

Editors

Martin Drenthen
Institute for Science, Innovation
& Society
Radboud University Nijmegen
Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Jozef Keulartz

Philosophy Group, Wageningen University
Wageningen, The Netherlands
Institute for Science, Innovation & Society
Radboud University Nijmegen
Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Martin Drenthen • Jozef Keulartz
Editors

Old World and New World Perspectives in Environmental Philosophy

Transatlantic Conversations

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Chapter 13

The Hero, the Wolf, and the Hybrid: Overcoming the Overcoming of Uncultured Landscapes

Nathan Kowalsky

13.1 Introduction

In the past few years, my children have grown to love listening to the orchestral tone poem *Peter and the Wolf* by Sergei Prokofiev accompanied by a picture book. It has had an important pacifying effect on the kids as they repeatedly endured 600 km per day road trips through the prairie grasslands and aspen parklands of Western Canada to and from my parents' rural home. But while my children love this composition, I have come to hate it, not as a piece of music but as a piece of culture that inculcates a worldview in children – as socialization. Philosophically, it is emblematic of why the putatively non-dualistic “Old World” view of cultured landscapes is not a viable alternative to the dualistic, “New World” view of wilderness. I propose an alternative derived from a cultural landscape activity which is familiar to both contexts: hunting. Hunting is a landscape culture that can allow humans to interact with while not dominating what we call wilderness.

13.2 Rural Landscapes as “Cultural” Landscapes

Any environmental ethic is informed by an underlying model which outlines how nature and culture relate. Contemporary thinking about nature remains dominated by the North American concept of wilderness as defined and reified by the national parks system of the United States. This standard model sees “nature” in its truest form as “wilderness,” that which is defined as lying outside human culture. However, this so-called received notion of wilderness has come under criticism by a diverse

N. Kowalsky (✉)
St. Joseph's College, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada
e-mail: nek@ualberta.ca

range of Anglo-American philosophers. In general, the criticism is that wilderness conceptually and literally *excludes* human presence and especially human activity from nature.

J. Baird Callicott argues that there is no fundamental distinction between humanity and nature. In his words, "human works are no less natural than those of termites or elephants. Chicago is no less a phenomenon of nature than is the Great Barrier Reef..." (Callicott 1992, 18). Indeed, even aboriginal peoples modify their environments, and besides, contemporary civilizations have already polluted every last square inch of the planet anyway.¹ Furthermore, very few contemporary societies have access to anything like wilderness. One reason for environmental philosophy to move beyond the wilderness ideal, then, could be that most people can relate to rural landscapes.

Val Plumwood (1998, 666) repudiates Callicott's "wilderness skepticism" and asserts a continuum between the dualistic poles of (pure) nature and (pure) culture to allow a variety of hybrids in the middle, thus valuing both reformed urban living and unoccupied wild spaces. By contrast, Donna Haraway's theory of hybridity is opposed to any semblance of hegemonic organicism. She explicitly embraces "illegitimate fusions of animal and machine", going so far as to advocate "'technological' pollution" (Haraway 1991, 174, 176). Underneath all these monisms and hybrids lies the assumption that "pure" wilderness is not human, and that urban sedentism characterizes human culture *per se*.

Given that Europe almost completely lacks wildernesses and so only has primarily rural landscapes with which to interact, perhaps an Old World perspective can provide a more *inclusive* model of the humanity-nature interface that concretely builds on hybridity's critique of wilderness without falling into cyborgism or the baptism of pollution. The European environmental philosopher Martin Drenthen has written extensively on both wilderness and the application of landscape hermeneutics to contemporary environmental issues in the Netherlands. He speaks eloquently of "traditional" Dutch agricultural landscapes, which can be read as texts that tell us how the people there have dialogued with the land. He says, "In this ancient, small scale landscape, culture and nature merged more or less organically into a meaningful whole, where biodiversity and cultural diversity go together" (Drenthen 2009a, 290). Speaking more generally, traditional European agricultural landscapes can be understood as *cultural* landscapes, hybrids of human artifice and the nature that lies beneath.

Drenthen argues that human place attachments to outdoor landscapes derive from *lived engagement* with a particular and significant location. Non-traditional and industrialized monocultures reflect the modernist conception of neutral "space" as an empty abstraction, whereas Old World rural landscapes embody the value-laden conception of "place" because of their meaningful attachments with real people. Meadows, fields, polders and even villages reflect an attuned interaction and blending between human culture and the environment of which it is a part. It is this delicate conversation between humanity and nature which the landscape interpreter learns to read; by contrast, the unending suburbs of my Canadian city offer virtually no reason to consider how human culture might be fruitfully and symbiotically integrated with more natural elements.

¹ Callicott's second point follows McKibben (1988); cf. Callicott 2002, 301.

But wilderness still lies outside either of these models of humanity-nature interaction, the only difference perhaps being the quantity of wilderness or near wilderness in Europe as opposed to North America. The Low Countries are perhaps unique in that ecological restoration very often involves *rewilding* previously de-wilded, rural landscapes. Willem Van Toorn worried that this would make the traditional Dutch landscape just as illegible as an indiscriminate monoculture, but Drenthen argues that these restored landscapes still contain features that can be interpreted hermeneutically (Drenthen 2011, 128). And yet (originally? fully?) *wild* landscapes do not appear to be legible for Drenthen. As soon as we read them, they cease to be wild, because wildness lies outside human symbolic appropriation both literally and conceptually. It is that which precedes legibility, that which is not appropriated and yet must be appropriated, which is why our contemporary desire to experience it 'in the raw' is profoundly ironic: "in our postmodern age, we seem to have become too self aware and too aware of the contingency of each particular appropriation of nature. Postmodern wilderness desire could be a symptom of this nihilistic self-awareness: we long for something that is not interpretation because we seem to lack a culture of nature – are not at ease in any cultivation of the world" (*ibid.*, 134).² This wildness for which we long is, for Drenthen, the uncultural and the uninterpreted, a longing that cannot be fully satisfied because all meanings are cultivated cultural interpretations. Drenthen is speaking about hermeneutic cultivation, but as I shall argue below, this hermeneutic closely parallels the logic of *literal* rural hybridity: culture and nature are defined in mutually exclusive terms, cultivation is the paradigm of human activity, and such appropriation is seen as an intrinsically dewilding force. The "unbridgeable gap between nature and ourselves" refers not only to the extra-discursive as such, but also the inability of postmodern human beings to literally be at home in the literal wilderness. That is, the "sense of alienation that is presupposed in the concept of wilderness" reflects the equation between tilling the soil and cultural significance that is reified in the traditional European landscape (Drenthen 2009b, 313, 314).

13.3 Peter and the Wolf

Drenthen says that he is not articulating his own nature-culture metaphysics so much as the understanding implicit in existing, everyday Dutch conceptions of nature, culture and wilderness – and then working towards ultimately transcending those categories. This is a valuable method and goal, and my point is not to criticise Drenthen so much as to illuminate precisely these everyday categories as "Old World". Dutch landscape hybridity is a logic which entails a notion of wilderness as

² Drenthen notes here that his understanding of wilderness is developed in earlier writings (Drenthen 1999, 2005, 2007), but its implications for landscape hermeneutics and the illegibility of wild places (spaces?) were drawn out in more detail in an earlier version of this paper presented at the Sixth Annual Joint Environmental Philosophy Meeting, Allenspark, Colorado, USA, 17 June 2009.

unculturable and thus exclusive of humans – that is, the very received notion of wilderness which a European appreciation of cultural landscape was supposed to free us from! If there are “cultured” landscapes, it is necessary that we posit “uncultured” landscapes as well. While wilderness environmentalism tries to overcome the devaluation of nature by inverting the dichotomy, hybridity environmentalism tries to overcome wilderness environmentalism by prioritizing the dewilding of nature achieved by agriculturing. Moreover, the dialectical nature of wilderness’ necessary entanglement in hybridity is value-laden; to be “uncultured” is to be inaccessible, unattainable and ultimately inappropriate for meaningful human dwelling. *Humans cannot belong in wilderness either conceptually or literally*, and so the logic of cultural landscapes prevents human beings from being a part of (this kind of) nature just as much as the received notion of wilderness does. The Old World approach to wild nature is just as exclusionary as the New World approach.

The orchestral tone poem *Peter and the Wolf* by the Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev supplements this notion of cultural landscape with what we might call “traditional European ecological knowledge.” His work is useful because it tells us what Old World and New World Europeans already “know” about humanity, hybridity and wildness – and this folk knowledge, deeply ingrained in mainstream thinking about nature and inadvertently perpetuated by environmental philosophers, is interventionist and not at all conducive to wildlife and habitat conservation.

Peter and the Wolf tells the tale of a brave boy named Peter who ventures out of the confines of his walled yard into a meadow, despite the warnings of his grandfather about the dangers of wolves. Of course a wolf does emerge from the forest but Peter – with the help of several animal friends – is clever enough to capture the wolf and march it triumphantly into town (he takes it to the zoo).

The story is organized around three locales or places: the domicile, the meadow and the forest. First, the *domicile* is secured by a wall and a gate, dramatically separating the sphere of humanity and safety from the realms beyond. Second, the *meadow* is the stereotypical European rural landscape: bucolic, pastoral, and a dwelling place of friendly animals (the songbird). It is an intermediate place, a blend between the confines of domesticity and nature in the raw. Third, there is the looming presence of the *forest*, the unhybridized, uncultured landscape which lies at the edges of the meadow and out of which emerge dangerous wild animals and savage humans who hunt.³ The forest is not an intermediate place, but a place beyond the edges of comprehension where no culture (worthy of the name) can exist (see Harrison 1992).

These three place settings correspond to the three classes of human characters. The hero of the hybrid zone is obviously Peter. He communicates with friendly wild animals (the songbird), protects them from unfriendly domestic predators (the cat), is unafraid of wild predators (the wolf), and is repeatedly described as *clever*. The heroic character cannot remain constrained by the domestic stronghold. The grandfather, however, is no hero, but a benighted, fearful and weak farmer who avoids the

³“Savage” is an etymological derivative of *silvaticus*, or forest-dweller.

danger of the hybrid zone by remaining in his environmentally gated community.⁴ Nevertheless he is relieved and impressed by Peter’s clever solution to the problem posed by the wolf, once he overcomes his anger at Peter’s disobedience. He takes up the rear in Peter’s triumphal procession. Finally, the hunters are forest dwellers and portrayed as non-heroic fools; they follow the wolf’s trail within the forest, eventually tracking it to Peter’s meadow. They discharge their firearms the entire time which, of course, is not a good way to sneak up on an intelligent wild animal. Peter enjoins them to not shoot the wolf, and so they march directly behind Peter and help him take it to the zoo.

The four nonhuman animal characters, meanwhile, are combinations of two sets of distinction: wild vs. domesticated, and carnivorous vs. (functionally) herbivorous.⁵ The songbird is herbivorous and the only native dweller of the hybrid zone. Even though it is a wild animal, it helps the hero outsmart the wolf. It sings Peter’s praises (and its own) in the final procession. The duck, though herbivorous, is domesticated and thus comical and pathetic. It is usually confined to the gated domicile, and is mocked by the songbird because its wings are clipped. Its inability to fly leads to the wolf eating it. The cat, because it is domesticated, also dwells in the domestic stronghold, but as a carnivore, is sly and stealthy, trying (comically and pathetically) to catch and eat the songbird. It accompanies the peasant Grandfather at the rear of the procession. The wolf, of course, is both wild and a carnivore, and we *know* what that means: “big, gray, ... wicked, greedy”, and angry.⁶ Impressively, all it takes is a single gulp to swallow the duck whole, but thankfully the hero and his wild herbivore friend are ultimately more clever than the wolf.

Prokofiev’s inhabited locations are instructive because they remind us that the “cultured” landscape is dialectically related to the uncultured landscape of the wild forest, even if hardly any traces of the latter remain in Europe. The hybrid landscape is thus defined in opposition to the “pure” uncultured wilderness because the former is literally constructed by “clearing” the latter. While Prokofiev is unaware of this dialectical relation, Drenthen (2005) recognizes wilderness as a “border concept”. On the one hand, he rejects traditional landscape conservatism and defends ecological restoration projects that “rewild” rural Dutch landscapes. “New wildernesses” can uncover prehuman landscapes which can nonetheless be significant for human beings (Drenthen 2009a, 294). Drenthen suggests that we should have a multi-layered understanding of a meaningful landscape, where both human or cultural and nonhuman or natural layers are integrated into a co-authored whole. Yet on the other hand, wilderness can only be a border concept *if* it is seen as an uncultured place where

⁴In English, a *boor* is not clever but a “rustic ill-mannered fellow”, a pejorative term derived from the more neutral Dutch word *boer*, for “farmer” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, s.v. “boor”).

⁵Technically ducks and most songbirds are omnivores, but because – like seeds and nuts – insects shed no blood, Prokofiev’s neat categorizations and contrasts present both birds as trophically benign in contradistinction to carnivores.

⁶Prokofieff (1961). This book does not have page numbers, but I understand its English text to be a close translation of the Russian original.

human beings cannot be at home – except in an ironic sense, where our own alienation from nature is at home in the alien wild (ibid., 303).

These two European perspectives share the view that wild places lack culture and are in a sense inhuman, even though for Drenthen this is paradoxical and tragic whereas for Prokofiev it is unremarkable. On further examination, it also becomes clear that they both assume that human culture entails a violent confrontation with the uncultured Other. For Prokofiev, this is seen in the conflict with the wolf. The nature-culture blending which constitutes the hybrid meadow is profoundly asymmetrical. While the meadow is depicted as an harmonious playground where Peter, the duck, the songbird and the cat all comically interact, this cultured landscape is a vulnerable human construct that lies outside the garden walls. All who enter the hybrid zone are in danger of being eaten by the wolf who is also free to invade and violate it. The duck, because it has been domesticated by human design, is a (putatively) harmonious nature-culture hybrid constructed by humans. But being domesticated, the duck lacks the ability to defend itself, requiring it to remain behind the gated walls like Peter's timid peasant family or, if it wanders into the liminal meadow, leaving it profoundly vulnerable to the powers of unbridled nature embodied by the wolf. The wolf, being wild, untamed and thus uncultured, is viewed as an intruder in the hybrid realm because of the threat it poses to this "domestic order" (Kover 2009).

Peter, by contrast, is no threat to the hybrid landscape but rather its heroic master; the human *owns* the cultural landscape by virtue of its having been cultured by humans. Peter is presented as transgressing the nature-culture binary, being neither constrained by walls nor afraid of the wolf. Though he is unable to prevent the wolf from eating the defenceless duck, he utilizes the help of the undomesticated songbird to protect the domestic cat by capturing the wolf through trickery. In a move reminiscent of Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Peter does not descend into the animality of the hunters who, by wishing to kill the wolf, would be mimicking the wolf's own bloodthirstiness. Rather, the true hero maintains rational distance from nature's (putatively) "pure" form by refusing to kill the wolf. Peter outsmarts it, tying it up and triumphantly parading it to the zoo. For Prokofiev, then, the very essence of wild nature is a threat to human culture per se, and the solution to this problem is to construct and defend a harmonious hybridization and *taming* of nature while paradoxically trying *not* to imitate nature's own dominating and threatening wildness.

Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) recognize this logic as self-defeating, because it solves the problem of being dominated by the Other by dominating the Other in turn. Drenthen is attuned to this irony: even though he sees harmony and symbiosis as the goals of his landscape hermeneutic, he uses the language of domination to describe those cultural landscapes characterised by human cultivation and domestication – i.e., traditional agriculture:

By showing how the landscape must have been like before humans dominated the landscape and releasing the natural forces that early inhabitants had to deal with, we can deepen the scope of our sense of place...In the history of human cultivation and domestication of the landscape, people almost always were aware of the difference between cultural landscapes

and "pure" nature...Nature development could give us a sense of how the natural world would have looked like if humans would not dominate the scene – it could help us regain a sense of what is "normal" and "in tune" and what isn't (Drenthen 2009a, 293–295, 303).

He goes on to acknowledge "the actual "detached" or "alienated" relation we have with the land" which Peter does not realise he has (ibid., 302).

Being more clever than Prokofiev's hero, Drenthen takes this dominating alienation from the land as his starting point for interpreting rewilded landscapes: wilderness is a non-place which excludes human beings and human culture, but is eminently fitting to us postmoderns who cannot feel authentically at home in any place at all. Moreover, postmoderns know that the a-cultural and symbolically empty wilderness is an artificial construct which mirrors their own alienation from nature, reflexively confirming the assumption that nature is meaningful or pleasurable only when it has been placed under rational control.⁷

13.4 The Metaphysics of the Barnyard

What we find, then, is that these Old World perspectives reinforce rather than escape the oppositional logic of the nature-culture dichotomy and the received notion of wilderness as exclusionary, uncultured and inhuman. The "unruly" and uncultured forest wilderness lurks in the shadows cast by the traditional European landscape, which is a hybridity enforced by human heroism that views the Other-than-culture as a threat (Drenthen 2009a, 305). Both the received notion of wilderness and European approaches to hybridity say that human beings cannot belong in wilderness. The only substantive difference between the two is that the former prioritizes human exclusive landscapes for (putatively) nonanthropocentric reasons, while the latter prioritizes agricultural landscapes (and possibly urban landscapes as well). Both the Old World and New World approaches have yet to overcome the problem of alienation or exclusion from nature lamented by the critics of the received notion of wilderness.

I suggest that the way out of this conundrum starts with paying closer attention to two of Drenthen's own remarks. Doing so, moreover, will rescue the figure of the hunter from Prokofiev's derision. First, consider the semantic range of Drenthen's landscape hermeneutics: the cultural appropriation of nature is conceptually equivalent to dewilding, cultivation, domestication and domination. I argue that we must not understand "domination" and its hermeneutic analogues in a value-neutral way, but critically consider the actual practices from which these concepts derive. Both domestication and domination share an etymological root: to domesticate is literally to "house-train" (from *domus*, domicile) whereas domination derives from the *dominus*, the master or lord of the household. Animals are obviously not landscapes,

⁷"Of course, one could argue that the idea of these places somehow represent the not-yet-symbolised is itself another symbolised meaning, but whether that paradox will prove to be a killing objection is yet an open question" (Drenthen 2009a, 303).

but domestication is best understood via the familiar figure of the domesticated animal. Speaking from the ostensibly value-neutral perspective of scientific description, Jared Diamond (1997, 159) defines a domesticated animal as one “selectively bred in captivity and thereby modified from its wild ancestors, for use by humans who control the animal’s breeding and food supply. That is, domestication involves wild animals’ being transformed into something more useful to humans.” In terms familiar to environmental ethics, domestication is simply reified anthropocentrism. Indeed, Holmes Rolston, III (1992, 271) notes that from the “wilder perspective the domesticated is the degraded” (cf. Rolston III, 1988, 78–79). Paul Shepard goes further, arguing that the domestication of animals was not a covenant freely entered into by both parties, and in fact results in the non-symbiotic, genetically crippled slavery of animals (Shepard 1993, 285–287; 1982, 38; 1992, 74). In his words, domestication is a failure to “respect...the other on its own terms” (Shepard 1993, 287).

“Cultured” animals – domesticated hybrids of “nature” and “culture” – are thus morally suspect rather than benign, for they raise the spectre of the domination of alterity by a human self. Furthermore, “uncultured” animals fare rather badly according to the logic of domesticated domination – case in point, Peter’s treatment of the wolf! Peter, the hero who dwells fearlessly in the hybrid landscape, treats the wolf as a threat to be contained because it is a wild carnivore which cannot be domesticated (unlike the duck and the cat) and endangers the domestic order (the duck, the songbird, the grandfather and Peter himself). The wolf must be dominated because hybridity simply cannot tolerate organisms that will not or cannot be hybridized.⁸ At the same time we must realize that hybridity avoids killing wild animals *so that* they may be dominated: Peter refuses to kill the wolf not only because doing so would implicate him in the wolf’s dominating logic of wild predation, but also because one cannot be master and commander of a dead animal.⁹ Only the living can be controlled. The ethics of hybridity are thus the ethics of castration and the cage. At the individual level, at least, hybridity is domination, either by genetic enslavement or simple incarceration, and so cannot be assumed to be morally unremarkable.

Second, recall Drenthen’s suggestion that the concept of wilderness as uncultured and inhuman is a contingent *social construction*. Indeed it is! But this means not only that so-called wild landscapes are epistemically cultured, but also that they are metaphysically cultured. Noble savage debunkers will always remind us that even non-agricultural aboriginal peoples actively maintained ecosystems to ensure preferred conditions – e.g. through burning (Day 1953; Kay 1994; Lewis 1995; Nadasdy 2005). Far too much hay is made of this point, however. Rolston argues convincingly that “there is no reason to think that the Indians by deliberate fire policy really modified the regional grasslands ecology of the vast American West” (Rolston III, 1994, 190). Foraging cultures rather alter their environments in

⁸Diamond (1997, 168) also notes that only fourteen of the world’s 148 “big terrestrial herbivorous mammals” are suitable for domestication.

⁹And so, according to Adorno and Horkheimer (1997), Enlightenment seeks to overcome domination by dominating it, and thus never escaping (what it thinks is) the barbarity of nature.

ways that mimic prior ecosystemic processes (e.g., lightening lit grassland fires), on the apparent assumption that wild nature already possesses an order of its own which humans may or may not align themselves. All lifeforms alter their environments, humans included, but *being human is not dependent on altering the environment in an agricultural way*.

Indeed, human cultures have flourished within cultured wildernesses for at least 90 % of our species’ timeline, and the reason why they no longer do so in North American parks is because they were forcibly evicted in the twentieth century to more accurately reify the acultural ideal of uninhabited wilderness (Spence 1999). Wildernesses cannot be exclusive of humans because *humans live(d) there*. It is rather inhuman to take humans out of wilderness! To understand “wilderness-as-inhuman” as a social construction made possible by European imperialism means that, at the bare minimum, *wilderness is not inhuman, uncultured or inhospitable to human dwelling*. Of course, it has been the time-honoured practice of agrarian peoples throughout history to view “humans outside the boundaries of one’s community ... as chaotic and evil ... less than human [and] essentially feral and immoral” (Kover 2008; paraphrasing Sanday 1988, 83–87). This is why the word “savage” (forest dweller) has taken on such a pejorative connotation in (so-called) civilized societies, even though it is obviously false that humans who live in wildernesses are not also fully human, cultural and social beings. Being agricultural or urban (i.e., civilized, from *civitas*) is not a necessary condition of being human or cultural. A wilderness (conceptually or literally) lacking hunter-gatherers is a colonialist, racist and misanthropic social construction which cannot simply be accepted as a *fait accompli*.

At the very least, then, to call a traditionally agricultural landscape a “cultural” landscape is a misnomer, because doing so implies that other cultural landscapes – in this case, wildernesses – are not cultural. And yet the fact that wildernesses *are* (can be) cultured human homelands does not change the fact that they differ significantly from traditionally agricultural landscapes. Just as the existence of twilight does not make the concepts of “day” and “night” hopelessly problematic, there is no reason to reject a vernacular semantics which sees that forager managed landscapes are “wild” while the landscapes remade by agriculture are not (Plantinga 2000, 202).¹⁰

Moreover, as Drenthen (2009b) argues elsewhere, some appropriations of nature are more appropriate than others. Therefore, not all cultured landscapes are equal; domesticated landscapes should not be uncritically accepted any more than domesticated animals. Recall that Drenthen speaks of dominated landscapes in terms of *cultivation* or tillage. While the word “cultivated” is often used as a synonym for intelligence, this not only carries forth the racist presuppositions of agrarian rationality but also fails to see agriculture in anything other than environmentally benign terms. But an agricultural landscape is one where the soil has been “worked,” where the native foliage cover has been removed. I have in mind here what Colin Tudge calls arable farming: “breaking the soil in an entire field as a preliminary, removing the natural flora, and beginning with a *tabula rasa*” (Tudge 1998, 6).

¹⁰Paraphrasing Dr. Samuel Johnson. See also, Felipe Fernández-Armesto (2007, 37) for more on the comparison between the effects of foraging and farming on the landscape.

The same can be said, in general, of stick hole horticulture and nomadic pastoralist grazing, namely that “Farmers seek to influence the environment, to manipulate it, in ways that increase the amount of food that is available and consumable” for and by humans and their livestock (ibid., 5). Agriculture is thus a reified anthropocentric reorganization of the landscape.

So while it is a false dichotomy to distinguish agricultural from wild landscapes on the basis of unpredicated “culture,” the real differences between these two broad forms of landscape must be accounted for in terms of predicated and thus *different kinds of culture*. So-called hybrid landscapes are *produced* by agrarian cultures which “clear” the land, “break” the sod, introduce domesticated plants and animals, and then defend those dominated lifeforms by weeding (the removal of recurrent, often indigenous plants), irrigating (in case the weather does not “cooperate” with agrarian construction), and predator “control” (the elimination of “vermin,” like the extirpation of wolves). Shepard (1999a, 118–119, 125–127, 129–130) thus argues that agriculture entails ecological degradation and anthropocentric lordship. This is seen not only in the relatively recent “dust bowls” of the North American Great Plains, but also the domesticated sheep and goats which denude uncultivated land causing both the erosion of Eurasian uplands lamented as long ago as Plato (*Critias* 110e–111d), and the deceptively peaceful blanket of turf which covers the ruined cultures and ecosystems beneath. Domestication’s domination of wild species is a necessary condition for agriculture’s domination of wild landscapes, leading Dean Freudenberger to call agriculture “the most environmentally abusive activity perpetuated by the human species” (Freudenberger 1987; cited in Shepard 1992, 57). Even Drenthen (2009b, 314) will say that the notion of wilderness as inhuman conceptual void is a projection of the alienated postmodern self, and not of “most native peoples living in fairly natural environments.”

Making the full case for agricultural hybridity as environmental domination is outside the scope of this paper, but it may help to simply consider the following photograph (Fig. 13.1) of a traditional European agricultural landscape in the islands of the Azores.

The Azores, settled by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century, look the way they do now not simply because humans colonized them, but because the colonists were *farmers*. The islands would look much different had the colonists been and remained foragers; i.e., they would appear much the same as the “nature reserves” on the islands presently do. If we ask who or what is the lord of this landscape, or who or what is the source of its order, the answer is not *simply* “humanity” or “culture,” but rather the contingent and constructed culture of domestication.

It appears that traditional European cultured landscapes are *literally* as Drenthen’s conceptual language suggests: a peace enforced by anthropocentric domination to the genetic and ecological detriment of so-called uncultured landscapes, animals (including people) and plants. But we shouldn’t focus on actual subsistence practices to the exclusion of hermeneutics, because agricultural civilization brings with it its own deep-seated and often incognito conceptual categories: a domesticated metaphysic. We have already seen how the city and cultivation become the veritable *terms* of moral and intellectual virtue, but even conceptualisation itself becomes understood



Fig. 13.1 Terceira Island, the Azores, Portugal (Copyright 2011 by Nathan Kowalsky)

in terms of domination – as if there were no way to understand the other without violating its otherness. Meaning *must* be an anthropocentric projection, if “culture” is defined in terms of domestication and tillage. And yet many recent Continental philosophers are attempting to do philosophy outside this history of philosophy, to understand conceptualization outside the framework of intellectual mastery. We might do well to understand Derrida’s *différance* or Marion’s icon as attempts to break free of the metaphysics imposed by the “physics” of agriculture.

Whence this metaphysic? The sharp conceptual distinction between wild and tame only arises in a context where landscapes, animals or plants have already been dominated by domestication and agriculture. According to T.R. Kover (2008, 236), agriculture “depends on a decisive separation between the natural and the human world, a state in which the former is seen as completely compliant with human ends and needs and the latter is seen as defiant and antagonistic to the natural world”. Agriculturally dominated landscapes are not only clearly different from wild landscapes, they must be *made* to be different *against* the resistance of the landscape to that form of culturing. Gardens do not come easy, nor does clearing, groundbreaking or other forms of earthmoving.¹¹ Moreover, as we have seen with Prokofiev’s

¹¹This is not to say that some forms of gardening or agriculture are less out of step with the original recalcitrance of the land than are other forms of gardening or agriculture. Cf. Glenn Deliége’s contribution to this volume.

wolf vs. duck, undomesticated wild life becomes a literal threat to stunted and vulnerable domesticated lifeforms.¹² Wild nature is a genuine economic threat to agriculture because domestication makes animals and plants vulnerable (placing them in pens, removing many of their defence mechanisms). Therefore, humans *create* a situation where they are forced to defend these relatively helpless lifeforms against what would otherwise be perfectly normal ecological interaction. This constructed economic opposition to wild nature produces a more general sense of nature-culture opposition which becomes a full-blown cosmology, a metaphysics of the barnyard.¹³ Barnyards and fields – i.e., hybrid, “cultural” landscapes – *must* be defended against encroachment by the wild. No wonder “pure” nature is so inhuman, so meaningless! The socially constructed view of wilderness as antithetical to human culture which both Drenthen and Prokofiev take for granted is an artifact of the domination of nature. Rather than providing an alternative to the received notion of wilderness, using traditional European agricultural landscape hybridity as a model for environmental ethics produces the idea that the purpose of human culture is to outsmart nature so that it becomes our slave before the inverse happens.

13.5 Hunting as a Non-dominating Landscape Culture

It is incumbent upon environmental ethics, therefore, to decouple its conceptions of both human culture and wild nature from the urban-rural categories of agricultural civilization (“nature” is not “out to get us”). Doing so leaves us with the notion of a wild yet cultured landscape inhabited by non-agriculturalists unashamed by their mimicry of wild nature. If all claims about nature are inevitably cultural and no (ostensibly) “pure” wilderness can exist, then what we may continue to call wilderness must be reconceptualised as an appropriate dwelling place for human beings – even if no such realm exists in any significant quantity in Europe. We should not fail to attend to human cultures (past or present) which subsist in ways that leave wildernesses uncultivated, because such forms of life evidently do not possess social logics which encourage nature-culture dualism.

Second, if hybridity or landscape hermeneutics are to provide any critical perspective on the ecological crisis still facing us after fifty years of environmentalism, they will have to start articulating *which* landscapes are appropriate or non-dominating, and which ones are not. Rather than point at all the ways in which nature is cultural,

¹² “[N]ot only does the wild serve no discernible advantage for the farmer and for agrarian societies in general, but it seems to actively hinder and undermine ... the domestic human order” (Kover 2008, 240; cf. Shepard 1982, 23, 28, 35).

¹³ I owe this turn of phrase to T.R. Kover, who in turn derived it from Paul Shepard’s treatment of “the ethic of the barnyard.” See Kover (2012); Shepard (1999b, 60–61); and Shepard (1967, 190–205). To our knowledge, Shepard did not articulate his ethic of the barnyard as a metaphysics *per se*.

we should be trying to find out how our cultures can be natural! Europeans could do worse in this regard than consider the figure of European hunters, especially when plebeian rather than aristocratic, who are not at all the barbaric buffoons Prokofiev makes them out to be. More at home when in the out of doors, the “men in green” constitute a culture of the wild who transgress the binaries implicit in traditional rural landscapes even while coexisting with them out of necessity. I propose, therefore, the taskscape of hunting (or gathering or foraging) as an alternative to the heroic barnyard mastery of unruly nature.

Hunting, however, is a profound enigma to the agricultural mind. By the standards of laborious serfdom, foragers are as the lilies of the field – they neither toil nor spin. Indeed, the etymological root of “culture” is *cultus*, or work – and through agricultural eyes hunting is not work, leading both to resentment and the derision of hunter-gatherers as lazy. In mainstream environmentalism there is profound ambivalence (if not antipathy) towards hunting and, in especially critical animal studies, toward predation itself.¹⁴ Our culture routinely labels sex offenders as “predators.” The metaphysics of the barnyard inevitably conceive of predation as a threat, and indeed death itself is worse within the context of agriculture than without. Unmastered death – i.e., when the farmer does not freely kill her animals or plants – phenomenologically steals property from the farmer, her “live-stock” and the hard-won investment of time and labour that veritably sustain her own life. Death is not just an existential or philosophical enigma for the agriculturalist, but a thief emerging from the realm of uncultured chaos apparently aiming to deprive the domestic order of all that it has worked so hard to heroically master.

Not only do hunters kill animals, moreover, they kill animals *like animals*. Prokofiev mocks hunters for mimicking predation, and Adorno and Horkheimer view mimesis of nature as unenlightened because it means surrendering to nature’s domination of us. Hunting’s intimate involvement with pain and death is why it looks like obvious savagery and (illegitimate) domination to the Enlightened spectator, all the more so when it is practiced recreationally instead of by “necessity.” Besides, mimicking wild nature smacks of Social Darwinism. However, these complaints can only be advanced within the confines of the metaphysics of the barnyard. Lewis Mumford (1934, 186–187) argues that Social Darwinism does not derive from evolutionary theory so much as assume a picture of nature skewed by the projection of Victorian industrial malaise onto the nonhuman world. To think that hunting surrenders to nature’s domination of the self-made self assumes that wild nature is indeed an inhuman chaotic threat, and thus “a false attribution of civilized problems on to the ‘savage’, a projection by the suffering, civilized mind” (Shepard 1993, 295). There is nothing wrong with acting “like animals” unless by that we mean acting like genetically stunted and socially caged barnyard slaves or the vermin that threaten the same. Put simply, hunting cannot be made sense of in terms of agrarian hybridity because it fits into *neither* the category of domestic reason *nor*, truth be told, the category of the inhospitable wild antithesis to “humanity”.

¹⁴ E.g., Varner (1995); Cowen (2003); Nussbaum and Faralli (2007); Raterman (2008); as opposed to Callicott (1980); Hettinger (1994); Kover (2010).

As to the landscape, there is no need to belabour the point that hunting has no need of ecological reordering for it to succeed. It generally takes the landscape as a given and operates therein, which is why it can occur equally well on agricultural lands and their fringes as in robust wilderness areas (if legally permitted). Hunting as a landscape practice is far and away more mimetic of the phenomenologically prior natural order than are agriculturings; no "clearing" is required. In terms of Rolston's environmental ethic, hunting will follow nature "homeostatically" because it does not compromise the systemic integrity of the landbase's processes – unless of course it is practised without regard for a species' capacity for regeneration.

In terms of hermeneutics, however, I am struck by the slogan found on the label of Jägermeister liquor bottles: "Das ist des Jägers Ehrenschild, daß er beschützt und hegt sein Wild, weidmännlich jagt, wie sich's gehört, den Schöpfer im Geschöpfe ehrt." The sign of the hunter's honour is that he protects and preserves the game animal, hunts like a dweller of the forest to which he belongs, and honours the Creator in creatures – what mystery is this? Where is the domination of nature? *In spite of* the agricultural mastery of the European (and indeed global) landscape, something survives in the Weidmensch which anthropologists recognize about forager cultures – that their form of subsistence does not encourage the view that hunting or culture is dominion, but rather *exchange* between humans and other animals who have *their own* cultures (Kover 2008, 238). Richard Nelson suggests that animal others are viewed as more intelligent than human beings: "A Koyukon elder, who took it upon himself to be my teacher, was fond of telling me: 'Each animal knows way more than you do.' He spoke as if it summarized all that he understood and believed. This statement epitomizes relationships to the natural world among many Native American people" (Nelson 1993, 108). From an Anishinabe perspective, the human ability to hunt is seen as a result of our being instructed in the pathways of life by the wild animals that precede and environ us: "In the end, Nathan 'the hunter' came to understand hunting through the skills and abilities gifted to him by the very creatures he was hunting – gifts which he remained ever grateful for..." (Wawatie and Pyne 2010, 104; cf. also 96–98). Rather than viewing wild animals as oppositional threats, hunter-gatherers delicately navigate animal otherness through ritualistic ties of respect: "there is no vague 'identity with nature', but rather a lifelong task of formulating – and internalizing – treaties of affiliation" (Shepard 1982, 34).¹⁵ Hunting does not encourage a view of wilderness as an empty, inhospitable wasteland, but rather as a home shared with a wide range of nonhumans possessing orders all their own.

The surprising irony, then, is that agriculture can be accurately understood as forcibly making nature "one" with the civilized conception of humanity, whereas hunting as a landscape culture recognizes the legitimacy of wild nature's meaningful,

¹⁵ Shepard (1993, 289–290) also notes that these treaty relationships were always understood metaphorically, but that animal domestication collapsed the distinction between literal and figurative. I would suggest this as another reason why Social Darwinism can only arise within an agricultural context.

transcendent and non-adversarial alterity within which humanity finds its fit.¹⁶ As Kover puts it, "far from the foraging mind seeing itself at one with its environment, the domesticated mind appears to want to make its environment at one with it."¹⁷ Speaking of my own experience of hunting in both Canada and Germany, I know that I must treat the animal I seek as intelligent, on the lookout for my presence, and exceedingly capable of avoiding my presence. The animal can be found only by my being-as-nothing (hiding and waiting) or by interpreting signs (tracking and stalking), because it has not been locked within an enclosure (French for "farm" is *ferme*). If the animal is found (and often it is not), I can take my shot (itself no guarantee) only if it presents itself to me in a particular manner – by not discovering me, staying in range, and turning to the broadside. None of this is within my control. Indeed, I have spent what felt like hours in a Hochsitz veritably begging the animal to not only appear, but to approach through the fields in the way that I needed it to. And even when I have succeeded in killing the animal, I know that even in that moment I have not captured it, for the dead body is only a trace, not the thing-in-itself. At every step the prey is elusive rather than mastered, enchanting and sobering all the way.

Attending to wild animals in this way places me within the circles in which they move; hunters must ignore many of the boundaries set by agrarian reordering (fences, hedges, ditches, roads – to say nothing of disinterested spectatorship), because that's what their prey do. Rolston says that cultures which follow nature "tutorially" possess a sense of place and belonging *in* nature, and we have seen hunting to be structurally at home in even wild nature. I credit hunting with the zealous place attachment I have to the shortgrass prairies of southeastern Alberta, the home of my upbringing and my undying desire. Moreover, following nature "axiologically" includes participating in natural values so as to know them firsthand, much like what Alan Holland and Simon James suggest about gardening in this volume. But as Rolston says, "[i]n ways that mere watchers of nature can never know, hunters know their ecology"; the natural axiology known by gardening is not the same as the one found in the ancient forest or the great plains. (Rolston III 1988, 92; cf. Kellert 1978, 422). Indeed, Adrian Franklin argues that "hunting and fishing provide an absorbing and exciting sensual engagement with the natural world and frame what hunters and anglers see as an alternative environmentalism, with humans *in* the landscape, not skirting nervously around its edges as 'organized tourists'" (Franklin 2001, 75). Stereotypical "red-neck" hunters (like the cartoon character Elmer Fudd) may embody Prokofiev's stereotypes, but the logic of hunting is more revealing when we step away from the logic of the barnyard.

¹⁶ I offer one caveat here: there is a form of hunting which intentionally pursues "dangerous game", such as grizzly bears, lions or Cape buffalo. Theodore Vitali (2010, 24) notes that "[i]n this model, the hunted animal is perceived as a threat to the hunter and thus the hunter-hunted relationship is viewed as mortal combat in which there is parity of danger: for one or the other, the outcome will be final."

¹⁷ T.R. Kover, e-mail message to author, 6 December 2011.

13.6 Conclusion

Hunting likely sounds too unfamiliar, anthropological and distant in both time and space to have any relevance to environmental debates in the Old World. But it is not. For example, I understand that hunting is not permitted in the Oostvaardersplassen, although some culling is permitted to mitigate the suffering of large herbivores which would otherwise starve to death.¹⁸ This indicates, first of all, that hunting culture is not foreign to the Netherlands, even though it may be infected by aristocratic or agricultural assumptions (as it is all over the world). Second, hunting appears to be excluded from the Oostvaardersplassen for the same reasons it is excluded in the North American parks: humans are not supposed to interfere with wild nature because such contact undermines the system's ideal naturalness.¹⁹ Evidently the most natural thing for humans to do is observe nature at a sanitized distance, enacting classical disinterested objectivity. And so we return to Peter, the hero who rules nature by not copying it.

The Dutch metaphysics Drenthen works with do not differ significantly from Prokofiev's. Hybridity discourse in general fails to realise that – first – wildland is not a human exclusive substratum which, with the admixture of agriculture, becomes a "cultural" landscape, and that – second – this mixing is not automatically benign or symbiotic. Because *agriculture does not permit the understanding of humans at home in undomesticated landscapes*, it leaves no option but to accept some measure of domination of the natural Other as inescapably human. But understanding wilderness as a social construction unmasks the notion of European landscapes as harmonious unities; they are rather constructions of a dualism masquerading as a monism where the Other is almost completely smothered, sent subterranean, turned into an inhuman "Same." The radical implication is that no agri-cultures successfully follow nature (we might need to call them "agro-cultures"!). Because hunting can successfully follow nature, it constitutes a landscape culture profoundly subversive of traditional agrarian or techno-hybrid cultures which, rather than following nature, accept dewilding, domination and degradation as par for the course.

Hunting, then, can be a litmus test of nature-culture relations even in Europe. If an ecosystem cannot sustain hunting by humans, then it is not rewilded enough. If hunting is banned in principle, then the metaphysics of the barnyard remain in force against both humans and wild nonhumans. Either way, the resources for investigating a post-civilized embrace of wild nature as a human home still exist on the

¹⁸ARK, "Death as Part of Nature," <http://www.arknature.eu/ark-en/nature-development/natural-processes/predation-and-death> (accessed May 4, 2011).

¹⁹"We see it as our duty in the debate to put the interests of the animals first: are these measures really benefiting the animals? Wild animals are really best off when there is least interference by humans. It is always the hunters who are asking for supplementary feed to be provided to prevent an agonizing demise" (Esther Ouwehand, Member of the Dutch Parliament, Party for Animal Rights). "It really is an ideal situation in the Oostvaardersplassen. Animals dying just happens to be a fact of life. Unfortunately, huntsmen have a really powerful lobby aimed at doing away with this natural system" (Pauline de Jong, Secretary of the Fauna Protection Society; cf. Kleis 2010).

ground in the Old World as well as the New, because hunting as a landscape culture remains even though the undominated landscape might not. No matter where its practitioners dwell, environmental philosophy should be at the forefront of rethinking humanity's place in nature outside the agrarian model of both the intellectual and practical mastery of the world.²⁰

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