The Nature of Order in North American Parks

REGULATING
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State and provincial parks are represented as inherently natural places set apart from the demands of everyday life, places that are intrinsically 'wild' and that must be protected. Yet, in order to experience the naturalness and freedom of the parks, we must embrace the very forms of regulation that we associate with places we consider to be artificial, restrictive, and alienating.

Drawing on a wide range of documents used to govern park jurisdictions, Joseph Hermer explores the character and consequences of the contradiction posed by the 'regulated Eden' of park destinations. Central to his analysis of parks as historically specific sites of governance is the notion of 'emparkment,' the practices and discourses that manufacture wildness and nature through specific forms of spatial and temporal regulation.

Using theoretical literature from the sociology of law and cultural geography, Hermer argues that emparkment order is driven primarily through discourses of both personal and environmental risk and results in an interdependency that generates powerful moralizing effects. He suggests that the mode of power constituted by emparkment is a mirror not only of how nature is configured in an era of environmental toxification, but also of how the experience of freedom itself is constructed in a society frequently characterized as repressive. Challenging us to rethink the place we have given to 'nature' in the protection of ecologically valuable landscapes, Hermer also urges us to consider the forms by which we govern ourselves in the moral order of daily life.

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For The Woodman

Preface

The experience of visiting a park holds a privileged place in our childhood memories. It is rare to find a person who does not recall childhood adventures at summer camp or on a family camping trip, or afternoons spent at a secret spot in a neighbourhood park. Remembrances of parks and parklike places survive as archetypes of innocence, places where we can somehow orient ourselves in an often alienating 'grown-up' world.

My childhood was an experience of parks in the extreme: my father is a forester, and my summers were spent working with him in a variety of park spaces. The most memorable of these summers was spent in a provincial park where we sold bundled firewood to campers from within a fenced woodyard. Cutting and bundling firewood in the summer heat was back-breaking work, and my father did not appreciate the picky comments of many of the campers, who complained that the firewood had too much bark or was too dry or too wet.

My father is a small, wiry man who does not waste many words expressing himself, and he often had a hard time holding his tongue when a camper said something especially provoking. On one occasion a man came in and picked, piece by piece, through the woodpile, until my father asked if he needed help. 'Do you have any wood without knots?' the man asked, annoyed at the apparent inconvenience. 'Wood without knots?' my father asked, rubbing his callused hands. 'You know, knots! knots!' the man said, sarcastically, holding out a piece of spruce as if my father had

never seen firewood before. My father was silent for a moment. 'If we had wood without knots,' he said, motioning overhead to the shade tree they stood under, 'where would all the little birds sit?'

This book reflects on the meaning of the camper's search for a knotless version of nature, and considers the consequences of the notion of nature hinted at in my father's answer. Certainly, the image of the camper searching for a piece of knotless wood is one I often thought about years later, when I worked as a park warden, where much of my time was spent in regulatory dramas inevitably related to notions of nature and order very similar to the one held by the woodyard customer.

My approach involves examining how parks in Canada and the United States are constructed, through moral regulation, as 'official' sites of nature. This regulation helps to construct not only our notion of nature in an era of environmental destruction, but also shapes and informs our experience of freedom.

Despite my extensive critique of the contradictions inherent in government park-making projects, I would caution readers not to read between the lines an argument that celebrates the failure of the ideal of public 'emparkment.' This book was being completed just as the Conservative government of Premier Mike Harris, much to my dismay, had begun to privatize the Ontario provincial park system, a move which will only exacerbate the ways in which 'emparked' nature is complicit with widespread practices of environmental toxification. In this sociopolitical context, this book is as much a condemnation of such short-sighted political mentalities as it is an examination of the role that parks play in manufacturing the moral order of everyday experience.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Emparkment of Nature

The famous American conservationist John Muir's comment of a century ago, that the wildness of parks is a necessity for the 'thousands of tired, nerve shaken, over civilized people,' has never seemed more prophetic (Nash 1973:140). As places that offer us shelter from the dehumanizing surfaces of the concrete jungle, parks have come to play a crucial role in the therapy of the modern self. Our desperation to experience nature appears to be exceeded only by our ability to create equally desperate landscapes that cater to a wide range of recreational whims. Thus, we should not be surprised to read the claim that

> Even the most discerning outdoor enthusiasts and history buffs will discover the enchantment of New Mexico's 37 state parks ... There are large reservoir parks for every imaginable water sport, quiet mountain parks for hiking and camping ... a land of hidden lakes, quiet streams, and rushing rivers. Cool green forests and meadows laden with wildflowers beckon hikers, campers, naturalists and photographers. (New Mexico B)

This image from a brochure represents what we have come to expect of a park: peace, permissiveness, a space we may explore at our leisure, where nature beckons us to experience an enchanted landscape. The park destination is depicted as a primitive playland, an Eden-like garden that has been mapped and fenced off for the rejuvenation of a 'fallen' humanity lost in the alienation of mod-

ern life. Consider, however, the regulations that govern this escape into nature:

> Picnicking is allowed in designated areas from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. or as posted. An entrance fee is charged for picnicking. Any use of a Park between 9:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. is considered overnight camping. Camping is allowed only in designated areas, and a camping permit is required. Overnight campsites must be vacated by 2:00 p.m. on the following day to avoid additional fee payments. Camping is limited to 14 days during any 20 day period. Camps must not be left vacant for more than 24 hours. Camp and picnic areas must be kept clean and sanitary at all times. Property left unattended for more then 14 days will be considered abandoned. (New Mexico A)

The regulation required to order this natural space presents us with a vivid paradox: in order to experience the wildness of parks, we must embrace the very forms of order and regulation we so deeply associate with places we consider to be artificial, restrictive, and alienating. Yet, this paradox is generated by a political reality: if landscapes deemed to be natural are to be protected they must be *emparked* – that is, enclosed under the protection of legislation and managed within a detailed juridical framework – a practice most commonly illustrated by the incongruent presence of regulatory signage in parks. In other words, the 'no littering' sign acts to protect nature in a form that offends the ideal of the 'natural.' It seems, then, that to 'regulate wilderness' is to preserve 'nature' by means that are antithetical to the *idea* of wilderness and those qualities that we associate with the natural. As Roderick Nash (1973) notes, the quality of freedom we so desperately look for in the wildness of parks is destroyed by intensive regulation, which turns parks into little more than 'sleeping bag motels.'

I view this paradox as one of the most significant contradictions of everyday life, one that can be explored by investigating how park destinations are 'made up' as wild and natural places through the very forms of regulation which make the idea of an escape into nature attractive to us in the first place. I argue that parks do

not simply 'protect' nature, as we are so often educated to believe, but rather manufacture an experience of wildness and disorder which is not only congruent with widespread practices of environmental toxification, but also plays a central role in constructing particular social relations as 'natural' and 'normal.' The social construction of nature and the policing of 'civilized' social relations are intricately linked.

The Power of Representation

To carry out an examination of the nature of emparkment, it is necessary to engage a theoretical outlook which takes account of how social theory has undergone a paradigm shift in conceptualizing how people are governed in advanced capitalist societies (Hunt 1993:305). Influenced by the writings of Michel Foucault, especially his later writings on 'governmentality' and 'care of the self' (1988, 1991), scholars from a range of interrelated disciplines are rethinking the everyday mechanics of power, forming a movement that can be loosely identified as a 'sociology of governance.'[1] Foucault argued that in the nineteenth century the modern state was 'governmentalized': the exercise of power shifted from the sovereign to what he called an 'art of government,' where individuals could be administered within statistical constructions of population. Closely aligned with the emergence of these 'governmentalities' were the practices of 'police,' what Foucault describes as a governmental technology peculiar to the state. While today the term *police* denotes a specific profession charged with a narrow band of law enforcement, through the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the term designated a 'state science' where civic officials administered the experience of citizenship. Described by the police magistrate Patrick Coloquhoun in the early nineteenth century as the 'art of conducting men to the maximum of happiness and the minimum of misery,' police were involved in widespread regulation of habits, trades, commerce, buildings, streets, highways, poverty, peace, and public order (McMullan 1998; see also Gordon 1991: 10). A prominent aspect of emerging 'governmentalities' was the growth of the 'medical

police,' with their ever-present themes of public health and sanitation (Carrol 1996). Medical police were also central to the emerging fields of forestry and landscaping, both closely linked to the art of the apothecary. For Foucault (1978), the deployment of medical technologies of governance was to become one of the most important features of modern modes of power, where the human body can be subjected to a wide array of expert gazes.

Marshalled as a category of sociological inquiry, the idea of governance recognizes that political power is exercised 'through a multitude of agencies and techniques, some of which are only loosely associated with the executives and bureaucracies of the formal organs of state' (Miller and Rose 1990:1). This understanding emphasizes the role of 'intellectual technologies' in constructing and regulating individuals from locations that may include, but are not limited to, constitutional governments. To speak of 'government' in this wider sense is to describe an array of mentalities and practices that work to direct social actors and configure individual subjectivity, often in highly peculiar ways that are centred in moralizing programs of self-regulation.[2] This conceptualization of government liberates us from a narrow, instrumentalist view of law which posits a compliant 'subject' that can be commanded, repressed, restricted, and prohibited. Instead, we can consider how social actors, like park destinations, are also 'made up,' this time through a set of discursive trajectories that normalize particular social relations and spaces. Governmental forms of power are primarily positive and constitutive in character: individuals are governed through both the enforcement of particular social roles and identities, such as 'football fan' or 'cancer patient,' as well as more loosely constituted modes or trends of conduct which are congruent with ideas of taste, style, and fashion.

While this approach corrects overly structuralist and materialist conceptions of the state and state power, we should not lose sight of how governmental practices rely on a durable world of stabilized material objects which carry out the representational technologies of knowledge-based expertise. A key aspect of these technologies of power are techniques which construct *visual* rep-

resentations which in turn enable social actors to moralize individual character and conduct (Law and Whitaker 1988:161). The art of moral regulation, as Rojek points out, has increasingly relied on an expanding repertoire of visualization techniques in an 'age of spectatorship' and in a society dominated by what Mitchell has coined the 'pictorial turn' (Rojek, 1992:356; Mitchell 1994b:16). Terry Eagleton's (1990: 27–8) assertion that morality has become aestheticized as a mode of power brilliantly captures this linkage between visualization and consciousness. 'Power is shifting its location,' writes Eagleton, 'from centralized institutions to the silent, invisible depths of the subject itself ... transforming the relations between law and desire, morality and knowledge ...'

How is the art of moral regulation carried out? The ability of social actors to construct and deploy particular representations relies on processes of translation which carry out what Thévenot (1984) has conceptualized as 'investment in forms.' Thévenot argues for a conception of codes that go beyond the formal texts most often thought of as law to include any set of conventions that order 'regulated' communication. For Thévenot, laws are an especially 'good form' because they stabilize social objects with a minimum of human intervention. Drawing on the work of Ivins (1973), Bruno Latour (1986:7) expands on this notion of investment by exploring the relationship between 'visualization and cognition,' which allows social actors to think 'with eyes and hands.' As Latour reads Ivins: 'no matter from what distance and angle an object is seen, it is always possible to transfer it – to translate it – and to obtain the same object at a different size as seen from another position ... since the picture moves without distortion it is possible to establish, in the linear perspective framework, what he calls a "two way" relationship between object and figure.'

This 'regular avenue through space,' established through this sort of regulatory parallax, is described by Ivins as an 'optical consistency.' Latour (1986, 1987) has brilliantly captured a key expression of this 'two way' relationship through his conceptualization of 'immutable mobiles,' inscriptions that are immuta-