

***Genuine Friluftsliv* as a way to great natural experiences and professional experience production**

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Abstract:

Friluftsliv as an environmental philosophy deeply rooted in Scandinavian people may be a way to great experiences in nature to contrast the post modern urban every-day life. The philosophy and biology of *Genuine Friluftsliv* is explored showing its importance as a mean to great experiences of nature within professional experience production and to facilitate a true connectedness to the more-than-human world to enrich there meaning of our lives as well as to obtain urban stress release by stimulation ancient human biological needs.

Introduction

We are in a splendid remote wilderness—the Wind River in northern Yukon. Crystal clear water sparkles around us with the marbled river bottom several meters below, giving the sensation of our canoe gliding in open air. The strong current and our synchronised paddle strokes carry the canoe down this Arctic river with a force that creates a deep shiver of pleasure. The breathtaking big sky above us, the river valley bordered by magnificent mountains, and the sensation of undisturbed wildlife surrounding us causes a deep emotional storm of happiness within, filling my eyes with tears—a spiritual, almost religious feeling I often experience in nature. This landscape absorbs me so completely, entering through all of my senses and directly touching my limbic system. This gives me a sensation of a total integration with this place; a strong feeling of being at home in a place I had never visited before. Sensing myself as part of the landscape I experience the processes and evolution of this place unfolding itself inside my consciousness. I get a strong feeling of knowing the ways of things around me.

The power and intensity of this feeling has always surprised me, as well as the fact that not everybody experiences the same feelings. Trying to discuss this feeling with people who have never experienced it is difficult, as they cannot relate such strong feelings to nature. The feeling of being a part of the river or the mountains seems too spiritual to most people. Many of today's urban people have lost this ability to experience nature in a subjective way, seeing the landscape in an objective and disconnected way. The ability to be absorbed by a place is a state of mind, a skill that needs training. Many modern people have lost this ability to give the landscape free access through open senses to the limbic system. This limbic system makes up the functional centre of human emotions and memory. Sensory information enters the brain here and the higher centre of integration in the cerebrum consults the limbic system for memory retrieving and memory processing. By electrical stimulation of the limbic system hallucinations, religious experiences, out-of-body experiences, and near-dead experiences can artificially be created, indicating this system's importance for the experience of reality. Thus it seems as if there is an ability to let the landscape interact directly through open senses with the limbic system when

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interpreting the world, which can create a strong emotional reaction—a reaction we may experience as spiritual or religious. This has nothing to do with the endorphin and adrenaline rush one can experience in adventure activities.

This spiritual feeling of connectedness to the landscape is probably the deep experience in Arne Næss's philosophy of Deep Ecology (Sessions, 1995). Næss, himself a mountaineer and outdoor person, proposes that a deep experience of nature creates deep feelings leading to deep questions and a deep commitment for nature (Harding, 1997). This may result in a paradigm shift in one's way of viewing the world. In Scandinavia we would say that this deep experience of the landscape is the essence and reward of a lifestyle we call "*Friluftsliv*" ["free-lufts-leav"] (Gelter 2000). The word translates to "free air life" meaning a philosophical lifestyle based on experiences of the freedom in nature and the spiritual connectedness with the landscape. The reward of this connectedness with the landscape is this strong sensation of a new level of consciousness and a spiritual wholeness.

The essence of *Friluftsliv* is difficult to define. It is a concept that can be found among outdoor people all over the world, but as a specific philosophy and the use of a special word for it is unique for Scandinavia, especially in Norway and Sweden. Here *Friluftsliv* is deeply rooted in the soul of the people although far from everyone practices it. In Norway *Friluftsliv* is an important part of most people's lives and a way of living close to the beautiful landscapes of the country. In Sweden and Denmark the word recently has obtained a more technical meaning in outdoor activities and among many has lost its philosophical dimension.

***Friluftsliv* as a Philosophy**

Friluftsliv as philosophy is a view of oneself in the more-than-human world, about finding the way back to an old human, biological lifestyle, but in a new context—to move from a techno-life to an eco-life, back to our fundamental biological ways to relate to nature. In the pre-civilised world humans knew their way in nature as a way of survival. In modern urban life these survival skills are forgotten, and today most urban people only visit nature as tourists or consumers. Modern people need to re-learn basic skills, not by books or instructions, but learn how to relate to the more-than-human world by experience. In connection with nature we learn how precious life is—in sharp contrast with the civilised life—where life often is a struggle. *Friluftsliv* is a paradigm shift away from a dominant "objective" view of nature, toward an emotional identity and a way of living Arne Næss's Deep Ecology.

Genuine Friluftsliv also provides a social experience that many people in our urban secularized lives are missing. When pursuing *Friluftsliv* you often do things together with friends, like sitting around the campfire, travelling together, sharing experiences, and being dependent on each other. *Friluftsliv* thus recreates the tribal life with the same security of belonging to an interdependent group. This is a form of human resources and human wealth (Quinn, 1997) we have lost in our urban life, where individuality and survival by yourself is the standard. *Friluftsliv* fulfils a basic human need and thereby creates a sensation of wholeness. This may well be one of the reasons for the sensation of pleasure sitting around the campfire and just feeling the strong connectedness within the group and with life.

Today, when people have lost their original home, their place in nature, security in their connectedness with the world and also often with a social group, they become insecure and afraid. Fear easily develops into aggression towards foreigners or aggression towards nature and other living creatures. This increased aggression is released through hard work, sports, or outdoor recreation activities. Nature often becomes the victim of this cultural aggression. If, on the contrary, you feel connected to the more-than-human world, you gain self-esteem, security, and confidence, thereby decreasing cultural aggression. Connectedness to nature creates responsibility towards nature and others—a more biophilic lifestyle (Selby, 1996).

Although *Friluftsliv* is a modern escape from urban life to regain physical and psychic strength, it is not a quick fix for social ills through a form of wilderness therapy. Genuine *Friluftsliv* is a philosophy about personal development, thus a lifetime process of growing self-esteem, social capabilities and survival skills in and attitudes towards the more-than-human world. *Friluftsliv* is about love and respect for nature, attitudes one does not learn reading or teaching, features that can only be learned by experience. For an outdoor person who has reached familiarity and connectedness to nature, nature is never wild and scary, and such a person is at home everywhere in nature regardless of the place on the planet.

Biology of *Friluftsliv*

Why does *Genuine Friluftsliv* create a deep sensation of connectedness with nature, as well as providing mental and physical pleasure? Here we must turn to human biology. If we want to find the biological roots for *Genuine Friluftsliv* we have to look past the origin of Western culture, back to pre-civilised culture, and to the ecological habitat where most of human evolution has taken place. Humans have evolved as an integrated part of an ecological system, in close relationships with other organisms and the environment, and our human characters are evolved as an adaptation to these ecological demands and changes. Humans have followed the same rules and processes that have shaped other organisms in nature. Only by understanding these rules and processes that form the life of organisms can we gain an insight and understanding of our own development and nature.

Human nature is thus adapted to a natural habitat, not to today's urban technological world. The natural setting for human evolution, including the evolution of human senses and the human brain, consists of fractal structures (Gleick, 1987; Fleishman et al., 1990; Kaufman, 1993) of repetitive patterns that never repeat themselves exactly, and rhythms of repetitions. Thus our brain is developed in a fractal world of rhythms. Fractal stimuli from the natural world harmonise with the stimuli processing patterns of the brain, creating a sensation of pleasure in such natural environments. Having a brain working in harmony with its capacity explains the pleasure of looking at the fractal structure of a landscape, the endless fractal structure and rhythm of waves from the ocean, and the deep pleasure of looking into the dancing flames of a fire.

The rhythms of nature include day rhythm, moon rhythm, seasonal rhythms, etc., as well as rhythms in patterns and structures. We find rhythms every where in nature as in the sparkling creek, the dancing flames of a fire and in the clouds of the sky. Resting the eye on the blue sky,

the sparkling night sky or the endless ocean triggers a feeling of infinity which can be regarded as rhythms with the frequency of zero. When travelling in nature for a longer period, these rhythms become a natural part of our daily life. We even have internal rhythms, biological clocks that are evolved to synchronise with the rhythms of nature. Breaking these natural rhythms cost energy. Electrical energy is needed to break the rhythms of day and night. Breaking the seasonal rhythm to create green grass in winter and ice in summer requires much of energy. Breaking straight roads through the fractal landscape requires energy. Creating monoculture we break the growing rhythm, which needs enormous amounts of energy in the forms of fertilisers, pesticides, maintenance, etc. to keep the culture clean.

. . . these other shapes and species have coevolved, like ourselves, with the rest of the shifting earth; their rhythms and forms are composed of layers upon layers of earlier rhythms, and in engaging them our senses are led into an inexhaustible depth that echoes that of our own flesh. (David Abram, 1996, p. 63-64)

Abram (1996) stresses the importance of the reciprocity between our senses and the natural world to create our experienced perception of the world. In our pre-civilised world this reciprocity of our senses and the natural world created a strong subjectivity between the perceived world and the human mind, creating the animistic dimension of perception that now has been lost in modern urban life. In contrast to the fractal world of nature, our civilised world is non-fractal consisting of straight lines, flat surfaces and smooth areas—an environment sub-optimal for our mental processing capabilities. This is causing understimulation, stress and incompatibility in such environments. Humans are adapted to live according to the natural rhythms, but lately we have constructed artificial, mathematical rhythms determined by mechanical machines. These new rhythms split the day and the year in exact units independent of the events in nature. With clock time we have emancipated ourselves from the rhythms of nature and have violated our biological clocks creating an urban stress, a stress evaporating when returning to the rhythms of nature.

After weeks of canoeing the body and mind settle into a natural rhythm where breathing, pulse and paddle strokes harmonise in a natural way. Our rhythms not only come from inside of us, they harmonise with the surrounding landscape, with the current of the river, the sun and light, the wind and waves, and when these rhythms interplay we feel a great pleasure of harmony. The same feeling of harmony with the landscape is reached after days of trekking, where the pace harmonises with the internal and external environment, and each step is synchronised by our spinal auto pilot so the mind may become absorbed by the landscape. This synchronisation of internal and external rhythms when travelling for an extended time in nature is like playing in a samba batucada. When the rhythms are synchronised by all the percussion instruments playing takes no effort—the energy of the rhythm absorbs one. But as soon as the rhythm disharmonises there is a physical and psychic pain that requires lots of energy and concentration to get the rhythm back into harmony. Suddenly the rhythm is back and the music swings again, and there is a feeling of a dimensional shift to a higher energy level. The music becomes a part of body and mind in an internal dance of mental energy and external dance of musical energy. The asynchronic rhythms of modern urban life create disharmonies, creating physical and psychic stress which consumes much energy. Therefore when returning to nature and living *Friluftsliv*

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we regain the natural rhythms and feel the energy flow into body and mind, lifting us to a higher energy level, and to the experience of harmony and happiness—just like in the samba batucada.

Having a brain that under millions of years has developed in a rhythmical and fractal world, we feel as “coming home” when returning to nature, giving the brain the stimuli it was developed for and explaining our rewarding feelings of harmony in nature. When looking into a fireplace we feel the flames alive and attracting our attention. No artificial light, like the cold mechanical lifeless light of a flashlight, will ever attract us in the same way. What is the difference between the dead flashlight and the living spirit of the flames, if not the fractal rhythms that so much stimulate our perception? Abram (1996) may have found a biological explanation for our need to consume artefacts in our lifeless non-fractal world:

In contrast, the mass-produced artefacts of civilization, . . . draw our senses into a dance that endlessly reiterates itself *without variation*. To the sensing body these artefacts are, like all phenomena, animate and even alive, but their life is profoundly constrained by the specific “functions” for which they were built. Once our bodies master these functions, the machine-made objects commonly teach our senses nothing further; they are unable to surprise us, so we must continually acquire *new* built objects, new technologies, the latest model of this or that if we wish to stimulate ourselves. (Abram 1996 p. 64)

The problem with technology and our civilization is that its goal is to make things predictable and simple so we do not need to focus attention on it. Technology is about freeing humans from the complexity of nature, to make our perception and understanding easy, to erase complex information and patterns in nature into simple systems such as flat surfaces and straight lines. At the same time technology becomes boring as it don't provide us with any deeper information. The information in the light of a flashlight is much simpler than the information in the dancing flames. In our technological development the straight line has become our tyranny as we carelessly create straight lines and flat areas in the landscape to erase its complexity. Every pattern we create based on the straight line becomes boring and empty. It creates an aesthetic emptiness, sterility and monotony that counteract creativity.

The lack of complex information in the technology of the straight line creates a cognitive emptiness and dullness in strong contrast to the cognitive harmony of the complex and fractal nature.

Therefore the straight line civilization and its cities becomes boring and empty, aesthetic sterile which cannot offer relaxing rests for our eyes and mind. Returning to nature on vacations or bringing in nature indoors as pets and plants is our natural response to this information depleted civilization.

In our modern, civilised lifestyle we have also emancipated body and mind. We do physical work in one place, the factory or the gym, and mental work in another place, the office or on the TV-sofa. When the rhythms of the body and mind do not harmonise it creates a non-harmonising physical or mental tiredness. In contrast, doing a mental and physical task synchronously as in *Friluftsliv*, body and mind harmonise and the tiredness experienced after such a task is as great a pleasure, no matter how tiresome it was.

We often describe our fundamental needs as “primitive,” “animalistic,” or “pre-civilised.” This view assumes that humans have undergone an evolutionary change since the rise of our civilisation, from a “primitive” to a “developed” human, implying that we are biologically different today than 10 000 years ago. This culture phobic view indicates a lack of evolutionary and biological insight. The only difference between people of today and those living 10 000 years ago is their fundamental philosophy and cultural context. The time-span in our habitat change from the natural setting into the technologically habitat is too short for the evolutionary processes to permit any major biological adaptations. The differences we have developed are new behaviours, new attitudes, new language, and new technology, but we have not changed biologically. Neither basic needs nor our anatomy, physiology and ontology have changed. Our brain’s anatomy and function are the same as when we lived in the fractal biological world. So those “primitive” needs are not some old remains from a primitive state, they are still human basic needs. So when we return to nature through *Friluftsliv* we do not satisfy our primitive needs—rather our basic human needs. As long as we deny these basic needs our modern human society will not become a more humane society. As long as we believe that humans can adapt biologically to the technological world we have created from an anthropocentric scientific philosophy, humans and human society will suffer from technological stress.

As clearly stressed by modern environmental philosophy (Sessions 1995, Quinn 1992, 1997) we cannot return to a “primitive” pre-civilised culture. Rather we have to recognise basic human needs and use them as goals for cultural development. The experience of *Genuine Friluftsliv* might be a way to let people discover the pleasure of fulfilling these basic human needs when body and mind harmonises with the natural world, and thus creating a foundation for a cultural change away from an anthropocentric philosophy. It is therefore important to clearly make a distinction between the philosophy of *Genuine Friluftsliv* and the anthropocentric, superficial kind of *Friluftsliv* where competition, consumption, egoism, and commercialisation are its philosophy.

Gardner’s (1983) description of the seven intelligences is a modern re-discovery of the nature of the human mind as evolved in the biological world. This realisation got lost through Greek philosophy, **Desecrates** dualism and the objectifying scientific focus on the logical thought. Gardner’s intelligences show a flexible human brain that is needed for adaptation in a socio-ecological environment. The different human intelligences are evolutionary evolved and co-ordinated to optimise the human survival chances in the complex natural world. Gardner’s mathematical-logical intelligence (the ability to organise thoughts sequentially and logically, to analyse and solve problems, to see connections) is the base for the modern scientific secular school together with the verbal-linguistic intelligence (the ability to understand and express ideas through language, communicative skills, to tell stories of past experiences, to communicate how to solve problems etc.). Together with the visual-spatial intelligence (the ability to learn through images, spatial skills, to estimate distances, etc.) it is easy to understand the importance of these three intelligences for survival in the wilderness. Also of great importance in a tribal world (Ross 1992) are both the interpersonal (the ability to notice and make discriminations regarding the moods, temperaments, motivations and intentions of others, cooperate, leadership and group dynamic skills) and the intrapersonal intelligence (one’s access to one’s feelings, skills of visualisation, metacognition, reflection and self-analysis). In an evolutionary sense the bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence seems obvious for the survival in the natural environment. The

intelligence of mastering different skills and physical activities has a high survival value in the pre-civilised world. The seventh intelligence, the musical-rhythmical sensitivity to tone, pitch and rhythm, and the ability to reproduce them do not seem obvious for human survival. But to the hunter the knowledge of alarm calls of birds and other animals, and the ability to distinguish and copy different animal sounds is an important skill. This ability extends the hunters senses to include those of other species to determine the presence of prey or predator; thus reading sounds in the environment is a highly evolutionary skill. In an animistic tribal world (Abram, 1996) the interpretation and sensitivity of rhythms of the internal and external world, as well as the interpretation and presentation of these in the form of dances and songs, is an important skill for survival. By chants, dances, tricks, etc., the shamans interpreted and presented the ecological conditions for the tribe, which had great importance for the tribal survival. Today we are no longer trained to listen to faint nuances or use these skills, as we in the urban noise rather have closed our senses as an adaptation and habituation to an urban noisy life.

Gardner's different intelligences can thus be translated to evolutionary fitness components of the human mind, and have probably strongly influenced the evolution of the human brain. In today's urban world these different aspects of human intelligences are emancipated and some are regarded more important than others. This situation again creates a mental disharmony, absorbing energy like the unsynchronised samba batucada. By leaving this unharmonized urban lifestyle through pursuing *Friluftsliv*, Gardner's different aspects of the human mind can rejoin again into harmony, giving a sensation of pleasure and happiness. Thus *Friluftsliv*, by involving all senses, Gardner's different intelligences and the body and mind, fulfil basic human needs as well as restore mental and physical harmony. In our urban settings we try to fulfil this harmonisation of the different human needs by artificial means such as drugs, alcohol, consumption, over training, etc., creating nothing but frustration, diseases of boredom, belonginglessness and meaninglessness. The "quality of life" we seek, will not however be found in civilised urban culture, but in our basic biological functions, our natural ecological habitat, in nature as an unstructured fractal and complex environment, in our true home.

This is evident from studies made by Grahn et al. (1997) of children's preferred play environments, showing that children prefer free nature to artificial environments. We feel physically well playing in natural complex movements, and this research has shown a connection between physical and intellectual development. Children who spend lot of time in natural settings develop better both physically and mentally, feel better, find it easier to concentrate, and suffer less from stress, allergies, etc. All this supports that nature is the natural habitat even for modern urban people. Today most humans live in an uninteresting and uninspiring artificial world for the human mind and body. Urban life does not stimulate all our senses and our different intelligences, nor our physical abilities, which creates a form of stress and restlessness. Our natural habitat probably consists of a complex patchy environment with different biotopes to find food in, open areas to find prey, and shelters to hide in (Grahn 1992). Maybe that's why most of us find a complex natural surrounding more aesthetic than an urban or a monocultural setting.

There may also be an evolutionary survival explanation for the close connection between sensory and memory processing in the limbic system. Abram (1996) suggests a close interaction between the sensory interpretation of the world and the memory in the Australian aborigine's Dreamtime.

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Dreaming songs used by aboriginals as an oral map when travelling the arid landscape of Australia function as a memory tool, an oral means of recalling viable routes through the harsh environment. In these Dreaming songs the landscape itself provides the visual clues for remembering the Dreamtime-stories that guide the tribe to resources of water, shelters, and other landscape features important for their survival, providing a form of “ecological memory” (Jardine 1998). Thus the landscape directly interferes through the limbic system with the memories that are essential for survival. This may be one explanation for the deep spiritual experience we feel when we let the landscape subjectively integrate with our limbic system. It is a basic human feature for survival that is lost in our modern objective culture. The strong feelings experienced when in wilderness may be nothing more than fundamental survival mechanisms, when the landscape directly interferes with the brain’s memory mechanisms, and the synchronisation of the landscape with the brain is experienced as a deep spiritual experience.

As we return to our senses, we gradually discover our sensory perceptions to be simply our part of a vast, interpenetrating webwork of perceptions and sensations borne by our countless other bodies...This intertwined web of experience is, of course, the “life-world”... nothing other than the biosphere - the matrix of earthly life in which we ourselves are embedded. ... the biosphere as it is experienced and *lived from within* by the intelligent body - by the attentive human animal who is entirely a part of the world that he, or she, experiences. Abram (1996, p. 65).

Friluftsliv is not outdoor education as outdoor education has specific goals described as a place (natural environment), a subject (ecological processes) and a reason (resource stewardship) for learning (Priest, 1990). *Friluftsliv* is more like a game (Isberg, 1995). To become absorbed by a game one needs imagination and fantasy, which shift you to another level of consciousness. To see that every rock, tree or leaf has its own form and identity, has its own history to tell and its own right to exist, requires a higher level of consciousness and fantasy. *Friluftsliv* it is not about teaching and lecturing or being on excursions. But it involves a sort of education, learning the ways of yourself and the place in the more-than-human world and learning the ways of every creature and phenomenon you meet on your journey through life. Traditional environmental education (Weston, 1996) and natural sciences enrich and deepen the experiences of *Friluftsliv*, but in *Friluftsliv* the goal is not to become an expert naturalist. Rather *Friluftsliv* is a link between natural history and philosophy to you self linking the knowledge of yourself and the surroundings into the understanding of the world.

Conclusions

Experiencing *Genuine Friluftsliv* provides a biological, social, aesthetic, spiritual and philosophical experience of closeness to a place, the landscape, and the more-than-human world, a deep profound experience most urban people today are devoted from. This deep experience is a biological phenomenon with its roots in human evolution. *Genuine Friluftsliv* thus is something

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more than plain outdoor activities such as canoeing, climbing, skiing, hunting, fishing, collecting, painting, etc. It is a way to rediscover our deeper resources and biological needs as well as a way to give meaning and value to our lives. *Genuine Friluftsliv* thus may be a valuable way to create sustainable and meaningful experiences of nature and wildlife far beyond many superficial “outdoor activities” within the commercial business of “nature tourism”. Using *Genuine Friluftsliv* in professional experience production thus need more than technical skills of outdoor activities. Rather it needs a deeper philosophical understanding of human nature and the human connectedness to the more-than-human world as well as a tender feeling for human spirituality and

During my canoe trip down the Wind River in northern Yukon, we weren't there to conquer nature, to compete or beat nature, to win a race, doing better than others. We were there to live in and with the river and its surroundings. Some days we paddled hard just to feel the happiness of letting the muscles and body work hard; some days we just drifted with the current lying in the canoes snoozing to the music of the river, wind, and the bird-songs. We had no goal in life other than to survive and enjoy the moment, have fun together and move forwards—not on a time schedule, but according to our internal rhythms and rhythms of nature. By doing this we learned more about ourselves, each other, the surrounding landscape, and our place in the world. This is the true essence of *Genuine Friluftsliv*.

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