

Aesthetic & Spiritual Responses to the Environment

A two-day BESS workshop at York, 22/23 January 2013

Report by John Rodwell, Workshop Convenor

1 The context

1.1 Similar to the Millenium Ecosystem Assessment (UNEP 2003, hereafter MA), the 2011 UK National Ecosystem Assessment (<http://www.uknea.unep-wcmc.org>, hereafter NEA) classified ecosystem services along functional lines into provisioning, regulating, supporting and cultural services. The last was considered to include, for example, spiritual or religious enrichment, cultural heritage, recreation and tourism and aesthetic experience. The NEA acknowledged that contact with nature offers experiences of fascination that are an integral part of being human, contributing to our health and well-being; and that environmental settings can play a positive role in religious practice and faith. But it recognised a shortage of regular and consistent data on these experiences and a lack of understanding of the complex ways in which individuals and groups engage with environmental settings; and of how these benefits might be measured within the ecosystem services framework.

1.2 *Making Space for Nature: A Review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network* (Lawton et al. 2010) recommended the establishment of a coherent and resilient ecological network through which multiple benefits could be valued through an ecosystem services approach, and funding for 12 Nature Improvement Areas (NIA) quickly followed. Three meetings of the NIA Steering Group (13 March & 3 April, London; 3 July 2012, Peterborough) considered how a Monitoring & Evaluation Framework could demonstrate delivery of NIA objectives and aggregation of their contribution to national and international objectives. One particular aim was to identify core, preferred and optional indicators that could be used by the NIA teams for the four themes (a) Biodiversity, (b) Ecosystem services, (c) Social & economic benefits and contributions to well-being and (d) Partnership working. Under these heads, indicators of cultural services focused on landscape character, open space and access and benefits for well-being. These were to be measured by visitor numbers and mix, educational opportunities, volunteer hours and local attitudes.

1.3 A BESS/NIA Workshop (26 June 2012, London) was designed to bring together NIA partnerships and the academic community to discuss ways of monitoring ecosystem services in both the NIAs and the focal BESS landscapes: wetlands, uplands, lowland farmland and urban. Particular concerns were to identify both general and particular indicators for this range of scales; to ponder whether ecosystem service flows can reliably be monitored as well as the underlying stocks; to consider what algorithms and models exist for converting proxies into reliable measures; and to decide whether some ecosystem services cannot currently be quantified even by proxies.

2 The challenge

2.1 From all these workshops, it was clear that there was considerable uncertainty about the typology of cultural ecosystem services, and in particular whether and how these might all be understood and monitored. Indicators of recreation and tourism can be more readily characterised, while other ecosystem benefits concerned with the aesthetic and spiritual are apparently more resistant to quantification and may be ultimately immeasurable. Yet there is a gathering literature, deep understanding and practical experience of the complex relationships between people, nature and place which might inform and clarify our understanding of these questions.

2.2 It thus seemed fruitful to bring together experts and practitioners in cultural identity, the arts and various religious faiths to consider how to define aesthetic and spiritual responses to the environment, to discuss their relationship to recreation and tourism and to identify meaningful indicators.

3 The workshop

3.1 Funded by the BESS programme, a two-day workshop was held at the Royal York Hotel, York on 22/23 January 2013. The workshop programme is included as Annex A and the 29 delegates are listed with their affiliations and specialisms in Annex B.

3.2 The workshop began with presentations to explore the meaning of aesthetic and spiritual experiences, group discussion and feedback in response (Section 4 below). In the light of these exchanges, and in response to material from the NEA, we then considered, in group discussion and feedback sessions, four particular relevant topics: environmental settings (Section 5), nature conservation (Section 6), human well-being & environmental condition (Section 7) and nature, heritage and cultural identity (Section 8). Some final reflections from the workshop (Section 9) are provided to assess whether we met the challenge and how our discussions might contribute to the wider debate about ecosystem services, culture and aesthetic and spiritual experience. Acknowledgements (Section 10) follow and references are included in the text.

4 Aesthetic and spiritual experiences

4.1 Inspiration and artistic practice

Three practitioners provided accounts of what the notion of inspiration means in their own work.

4.1.1 For Patricia Townsend, a photographic and video artist and psychoanalytical psychotherapist, it was D.W. Winnicott's notion of 'transitional phenomena' that help her understand how she works as an artist. Such phenomena provide an intermediate area between self and other, between inner and outer experience, and can provide respite and comfort. For the artist, however, there is the possibility of more than an emotional charge, because, between self and other, something unexpected may be found or something happen, something awaited but without knowing beforehand. The example of her work that she showed, the video piece 'The Quick and the Dead' (<http://www.patriciatownsend.co.uk>), was produced from Morecambe Bay, in view of the solid mountains of the Lake District, but within the anxious, labile world of the shore sediments, with their flux of tides, risk of quicksands and memories of loss, an in-between world of appearances and disappearances.

4.1.2 For Louise Ann Wilson, site-specific and landscape performance maker, the artistic response to place is one of dialogic engagement, noticing, reflecting, connecting. This means that a place can be seen afresh, even if it is already well known. She works with locals and visitors, amateurs and experts, using encounters to generate a new way of knowing maybe old experience. In her walking performance 'Fissure' which unfolded over 3 days in the Yorkshire Dales (<http://www.louiseannwilson.com>), encounters between participants, performers and places explored experiences of death, grief and renewal. In particular, remembering her sister's death from a brain tumour, she was concerned to explore analogies between geology and neurology expressed by the fissured surface of the brain and the limestone landscape. There was an underlying reference to the Triduum (Three Days) of Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Day with its narrative of surrender to being there and being somewhere you never thought possible.

4.1.3 Paul Evans, nature writer, broadcaster and lecturer in creative writing, is concerned to put nature and language together, so as to articulate significance. He likes to be especially attentive to the liminal and in-between world of place and no-place and his contributions to *The Guardian* are written out of Wenlock Edge, a borderland between England and Wales. In his piece for that day, 22 January (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2013/jan/22/snow-new-dimension-to-nature>) 'the ordinary becomes extraordinary as snow adds a new dimension to nature ... warned about, but unbidden ... (in) which made some otherwise barely noticed things took on a visionary intensity ... an ever-present time with neither past nor future; a quiet drifting dimension'. He sees his work as a spiritual and political intervention that questions the dominant emotional and intellectual control.

4.2 Spiritual wonder in nature

Three contributors provided insights as to how major religions consider nature and the experiences of wonder that are part of spiritual experience.

4.2.1 Mohammed Chowdury, a specialist in Islamic environmentalism from Lancaster University explained the relationship of the holy written Q'ran and the Sunnah or normative Muslim way of life, the Ijtihad or interpretation of texts mediated by reason and the mystic interpretation of Sufism. Muslims believe that God's beauty expresses itself in nature and can be perceived by the believer as divine gift. A belief in beauty is essential for a Muslim and coincident with truth. Nature has a unity of existence which includes God and humanity and reflects his mighty Oneness. Nature is obedient to God but man's freewill allows of imperfection. Nature exists to correct human behaviour, for example through experiences of terror, and we must act right by the environment. The artist cannot make anything new.

4.2.2 Nigel Cooper, Anglican Chaplain at Anglia University, spoke of the necessary practice of 'attending' to the natural world through both science and art, as opposed to 'looking' with the kind of gaze that could appropriate. The Christian scriptures see nature as a place of encounter, as mediating providential sustenance and as offering a place where we might learn to be human, and learn to die, the unavoidable end we share with all natural things. Such an approach counters assertions of the disenchantment of the world, from which follows all too easily an instrumental environmental ethic and the commodification of nature. Allowing the possibility of enchantment is thus a richer way of understanding our experience of nature than 'charging our batteries' or even 'awe and wonder'. Such a spiritual dimension alerts us to the inadequacy of economic models for valuation and decision-making.

4.2.3 Simon James, Senior Lecturer in philosophy at Durham University, explained that the first noble truth of the Buddha is that nature is shot through with *dukkha* - change, suffering and unsatisfactoriness, a craving, which compassion and mindfulness can quell. Natural cycles are an emblem of impermanence in which we are all involved. Nature can be a context for disinterested meditation and environmental consciousness opens the human from its own selfish interests and instrumental attitudes.

4.3 Reflections from the workshop on aesthetic and spiritual outcomes, indicators and valuation

4.3.1 Alternative terms for 'wonder' might be 'delight', 'fascination', 'joy', 'pleasure' and, for 'inspiration', we could use 'engagement'. This would recognise some commonality between aesthetic and spiritual responses to the environment (and an overlap with recreational and touristic experiences) and avoid notions of the elitism of experience.

4.3.2 Although the concept of 'ecosystem services' is the best conceptual framework for considering how different cultural experiences of nature and their

outcomes can relate to one another, there was a general dislike of using the term 'services' in relation to any kind of cultural relationship, and a preference for the term 'benefits'.

4.3.3 Some environmental experiences and outcomes are directly measurable, others not and why should we measure if we thus destroy the essential character of what we experience and value?

4.3.4 The economic valuation of cultural benefits is of limited applicability and recognising the intrinsic, non-instrumental value of nature is a very important defence against a drive for universal monetising. Maybe different economic situations demand different approaches.

4.3.5 Who are the customers of nature conservation and environmental sustainability: just ourselves or also nature and its other creatures? Services to and benefits for them are also important.

4.3.6 Accumulating knowledge about ecosystems can help register or enhance their significance or value as places of possible aesthetic and spiritual experience. In this respect, science is not inimical to 'wonder' or 'delight'.

4.3.7 Seeing the artwork, telling the story or performing the experience can be a vital way of registering over and over again the occurrence of an aesthetic or spiritual encounter with nature. Artistic performances and religious liturgies both perform the function of making a past event, maybe occurring elsewhere, actual and significant to a different gathering of people here and now.

4.3.8 Room needs to be made within the frame of cultural experiences of nature for encounters with the ordinary (even our own backyard) and those places which are largely unvisited (like the deep seabed).

4.3.9 One possible proxy for indicating the occurrence of aesthetic or spiritual experiences and measuring its significance is changed human behaviour.

5 Environmental settings & cultural ecosystem services

5.1 What the NEA says

5.1.1 'Environmental settings are inscribed with the legacies of past and current societies, technologies and cultures. In contemporary society, people tend to perceive these as distinct from technologically produced settings ... as outdoor places where there are opportunities for people to engage with nature and each other. Environmental settings have a number of readily measured features and characteristics that can be incorporated into empirical assessments of value' (16.2.1).

5.1.2 'Our need for environmental settings must be considered alongside our need for "being", "doing" and "having" (see figure over). An individual's need to "be", by

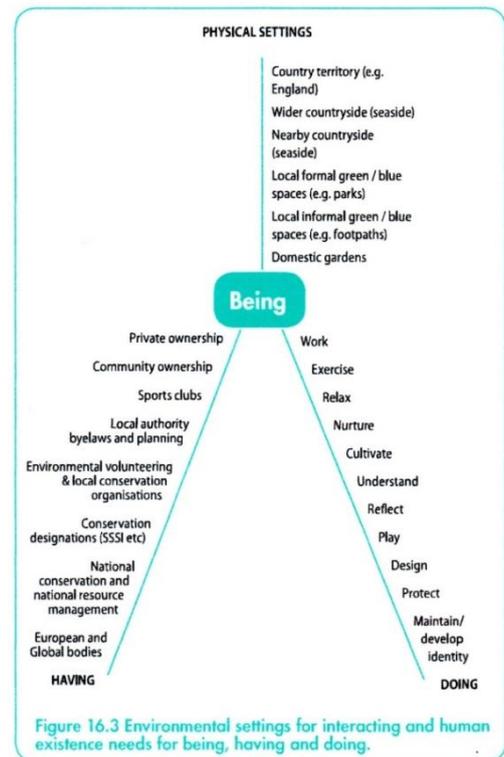
developing personal and collective attributes, is a process of endless change that involves constant tensions and relations with the other axes' (16.2.2).

5.1.3 'The cultural significance of these environmental settings arises from the role they play in meetings people's values and existence needs' (16.2.4).

5.1.4 'The interactions between cultures, environmental settings and habitats have led, over long periods of time, to the emergence of a series of landscapes that constitute heritage goods based on material objects, imagination and memories' (16.3.4.2).

5.1.5 'The connection of natural areas with cultural heritage has a long and distinctive history in the UK, linked to the notable tradition of art and literature in transforming the landscape from an environmental setting to a "scenery with amenity value" ' (16.3.4.2).

5.1.6 'It is extremely hard to pinpoint evidence of particular landscapes or ecosystems being conducive to religious experiences ... Wynn (2009) seeks to explain how "our encounter with particular places, each characterised by its own phenomenology and distinctive possibilities for bodily appropriation, may prove to be religious significant" (because) particular places may come to hold a religious significance because they epitomise in some way the nature of things more generally; God may be taken to be presupposed in some particular material context which may be a place or landscape or habitat; and specific places may represent the meaning of past religious events that occurred there' (16.3.6.3).



5.2 Reflections from the workshop on environmental settings in relation to aesthetic and spiritual experiences

5.2.1 Environmental settings are places where people find themselves, realise or discover something about themselves, in nature. In aesthetic and spiritual experiences, places act as mirrors of ourselves.

5.2.2 A necessary feature which makes such places conducive to aesthetic and spiritual experiences is that they allow/encourage/provoke a surrender to attentiveness.

5.2.3 Ordinary places can be made particular and special by the memorialisation of events there, as with the placing of flowers and other mementoes at sites of traffic accidents.

5.2.4 Some forgotten environmental settings in the modification of the Max-Neef framework used in the NEA (Figure 16.3) are care homes for the non-independent, farms and micro green-spaces.

5.2.5 Some forgotten activities along the 'Doing' axis (figure 16.3) are religious worship; and pilgrimage, not necessarily religious, for example a return to our, or someone else's birthplace.

5.2.6 One forgotten kind of 'Having' can be seen in colonial landscapes, both home and away, where appropriation by occupying powers might be a very obvious feature.

5.2.7 Notions of 'Being' are generally concerned with mobile, healthy, well-to-do people, empowered to have and do in a particular setting where they feel at home.

6 Environmental settings & nature conservation

6.1 What the NEA says

6.1.1 'Environmental settings are inscribed with the legacies of past and current societies, technologies and cultures. In contemporary society, people tend to perceive these as distinct from technologically produced settings ... as outdoor places where there are opportunities for people to engage with nature and each other. Environmental settings have a number of readily measured features and characteristics that can be incorporated into empirical assessments of value.' (16.2.1)

6.1.2 'The changing institutions and laws for protecting and conserving the countryside have altered the relationships between humans and certain environmental settings, often making places available where people can undertake recreation activities or appreciate flora and fauna.' (16.2.4.1)

6.1.3 'The processes affecting the connection between humans and environmental settings are not just shaped by formal institutions and legislation. The groundswell of protests by local communities and specialist interest groups against planning decisions opened the way for massive changes in urban and rural areas ... Debates raged about what constituted 'natural' and 'cultural' heritage; about whether it was possible to determine, in any scientifically robust way, a cause-effect relationship between assemblages of physical terrain, vegetation cover, human artefacts and expressions of landscape preferences.' (16.2.4.1)

6.1.4 'A cultural substitution is offered by wildlife documentaries on television which attract audiences in the millions and do satisfy the value need for understanding. But there is a struggle between conservationists and documentary film-makers about the impact of this substitution on the fate of actual wildlife.' (16.3.1.1)

6.2 Reflections from the workshop on whether nature conservation delivers environmental settings which enable aesthetic and spiritual experiences.

6.2.1 Nature reserves and other kinds of designated environmental settings have usually been prevalingly natural and semi-natural, but we have to remember that restored landscapes can also provide sites for nature conservation and aesthetic and religious experiences.

6.2.2 People may need the experience of others, whether expert or not, in appreciating what is special about a place and the relationships with nature that we might have there. This can provide a rich accumulating narrative of encounter.

6.2.3 Guided and interpreted visits provide managed experiences. These may be thought necessary to protect environmental settings and their wildlife, and to ensure the health and safety of visitors, but how far does this hinder or prejudice unmediated and fresh opportunities for aesthetic and spiritual experiences? Over-interpretation may leave no room.

6.2.4 Nature is also about risk, real wildness, terror. How far are these accommodated in the environmental settings provided by nature conservation, and how much do they figure in aesthetic and spiritual responses? Maybe, in all these, we prefer a light green mediocrity rather than 'real' nature.

6.2.5 There is a tension between open access and higher visitor numbers and the possibility of those aesthetic and spiritual experiences which depend upon or are favoured by lone contact between person and place.

6.2.6 Aesthetic and spiritual experiences can be vicarious, rather than by actual access to an environmental setting, enabled by wildlife films, exhibitions of paintings or photographs, performances of music or dance.

6.2.7 Experiences of nature are particular, not general.

6.2.8 Nature conservation implies a duty of care which we could see as the outworking of a spiritual/religious commitment, nourished by aesthetic and spiritual experience.

6.2.9 Nature conservation professionals often point to an experience of fascination or wonder as crucial in developing their own interest and determining their career trajectory.

6.2.10 What is it that actually engages people in nature? 'Biodiversity' is a poor summary of what many people find fascinating or valuable.

6.2.11 'The spirit of the place' is more than 'the nature of the place'.

7 Human well-being & environmental condition

7.1 What the NEA says

7.1.1 'A substantial body of research on the associations between nature and health has been produced ... addressing a wide range of issues including levels and types of engagement with nature, physical and mental health outcomes and relationships between proximity to greenspace and both health and crime.' (16.3.3.2)

7.1.2 For example, the prevalence of psychiatric morbidity is greater in urban than rural domains ...people in greener areas show lower levels of health inequality relating to income deprivation for all-cause mortality and circulatory-disease mortality ... accessible local greenspace is associated with longevity.' (16.3.3.2)

7.1.3 'Measuring the value of the health and well-being benefits from contact with environmental settings raises particular challenges but a geographically referenced quota survey of 1851 respondents with ordinary least squares regression analysis revealed significant relationships between self-reported physical well-being and visits to the countryside at least once a month, and between physical and emotional well-being and similar frequency of visits to urban parks, and between a view of grass from the home and emotional well-being.' (16.3.3.4)

7.1.4 'Causal relationships can be hard to identify because existing health can affect an individual's use of greenspace or choice of residence near a particular environmental setting. But findings suggest that more attention should be given to developing the use of green exercise as a therapeutic intervention and planners and architects should be encouraged to improve access to greenspace.' (16.3.3.2)

7.1.5 'Proximity of respondents homes (in a web survey) to broadleaved or mixed woodland was associated with higher life satisfaction ... proximity to mountain, moorland and heath with slightly lower life satisfaction.' (16.3.7.2)

7.2 Reflections from the workshop about human well-being and aesthetic and spiritual experiences

7.2.1 Aesthetic and spiritual experiences may encourage us to reconsider just what we mean by human 'well-being', and what kinds of environmental condition are most conducive to our being well.

7.2.2 The care-home experience might lead us to ask how far environmental settings are, or nature as a whole is, a care home.

7.2.3 Understanding risk and developing a measured response to threat are essential aspects of human well-being. How far is such learning met by environmental settings?

7.2.4 Aesthetic and spiritual experiences can challenge us to embrace terror and death. Does our relationship with nature provide a setting in which we can learn to do this?

7.2.5 Human well-being is often preoccupied with notions of happiness. Is nature a happy place? Do we try to make it so through our management and interpretation?

7.2.6 Biodiversity is not essential for green space to be conducive to human well-being or to be therapeutic.

7.2.7 Familiar, local green space might be more important for encouraging human well-being than a distant nature reserve or National Park.

7.2.8 There are problems with the measurability of human well-being/social behaviour and the demonstration of causality in links with environmental settings.

7.2.9 The prompting of narratives about how people feel in nature may be a necessary precursor to attempts to measure human well-being.

8 Nature, heritage & cultural identity

8.1 What the NEA says

8.1.1 ' "Heritage" is the term often used to refer to what the past bequeaths the present; like many other cultural goods, it is a contested concept since the elements of the past valued by one social group may not be valued by another (and) there is often disagreement between experts and lay publics.' (16.3.4.1)

8.1.2 'In the UK, environmental settings are all heavily infused with the cultural values and histories of human use, with each adaptation imprinting the values and assumptions of the cultures of that time and place.' (16.3.4.1)

8.1.3 'Through their differing heritages, every environmental setting is capable of being interpreted as possessing a distinctive sense of place. Thus, they can contribute to a range of human needs, such as the need for "protection" by creating a sense of local solidarity, or the need for "affection" by nurturing passion for places, as well as contributing to the need for identity, leisure and understanding.' (16.3.4.1).

8.1.4 'People's ideas and values relating to heritage are both idiosyncratic in terms of their everyday lives and environmental settings, as well as consensual when considering what constitutes national heritage.' (16.3.4.1)

8.1.5 '(invoking) an urban-rural dichotomy works to exclude ethnic groups from claims to "English" landscapes and places. The not-urban has provided a resource for a variety of English nationalisms. Inevitably, this has involved repressing a variety of entangled histories that show the countryside of the pastoral idyll has never been

separate from histories of social class, colonialism and black presences in places and landscapes.' (16.3.4.2)

8.1.6 'Environmental settings also function as a generator of a vast range of local identities based around a more everyday sense of heritage. Heritage goods, therefore, can be a source of community empowerment, as well as potential conflict between different interests.' (16.3.4.3)

8.1.7 'The National Ecosystem Assessment was not able to obtain accurate data on the nature or value of heritage goods produced by different forms of the media that rely on representations of nature and environmental settings, such as wildlife documentaries and TV programmes about the countryside. A future analysis of the economic value of this type of heritage good would need to be accompanied by quantitative and qualitative research to understand how such goods link to other forms of environmental behaviour and whether they satisfy our needs as synergistic satisfiers or are pseudo/inhibitor satisfiers.' (16.4)

8.2 Reflections from the workshop on aesthetic and spiritual experience, heritage and identity

8.2.1 Aesthetic and spiritual experiences often relate to notions of 'belonging' and nourish a sense of identity. Although 'ownership', both public and private, figures along the 'Having' axis of the Max-Neef framework in the NEA (Figure 16.1, included here above in 5.1), this is not really the same thing as 'belonging'. 'Ownership' is about possession, 'belonging' is a more reciprocal relationship with place.

8.2.2 Can intimate relationships with place as expressed through heritage be understood in terms of measurable 'services'? Are they more than a sum of individual benefits?

8.2.3 Cultural identity and heritage are about shared experience and community values, relationships with place that are held in common. What measures do we have of such shared phenomena?

8.2.4 Cultural identity is about some sort of rootedness in place. How far do we accommodate immigrant or migrant perceptions of environmental settings, and the aesthetic and spiritual experiences that strangers bring to the places where we ourselves are already at home?

8.2.5 How readily do we accommodate new nature: seasonal immigrants are one thing but what about alien invaders, losses of plants and animals through new diseases and shifts in familiar landscapes that are responses to climate change? Will we have to remake our heritage in relation to such unfamiliar things?

9 Closing Reflections

9.1 Artistic inspiration & 'aesthetic' ecosystem services

9.1.1 The three arts practitioners worked in different disciplines (photography/video, performance-making and writing) but there was striking confluence about how they described their relationship with the environment, with nature. For all of them, there was an in-between world, between self and other, then and now, here and there, where some kind of engagement occurred. In this space, through waiting, through dialogue, through things being brought together, something happened. There was a commitment to create but an uncertainty about what might emerge and a willing attendance on the situation meanwhile. There was an outcome to the examples they gave: a video, a performance, an article for a newspaper. The outcomes could be measured in some way - in size or duration or in number of performances - and also perhaps the potential impact in terms of eventual viewers, audience numbers, readers. Their responses, too, might presumably be quantified in some way. But the core experience of inspiration, if we wish to use that term, remains resistant to quantification and its occurrence demands a freedom to attend, a lack of existing interpretation, risk, many of the things we put in place or guard against to ensure safe delivery of other more measurable cultural services. The work the practitioners described was funded – through grants or fees – and could be said to have some market price, in terms of costs of viewing or attendance or purchase of a newspaper. But the originating experience itself would be ultimately resistant to being bought.

9.2.2 Though we do not necessarily need their prompting, artists can communicate their responses to the environment in ways and with outcomes that can enrich our own experience and open up the prospect of similar relationships, even though we lack their expertise or practice, and do not ourselves create professionally, or indeed at all. Then the indicators of such experience may be anecdotes, stories, memories of things seen, heard, touched, smelled, felt. Articulating and capturing such experiences would provide more direct indicators than measurements of access and footfall.

9.2.3 The term 'aesthetic' is not an entirely helpful one to describe these more widely shared possibilities, since it carries an additional sense of 'belonging to the appreciation of the beautiful ... of good taste' (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1976). This is essentially the MA definition of this category of ecosystem services and neither the NEA, nor other sources (e.g. Daniel et al. 2012. Contributions of cultural services to the ecosystem services agenda, *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Sciences*, 109, 8812-8819), provide further guidance. Yet, this is too narrow a definition for the broader understanding of these kinds of relationships with the environment which, even in our brief exploration, we recognised as significant. It would rule out certain kinds of experience of nature which were enriching and beneficial for well-being, but which involved encounters with ugly or frightening creatures or finding ourselves in uneasy, risky or awe-inspiring situations.

Excluding these does not do full justice to the capacity of our perception and our ability to be human. A better, value-free, term to describe such services might be 'sense or sensory experience'.

9.2 Religious experience and spiritual ecosystem services

9.2.1 We were clearly scratching the surface in our exploration of how major belief systems like Christianity, Buddhism and Islam understand nature and our relationships with it, and it is unwise to seek for simple generalities across different religious commitments. However, some important points emerged from the presentations. There is a given-ness about the world in which we find ourselves that limits any claims to our ownership of it. Finding ourselves in nature is part of the human predicament and nature provides a context in which we can learn what it is to be human, how to live and how to die. But nature is not simply instrumental to human survival or well-being. Concern for the environment is a defence against human selfishness and a responsibility. Our attentiveness to nature, our mindfulness within it, guards against appropriation and commodification. Spiritual experiences within nature can be described as particular moments of wonder, but we thought also of the general possibility of the (re-)enchantment of nature through such a readiness to attend. For some, spiritual response might be a kind of nature-worship, though many major religions would assert that nature does not exhaust the divine; and nor is its own value simply intrinsic.

9.2.2 Further discussion might take note of existing inter-faith statements on environmental concern (like the 1986 Assisi Declarations, for example, <http://www.arcworld/downloads/THE20%ASSISI20%DECLARATIONS.pdf>) and benefit from the increasing experience of including different religious cultures in environmental projects. However, this is insufficient to think we are doing justice to the complex lived experience of religious commitments and how these see ecosystem services in spiritual terms. Further serious intellectual engagement is necessary and should also embrace traditions which were not represented in our workshop. Unfortunately, a Hindu scholar was prevented from attending by illness and we got no response to our invitation to the leading Jewish environmental group. Neither from the Alliance of Religions & Conservation but their recent *Valuesquest* collaboration with the Club of Rome (<http://www.arcworld/news.asp?pageID=607>) highlights the need to ponder the important philosophical issue of relationships between 'services' and 'values'.

9.2.3 There are spiritual ecosystem services which any person may appreciate whether or not they have a specific commitment to a belief system or institutional religion, or the understandings of the divine which they commend. Spiritual experiences in the environment may be apprehended by our senses, but they commonly speak of ourselves being apprehended by an 'other', They also enrich what it is to be human in ways that go beyond sensual satisfaction, for example by prompting change in behaviour and moral development. Some thought that 'delight' or 'fascination' might be better descriptors for those uncomfortable with the notion of 'wonder'.

9.2.4 Measures of inclusion of faith groups in environmental initiatives, or the contribution of religious capital in terms of meeting places for discussion and networks for promotion are inadequate indicators of spiritual ecosystem services. What is required is some engagement with the content of what religious traditions and those with no faith affiliation wish to call spiritual experiences, a sensitive reading of their narratives. Outwith frames of institutional religion, people are sometimes hesitant about retailing these experiences and can lack the language which they consider does justice to them, or which leaves them unspoiled and still personally significant. Indeed this may be one of their marks and the frame of ecosystem services needs to ponder how best to let these significant experiences be told and registered.

9.3 The typology of cultural ecosystem services

9.3.1 Both sense and spiritual experiences alert us to the limited purchase of the term 'services' and perhaps 'ecosystem benefits' does better justice to their character and outcomes. These experiences are resistant to measurement, quantification and economic valuation in the same way as other cultural services and lead us to question just what 'goods' and 'flows' might be in such cases.

9.3.2 Clearly those benefiting from recreational and tourist services, or enjoying heritage, can thereby have sensory and spiritual experiences of the kind we considered: indeed, recreational, touristic and heritage opportunities might enable aesthetic and spiritual experiences otherwise denied. But a typology of cultural services needs to recognise functional categories which represent distinct aesthetic and spiritual outcomes.

9.3.3 Sensory and spiritual experience share with one another a rich appreciation of the creativity of unbidden encounter but for many people they differ in their understanding of where the balance of initiative and revelation lies. For explicitly religious people, there would be an element of the personal and divine in the other which granted to us the gift of experience, and a sense of grateful receipt of an enhancement of our spirit.

9.3.4 The concept of subsequent performance is also common to both artistic and religious experience. Exhibitions, dramas, recitals, acts of worship also provide some way to understand both the sensory and spiritual benefits of human encounters with the environment. They offer an opportunity for us to be incorporated into the experience of others and to transmit significance from one time to another. Thus they can be part of community life and inter-generational equity. Simply measuring the number of such events, or of the participants, this would not be a sufficient indication of their benefits.

9.4 Environmental settings, space and place

9.4.1 Sensory and spiritual perceptions can enrich and change the way we understand Having, Doing and Being and how these interact in the 'environmental settings' of the Max-Neef framework of the NEA.

9.4.2 It would be better to talk of 'Making Places for Nature' than 'Making Space for Nature' because space is a philosophical concept, whereas it is particular places that are the real locus of our cultural experiences of the environment. In the United Kingdom, all our ecosystems bear some marks, past or present, of cultural interactions and the way we attend upon nature is necessarily a cultural process.

9.4.3 In the workshop, we did not defer to the notions of 'sacred space' that so often dominate definitions of what is special about the places where the spiritual has been part of felt experience. Certainly, sacred sites or sacred areas are important to many religious traditions as places where particularly potent spiritual events have occurred or experiences have accumulated but, in both the presentations and our discussions, it was the in-between, the ordinary, the neglected that figured as much

Somewhere in the hollows and spaces between our carefully managed wilderness areas and the creeping, flattening effects of global capitalism, there are still places where an overlooked England truly exists ... complicated, unexamined places that thrive on disregard, if we only could put aside our nostalgia for places we've never really known and see them afresh. Paul Farley & Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands, Cape*, 2011.

as the special. Of course, this is how subsequently sacred places gain a shared and inherited significance but new places can always become spiritually meaningful, and how this happens initially also needs to be appreciated. Restored landscapes may be especially interesting in this respect.

9.4.4 In sensory and spiritual experiences, we said that something 'takes place', a fortunate double-meaning which does more than simply appropriate a setting, but reveals depths of engagement, maybe previously unexplored.

9.4.5 Aesthetic and spiritual responses to the environment help us see that ownership of an environmental setting is not the same as a sense of belonging. They prompt questions about who got to a place first - nature or ourselves - and whether we really belong together there in a sustainable fashion. These are crucial matters in deciding who really owns the stocks and flows, and to whom the ecosystem services are being delivered in the end. Differences in aesthetic and spiritual perceptions of nature might also help us to explore just how readily immigrant cultures settle or ever feel they own places like supposed natives.

9.5 Nature conservation, sense & spiritual experience

9.5.1 Sensory and spiritual responses to the environment show that nature conservation can present too narrow a view of what it is that we wish to sustain for future generations: the designated rather than the ordinary, the exemplary rather than the particular, the static pattern rather than the process. We need to find

ourselves in nature that is itself taking place in all its local particularity, so the measurement of difference and change may be as important as indicators of common standards for the delivery of benefits.

9.5.2 Sensory and spiritual experiences also suggest that nature conservation is too preoccupied with biodiversity and that this may be an inadequate proxy for the 'nature' which many people appreciate and relate to. Biodiversity stands in relation to nature, as space does to place.

9.5.3 Sensory and spiritual responses to the environment seem to offer a wider range of cultural takes on experience than are found within nature conservation's own view of itself as a service, for example in the promotional literature of statutory agencies or wildlife NGOs. Visitors to nature reserves can be of a much narrower social and ethnic mix than the variety of people who have sense and spiritual experiences to retail.

9.5.4 While legislation and campaigns have opened up landscapes for the appreciation of wildlife, the conditions under which they can be visited may be inimical to sensory and spiritual experiences. Interpretation, guidance, party visits, warnings about health and safety in sites designated for nature conservation - these are readily measurable but may cramp not enable. We need thoughtful pointers that leave something to our imagination, an accumulating narrative that reveals the diversity of previous responses, company for shared experience and sufficient protection to ensure that we live to tell the tale, but ... the startling products of pioneer, lonely and risky encounters with nature suggest alternative ecosystem services with different indicators. To which environmental settings do we go for these?

Most nature reserves only continue to exist as distinctive local spaces because they exist also as standardised representations, such as species lists and habitat descriptions, in a much more universalised context ... The processes that, through protection and conservation, have maintained some local distinctiveness in a reserve, also disembed it. The abstracted, reductionist constitution of nature reserve sites ... often appears to conflict, at a foundational level, with the fluid relational performance of place. Matthew Watson 'Performing place in nature reserves' in *Nature Performed*, ed. Bron Szerszynski, Wallace Heim & Claire Waterton, pp. 145-160, Blackwell, 2003.

9.6 Human well-being & environmental condition

9.6.1 Nature is the context in which we find ourselves and where we can learn something of what human nature is. Sensory and spiritual experiences can have a key role in negotiating the relationship between these two and helping us understand what it might be to feel truly at home in nature, and what is our role there.

9.6.2 The received view of environmental problems and our responses to them provide us with a limited understanding of what it is to be human, and how we might be cared for and healed. Measures of the influence of our surroundings on human health can be very shallow and we need a richer dialogue between professionals in these realms. Sensory and spiritual experiences could help us identify indicators of human well-being that would map better on to indicators of environmental condition, and articulate such a conversation.

The present orthodoxy on environmental questions is (also) inadequate because of its superficial treatment of the mysteriousness and open-endedness of existence itself. There is little sign in the official descriptions of environmental problems or methodologies of the radically unknown character of the future, or of man's place in creation ... No matter where one looks in the environmental sphere – whether to land-use planning law, environmentally-related forecasting tools, appraisal methodologies such as cost-benefit analysis or probabilistic risk assessment – a disturbingly one-dimensional picture of human identity emerges ... Concepts such as “amenity” and “recreation” are more and more inadequate for reflecting the full dimensions of felt experience. Robin Grove-White, 'The Christian Person and Environmental Concern', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 2, 1-17, 1992.

9.6.3 Artistic and religious traditions offer us rich perspectives on the 'wild' and how we might survive it, within and without ourselves. They could provide us with a critique of the often shallow debate about re-wilding and the limited range of normative models of the 'favourable condition' or natural state of ecosystems we often set as targets.

9.6.4 Negotiating change in our lives, as individuals and communities, can be deeply problematic and people testify to the role which aesthetic and spiritual experiences can play in accommodating a shift in our own capacities and the altered circumstances or different places in which we find ourselves. Nature changes too, and this may affect our own future. We need to accommodate aesthetic and spiritual perspectives on processes like landscape restoration, responses to alien species and to climate change.

9.7 Nature, heritage and cultural identity

9.7.1 Many people see culture as distinctive from nature and privilege one of them over the other in their attitude to what matters about our environment. This is a situation aggravated by the traditional separation of agencies and NGOs concerned with these different realms, the training of their professionals, the protocols they apply, and their often uneasy, even grudging, partnership in projects. Landscape Character Assessments can show the best and the worst of this split-mindedness, but a real effort is needed to ensure that indicators of quality and value are sensitive to both nature and culture, at the same time, in the same place. Aesthetic and spiritual experiences can help mediate this division and reveal that, very often, it is interactions between the two that influence the ecosystems whose benefits we cherish.

For a variety of conceptual, historical and political reasons, contemporary international law distinguishes between “natural” land forms, cultural monuments, moveable cultural property, the performing arts and scientific knowledge. Indigenous peoples do not make these distinctions. Rather, they tend to regard landscapes as inherently cultural products in which artworks, literature, performances and scientific-knowledge systems are inextricably embedded. Scientific knowledge must periodically be rehearsed within the landscape in recitations and performances that remember the historical process by which people and non-human kinfolk constructed the landscape. Detaching specific cultural or scientific objects from the landscape and commodifying them, as is contemplated by most current proposals for protecting indigenous people's rights, will undermine the institutions and procedures necessary for perpetuating the quality and validity of local knowledge. R. L. Barsh 'How do you patent a landscape?' *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 8, 14-47, 1999.

9.7.2 Aesthetic and spiritual goods and flows are an integral part of the heritage of many different individuals and peoples but we have, as yet, a very limited understanding of how some of these distinctive bequests translate into our present mix of cultural identities; and how they accommodate the natural into their heritage.

9.7.3 In some situations, as with deeply contested landscapes, where different cultural groups stake conflicting claims on ownership, use or understanding of space and heritage, aesthetic and spiritual processes may be a way to articulate a dialogue and reconciliation which would otherwise be impossible. How artistic and religious traditions themselves accommodate cultural conflicts can provide models and tests of the effectiveness and reality of shared landscapes.

9.7.4 Artistic traditions offer representations, expressions and abstractions of heritage and the natural. Religious traditions differ in their acceptance of representation, in their cherishing of artefacts weighted with inherited significance, in the inclusion of natural imagery and the role of story and myth. In the light of all this, we need to re-think just how 'real' our own conceptions of the natural are, and how much a creation of the culture we inherit.

I have tried to argue that the countryside that we care for is very largely a creation of our own minds. It is really there, the hills, the hedgerows, the silage clamps, but its significance lies not in these things but in what we imagine it to be. With our slight and transient knowledge of what is actually "out there" among species, populations, ecosystems and landscapes, we create stories or myths which we then empower to affect the way we think about nature.
W.M.Adams, *Future Nature*, Earthscan, 1996.

10 Acknowledgements

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Tuesday 22 January 2013

1030 Coffee/tea on arrival

1100 The context of the Workshop: Ecosystem Services & the BESS Programme
(Dave Raffaelli, BESS Director)

1120 The task of the Workshop: Ecosystem Services & the challenge of the aesthetic & spiritual (John Rodwell, Workshop Convenor)

1140 Inspiration and delight: examples of aesthetic responses to nature and plenary discussion

1300 Lunch

1415 Wonder and the spirit: examples of religious responses to nature and plenary discussion

1545 Tea/coffee

1615 Aesthetic & spiritual outcomes, indicators, values and valuation: some challenges for group discussion

1715 Aesthetic & spiritual outcomes, indicators, values and valuation: feedback in plenary discussion

1800 Close

1900 Dinner

Wednesday 23 January

0900 Some further challenges for group discussion:

- A) Environmental settings, space & place
- B) Nature conservation and disenchantment

1000 Designs on nature: plenary discussion

1030 Coffee /tea

1100 Some further challenges for group discussion:

- C) Human well-being & environmental condition
- D) Nature, heritage & cultural identity

1200 Finding ourselves in nature: plenary discussion

1230 Goods & goodness, indicators & signs: plenary discussion.

1300 Lunch

1400 At home in nature, tourists or at play: plenary discussion on a typology of cultural ecosystem services.

1500 Tea & close of workshop

Annex B

Workshop Delegate List

Name	Surname	Specialism & affiliation
Mike	Alexander	Natur Cymru conservation manager, writer & photographer, Barmouth
Malcolm	Barton	Painter in oils and pastels following a figurative tradition, Huddersfield
Candida	Blaker	Freelance arts, social change & environment consultant & arts-science events director, Lyme Regis
Garuth	Chalfont	Designer & researcher for Dementia environments, Chalfont Design, Sheffield
Mohammed	Chowdhury	Specialist in Islamic Environmentalism, Lancaster University
Steve	Cinderby	BESS Communications & Impact Manager, University of York
Peter	Coates	Environmental historian & NEA2 contributor, Bristol University
Debbie	Coldwell	PhD student in Cultural and Educational Ecosystem Services, York University
Mary	Colwell	Freelance TV Radio & Internet specialist & feature writer for The Tablet, Bristol
Nigel	Cooper	Anglican Chaplain & 'Shrinking the Footprint', Anglia University
Paul	Evans	Nature writer, radio broadcaster & lecturer in creative writing, Bath Spa University
Adriana	Ford-Thompson	Teaching & Research Fellow in Conservation & Society, University of York
Judith	Hanna	Principal Specialist in Social Analysis, Natural England Peterborough
Sue	Hartley	Professor of Ecology and Director of Environmental Sustainability Institute, University of York
Simon	James	Senior Lecturer in philosophy with specialism in Buddhism, Durham University
Helen	King	Researcher in cultural services for the Wessex-BESS project, Cranfield University
Andy	Lester	Director of Conservation, A Rocha UK
Dave	Raffaelli	Director, BESS programme, University of York
John	Rodwell	Freelance ecological consultant & Anglican priest, Lancaster
Christopher	Smout	Historiographer Royal in Scotland,
Patricia	Townsend	Artist and psychoanalytic psychotherapist London
Stewart	Walker	Director of Design and Co-Director of the Imagination Lancaster, Lancaster University
Ruth	Waters	Head of Profession for the Ecosystem Approach, Natural England Peterborough
Piran	White	Deputy Director, BESS programme, University of York
Lorraine	Whitmarsh	Research in Psychological & Social dimensions of environment & sustainability, Cardiff University
Louise Ann	Wilson	Site-specific & Landscape Performance Maker, Freelance & Lancaster University.
Michael	Winter	Social scientist specialising in agriculture and the environment & NEA2 contributor, University of Exeter