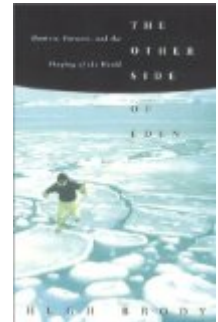
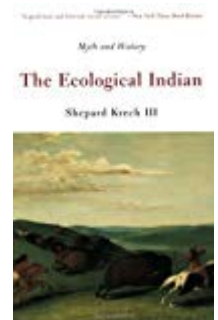


Hugh Brody. *The Other Side of Eden: Hunters, Farmers and the Shaping of the World.* New York: North Point Press, 2001. 376 pp. \$25.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-86547-610-3.



Shepard Krech, III. *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999. vi + 318 pp. \$27.95 (cloth), ISBN 0393-04755-5; \$14.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-393-32100-5.



Reviewed by Chris Paci

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Witnesses of Aboriginal Cultures

The demystification of all cultural constructs, "ours" as well as "theirs", is a new fact that scholars, critics, and artists have put before us. We cannot speak of history today without, for instance, making room in our statements about it for Hayden White's thesis in *Metahistory*, that all historical writing is writing and delivers figural language, and representational tropes, be they in the codes of metonymy, metaphor, allegory, or irony. [1]

The narrative investigation of tropes by witnesses of Aboriginal cultures, scholars, continues to fill great halls and libraries the world over. Coded by language and fit within paradigms, many of these narratives have spawned their own

schools of thought, criticism, and ways of explaining the world. *The Other Side of Eden: Hunters, Farmers, and the Shaping of the World*, by Hugh Brody and *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*, by Shepard Krech III, are well worth the read for students, scholars, critics, and artists alike. Collectively these two authors employ different anthropological perspectives to view North American Aboriginal cultures as their subject, using local examples to make universal associations.

Shepard Krech III has a B.Litt. from Oxford and an anthropology degree from Harvard, based on fieldwork he did with the Gwitch'in in the northern territories of Canada in the late 1960s. His writing is authoritative and he is well respected by the academic community. Hugh Brody, an

anthropologist and linguist by training, has made documentary films and written seven other books, the best known being *Maps and Dreams*. While Brody has acted as expert witness to important Aboriginal rights and title cases in Canada, notably in Delgamuukw, this book is a general challenge to the anthropological classification of "hunter-gatherer cultures".

Before I tackle the job of laying out the basic arguments of each book I want to note that they are beautifully bound handsome books. Together they hint of a new school in anthropological writing on Indigene, a movement with an undercurrent that erodes the exotic other and has the potential to resist asserting master narratives. Furthermore, this school is driven by a reclamation of "ourselves", lead by a handful of Aboriginal scholars who seek to end domination of their cultures by authoritative texts. This review follows a train-of-thought on the business of cultures and places, things of and not of "our" own, a political act with a taste for appropriation and reclamation. In academic disciplines there have always been, what might be described in vulgar terms, an Industry of scholarship about Aboriginal peoples, their cultures, worldviews, languages, spirituality, etc. For now, let us put aside the argument that Aboriginal cultures are studied to death by outsiders, many who have profited at becoming cultural experts while communities have suffered poverty. In Canada and the United States Aboriginal cultures are diverse, making one wonder how newcomers, colonial decision-makers, settlers, their offspring and the like, could be so ignorant as to clump them together as Indians.

The Ecological Indian is set in seven chapters, several based on Aboriginal use of specific species--bison, deer, beaver--as examples of instances where Krech, in his thesis, claims Aboriginal peoples overexploited and damaged the environment. Krech's analysis could have been improved with common property theory. Specifically, his analysis could have been informed by

Game theory (the prisoner's dilemma) to show how resource scarcity developed as competition eroded traditional management/governance systems. To his credit Krech does argue that ultimately species were exhausted where instances of control rules or their enforcement were lacking. In Brody we get a sense of these rules embedded in Aboriginal cultures and their lands. It is obvious in both books that Aboriginal lifeways were eroded by contact. In fact, the same sources used by Krech to discredit the ecological Indian trope, can be used to support claims that as Aboriginal commons were exposed to successive waves of competition from interlopers, including other Aboriginal peoples, local systems broke down to result in ecological losses. Taken to full argument, the evidence presented by Krech shows that ecological Indians existed. What little archaeological evidence there is to suggest extirpated species cannot be used conclusively to show a cause and effect relationship of species loss due to over-harvest. That Amerindians knew how to maintain their balance in ecosystems is demonstrated in oral history and proven inadvertently by Krech because his narrative shows that ecosystems broke down after the introduction of destructive practices by outsiders. The commons were transformed into open-access conditions through the erosion of traditional management systems, and the eventual displacement of local Aboriginal tenure, title and associated property rights regimes. The elements of transformation were accomplished piecemeal through an uneven displacement of goods, processes, diseases, ideas, languages, technologies, and the like.

Brody's discussion of Canadian Aboriginal cultures, in particular Inuit, Dunne-za, and Gitksan, challenge the general anthropological assumption of "hunter-gathers" the world over. The book is set in six chapters: Inuktitut (language), creation, time, words, gods, and mind. He shows that despite historical arguments of Aboriginal hunter-gatherers as nomadic, it was basically agriculturalists, their cultures (mapping,

economies, churches, archives), who were nomadic and able to recreate their destructive ways of life across the globe. Brody's text is highly figurative and richly tied to his other works; but, readers deprived access to these should worry not, as they will be unhindered in appreciating his thesis. *The Other side of Eden* is based a great deal on Brody's direct experience living and learning from Aboriginal Elders, written from field notes, legal transcripts, and memory years later. It is a book written for the academy, which honours the memory of those lives Brody shared.

Shepard Krech III has written extensively in the disciplines of anthropology and history. His latest book, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*, delves into historical records to deconstruct the ecological Indian trope, an image, according to Krech, that is projected on and by Amerindians in political-ecological arguments. Krech's research is instrumental in how historical documents are researched for what is understood about Aboriginal cultures/issues. While we can debate his argument that there is no natural ecologist and noble savage, or that they cannot be reconstructed from master archives/narratives, as a selected reading of archaeological and historical documents, his methodology is instructive. The multidisciplinary perspective employed by combining archival, historical, archaeological, anthropological and cultural studies research forms a powerful lens of inquiry.

When I first heard about these book titles I was very excited, having read a score of authors on Aboriginal representations and misrepresentations[2] and anthropological studies of different northern Aboriginal cultures. Having read articles by Krech, I anticipated how he would demystify his topic. The basic premise of the book is the exploration and deconstruction of the ecological Indian as a trope. Tropes, of interest to anthropologists and the cultural studies set, are generalized constructs that form representations and general cultural markers. It is unclear how widespread

tropes are. That is, are they shared across groups or are they specific to groups looking at others? *The Ecological Indian* does not investigate how the trope functions except to say that environmentalists and modern "Indians" have used it to legitimize political claims. On the surface, Krech seems to discuss where the trope comes from and who is served by it; however, I find he is more interested in critiquing the trope's use to legitimize Aboriginal claims to land and governance. This is not a rejection of Aboriginal groups having their own systems of governance, which is the case for some scholars [3], but Krech seems to oppose the very idea of pan-Indians as natural ecologists. I see two possible causes for this assertion. First, I think Aboriginal title and rights issues raise fears for many white liberals who believe that balkanization will result from identity politics. Second, in the larger sense the assertion best reflects the schizophrenia and confusion of Americans specifically, who claim or reject Aboriginal identity while at the same time embracing their real/imagined origins.[4]

Brody, in *The Other Side of Eden*, employs a very different approach to Krech in deconstructing the "hunter-gatherer" trope. His use of field notes, collected and revisited after the fact is similar in some ways to Krech's use of historical documents; both are divorced from live experience and rely on memory of context. While Krech relies on the objective and impersonal authority of archival documents and historical texts, Brody's legitimacy comes from the ethnographical link of having conducted the original research and so there is this personal authority to the documented field notes. In addition, Brody advocates for recognition and respect of "hunter-gatherer" societies, suggesting that their use of land was much less destructive when compared with agriculturalist transformations. While Krech is interested in limiting the political associations made by the ancestors of Aboriginal cultures in the United States in maintaining the ecological integrity of various systems, Brody shares no such motive. In this re-

gard Brody is not interested in natural ecologists. Rather, he deconstructs the myth that indigenous systems that existed before contact were maladaptive to their various environments, adapted successfully to various forms of economic development (the fur trade) and are currently threatened by postindustrial natural resource development (such as oil and gas development). Krech unsuccessfully argues that Aboriginal peoples were, in general, destructive of various species and ecosystems and Brody is unsuccessful in explaining the social learning of either nomadic or sedentary economic systems. In some degree these authors both demonstrate the limits of writing and researching from outside one's own culture.

If both authors claim to tell the story of how Aboriginal peoples have lived and continue to live, they run the risk, equally, of misrepresentation and possibly advancing further confusion. Some of these limits are a result of pan-Indianism, an approach that fails to acknowledge and stress the pluralistic and the specific of Aboriginal communities. What I think these books achieve is demonstrating the difficulties of understanding people from the outside. Furthermore, the authors show that pan-Indian arguments are impotent analytical devices, inadequate MEMS. Finally, in reading these books I learned a great deal more about the structural inequalities of academia and its treatment of the Aboriginal object. *The Ecological Indian* provides a clear picture of the gap between Indigenous knowledge based on experience and Aboriginal history, and academic knowledge based on research about a topic abstracted from Aboriginal history. *The Other Side of Eden* demonstrates an equally clear picture of the gap between lived experience and the abstract. Brody tells stories of Elders in the first person, as if we are sitting with them in the original conversation/research and we are left wondering how the book chapter came together differently than this initial conversation. We do not see the invisible hand of

the editor and narrative moving us to read a certain telling of the story.

The most important criticism I have of these books is reserved for *The Ecological Indian*. In mustering his research I find Krech has made no attempt to reconcile oral history with documentary evidence, perhaps the reverse of what I read in Brody's book. The people who created the documents used to uncover the ecological Indian myth are for the most part outsiders; "ethnographic fact" is established from the accounts of fur traders, missionaries, government agents, travelers, academics, and the like. Krech fails to interrogate his sources and accepts the singular and isolated account as descriptive of all Aboriginal people in North America, a spatial and temporal generalization that we must reject. Brody could have made his book stronger had he brought in more of the context, voices of the people themselves, historical documents and other related texts. As it reads now, *The Other Side of Eden* is very much a travel-narrative or work-narrative of the life of an anthropologist and various interfaces with Aboriginal Elders.

Challenges to the modern idea of Aboriginal peoples as natural ecologists, by showing that Aboriginal peoples were historically wasters, goes against everything I have learned from Elders who always told me that nothing is wasted. Furthermore, Brody shows convincingly that the modern environmental problems we face result not from the actions of sedentary "hunter-gatherers", but in the globalization of agriculturalism, which at its very heart is nomadic and all too often destructive of environmental processes. Such arcane arguments about conservation and preservation are not new arenas of debate.[5] It is clear to ecologists that conservation is borne out of social learning resulting usually from devastation. What I mean is that anthropological and historical studies need to catch up to thinking in natural resource management and ecology. We are learning that arguments about pre-contact Aboriginal

peoples as wasters and the catalysts of species extirpations, are far too simplistic to be of much use to understanding the basic relationships people have had with different environments.

Contrary to Brody, Krech argues that Aboriginal peoples were not the first peoples (they displaced others, i.e. archaeological evidence). In this regard, Krech's main argument is if the ecological Indian lived in harmony in nature it is only because population numbers did not allow them to over-exploit ecosystems and resources; there was lots of space and they could move around. Various scholars, including Ward Churchill, have argued that pre-contact demographics, including total population for each Aboriginal group, were larger than many Anthropologists have argued.[6] In the case of Brody, and in particular the Arctic environments he speaks of, arguments about population numbers and origins are moot. Furthermore, there is an implicit assumption that each group displaces or absorbs the last without any continuity or learning from the past. Nonetheless, this social learning among aboriginal groups, allowed them, historically, to adapt and develop the resolve needed to live a prosperous way. Such a reality is evidenced in historical accounts of many Aboriginal cultures first witnessed across North America from the 1500s to the mid 1800s.

Krech has brought together historical readings but his analysis is a construction of generalizations about people, time and space. He bases his analysis on a thin wedge of evidence. Local examples are implied across vast geographies (and cultures). The bias of the documentary evidence is not questioned, which I find very disturbing. There are instances where he relies on very limited observations. One or two explorers seeing hundreds of rotting carcasses can mean more than caribou wasted for tongues and noses. Most ecologists would ask what condition the lichen was in, what were conditions of ice and snow, were there other ecosystem conditions that year that lead Chipewyan and others to "cull" caribou herds?

Was there something happening that the outsiders did not understand? Were the people who lead the intruders equally intruding on the land of others? That newcomers, explorers, missionaries, and others wrote about some things and failed to write about others is not surprising. Furthermore, reading and assigning cultural terms like *conservation*, as if they are not cultural constructs, we are required to seek equivalencies in Aboriginal cultures. Brody is effective in his attempt to step out of his own cultural box of perception. Neither man can claim to be free from culture, both are writing books for academic audiences and hope to influence the way we see the world.

The questions I am left with after reading these books focus on evidence and ways that academics seek to determine fact. For Brody the lived ethnographic experience forms the basis of his book, whereas for Krech evidence is interpretation of historical documents and related archaeological study. The real answer to critical incidents of species extirpations as a result of over-hunting or over-fishing, could easily be found in Aboriginal accounts, in oral history and sacred stories. In the end I appreciate the mustering of facts in both books. It is interesting to note the historical and anthropological in these books. For me there is far too narrow an understanding of the past in history and far too narrow an understanding from cultures in anthropology. I would like to see more interdisciplinary study utilized to bridge questions regarding, for example: oral and written, past and present, micro and macro, spatial and temporal, of "our" culture and of "other" cultures.

To conclude, the audience for these books should be well armed with specific oral histories and knowledge of the specific cultural geographies and ecology before accepting the validity and granting authority to these books. Where Krech and Brody have come from and how they developed their arguments can prove good starting points in understanding the various tropes

about Aboriginal peoples. I doubt that anthropology, history, or ecology are exclusive evolutionary constructs. It is clear when read together, that these books suggest the limits to adaptation among rapid change. Rather than a clear development of cause and effect demonstrating Aboriginal cultures moving from natural ecologists to wasters to conservationists, the interference brought on by changes in language, tenure, thinking, measurement of distance and time, introduction of Christianity, and agriculture, has undermined North American ecology since contact. The case may well be that we are all born natural ecologists and learn to waste as we become producers and consumers; however, more research needs to be carried out to prove this.

Notes

[1]. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

[2]. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); and, Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992).

[3]. Tom Flanagan, *First Nations? Second Thoughts* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).

[4]. Jill Lepore, Jill, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999).

[5]. Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); and Shepard Krech III, ed., *Indians, Animals and the Fur Trade* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1981).

[6]. Ward Churchill, *Since Predator Came: Notes from the Struggle for American Indian Liberation* (Littleton: Aegis Publications, 1995).

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