

The Metaphorical Drift of Classical Wilderness

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How do the meanings of words shape actions towards and reactions to others? Such a question is crucial to philosophers and geographers interested in terms which describe space and place. This paper investigates the hermeneutic transformations of 'wilderness', a word which is of particular interest to both environmental philosophers and social geographers, with attention to the social and political connotations it continues to have. Specifically, the metaphorical connotations of the term are tackled through an argument that the identifiable qualities of classical wilderness have gradually been passed from descriptions of nature to descriptions of cities. Just as the political dimensions of classical wilderness served as the basis for a demonization of inhabitants of natural wilderness—aboriginal peoples in North America—so too are inner city residents feared and discriminated against through a racist patische that includes the idea that they are savages in an urban wilderness. What is to be done about this semantic drift of wilderness? This discussion ends with an attempt to sketch out one basis for a political response to this transformation using Gramsci's notion of hegemony.

Nietzsche called (semantic) truth, a 'mobile army of metaphors', expressing one of the more skeptical positions in the recent history of philosophy of the possibility for limiting the scope of reference for individual words. But even if language is as heterogeneous as Nietzsche suggests, there may still be virtue for such multiplicity of meaning. If language has such a multidimensional element, then we can potentially learn a great deal about ourselves as animals using language through the study of how different words have been used, or changed meaning, over time.

Sometimes changes in the meanings of words can reveal something of the original ideological presuppositions behind them, particularly if these terms were created to meet certain political needs. Sometimes words that have seemingly lost their ideological origins can in their contemporary use betray some of the original intentions that have shaped their genealogies. Such is the case with the word 'wilderness.' This paper is a philosophical reflection which expands on previous studies that have demonstrated that at least part of the original intention of the

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use of wilderness was as a reference not just to the wild nature encountered in new lands, but as *the* term that marked out the cognitive or conceptual space that was not civilization. This *classical* wilderness was the jungle, the wild place, not fit for human habitation except for those beings who were not really fully human, that is, for savages. Wilderness did not just mark the geographical boundaries between human settlements and wild nature, but also a cognitive boundary between the civilized explorers and the 'savages' that were being encountered. The wilderness was in short, the mental and physical boundary between humans and the radical/racial others. This paper is not intended to be a summary of the vast literature in Geography concerning wilderness, but only an expansion of one particular theme that has shown up in the literature.

I will further the analysis of classical wilderness by suggesting that its ideological transformation continued in different ways, namely by colonizing new territories as wilderness areas. We can see a shift in focus of classical wilderness at the beginning of the 20th century in America where metaphors of the growing 'wilderness in the cities' were used as a rallying cry for social reform against exploitative labor practices. In this context, reformers suggested that if the wilderness was where we civilized people were not supposed to be, then inhuman physical conditions in our cities were intolerable and had to be changed. Today, however, we have returned to the use of wilderness and metaphors of the wild to describe those who we civilized humans would mark off as separate from ourselves. But this is not to return to descriptions of wild nature as containing these qualities, but a transference of these qualities onto urban spaces. Therefore, the city is one of the places where classical wilderness has drifted.

THE SEMANTIC DRIFT OF METAPHOR: A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

Before continuing this discussion of wilderness, let us look at a hypothetical example which may demonstrate the simple point of how the meanings of words may change over time due to background conditions, or how an expression may undergo *semantic drift*. While such changes may be home territory for geographers, many philosophers do not hold such a view as closest to their claims about the semantic meaning of metaphor (see Cooper, 1986). Take for instance the possible transformation of the limits of the meaning of the phrase, 'Juliet is the Sun', from the time that Shakespeare created the metaphor to its present reception. We can take this turn of phrase to be a fairly straightforward metaphor about how Juliet somehow has properties like source of light or ultimate life giver. But what is behind this seemingly innocent and non controversial interpretation of this utterance?

For one thing the rather broad community of interpreters who receive this metaphor do so under the influence of an important background condition: in hearing 'Juliet is the Sun', today, we receive it in a heliocentric universe, that is,

in a social community that accepts as a scientifically established fact that the Sun is the center of our solar system (and importantly accepts that it is to science that we look to find out important things like what object is at the center of the solar system). Consequently, the properties we identify with 'Sun' are those, largely physical, properties that we associate with the Sun and then can translate into the metaphor so that 'Juliet is the Sun' becomes figuratively coherent. So, we might at first think 'Juliet is the Sun' means 'Juliet is the center of Romeo's universe,' in some figurative way, since that property of the Sun makes the metaphor work.

Now, suppose that we could approach someone in Shakespeare's audience with our interpretation of the metaphor. Further suppose that the person believed a churchman who had told him that the Earth was in fact the center of our universe. While we may find it easy (perhaps misleadingly) to imagine what it must be like to believe such a proposition, and have our intuitions shaped accordingly, we can imagine that someone who was a geocentrists would, upon hearing our interpretation of the metaphor (based upon our heliocentric presuppositions) find what we are saying possibly inconceivable and probably misguided. Their reasons however would be different than those which might be offered by our contemporaries who might object that the interpretation does not fit the context of other lines in the play. A geocentrist might object to the metaphor having anything to do with Juliet being the center of anything as their background beliefs about the cosmological importance of the Sun did not include an important component which we take as part of its description. An interpretation of this metaphor that we have access to, is therefore not available to such a critic.

What this brief example demonstrates is that background assumptions can shape the meanings of words, and that as those assumptions change over time the meanings of metaphors based on those words can 'drift' to something different. While not necessarily in this case, in some cases such changes can have important ramifications for how we interact with each other in the world.¹ I will return to this example at the end of this paper.

CLASSICAL WILDERNESS AS METAPHOR

The possibility of the term wilderness changing meaning over time has more interesting consequences than the previous case. But to see this we need to first figure out what thing in the world is the reference of 'wilderness.' At least two conceptions of wilderness are identifiable in the Geography literature: the 'classical' and the 'romantic' conceptions of wilderness (Short, 1991:6). There is of course a large amount of literature on wilderness but for the purposes of this philosophical analysis on one idea of wilderness, this simple distinction will suffice. The classical view places wilderness as something to be feared, an area of waste and desolation inhabited by wild animals, savages and perhaps even supernatural evil. Here, human society is the standard by which the world is measured

and hence conquest over the non-human areas, the wild areas, signals a form of human achievement, "a victory over the dark forces and a measure of social progress" (Short, 1991:6).

The romantic view sees wilderness as an untouched space whose purity human contact corrupts and degrades. Here the wilderness is a place to be revered, a place of deep spiritual significance and a symbol of earthly paradise. Wilderness is that form of nature that has remained close to its 'pristine' state, meaning that it has not been 'corrupted' by human intervention.² These two ideas of wilderness are not exclusive, nor are they temporally separable. Classical and romantic views of wilderness pop up in many places at many different times, sometimes even in combination. My focus here is how to clearly identify classical wilderness from other forms and then track the referent of the term. Now, despite the fact that today in the first world we are largely at least neutral in our public conception of wilderness as wild nature and at worst pseudo-romantics, the idea of an unknown evil at the edge of civilization still haunts us. To understand this point though we need to know more about the referent of classical wilderness.

The classical view, to a large degree revolves around what I want to call a *cognitive dimension* of wilderness. Here I mean the sense in which the wilderness is a place that is always marked as the realm of the savage who is (in addition to other things) thought to be cognitively, or mentally, distinct from the civilized human. The savage is always marked as the thing that we outside of the classical wilderness, we civilized people, are not. We are superior to the savage simply in not being the savage and part of what makes us not savage is that we *think* we have possession of reason, or control over our passions. The savage, in the classical wilderness view, is completely subject to his passions and is in fact driven by them to the point where he may not escape the wilderness. But the escape from the wilderness is not merely a physical escape; if the savage leaves wild nature he is still wild because of the 'cognitive' wilderness within him. The cognitive dimension of wilderness refers then to the (misperceived) wildness *within* the beings who are part of wild nature, it is not the mere physical surroundings but the claim of those surroundings on the mentalities of its inhabitants. To be able to mark off the wild from civilization does not therefore require any specialized knowledge of wild places with respect to their mere physical descriptions, but only a strong sense of the difference between us and them—between we civilized rational agents and those uncivilized passion-filled savages.

The classical view, with this important cognitive presupposition, was the dominant view of the wilderness that traveled from the old world to the new world and shaped the early Euro-American perceptions of Native Americans. So uncontested was this presupposition of a cognitive distinction between civilized and uncivilized in early American history (with a few very notable exceptions), that different thinkers developed radically different views of the potential of civilizing various kinds of savages without ever questioning the grounds for their debate. While some believed that the African 'savage' could be made to be civilized (with

appropriate 'guidance') outside of their wild jungles, they held for various reasons that other savages—most importantly Native Americans—were beyond hope. Others, like Thomas Jefferson argued that the formula was reversed (Takaki, 1988).

One way of looking at the extremity of this situation is in recognizing that the classical wilderness becomes a stand in for a place where the civilized do not want to go because it results in spiritual despair. Wilderness is a kind of hell. Certainly, one cannot help but think that the cognitive classical wilderness was, for at least the early Puritans, a projection of their deepest fears for what they could become in this new land if they were not careful. As John Rennie Short says, "the Wilderness becomes an environmental metaphor for the dark side of the human psyche" (Short, 1991:9).

While the arguments concerning the composition of classical wilderness are fascinating, there is some need to carefully distinguish the different components of the idea, which I believe have not been succinctly articulated before. The classical position can be summarized as emerging out of three related (and often overlapping) theses, that is, three characteristics that must be present in some form for there to be a wilderness of the classical kind:

- (T1) Separation. Since the wilderness is bad, evil, cruel, etc., it must be separated from humans—it must be marked off as distinct and kept out of civilized spaces.
- (T2) Savagery. The inhabitants of the wilderness are non-human beasts and are accordingly demonized and vilified.
- (T3) Superiority. In contrast, civilized humans and civilization may be celebrated in its successful separateness and triumph over wilderness as virtuous and superior.

I will continue to refer to these theses throughout this discussion in order to test the existence of classical wilderness in different examples. The idea of the classical wilderness is of course one that is constantly going through revisions and so the relative existence of these characteristics, as applied to certain spaces, may indicate a kind of wilderness in transition. For example, one could speculate that as Euro-Americans began to eliminate the threat of Native Americans in the 1800s the relevance of T2 diminished for a time, but for some the wilderness still existed as a place inferior to white civilization (T3).

Certainly wilderness on the classical account as identified in these qualities is a cultural construction with an identifiable history.³ Importantly though my claim is *not* that everything is a cultural construction (as some postmodernists might seem to suggest) or even that all referring expressions to parts of or processes in nature are cultural constructions. On my account, the photosynthesis, to pick just one example, is not a cultural construction.

Wilderness, or as I prefer to think about it given this genealogical account, 'wild nature,' is somehow different in kind than photosynthesis. While it cer-

tainly does contain a dimension that is scary and harsh, the experience of which helped to form the classical ideal, it can also be other things. It could also be a source of special transcendence as some Romantics claimed. But the reality of the *wild* must lie somewhere between these two poles of terror and bliss: wild nature is savage *and* it is also beneficent, but certainly not exclusively either all the time. Whatever this reality is, for good or for bad, 'wilderness' is a culturally constructed term whose reference is dependent on the social context in which it is used. One familiar way of beginning such an argument is to look at world views which do not contain either of these cultural constructions, that is to examine coherent views of the wild that do not seem to rely on an extreme vilification or celebration of wilderness.

What is wild nature outside of either the classical or romantic frameworks, or indeed any specific framework humans may have imposed on wild nature? It is well known that the original inhabitants of North America did not have a special idea of wilderness as something set apart either classically or romantically (Nash, 1982). Interestingly enough no word in any indigenous North American language has been identified as meaning what Europeans or Euro-Americans take to mean 'wilderness' (Nash, 1982).

But for Native Americans, no such term is needed. The term 'wilderness' does not pick out anything separate or distinct or alien in any way for them, it is not a natural kind term at all as it does not pick out anything particularly distinct in the world physically or even cognitively. Words for 'hills,' 'streams,' 'plains,' or 'forests' are all that are needed to identify the 'wilderness' around them. If these areas are home, why should the residents come up with a term to signify this area as imbued with alien properties? In contrast, a classical conception of wilderness is a good idea of wild nature to have if you want to separate new colonial settlements in a new place from the world around you (and of course justify a suppression of the 'savages' in that hostile world). In that case something is being identified as separate and distinct and deserves in some sense a term to designate it as containing certain properties.

Even with this account I think that more is needed by way of an explanation of why Native Americans do not refer to wilderness as Europeans did upon their arrival to the new world. Certainly it is possible that indigenous North Americans could have a word for something approximating a special sense of 'wild nature' as distinct from settled areas, and we may have simply lost this term over the course of the steady obliteration of Native American culture. And it is possible that the idea of the 'absence of the wild' for indigenous peoples is itself a cultural construction romanticizing their disconnection from Euro-American culture.

Recent work by ethnobotanists suggests that the roots of the 'absence of the wild' for Native Americans may have a more coherent material base. The argument is essentially that the physical stuff which we in the United States refer to as 'wilderness' (both when Euro-Americans first arrived and today in statutes like the American Wilderness Act) was for indigenous peoples cultivated land. For

example in California, what early explorers found to be a rich, impressive and daunting 'wild' landscape thought to be a "natural untrammelled wilderness, ... was to a large extent actually a product of (and more importantly dependent on) deliberate human intervention" (Anderson & Blackburn, 1993:8).

The 'wilderness' for Native Californians did not exist because it was not separable (T1), and it was not separable (importantly classically or romantically) because it was a basis for the material culture that was the foundation for every day life. From the point of view of the tradition of Euro-American agriculture, non-recognizable practices focusing primarily on controlled fire, but also, seed beating (for seed broadcasting), transplanting of shrubs and small trees, construction of ditches for irrigation, pruning and cropping, weeding and tillage of specific plant communities and other methods were used to change the landscape. This process was so extensive according to Kat Anderson and Thomas Blackburn, that when it stopped the 'wilderness' in some sense began to recede (1993). Native Americans were not idle hunters and gatherers who left nature in a pristine state open to fear or reverence. Instead the 'wilderness' was a part of every day life maintained in the same way the urban public sphere was and is for Euro-Americans.

The relevance of this argument for this discussion is that it greatly strengthens the claim that the classical conception of wilderness is a cultural construction and puts that argument on a more concrete foundation than is often the case when something is labeled a 'cultural construction.' If everything is a cultural construction then the label ceases to have any meaning. What is needed first is a specific argument for why something is a cultural construction, and second some account of the significance of the claim. In this case, if I can successfully argue that wilderness is a metaphor that is culturally constructed, then I must give some reason why that is important. The significance of the metaphor here will be gauged in terms of what it *does* rather than what it *means*.

Particularly in the case of North America, the classical conception of wilderness imbued an ideological overlay on the land. Perhaps beyond that, what was being referred to, the physical stuff itself, was not wild nature at all. The 'wilderness,' however one wants to look at it, and whatever properties you want to give to it, was in a strong sense never really there. Given this position, the word wilderness does not pick out some condition in, processes of, or state of the world. This is why I think that the term is simply, but on my view *more powerfully*, a rather interesting metaphor, a metaphor which describes primarily a view of how certain people project themselves into and as opposed to the world around them. In this sense, in the instance at least of the classical conception of wilderness, the cognitive metaphorical dimension is the most important, and perhaps the only coherent dimension of the term. While we have good reasons though to doubt the existence of the physical referent of the term wilderness, the cognitive referent is still importantly alive no matter what the status is of external 'wild' nature.

Though this conclusion may seem startling at first, I think that it is what we need to make sense of the evolution of classical wilderness from its status in the early American colonial period. For as Euro-Americans came to think that nature was no longer an evil place, the classical ideal still persisted in some rather unusual areas. The metaphorical legacy of classical wilderness is the claim that urban areas are a sort of wilderness. The primary vehicle of this transformation is the shift of the cognitive dimension of wilderness to the cities. Even though the evil or untouched natural physical space picked out by the term was either never really there or is at least no longer there (since after all it has been conquered), what is 'out there' still, projected as the cognitive wilderness, is a sense of fear of the 'savage space' and its 'savage inhabitants'. Other commentators have noted this shift, especially Roderick Nash briefly mentions such a transition in *Wilderness and the American Mind* but does not go so far as to explain the sense in which this transition depends on the classical conception of wilderness in an exclusively metaphorical cognitive context. I hope that my discussion will deepen the few references in Nash's book as well as update their significance (1982).

URBAN REFORM AND THE WILDERNESS METAPHOR

As a case of semantic drift, the classical idea of wilderness has shifted from an exclusive reference to 'green spaces', to include non-natural physical spaces. One of the first examples of this can be seen in the attempt to take advantage of the metaphoric power of the classical view at the turn of the century by American social reformers. These theorists and activists used the imagery of the 'urban wilderness' as a motivation for their reforms (see for example, Wood, 1898). Aside from numerous uses of this kind of language in reformist periodicals of the time, particularly the socialist newspaper *The Appeal to Reason*,⁴ the most famous attempt is surely Upton Sinclair's 1906 *The Jungle* which documented the abuses of recent Eastern European immigrants in the meat packing industry.

In using the imagery of the 'Jungle' we see an attempt to argue for social reform based on the power of naming a space where humans are trapped in a new wilderness. Capitalizing on the classical conception of wilderness as an evil physical place unfit for human habitation and in fact destructive to them (an assumption behind T1), the argument is that where we can recognize people as uniquely human we have a moral obligation to 'save' them from the wilderness. The wilderness is no place for such beings whose identity is inherently superior as they are civilized (T3) and hence in some way more virtuous than their surroundings.

The text of *The Jungle* is full of the language of the classical wilderness. References to 'packingtown', the home of mainly Eastern European immigrants working in the Chicago stockyards, directly as a wilderness and jungle are numerous. Even more interesting perhaps are the references to the overwhelming

character of this classical wilderness. Sinclair here has us watch the protagonist of the story, Jurgis, go through all manner of criminal abuses, but consistent with the bewildering power of the wilderness (specifically consistent with T1 that the wilderness can have a corrupting influence), he can never see the harm around him until it is too late. To Jurgis, the unnatural and natural get blurred by the power of the urban wild. Looking out at what Sinclair clearly takes to be the chaos of an urban wilderness wasteland the innocent reflects:

All that a mere man could do, it seemed to Jurgis, was to take a thing like this as he found it, and do as he was told; to be given a place in it and a share in its wonderful activities was a blessing to be grateful for, as one was grateful for the sunshine and the rain (Sinclair, 1981:40–1).

Sinclair appropriates the classical language of the wilderness to describe the urban wilderness, and in doing so he names the new wilderness as containing a new cognitive dimension, a dimension of confusion and corruption that serves as a breeding ground for injustice. A new face is put on the old evil: savage Indians are replaced with savage capitalists (a reserved application of T2); threatening dark landscapes are not the creation of the supernatural but the result of the naturalization of an exploitative labor relationship hidden behind an industrialized factory environment. In making this move Sinclair however does nothing to subvert the classical designation of wilderness as uncivilized space. In fact the wilderness must remain classical for him in order for it to do the metaphorical-political labor he desires. The difference now is only that the purpose of calling this space wilderness is to get us to acknowledge our complicity in the construction of this dangerous physical and cognitive space. Sinclair wants us to be repulsed at these conditions. Like the early Euro-Americans who were stimulated by the metaphorical power of classical wilderness to build a new civilization to serve as a base to attack the danger at its borders, Sinclair wants us to attack the poverty and savagery of the urban wilderness out of our revulsion.

Other writers have also made the case that cities more and more take up the sense of the classical definition of wilderness. “The big city,” says John Rennie Short, “is now the modern equivalent of the medieval forest populated by demons,” or as Henry Miller describes New York, it is a “mad stone forest”⁵ (Short, 1991:25–6). At least though with Sinclair and the other socialist urban reformers, the argument for an urban wilderness was made out of a concern for its most abused inhabitants. We are not supposed to think that Jurgis and *all* other poor inhabitants of packing town are vilified, demonized savages (T2) merely because they are in the wild, they are instead people in the wrong place who we should try to save from their wage-slavery at the yolk of savage machines.

The transformation of urban space into wilderness through a new construction on old themes is thus an interesting subversion of the original physical dimension of classical wilderness while retaining the overall cognitive meaning of the idea.

After all, as long as the idea is still around and recognizable, why not put it to good use? The problem is that today we are coming back, at least in the United States in some places, to a redefinition of urban wilderness as a classical wilderness with the original cognitive content present in the three original theses that I suggested earlier. However, instead of separation (T1) for the purpose of beneficial reform as Sinclair desired, T1–T3 are proposed for one of the more insidious purposes of classical wilderness, to justify vilification of its inhabitants. And just as we heirs of the romantic view of wilderness, or at least of an anti-classical view, can see a real malicious and damaging potential in the classical view of natural wilderness, we can see in the construction of a post-social reform urban wilderness potential harmful effects.

URBAN CHAOS AND THE WILDERNESS METAPHOR

Los Angeles is one of the premiere contemporary urban wilderness areas in the United States. We may even think of LA as something of a 'wilderness preserve', maintaining as clear as possible a separation between suburbs and inner city racial minorities trapped in concrete jungles. Recently, we have even seen the emergence of modern day twisted Kiplingesque stories of forays into this wilderness in the film 'Falling Down'. In this fable an LA area defense worker (played by Michael Douglas) decides he can not take the place or the people any more and 'valiantly' clears out the jungle by force. But clearing out the jungle necessitates entering it and as a result (consistent with some of the Puritans' worries in their version of T1), it taints him. A neo-Nazi finds the new gun-wielding, gang member executing Douglas to be a kindred spirit. By the end of the film, confronted with the police, he is wondering aloud how he has become the 'bad guy.'

Against the background of the construction of the urban wilderness in the classical wilderness tradition it seems fairly clear how this movie became so popular. On the Sinclair account, urban space is a destructive wilderness, but the unfortunate inhabitants are not savages—they are on Sinclair's subversion of the tradition, deserving of recognition as humans who need our help. Importantly, this argument recognizes the constructed metaphorical quality of the designation 'wilderness,' while at the same time capitalizing on its semantic history to motivate people for a morally just cause. But without this motivation to use the term for such a purpose, for example once the fervor for social reform has passed, all that is left is the designation of the inner city as a new classical wilderness. The legacy of the urban space as a classical wilderness in this sense (devoid of its reformist intentions) is what persists today and what makes it easy, possibly too easy, to swallow the picture of the hostile urban wilderness in 'Falling Down'.

But of course the urban conditions in this specific case, culminating recently in the rampant turmoil of the Los Angeles riots, makes the designation of 'wilderness' on the city easier. My concern is that readings of these episodes as 'urban anarchy', that grab national attention and that persist in every day life in

L.A., are too often informed by the background of the urban wilderness as the most important inheritor of the classical wilderness metaphor. To see this we need to examine how the three theses of classical wilderness can be found in descriptions of inner-city Los Angeles, and how they may in fact shape the material culture of the city.

T1, separation, is not too hard to document in the case of LA, and has in some ways operated as one of the dominant presuppositions of urban growth and renewal in the area. We can see this thesis at work in the dire descriptions of urban life in the final report of Richard Nixon's 1969 National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence: "... we live in 'fortress cities' brutally divided between 'fortified cells' of affluent society and 'places of terror' where the police battle the criminalized poor" (NCCPV, 1969).

Mike Davis' *City of Quartz*, a most impressive resource for fleshing out the particulars of these attitudes that fortify the separation thesis, explains how these earlier descriptions matured. Much of the vision of the urban wilderness can be attributed to the run-away white middle-class imagination, absent according to Davis, from any first hand understanding of the inner city, so that any real threat is seen only through a 'demonological lens' (Davis, 1992:224). This lens though seems to be the same one that informed early colonial perceptions of the 'natural' wilderness and its inhabitants. In both cases the perception of a classically savage wasteland was enough to designate an area as wilderness and justify its separation without needing a fully informed description of the actual physical place.

While the justification for such descriptions may stem from actual dangers in these areas the results of this perception on urban policy are nonetheless extraordinary. In an attempt to create a new urban center in LA, which would be attractive to what *Urban Land* magazine calls 'respectable people', (Davis, 1992:231) Davis calls our attention to the construction of what he calls 'Fortress LA', a stronghold I would contend, against the new urban frontier:

The carefully manicured lawns of LA's Westside sprout forests of ominous little signs warning: 'Armed Response' (...) Downtown, a publicly-subsidized 'urban renaissance' has raised the nation's largest corporate citadel, segregated from the poor neighborhoods around it by monumental architectural glaciers. (:) In the Westlake and San Fernando areas the LA police department barricades streets and seal off poor neighborhoods as part of their 'war on drugs.' In Watts ... (a recolonization) of the inner-city retail markets: a panopticon shopping mall surrounded by staked metal fences and a substation of the L.A.P.D. in a central surveillance tower (Davis, 1992:223).

Indeed, the separation has been pursued to such an extreme that there is no pedestrian access to L.A.'s new revitalized downtown business and arts district. The implications of this are that residents of the largely Latino neighboring com-

munities cannot gain foot access to this area without risking walking across a highway.

Davis traces the fortress mentality at least partially to the plans for 'resegregated spatial security', outlined in the 1965 McCone Commission Report ('Violence in the City—An End or Beginning?') which followed the original Watts riots. Following the more recent riots, Davis traces these transformations more specifically as a deliberate movement responding to the 'surrender' of the cities by a decade of Republican urban policies (with Democratic complicity) designed to privatize the public sphere. This is a returning, he claims, of the cities to the 'Darwinian or Hobbesian wilderness' (Davis, 1993a:3–28).

I find this last language telling, and more appropriate than the descriptions Davis gives of the fortress mentality in other terms. For instance, he suggests that an 'urban cold war' is being waged in the city, specifically in the policy of 'containment' (official term) of the homeless in Skid Row' (Davis, 1992:232). However, it looks like a kind of dehumanization is going on here that was never the case for the teeming masses 'trapped' behind the Iron Curtain. Cold war containment was a policy directed against the leaders of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Block and not really against the people who after all were supposed to be yearning to be free capitalists.

What is going on in this form of separation is a deeper anomaly. It is almost as if the classical wilderness was the object of preservation that stimulated such legislation as the Wilderness Act. Rather than a pseudo-romantic view that the wilderness should be set aside because its good qualities deserve protection, the L.A. separation policy seems implicitly to argue that once we have conquered the classical wild we should preserve it as a quaint reminder of the environment to which we have not succumbed. Or probably more consciously, to encircle it because it is beyond hope. There is no Sinclairian reform instinct here, 'we' would not even think of allowing 'them' into our areas, so we ought to just control this wild place and keep it separate as best as we can and as long as is possible.

Implicit in this discussion of T1 one can see T2 and T3 in the not too distant background, but it may be interesting to look at them separately as well. Particularly in the language of the Rodney King trials, the ensuing riots, and the response, the assertion of the savagery of the natives of the urban wilderness and the superiority of those outside the inner city is striking.

T2 and T3 were already clearly present in the language of the first trial which served as the catalyst for the riots. In Robert Gooding-Williams account of the rhetorical strategies of the defense attorneys (which occurs in a discussion very different from this one) the language of classical wilderness is thick:

After inviting jurors to see events from the point of view of the police officers, the defense attorneys elicited testimony from King's assailants that depicted King as a *bear*, and as emitting *bear-like groans*. In the eyes of the police and then again in the eyes of

the jurors, King's black body became that of a wild "hulk-like" and "wounded" animal, whose every gesture threatened the existence of civilized society. Not surprisingly, the defense attorneys portrayed the white bodies which assailed King as guardians against the wild, and as embodying a "thin blue line" that separates civil society from the dangerous chaos of the essence of the wild. (...) This animal, claimed one of the jurors, echoing the words of defense attorney Michael Stone, was in complete control and directed all the action. Still, somehow, the forces of civilization prevailed, preserving intact human society as we know it (Gooding-Williams, 1993:166).⁶

Many racial, material, and psychological explanations could be advanced to explain the predominance of this language in the case. But it seems wrong to try to attribute any one of these as the sole explanation, as it seems wrong to attribute the riots that followed exclusively to either wanton license or revolutionary fervor as some have tried to do. Certainly, given the legacy of the naturalization of the urban wilderness as a cognitive component of outside views of the inner city—rational or not—any explanation of such language should not omit the importance of its consistency with previous similar descriptions of the savagery of inhabitants of the wild.

In support of this claim, we should not find it surprising that overwhelmingly the response to the riots in L.A. was to continue to view the inner city in the context of T1–T3. Even under the direction of a new kinder and gentler police captain, abuses (including possible unjustifiable killings) continued in the L.A.P.D. against inner city residents. Youth gangs have been solidified in the public mind as the savage 'enemy within' the city consistent with a distanced identification of urban wilderness. Separation efforts were redoubled in an attempt to protect threatened white suburbs at the insistence of the post-riot Webster commission in what has been called the 'Ulsterization' of the city. Successful arguments were made in the California State Legislature to justify increased criminal penalties to further ease the control of urban savages while aid to rebuild the city remains at a standstill (Davis, 1993b:29–54). A consensus in the business community seems to be forming that the region as a whole is slipping backwards into a 'neo-Disney, plastic Stone Age' (Davis, 1993b:47)⁷.

Now, even if it is true that the city is the new inheritor of classical wilderness, worries about the effects of this shift on the inhabitants can be easily ignored. A simple 'law and order' stance is all that is needed to argue that just as the idea of the classical wilderness was in part motivated by real dangers 'out there,' characterization of an urban wilderness is justified due to the actual dangers (soberly perceived) of life in American cities. Still, there is good reason to believe that the legacy of 'savage hating' caused harm beyond the mere response to threats to civilized security. Acknowledging a danger is one thing, but unnecessarily dehumanizing the source of a real or only perceived threat is quite another. Without the

designation of the inner city as an alien savage place, is it not plausible that a more reasoned discussion of its problems could be accomplished?

There is an additional side to this story however that deserves brief mention and which may answer objections by advocates of the law and order position. There is some evidence that indicates that natives of the urban wilderness have internalized this designation as 'savage', and that in doing so the self-description may contribute to at least destructively low self-esteem and at worse increased violent threatening behavior. If such a claim can be established it certainly does not indicate a necessary causal relationship between urban areas as wilderness and the self-identity of inhabitants, but it does represent a very uncomfortable correlation.

One disturbing relevant case occurred in New York on April 20, 1989 when a young middle-class white woman was severely beaten and raped in Central Park by a gang of young African-Americans who themselves described what they were doing as 'wilding'. Newspaper headlines around the city immediately capitalized on this language of the wilderness and the sense that the lines of separation had been crossed: 'Teen Wolfpack Beats and Rapes Wall Street Exec on Jogging Park', 'Central Park Horror', 'Wolf Pack's Prey', 'Female Jogger Near Death after Savage Attack', 'Park Marauders Call it Wilding' (Diddion, 1992:6).

Tremendous controversy ensued in the city over the case with accusations of racism and reverse-racism bantered about in the media. Calls for more spatial separation (T1) were stimulated by a demonization of the young men accused of the crime (T2) while the media held up the victim as a 'model' of the resistance of middle class morals and steadfast refusal to surrender territory to the beasts of the inner city (T3)—even to the point of maintaining the 'right' to jog in Central Park at night. But what strikes me most of all is the way that the language of the classical wilderness had seeped into the urban setting, helped consciously to self-designate the behavior of inner city residents, and may have *possibly* contributed to their ability to perform such an act. At least it is clear that the young men had been affected by constant cultural cues that they were inferior, somehow less than (civilized) human.

Yusef Salaam, one of the accused (and convicted) in the case, reveals something of this problematic in a rap he presented as part of his personal statement in court before he was sentenced:

I'm kind of laid back, but now I'm speaking so that you know
I got used and abused and even put on the news
I'm not dissing them all, but the some I called
They tried to dis me like I was an inch small, like a midget,
a mouse, something less than a man (Diddion, 1992:9).

Another very similar case occurred in October 1993 in Orange County California. Similar at least in the metaphorical characterization of the crime, though the circumstances were very different. During a brief altercation between a group

of white and Mexican youths, a freak accident resulted in the death of one of the whites. Six of the Mexicans were arrested and charged with murder. Suffice it to say that the circumstances surrounding the event were such that most people would mourn the tragic loss but understand it as an unintended accident. Following the analysis I have given so far though, we should not be surprised to learn that the accident was transformed into what Mike Davis calls a "demonic allegory about a 'wilding' pack of gang *predators* and their 'innocent victims'" (Davis, 1994:486). The *Los Angeles Times* described the place in which the incident occurred as a "quiet coastal haven", and the prosecutor of the youths described them as "wild dogs" (Davis, 1994:486).

A coincidence in the language? Unlikely. As I mentioned earlier, the significance of these metaphors of the classical wilderness reside in what they do rather than what they mean. These metaphors are doing real damage to inner city inhabitants and fit into the rest of Davis' analysis of the Orange County incident, of an increased frequency of hate crimes in southern California. We could do without this legacy of Classical Wilderness, but the question is what to do about it.

THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE OVER SEMANTIC DRIFT

In making a few suggestions about how to proceed from here, let me return to the first part of this discussion. The semantic drift of the meaning of the metaphor 'Juliet is the Sun' was effected by the change in background conditions from a generally widespread acceptance of a geocentric view of the universe to an equally widespread heliocentric view. Consequently, there are certain interpretations of the metaphor open to us that would have been rejected at earlier moments in history. But what appears most fascinating in the Juliet case is that the expanded meaning of the metaphor was plastic enough to change over time and that its clarification changed with and was even caused by the change in background conditions which informed its meaning.

A similar case can be constructed around the idea of or meaning of the metaphor of wilderness. We have been in the midst of a transition (a drift in the meaning) for some time away from the classical metaphor of wilderness as applied to green spaces. It does not seem too controversial to suggest that part of the reason we are moving toward an identification of wild nature as a thing to be preserved, saved, cherished, etc. and not feared is because the background conditions which caused us to vilify the wilderness are by and large no longer sustainable. For scientific, philosophical, anthropological and other reasons it does not make much sense to adhere to T1-T3 in our cognitive construction of the nature of wild nature.

Nonetheless, as I have argued here, a remnant of classical wilderness persists as the urban wilderness and so the three theses are still doing some work, and possibly harmful work at that. In the urban wilderness the cognitive dimension of the

wild, as that place where the savage lesser-human exists and where civilization breaks down remains. Here civilization identifies and demonizes the new savage, while it ironically, may sometimes idealize and romanticize the former savages (namely, indigenous peoples).

Perhaps though the inner city is the last refuge of classical wilderness. Hopefully it is the last gasp of demonization of those we find different from ourselves.⁸ Its death may also mark the end of a vilification of an internal boundary between that which we wish to be (virtuously rational) and that which we fear to become (savagely passionate), made at the expense of others.

But even if the transformation out of urban wilderness could be shown to be inevitable (which is *apriori* unlikely), that does not mean that the transition could not be politically hurried along. Like the tasks of the Renaissance astronomers, one of the first important steps is to accept that the received understanding we have of our object of study is questionable, that anomalies exist that need to be explained, and that there may be some powers (in the solar system case it was the Church) which have an interest in falsely naturalizing our object of study. Once these important principles are recognized then transitions can be pushed along, if not toward ultimate understanding then at least toward recognition of mistaken conceptions. Once we begin investigating the idea of wilderness (or specifically the legitimacy of the metaphor of an urban wilderness) we can see that we do not need to be wedded to any one view.

But given the political content that these metaphors have, we must first acknowledge that the things that these metaphors do is primarily political. Therefore, the terrain over which the struggle to push along the drift of the meaning of wilderness, must be a political struggle. This recognition will change our approach to the problem of wilderness metaphors as descriptions of cities.

There are many ways of characterizing political struggles over the meaning of language, but one of the most intriguing to me, and one that fits best with the analysis I have given so far, is the Gramscian notion of hegemony. As is well known, Gramsci distinguished between two ways in which political authority is formed: consent and power. Power is the straightforward rule of law enforced through state police power, while consent is formed through hegemony, or the political 'normalization' of certain practices and restrictions (including the use of language) in certain ways. For example, all things being equal, in the United States, the market is allowed to govern exchange of private property, and by and large Americans accept the resulting implication that nature is primarily a resource. Laws may be formed around the consent to those practices but the practices themselves are not originally juridical in nature. People in this situation find it odd to think differently about nature, and even if *some* can consider nature differently, it is generally expected that Americans will accept this idea unconditionally.

Any thing that has a political content is open to appropriation for the purposes of forming hegemony in support of some interest. Wilderness as a metaphor

describing cities seems to be a good case where a determinate and hegemonic political meaning has been embedded in the use of the term. So successful has been this transformation that this use of language, including its racist implications, is used in mainstream newspapers without hesitation. Of course, the meaning of the metaphor, or at least its political function, need not persist. One of the most enlightened things about Gramsci's Marxism is its anti-determinism. Hegemony, especially in its cultural forms, is something that can be changed, and so even if the drift of wilderness out of cities cannot be hastened, a concerted effort could in principle temper its power. But this will only happen if we make it seem odd to people that wilderness, and the cluster of related terms in its urban guise, are used in the ways that they are. The hegemony model asks us to fight for the linguistic-political associations of wilderness. Here is where we must leave theory and move into practice.

NOTES

1. Importantly, this analysis is intended not as an accurate portrayal of the historical reception of the Juliet metaphor but only a thought experiment which demonstrates one plausible way in which the meanings of metaphors can drift. Let me emphasize that nothing in what follows depends on the historical accuracy or inaccuracy of this analysis.
2. For a history of this argument see Nash (1982) and Sax (1980).
3. See for example Oelschlaeger (1991) for an excellent genealogy of the idea of wilderness, especially his account of the idea of wilderness in the Western middle ages.
4. See for example John Graham's fine book on the Socialist newspaper, *The Appeal to Reason* (1990). The image of the dark urban factory environment can be seen in political cartoons as well as essays. For example, one cartoon in *The Appeal to Reason* from 1922, 'The Trap', depicts a brutish oversized ape-like capitalist luring workers into a factory entrance which is actually the entrance to a huge forbidding forest. Importantly, Sinclair's *The Jungle* appeared as a serial in this publication before it appeared as a book.
5. Denis Cosgrove pointed out to me that in the film *King Kong* a play of images of New York as an urban wilderness (now with an actual jungle beast) is powerfully at work.
6. Gooding-Williams in part drew the record of the trial from the *Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 1992, April 21, 1992, and April 22, 1992.
7. Davis' current research will most likely give us reasons to suspect that nature itself has also become demonized in Los Angeles. Recently (1995) he has argued that residents of Los Angeles, victims of many 'natural' disasters of the past few years, are beginning to think of their home as an 'apocalypse theme park'.

8. Some theorists argue that all identity is constructed on a rejection of the 'other', and so as long as there are political identities there will be vilified others on some ground. See, for example Young (1990). I'll leave this claim aside for now but I do attempt to answer it in some of my other work.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks to Denis Cosgrove, Jonathan Smith, and Eric Higgs for helpful comments on this paper.

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