

REMAKING REALITY

Nature at the millenium

*Edited by Bruce Braun
and Noel Castree*



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Private productions of space and the “preservation” of nature

Cindi Katz

INTRODUCTION

Nature changed in the 1970s. However we “value” nature, our conventions and practical engagements with the external world – “the environment” or “nature” – under capitalism have operated as if nature were given, a free good or source of wealth, an unlimited bounty awaiting only the “hand of man” to turn it into a bundle of resources. With decolonization and the environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s coupled with the oil shock of 1973, the utilitarian presumptions that undergirded so much of the relationship to nature under capitalism hit their limits. Capitalist actors could no longer be sure that “natural resources” would be everywhere and eternally available to them. The very grounds of capitalism’s global ambition – environmental as much as spatial – had been altered. Yet at the same moment that recognition of environmental exploitation increasingly scripted capitalists as the enemy of nature, those exploitative practices, indeed nature itself, was remade for capitalism. In less than two decades, corporate capitalism reversed its dismissive opposition to environmental movements and gleefully embraced various brands of environmentalism as its own. In the course of this shift, and central to it, nature became an accumulation strategy for capital.¹

Nature is no longer an “open frontier” for capitalism in the sense of an absolute arena of economic expansion. Rather, nature has undergone an “involution” (cf. Geertz 1963), much as space did in the first few years of the twentieth century when planetary expansion was effectively at an end (Kern 1983; Smith 1984; cf. Lefebvre 1991). In this period, productions of space no longer pushed the borders of the unknown so much as reworked its internal subdivisions. Conceptions of space changed dramatically as a result; cubism was a case in point but so too was Einstein’s relativity theory which promised the recombination of

space and matter through the ascendance of relative over absolute space (Smith 1984: 72). Today, biodiversity prospecting – to take just one example – illustrates the case of a similar and equally consequential redefinition and involution of nature at the end of the millennium.

In summary, after the limits imposed by decolonization, the environmental movement, and the so-called oil shock, culminating in the early 1970s, the contours of nature produced and conceived under capitalism were reworked in ways that are continuous with and analogous to those of space in the early years of the century. The time-space of nature has changed irrevocably. Rejecting any limits to its own growth, corporate capitalism quickly morphed into a green version of itself by the 1980s, while science, an always ready accomplice and increasingly indistinguishable partner, had embraced startling new objects of inquiry and practice – from mapping the human genome, through documenting the earth’s biodiversity, to cloning. Faced with the loss of extensive nature, capital regrouped to plumb an everyday more intensive nature. The process was facilitated by the appearance (in both senses of the term) of corporate environmentalism in the 1980s.

This shift promulgated and was propelled by the conversion of nature into an accumulation strategy. To be sure, the traditional entanglement of environmental and human exploitation remains, but productions of nature under capitalism now also reflect a different spatio-temporality. Without absolute control over the mineral and vegetation resources of the former colonies and other parts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, or the security of cheap access to the seemingly bottomless fuel reserves of the oil exporting states, Western capital no longer found nature so unproblematically there for exploitation. The environmental language of nature as an “investment” in the future took on an explicitly capitalist meaning with increasing privatization, whether in the form of “preserves” or as a component of intellectual property rights, and as a result, nature was scrutinized and “mapped” in wholly new ways. The entailments of this rescripting of nature are witnessed in, as much as driven by, the rise of corporate environmentalism, the re-ascendance of “preservation” and “restoration” as environmental politics, and the increasing privatization of public environments. These are obviously connected, and come into play in interesting and troubling ways in the practices and policies of, among others, The Nature Conservancy, which operates on an increasingly global scale, and in the operations of the Central Park Conservancy in New York City, which obviously works on a much smaller scale.

In this chapter I want to address the new enclosure movement, witnessed in the growing acreage worldwide commanded by “Park Enhancement Districts,” “World Wildlife Zones,” biosphere reserves and the like, and their special significance to poor people and poor regions in remote areas of the so-called Third World. Driven by a common impulse and portending increased privatization of the public environment, the intent of these natural set-asides is to cordon off discrete patches of nature in ways that efface their own historical geographies while simultaneously serving up these preserves for “bio-accumulation.” Underwriting

these strategies are deeply problematic constructions of nature that turn around peculiar and problematic tropes of wild and wilderness; a class-based, racialized, and imperially inflected notion of the "public" and its "commons"; and a paradoxical understanding of material social practices as somehow outside of nature. By drawing transnational parallels between preservation attempts at different geographical scales, this chapter will examine the new ideological commitment to "preserve" nature, the contested boundaries of what is to be preserved, and the significance of the privatization of nature via which this occurs. I will argue for a political ecology that is rooted in productions of nature that hold environmental concerns in tension with social, cultural, and political economic considerations.

NATURE AS AN ACCUMULATION STRATEGY

An instrumentalist view of nature as a source of value or a "resource base" has been a feature of enlightenment thinking and capitalist social relations of production since the eighteenth century. Marxist and eco-feminist theorists, among others, have exposed and analyzed the common threads between the exploitation of nature and the exploitation of people. However, the notion of nature as an accumulation strategy introduces an altered and broader purview for capital's interests in nature. First, nature *qua* nature has become an "investment" in the future. Second, to secure that investment nature has been commodified and privatized at all scales. Finally, with the traditional means of access to nature for metropolitan capital no longer ensured by colonialism, patron-client state relations, or the acquiescence of trusting or environmentally unaware publics, capital's need for clear channels of access to control nature and environmental resources has been refashioned and reasserted strongly in recent years. Each of these related bundles of practices is associated in distinct ways with the reproduction of nature as an accumulation strategy.

The environmentalist literature – corporate and otherwise – is so full of the metaphors of investment, saving, and future gain that it often reads like board room script. This is no accident, given the conservatism of so much of the conservation movement. As biodiversity prospecting has taken off, much of the rhetoric advocating the salvation of particular habitats or restoration of ecological "balance" stresses the potential uses of "as yet unknown" species and organisms. This logic pushes instrumentalism to the vanishing point; apparently *nothing* should be allowed to become extinct, let alone destroyed, because it might one day prove useful (and profitable) to humankind. Darwin be damned. Rooted in an homologous rhetoric of care or biocentrism to that espoused by many environmentalists, such preservation agendas mooted by corporations, foundations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and various governments are directed to a much more instrumentalist cause.

While nature "preserves," and the more specialized biosphere reserves, appear to, and indeed do, protect particular environments from a range of

"inappropriate" uses and thus from damage, they also invite and encourage scientific documentation and analysis of endemic flora and fauna with the explicit intent of facilitating future expropriation. To all appearances, the preserved landscape is secure; but in the world of action, mediated by particular axes of knowledge, power, and wealth, its conversion to resource in some global accounting ledger has fundamentally altered its status and temporality. The preserve becomes, in current lingo, "a biodiversity bank." Deferred consumption coupled with various investments in money and scientific inquiry are expected to pay off in the future. All of which begs the question of who has rights to determine the "appropriate" use of preserved land; of how the altered temporalities of nature bias future social access to the landscape. Like any corporate investment, the biodiversity bank exists for its investors, and access is strictly controlled. In these ways and others, biosphere reserves and nature preserves come to represent a peculiar form of fetishized nature.

Of course most nature preserves are more than banks of biodiversity. Many of them are also sites of nature appreciation and learning – destinations for eco-tourists or those looking to experience nature in their local environment. Yet there is an interesting difference between the properties set aside for preservation in the contemporary landscape and those made into parks in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Where preserves or national parks were once a means of ennobling wastelands or landscapes that promised little in the way of potential resource extraction – it was easy to make a park of a landscape as starkly beautiful *and* unyielding as Yellowstone, for instance – contemporary preserves are immediately recognized as productive or potentially productive sites. Indeed, that is why many of them are selected for preservation initiatives. Putting such properties aside in the name of some global citizenship is actually a form of luxury consumption requiring considerable reserves of money and power. In an era of ascendant neo-liberalism, preservation and privatization are mutually implicated.

There is, of course, a geography to the process of preservation, and it is uneven. The transnational and class aspects of modern preservation practices are particularly troubling. Thanks to dramatic reductions in biodiversity resulting from industrial development in Europe and North America, as well as, more directly, the enhanced geographical power of capital to dictate conditions of exploitation at the margins, many of the biodiversity battles are being waged in the underdeveloped countries of Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Environmentalists and governments of the "north" (often in collaboration with scientists and policy-makers from the "south") have determined that, for the good of the global environment, substantial parts of such regions rich in biodiversity must be preserved rather than squandered. But here, the attentiveness to diversity in terms of plants and animals is strangely contrasted with a one-dimensional treatment of vastly different human constituencies who use the protected environment. Poor people are thereby constituted as poachers or intruders on their own land (Peluso 1992; Brandon and Wells 1992; Colchester 1994). Preservation has too often

been deployed like a blunt instrument when a more fine-grained approach – ecologically and socially sensitive – might have done better. As a growing percentage of land in biodiverse regions is locked in preserves,² those with lower mobility and fewer economic options are constrained more by the restrictions on land use than large-scale users such as multinational timber, pharmaceutical, and ranching companies whose production practices are in any case more damaging. Equivalent restrictions on land use by corporate resource exploiters and small-scale agriculturalists and resource users have radically unequal results; for one group, extractive exploitation can be pursued elsewhere, while the other is exiled from the means of their existence. There is no metric of equivalences in universal preservation, equally but blindly applied.

The privatization of nature is also witnessed in such recent innovations as “debt-for-nature” swaps. When the debt of a poor nation is assumed (after renegotiation at a much lower rate) by a non-governmental organization or one of the northern industrialized states, in exchange for the “preservation” of an area they deem to have particular environmental value, the economic valuation of preserved nature is made explicit. This value is clearly intended to accrue primarily to the investors, and to require the long-term accommodation of the debtors (the language is instructive) to the necessary conditions of investment. This is especially true of those who live or lived in or use the environment in question even though the national debt was surely an abstraction to them. This arrangement – of growing popularity in recent years – exemplifies imperialism redux via nature (Mahony 1992).

The presumption that there is impending environmental disaster, especially in the Third World, has become such orthodoxy, that it is hardly remarked that such strategies as debt-for-nature swaps, environmental preservation projects, or the creation of buffer zones to protect various threatened ecologies, represent a sea change in north-south relations which were premised for years in an extractive relationship so intense that many of the current environmental problems can be traced to them. More commonly, the new environmental policies and practices are touted as evidence of global environmental concern contra imperial ambition. While this dissembling might be expected from the purveyors of such projects, liberal environmentalists and radical ecocentrics not infrequently toe the same line (Bonner 1993; Colchester 1994; Neumann 1995, 1996). Yet these policies and practices betoken a whole new regime of imperial exploitation camouflaged as environmentalism. There is big money to be made from “preserving” nature, and the current transnational political ecological relations by and large ensure that the eventual profits will flow north.

The role of science in these preservation efforts and other nature investment schemes is substantial. While science – especially agronomy, biochemistry, and biotechnology – contributed in important ways to earlier “development” endeavors, helping to shape the contours of the “green revolution” and to develop appropriate conservation measures for tropical soils, for instance (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Shiva 1991), contemporary scientists are increasingly

concerned to patent knowledge and nature prior to any social use (Blum 1993, *Africa* 1996, Martinez-Alier 1996). Ian Wilmut, the Roslin scientist who cloned the sheep “Dolly” (as in Parton) from a cell in her original’s mammary gland, secured the patent for his reproduction before announcing the results in a scientific journal in early 1997. Financed largely by a US-based pharmaceutical firm interested in genetically engineered animals that will produce drugs in their milk, Wilmut remained beholden to the investment interests of his backers six months after his accomplishment (Kolata 1997). Science might here be compared to a true wolf in sheep’s clothing – in the age of bio-mechanical reproduction cum neo-liberalism, science has become as much a means of production as Herbert Marcuse anticipated. The “productivizing” practices of many contemporary scientists provide a new ironic twist to the claim that science is “value” neutral. An ever-shrinking number of contemporary university scientists work on projects that do not directly commodify nature for the corporate benefit of their employers and/or funders. So called “intellectual property rights” are the latest profit frontier in the privatization of nature. This may be the true “tragedy of the commons.”

CORPORATE ENVIRONMENTALISM

The commodification of ever smaller bits of biodiversity, the reproduction of nature as product – whether whole sheep or bit of DNA – and the privatization of common property resources of particular instrumental or aesthetic value, suggest the myriad ways that investments in nature pay. These interests underlie (and have underwritten) much of the surge in US corporate environmentalism in the last two decades. The cache of environmental awareness, focused on consumption practices or gushing sympathy for “charismatic megafauna” in distant places, has not been lost on US corporate leaders. For a relatively small price, corporate capitalists buy the good will, averted glance, and forgiveness, as well as patronage, of much of the population, with changes in packaging and tokenistic “green” gestures. With substantial financial support of various environmental causes, they have bought off much of the environmental movement (Cockburn and Silverstein 1996). Environmentalism is now a pillar of establishment orthodoxy, its own cash cow. As Neil Smith (1996) notes, it was only a few years from Reagan’s retro tree bashing in the 1980s – recall his memorable, “if you’ve seen one redwood . . .” or his quirky notion that trees cause pollution – to Bush’s declaration that he would be the “environmental President.” In a parallel shift, large corporations have discovered the currency of environmentalism. And like the Republicans, who laid the groundwork for gutting federal environmental protection legislation in the USA and for increased (subsidized) access to federal lands for commercial timber, mining and ranching interests since the “environmental President” took office, most corporations have camouflaged more than changed their environmentally destructive practices.

Advances over older forms of environmental destruction have been real enough, but the "racket in nature," as Horkheimer and Adorno (1987) called capitalism more than half a century ago, has moved to a different level.

Corporate environmentalism sells as well as buys "nature" – whether eco-tourism outfits, or shops such as The Nature Company, The Body Shop, or the recently opened Evolution in downtown Manhattan, which sell *inter alia* bones, fossils, natural elixirs, and dead bugs (Kaplan 1995; Smith 1996; Luke 1997). What I like to call "greenateering," has become an unabashed marketing strategy. Greenateers pander to and assuage consumers' environmental concerns by making it part of their sales pitch that their products are packaged in "environmentally friendly" containers, they use recycled materials, and they only use goods produced in ecologically sensitive ways. Green sensitivity pays tremendous dividends with a public that has itself become consumed with the environment. But religious recycling and the consumption of "green" goods in "green" packaging in the USA have become little more than consciousness cleansing, although they pass for politics.

With so much green, I start to see red. In the tide of "win-win" bonhomie politics for which these gestures pass, it should not be forgotten that corporations – both those that trade in nature directly and those that use it to trade other goods – make a great deal of money in the process. Perhaps there is nothing wrong with that – clean capitalism is better than dirty to be sure – but other issues are at stake. Politics as consumption (and vice versa) works to individualize environmental problems and their solutions in ways that repeatedly forestall and mystify any meaningful ways of dealing with them. As many others have noted, focus on the scale of individual recycling or consumption practices often serves to efface the much broader realm wherein environmental problems are produced and to lull people into a problematic sense of security. So focused on individual solutions is contemporary recycling policy, for example, that almost no one marks the astonishing rate of growth in waste production. Martin Melosi (1981, cited in Horton 1995), indicates that US per capita waste production went from 2.75 pounds per day in 1920 to 8 pounds a day in 1980. While we recycle frantically (and I do), plastics manufacturers, paper companies, and the metal industry, among others, produce, profit, and can pollute – or at least dissemble on the question of their pollution – with abandon. Moreover, while recycling may reduce the inputs of various raw materials to production, it also represents a net economic transfer from individuals to business. Corporate responsibility for dirty production is individualized.

Other corporations curry favor with the public by funding various environmental projects from biodiversity protection efforts through watershed preservation to wildlife conservation. These companies may be among the world's biggest polluters or habitat destroyers, but their environmentalism buys a protective if not mystifying shield for their actions. How else to explain the prominent role of the big oil, chemical, and timber companies on list after list of "environmental" donors. Of course, the conservation movement in the USA

and elsewhere has a long history of self-serving connections with sport hunters, forestry interests, and others interested in "resource managerialism" (Luke 1994; cf. Bonner 1993). But what I am describing here as characteristic of the contemporary era of corporate environmentalism is different. It has at least as much in common with "blood or hush money" as it does with the assurance of sustained yields. Thus, Cockburn and Silverstein (1996) describe how environmental opposition has been blunted under pressure from corporate donors, and expose the ways that environmentally inclined foundations are directly underwritten by profits gained from environmentally destructive practices. Environmentalism may be good for business, but environmental destruction – new forms are preferable to old – is still better.

Of course there is a geography to these practices too, and it is most easily uncovered in the Janus face of so many corporate environmentalists. These companies destroy or wreak havoc on environments at one scale or location, and present an entirely different face at another scale or place. For instance, the Ordway family, heirs to the once notoriously polluting Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company (3M Company), is one of the darlings of The Nature Conservancy. They and their well-heeled neighbors along the Brule River in an exclusive neck of northern Wisconsin formed a property association in the 1950s to protect "their" river and its environs, their estates of thousands of acres each. Not trusting their own heirs to continue to protect their property, they enlisted The Nature Conservancy to protect their property and prevent future development except for "inoffensive construction . . . a guest cottage or another outbuilding" (Krasemann and Grove 1992: 84). In keeping with their "focus," the Conservancy seems willing to overlook whatever environmental problems companies like 3M might cause elsewhere in order to help such powerful donors as the Ordway family keep the Brule pristine and protected, even from such class offenses as "boisterous, destructive fun-seekers," such as "tubers [who] crawled out on the banks to leave defecation and litter."³ The combined clout of the ruling-class landowners and The Nature Conservancy resulted in a law – believed to be the first of its kind in the nation – banning tubing on the Brule, and thereby eliminating the unsavory "splashing and yelling of beered-up groups" from the Ordways' otherwise peaceful world (Krasemann and Grove 1992: 84, emphasis added).

Such dissonant geographical practices – and here we could include the conservation of biomass or rerouting the carbon cycle at a global scale through such mechanisms as "pollution exchange credits" – suggest the ways that corporate environmentalists manipulate geographic scale and produce nature quite differently at different scales. The Montreal Protocol of 1987 ushered in a novel approach to coping with increasingly restrictive environmental legislation in various localities by advocating "mitigation banking" according to which "pollution credits" are traded on a world scale. With mitigation banking, a company polluting in one location can continue unpenalized by, for example, reforestation in another. The logic of such exchanges is that at a global scale

biomass or the carbon balance is maintained. Too bad for those ("beered-up") people who live near the still belching source of toxic emissions or those whose forests are cleared while saplings take root elsewhere.

Probing environmental politics through the lens of scale can bring even more sinister contradictions to light. For instance, despite my insinuations above, the 3M Company in recent years has embraced the notion that environmental responsibility will enhance profitability,⁴ and among other things, reduced its emissions substantially even where not required to by law. While at a global and national scale, 3M has become a leader among corporate environmentalists, its productions of nature at other scales are more equivocal. One of the biggest law suits facing 3M, according to its 1996 *Annual Report*, concerns its role in the production of breast implants. Thus, it is across scale as much as across space that the contradictions of corporate environmentalism need to be monitored.

ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION

Environmental restoration and preservation projects combine imperatives of absolutism and accumulation. Preservation turns on an intrinsic contradiction. It requires that a particular patch of nature – ecological niche, biome, or park – be cordoned off as an island in space and time. Preservation represents an attempt both to delineate and maintain a boundary in space and to arrest time in the interests of a supposedly pristine nature which, of course, is neither bounded nor static. As such, preservation is quite unecological, defying natural history and the vibrancy of the borders – physical, temporal, spatial – where evolution, change, and challenge are negotiated and worked out in nature as in culture. "Preservation" is most commonly accomplished by a physical and textual exclusion of sedimented layers of social activity and actors, past and present.

Several authors have therefore noted the problematic relationship between the preserved and not preserved. They suggest that the preservation of certain sites often legitimates and mystifies the continued or even heightened destructive use of all that is outside the preserves' borders. Timothy Luke (1995), for example, refers to land preserved by The Nature Conservancy as a nature cemetery, suggesting that as certain areas are preserved from a more general environmental exploitation, which continues outside of them, "preserves" will not actually preserve any sort of viable ecologies, but, more accurately, will serve as memorials to what once was. Drawing on strikingly similar metaphors, Wes Jackson (1991: 51) suggests that wilderness – "an artifact of civilization" – has become a kind of "saint" in the USA. Like Luke, he notes that people pay homage to the saint, enshrined in preserves, to commemorate what has been lost, to assuage their sense of loss, and to absolve their guilt in not treating the lost object with all due respect. Such soothing shrines to nature actually enable business elsewhere to go on as usual. But nature preserves can also work to license further depredation elsewhere. Jackson notes poignantly that it is dangerous and deeply flawed in

environmental politics to separate "the holy" from "the rest." If we do not care for cities, farmland, and other "pieces of nonwilderness" – East Saint Louis, Hafler, Iowa, and Kansas – the "pristine" wilderness will, he cautions, be "doomed" (*ibid.*).

Of course, it is precisely this separation between the wild and non-wild that defines The Nature Conservancy's environmental strategy. Their vision and their attractiveness is founded in the insistence that nature can be located, fixed, and preserved outside of culture. The social doubly removed: first, their work perpetuates and hardens the boundaries Jackson and others dissolve between urban, agricultural, and wilderness landscapes, to valorize only the latter as the vestiges of pure nature; second, they read generations of social actors out of the "nature" they preserve, denying any social history of landscape.

At another scale, preservation efforts often partition landscapes in a fairly arbitrary way, rendering parts of inhabited environments off limits to future habitation. Apart from the forced displacement of usually marginalized peoples, such a strategy intensifies the stress on non-preserved environments. One of the responses to this problem has been to create buffer zones around protected areas, but predictably, mixed success has led in turn to demands for buffering the buffers, creating a sort of bull's eye of preservation ringed by buffers of decreasingly restricted use (Brandon and Wells 1992). These dartboards of nature are often constructed and overseen by non-residents whose livelihood is not dependent on the preserved environment. Marcus Colchester (1994) among others (Hecht and Cockburn 1990; Peluso 1992; Nepal and Weber 1995; Wood 1995; Neumann 1997), has addressed the political fallout from these sorts of divisions. He notes that when biodiversity or some other perceived environmental resource is "locked up" in a particular place without regard to the broader social, economic, cultural, and political context of resource use, it not only leads to compensatory exploitation elsewhere, often quite proximate, but ultimately is ineffective even within the site itself. Long-term local land users and residents removed from a preserve have no stake in its abandonment (International Alliance 1992, cited in Colchester 1994). Here again, history is sideswiped and landscape misrecognized as a solely natural artifact. The result is a continued pairing of preservation and plunder, with deeply problematic implications for "local people."

The environmental conservation literature and the literature on "development" are both adept at producing (and often patronizing) the figure of the local. Resident populations in conservation areas or preservation initiatives are generally scripted homogeneously as "local people" by those who presumably see themselves, and their interests, as translocal, and thus more important. As with all strategies of "othering," the creation of "local people" enables planners, policy-makers, and practitioners to romanticize as they exclude, exploit, and marginalize those with most at stake.

Finally the whole notion of preservation is pregnant with Malthusian assumption. Malthusian and neo-Malthusian presumptions are rarely more than

a heartbeat away from environmental politics, except perhaps among some socialist and feminist environmentalists, and Malthusianism has made a comeback in the 1990s. Part of what drives the impulse to "preserve" is the notion that resources are running out, that people are destroying the environment, and that these problems are exacerbated by unchecked population growth. It is a classic rationale for blaming the victim (Harvey 1974). Malthusian scenarios demonize especially the poor, implying that population growth among poor people must be checked if collective resources are not to be jeopardized. The stubborn attractiveness of this logic, and the nasty environmental politics it engenders, speak volumes about a range of global agendas that consistently deny the broader ecologic importance of people's self-control over the relations of production and reproduction in their community. The purpose of such denials is less to create a viable program of conservation than to make particular claims on global resources. Such practices ensure that conservation will falter or succeed only through coercion (Peluso 1993).

RESTORATION AND ITS LIMITS

The politics of ecological restoration, most eloquently espoused by the late Alexander Wilson (1992), is, by contrast, built upon the recognition that landscape is a social activity, a social text. In *The Culture of Nature*, Wilson offers restoration as an explicit alternative to preservation. Rather than "saving what's left," he suggests that environmental politics center on "repairing" ruptures in the landscape and "reconnecting" its parts (1992: 17). Recognizing that landscapes are by definition disturbed – "worked, lived on, meddled with, developed" – Wilson calls for greater intervention and "care." His plea to "make intelligible our connections" (ibid.) with one another and our environments via active work in the landscape, resonates strongly with that of Wes Jackson at the Land Institute in Kansas. Restoration ecology is intended to "reproduce, or at least mimic, natural systems," and is envisioned to take place at all scales, from habitat to biosphere. Unlike preservation, restoration is not an "elegiac exercise" for Wilson; it offers rather, an environmental ethic that "nurtures a new appreciation of working landscape" (p. 115).

Restoration ecology offers a more promising environmental politics than preservation. Rather than enshrining nature, restoration works it; rather than ignoring, eclipsing, defacing, or erasing environmental knowledge, restoration is premised on its ongoing production and exchange. In reconnecting nature and culture, restoration offers a politics that is much more ecological than the politics that drive preservation. Taken seriously, restoration ecology would undermine preservationists' and other environmentalists' exclusion of people from the environment, and make impossible the narrow gauge, anti-social politics of biosphere preserves and strict nature reserves.

But restoration ecology also has its limits. It operates at a smaller scale than

that in which many environmental problems are generated; it can still be driven by deeply romantic notions of nature; and it has a tendency to privilege certain landscapes and land use practices. Despite a rhetoric that covers all scales, restoration ecology is very much locally focused. It fails to "jump scale" as Neil Smith (1992) put it in a different context, and this limits the viability of restoration as an environmental politics at the transnational scale. In other words, restoration and repair at the grassroots level, however important, are not enough either to fashion a hybrid, liveable world out of a multiply troubled landscape or to cut through and undo the tiresome and moralistic narratives of scarcity, ends, and limits that pervade environmentalist discourse (Katz 1992). Given the scope of problems diagnosed by Wilson and other environmental activists, a refashioning is needed as much as a rehabilitation or restoration; the production of wholly new political ecologies is inevitable.

If the best restoration ecology is appealing insofar as it denies the separation between nature and culture and incorporates histories of environmental knowledge, it nevertheless romanticizes particular historical geographies. It privileges certain landscapes over others, which begs the question who determines what a "good landscape" is. To which period is the political ecology to be restored? Restoration ecologists appeal to "nature" for the answers, and inevitably advocate, valorize, and fix a specific historical landscape as idealized and ahistorical, somewhat antithetical to the living, socialized ecology they set out to remake. Rather than building upon Raymond Williams's idea of "livelihood" as an active practice within a mediated physical world as Wilson (1992) advocated, restoration ecology also tends to naturalize the produced and produce the natural. The subliminal appeal of such neatness makes restoration ecology that much more seductive. But once everything is set aright, "active practice" can easily be jettisoned for authenticity and "livelihood" sacrificed to lawful use. Nature as measure and arbiter of what is good and right has had a long and powerful history, as appealing to fascists as to those who would "heal" the land (Bramwell 1989). The ease of this appeal should trouble anyone interested in the radical project of interrogating nature as a social construction and producing new political ecologies. Recuperation smuggles in the real danger of stopping nature dead.

PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION AS GATEWAYS TO PRIVATIZATION

The politics of preservation and restoration short circuit the radical possibilities of producing nature, authorizing instead, a privatized rescripting of nature. The social is excluded as a redemptive prelude to the resocialization of nature in a very particular guise. The doctrine of "wise use" (see McCarthy, this volume) operates for example, as if wisdom and use were entirely separable from questions of history, geography, or power, while claiming nature for some social and

economic interests over others. Nature indeed becomes an accumulation strategy, and provides simultaneously the new material for present and future production and an in-built justification of the naturalness of exploitation.

As a scratch almost anywhere on the transnational landscape will reveal, preservation and restoration facilitate the privatization of nature and space that have become the hallmark of global neo-liberalism. The operations of the transnational Nature Conservancy, and the local Central Park Conservancy, are illustrative. These two conservancies do their work with the zeal and self-righteousness of missionaries. Indeed, they are capitalists with a mission – saving and protecting nature – which, in the spirit of global capitalism, they see as everywhere theirs. Like religious missionaries, both conservancies presume that the larger “good” of their endeavor will immunize them from charges of self-interest, or from the erasures of history that their projects require.⁵

The unquestioned assumptions that drive the work of both organizations and their overweening self-approbation are formidable. Yet what is actually going on in urban “park enhancement districts” such as New York’s Central Park, and the productions of nature authorized by The Nature Conservancy? The Central Park Conservancy (CPC) promulgates restoration ecology, while The Nature Conservancy, in the main, promotes preservation. Each exemplifies issues raised in this chapter.

Devoted since 1980 to a rehabilitation of the park, the CPC has nearly completed an extraordinary project. This achievement has incurred many of the political and social costs that dog restoration ecology. First, it has valorized a particular moment of the Park’s history, choosing the halcyon days of its architects, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, as the authentic moment. Little regard is given for intervening histories or the landscapes that were erased when the Park was developed.⁶ Second, the CPC has drawn a rigid boundary around the Park. Since 1980 the Conservancy has invested more than \$110 million for restoration and maintenance. As of 1995 it had assumed 70 per cent of the Park’s operating costs and by 1998 had taken over the day to day running of the Park (Central Park Conservancy 1995; Martin 1998). Thus privatized, the experience of Central Park has led to a diminution of resources for other city parks, both by enabling the City Government to reduce its Parks budget drastically without penalty to New York’s flagship park, enjoyed by its wealthiest citizens and by tourists, and also by claiming the attention (and money) of powerful social actors concerned with parks and public space. The ahistoricity and social bias of a revitalized Central Park is explicit. For instance, CPC’s 1995 *Annual Report* boasted that it replaced an “abandoned playground” with a “grassy glade.” Unmentioned was the historical geography of the playground that might have revealed why it was abandoned, and which would have raised the possibility of its creative rehabilitation rather than removal. While the Conservancy has redesigned most of the Park’s twenty-one playgrounds, the preference in this case for a “grassy glade” reveals the power of their naturalized restoration language, even at the expense of children.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is also concerned with restoration as well as preservation, but its agenda is dominated by the latter. It operates “the largest private system of nature sanctuaries in the world” (The Nature Conservancy 1996), and is fond of pointing out, mimicking an advertisement for a large brokerage house: “We protect land the old-fashioned way, we buy it.” Since 1980 it has worked with “partner organizations” internationally to establish nature preserves in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific, and Asia. Many of these become destinations for eco-tourists who are exhorted during their visits that these sites are there “for the plants and animals, not for humans.” The same logic applied to resident populations leads to a far crueller fate rippling with Malthusian sentiments. The Nature Conservancy’s preservation efforts insistently evict people from nature. So adept at recognizing diversity in the biosphere, TNC cannot seem to distinguish between different kinds of hunting or varieties of human occupancy and use, and thus works in partnership with national environmental organizations to block all “human interference” with the environments it protects.

Oblivious to the problem of constructing and preserving nature apart from people, TNC’s overseas partnerships under the banner of environmentalism reinstate imperial and neo-colonial relationships to land and other environmental resources. To take just one case, TNC has joined with the Foundation for the Sustainable Development of the Chaco (Paraguay), an organization founded and directed largely by Mennonite settlers in the area, to protect more than over 250,000 sq km of ecologically diverse terrain. Together they have established a “conservation buyer program” whereby parcels of “ecologically significant land” are purchased by “nature lovers all over the world” (Thigpen 1996). The contradictions of nature lovers from afar owning land that may be the livelihood and means of existence of people in the Paraguayan Chaco are transparent.

A final almost hallucinogenic event highlights the role of both conservancies in serving up nature as accumulation strategy. In May 1996 The Nature Conservancy of New York collaborated with the Central Park Conservancy to host the “Second Great Party to Save the Last Great Places.” Held in Central Park with “entertainment, corporate, and media” leadership, complete with awards to Ted Turner and Charles Kuralt, the party raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for The Nature Conservancy of New York, which in turn helped to support a restoration project in Central Park. The draw was five “eco-tents” offering the “opportunity to travel to one of the Last Great Places in the world: the Desert Southwest of Utah and Arizona, the Peconic Bioreserve on eastern Long Island; Alaska [period]; the Pantanal in Brazil; and the Lore Lindu Park on the Island of Sulawesi in Indonesia.” Each tent featured “authentic decoration; food and drink, dance and music, and crafts, and costumed characters who . . . inform[ed] and entertain[ed] our guests” (The Nature Conservancy of New York 1996). Consistent with its theme park-within-a-park approach, the conservancies managed to conflate a nature reserve at the end of New York’s Long Island, the entire state of Alaska, and the largest wetlands in the world.

Especially as fund raiser, such ahistorical and deracinated productions of nature and culture are symptomatic. That they are produced to inform and *entertain* their guests speaks volumes about the private politics of conservation.

Remaking nature is a bigger project than ecological preservation or restoration. It is not at all about entertainment, privatisation or authenticity. All the indications are that it cannot be done without simultaneously remaking the social world, and this will require a class, gender, race, and sexuality politics that engages the concerns of political ecology and environmental justice across scale and nation. To begin to create a world in which all of us can live productively in an enduring way, we will have to be bold in imagining and working out new productions of nature. The post-1970s radical break in the production of nature, which installed nature as an accumulation strategy in the sense applied here and rescripted the scale, shape and temporality of its plunder, alerts us to the urgency of this alternative environmental politics and rescripted the scale, shape and temporality of its plunder.

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NOTES

- 1 Cf. Harvey (1998) for a discussion of the body as an accumulation strategy under capitalism.
- 2 By the first half of the 1990s, for example, more than 12 per cent of Costa Rica and over 20 per cent of Bhutan were "preserved," while according to the World Conservation Union, nine African countries, including Tanzania and Botswana had more than 9 per cent of their land under strict protection. Plans almost everywhere in the so-called Third World called for increasing these percentages (Nygren 1995; Wood 1995; Neumann 1997).
- 3 "Focus" is the way The Nature Conservancy's spokespeople explain their avoidance of all political stands. The organization frequently infuriates other (quite staid) environmental groups for its refusal to take positions on anything remotely contradictory. In letters to the editor of *The Nature Conservancy Reporter* (1996: 2), for instance, one reader implored the organization to take a stand in favor of zero population growth, and was told that The Conservancy is best able to help the environment by sticking to its "very specific mission"; another reader accused them of "cowardice" for not condemning the assault on environmentalism encouraged by the Republican-led Congress. The response was, "It's not cowardice, it's focus," noting it was not their style to "bash those with whom they disagree."

- 4 3M produces, among other things, chemical coatings and abrasives, two notoriously toxic products. L. D. DeSimone, the Chairman of 3M, indicated upon receipt of a 1996 Presidential Award for Sustainable Development for 3M's pollution prevention program, "We are convinced that, in the future the most environmentally responsible companies will also be the most competitive companies." Indeed, their pollution program was called "3P" for "Pollution Prevention Pays" (3M 1996, 1997).
- 5 I must confess (since we're talking about missionaries, why not get religious) that I feel squamish sometimes about taking on either of these conservancies. They are on one level "good guys" in a sea of far worse political operators, so why (I hear my father asking me) do I need to go after them? Precisely because they trade on being "good guys," to evade scrutiny. Not only do they operate politically with very little external accountability, but their funding strategies explicitly remove not only tax dollars but public environmental responsibility from the state. Privatizing nature and space, as these conservancies do, reduces the tax base for less noble environments (viz. Jackson 1991), siphons off the pressure for safe, engaging, healthy public environments elsewhere, and eclipses the environmental interests of non-dominant populations (cf. Katz 1995).
- 6 One of the nice exceptions to privileging the Olmsted landscape has been the Conservancy's "legitimation" of footpaths made by Park visitors heading to popular areas. By constructing these "recreational pathways" the Conservancy recognizes contemporary social practice as it protects other areas from being trodden.

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