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natures cultures **spaces**

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SAGE Publications
London • Thousand Oaks • New Delhi

First published 2002

SAGE Publications Ltd
6 Bonhill Street
London EC2A 4PU

SAGE Publications Inc
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
32, M-Block Market
Greater Kailash – I
New Delhi 110 048

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0 7619 6566 1
ISBN 0 7619 6567 X (pbk)

Library of Congress catalog card number 2002102286

Typeset by Photoprint, Torquay
Printed in Great Britain by Athenaeum Press, Gateshead

for
Denys E. Whatmore

You embark; you make the voyage;
you reach port: step ashore, then. *

* Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations (Book Three)*. Penguin edition, 1964: 55.
Translated by M. Staniforth. Penguin Books, London.

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Preface and acknowledgements

This book has been some time in the making. I have tried to hold on to some sense of this energetic fabrication in the writing which weaves my journeying in the space/times of this research through all manner of sustained and chance encounters with others whose assistance and company afford quite different tacks. I am pleased to be able to acknowledge at least some of these many debts without divesting myself of any responsibility for what follows. These journeys began in 1993 under the auspices of a Global Environmental Change Fellowship funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (award no. L320273073). An early version of chapter 7 was written during this fellowship, which also supported the research on which chapters 4 and 5 are based. The research for the chapters in section 1 was funded by another ESRC research grant 1996–97 (award no. R000222113), while the award of a Haggett Fellowship in 1999 by the School of Geographical Sciences at the University of Bristol facilitated the research for chapter 6 and enabled me to write a large part of this book.

I am grateful to numerous colleagues and friends for ongoing conversations or specific engagements with versions of one or more of the chapters that follow. In this regard, I would like to thank Kay Anderson; Trevor Barnes; Nick Bingham; Fred Buttel; Noel Castree; Gail Davies; David Demeritt; J.D. Dewsbury; Margaret Fitzsimmons; David Goodman; Kevin Hetherington; Steve Hinchliffe; Jane Jacobs; Owain Jones; Jack Kloppenberg; Doreen Massey; Mike Michael; Marc Mormont; Jon Murdoch; Phil O'Neill; Bronwyn Parry; Andrew Sayer; Pierre Stassart; Lorraine Thorne; Nigel Thrift; and Michael Watts. Two people warrant particular mention. First, Lorraine Thorne who has shared with me many of the passionate curiosities and strange journeys ventured here, not least as co-author of earlier versions of chapters 2 and 3 which she has generously allowed me to re-work for the purposes of this volume. I remember our floor-scale 'back of the envelope' diagramming fondly, and miss it still. Secondly, Nigel Thrift whose polymathic energies and enthusiasms have fostered an intellectual current of experimentation at Bristol that has

nourished my work, alongside many others, over the years to which this book owes much. If academic work were always such serious fun.

I am also indebted to several people for contributing various forms of expertise solicited in the production of this book. Simon Godden and Jonathan Tooby at Bristol worked with skill and good humour on the figures and illustrations. The library staff at the Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome and the Australian Parliament in Canberra were endlessly helpful in furnishing my documentary requests. Pepe Esquinas-Alcazar kindly made available his rich records and remembrances of the political career of the Commission for Plant Genetic Resources and guided me through the FAO labyrinth. Dr Brian Johnson at English Nature; Dr Amy Plowman and staff at Paignton Zoo; and Mr Geoff Wilson at the Earthwatch Institute, Oxford, all made themselves and various materials available amidst busy schedules. In addition, a number of academic institutions have been generous hosts of study visits and/or workshops which have enriched my thinking. In particular, I would like to thank faculty and graduate students in the Department of Rural Sociology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison; in Environmental Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz; in the Department of Geography at the University of Newcastle (NSW); and in SEED (the Société, Environnement et Developpement research group) at the Universitaire Luxembourgeoise, Arlon.

As an editor Robert Rojek at Sage has been a model of patient encouragement throughout the protracted writing of this book. More than this, his commitment to the project has spurred me on at difficult moments. It is also to his talent for making connections that I owe the cover. In this regard, I am much indebted to Caroline Tisdall who generously agreed to the use of one of her series of Beuys/Coyote photographs and to Robert Violette of Violette Editions who made the image available for reproduction. I would also like to thank Claire Roberts at Sage for her patient work in securing reproduction rights to this and other images in the book.

Finally, I must thank Keith who has borne the brunt of my prolonged preoccupations with characteristic forebearance; Tom and Anna who have indulged them during their visits; my parents who have been unfailingly supportive even when their needs have been much greater; Jan and Jo whose love and friendship has kept me going through it all; and Meg and Dillon who have kept me company during the long hours at 'the top of the house'. I dedicate this book to my father, who did not live to see its completion but whose life shapes mine still in so many enduring ways.

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Paignton Zoo Environmental Park (Paignton, Devon) for Figure 3.2, 'Giving Animals a Home They Deserve and a Place You Enjoy', 1997.

The Earthwatch Institute, Center for Field Research (Massachussetts, USA) for Figures 3.4 and 3.6 from the Earthwatch Annual Expedition Guide.

Andrew Ireland, for Figure 4.1, 'A Perfect Case of Terra Nulltus!', first reproduced in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

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The author and publisher would also like to acknowledge the original source of material adapted for use in this volume:

Figure 2.1, adapted by the author from C. Scarre, (1995) *The Penguin historical atlas of ancient Rome*, The Penguin Group, New York.

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Figure 6.2, adapted by the author from Rost et al., (1994), 'Redefining the goals of protein secondary structure prediction', *Journal of Molecular Biology*, 235, 13–26.

1

Introducing Hybrid Geographies

> What happens if we begin from the premise not that we know reality because we are separate from it (traditional objectivity), but that we can know the world because we are connected with it?' (Katherine N. Hayles, 1995: 48)

dis-placing nature – the refrain of the 'outside'

Barely a day passes without another story of the hyperbolic inventiveness of the life sciences to complicate the distinctions between human and non-human; social and material; subjects and objects to which we are accustomed. Variously labelled as 'life politics' (Giddens, 1991) or 'bio-sociality' (Rabinow, 1992a), such worldly apprehensions have struggled to make their mark against academic divisions of labour and the viscous terms in which the 'question of nature' has been posed in the social sciences and humanities (see Macnaghten and Urry, 1999). As their forays into the domain of natural sciences have swelled, so a plethora of 'things' has been trespassing into the company of the social unsettling the conduct of its study. Such things exceed both the proliferation of environmental sub-disciplines[1] and the tired theoretical resources of '(social) constructionism' and '(natural) realism' that have greeted them (see Soper, 1995; Demeritt, 1998). They present an unhappy choice. On the one hand, 'post-modern' modes of enquiry in which Nature, having nothing to say for itself, is the always already crafted product of human interpretation, and analysis becomes fixed on the representational practices that make it meaningful (Robertson *et al.*, 1996). On the other, knowledge projects committed in various ways to maintaining a 'crucial distinction . . . between material processes and relations . . . and our understandings of . . . those processes' (Dickens, 1996: 83) in order to sustain the possibility of (and their own pretensions to) exemption from the representational moment.

There is undoubtedly a generous measure of caricature in this embattled depiction of the treatment of Nature/nature in social theory that serves

primarily to reaffirm intellectual prejudices and identities, and which is writ large in the so-called science wars (see Gross and Levitt, 1994). Only the most vulgar of 'constructionist' accounts suggest that the world is – to borrow Sheets-Johnstone's evocative phrase – 'the product of an immaculate linguistic conception' (1992: 46). Equally, only the crudest of 'realist' accounts refuse to recognize the contingency of knowledge claims about 'real world' entities and processes. Moreover, accounts that get lumped into these categories are inevitably more diverse than their detractors acknowledge (see, respectively, Benton, 1996; Conley, 1997). But for all their loudly declared hostility, these theoretical encampments are similarly premised on an a priori separation of nature and society. As Bruno Latour has put it:

> Critical explanation always began from the poles and headed toward the middle, which was first the separation point and then the conjunction point for opposing resources. . . . In this way the middle was simultaneously maintained and abolished, recognised and denied, specified and silenced. . . . How? . . . By conceiving every hybrid as a mixture of two pure forms. (1993: 77–8)

Perhaps because geographers have inhabited this 'nature–society' settlement more self-consciously than other disciplines, these (re)turns to the question of nature have a particular resonance. As every undergraduate knows, Geography stakes its identity on attending to 'the interface between social and natural worlds'. In practice, the separateness of these worlds has been intensified by a disciplinary division of labour between 'human' and 'physical' geography, each of which tends to pay more allegiance to the divergent research cultures of the social and natural sciences respectively than to the other.[2] There is a sense, too, in which the life seems to have been sucked out of the worlds that Geography has come to inhabit, at least in its efforts to become a spatial science and in some more 'critical' spatial theorizing (see Fitzsimmons, 1989).[3] In their urge towards the disembodied authority of panoptic knowledge practices, such maps have 'ceased to be places of sensible activity and journeying' (de Certeau, 1988: 129). More significantly, the spatialities in which the ontological separation of nature and society inheres are woven through all manner of scientific, policy, media and everyday practices that enact nature as 'a physical place to which you can go' (Haraway, 1992: 66). As Tim Ingold has observed: 'Something . . . must be wrong somewhere, if the only way to understand our own creative involvement in the world is by first taking ourselves out of it' (1995a: 58).

Human geography is by no means alone in finding itself at an important juncture in its efforts to escape the dialectical vortex of nature–society relations and the environmental refrain of the 'outside' (see Wolfe, 1998).[4]

The 'hybrid geographies' that I embark on here exercise other modes of travelling through the heterogeneous entanglements of social life that refuse the choice between word and world by fleshing out a different conception of fabric-ation, 'not as mere retro-projection of human labour onto an object that is nothing in itself but a sturdier, much more reflexive co-production richly invested within a collective practice' (Latour, 1999a: 274).

Of course hybridity is already freighted in various ways, for example as the 'margin . . . where cultural differences contingently and conflictually touch' in post-colonial studies (Bhabha, 1994: 206), and in agronomy as the bodying forth of human in(ter)ventions in the flesh of plants (Simmonds, 1979), both of which are interrogated during the course of the book. But its energies are enrolled here primarily as a device to negotiate the temptations of the 'one plus one' logic or 'mixture of two pure forms' that Latour warns against above, in journeying between natures and societies; objects and subjects; humans and non-humans and into their excesses.

'Hybrid geographies' allies the business of thinking space (Crang and Thift, 2000) to that of thinking through the body (Kirkby, 1997), in other words to apprehend and practise geography as a craft. This enterprise gestures towards Michel Serres' insistence that 'there is a sense in space before the sense that signifies' (1991: 13) in two ways: by attending simultaneously to the inter-corporeal conduct of human knowing and doing *and* to the affects of a multitude of other 'message-bearers' that make their presence felt in the fabric of social life. To map the lively commotion of these worldly associations is to travel in them, negotiating 'modes of access and ways of orienting ourselves to the concrete world we inhabit' (Bingham and Thrift, 2000: 292). What happens as a consequence of such mappings into knowledge? A preliminary response to the question staged at the outset would be – an upheaval in the binary terms in which the question of nature has been posed and a re-cognition of the intimate, sensible and hectic bonds through which people and plants; devices and creatures; documents and elements take and hold their shape in relation to each other in the fabric-ations of everyday life (Clark, 1997). As the book goes on to explore, this upheaval implicates *geographical* imaginations and practices both in the purifying impulse to fragment living fabrics of association and designate the proper places of 'nature' and 'society', *and* in the promise of its refusal. This is a promise of countenancing the world as an always already inhabited achievement of heterogeneous social encounters where, as Donna Haraway puts it, 'all of the actors are not human and all of the humans are not "us" however defined' (1992: 67).

diagramming – more than human worlds

> A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 380)

The heterogeneous conception of social life that I want to flesh out here takes up the 'common emphases on positionality and interaction' that Hayles (1995) discerns among disparate theoretical efforts to rupture the terms in which the question of nature has been posed. I take these emphases to imply an epistemological insistence on the situatedness of knowledge and a 'modest' ontological stance towards the performativity of social ordering.[5] At its most skeletal, 'hybrid geographies' takes a radical tack on social agency manoeuvring between two theoretical commitments. The first is to the de-centring of social agency, apprehending it as a 'precarious achievement' spun between social actors rather than a manifestation of unitary intent (Law, 1994: 101). The second is to its de-coupling from the subject/object binary such that the material and the social intertwine and interact in all manner of promiscuous combinations (Thrift, 1996: 24).

My aim in this book is to elaborate these stances not in the abstract but by working them through closely-textured journeys that follow various socio-material imbroglios as they are caught up in, and convene, the spatial practices of science, law and everyday life. It is organized as a series of paired essays that can be read in at least three ways: as cross-cutting conversations that interrogate the theoretical currents set in motion in this introductory chapter; as thematic sections that explore the spatio-temporal vernaculars of wild(er)ness, governance and consumption; or as individual essays that follow the interferences of 'things', from elephants and soybeans to deeds and patents, in the geographies of social life. This iterative style of argument works towards multiple mappings of the ethical import of taking hybridity seriously in/as geographical practice in terms of 'the real consequences, interventions, creative possibilities and responsibilities of intra-acting within the world' (Barad, 1999: 8). In the same spirit, these introductory orientations are not restricted to this chapter but continue to crop up as prefaces to each section, situating the particular essays they introduce.

My elaboration of these themes engages with four main bodies of work that converge through conversations between geography and science and technology studies,[6] but are also becoming aligned in more ambitious and various ways that Nigel Thrift has dubbed 'non-representational theory' (1999, 2000a, 2000b).[7] The first is science and technology studies (STS) where the vocabularies of hybridity have been most keenly honed through devices like the 'hybrid collectif' (Callon and Law, 1995), the

'quasi-object' (Serres and Latour, 1995) and the 'cyborg' (Haraway, 1985). 'Hybrid geographies' diagrams between the technical and corporeal emphases of two STS communities, those charily associated with the acronym ANT (Actant–Network Theory) (see Law and Hassard, 1999) and those of feminist science studies (see Haraway, 1997). My interrogations of these different efforts to accommodate 'non-humans' in the fabric of the social work to evince three consequences of such a redistribution of social agency. These involve shifts from intentional to affective modalities of association; from being to becoming in the temporal rhythms of human/non-human difference; and from geometries to topologies as the spatial register of distributed agency.[8] Above all, I want to hold on to the sense in this work in which 'the world kicks back' (Barad, 1998), or as Latour puts it, 'things' can object to their social enrolments (2000). At the same time, though, I want to exceed the scientific onus of these concerns and to mobilize the political implications of this 'redistribution' through other knowledge practices, notably those of law and governance, and everyday life.

The second engagement that situates this project is with bio-philosophy, which is never far from the various manoeuvres of science studies, particularly ANT (see Ansell-Pearson, 1999; Lorraine, 1999). Here, my argument is drawn into concerns with the morphogenic impulses of replication and differentiation, multiplicity and singularity through which the flux of worldly becomings takes, holds and changes shape. This rich vein of work folds debates on the philosophy of organism in the early twentieth century (such as Weisman, 1892; Bergson, 1983/1907; Whitehead, 1929) into those at its close, interrogating the precarious register of 'life' as a means of thinking past the human. Notable here are Deleuze and Guattari's vital topology (1988/1980), Bateson's ecology of mind (2000/1972) and Serres' material semiotics (1985).[9] 'Hybrid geographies' pursues this work's commitment to what Keith Ansell-Pearson calls the 'inherently ethical task of opening up the human experience to a field of alterity' (1999: 2).

The third theoretical conversation exercised in this book is with aspects of the diffuse literature on corporeality that have been particularly, though by no means exclusively, elaborated in feminist work (see Welton, 1999). Here, my argument engages with (various) theories of bodily *practice*. These serve both to reassert the corporeal affordances in which cognition inheres and, just as importantly, to challenge the cognitive privilege by extending the affective register of senses, feelings and habits engaged in 'thinking through the body' (see, for example, Radley, 1995; Weiss, 1999).[10] Haunting these debates is Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh (*la chair*) and its emphasis on the reversibility of energies between bodies and worlds such that 'the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in things' (1968: 134).[11] Taking the ethical import of this intercorporeal stance at its word, I interrogate these arguments by fleshing

out the place of animal body-subjects in the geographies of wildlife conservation.

Last, but not least, 'hybrid geographies' engages work that is concerned with the knowledge practices of everyday life or what Shotter refers to as a 'third kind of knowledge' (1993). Here the notion of thinking through the body is invested in a particular direction, admitting the know-hows, tacit skills and bodily apprehensions through which everyday life goes on into the repertoire of knowledges that social/scientists need to take seriously (see de Certeau *et al.* 1998; Schatzki *et al.* 2000). These everyday knowledge practices have been argued to be performative rather than cognitive, such that 'talk' itself is better understood as action rather than as communication (see Shusterman, 2000; Thrift, 2000a). Allied to this argument is the suggestion that the spatialities of everyday life constitute a mode of dwelling, as against building, in the world (see Ingold, 1995a; Thrift, 1999). These arguments have a particular resonance for my determination to escape the scientific 'power-houses' of knowledge production and interrogate the ways in which nature–culture hybrids are apprehended through activities like consumption, and their interferences resisted and accommodated in the intimate fabric of social life (see Hansen, 2000a). These arguments are explored in the last section of the book in relation to the dissonance between consumer and producer knowledge practices in the event of food scares.

Thus freighted, the hybrid invites new ways of travelling that are beginning to make their mark in Geography (see, for example, Bingham, 1996; Murdoch, 1997a; Hinchliffe, 1999) and elsewhere (see, for example, Mol and Law, 1994; Strathern, 1996; Hetherington, 1997c). In place of the geometric habits that reiterate the world as a single grid-like surface open to the inscription of theoretical claims or uni-versal designs, hybrid mappings are necessarily topological, emphasizing the multiplicity of space-times generated in/by the movements and rhythms of heterogeneous association. The spatial vernacular of such geographies is fluid, not flat, unsettling the coordinates of distance and proximity; local and global; inside and outside. This is not to ignore the potent affects of territorializations of various kinds, just the reverse. It is a prerequisite for attending more closely to the labours of division that (re-)iterate their performance and the host of socio-material practices – such as property, sovereignty and identity – in which they inhere.

This book is not a lot of things. It does not espouse a particular philosophy, although its engagements and commitments position it philosophically. It is neither a complete 'thesis' nor an assembly of 'empirical' fragments, but rather an effort to germinate connections and openings that complicate this settlement. It is not a 'geography of nature' – though natures and geographies are always in play. Doubtless this list will grow as the book travels. Geography is at its most affective when, to use Homi

Bhabha's evocative phrase, the 'unhomely' stirs (1997: 445). In some sense, I owe my career as a Geographer to just such a fleeting fusion of the space-times of empire, discipline and self which occurred as I crossed the threshold between students and staff in the Geography Department at University College London.[12] That momentary slippage between worlds has shaped the kinds of geographical journeys I have sought to make ever since. But it has taken me more than a decade to venture a mode of geographical practice that holds on to this affect. It takes much of its inspiration from Game and Metcalfe's wonderful book *Passionate sociology* (1996) and its salutary immersion in life, compassionate involvement with the world and with others, and sensual and full-bodied approach to knowledge. Fleshing out a practice that shares these commitments but endeavours to enlarge the company of 'others' that they bring to notice has been a collaborative and heavily indebted activity, as is acknowledged in the preface. Not least in this company are the various 'companion-guides' (Bingham and Thrift, 2000) from Roman 'leopards' to Roundup Ready™ that I have enrolled in these journeys, as they have enrolled me in theirs. But it is also a question of style. Writing is an important part of any geographical practice (Barnes and Duncan, 1992). Indeed, as de Certeau suggests, stories *are* spatial practices that bear within them ghostly reminders of our journeying to and fro; they convey in words a sense of the body-subject occupying, inhabiting and traversing space, transforming it into places and specific presences (1988, see also Rogoff, 2000). In these essays I experiment with different ways of retaining the partiality and open-endedness of this 'to-ing and fro-ing' against the alliance of narrative and analytic conventions in social science that would forge it into completeness. 'Rather than vainly denying the living power of stories, an acknowledgement of narrative textures puts stories in their place' (Game and Metcalfe, 1996: 50).

As I hope is clear by now, the journeys undertaken here are not destined to arrive in the brave new world of a 'third nature' emerging perfectly formed from the 'machinic totality' of 'contemporary global capitalism' in which *everything* is caught up' (Luke, 1996: 11). In contrast to the universalizing ambitions of such accounts, the hybrid geographies that I work towards here are inescapably partial, provisional and incomplete. Refusing any vantage point that purports to take in the world at a glance, they are more modest in the claims they can, and want, to make and, by the same token, are more attendant to the energies of those they make claims about. Finally, such hybrid geographies work to invigorate the repertoire of practices and poetics that keep the promise of the Geographical craft alive to the creative presence of creatures and devices among us and the corporeal sensibilities of our diverse human being.

Section 1

Bewildering Spaces

> *Wild*ness (as opposed to wilderness) can be found anywhere; in the seemingly tame fields and woodlots of Massachusetts, in the cracks of a Manhattan sidewalk, even in the cells of our own bodies. (William Cronon, 1995: 89, original emphasis)

What does it mean to be 'wild' at the beginning of the twenty-first century? Everyday understandings of the 'wild' place the creatures and spaces so called outside the compass of human society. In various ways this treatment of the wild as a pristine exterior, the touchstone of an original nature, sets the parameters of contemporary environmental politics. Millennial anxieties about the seemingly limitless technological reach of human society, from global warming to genetic engineering, have shaken this framing of the wild to its core, a portent for some of 'the end of nature' (McKibben, 1989). Coming to terms with the contradictions of our own ubiquitous presence in the practices and spaces of wildlife management, tourism and multimedia, to name but a few, heralds important ethical and practical shifts in the life prospects and cultural freight of the creatures who inhabit this designation. Moreover, their import reverberates much closer to home. For at the very moment that the 'human mastery of nature' appears to have arrived, so the safety net that holds 'us' (humans) and 'them' (other animals) apart unravels as the instruments of this supposed mastery render our own species genome just one more entry in the vast informatic menagerie of life science (Cole, 1997).

The chapters in this section set out to explore the limits of these precarious geographies of wildlife, deterritorializing the creatures and spaces encapsulated by the wild to entertain more promiscuous patterns of worldly inhabitation that re-cognize its cargo of uncanny, but much less distant, kinds. Rather than an exterior world of original nature, I start with the premise that animals (and plants) designated wild have been, and continue to be, routinely caught up within multiple networks of human social life. These social orderings of animal life confound the moral geographies of wilderness which presuppose an easy co-incidence between the species and spaces of a pristine nature, confining their place

to the margins and interstices of the social world. The chapters in this section trace a more volatile and relational conception of the topologies of wildlife that configure human and animal categories and lives in intimate, if not necessarily proximate, ways.

But, as the distinguished North American environmental historian William Cronon found in response to his remarkable essay 'The trouble with wilderness' (1995), these are dangerous waters indeed.[1] To question the sanctuary of wilderness is to disturb the orthodox parameters of environmental concern and to risk the wrath of those who, bolstered by scientific and/or environmentalist credentials, have cast themselves as custodians of the wild. Thus, for example, in an environmentalist slant on the so-called 'science wars', to entertain such questions has been condemned as intellectual 'tinkering' that is 'just as destructive to nature as bulldozers and chainsaws' (Soulé and Lease, 1995: xvi). In this climate, venturing into the wild – whether in the scientific guise of the biodiversity reserve or the environmentalist guise of the sacred grove – is unavoidably bound up with passions and convictions that enmesh personal, political and professional sensibilities in potent and complex ways, including my own.

In his essay, Cronon lays bare the historical erasure of 'indigenous' peoples, both figuratively and physically, which underwrites the wilderness premise that nature, to be natural, must also be pristine. The uncomfortable burden of his argument is directed at the political discourses of (North American) environmentalism rooted in this purification of the spaces of 'nature' and 'society' (Haila, 1997).[2] These discourses span the measured tones of established conservation bodies like the Wilderness Society and Sierra Club, which combine the vocabularies of nineteenth-century nature romanticism and contemporary conservation science, and the militaristic rhetoric of a new breed of 'eco-warriors' whose stated mission is the defence of 'the big outside' (Foreman, 1981). Such discourses, Cronon argues, 'get us back to the wrong nature' (1995: 69) in the sense that they reproduce categorical binaries between society and nature, human and animal, domesticated and wild that are intellectually and politically moribund.

Playing on Thoreau's famous dictum, the opening quotation from Cronon's essay signals the importance of geographical imaginations and practices both to keeping 'nature' and 'society' in their proper place and to freeing them from this binary fix. Given the discipline's instrumental role in mapping the 'wildernesses' of European colonization (for example, Driver, 1992; Livingstone, 1992), and the currency of profoundly geographical concepts like landscape and ecology in the accounts of other disciplines today, geographers have paid remarkably little attention to wildlife (Philo, 1995).[3] Only now, with significant moves to reverse the neglect of animal life in the social sciences (for example, Arluke and