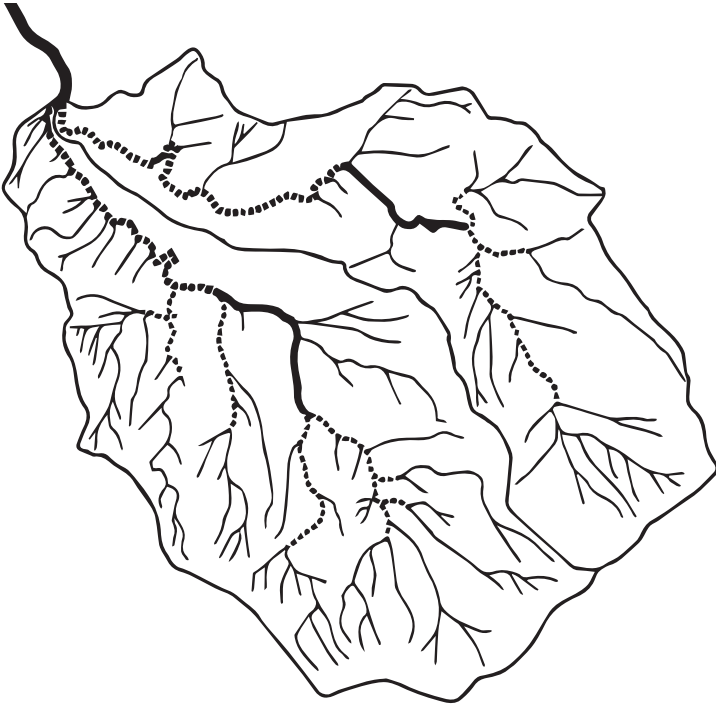
Daodejing begins with: “The Dao that can be told is not eternal Dao.” That which is itself is already articulating in entirety. Everything is Qi. A pure vacillating movement: matter to energy, energy to matter. A flux of potentials along the multidimensional plane of Qi. That from which all vacillates.

DYAD

Qi is made legible through Yin and Yang. Both are fundamentally still Qi. They have different properties and can be thought of as demarcating two fundamental categories. From there, everything in the all is either Yin or Yang: a metaphysical binary.

TRIAD

Through the concept of Qi (vacillating matter-energy), Chinese medicine opens thinking about body, land, and cosmos as inextricably linked—scalable. It follows immanently that body-mind-soul are a triad, each one producing and affecting the other: 道.



MERIDIAN

Just as we talk about a river in an ecosystem, we can speak of meridians. They are made of the same thing: Qi. Body is land and the land is our body. The six channels are internally and externally linked. Dogs have meridians. Plants have meridians. Even a river has a Xi (cleft) point. When we come into balance we bring the world into balance. Much like a terrestrial ecosystem needs soil and its intermediaries—minerals, carbon, nitrogen, fungi, bacteria—we too need the same. Our bodies, for example, rely upon hemoglobin proteins to oxygenate blood and allow for cellular respiration. At the centre of hemoglobin, acting almost like an organic crystal, an iron ion charges, facilitates binding to oxygen. Similarly, plants rely on chlorophyll to accomplish a similar binding: magnesium and carbon dioxide. Mirroring bodies. We can couple relationships of body and land through herbal medicine.

PAO DING JIE NIU

Ding was King Liang Hui's butcher. Wherever his hands touched or feet stomped, the sound of skin-and-bones separating followed—loud, like the Mulberry Woods Dance. Liang Huiwang asked, "How can your skills be so brilliant?" Pao Ding replied, "What the minister inquires about is the law of things, it exceeds the slaughter of cattle. When I started butchering, I saw nothing but the whole ox. After three years, I no longer saw the whole ox. I follow the Dao, striking apart large gaps, moving toward openings, following the natural structure. Even tendons webbed to bones give no resistance. A good cook goes through a knife in a year because he cuts. An average cook one a month—he hacks. My knife is nineteen years old. It has butchered thousands of oxen. But the blade is like new.

—Zhuangzi

GAP

Gaps depend on the object they separate. Is a separation the same as a gap? A gap is a temporal disjunction, a spatial cleaving, a lingering lack of movement in a stream of what is, was, or might be. A hole in the whole. In its fading, a gap produces something more. An absence that potentiates. Gaps hold rhythm—movement created through the punctuation of space. They ask: does movement create space, or space create movement? Chinese medicine is about potential movements that create space. Gaps occur. They make boundaries between ideas, tissues, bodies, words, musical notes, mountains, and crowds. Acupuncture points or their meridians are found in the gaps of interstitial fluids, tissues, vessels, fascia, and lymph as they overlap and populate the body. Not all gaps are the same. Some occur suddenly. Some murmur in presence before their inevitable collapse. Others are barely perceptible. Like the geography of meridians, a landscape's form informs which gap presents. Things move through gaps. They do not linger—marked only by an absence: the gap. Gaps are connections. Plants fill the gaps between sunlight and shade, earth and sky. Plants are native gap dwellers; herbal medicine shifts what's agape. When something is agape, it is connected. It must change.

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CRITICAL HERBALISM

If we are tangled up
in more-than-human
worlds, what counts
as good health?
How can we cultivate
reciprocity in health
practices?

Join herbalist
Hayden Ostrom
for a DIY herbalism
workshop.

1–4pm, May 6th, 2023

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**OTHERWISE
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1oz. 1/23

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