

Imagination and the Ecology of the Sacred

Joe Sheridan and Dan Longboat
Faculty of Environmental Studies
York University, Toronto, Ontario.

To Chief Jake Swamp and the Tree of Peace Society.

Introduction

The crisis of 1492 imported to North American its own version of imagination. Thereafter, Christianity, colonization and education combined to prohibit nature and mind from their duties to one another among lived rights of passage that had always concluded in the mythic realities that are the essence of this continent. Pre-Columbian North American reality did not know imagination as an expression of discontentment with their reality. Native American intellectual tradition still continues to express the North American landscape in intellectual and spiritual reciprocity, where the more-than-human grants qualities of mind to the human. The quality of mind characterized by Western tradition as imagination¹ is foreign to the Haudenosaunee, the Six Nations Confederacy, who understand that Creation expects human recognition to perpetuate their thankful reciprocity. That spiritual ecology (Cajete, 1997) is modernity's guide to recovering the necessary relationship between healthy ecologies of land and human minds. Thinking with and believing in the diverse minds that assemble ecosystems allows humans to understand what their animal teachers and helpers guide and instruct. In the ways of being of the continent. Without that instruction we are less human because we are less natural and ever more liable to mistake Creation's assistance as imaginary. Haudenosaunee realism has no need for imagination because what it knows is so large and ancient that traditional knowledge has seen it all before. What follows is a meditation on the problem of imagination in North America.

Animist Realism

Imagination will be initially replaced with the term *animist realism* to portray a planet where everything is alive and sentient but this belief has been around far longer than ecological theory.² Animist realism mirrors Creation's temporal and material totality by accounting for the unseen and the dreamt in a complex implicature that intersects with and provides passage to other domains. For the Haudenosaunee, Creation has been known in the language of the land, their own tongue, through deep time and across the vastness of space. That familiarity confirms a knowledge and faith in Creation's necessary architecture of ecological and spiritual interrelationships. Iroquoian belief can be understood as a spiritual connection to a bountiful reality known also as an ecosystem or a traditional territory. This traditional territory is so vast that Haudenosaunee tradition speaks about the sky as the roof, the Mother Earth as the floor and the setting sun and the rising moon as the doorways of the Longhouse. Consequently, there is no need to account for the imaginary since the encounter with Creation's authentic qualities embodies *what is and was* and *what can be* in a cycle that is always returning to sacred time's *forever*.

Haudenosaunee thought demonstrates spatial and temporal realism as it should be. Realism as the ancestors expect it. As Creation wills it. As the Creator made it. Haudenosaunee realism is a reciprocally interactive, enabled system whose encounter with Creation forever re-establishes the autochthonous archetype of engagement with the natural world that grows and plants an autonomous³ way of life from the ground. That is, the entities that compose Haudenosaunee traditional territories and culture interact with each other in ways that continually re-establish and maintain those entities and their recurrent

relations. This autopoietic system generates the ‘Haudenosaunee world’ precisely where it belongs and ever renewing in its ability to become forever.

Keeping tradition healthy allows the system stability that, in turn, perpetuates the identity of their system – in other words, relationships to landscape and cultural identity become ongoing, self-supporting processes. The autochthonous archetype is mind on nature and that reciprocal reality understands the realm of relationship between the system that is Haudenosaunee culture and the terrestrial, aquatic, atmospheric and spiritual domains of landscape. In their traditional territories, Haudenosaunee actuality is known and encountered with a precision beyond equal and while there is no doubt traditionalists know what imagination is, what is significant here is how these ideas or inspirations are tracked back to their origins in Creation and beyond. Like everything Haudenosaunee, imagination has a place because *imagination is a place* and since everything is connected to everything else, the encounter with imagination is a living communication within a sentient landscape. While imagination is certainly an honor, it comes as no surprise to minds raised on a living cosmology within an autopoietic and thereby recurrent reality. Those in North America unaware of the spiritual and cultural accomplishments of Aboriginal Peoples would do well to comprehend that where one *is* has everything to do with *what one thinks*. When North Americans rely on their primal intelligence they can intuit that to *be here* is to encounter sentient temporal and spatial landscapes. They may then appreciate that Wordsworth’s summoning of ‘the ghostly language of the ancient earth’ was far, far from imaginative.

The Calling

North America's old growth engaged in a cultural relationship with the minds and spirits of everything that once existed and still exists in the spirit world. Yet diminishing biodiversity augers against the continued capacity to know how to think with everything. The principle that every being participates in everything immunizes against anthropocentrism and through a satisfaction with Creation offers a conscious humility that keeps humans in their place of thankfulness. This ensures Creation's continuation. Humans think at their best if they know they are the last beings created. Literally, after all, humans are totally dependent on everything else. When mind, spirit and land in North America are understood to be as they have always been, as co-evolutionary, there emerges a principle that guides imagination in its duty to integrate nature's realities and ensure the perpetuation of those realities and so all of life. The stories that perpetuate themselves through human beings are our environmental contribution in nature (Bringhurst:1995:12). This duty stems from indigenous intellectual heritage through deep time and characterizes and honours a sacred relationship to time, space and spirit. It is significant to note that what is dismissed as primitive imagination by dominant culture is to indigenous tradition reality's only viable description. Any indigenous culture assures this truth be it Celtic, Hopi or whale pod.

One needs look no further than contemporary physics theory to recognize that normative realism and the languages that support it make for a lousy *Weltanschauung*. North American Aboriginal Peoples have long been critics of that threadbare settler realism and their criticism is derived from a recourse to the poetics, etymology and epistemology of

sacred languages. Those poetics re-connect speakers with the essence of being and Creation. In those sacred languages are the true names of the things themselves and knowing what to call everything in a human language that does not wither the meaning of everything is at once the intellectual accomplishment of Aboriginal Peoples and the teaching by sacred language about the right way to speak. What concession has English made to North America? Why does English, the language that thinks us as much as we think it, continue to structure as imaginary the numinous experiences that happen in the territories beyond its origin? English clear-cuts cultural and biological diversity alike. Speaking only English, can we think our way back to the indigenous languages that are our ancient birthright? Does speaking English or its echo preserve this lousy *Weltanschauung*?

The Mythic Return

If the Neo-American's experience of imagination is at least an intuitive register of the spiritual and intellectual ecology of North America's old growth, then imagination is deciphering Neo-American as a foreign consciousness, to naturalize it. For mature North American cultures, the issue of imagination is resolved in ecologically based cosmology. Cosmology's ethos of integration and cosmogony's felicity at recalling ancient memory are parallel accomplishments. Their congruence among Aboriginal Peoples prohibits the aberrant from destroying Creation's sacred balance. When humans perceive Creation's genius or learn of it from their wondersmiths⁴, the gift of beholding Creation's bountiful dimensions must be sacrilized to ensure they will continue. That is, we must credit Creation in those epiphinal moments for wisdom follows their cultural integration. Understood as a blessing, imagination is the ongoing invitation to give thanks at remaining part

of Creation's bestowal of belonging. The reveries and idylls that characterize the arrival of this bestowal are sylvan messages from intact ecologies or their spirits in lands long eviscerated of their rightful biodiversity. The tongue settlers hear as imagination is the budding of the autochthonous archetype that begins the intellectual task of restructuring or abandoning prophylactic English and is learning to think as the continent thinks.

Modernity misidentified the imaginative dimensions of traditional oral cultures as mental qualities (Levy-Bruhl, 1985 c. 1926; Ong, 1982) rather than correctly understanding them as expressions of Creation's legitimate interconnected ecologies. Whether those ecologies be stories, watersheds or minds. Though imagination is a minor player in oral tradition it is still a deeply environmental entity (Sheridan, 1994; Kane, 1994; Abram, 1996; Bringhurst, 1999) encompassing, as does the entire oral tradition, a methodology for thinking our way into the continent. If imagination were understood by Neo-American culture to be a quality of consciousness that re-minds consciousness of its spatial and temporal belonging within Creation's spiritual ecology, then duties to arrive at the end of its journey would inevitably lead to mythology and mythtelling. Making that claim doesn't diminish the creative or volitional properties of traditional minds. Rather, the claim accounts for qualities of a larger mind capable of expressing the mimetic experience of the ecological integrity and biodiversity that encompasses landscape and cosmology alike. The understanding of the experience of reality and its aural representation validates the congruence between nature and mind in their primal symmetry and the renewal of their intellectual engagement. Dismissing this process as imaginary keeps those assimilated by modernity content with their condition by dispelling this numinous heri-

tage much as colonization misjudged Aboriginal teachers as childish or naïve in trying to naturalize Neo-American minds.

Imagination, in its ecological sense, is the cognitive and spiritual condition of entwining with local and cosmological intelligences. Indeed, imagination is the spiritual medium of those powers that engage humans without humans being the prime movers of the act.

Imagination did not become a quality of a singularly human mind until mind severed itself from landscape and the depths of time. For the Haudenosaunee, imagination possesses no prehistory. Imagination became something other than what it is when mind went solo into Cartesian waters and lost sight of mythological shores. When mind decided against validating the psychoactive encounter with Creation's multiple dimensions, mind compensated for the loss with belief systems that worked from a false legitimacy. Imagination subsequently became a wrecking yard collecting the parts that fell out of the old equations.

For the Haudenosaunee, the natural and spiritual are twin shores of the same unquestionable reality and imagination wasn't necessary when accounting for wondrous reality since that spiritual experience could be explained by ancient memories and the regenerative and psychoactive powers of traditional landscapes. You see, spiritual ecology enacts its legitimate processes not to engulf but to remind and in reminding necessitates the learning of the way to the beginning when all things spoke the same tongue. Knowing that the beginning is still *here* means knowing it has never left. Those who have not lost

their beginnings know the refuge, safety and sanity of returning to forever. Of forever returning. And of forever returning.

Modernity's invention of imagination as an anthropocentric quality dismisses those who comprehend that their very being manifests stories, ideas and life forces. Those who know that they are composed of and by these beings and places also realize those beings are long indigenous to the psychological, temporal and spatial dimensions of traditional landscapes. That is why when things happen only in traditional landscapes they are understood as needing to happen there. Because those places possess mind and those places orchestrate psychological and spiritual ecologies wherein ideas live simultaneously visible and invisible lives. This does not deprive spiritual ecology from being volitional; instead, it humbly recognizes more-than-human nature's psychoactive reach. If the qualities modernity discounts as imaginative to distinguish them from putative realism were undertaken within ecosystem logic, spiritual ecology would be revealed as a living entity of reconciliation and balance between mind and Creation for Creation comprehends everything. And just as stories that want to be told find their tellers, the expression across species diversifies itself by thinking in the consciousness of all beings. One need only keep company with coyotes, wolves or foxes to know this with certainty. Yet, as the experience of bio-diversity wanes, so wanes the capacity for thinking with nature and beyond species-specific consciousness. That reciprocity and ecological capacity was deemed to be imaginary only after it had reaped capital punishment as paganism or witchcraft.

Body and Desire in Making Imagination

The contemporary denial of the intellectual and spiritual sentience of North America is more than an anti-environmental sentiment since modernity has spawned avid theorists of electronic (McLuhan) and silicon (Negroponti) space. The real failure to understand North America is a failure of wanting to understand the continent and the protocols of her Aboriginal Peoples. It is a fear against wanting to understand and experience the experience of the past and so is also a failure to trust in the Beginning. Correspondingly, imagination as an insistent modern educational enthrallment is trusted despite its military industrial roots in the Space Race. Aberrant imaginations that fuelled the popular scientific mind conduct themselves without regard to the cosmological or ecological outcomes of their behavior. Aberrant imagination imperiled Mother Earth and now seeks to replace her to perpetuate itself. As the project of ignoring the legitimacy of *what is* turned into the ambitions of *what next*, the ethics of *what should be* became so eroded old growth forests were felled to print stimulants for the imagination. Without everything to think with and through, imagination thinks only of itself and neglects the salmon's mythological lesson of the journey to become Grizzly, mountain rain and finally, Douglas Fir.

Normative perceptual and cognitive integration with the sentience of the North American continent has not yet developed the quality of meaning this continent deserves. This despite half a millennium of occupation and still no settler mythology has arisen. And it is not enough to claim that this discordance stems from rationality, literacy and highly secular languages. The force that prevents symbiotic union with the continent's spiritual center by deeply experiencing the land further prevents us from deeply comprehending

the past. And anticipating the future. Dysfunctional spatial beliefs germinate the inability to fulfill the human capacity of keeping things so balanced that the future can remain an expression of its past. Haudenosaunee seven generations thinking continues *what should be* into the future as an imperative in which all of nature and humanity participate. When we succumb to a dysfunctional relationship with landscape what follows is a dysfunctional relationship with time. Together the two establish a compression of the past and the future in the present. The effect violates the carrying capacity of the present by overburdening it with what since the beginning have been the duties of the other tenses. Anthropocentrism further limits Creation's thinking ability while robbing time of its distant horizons. Downsizing time is coincidental with Earth's most imaginative era (Negroponte).

We may get somewhere in this discussion by realizing imagination is inescapably metaphysical. A story exemplifies the difference between approaches that are capably metaphysical or aberrantly imaginative. When nuclear waste scientists journeyed to Northern Saskatchewan in the 1970's, they discussed with local Cree the regional geological capacity for storing spent uranium and the erection of statuary that would communicate to people over millennia the dangers inherent at the site. After weeks of discussing the best way to symbolically communicate the danger, the elders digested all the professional advice on the best solution, concluding, "You tell us and we'll tell them."

Myth Comes From Here

To know deep time is also to understand sky, earth, water and spirit in their sacred interaction and to know this attains an equivalent depth of human belonging to deep time's

continuity in the present. Achieving this establishes standards of realism whose first language must encompass these dimensions of reality. This is the language of mythology and its grammar expresses the ecology of North America from towering glaciation to caribou migration and the graceful tumescence of the aerial reborn in the aquatic. Mythology preserves in its discourse the texture, impress and presence of the past as a reminder of what the primeval looked and felt like. Merlin's description of the English countryside as 'the skin of the dragon' exemplifies how an indigenous culture understood its land. While the Quest for the Holy Grail exemplified how that same heritage understood and re-acquired the forgotten truth of needing to be one with the land. Just as ecological connection is never arithmetic or linear, imagination connects to that entity and in that connection to the seen and the unseen and the past and the future reveals the experience of everything expressing itself. Mature environmental cultures comprehend those terms and accomplish symbolic symmetries between material and psychological ecologies. Those words breathe life into the past and that keeps the past alive and ever present so the past can remain convivial to the legitimacy of what had once been present and what awaits in a future of round time.

Aberrant imagination is mostly invested in self assuredly prophetic futures devoid of ancestral realities. This imbalance is what makes aberrant imaginations destructive, for they assure futures devoid of their past by the only human population ever so remote from their indigenous identities and traditional territories. Conversely, mythology is instructive in its ethic of keeping the past through the future. Imagination as normatively conceived and promoted today coaxes humanity toward a future unrelated to elders and living

knowledge of the life of the past to guide the future. Perhaps worst, it conducts itself as an ecological ignoramus while mythology articulates the story everything tells to everyone. Mythology is imaginary only to modernity. Aberrant imagination, modernity's best loved version, is antithetical to the very future it envisions.

Coming From Forever

Haudenosaunee belief that they have been in North America forever solves imagination's temporal problem. If we accept that time is imagination's natural habitat, time's eternal return is always ecologically manifest and this too warrants another story. When Sudbury nickel smelters erected the 'Superstack' in the 1970's, the immediate locale was at long last spared emissions and the polluted rocks, long denuded of their soil, slowly recovered their former ability to foster life. First, organic accretions formed lichens, then moss and next blueberries reclaimed and formed the habitat that matures as old growth White Pine forest. You see, blueberries mother the rebirth of old growth White Pines in the completion of the blueberry's own maturation, in its own old growth. This was not the first time the plants had been dormant. That Precambrian Granite had been scraped clean of her soil long, long ago, when the Wisconsin Glacier of the last Ice Age freeze-dried biological memory in plants predating the ice. Blueberries shapeshifted into old growth White Pine by whiling away the frozen millennia telling ancient stories within the husk of their seed.

Within old growth is an embodied memory of an *other* that dwells within a permeable self. Why should time derive any less benefit from its forebear? Owen Barfield's *Poetic Diction* and Edith Cobb's *Ecology of Imagination in Childhood* comprehended the neces-

sity of the poetic to make the domains of the mythopoeic and ecology symmetrical. In so doing mind becomes assigned the properties of life's multiple miracles. Without validating mind with ecological properties there develops educated minds engaged in diminishing global ecological integrity through the exercise of chronically over-developed reason. Appealing to the atemporal and consequently aberrant educated imagination only multiplies humanity's largest-ever ecological footprint. Making sense with nature returns mind to the fabulous where it is at its happiest and is safe from harming its surroundings and itself. As every wondersmith knows, ecologies are stories in languages without words (Bringhurst, 2003). And if words are to renew their power they too must return to their sources and the beginning. Which is why the wondersmith must allow them to run away and why the wondersmith must know where they have gone. Into deep time.

Old growth cultures are conscious of all of the forces that influence life. Their knowledge of that dimension resonates with those forces that were here and want to be here again and whether that resonates with buffalo or saber tooth tiger spirits, the temporal animism of the Haudenosaunee refutes empty time with the same ancestral vigor as when they were required to live in the terra nullis of the imperial imagination. Their familial relationship to animals is also their immunity from ecological amnesia. Old growth minds busy with the integration of these forces build an ecology of mind that stands in the middle of the temporal arc to see future and past synchronically in equal, bending horizons. To be disproportionately resonant with the present without equivalent resonance with deep time is a conceit of Western culture that allows easy dismissal of myth as an amplification of bizarre causal connections. That dismissal of indigenous Celtic belief that

England's troubles stemmed from Arthur's lapsed attention is a profound diagnosis of the ethos behind ecological ruin. Upon meeting those who had accomplished a delicate balance with the forces of deep time, the post-Enlightenment West diminished their intellectual and spiritual accomplishments as 'mythical' as easily as declaring their homes to be wilderness. Loss of the capacity to engage with the supernatural that surrounds us is a denial of natural intelligence wherein landscapes resonate with mythical minds desirous of that resonance as *the right mind* with which to be fully alive and to ensure the continuation of life. If that resonance is understood as an accomplishment of mind, soul and will, then imagination can comport with the intellectual and spiritual terrain upon which that resonance with time and space are performed in life as well as death. That way, the words return from their renewal to live in the Longhouse as honored members.

One can understand how Creation and mind are expressions of each other and mutually interested in the deepest of friendships. So long as humans 'mind Creation', the duty is done and the animal helpers will look after a human vulnerability dependent on all the other creatures, birds, trees, plants and insects. Animism, the West's derogation of the first Deep Ecology, is only imaginary after environmental ethics have been dismissed in favor of the simplistic advantages of anthropocentrism. The conceit that imagination is a function of intelligence and that mind is a solely human capacity is akin to reasoning that the food chain possesses a human ruler because that very metaphor is unguided by the primal experience of human dependence on the rest of Creation. The Western imagination, lest we forget, is also the agent of evil when it thinks only with the narcissism of individualism. Feeding on a broken cosmology and finally upon itself, imagination no

longer is the creative ecology of *intelligences in their places* but becomes a non-spatial entity limping on the singularity of a receding future bereft of the eternal.

Thick Duties

Just as the granite of Sudbury illustrates the thick material duties of ecosystems to perpetuation of self and other, mythology is the intellectual expression of that duty undertaken in spatial and temporal integration. Myth's identifiably ecological ethos preserves the material, temporal and spiritual qualities of the place it describes so that the invisible is also accounted for in the tangibility of language. That ethos must also be symmetrical with the force and function of memory. For if memory is understood as simultaneously spatial and temporal, then to think with all the animal helpers and teachers that have composed the mind and the body then reclaims a consciousness and being that is natural and realistic to those long accustomed to thinking in the ways of the animal helper and the Clan families who preserve that knowledge. Mind connects to forces of the past and future in the knowledge that the present isn't the mirror and final evidence of the real. Realism, when limited to the carrying capacity of an anthropocentric present, actually and severely limits the ability of landscapes to compose human minds. Minds composed without that resonance resort to imagination and novelty to explain the ecology of deep time as the invisibly palpable dimension of space. Spiritual ecology.

When Neo-American minds encounter the imagination chances are that they are engaging with the substance of the supernatural without the protocols to understand what to do with their encounter. Properly understood, imagination is a homing device for finding a

way into the sacred unity of time, mind, spirit and place. Unfortunately, the disconnected imagination is aimless because it forfeited belonging somewhere. This is the reason why so many contemporary people choose not to brave the bush or the outback and this (Lightning, 1992; Tacey, 1995) has to do with the fear of knowing what Cree traditionalist Walter Lightning calls ‘the heavy stuff.’ Of the intellectual life of the bush, Kathleen Raine said, “inspiration exceeds reason in accessing the first principle of poetic genius” (Raine:8). She guides meaning back to its primal condition of expressing beauty in a manner akin to recent archeological evidence on Stone Age hunters from Britain’s Boxgrove site that suggests that in awaiting animals at a watering hole, the humans of five hundred thousand years ago were, “tall, muscular hunters with the body of a sprinter, not a marathon runner. He was designed for short bursts of energy, more suited to ambush, entrapment and escape than the long slog across open ground. (Derbyshire, 2003).” Inspiration, the vision of something worthy of pursuit, must match with a language up to the chase and that is why the mythopoeic is the best pursuit vehicle for it makes the leaps and bursts to alight in ancestral mind in a task beyond and out of character with the stultifying demands of the expository and the urban. In the absence of a settler mythology, poetic voice and ecological epistemology serve to build a capacity to do the thinking Turtle Island expects of her children. Without a mythology words return replenished from their pilgrimage only to be greeted by unwilling ears and so these wild words must resort to academic explanation.

If imagination is finally “applied problem solving” (Oxford Paperback Dictionary:402) what problem does it seek to solve? If imagination is only inspiration in short bursts then

it is poor stuff from which to build wisdom. Yet, if imagination serves to inspire wisdom's potential to know and honor the mysteries of reality then ecologically replenished mythologies may be the only language capable of getting us beyond the lethal reality environmental degradation inflicts. Of course, reality would then cease to be imaginative when resolved by mythology as replenished by old growth.

Imagination in any instructive sense then must concede that the universe is a creative process whose accretion results in consciousness. Though evidence is split on whether this process is a way out of modernity or a continuity with Paleolithic environmental thought, there is at least some hope that what Paul Shepard regarded as a 'post-historic primitivism' could emerge. This is another way of understanding that active imaginations are healthy reflections of a human capacity to understand the ecology of relations and inspirations that weave the fabric of life. So much so that imagination must be understood to be a phase that humans progress beyond since the maturation of its power is resolved in the realm of the spirit and in cultural engagement with the natural world. Imagination is mythology's pre-pubescence. This is why it is so unlikely that essentially wild imaginations can be forced, evoked or nurtured in school settings. Schools, like William Blake's 'satanic mills', are places where mind is isolated from nature and where imagination is domesticated to innovation in the service of those very technologies that keep minds fixated on built and artificial environments or their symbolic extensions. The effect re-creates minds as buildings rather than as hunters or bush-dwellers. The assumption that the roof we bear in having a mind is the roof we deserve extends the Neolithic imperative that the roof is a human inevitability. Thinking within that conceit there is no

outdoor life even when we are outdoors. Domesticating the planet, the imperial consequence of that grand conceit, emerges as the ethos of this idea of what a mind is and what mind is for. And so, imagination either gets us out from under that roof or finds new, if exponentially diminishing ways of living beneath one. But imagination can only get us so far in making a sustainable culture and relying on it is akin to a service sector run exclusively by twenty year olds. The work of building a sustainable culture is too important to be left to unaccompanied youth.

Aboriginal oral tradition comprehends North America's intellectual heritage of thick, inter-generational duties. Thinking in the more-than-human language of the continent creates epiphinal continuity between mind, Creation and landscape. That dynamic between childhood's encounter with landscape, so aptly articulated by Edith Cobb (1977), matures as an environmental and spiritual ethic. Successfully reconciling mind, body, spirit and landscape produces a prototype of the autochthonous archetype as the legitimate expression of a balanced sensorium experiencing, but moreover, keeping faith with the continent's sacred essence. Mythology is what happens if imagination grows up. When Neo-American culture resorts to imagination to explain its encounter with North America, the language of interaction between mind and nature's sentient powers is reduced, dishonored and imprisoned in a permanent adolescence. Merlin's retreat from mortality, you will recall, was because it was the time of humans and the One God. In the case of the Cottingly Fairies and the remarkable encounters of Opal Whitely, the girls who cavorted with the pixies were persecuted for the rest of their lives. Tongues speaking the autochthonous

archetype may not at first understand their participatory consciousness will challenge the boundaries of their realities.

Modernity's confusion with the boundaries of the real begins in educated denial. Despite the powers that are trying to speak with and through them but also in fear at what recognizing these powers may do to identities that have yet to absorb the ecological realities of this continent. Speaking the sacred dimensions of North America profoundly anchors mind in landscape and landscape in mind by manifesting qualities of each in the other. Practicing this dissolves insistent settler identities.

Those who know those qualities best, Aboriginal traditionalists, validate them as realistic and natural instead of unnatural and describe these qualities as intellectually authoritative rather than artificial or imaginary. Superior accounting and deep memory limits the largeness that credits this as imagination by maintaining and validating a larger and mysterious reality. Deep memory, by its very essence, establishes standards not convivial to any imagination contrived from the wrong medicine, just as closed ecosystems are inhospitable to invasive species challenging their terrain. The absence of a viable mythology reveals that settler presence in North America has been little more than a passing enthrallment with place and time. The thick duties of spatial-temporal belonging humbly recognize a human duty to live honorably and to remember what that means. To do so one must learn how Creation thinks on this continent and to do so with authority, legitimacy and validity finally allows no quarter with imagination, for understanding as the continent knows solves the metaphysical problems that are imagination's final resort.

Attention to the elements is the vigilance required to know that one's understanding of reality remains correct for the metaphysical problems they address. For they must begin anew if changing environmental conditions require other explanations to address those new conditions. That is why an environmental ethic underlies all Haudenosaunee life and knowledge, since ensuring that the future will remain convivial to the past is a duty. In accomplishing that sacred balance the ability to be Haudenosaunee will be ever lasting in the only places where one can ever be truly Haudenosaunee.

Forests Before Western Civilization, Deserts After: The Aboriginal Perspective

Duty to deep time is a precursor for settler culture to know with certainty the enormity of the challenges affecting the survival of our species. Those challenges are as ancient as the mythology that is humanity's longest lived and most appropriate method to think through such challenges. Because myths are ancient we should not hesitate to compare them to the standards of memory in Western civilization. Gregory Benford (1999:4) places an upper limit of ten thousand years on conscious, planned communication. In other words, agriculture and standards of memory are temporally coincidental. Thinking of agriculture, we think of writing. Straight rows watered and fertilized to assume the shape of the psychological architecture that is manifest in print's relentless linearity. Stan Wilson, a Cree elder from the University of Alberta, makes the case that helps us to conceive of what it means to communicate across ten thousand years in the recurrent temporal circle of the autochthonous archetype. In Stan's story (1995) he attempts to come to terms with a three-day elation in Georgia followed by an immediate and crushing depression that compelled an immediate return to Saskatchewan. The two encounters were thus ex-

plained by Eber Hampton of Saskatchewan Federated Indian College as a ten thousand year old experience having to do with the receptivity of the presence of Cree ancestors in the Georgia soil, the southern extent of their migration before the Wisconsin Glacier ten thousand years before. Stan's speaking of the Cree language awoke those spirits and after three days of a welcoming feast to honor his presence they next told of the horrors of colonization and of death along the Trail of Tears, Washington's forced march of the Eastern tribes to Oklahoma in the 1830's.

By implication then, imagination dominates where fear of the unknown, uncertainty of memory and placelessness thrive. That uncertainty is fundamentally a matter of no longer knowing the relationship between where one is and what one thinks. When the animistic possibilities of human thought exiled themselves within profligate farm acreages, the capacity to think with the aid of spiritual animal powers increasingly became dormant while the animals began to spend more time watching us than we did watching them. Among the Haudenosaunee especially this is a dark period for it marks an era that prophecy explains by warning that forgetting the animals leads to the animals forgetting about us. Then life then becomes impossible. Loss of animal guidance is also a loss of the capacity to know something about North American identity through the animal teachers. This is what it means to be unguided by this continent. The settler's condition. Without being able to follow our footprints back to a creation story that accounts for where we and all the beings and all the elements that are Creation come from we have no way to understand how that ecology of Creation is asking us to develop an intelligence that is symmetrical with all of Creation. When all things spoke to all things, ecology and story where

simultaneous and symmetrical expressions of each other. Indeed, ecology and story are not imaginary to childhood's participatory consciousness. Who would not weep for days at the spiritual violence of learning from one's schooling that a prized flannel rabbit didn't care if she was in her favorite place beneath the junipers because she wasn't alive?

Creation Stories

When the absence of a creation story defines one's concept of being, then imagination is the first response when encountering the unexplained, the ecology of the invisible. The absence of creation stories is the willing ignorance to limit the known to smaller and smaller canons prohibiting in their imbalance larger and wiser mythologies. The results speak for themselves.

The spiritual beings that live on this continent whose names are used by those who validate their existence have established complimentary proofs for reasoning why things happen when and where they do. The spatial magnitude of the creation story, of course, requires an equivalent dimension of accounting. And while scholarship on nature myths abounds, the realization that myth is sentient and alive is in absurdly short supply.

Moreover, so too is the human desire to know myth's preconditions, the old growth systems, that are rapidly diminishing. When those conditions were abundant, environmental lore concerned itself with visible and invisible properties of the land but environmental lore diminished in ratio to the decline of its biodiversity and so do cultures and languages rightfully allied to that biodiversity.

That exponential loss is simultaneously phenomenal and symbolic. Material and symbolic realms are declining since loss of biodiversity creates loss of cultural and linguistic diversity. Even worse is that the decline of both is the decline of experiencing their correspondence. Julian Jayne's correspondence theory of the evolution of the corpus collosum and the interaction of the brain hemispheres helps in visualizing the relationship between the symbolic and the material and exemplifies a sustainable and positive correspondence, an autopoietic symbiosis that when functioning negatively is the lethal reduction that begins in alienation from nature's experience and finally renders nature and humanity lessened as nature has less opportunity to think through us and thereby limiting our ability and actions to behave honorably. So reduced we have little recourse but to imagination that, at best, consigns us to an eternal midpoint between what we are and what we were; between old growth and succession forests; between information and transformation.

The ecological consequences of positive autopoietic systems are obvious for beings and their environments remain self-perpetuating. A good example is the immune system's ability to distinguish between self and non-self. Varela (1979) recognizes that this is an observed behavior, produced by the operational dynamics of the immune system in its environment. He believes it is wrong to look for some discriminatory recognition mechanism within the immune system. Attention should instead be focused on the internal dynamics of the immune system, and how this is affected by and affects its environment of operation so as to give rise to the observed behavior. Imagination is similarly a behavior seeking to be what humans once were before reneging on the promise of belonging to

everything. Mythology's proof lies in its ecology and vice versa and for to the Haudenosaunee good mind and land are inseparable for neither is possible without the other.

Conclusion

Disallowing the correspondence between systems and environments is not possible but ignoring that correspondence is now a Western cultural dynamic. That is the conceit and fabric of a false realism gutted of its mythological ethos and so disfigured can't see the *miracle* of connection between land, mind and spirit and concludes in the shadow of fallacy that they are unrelated. That result is the modern mind (Andrews: 1998: vii). Modern minds are normatively held to be inconsistent and irrevocably different from ancestral minds. When nature myth was still the planet's primal ontology and its greatest expression of realism, there was a definitive correspondence with the spiritual qualities of the natural. Education is guilty of that denial and for the abandonment of those intergenerational truths. The mythological record expressed the condition of everything being connected to everything else in the only language up to the challenge. Under that condition the observation of systems results in knowing where things come from and our relationship to them and imagination in any formal sense is eliminated by the ability to comprehend imagination as an initiation in the minds of the natural world. Humans should need no reminding that they are part of nature though they still believe in ways antithetical to that reality and education in any normative sense brokers that falsehood to the point where students regard nature as a prison to escape. Although where they would escape to eludes even their best laid plans.

The ancestral mind was expansively and ecologically rational and understood myth as the most dependable assay of the significance that distinguishes information from transformation. Myth is inherent in making primal and sustainable knowledge, not to mention spiritual praxis. But myth is moreover the dialogue of ecology, the continent's intra-system community. Mythology performs the symbolic autopoeisis that is consistent with a continuing life world and restoring that relationship can only be accomplished through the restoration and preservation of cultural and biological diversity alike.

Imagination is the quality of surprise at the richness of the spiritual and intellectual life of the continent. Mythology is the ecological wisdom that knows what imagination is, where it comes from and what to do with it. Settler duty and certainly the central mission of environmental education is to hold to those standards for those standards help Neo-Americans out of their problems and into how things should be. That is why mythology and imagination remain poignantly ecological. We know we have become delusional when we mistake imagination for illusion and mistake illusion for substance. In believing illusion to be truth the guilt rests with modern habits rather than with imagination. Imagination is showing us the way to the quintessential human condition; the paradise of one's surroundings and one's place there. Aberrant imagination is a hired gun creating the very problems it seeks to resolve.

Finally, imagination is the wrong word for the quality named by the observation of Haudenosaunee culture encountering its relationship with expansive reality. Imagination is to those without spiritual ecology what for the Haudenosaunee has been long under-

stood as minding nature. Understanding that quality of mind as imaginary endures so long as there is no experience with thinking with the others in the ecosystems of mutual belonging.

The status of being that is reconciled on Turtle Island is not to be someone *new* but to remain someone ancient and to learn the lesson of being from time immemorial; that one can not be beyond one's indigenous self without devastating effect. The power of that realization reclaims what modernity has stolen from human identity and calling that identity imaginary does not reclaim the loss. Becoming *what we were* resolves what *we are and what we should be*. The Great Peace that follows reunites mythology and ecology to restore the council of all beings. But remember that without all beings, being is incomplete and that is why the Onkwehonwe⁵, the real people, say, everything forever.

Bibliography

- Abram, David
1996 *Spell of the Sensuous*. New York: Pantheon.
- Ackroyd, Peter
2002. *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Andrews, Tamra
1998. *A Dictionary of Nature Myths*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Auerbach, Eric.
2003 *Mimesis: the representation of reality in Western Literature*.
Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Benford, Gregory
1999 *Deep Time: How Humanity Communicates Across Millennia*. New York: Avon Books.
- Barfield, Owen
1973 *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*. Middletown, Conn. : Wesleyan University Press.
- Bringhurst, Robert
1995 Introduction in Sean Kane, ed. *Alice Kane: The Dreamer Awakes*. Peterborough: Broadview Press.
1999 *A Story as Sharp as a Knife*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre.
2002 *Ecological Linguistics Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*. Vol.7:9-22
- Cajete, Gregory A
1993 *Look top the Mountain: An Ecology of Indian Education*. Skyland, North Carolina: Kivaki Press.
- Cobb, Edith
1977 *Ecology of Imagination in Childhood*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- David Derbyshire
2003 *Stone Age man: spear-thrower or scavenger?: Experiment sheds light on hunters, gatherers of a half million years ago*, National Post. Vol.5 No.177,
Monday May 26, 2003. p.A12.
- Doyle, Arthur Conan
1979 *The Coming of the Fairies*. New York: Samuel Weiser.
- Frye, Northrup.
1969 *The Educated Imagination*. Canada: CBC Publications.
- Jaynes, Julian
1976 *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Kane, Sean
1994 *Wisdom of the Mythtellers*. Peterborough: Broadview Press.
- Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien
1985 *How natives think*. Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, ,

- Lightning, Walter
 1993 Compassionate Mind: Imp[lications of a Text Written by Elder Louis Sunchild. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 19:215-253.
- Matthews, Caitlin
 2002 *King Arthur and The Goddess of the Land*. Rochester, Vermont: InnerTraditions.
- Maturana, H. R. and Varela, F. J.
 1987 *The Tree of Knowledge*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.
- Maturana, H. R. and Varela, F. J.
 1980 *Autopoiesis and Cognition*. Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel.
- McLuhan, Marshall
 1994 *Understanding Media*. Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press.
- Mohawk, John
 1978 *Basic Call to Consciousness*. Summerstown, Tennessee: Book Publishing Co.
- Negroponti, Nicholas
 1996 *Being Digital*. New York : Vintage Books.
- Nettle, Daniel and Suzanne Romaine
 2000 *Vanishing voices: the extinction of the world's languages*. New York : Oxford University Press.
- Ong, Walter J.
 1982 *Orality and literacy : the technologizing of the word*. New York: Methuen & Co.
- Oxford Paperback Dictionary: Third Edition.
 1991 New York: Oxford University Press.
- Raine, Kathleen
 2001 *William Blake: Prophet of Imagination Resurgence*: 204: 6-9.
- Shepard, Paul
 1992 A Post-Historic Primitivism in *The Wilderness Condition*, Essays on Environment and Civilization, ed. Max Oelschlaeger. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Sheridan, Joe
 1994 *Alienation and Integration: Environmental Education in Turtle Island*. Unpublished Dissertation. Edmonton: University of Alberta.
- Tacey, David.
 1995 *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia*. Melbourne and Sydney: Harper Collins.
- Varela, F. J.
 1979 *Principles of Biological Autonomy*. New York: North Holland.
- Wallace, Paul.
 1946 *White Roots of Peace*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Wilson, Stanley
 1995 Honoring Spiritual Knowledge. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 21:61-69.
- Wordsworth, William

1977 William Wordsworth: Poems Volume One, ed. J.O. Hayden. London: Penguin.

¹ In Ackroyd (2002:XIX) there is the potent reminder that the etymology of Albion is *Albio* in Celtic and *Alba* in Gaelic translates as “the white land” in sourcing and expressing the white cliffs [of England].

² Deep Ecology, Eco-feminism and related contemporary spiritual movements and theories of nature have arguably arisen by the renewal of duty to the land. As the land is the basis of mythology, it is little wonder that the ideas are related. The authenticity of Aboriginal Peoples belief is the capacity to think in the language of the land and this has always been at odds with the expository prose of the educated imagination.

³ The decision to maintain this complex relationship is at once volitional and a profound intellectual accomplishment that preserves the mind necessary to traditional territories. As such, Haudenosaunee tradition is an integrated and ubiquitous environmental ethic.

⁴ The wondersmith is a term used to describe the storyteller whose specialty is the wondertale described by Robert Bringhurst (1995:14) as “a long chain of adventurous episodes, we may call it a saga or even an epic...if it mingles with the gods and humans with an emphasis on the humans, or turns the human world over like a stone to show its hidden, magical side, we may call it a wondertale.”

⁵ Onkwehonwe is the Haudenosaunee word for the Haudenosaunee/Mohawk people.