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Friluftsliv

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”Each day we reacted less like tourists and more like tenants [natives, as in native to a place].”

Student Field Notes

Friluftsliv is a Norwegian word denoting a quality of outdoor education as lived experience in nature. It concerns an aspiration towards a genuine meeting face to face: nature in its primacy, as it genuinely is! This quality of experience is unfettered by an aggressive human agenda of conquest or study of nature as ”other”, or nature as a cultural construction. Friluftsliv is a quality of experience through which guides and students come to understand and EXPERIENCE a particular spirit of relationality.

Meeting nature on nature’s terms allows for a simplicity that one spokesperson, Sarah Pendleton suggested, lets ”nature live free, meaning let nature’s rhythms unfold freely” (1983, p. 107). This is a joyful learning allowing nature to work and play on our spirit. While self-realization involves a caring for and identification (love) with surroundings as communion of the Self extended, the lived experience of Friluftsliv (in wild nature) involves coming to know nature as home through simple travel and camping experience. It is a quality beyond a naive romance and lies further along the continuum towards a relational maturation.

Sharon Butala, in her ”friluftsliv-like” book, *The Perfection of the Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature*, writes:

It is one thing to come from the city and be overwhelmed by the beauty of Nature and to speak of it, and another thing entirely to have lived in it so long that it has seeped into your bones and your blood and is inseparable from your own being, so that it is part of you and requires no mention of hymns of praise. (1994, p. 89)

While there is a big difference between the week long ”apprenticeship” of the canoe or snowshoe trip and full time habitation, friluftsliv as a principal tradition for outdoor education seeks this seeping of nature into one’s bones and thus remains an apprenticeship for how to dwell in Nature. Home with nature is home with a quietly celebrated, respected presence, not an awe-struck spirit of worshipped otherness. The tonic of friluftsliv is for a nature that gets (seeps) under one’s skin, solidifying in our being, not for nature as a halo we worship outside ourselves.

I believe nature as home is what traveller P. G. Downes had in mind in his general references to the ”ways of the North.” Downes wrote:

The real people of the North don’t love the North; what they cling to is that complex in themselves which is satisfied by their own situation

- by the freedom of being their own boss ... [by the] wandering irresponsibility of it all. (Downs, 1936, p. 174)

Sigurd Olson (1956), reflecting on the north woods, sought the lived experience of friluftsliv in nature as a listening to the wisdom of the stillness, touching the external rhythms of the water and land, discovering the harmony of the natural order. Developing through this lived experience, he sought a personal philosophy, what can be called an ecosophy with which he developed, a personal rhythm, stillness, and touch for life with nature. The lived experience of friluftsliv is a living "with" one's place, rather than an agenda of "against," "over," or "through" as one's dominant expression of relationship. It is a particular kind of meeting. Meeting, Martin Buber has proclaimed, is "an event at the source when a response was made to a You, an essential act of the spirit" (1987, p. 103). That response can be steeped in alienation of otherness or it can favor identification and thus caring and meaning. It is assumed here that we can ultimately free ourselves of the subject-object dichotomy to explore our meaning of being part of nature, rather than apart from nature.

Friluftsliv is immediately concerned with teaching practical skills, craft, and lore of living in and with nature. The simple living/travelling with nature avails oneself to seeking meaning and direction *from* nature. The way home to nature is not one of struggle but, in Sarah Pendleton's terms, "[t]he aim is rather to nurture ways of creatively adapting to nature's terms in ways that are protective of both human and nature's welfare" (1983, p. 107).

The lived experience of friluftsliv finds a concrete expression in the Norwegian tradition of outdoor education and recreation. Playwright Henrik Ibsen first introduced the word to print with the line, "And friluftsliv for my thoughts" (Reed and Rothenberg, 1993, p. 12). Translated as "open air life" or "life in nature," friluftsliv concerns "thoughts" of nature as "a way home," not an escape from urban pressures, but a surfacing of a free, nature-inspired lifestyle, not a departing from a village/city but an actual arrival to authentic home. Friluftsliv is an outdoor educational/recreational movement that requires a shift from a vacationer's superficial sensibilities. As Arne Naess states:

Conventional goal direction: to get there, to be skilful, to be better than others, to get things done, to describe in orders, to have and use new and fancy equipment - is discouraged. The ability to experience deep rich and varied interaction in and with nature is developed. (Naess, 1989, p. 179)

Nils Faarlund, a leading spokesman for this tradition, connects friluftsliv beyond personal growth towards the individual as a "transformational tool" in creating "an ecologically sensitive society." Friluftsliv is "not meant to shore up our modern way of life but to help us - as individuals and as a society - out

of it" (Faarlund, In Reed and Rothenberg, 1993, p. 164). Friluftsliv, as an expression of the lived experience in wild nature, is a tuning out, a disorientation turn, decontextualization for a corresponding tuning in to a sincere listening, meeting, touching of the harmony and order and rhythms of living with nature. 'Friluftsliv for my thoughts' is Thoreau's quest for the "tonic of wilderness," Olson's attention to "ancient rhythms," Butala's "seeping of the beauty of nature into your bones," Downes' "ways of the north." All in all, it is a quest to be a tenant, or rather native with nature, of nature, not a tourist, in nature as for nature.

"It is not just what you see and hear out here but it is the aura you feel through your whole body. It's a feeling of freedom. Freedom from the everyday hustle and bustle."

Student Field Notes

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Notes:

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