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For Wilderness or Wildness? Decolonising Rewilding

1. Introduction

Whilst rewilding has emerged as a popular and controversial conservation strategy in recent years it has been lambasted by critics for advocating 'wilderness' preservation, and for it's supposed preference of re-wilding 'back' to a particular type of nature (See Jørgensen 2015:12 who states [Rewilders] 'still want to re-create a wild without people and are oblivious to the problematic nature of the wilderness construct'). Both 'wilderness' and 'going back', critics argue, are bound-up in a drive to create a 'pristine' nature, a nature before human inhabitation. Whilst defenders of wilderness (see in particular Foreman 1998) have historically hit back at such critiques as a 'war against nature' it is important to acknowledge that wilderness, whilst a seemingly innocent and objective material reality, is a concept indelible with symbolic meaning. In Western environmental narratives at least, the 'wilderness idea' was led by Euro-American men within the historical-cultural context of patriarchal colonialism and wilderness preservation is therefore, an artefact of colonialism that can (and has) act as a vehicle for the exclusion and erasure of people and their histories from the land (Merchant 1980; Cronon 1996; Plumwood 1998; Adams and Mulligan 2003). Critics of approaches to rewilding then have warned against the anti-humanist sentiment implicit in rewilding narratives that appear to advocate 'wilderness' rather than 'wildness', a linked but distinct concept that is qualified by non-human autonomy rather than the categorisation of humans and nature into the conceptually separate, distinct and pure sphere of wilderness (Prior and Ward 2016; Prior and Brady 2017).

This chapter begins by tracing the term 'wilderness' within Western environmentalism to reveal its conceptually problematic nature. It then proposes an alternative conceptualisation of 'wildness' as more useful in the practical and future-oriented implementation of rewilding initiatives. The final section explores how 'wilderness' and dualistic thinking are embedded within rewilding narratives in North America where rewilding has taken hold of public and conservation imaginations, however in the European context, with its distinct cultural-historical expressions of the wild, a more hybrid, open-ended and 'borderland' version of 'wildness' can be found, which appears to be more sensitive to existing cultural interpretations, social impacts and indigenous livelihoods in designated 'wild' places. The chapter ends by addressing some of the tensions that arise in rewilding narratives due to the tendency for both some rewilding advocates and critics of rewilding to conflate wildness with wilderness.

2. Imagining 'Wilderness'

Wilderness is a term that evokes a collective imaginary of 'wild' landscapes, areas vast and uninhabited by humans: spectacular national parks, lush rainforests, desolate canyon valleys or mountainous forest regions. Most often we think of these spaces as being 'pristine' or untouched by humans. Indeed, these are imaginaries so deeply ingrained in human consciousness that they have been firmly embedded in the historical narratives driving forward Western environmental activism and global conservation policy over the last century. Yet beyond this immediate imaginary 'wilderness' is an elusive entity, something that assumes particular qualities or evokes particular feelings or moods (Nash 1982). Wilderness is, critical social scientists would argue, our subjective and interpretive experience of the natural world, an interpretation that reflects the socio-political values and cultural hegemonies of our time (Merchant 1980; Cronon 1996; Plumwood 1998; Adams and Mulligan 2003). Yet despite this, to many scientists and environmentalists, wilderness is an unproblematic category of nature and to suggest that wilderness, as an idea, is a "human creation", most famously by Cronon (1996:69), is not always well-received by proponents of wilderness preservation.

In acknowledging that the idea of Western Wilderness (from herein this notion of Wilderness will be capitalised) is a "human creation" this chapter explores the changing meanings and morality embedded within the concept. An examination of this social constructivist claim is vital if we are to bring to bare the types of human values and politics deep-rooted in modern conservation practice which are built upon wilderness narratives.

3. What is Nature? The Constructivist Perspective

In order to understand how and why Wilderness has been so vital to modern environmentalism we first we need to understand how Nature itself has been conceptualised historically in the Western world. If the value of nature is relative to the cultural context within which it is known (as social constructivists claim), then it is important to document how understandings of the concept have changed over time and how this has affected the way people recognise, know and interact with 'wild' natures. The following sections briefly outline the historically situated cultural understandings of Nature and Wilderness.

Much modern conservation policy has been built upon an environmental ethics that holds normative assumptions about what nature is. Studies of nature informed by scientific philosophy often hold the position that nature exists as a determinate entity, independent of human consciousness. This Rationalist position has instructed the protection and preservation based approaches that we have seen historically in conservation policy and practice and upon which wilderness preservation is based (Callicott, 1984). In particular, Rationalism in environmental ethics has oft held up 'wilderness' as the key site for protection and preservation of 'independent natures,'

where Wilderness is imagined as pristine, uninhabited and/or uninhabitable space, separate and autonomous from human thought (Cronon, 1996, King 1990).

This Human-Nature distinction has a complex history in Western thought. Whilst Classical scholars such as Aristotle sought to categorise and order forms of life into a hierarchical continuum, most importantly for the consolidation of the rationalist dualism of Humans and Nature was the rise of modernity and the Enlightenment period, where duality was underpinned by Cartesian thinking (Whatmore 1997; Wolch 1998). This system of thought categorised the mind (as immaterial/thinking) and body (material/unthinking) as distinct and mutually exclusive entities and enabled the world to be constructed as subject-object relationships. The logical extension is a reductionist position of 'Self' as a rational, autonomous subject and 'Other' as the 'natural' radical negation of Self, whereby the Other must be passive and morally inferior. (Gellner 1992; Gerber 1997; Plumwood 1998). The importance of Cartesian dualisms in Western Culture, as 'a fault-line that runs through its entire conceptual system', cannot be understated in the development of contemporary human relationships with the natural environment in the Western context (Plumwood 1993:42). In normative understandings of nature, nature is firmly positioned as the 'Other' in relation to 'Culture'. Such dualistic logics (re)enforce cultural norms and moral justification that subjugate the Other in relation to the Self, e.g. Mind over Body, Self over Other, and Culture over Nature (Harraway 1991, Rose 1993).

From this discussion we can see one issue with Rationalism in environmental ethics is that ideals of nature are situated in opposition to Humans, as something distinctly material and separate from human consciousness. To consider Wilderness as socially constructed, in contrast, is based on the philosophical position that our perceptions and interpretations of the environment are relative to the social and cultural contexts within which they are made 'knowable'. This means that what we understand to be Nature is in itself is an interpretation based upon our societal, emotional, technological and intellectual experiences and perceptions of the natural world (Cronon 1996; Braun and Castree 1998). This is to say that humans conceptualise, understand and interpret meanings of Wilderness in reflection of the historically and morally situated frameworks within which they are thought and experienced. This is particularly important in understanding how wilderness has been conceptualised throughout the rise of modern environmentalism.

4. The Rise of Modern Environmentalism: Romantic Conceptions of Wilderness

The Wilderness concept to which this chapter refers was largely born out of America. Therefore this chapter will focus on the evolution of the concept within Euro-American narratives. This is not to say that Wilderness is simply a Euro-American notion, indeed metaphysical notions of wilderness are rooted in a variety of cultures across the world (Callicott 1989; Braun 2002). The American Wilderness concept is

focused on here due to its influence on global environmental policy and the advent of rewilding narratives.

4.1 Romanticising Wilderness: from Europe to America

By the 19th century rural areas colonised by Europeans settlers from the 1600s onwards were becoming emphatically transformed by urbanisation and industrialization. North America had begun its 'urban revolution'. As large swaths of the population migrated to cities to live and work people's perceptions of rural 'wild' lands began to change, from that of a desolate and God-less place (a powerful imaginary generated through European Judeo-Christian perceptions of Wilderness) (Merchant 1989), to one that idealized and appreciated Wilderness as a sanctuary from modern urban life. Wilderness, as Merchant (1989) famously purports, became Eden on Earth. This heavenly conceptualisation of Wilderness was most visibly depicted through Euro-American Romanticism and formed the birth of the wilderness preservation movement.

The endeavour of romanticising wilderness drew heavily on the notion of sublimity, much influenced by the publication in 1757 of '*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful'* (Burke, 1757). Indeed, Burke's book was essential reading for European painters and travel writers of the early 19th century for whom the natural world was the focus of their art (Cronon 1996; Fulford 1999). For Burke, a sublime Wilderness then was one of terrifying rapture, awe and reverence in the face of the infinity, power and mystery of nature. The beauty and spiritual truths that could touch any Man who dared to linger in such environments was much celebrated in sublime Romantic writings and paintings of the period. For example, the sublimities of nature are expressed in the work of early Romantic Poets such as Percy Bysshe Shelly, encapsulated in the first lines of his poem '*Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni*':

> *Mont Blanc yet gleams on high: --the power is there, The still and solemn power of many sights,*
> *And many sounds, and much of life and death.*
> (Shelly, cited in Donovan and Duffy 2017)

Shelly, much like many Romantic poets of this period, stressed the wild and transcendental nature of Wilderness that inspired awe as well as spiritual melancholy. Shelly evokes a sense of divinity in nature and cannot avoid the terminology of religion so important to Classical conceptions of Wilderness. Yet whilst God is present, particularly in the early sublime Romantic writings such as this, the Wilderness itself is evoked as a place of awe-inspiring spirituality, a kind of substitute for the Christian religion, if you will. This substitution of Nature for God in part reflects the modern Enlightenment doctrine; by emphasizing the belief that nature

exists as a naturally ordered and hierarchical world, it eliminated the 'irrational' tendencies of religious doctrine in Classical conceptions of wilderness (Merchant 1980; Cronon 1996). These were the beginnings of the Euro-American cravings for Wilderness.

As Romanticism evolved in America, the terrifying aspects of sublimity gradually receded into a 'domesticated sublime' construction of Wilderness famously critiqued by Cronon (1996). American nature writing of the late Romantic period embodies this Romantic enthusiasm for the wilderness as a divine sanctuary from modern urban life; where the power of the sublime is softened and Wilderness is conceptualized as a beautiful, sentimental and divine place. This 'domesticated sublime' is a sentiment best evoked by Scottish-American nature writer and conservationist John Muir. In his use of similes and metaphor like *'a lake of pure sunshine' and 'from the blue sky to the yellow valley smoothly blending as they do in a rainbow, making a wall of light ineffably fine' and comparing the Sierra to 'the wall of some celestial city' (Chapter 1, The approach to the valley 1912)* you could be forgiven for mistaking it as a love poem. Though rather written to a human companion it is written to the wilderness of Yosemite. Olwig (1995: 385) contends that Muir, like many nature writers of the Romantic period, equates love for Yosemite with the moral valorization of nature. And like any star-crossed-lover, Muir puts Yosemite, and the idea of Wilderness, on a moral pedestal. Merchant (1980) tells that gendered constructions of wilderness as pristine and virginal land to be tamed and domesticated can be understood in the colonial context, where the presence and agency of indigenous peoples is erased and the land is violently transformed through the 'Othering' of nature, legitimising land as 'empty' and therefore ripe for conquer and active domestication (Plumwood, 1998). These are critiques that shall be revisited when analysing wilderness preservation in practice.

4.2. Masculinity and Romanticism: The American Wilderness

Particular ideas of masculinity and femininity have also been a vital vehicle for driving forward particular conceptualisations of Wilderness. Nowhere is this more evident than in the American Frontier Myth. The American 'frontier' was officially closed from the late 1800s and subsequently numerous male writers sought to preserve and perpetuate a sense of the frontier imaginary in wilderness narratives (Brandt 2017). Writings of the time show that much of the attraction to 'wild' areas by urban, white American men was nostalgia for an imagined frontier life, a life of freedom, rugged masculinity and individualism, physical endeavour and conquest (Plumwood 1993: 662 Rifkin 2014). No man can better illustrate this perception of American wilderness than in the writings of Theodore Roosevelt, 26th President of the United States (Brinkley and Holland 2009). Roosevelt wrote a number of books and essays that inscribe masculine endeavour into Wilderness narratives. As a politician and President he was a fundamental figure in the development of wilderness

preservation legislation, heavily influenced by his close friend John Muir. The mythical ‘wild pioneer’ captured the American imagination with cowboys and pioneers upheld as national heroes and the rugged American hero continues to permeate American popular culture today (Wright & Slotkin, 1993). In these cultural artefacts masculine identity is linked with the conquest and subjugation, and/or protection of a domesticated wilderness and was epitomised by masculine endeavours such as hunting. As such hunting and military tactics codified wilderness as a colonial, masculine space, as Roosevelt himself strove to protect and preserve wilderness from human inhabitation whilst indulging in big game hunting. Indeed the colonial tactic of preserving wilderness to secure property ownership and the right to hunt would become a key criticism of the global National Park movement (Neumann 2002; Adams and Mulligan 2003).

4.3. Romantic Wilderness as a Basis for Preservation Policies

Whilst the concept of Wilderness can be traced back to 18th century European Romanticism the concept came to the fore during the late 19th century, where preserving nature in its so-called wild and ‘natural’ state became the cornerstone of American environmental approaches. Leading advocates and architects of wilderness preservation and the Wilderness Movement in America were the writers and activists John Muir and Henry David Thoreau as well as Emerson, Leopold and others (see REFS). In particular the power of Muir’s emotive and sentimental prose, along with other writers of the time, cannot be underestimated (Callicott and Nelson 1998; Phillipon 2005). John Muir founded the Sierra Club in 1892 whose manifesto was built on the call to “Save the Wilderness” from the increasing encroachment of infrastructure and industrial tourism (Woods, 2007: 31). Paradoxically tourism and the availability of ‘wild nature’ for the masses to enjoy was a driving factor in the political development of the preservationist movement in America.

The Sierra Club grew into a political force to be reckoned with. Romantic conceptions of Wilderness, for example, were pivotal in establishing the protection of Yosemite Valley via the Yosemite Grant in 1864, and The Wilderness Movement, led by Muir, was a driving force behind its successful designation as a National Park in 1890. In particular, John Muir along with other writers belonging to The Wilderness Society and Sierra club drove forward the American (and global) appetite for the protection and preservation of what critical social scientists would describe as domesticated sublime and romantic natures which formed the basis of the American and global National Park movement. Indeed once Yellowstone became America’s first National park on March the 1st 1872 it stood as a model for the global expansion of America’s ‘big idea’ (Stevens 1997; Wuerthner 2015). After the designation of Yellowstone, National Parks were developed across the world, particularly in colonial locations across Australia, Africa, Canada and New Zealand in the late-1800s.

4.4. Critical Reflections

So far, we could be forgiven for understanding Romantics conceptions of Wilderness as innocent musings to give space to autonomous and beautiful nature. Yet these narratives are far from innocent and embed within them a particular way of understanding *what* and *who* belongs in Nature. The cultural attitudes and values embedded in Romantic writing and painting informed and mobilized a particular environmental ethics evoking Wilderness as 'true nature' set apart from humans. This in turn informed conservation efforts of the late 19th and early 20th century on the preservation of large tracts of land or more specifically, wilderness preservation. The solution to environmental crisis under this environmental philosophy is to prioritize a human-less wilderness over a nature-less civilisation. Wilderness in this sense is dangerous, if it is pursued with a sense of absolutism. The philosophical separation of humans in these preservation narratives hinges on the idea of nature as a binary opposite of society and therefore symbolically and materially places humans strictly, and often violently, outside of preservation areas.

Wilderness legislation was inscribed with philosophical foundations that articulate and defend particular values: embodying notions of a domesticated sublime, rugged masculinity, and individualism as well as capitalist and exclusionary colonial tactics (Sutter, 1999). These latter two will now be discussed further in relation to the American National Park project.

It is important not to conflate National Parks with wilderness. Wilderness areas can exist within National Parks, but National Park status isn't a prerequisite for wilderness. However it should be noted that the Wilderness imaginary was vitally important to the American National Park concept and preservationist policies to follow in America and globally. Yellowstone, and what became known as the 'Yellowstone Model' was characterised by an exclusionary nature emanating from Euro-American ideas on property rights, colonialism and Nature (Mackenzie 1988; Adams 2004). Rather than a move purely to protect an undisturbed wilderness, scholars note that Yellowstone was established with a political concern for establishing federally owned lands in a protectivist move from the private exploitation of land seen under America's Gilded Age (Germic 2001). This move was underlined by a profit motive, to create a 'wilderness experience' to be enjoyed by American society through tourism and the beginnings of private-federal partnerships that fostered nature-based tourism based on romantic Wilderness imaginaries (Farrell 2015).

One of the central features of Yellowstone National Park at the time of inception was erasure of the indigenous cultural landscapes, as well now infamous instances of removal of indigenous Americans themselves (Meyer 1996). Spencer (1999) details the political backdrop of the Park Act, situated among heightened concerns that land be protected against potentially violent indigenous claims of 'ownership', which, in

Yellowstone's case, would impact upon and frighten tourists. Consequently, in a move to prevent Indigenous Americans entering the Park a military post was installed at Yellowstone's western boundary in 1879. In this sense the Wilderness sold to tourists through the imagery of Yellowstone, as a pristine and uninhabited space of nature is a politicised imaginary that erases the historical presence of indigenous people on such land for centuries prior to European colonisation. Consequently wilderness preservation narratives within the National Park Model have the potential to negate the association of (indigenous) people from the landscape (Stevens 1997; Dove 2006). Indeed beyond Yellowstone, attempts to own, protect and preserve wilderness have often been accompanied by historical exclusion and dispossession from the land of indigenous people and accompanied by the profit motivation for nature-based tourism, recreation and resource management (Stevens 1997; Watson et al 2003; West et al 2006; Binnema and Niemi 2006; Igoe, Neves, & Brockington, 2010).

The Romantic notions of Wilderness Muir inspired, as pristine and uninhabited spaces, assumes a virgin land before European conquest as well as unacknowldging the thousands of years of impact that pre-Columbian cultures had on the American landscape. This has the effect of valorising a mythical 'pristine' Wilderness and removes ownership and agency over the land from indigenous peoples. The Yellowstone model - inscribed with particular cultural-politics and moralities that have the potential to violently erase the history of indigenous people from the land, both materially and culturally - was subsequently rolled out on the colonial map. Kruger National Park, the oldest national park in Africa, was designated in 1898 as part of the broader appropriation of land and natural resources and named after Paul Kruger, an important military figure and statesman in Afrikaner history (Neumann, 1998). Indigenous people living within the boundaries of Kruger National Park were dispossessed and dislocated from their homeland under colonial conservation laws, such as the criminalisation of traditional hunting, wood collection and cattle grazing on National Park land as a part of a wider move to secure the land for tourist and recreational activities (Neumann, 1998). Not only did the expansion of the National Park movement into South Africa dramatically restructure property relations, but it also alienated indigenous people from the historically available resources to support their livelihoods as well as the gradual erosion of traditional knowledge (regarding hunting, grazing). More recently within and beyond academia, indigenous efforts to reclaim territories and rights have been both highly visible and controversial, especially when they come into conflict with state/corporate interests (see Standing Rock). As Neumann (1998: 31) notes "[r]epresentations of a harmonious, untouched space of nature, [which] mask the colonial dislocations and obliterate the history of these dislocations, along with the history of those spaces that existed previously".

5. For Wildness not Wilderness: Decolonising Rewilding

The preceding account has unpacked how deeply held social, cultural and political values have projected and inscribed onto 'wilderness' idealised forms of Nature that consequently have been (re)made through environmental policy narratives. In doing so it has shown that the value we place on 'wilderness' is not construed from Nature/wilderness in itself as an independent entity, but from the socio-cultural and political matrixes within which we have mediated our understanding of the term. In this mediation, Wilderness has been positioned as the "Other" in the Nature-Culture dualism. This oppositional conceptualization works to construct the wilderness into a subject-object relationship that is embedded with hegemonic ideologies. Critically analysing Wilderness narratives asks us to reflect on a series of questions when thinking about rewilding conservation practice. The first of course is whether or not rewilding also collapses Nature and Society into binary dualisms and if so, to understand the consequences of this is so for how we morally 'view' and rewild nature in this guise. What values and assumptions embedded within rewilding conservation? How useful is the term Wilderness is to rewilding narratives?

Defining Wilderness as solely a social construct does not give space to non-human autonomy within its narrative (Whatmore 2002, Booth 2011). Whilst romanticism, frontierism, and religiosity are fundamental to the way in which wilderness is- and has been- constructed and classified by humans, to allow the semantic dominance of the term Wilderness, and its associated symbolic valence, within rewilding narratives is to deny agency to more-than-human forms of life within these narratives (Whatmore 2002). Whilst Plumwood (1998: 659) argues that concepts of nature and wilderness should not be abandoned, but need to be situated 'within the context of a renewed, radical ecology committed to healing the nature/culture split and ending the war on the Other," others argue that a conceptual apparatus that acknowledges cultural expressions of Nature whilst allowing more room to more-than-human agency and intersubjectivity in the co-production of 'wild' spaces is necessary (Whatmore 2002; Castree 2003; Lorimer 2015).

Both 'wildness' and wilderness are to some extent important to the ethos of rewilding, however I argue, that understanding and valorising 'wildness' as the key element of rewilding, rather than wilderness, would be useful in moving the rewilding agenda towards practices that do not fall back on an imaginary space of purity but instead open up the possibility for co-producing spaces of 'wild' nature in a radical ecology committed to healing, as Plumwood argues, the philosophical split between Nature and Culture in Western environmental narratives.

'Wildness' has its own historical set of socio-cultural and political associations. Henry David Thoreau famously asserted: 'In Wildness is the preservation of the world' (Thoreau 1974 [1862]). Thoreau's legacy as a visionary preservationist inspired the American National Park System discussed above, and this quote if often viewed (and used) as a declaration for wilderness preservation. It is true that Thoreau

valorized the idea of wilderness in a way that cemented him as an icon of American Environmentalism (Bennet 2000). Yet Thoreau does not use the term wilderness here, as is often stated, instead he uses the term 'wildness'. Whilst initially these terms might appear interchangeable, it should be argued that wilderness and wildness should not be understood as the same thing (Chapman 2006, Prior and Brady 2017). If wilderness is underpinned by a dualistic separation of Culture from Nature then conflating wildness with wilderness also implies this dichotomy. This subsequently implies that 'wild places' or 'wildness' can only be realized when humans are excluded in time and space from Nature. This is a troublesome narrative that is marked by many of the same problems/critiques I've alluded to. Consequently, in the endeavor of developing more positive and socially-just conservation practice in rewilding we can valorise Wildness, rather than Wilderness to renegotiate our understanding and relationships with non-human nature in ways that are not dualistic, exclusionary, or indeed, loaded with cultural baggage. In order to do this we must conceptually understand Wildness as embodying three qualities: (1) wildness as a relational concept, (2) wildness as a borderland, and (3) wildness as autonomy.

1. Wildness as Relational

By better distinguishing between Wilderness and Wildness as different terms in this way, we are able to understand 'wildness' in a relational, rather than binary, sense As Chapman (2006:1) purports:

> "Unhappily, environmental restoration turns out to be paradoxical under the current identification of wilderness with wildness where wildness is, at least, a necessary condition for the possession of natural value. The solution to the paradox is to separate wilderness from wildness both conceptually and ontologically by enlarging the domain of wildness to include certain human activities"

It is true that the term 'wildness' contains implicit historical cultural assumptions that categorise the 'wild' as Other, a process which has encompassed the 'placing' of 'wild things' in human-ordered spaces of belonging or not belonging (Urbanik 2012). Part of this process of distancing of 'wild things' from civilisation has been the association of wildness, or wild animals, as belonging to wilderness, as spaces of a pristine nature (Chapman 2006, Woods 2005, Prior and Brady 2017). Yet as many contemporary social scientists have argued, contemporary understandings of 'wildness' or 'wild-life' need to be more nuanced (Whatmore and Thorne, Latour 2004). 'Wild-life' according to Whatmore and Thorne (1998: 437) should be reconceived as

"*a relational achievement spun between people, animals plants and soils, documents and devices, in heterogeneous social networks that are performed in and through multiple places and fluid ecologies*".

In this account, wildness is abiotic, biotic and a social relational achievement within human and more-than-human worlds. This understanding acknowledges the autonomy of more-than-humans, the social networks, multiple places and ecologies within which 'wild' life is brought into being. By reconfiguring wildness as quality exercised in relational exchanges across and within fluid ecologies rather an Other within an imaginary space of purity held at a distance from humans, we are able to open up possibilities that rewilding offers for co-producing experimental natures with non-humans outside of wilderness narratives.

2. Wildness as a 'Borderland'

By defining Wildness as a border*land*-concept, rather than the totalising border*line*-concept of Wilderness-Culture, we are able to challenge the ontologies that conflate 'wildness' as something that is pure, separate and Other from the human realm; and instead wildness is something that can be realised through topological borderlands-spaces. By engaging with understandings of wildness in a relational, topological sense, the notions of power and exclusion over wild-life configured in geometrical space is 'loosened' and wildness becomes a quality unconfined by territorial borderlines seen in wilderness management (Whatmore 2003, Hinchliffe et al 2013: 541). Therefore whilst wilderness is a 'border-concept'; a cultural concept that separates wildness from the sphere of human society, 'wildness' is not. Rewilding based on the premise of 'wilding' rather than Wilderness assumes the (re)creation of borderland spaces, through relational configurations of the human and more-than-human world. It is then, these borderland spaces, which offer the most promise for Rewilders.

3. Wildness as Autonomy

Whilst ecological restoration is enacted through practices of intervention and stewardship, rewilding is foregrounded in an ethos that relinquishing direct human management of wild organisms or ecological processes will generate better functioning ecosystems. Rewilding – unlike other ecological restoration practices – is premised on non-human autonomy; the self-willed and self-sustaining qualities of non-human Nature (Prior and Ward 2016). In characterising wildness as autonomy, 'the more-than-human world where events, such as animals moving about, plants growing, and rocks falling occur largely because of their own internal self-expression' (Woods, 2005, p.177). Under this definition then, wildness (of animals, plants, landscapes or ecosystems) is premised on non-human autonomy within plural and hybrid spaces rather than the material realization of vast pristine environments. Defining wildness in these terms again allows Rewilders to create 'wild spaces' rather than wilderness.

6.1 Wilderness or Wildness in Rewilding Conservation?

Rewilding itself has been described by some of its fiercest proponents as a paradigmatic shift in conservation and broadly speaking it aims to restore and/or regenerate ecosystems through reintroduction programmes (Monbiot, 2013). The ecological specifics of rewilding will not be discussed here (as they will be explained in detail elsewhere in the book) however it's important to note that behind the fervent environmental discourse from pro-wilding scientists and activists the concept of rewilding is deeply imbued with cultural, political and ethical values. Many rewilding practices, generally speaking, do not outwardly reproduce the aims of wilderness management, or indeed seek to construct pure spaces of Nature (see Prior and Ward 2016). But critics of rewilding have claimed that rewilding conservation seeks to reconstruct a mythical, and fundamentally flawed Nature–Culture binary. According to Jørgensen (2015:487), Rewilders:

> "want to re-create a wild without people and are oblivious to the problematic nature of the wilderness construct. Rewilding as activist practice attempts to erase human history and involvement with the land and flora and fauna, yet nature and culture cannot be easily separated into distinct units."

Perhaps Jørgensen has a point. Emanating from north America, the first call of Rewilders was to 'restore' and 'rewild' large tracts of land in order to the generate the space and connections necessary to reintroduce large carnivores. Such calls were put forward by Michael Soulé and Dave Foreman, the latter of whom co-founded the Wildlands Project in 1991 now known as the Wildlands Network and who went on to become co-founder of The Rewilding Institute. Both organisations have been pivotal in the developing the scientific ideas underlining continental-scale rewilding networks (Carver 2015). Foreman historically cofounded the environmental-group 'Earth First!', a radical movement with roots in deep ecology that had wilderness protection at the heart of its vision. Michael Soulé, a conservation biologist, whilst not a radical environmental activist in the same sense as Foreman, can still be recognised as a wilderness proponent, seeking to provide the scientific basis for the realization large core areas of protected wilderness and landscape connectivity.

The scientific ideas behind early calls to rewild America were first published in a landmark paper by Soulé & Noss (1998) where the reintroduction of mega fauna, and the creation of what they term the 'three Cs' argument: cores, carnivores and corridors' were fundamental strategies for creating 'self regulating land communities' (Soulé & Noss, 1998:5):

> "*Our principal premise is that rewilding is a critical step in restoring self-regulating land communities.... Once large predators are restored, many if not most of the other keystone and "habitat-creating" species (e.g., beavers, prairie dogs)...and natural regimes of disturbance and other processes will*

recover on their own…'wide-ranging predators usually require cores of protected landscape for secure foraging, seasonal movement, and other needs; they justify bigness"

(Soulé and Noss, 1998: 6-7)

For Soulé and Noss, Foreman, and other proponents of the three C's approach, the protection, restoration and connection of core areas of American 'big wilderness' would be vital to the success of rewilding projects on the North American continent as is the introduction of wild-life. Rewilding in this context 'places' wild animals into large wilderness spaces, distancing wild-life from human-life and in doing so catagorising life forms into human-ordered spaces of belonging and not belonging.

Following Soulé and Noss's call to action, Donlan et al. (2006) produced a Manifesto for Pleistocene rewilding, claiming rewilding as a conservation priority for North America. In a similar vein to its predecessors, it calls for a multi-continent system of wilderness reserves and the introduction of charismatic pre-Columbian wild-life as an ecological framework. This approach has argued against the fragmentation of land seen in much sustainable management initiatives of contemporary conservation (ibid 2006).

The emphasis on designating and protecting large areas of land of both 'types' of rewilding pits wilderness conservation as the saviour of the global extinction crisis. Both the Pleistocene manifesto and the three C's approach of Soulé and Noss seek to rewild back to 'pre-human' state, a preference that radically negates humans from nature. The anti-humanism of these approaches is clear. Reflecting on earlier analysis of the way wilderness has been used to inscribe particular values on nature, there are several reasons to be cautious of such an approach to rewilding. Vast areas of protected wilderness landscape are necessary for this type of rewilding, creating enclosed and exclusionary places without regard for the people dwelling and seeking livelihoods in such places. Questions of land-ownership, access rights and elite-power are raised in these narratives; as vast areas of private land are marked for continental rewilding (See Donlan et al 2006: 674: 'Private lands probably hold the most immediate potential' for rewilding.)

Whilst the idea of rewilding emerged from North America has wilderness at its heart this has not always been conceptually translated in the same way beyond the American context. It is true that most rewilding narratives take a critical stance towards the (over)management and regulation of non-human nature. However, there are significant philosophical differences between the types of rewilding advocated in America and those in Europe. Europe has a much longer history of human land use than America, and much less wilderness to 'preserve'. Indeed according to Frank et al (2007), in Europe as a whole (excluding the Russian Federation), only 1.4% of forested areas are identified as 'untouched'. A long history and appreciation of

cultural landscapes is also apparent within European conservation contexts (Drenthen and Keulartz 2014). Recent academic literature that has sought to put a lens on the ideology and practices of rewilding in Europe. For Europe, rewilding has emphasised the importance of the naturalistic grazing of large herbivores in the ecological restoration of European landscapes, inspired by Frans Vera's mosaic forest hypothesis. Vera suggested that Europe's ecology was characterised by a mosaic of woodland-pastures sustained by the grazing of large herbivores. In order to test this hypothesis Vera and colleagues were able to conduct what has been termed a 'wild experiment' at Oostvaardersplassen (OVP) (Lorimer and Driessen 2014).

Oostvaardersplassen (OVP) is an 'experimental' nature reserve contained within an area of reclaimed polder, just a few miles northeast of Amsterdam. The polder had been initially marked out as an industrial development site but was gradually colonised by graylag geese as development plans fell through. The colonisation and intensive grazing of the polder by graylag geese created an 'accidental ecology' which secured its demarcation as an official nature reserve (ibid, 2014). Subsequent to this, the land was further diversified and de-domesticated as part of Vera's 'wild experiment' and 35 Heck Cattle were introduced to the reserve in 1983, followed by a number of Red Deer in 1992. While the restoration of natural processes may be the aim of rewilding at OVP the means to this end is through specific reintroduction of Heck cattle. The 'Heck' cattle aren't be any means natural, instead that are the culmination of 35 years of 'back-breeding' and genetical manipulation by two German zoologists, Lutz and Heinz Heck, in a programme to recreate the aurochs[1] (Lorimer and Driessen 2013). Such animals unsettle the supposed boundaries between Wildness and Culture, creating 'borderland beings' that challenge the ontologies that characterise 'wildness' as something that is distinct and separate from the human realm. The move to 'rewild' OVP had little to do with the concept of wilderness creation and management then, or the recreation of past 'natural' landscapes or animals in a utopic form. Instead, OVP can be placed within the 'nature development narrative' in the Netherlands and rather than rewilding back to a pristine state aims to 'restore' or 'rewild' natural processes whilst creating 'new natures'. The later point is important here as is underlines the open-ended and experimental approach instigated at OVP. This space then is certainly not one that equates to anti-human wilderness management or explicitly disavows humans from nature. Instead there it's a space of potential ecological surprises born out of the desire for creating 'wildness' in new natures.

Rewilding Europe (RE) is one of the leading rewilding organisations in Europe and is influenced by many of Vera's ideas. The reintroduction of keystone species (usually large herbivores or carnivores) and the available ability of space and connectiveness are important to their narrative, as is the idea of rewilding through land abandonment,

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[1] An ancient bovine species that ranged across Eurasia during the glacial/inter-glacial intervals of the Pleistocene (Lorimer and Driessen 2011:5).

a particularly European inflection of rewilding (Keenleyside, Tucker, and McConville 2010)[2].

According to Rewilding Europe's Annual Review (2016) wilderness protection is key to European approaches. They state:

> "Initial approaches in rewilding have shown that European ecosystems have a high potential for regeneration, while existing wilderness benefits from strict protection. Europe now has the chance to catch up with the global approach, where conservation is intrinsically linked to wilderness protection and wild nature" (7)

The implication here is that Europe has a chance to 'catch up' with Northern American approaches to wilderness protection through rewilding. However European conservation context has historically valorised and conserved 'semi-natural landscapes' prized for their long-standing cultural histories; histories that 'write' cultural meaning into landscapes and show an appreciation for the historical co-production of environments by both humans and nature. Indeed, Drenthen (2017:4) notes European rewilding projects may not have the explicit *goal* to of erasing human history and human involvement in the land, but have the potential to destroy historically important and meaningful places through the removal of particular cultural artefacts from the land. This may be a particular case in point when foregrounding rewilding strategies in ideas of Wilderness.

Tanasescu's study (2017) of Rewilding Europe's Romanian Danube Delta (RDD) project explores Rewilding Europe's vision for the RDD and the tensions and difficulties encountered on the ground in the conceptual and practical meaning of the term rewilding. According to Tanasescu, Rewilding Europe is an organisation curating the creation of a 'wilderness *spectacular*'; a representation of rewilded natures that romanticize particular versions of nature built upon cultural hegemonies that valorize 'wild' and people less places. This spectacular uses the emotional appeal of 'wild spaces,' the aesthetic-ethical appreciation of so-called 'wild landscapes' not only to drive forward a populist vision for rewilding but more importantly as a driving force in the nature-based tourism aspect of Rewilding Europe. Indeed the development of nature-based economies, largely through tourism is key to the Rewilding Europe Vision (Rewilding Europe 2016). In rewilded narratives then, it is important to be aware of the past lessons learnt from nature-based tourism and scholars who argue that nature-based tourism driven by marketization of nature also comes with concerns over land ownership, uneven power relations between local

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[2] Indeed debates about what to 'do' with the significant levels of farmland abandonment across Europe, and criticisms that EU subsides paid to farmers for the upkeep of traditional pastoral practices were outdated and costly, has led rewilding proponents to advocate for rewilding through land abandment as an ecological practice (Navarro and Pereira 2012; Merckx and Pereira 2015).

people and conservation businesses, and the potential for an obsession with economic growth that can lead to socio-ecological damage driven by imaginary wilderness narratives (see Brockington and Igoe 2007; Neves and Igoe 2012).

As noted by Vasile (2018) the characterisation of Rewilding Europe as a 'wilderness spectacular' may actually be at odds with the reality of rewilding in Europe on the ground, which *is* founded on notions of 'wildness' and ecological surprises, rather than wilderness creation. In particular, the introduction of autonomous grazing herbivores, pivotal to European landscapes, may also come with 'wild consequences' not palatable to the tourists seeking the emotional wonders of wilderness as identified presented in promotional devices of Rewilding Europe (Tanasescu 2017). One 'wild consequence' of rewilding can be seen during the severe winter of 2010 at OVP, where images of starving animals provoked national outrage at the moral implications of allowing animals to live autonomous lives (ICMO2 2010). In the context of Rewilding Europe this tension is encapsulated by Vasile (2018) who explores the ethical tensions for local people in negotiating their behaviour towards introduced Bison in the Romanian Carpathians, as well as the Rewilders themselves. In 2016, two years after reintroduction, four of the 30 reintroduced bison were found dead and an evaluation by the team identified the cause to 'a mixture of weakness, natural selection and predation by feral dogs' (Vasile 2018: 22). Whilst according to Vasile, the project team were 'devastated' by the loss of animals locals viewed the loss as regrettable, but perhaps a consequence of their hybrid nature; the bison were not fully 'wild' or 'domestic' in the eyes of the locals, but, what I term, a 'borderland being'. An animal afforded autonomy through rewilding, but an autonomy that also leads to uncertain 'ecological surprises' that might present aesthetically challenging situations for locals, Rewilders and tourists, ranging from untidy woodlands to the visible death and decay in what Prior and Brady (2014: page) term 'unscenic and terrible [wild] beauty of rewilding'.

There is reason to be hopeful in these narratives also. Tanasescu's research also indicates that rewilding project in the Romanian Danube Delta has been premised on meaningful engagement with the local community, a strategy that has helped to mitigate for highly tense and emotive conflicts based on the erasure of cultural histories (ibid 2017). Vasile's research also indicates that the introduction of grazing herbivores in the form of Tauros cattle on communal lands is well liked by locals, mainly because of the animals' aesthetic charisma[3] (2018). However Vasile (2018) also documents that there was also resistance within some sections of the community to the Tauros; for fear of the 'wild unknown'. This fear of 'wildness' and uncertainty has been documented in relation to other reintroduction initiatives, particularly in relation to biosecurity concerns of agricultural communities (Buller 2008; 2013) and it will be important for Rewilders to meaningfully engage with and understand local

[3] Though there was also resistance within the community to the Tauros for fear of the 'wild unknown'.

fear narratives in relation to human-wildlife conflict rising from the autonomous character of rewilded animals.

Yet another reason to be hopeful is the recognition of wildness and wild places as relational. For example, Rewilding Europe state:

> "*Rewilding is not geared to reach any certain human ended 'optimal situation' or end state, nor to only create 'wilderness' – but it is instead meant to support more natural dynamics that will result in habitats and landscapes characteristic of specific area(s), with abiotic, biotic and social features that together create the particular 'Sense of the Place'*
>
> 12)

Acknowledging that abiotic, biotic and social features are relational actors in creating a 'Sense of Place' rejects Nature-Culture binaries and allows for a rewilding in which collaboration and co-production of a multiplicity of human and more-than-human intersubjectivities is key to the (re)creation of 'wild' nature. This is a way of thinking that acknowledges the agency and autonomy of the Other.

7. For Wildness: Going Forward Critically

Whilst both ideas of Wilderness and Wildness are important to the rewilding debate on both continents, this chapter argues that it is the notion of wildness, not Wilderness, that offers Rewilders the most potential in moving towards an inclusive, future-orientated conservation approach that doesn't seek the ever-elusive goal to create pure spaces of Nature. Understanding wildness as natural autonomy is useful in acknowledging and allowing for the independence and self-governance of non-human nature whilst not restricting wild nature' to wilderness spaces. Understanding wildness as natural autonomy then means that rewilding can (and should) take place in a myriad of places beyond wilderness, a move that is particularly future-orientated in a rapidly urbanising world. However allowing for the autonomy of nature means Rewilders will also have to grapple with ways of *living with* the 'unscenic and terrible beauty of rewilding' and potential human-wildlife conflicts in new relational exchanges and 'wild borderlands'.

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