



# Path for a becoming animal

Sensuous nature magician **David Abram's** recent book *Becoming Animal*, conjures the contour terrain of a future depth ecology, while expanding on his practice of the wild. In this excerpt from the book, Abram extends the reach of depth in nature

**D**epth is the dimension of closeness and distance. It is the way the world spreads out from a few aspen leaves left dangling, golden and spent, on a branch in front of your face, to the rocky ridge across the glen, and beyond that to the further hills piled one upon the other against the last mountain range silhouetted zigzag against the sky, and on past, opening out across the unseen desert to a horizon still faintly visible between the near and far of things – the continuum, or glide, between the known and the unknown. It is the manner in which distances beyond the horizon – realms that you can dream but cannot see – somehow open onto those vague and far-off shapes that you *can see* but cannot possibly touch, the way the perceptual world bounded by those edges swerves toward you out of that purely visible distance, growing more and more palpable until, yes you can also reach it with your fingers, feeling the smooth texture of the branch with your hands as well as your eyes, a dimension that keeps on coming right up to your face and includes it.

Depth implicates the whole of our animal body (this carnal density of muscles and skin and breath),

situating us physically within the animate landscape. Whenever we notice that some aspects of the perceived world are closer and more accessible to us than others, whenever we acknowledge that some phenomena are crisply visible while others are concealed from view, we affirm our bodily location *in the midst* of those phenomena. Unlike the dimensions of height and of width, which seem entirely objective attributes of things that we perceive, the dimension of depth varies with each change in our own position. The overall *height* of the aspen grove across the meadow as a fairly fixed property of those clustered trees – as even the *width* of that grove seems an objective property of place. But the *depth* of that grove manifestly depends upon my bodily position in relation to those trees. From where I stand, the aspen grove has a somewhat shallow depth; my gaze can readily pass through it to the darker evergreens on the far side. Yet as I walk around the grove, the depth shifts: from here, that crowd of aspens has a more profound and many-layered depth, and my eyes cannot really penetrate it. And if I step among those aspens, into the heart of the grove, then its depth will open and envelope me, and I will need to describe it afresh.