

# FRAUD, FANTASY, AND FICTION IN ENVIRONMENTAL WRITING

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During the past several decades, a number of accounts of environmental and ethnic wisdom have appeared which have later been exposed as fraudulent. I suggest that the widespread popularity of these accounts should be understood as symptomatic of valid feelings and awarenesses that are unable to find expression in the modern world, and are usually dissociated from mainstream decision-making processes. I argue that as the natural order continues to be degraded, forms such as fiction which currently have relatively low status will become more important as vehicles for feelings, ideas, and possibilities which can find no other refuge within a world increasingly dominated by technological and economic viewpoints.

## INTRODUCTION: ENVIRONMENTAL 'FRAUDS'

Over the past century, there have been several enthusiastically embraced accounts of environmental lore that have eventually been recognized as less than entirely authentic. Among the most well known and less obviously concocted of these is the case of 'Chief Seattle's speech' - a homily of ecological wisdom that turned out to have been written not by the chief of the Suquamish himself, but rather by Ted Perry, a white University professor, loosely based on what Seattle had been reported as saying.<sup>i</sup> A second case concerns the writings of 'Grey Owl', who claimed to have been born to an Apache chief and a Scottish woman, and whose books about his life in the Canadian wilderness enjoyed wide popularity in the 1930's.<sup>ii</sup> He was later revealed as Archie Belaney, who was born in Hastings on the south coast of England and later adopted his chosen identity after emigrating to Canada. While these writings have often simply been dismissed as fraudulent, their enormous popularity suggests that they tapped into a deep-seated need among Euroamerican readers, and that this might usefully be regarded as symptomatic of something that is denied in industrial society. If a symptom can be regarded both as the expression of a repressed need and as an attempt to compensate for it, what is it that is repressed in the modern world, and how might it be authentically expressed? In order to explore these issues, I begin with a lengthy detour into the character of truth in modern society.

## TRUTH, CORRECTNESS, AND IDENTITY

A truthful statement is commonly understood either as one that accurately refers to some transcendent property of the outside world or as one that is consistent with some consensual system of thought such as logic; or as some combination of these. As modern humanity distances itself from the natural order and encloses itself

within a technologically created realm, the emphasis is shifting from the first of these criteria to the second. Increasingly, truth is defined in terms of that subset of the real that is scientifically plausible, politically acceptable, and economically exploitable; and as the world is physically reconstructed through the application of technology, so the first criterion of truth seems to fade. For example, the statement that nature is 'a human creation' expresses the growing skepticism in the industrialized world that there is anything genuinely 'other', anything outside and beyond human action and human reason; and as technological rationality colonizes the world ideologically and physically, so such statements – which would have been viewed as absurd even 50 years ago – become increasingly accurate descriptions of the way the world is. Thus the notion of truth as founded in the character of a natural reality that is greater than the form it might take within any particular cultural system or era is giving way to the idea of truth as reflecting the principles of one specific, technologically transformed world. This reflects a widespread but tacit acceptance of the 'end of ideology' hypothesis, implying that the sort of world we live in today is the only possible world. Given this 'idolatry of the actual', ecologically sound lifestyles tend to be viewed as unrealistic, childish fantasies or as harmless aberrations. And while intelligent, communicating, nonhuman creatures are common in children's stories and Hollywood science fiction, we are expected to leave them behind when we close the book or leave the cinema, returning to a 'real' world that is increasingly bereft of such qualities.

This shrinkage of the real toward a reified present leads to the view that qualities that are inexpressible in scientific terms<sup>iii</sup> are invalid or nonexistent. To say that a particular area of forest is populated by certain species or is rich in certain chemical elements, for example, may be correct; but it is a very impoverished expression of what the forest is in its entirety. While the first version of truth aspires to express this entirety (Heidegger's *aletheia*, or 'unconcealment'), the second version, 'correctness', merely maps it onto a particular system of understanding<sup>iv</sup>, and then in turn, re-imposes this understanding onto the world. If we insist on the reality of those qualities that tend to be ignored by merely 'correct' descriptions, then we are forced to look for means of expressing them other than the forms of science that have been conscripted into the cause of industrial growth. There are clear implications here for the sort of world that results from our behavior, given our enormous technological power; for qualities unrecognizable by such sciences tend to have a limited life expectancy. Spirits and gods once seemed real; and today not only ecosystems, but the idea of the ecosystem may be in danger of following them into oblivion.

There are implications, too, for our identities as human beings. If the world seems entirely rationally understandable, then feeling, spirit, and emotion become 'irrational' and therefore suspect. Of course, not all experience can be directly taken as a valid guide to what is true or moral; and it is one of the tasks of a sophisticated culture to interpret and articulate experience appropriately. A firm sense of identity needs to be grounded in a world that is experienced as complementing our senses, faculties, and indwelling expectations; and this experience motivates our intuition of the first version of truth, which grows out of our embodied resonance with those aspects of the natural world that we have interacted with in the course of our

evolutionary history. Since we evolved as multi-sensory creatures, it is reasonable to assume that all our senses and faculties have a part to play in forming our identities. What David Levin refers to as "the body's primordial and archaic attunement ... its implicit structures of pre-understanding ... of what is basically good, basically true, and basically beautiful"<sup>v</sup> provides our fundamental moral and epistemological orientation. This first version of truth accepts that although the senses, along with intuition, feeling, and instinct, provide us with meanings that may be difficult to articulate, they nevertheless enable us to reach out to insights and forms of relation that are omitted by many scientific models.

For example, Robert Ryan, in a study of three urban natural areas in Ann Arbor, Michigan, found that the more active users of an area developed a 'place-specific attachment', protesting against proposed changes, favoring minimal management and a policy of letting nature take its course. Ryan notes the "very real sense of personal loss or grief when favorite natural areas are changed or threatened by change", emotions which are, however, "not always verbally expressed."<sup>vi</sup> The emotional relation to place, in a sense, was not merely an element of self, but reached beyond self to become a stabilizing force within the ecosystem, suggesting a potentially more integrated self-place system. Writ large, this may be the nascent form of a natural process that is usually stifled by forms of 'education' which emphasize the detachment of self from world: a process of growing into the world, so that identity is no longer simply personal identity, but becomes that of the person-in-the-world.<sup>vii</sup> This form of identity, and its implications for ethics and epistemology, sits uncomfortably with our roles as consumers and workers; and it may embody a deeper truth that transcends short-term industrialist realities.

Truth defined in this way as not only scientifically understood, but also as the sensed, felt expression of the forms that a healthy life in a healthy world might take, is only partly conscious and remains mostly at the level of 'gut feelings' within modern society. Frequently, the forms in which it is expressible are either marginalized or intrinsically suspect: poetry and film are viewed as 'leisure' activities, licensed to depart temporarily from the important stuff of life such as share prices or genetic structures; and environmentalists are rightly suspicious of religious fundamentalisms, specious pseudo-sciences, or fanciful 'New Age' orientations. Sometimes, we feel pressured to translate our felt sense of what is right into the language of science, as Eugene Hargrove points out in referring to Ian Douglas-Hamilton's study of the attitudes of rangers in a Tanzanian national park. In this case, elephants were demolishing most of the trees, and one obvious course of action was to cull the elephants. But none of the rangers wanted to shoot the elephants, feeling that they had great intrinsic value. Nevertheless "they did not believe that their feelings could be part of a professional justification for not shooting the elephants. Given that such justifications were closed off for him, Douglas-Hamilton concluded that he was supposed to find some facts that would independently justify this position so that aesthetic considerations would not have to be mentioned."<sup>viii</sup> Truths expressible in the language of science are easily accepted. Truths that cannot be so expressed may be constantly reborn in the fringes of consciousness, but are also constantly extinguished when they venture into the unsympathetic gaze of the technological world. As a result of this repressive denial

of our experience, truth shrinks back towards correctness; and the resulting unease is interpreted as individual pathology.<sup>ix</sup> Visions of a healthy world based on felt truths and relations as well as on scientific knowledge are conventionally seen as unrealistic fantasies rather than possibilities to be worked towards; and so the corporate world replaces nature as the grounding basis of our lives.

### THE 'NATURAL' IN INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

Nature in its entirety is vastly more complex than the models we use to understand it; and so while science offers us powerful understanding, there are certain aspects of nature that cannot be viewed through a scientific lens – as, I think, many scientists would agree. In a discussion of cartography, for example, Tim Ingold refers to the "discrepancy between truth and accuracy ... the more [we aim] to furnish a precise and comprehensive representation of reality, the less true to life this representation appears." He continues:

In the cartographic world ... all is still and silent. There is neither sunlight nor moonlight; there are no variations of light or shade; no clouds, no shadows or reflections. The wind does not blow, neither disturbing the trees nor whipping the water into waves. No birds fly in the sky, or sing in the woods; forests and pastures are devoid of animal life; houses and streets are empty of people and traffic. To dismiss all this ... is perverse, to say the least. For it is no less than the stuff of life itself ... .<sup>x</sup>

Curiously, however, scientific models are often regarded as incorporating more accurate, deeper understandings than the realities they describe. Jean-Pierre Dupuy has pointed out that the term 'model' in scientific discourse has a meaning opposite to that of everyday speech. Normally, when we 'model' something, we produce a representation, an imitation of it; whereas a scientific model

enjoys ... a transcendent position, not unlike that of a Platonic Idea, of which reality is only a pale imitation. ... It is at this point that the hierarchical relation between the imitation and the imitated comes to be inverted.

Although the scientific model is a human imitation of nature, the scientist is inclined to regard it as a 'model' [for] nature. Thus nature is taken to imitate the very model by which man tries to imitate it.<sup>xi</sup>

In other words, our understandings of nature are claimed to be more real, more basic, than the natural world they set out to describe; and this suppresses all those qualities of nature that exist beyond science. While the domesticated world can, with some violence, be made consistent with scientific understandings, the wild world is, literally, another story. Wilderness stretches away from us, extending beyond the horizon not only of our vision, but also of our understanding and our imagination. That is what makes it so hard to define: it is partly accessible, but also partly inaccessible. As Edward Abbey remarks, wilderness "means something lost and something still present, something remote and at the same time intimate, something buried in our blood and nerves, something beyond us and without limit."<sup>xii</sup> In order to express some of what is beyond the horizon of current understanding, we have to embrace forms of communication such as fiction and

myth. Myth need not be in opposition to reality, but can expand and deepen understanding so that it reaches toward currently unrealized possibilities. As Robin Riddington explains in discussing Dunne-za mythologies:

In our thoughtworld, myth and reality are opposites. Unless we can find some way to understand the reality of mythic thinking, we remain prisoners of our own thoughtworld ... the language of Western social science assumes an objective world independent of individual experience. The language of Indian stories assumes that objectivity can only be approached through experience. A hunter encounters his game first in a dream, then in physical reality. In the Indian thoughtworld, stories about talking animals and stories about summer gatherings are equally true because both describe personal experience. Their truths are complementary.<sup>xiii</sup>

Ecological meanings that are becoming endangered continue to exist in the resonances evoked by the Seattle 'speech' or in Grey Owl's words, in the properties of nature that we sense experientially but cannot express, and in the repugnance we feel about the technological transformation of nature. Our difficulty in articulating such feelings does not make them invalid, but tells us something about the narrowing conceptual frame within which we are tacitly expected to locate not only 'external' nature, but also our own lives and identities. As Leon Kass has argued:

In crucial cases, ... repugnance is the emotional expression of deep wisdom, beyond reason's power fully to articulate it. Can anyone really give an argument fully adequate to the horror which is father-daughter incest (even with consent), or having sex with animals, or mutilating a corpse, or eating human flesh, or even just (just!) raping or murdering another human being? Would anybody's failure to give full rational justification for his or her revulsion at these practices make that revulsion ethically suspect? Not at all. On the contrary, we are suspicious of those who think that they can rationalize away our horror, say, by trying to explain the enormity of incest with arguments only about the genetic risks of inbreeding.<sup>xiv</sup>

While scientific language offers us the most powerful system of understanding the world has known, it is not a complete understanding. A mature scientific awareness should be ready to recognize the limitations of science, and to draw – albeit critically and cautiously – on other vehicles to convey and develop intuitions and feelings that are scientifically inexpressible.

## COGNITIVE AND ECOLOGICAL REALITIES

Much of what we hint at when we refer to 'ecology' has to do with the emergent properties of large systems – those properties that depend on, but are not reducible to, the properties of components of such systems. Similarly, much of what makes us human reflects the emergent properties of cultural systems that are scientifically inexplicable and empirically untestable. Rational understanding can explain the behavior of individual cells fairly adequately, that of individual creatures rather less adequately, and that of the larger systems we are part of hardly

at all – which is why we have little comprehension of the direction our society is heading in, and even less of the large-scale ecological systems it is displacing. Consequently, the most fundamental issues of our time are precisely those we can articulate least clearly; and this largely accounts for our persistent attraction to cultural identities and texts which express more adequately our potential place within the natural world.

As soon as we learn to count and to categorize, we are cemented into a cognitive system that organizes the world through conceptual similarities and differences. As Tim Ingold points out, we are taught that " ... every creature is specified in its essential nature through the bestowal of attributes passed down along lines of descent, independently and in advance of its placement in the world." Consequently, "difference is rendered as diversity. Thus living things are classified and compared ... in terms of intrinsic properties that they are deemed to possess by virtue of genealogical connection, irrespective of their positioning in relation to one another in an environment."<sup>xv</sup> A butterfly, we learn, is like a moth, but different to a buddleia. In ecological systems, however, butterflies and moths have few significant relationships; while butterflies and buddleias do. Our systems of classification, then, are selectively based in those specific natural characteristics that we can recognize and cognitively order, and we tend to ignore those other less accessible natural characteristics that have to do with relation and systemic functioning. The conceptual structure of rational thought, in other words, diverges from and takes precedence over the ecological structure of the natural world.

As Steve Buchmann and Gary Nabhan point out, a "biologically rich place is rich in relationships as well as in species. Conversely, the loss of biodiversity is always more than the simple loss of species; it is also the extinction of ecological relationships."<sup>xvi</sup> This suggests that the essence of a creature (including a human being), far from being defined just by innate characteristics, may reside partly in its developing relational extensions into structures larger than itself. Just as the pink lady slipper orchid cannot reproduce itself without being part of a larger structure that also includes the bumble bees that pollinate it, so humans are dependent on the cultural structures that according to Geertz "are not mere expressions, instrumentalities, or correlates of our biological, psychological, and social existence; they are prerequisites of it."<sup>xvii</sup> Consequently, the silent but relentless dilapidation of cultural, social, and ecological relations, although difficult to quantify, is as devastating for us as the absence of bumble bees is for the pink lady slipper orchid. Adopting a relational identity, then, suddenly brings into focus forms of damage that have previously seemed ephemeral. Loss of community, of extended family ties, of ecological relatedness, no longer seem less real than biological damage; and terms such as a 'broken heart' or an 'emotional wrench' begin to appear less as metaphors than as descriptions of previously hidden realities.

Those emergent properties that we term 'ecological', and that cognition finds difficult to cope with, tend to be omitted from our definitions of both nature and humanity. Today, the cult of individualism, fostered by capitalism, has pushed any structures larger than the 'things' we can see and identify to the periphery of what is cognitively acceptable. Just as "there is no such thing as society",<sup>xviii</sup> so ecosystems, supposedly, are no more than "transitory assemblages of biotic and abiotic elements

that exist (or could exist) contingent upon accidents of environmental history, evolutionary chance, human management, and the theoretical perspective one applies to define the boundaries".<sup>xix</sup> According to Donald Worster, when population ecologists look at a forest, they see

only trees. See them and count them – so many white pines, so many hemlocks, so many maples and birches. They insist that if we know all there is to know about the individual species that constitute a forest, and can measure their lives in precise, quantitative terms, we will know all there is to know about that forest. It has no 'emergent' or organismic properties. It is not some whole greater than the sum of its parts, requiring 'holistic' understanding."<sup>xx</sup>

As one population ecologist puts it, if ecosystems have properties that are more than the sum of their parts, then "the study of these systems should perhaps be carried out by theologians rather than scientists."<sup>xxi</sup> Such views veto the scientific study of emergent properties, which are viewed as unreal or even nonexistent, just as Thatcher's statement about the nonexistence of society denies that we are defined partly by the structures we grow into and participate in. The slippage is from methodological reductionism to ontological reductionism: in other words, it is one thing to recognize that understanding the pieces is a useful step in understanding the whole, but quite another to claim that the whole simply is the sum of the pieces. Writ large and translated into technological actions, this error obliterates the systems whose existence they deny: not just ecological systems, but also social, linguistic and cultural ones, along with the emotional and spiritual possibilities that depend on their existence.

Furthermore, denying the existence of emergent properties results in an emphasis on constancy rather than change. Life evolves through ever greater complexity of organization, including temporal organization; so while the basic components of life – say, molecules – remain the same, they become involved in increasingly complex patterns, processes, and cycles as we move towards more inclusive levels of functioning. Defining a person or other natural entity by their fixed attributes rather than by the structures and processes they grow into during their lives puts a boundary around the individual ego and denies that growth can occur across this boundary. If we assume that "persons embody certain attributes of appearance, temperament, and mentality by virtue of their ancestry, and ... these are passed on in a form that is unaffected by the circumstances or achievements of their life in the world",<sup>xxii</sup> then identity shrinks towards our genetic and social origins, and it becomes impossible to extend oneself into any cause, idea, or vision that extends beyond one's own life. However, experience teaches us that if we work to conserve wilderness, join a community, change our spiritual allegiances, or give birth, these changes affect who we are.

Inherited attributes, rather than being taken as a starting point for growth and transformation through participation, are all too often taken as boundary conditions for identity. Our blindness to larger systems carries with it a secondary blindness: that which prevents us from recognizing the possibilities of our own transformation within these larger systems. As individuals, we can supposedly develop attachments to a few other humans while our relations with the rest of the world remain instrumental, based in assumptions of human control and economic

exchange. Experiences of participation and empathy, especially with non-human entities, are regarded as, at best, harmless indulgences. Consequently, while our restless unease drives us towards consumerism and narcissistic forms of 'personal growth', experiences of self as undergoing profound transformations as we grow into larger systems are rare and often pathologized. As Anand Paranjpe notes, "one gets the impression that in Western philosophy and psychology there is a cultivated sense of aversion for any kind of personal transformation."<sup>xxiii</sup>

## TRANSFORMATION AND AUTHENTICITY

'Grey Owl's' exposure as 'really' Archie Belaney reflects this conventional view of identity as largely predetermined. However far removed Grey Owl's new lifestyle was from the English cultural landscape, his accident of birth cast him as definitively English, and therefore restricted the identity choices available to him. The enormous diversity of possible occupational choices in industrial society conceals what virtually all these choices have in common: the assumption of a lifelong radical separation between the individual and the rest of the natural world. In this situation where almost all identity choices embody the same underlying pathology and repression, it is not surprising that more adventurous souls may attempt to abandon this social context for one that more adequately expresses their felt resonance with the natural world.

But this is a move that is fraught with problems. Ethnicity and family background are not the only defining aspects of identity; but simply pushing them aside in the impulse to trade in one cultural frame for another is as unrealistic as the opposite error of over-emphasizing them. Also, the desire to embrace another cultural framework as a 'lifestyle choice' within industrial society has spawned facile blends of New Age philosophy, pop psychology, commodified Asian religion, and supposedly 'Indian' wisdom, in which the conscious adoption of an 'alternative' stance covers up the less conscious perpetuation of conventional allegiances. In these respects, Archie Belaney was certainly not the most dishonest of the 'whiteshamans' who have emerged over the past century or so: at least he lived in the wilderness rather than staying in Beverley Hills and writing about an entirely invented experience, and he was closer to Thoreau than we might comfortably acknowledge. The difference, of course, concerns identity: although he lived on the fringes of society, Thoreau never claimed to be other than Euroamerican. Why, then, did Belaney feel the need fraudulently to claim Indian parentage?

A possible reason is suggested if we compare the impact of the two men's writings. Before his exposure, 'Grey Owl' sold hundreds of thousands of books, drew large audiences across the world, and was courted by kings and queens. In contrast, Thoreau was a little known social isolate; and after the first print run of his most famous work, 'Walden', the book remained out of print until after his death. It appears that if fraudulently pretending to be a Native American is reprehensible, not being a Native American in the first place is almost as bad. One wonders how well known the 'Seattle speech' would be if it was instead referred to as the 'Perry speech'. Could it be that recognizing the depth of our colonization by industrialism,



we believe that only those writers who are separated from us by cultural background or the passage of time are felt to be acceptable as sources of environmental wisdom? Holistic environmental awareness seems to exist in a realm that is set apart from mainstream white society, a realm also inhabited by the ethnic, the spiritual, and the emotional; and what exists in this realm can only be admitted to consciousness if its subsidiary and subordinate status is first accepted. In other words, the truths inherent in this awareness are acceptable only on condition that they are simultaneously discredited. This is consistent with Wendy Rose's observation that Native American writers are shelved under 'Indians', 'Western', or some such label, whereas their white counterparts are shelved under 'literature'. Furthermore, "if a Native American writer happens to gain international prominence, as in the case of Scott Momaday ... critics and ethnographers exclaim that the author and his or her work is 'not really Indian'. Rather, it suddenly falls within the 'mainstream of American letters'"<sup>xxiv</sup>.

If feeling, spirituality, and ecological insights were seriously recognized and applied within mainstream white society, the consequences would be momentous, subverting our exclusive reliance on science and the entire anthropocentric justification for the industrialist exploitation of 'natural resources'. It is therefore necessary for feeling to be accorded a low status compared to rational argument, and relegated to a partly dissociated realm where it cannot seriously challenge industrialism. If a semi-permeable boundary is established between these two realms, the 'other' can be both acknowledged as a fringe interest while being ignored when the important decisions are made. The ascription of ecological wisdom to native cultures or past eras therefore protects mainstream white culture, allowing this wisdom a sort of dissociated survival within a subordinated sphere that is moored loosely alongside technological society without ever being fully accepted into it. 'Native literature' is one facet of 'multiculturalism' in modern society, suggesting the superficially democratic interaction of a range of ethnicities, religions, and cultures while actually cementing them into predefined places within an unshakeable politics of economy and power.<sup>xxv</sup> This allows spiritual and environmental awarenesses to be 'taken into account' in policy formulation where there is no risk that they would have any significant effect; or – if there is such a risk – they may be dismissed as 'unrealistic'. But nobody ever suggests that scientific and economic 'realities' should be 'taken into account': they are the unquestioned basis of decision making.

Simply to dismiss Euroamerican fantasies about native cultures as 'fraudulent', therefore, is to miss the significance of this phenomenon. The underlying problem is that certain types of experience cannot easily find authentic expression within industrial society, and are fundamentally incompatible with current economic structures. Since Euroamerican society is based on peculiarly irrational forms of economic 'rationality' and the rigorous exclusion of other meanings, it is difficult – without serious consequences – to embody ecological or religious principles in one's working life while remaining part of this society. Ecologically sound practices – along with growing vegetables, spiritual exercises, or camping in the wilderness – are 'leisure' activities that are separated from the serious business of earning a living. If we are sufficiently wealthy, of course, we can

retreat to our islands of ecological correctness within the ocean of environmental desolation; but such 'solutions' do little to challenge the direction of mainstream society, and embody geographically already-existing psychological dissociations. For all but a few, an authentic relation to nature can exist only as fantasy; and it flourishes in this role precisely because our working lives often fail to fulfill our need to feel grounded and in contact with the natural world. A diversity of cultural and spiritual options, together with their associated environmental beliefs and practices, are allowed a superficial existence in order to camouflage and compensate for their opposite: the inescapable uniformity of a capitalist economic and political reality that is now the unquestioned basis of our lives.

In rather the same way that a mistress can perpetuate a moribund marriage by delaying transformative change, these sops to a healthy lifestyle and identity maintain industrialism – and its underlying assumptions – by providing temporary relief from it. However, as the object relations theorist Harry Guntrip suggested, while fantasy is healthy if it is a precursor to action, it is pathological if it is a substitute for it.<sup>xxvi</sup> We need to ask ourselves: does the action we are taking challenge industrialism, or does it exist in the interstices allowed and shaped by industrialism? If the latter is the case, then our humanity is being kept alive through a 'life-support system' of leisure activities and 'lifestyle choices' just to the extent that we remain available to be used within the industrialist system. There is no shortage of parallels here: forests, for example, are allowed to flourish to the extent that they provide 'timber'; so natural tendencies are permitted and used by the system to strengthen itself. Similarly, human needs and desires – most obviously, sexuality – that could be part of a healthy world become perverted and distorted when harnessed as part of the industrial system.

In contrast to most indigenous societies, industrial society defines 'culture' and 'nature' in terms of their supposed opposition to each other, leading to a chronic, institutionalized lack of psychological integrity. Our socially learned characteristics, rather than complementing and expressing those tendencies that derive from our embodiment as living creatures, are often seen as replacing them; and so our resonance with the natural world, if we are to retain our basic cultural orientation, has to occur in a dissociated realm. This is a recurring theme in theories of psychopathology from Freud onwards<sup>xxvii</sup>, suggesting that it is the basis of a persistent cultural malaise. In Carl Rogers' 'person centered' approach, for example, psychological distress is viewed in terms of a lack of congruence between a bodily-based experiential self and a conscious self-concept that develops through the introjection of social mores and the denial of embodied awareness.<sup>xxviii</sup> The notions of truth, reality, and identity implied by these two versions of self differ fundamentally; and one of the main tasks of education is to reduce the resultant conflict by instilling the belief that embodied 'truth' is misleading and frivolous while consciously learned rationality is reliable and correct. But since conscious learning cannot completely eliminate embodied awareness, these repressed feelings will seek ways of expressing themselves symptomatically through an entirely different form of relation to the world, one which implants us empathically in the world as it abandons detachment and 'objectivity'. This implies a form of identity, and an understanding of human being, that utterly rejects the basic assumptions of

industrial life, since – as Tim Ingold says of the Ojibwa – the "achievement of empathy means taking on another way of being, [and] full understanding is attained not through translation but through metamorphosis."<sup>xxxix</sup>

But while native ways of being can be appropriated as fantasies within an industrial lifestyle in rather the same way that tribal artifacts are used to decorate a modern living room, indigenous realities, if taken to heart, more often directly challenge rather than complement Euroamerican representations of nature. The world represented in Native American writing, for example, diverges from the neatly arranged conceptual order that our cognitive representations assume, embodying – as William Bevis puts it – an "apparent fragmentation of the natural world into a huge cast of individual 'micro-characters', a fragmentation that has not been properly noted because it does not fit white formulas ... Cows, bats, mosquitoes, blackbirds, coyotes, magpies act in their individual, peculiar ways".<sup>xxx</sup> This is a world which is allowed to be, seemingly incoherent because it has not yet been made to fit within a humanly recognizable order. One thing does not 'symbolize' another, conforming to any anthropocentric taxonomy of comprehension: things and creatures just are, in their own peculiar ways, and relating to them involves a self-transformative effort of empathy rather than an attempt to assimilate them to a pre-existing cognitive pattern. Bevis illustrates this by referring to the writing of D'Arcy McNickle:

Archilde is at Mission School, and one afternoon a cloud  
 "by curious coincidence ... assumed the form of a cross - in the reflection of the setting sun, a flaming cross. The prefect was the first to observe the curiosity and it put him into a sort of ecstasy ...  
 'The Sign! The Sign!' he shouted. His face was flushed and his eyes gave off flashing lights - Archilde did not forget them.  
 'The Sign! Kneel and pray!'  
 The boys knelt and prayed, some of them frightened and on the point of crying. They knew what the sign signified ... the second coming of Christ, when the world was to perish in flames."

The cloud, of course, melts away, but curiously Archilde does not need this empirical proof to reject Christianity's symbolic use of nature:

"It was not the disappearance of the threatening symbol which freed him from the priest's dark mood, but something else. At the very instant that the cross seemed to burn most brightly, a bird flew across it ... It flew past and returned several times before finally disappearing - and what seized Archilde's imagination was the bird's unconcernedness. It recognized no 'sign'. His spirit lightened. He felt himself fly with the bird."<sup>xxxi</sup>

For Archilde, openness to his sensing of the world takes precedence over any elaborate conceptual scheme. The world comes first. This is also true, Bevis argues, of other native American writers: in James Welch's work, for example, "the natural world ... is strangely (to whites) various, objective, unsymbolic, *as if it had not yet been taken over by the human mind*."<sup>xxxii</sup>

Renouncing consumer society for the world that Welch and McNickle imply demands more than cosmological tourism. To paraphrase another critic of mercantile society, it is generally easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for an affluent inhabitant of the industrialised world to live in a

spiritually and ecologically consistent way. The impossibility of reconciling the fundamental industrialist assumption that we are separate from the natural world (including our own bodies) with the indigenous belief that human society is grounded in the natural world leads us to dissociate nature and feeling from economic 'realities'. Anything that challenges this dissociation leads to an unbearable degree of cognitive dissonance, in which mutually incompatible beliefs threaten to overwhelm our psychological equilibrium.

The assumption made by 'Grey Owl' that he could not, as Archie Belaney, achieve the more natural lifestyle he craved was well founded. As a teenager in Hastings, he "loved to go off on solitary walks to look for plants and wild animals";<sup>xxxiii</sup> but in the stiflingly provincial life of southern England, these activities were necessarily part of a dissociated realm of bodily awarenesses and inarticulable intuitions. Such experiences of contact with the natural world, in one form or another, are important in the psychological development of most children; but as Cynthia Tomashow notes, for many of us, "this aspect of identity seems to shrivel and recede to the dark reaches of ... consciousness".<sup>xxxiv</sup> Instead of developing and incorporating our bodily awarenesses as we reach out into the world, we instead learn that rational thought, the technological power that flows from it, and the economic structures within which 'business' can flourish are the fundamentals of life. Unlike most of us, Belaney rejected this socialized mode of being: what we play at, he made the centre of his life, rejecting capitalist society and his past identity within it. In order to do so, he lied about his parentage; but whether this course of action demonstrates less integrity than our more usual acceptance of the dissociations inherent in industrialized life is debatable. Under current conditions, the choice may not be a clear one between truth and untruth, or between authenticity and fakery; for each choice carries with it its own particular brand of inauthenticity.

## THE HUNGER FOR FORM

The dearth of ways expressing and justifying our embodied awarenesses makes us hungry for any suitable form; and this makes it easier to understand the enormous popularity of the Seattle 'speech' and the writings of Grey Owl. The unexpressed emotional needs of Euroamericans, unable to find more authentic modes of expression, give rise to the invention of forms of 'indigenous wisdom' that are often unrecognizable by the indigenous peoples concerned.<sup>xxxv</sup> Although this flourishing tradition of 'whiteshamanism' and the disingenuous literature it has generated are exploitative of the peoples and traditions they parody,<sup>xxxvi</sup> the emotional needs that underlie them are real enough. These needs should be frankly recognized, and expressed in honest forms such as fiction that is acknowledged to be fiction, so keeping alive the vision of ecological integrity until such time as it can be realized in physical reality.

Such subjective awarenesses are allowed to play only minor roles in the material but illusory world that focuses on the production and consumption of commodities. In this manufactured world, "what we experience is not real and what

is real is not what we experience".<sup>xxxvii</sup> While experience, in other words, in a flow of feelings, glimpses, intuitions, associations, and sensations, invites us to enter a world that transcends current actualities, this greater world is classified as unreal and replaced by a substitute, cognitive world defined in terms of material, biochemical, and economic categories that are learned but unfelt. Today, this partial view of reality is not just a learned understanding, however: increasingly, it is becoming the built structure of the world itself, so that the sort of world we have evolved to expect, hope for, and participate in is a latent world, hidden from us by a crude and degraded actuality. The task facing the environmentalist of the future, then, may be less one of conserving a world that is under threat, and increasingly one of actualizing a world that exists largely as a hope, a memory, and an intuition. As the novelist J. G. Ballard asserts, the

balance between fiction and reality has changed significantly in the past decades. Increasingly, their roles are reversed. We live in a world ruled by fictions of every kind – mass merchandising, advertising, politics conducted as a branch of advertising, the pre-empting of any original response to experience by the television screen ... It is now less and less necessary for the writer to invent the fictional content of his novel. The fiction is already there. The writer's task is to invent the reality.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Subjectivity, then, is not just a froth on the surface of reality, to be skimmed off and thrown away. It can also be a guide to what is missing both from our own lives and from the contexts we inhabit. Perry's version of the Seattle 'speech' was, as he himself was at pains to point out, largely a work of fiction; but the roots of this fiction come from an awareness that extends well beyond present forms of consciousness into the realm of a repressed, dissociated, cultural unconscious. As Rudolf Kaiser suggests, the Seattle 'speech' seems

to touch on an idea and a feeling that have so far largely been banned from our occidental, Christian, Western culture. It is the idea that the worldly and the spiritual, the mundane and the beyond, the profane and the sacred are not wholly separate from each other, as we are used to thinking; but that these seeming opposites are actually very closely connected in this world and that therefore everything in this world without any exception is seen as sacred in its nature and its character. This idea that each and every thing and creature in this world is spiritual and sacred may well prove to be the salient point of this text ... for a society which has always neatly separated the temporal and the spiritual and in this way has tried to justify man's claim that all the non-sacred world is at his disposal.<sup>xxxix</sup>

The notion that, say, a Douglas Fir, far from being merely the 'raw material' for garden furniture, is part of a system that is both natural and sacred is so at odds with our lifestyle, our education, and our inflated material 'needs' that to express it is to risk ridicule. As I argued above, such notions can only be allowed to exist within consciousness on condition that they are relegated to a psychological bantustan of ethnic, spiritual, and environmental awareness that is excluded from the main current of our thought. While the text of the 'Seattle speech' was not written by Seattle, it nevertheless, as Kaiser argues, possesses a kind of validity; and it can be understood as the product of an awareness that is also a hope, one that

resonates widely because it represents the shadow of the technological understanding of the world. This awareness can in present times not survive within mainstream politics, and is not viewed as 'real'; so it is necessary that it lead a dissociated existence as 'fiction' or 'fantasy'. But it should be recognized that in important ways, these dissociated realms are more real than what currently passes for reality.

As the destruction of the natural world proceeds, it becomes increasingly necessary to find ways of expressing not only what is, but also what could be: a healthy world, and those larger resonant structures that will be an essential part of such a world. To the extent that theory is consistent only with current, diminished forms of reality, it will be incapable of providing a basis for a movement away from these realities toward healthier ones: as Marcuse observed, to "the degree to which they correspond to the given reality, thought and behavior express a false consciousness, responding to and contributing to the preservation of a false order of facts."<sup>xi</sup> An adequate theory will also grasp the importance of relation, empathy, and emergent properties even when these are largely absent from the world today. In Michael Lambek's terms, the "basic question [is] whether [a] theory corresponds to the world as it is, whether it has ... 'veracity' (Descartes' *certum*; or 'correctness'); or whether it provides an ideal and has 'verity' (Vico's *verum*) against which the facts must be measured and perhaps found wanting."<sup>xii</sup> We need to be clear about which version of truth we are working within; and whether the future world we envision is an extension of current realities, or a transformation of these realities.

If we are to keep alive the long-term aim of a healthy world, we need to recognize that the term 'fictional' need not always mean 'unreal', but can also refer to what is not currently actualized. Great fiction can illustrate truths about life that are not always expressible through science; for science often captures the bare skeletons of once living creatures, shorn of everything that is inessential to the particular model adopted— the living flesh, the hopes and fears and beliefs, the connections and relations. In this vein, the novelist Toni Morrison argues that since we haven't yet found a way to preserve subjectivity, it will necessarily be the first casualty of historical recording. Morrison therefore refers to her writing as "a kind of literary archaeology: on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply. What makes it fiction is the nature of the imaginative act: my reliance on the image ... on the remains ... in addition to recollection, to yield up a kind of truth."<sup>xiii</sup>

Such 'fiction', which attempts to reconstruct a meaningful world from a few residual fragments, is no less 'true' than more conservative writing which refuses to go beyond the fragments themselves. If we live – as we increasingly do – in a world of ecological fragments, then we cannot take this as the 'true' world: rather, we need to imaginatively reconstruct the possibility of a more whole, healthy world. As Morrison remarks, " ... the crucial distinction ... is not the difference between fact and fiction, but the distinction between fact and truth ...".<sup>xiii</sup> This is a form of truth unrecognizable by those ostensibly 'objective' sciences that deny subjectivity any validity.

A reliance on 'facts', then, cannot be seen as an adequate default position: as Bernard Williams has pointed out, such a reliance "is itself an offence against truthfulness".<sup>xliv</sup> David James Duncan makes a complementary point:

fiction-making and lying are two different things. To write *War and Peace* required imaginative effort. To embezzle money from a bank does, too. [This] does not make Tolstoy a bank robber. *War and Peace* is an imaginative invention but also, from beginning to end, a truth-telling and a gift-giving. We know before reading a sentence that Tolstoy "made it all up", but this making is as altruistic and disciplined as the engineering of a cathedral. It uses mastery of language, spectacular acts of empathy, and meticulous insight into a web of individuals and a world to present a man's vast, haunted love for his Russian people. And we as readers get to recreate this love in ourselves. We get to reenter the cathedral.<sup>xlv</sup>

A disciplined subjectivity can enable us to 'reenter the cathedral' of the wild world and to nurture it; for just as Descartes' subjectivity of doubt has been largely realized in a mechanical and unfelt world, so a more complete subjectivity of empathy and relation can, eventually, be realized in a healthier one. As Ingold remarks, "we should resist the temptation to assume that since stories are stories they are ... unreal or untrue, for this is to suppose that the only reality, or true truth, is one in which we ... can have no part in at all. Telling a story ... is not like unfurling a tapestry to cover up the world, it is rather a way of guiding the attention of listeners or readers into it".<sup>xlvi</sup> It is not my intention to suggest either that science should be rejected or that fiction necessarily communicates truths; only that we need an understanding that as well as including science, also goes beyond it. An environmental movement, and a society, that limits its understanding to what is scientifically defensible impairs its ability to defend the natural world and is symptomatic of a crippled subjectivity.

Media such as film and fiction are not necessarily just the fanciful diversions of childhood, or distractions from the harsh realities of adulthood. If environmental ethics is to reach a wider audience, as David Johns has argued, we will need to use forms of communication that are "explicitly emotive and personally grounded". ... Although philosophy seeks to answer the same questions as myth - questions of meaning - philosophy does not even remotely approach the influence of the more potent modern forms of modern myth: novels and film. It would do well to learn from them.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Furthermore, if humanity and the non-human world are to survive in a more-than-biological sense, we will need to accept that we are continuous with our cultural and ecological contexts; and consequently, that authenticity is difficult to achieve in a world in which these contexts are degraded. We would do well explicitly to recognize our own colonization by industrialism, admitting that the battle between ecological structures and industrialism is being fought within ourselves as well as in the world outside. Just as the 'weeds' and 'vermin' that we have tried to annihilate may belatedly be recognized as forms of diversity necessary for the regeneration of the wild world, so censored modes of experience, together with the devalued forms of communication through which they can be expressed,

may conserve aspects of reality that may one day become actual. The sort of truth conveyed by such forms, like that embodied in the Seattle 'speech' or in Grey Owl's writings, differs from that of the physical sciences; and this should be recognized as a strength as well as a weakness. There is a curious and paradoxical authenticity in accepting the present impossibility of either individual or ecological health; and in this acceptance we abandon our narcissistic individual aspirations for consistency, wholeness, and an 'ecological' lifestyle, instead aligning our imperfect lives with the dream, the vision, and the hope of a healthier future world. In working to bring about such a world, we rediscover our own authenticity.

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<sup>i</sup>Perry himself never claimed that the 'speech' was anything other than a work of fiction. See Rudolf Kaiser, "Chief Seattle's Speech(es): American Origins and European Reception". In: Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat (eds.), *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>ii</sup>Donald B. Smith, *From the Land of Shadows: The Making of Grey Owl* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990).

<sup>iii</sup>Scientific disciplines do, of course, vary in their ability to express sensed qualities of the natural world. Some, such as physics, express a comparatively narrow range of properties, albeit with great power and accuracy; whereas others, such as conservation biology or ethnobotany, are sensitive to a much wider range of



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qualities. While recognizing this degree of variation, I use the general term 'science' in this paper to avoid lengthy qualifications and caveats.

<sup>iv</sup>David M. Levin, *The Body's Recollection of Being: Phenomenological Psychology and the Deconstruction of Nihilism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 24.

<sup>v</sup>Levin, *The Body's Recollection of Being*, pp. 171/172.

<sup>vi</sup>Robert Ryan, "A people-centered approach to designing and managing restoration projects: Insights from understanding attachment to urban natural areas." In Paul H. Gobster and R. Bruce Hull (eds.), *Restoring Nature: Perspectives from the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Washington DC: Island Press, 2000, pp. 213 - 215.

<sup>vii</sup> See David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (New York: Pantheon, 1996), for a more extended treatment of these ideas.

<sup>viii</sup>Eugene Hargrove, "Taking environmental ethics seriously". In: Dorinda G. Dallmeyer and Albert F. Ike (eds.), *Environmental Ethics and the Global Marketplace* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), p. 18.

<sup>ix</sup>This unease is reflected in striking increases in anxiety and depression in Europe and the USA over the past half-century or so. Despite greater material affluence, studies have typically found increases of several hundred percent in the prevalence of these disorders, so that towards the end of the last century levels of anxiety among 'normal' children were higher than levels recorded among child psychiatric patients in the 1950's. See, for example, Jean M. Twenge, "The age of anxiety? Birth cohort change in anxiety and neuroticism, 1952 - 1993." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79 (2000), No. 6, 1007-1021; and Priya J. Wickramratne et al., "Age,

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period and cohort effects on the risk of major depression: results from five United States communities". *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology* 42 (1989), 333-343.

<sup>x</sup>Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 242.

<sup>xi</sup>Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *The Mechanisation of the Mind: On the Origins of Cognitive Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 29-30.

<sup>xii</sup>Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (New York: Ballantine, 1968), p. 189.

<sup>xiii</sup>Robin Riddington, *Trail to Heaven: Knowledge and Narrative in a Northern Native Community* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1988), p. 71.

<sup>xiv</sup>Leon R. Kass, "The Wisdom of Repugnance", *New Republic*, June 2nd 1997.

<sup>xv</sup>Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 217.

<sup>xvi</sup>Stephen L. Buchmann and Gary Paul Nabhan, *The Forgotten Pollinators* (Washington DC: Island Press, 1996), p. 25.

<sup>xvii</sup>Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 49.

<sup>xviii</sup>As Margaret Thatcher famously observed.

<sup>xix</sup>R. Bruce Hull and David P. Robertson, "The language of nature matters: We need a more public ecology". In Gobster and Hull, *Restoring Nature*, p. 106.

<sup>xx</sup>Donald Worster, "The ecology of order and chaos". *Environmental History Review* 14 (1990), 1 - 18.

<sup>xxi</sup>John L. Harper, "The heuristic value of ecological restoration". In William R. Jordan III, Michael E. Gilpin, and John D. Aber (eds.), *Restoration Ecology: A Synthetic Approach to Ecological Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 38.

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<sup>xxii</sup>Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 137.

<sup>xxiii</sup>Anand C. Paranjpe, *Self and Identity in Modern Psychology and Indian Thought* (New York: Plenum, 1998), p. 229.

<sup>xxiv</sup>Wendy Rose, "The great pretenders: Further reflections on whitemanhood". In M. Annette Jaimes (ed.), *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonisation, and Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), p. 409.

<sup>xxv</sup>Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 39.

<sup>xxvi</sup>Harry Guntrip, *Schizoid Phenomena, Object Relations, and the Self* (London: Hogarth, 1981), p. 88.

<sup>xxvii</sup>See, for example, his "Civilised sexual morality and modern nervous illness". In J. Strachey (ed.), *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth, 1957), Vol. 9.

<sup>xxviii</sup>Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951).

<sup>xxix</sup>Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 106.

<sup>xxx</sup>William Bevis, "Native American novels: Homing in". In: Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat (eds.), *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 602/3.

<sup>xxxi</sup>Bevis, "Native American novels", p. 603. Bevis is quoting here from D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1936).

<sup>xxxii</sup>Bevis, "Native American novels", p. 599/600. (My emphasis).

<sup>xxxiii</sup>Smith, *From the Land of Shadow*, p. 17.

<sup>xxxiv</sup>Cynthia Thomashow, "Adolescents and ecological identity: Attending to wild nature". In Peter H. Kahn and Stephen Kellert (eds.), *Children and Nature:*

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*Psychological, Sociocultural, and Evolutionary Investigations* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), p. 266.

<sup>xxxv</sup>Michael F. Brown, *Who Owns Native Culture?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>xxxvi</sup>Rose, "The great pretenders".

<sup>xxxvii</sup>Robert D. Romanyshyn, *Psychological Life: From Science to Metaphor* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1982), p. 30.

<sup>xxxviii</sup>J. G. Ballard, Introduction to *Crash* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 4.

<sup>xxxix</sup>Rudolf Kaiser, "Chief Seattle's speech(es)". In: Swann and Krupat, *Recovering the Word*, p. 517.

<sup>xl</sup>Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 145.

<sup>xli</sup>Michael Lambek, "Rappaport on religion: a social anthropological reading". In: Helen Messer and Michael Lambek (eds.), *Ecology and the Sacred: Engaging the Anthropology of Roy A. Rappaport* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 267.

<sup>xlii</sup>Toni Morrison, "The site of memory". In William Zinsser (ed.), *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 112.

<sup>xliii</sup>Morrison, "The site of memory", p. 113.

<sup>xliv</sup>Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 12.

<sup>xlv</sup>David James Duncan, "When compassion becomes dissent". *Orion Magazine*, Jan/Feb 2003.

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<sup>xlvi</sup>Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 190.

<sup>xlvii</sup>David Johns, "Comment: The ir/relevance of environmental ethics". *Environmental Ethics* 25 (2), (2003), p. 224.