
My thesis focuses on philosophical themes implicit in corridor conservation, using the Big Thicket National Preserve as an example. The way in which corridors, boundaries and communities are ambiguous, as both limits and connections, is dealt with. Corridor-patch matrices assemble ecological and human groups into temporary communities, often with conflicting interests. Such constellations foreground how a foreigner’s boundary crossing is a notion important to both conservation and a philosophical study of being, seen as being always in relation with otherness. In this context, the notion of foreignness and Jean-Luc Nancy’s idea of being-with is explored. Understanding the complex network of relations in which an entity exists leads to an awareness of its ambiguous nature. To facilitate judgment with such ambiguity, one needs a contextual understanding of a situation.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In my thesis, I deal with three major themes: corridors, boundaries and communities. I try to show how they function and interact using for my example the Big Thicket National Preserve. I discuss complex philosophical themes through an empirical case, and hope to elucidate some of the problems of the Big Thicket through philosophical inquiry. In a sense, my thesis borders the threshold between philosophical inquiry and environmental conservation. Because my project is a patchwork of threads, the ideas in the following chapters can be read and then taken in different directions.

The Big Thicket is more than an example of ecological corridor conservation. It also illustrates a matrix of different human groups with interests that are often in conflict. The ecological and human community of the Big Thicket resembles a patchwork, with many different patches touching and composing each other. The Big Thicket National Preserve is on the top-ten list of America’s most endangered parks. While suburban sprawl and development are the major threats to the Big Thicket, the threat posed by non-native organisms in the Gulf area of East Texas is another factor intensifying the Thicket’s endangered status. Non-native, or exotic, species are often thought to imperil the survival of native species. An internal document from the National Park Service reports on the Chinese tallow tree’s exotic presence in the Big Thicket. The Chinese tallow presence as an exotic species in East Texas foregrounds important topics

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within environmental philosophy. I want to expand on this in order to introduce the major themes of my thesis.

*Figure 1. Picture of Chinese Tallow.*

The Chinese tallow was first noticed near the Big Thicket in 1980. It has since become a prominent feature of the Thicket’s forested areas; in particular, the bottomland hardwood forests seem to be the most threatened by this exotic species. In fact, the National Park Service report suggests, “if left unmanaged, our empirical models of the Chinese tallow invasion indicate that in 15 years Chinese tallow tree could displace almost all understory trees in the bottomland hardwood forest.” Thus bottomland hardwood forests will be seriously compromised if the Chinese tallow is left unmanaged. Before formulating a management plan, the arrival of an exotic species must first be understood. Ecological managers know that the movement of birds and flooding are means by which Chinese tallow seeds are transported. Further research about seed transmission is required, especially since management plans will differ depending on whether the movement of seeds generally occurs from within or from outside of the preserve.

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4 Zipp and Siemann.
The specification of whether seed transmission is driven internally or externally brings forth two philosophical issues. First, establishing the difference between an internal and external realm assumes, of course, a clear-cut boundary that distinguishes the two areas. Second, this boundary between inside and outside is permanently crossed by birds and water, which play a role in transporting Chinese tallow seeds. Thus, the Chinese tallow case is an example that intrinsically revolves around boundaries and crossing boundaries. Choosing particular management practices, in this case, depends on the ecologists' ability to distinguish whether the seeds come from the interior or exterior, and how they move between areas of the preserve. This is relevant because in the chapters that follow, I explore the flexibility of boundaries, and the functional roles they play within ecological areas, as well as in communities in general.

Furthermore, the Chinese tallow report hints to a discussion about the ways things become contextually identified. In this case, the Chinese tallow is characterized as an exotic as opposed to a native species. The tree's exotic identification functions very differently, depending on the focus and context of the situation. In the Big Thicket, the Chinese tallow is seen as a serious problem that deserves federal grant money directed toward its removal and management. On the other hand, discussions within agricultural design and gardening praise the overall benefits of this exotic species. The Chinese tallow provides a lot of shade, is functional for roadways, resistant to certain fungi, and displays superb fall colors. Related to the changing effects of the tree in particular situations, I am interested in the multiplicity of values attributed to the tree and its varying political identity. In the Big Thicket, and in the south in general, the Chinese tallow displaces native trees. In California and Australia, on the contrary, the exotic tree does not threaten native species, and hence can be valued positively if not praised for its ornamental qualities. Thus depending on the place, practice and focus, the exotic tree plays a
different role in the landscape. Through this example, one notices that the political identity of Chinese tallow has much more to do with its specific context than with a generalized definition. Furthermore, it is important to consider the way that identity can be multifaceted and able to change with each situation.

As an exotic species, one can identify the Chinese tallow as a foreigner, or even an intruder. The characterization of the Chinese tallow is dependent on the place, as well as the situation in which it exists. Thus it cannot be characterized as being one thing; it must be seen as multiple identities. This thesis attempts to describe how an openness to such complexity, multiplicity and ambiguity helps to foreground an awareness of the place of the other. In turn, the presence of the other encourages, philosophically speaking, an understanding of how the notion of being should always be analyzed and seen in relation to others.

The first chapter is more historical than philosophical in the sense that it outlines the development of corridor conservation. Corridor conservation is not a simple cure for all habitat issues. Each possible corridor configuration must be judged by itself in its own context, without a presumption of universally positive benefits of corridors. Nonetheless, due to the fragmentation of landscapes, the need for the establishment and maintenance of corridors is often necessary for the health of a community, be it human or ecological. Corridors invariably bring to the foreground questions pertaining to boundaries and how they link up to and create communities.

The second chapter deals with the complexities of communities. Communities may at times seem exclusive and fixed, similar to a static identification of an entity. In this chapter, I focus on the dynamic existence of community, specifically on the way in which an entity is always temporarily located within a context. The foreigner is crucial in bringing this to light. Foreign elements by definition cross boundaries, whether intentionally or unintentionally, that
have been established by a community. The chapter describes the way that bodies, in a general sense of the term, and communities interact and how foreign bodies rearrange the dynamics of a community. Specifically, the ambiguity of foreignness is explored through an analysis of the way foreignness can be understood as reviving a community.

The third chapter draws upon the previous chapters and couples the ambiguity of the foreigner with the notion of a community’s ambiguous nature. The foreigner is often perceived as either harmful or beneficial. However, in order to approach the question of foreignness more thoughtfully, it may be best to remain unclear about its nature. To remain ambiguous does not require that judgment remain idle. Instead, judgment should always be made with consideration of the particularities of a given situation. Judgment, at times, may prove to create the ambiguity (e.g., a person can judge the speculations on foreignness as wrong, which opens up the dialogue on foreignness and renders it less definable) or it may lead to clarity in the midst of questioning. Most importantly, the chapter discusses the significance of the being-with of the foreigner and the denizen and the continual and productive tension that that relation endures. As I mentioned above, the Big Thicket is a good case to demonstrate such philosophical themes.

Contention within a community can be a reviving force, creating the possibility that different patches can allow for the existence of others. In this way, the concept of being-with can be seen through an examination of the development and application of corridor conservation in the Big Thicket National Preserve.
CHAPTER II

DEVELOPING THEMES OF CORRIDOR CONSERVATION AND THE
BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE

Introduction

A corridor is a passage between ecological patches. Conservation plans incorporating corridors have become increasingly necessary due to human settlement patterns and habitat fragmentation. Corridor conservation plans create ecological areas that are pieced together like mosaics, or matrices. Such ecological mosaics may run through towns or come up to timber or agricultural lands. In East Texas, corridor plans have made possible the conservation of an underestimated ecological beauty, the Big Thicket National Preserve. The Big Thicket is a mosaic that encounters diverse landscapes, as a result of its many borders. The boundaries of the Big Thicket may themselves function as passageways to the other landscapes nearby.

Boundaries and corridors are locatable, but they also have an ambiguous quality because the clarity of corridors and boundaries, at times, is blurred. Moreover, liveliness is present within corridors and boundaries, along with there being an exchange between corridor boundaries and others they touch. This chapter, therefore, explores corridors and boundaries as a passage to consider the complexities of identifying ecological areas and the cooperation that occurs between such landscape structures. I outline the development of the ecosystem management concept and discuss corridor conservation with these themes in mind. The Big Thicket National Preserve demonstrates the ambiguity of ecological corridors and boundaries. In this vein, the Big Thicket serves as an example for the possible roles corridors and boundaries play in the identification of
an area and cooperation between areas. The important role of the other, especially concerning identification and cooperation, underlies this chapter; however, it is expanded on in subsequent chapters.

**Corridor Conservation**

Conservation plans usually consider corridors as green areas linking natural preserves together. Thus the terms greenways or greenbelts are sometimes used to describe corridors in conservation efforts. The term *greenway* first appeared in the late 1950s, but the design of “linear open spaces” goes back almost a century in North America. In the 1860s, Frederick Law Olmsted, the first American Landscape Architect, proposed an environmental plan to enhance growing urban lifestyles. Olmsted’s plans attempted to intertwine urban and rural landscapes in order to improve contact between visitors and parks, heighten water quality, increase flood control, as well as provide space for fostering “civic friendship.” It is worth mentioning that Olmstead thought civic friendship enhanced citizenship because it is associated with the notion of place and promotes thoughtfulness within neighborhoods. Many people can be associated in civic friendship since it is less demanding than an intimate friendship. Civic friendship develops through unexpected meetings, like encounters at stores, on streets, or in parks. Moreover, Olmsted encouraged people to gather in groups, at both large and local scales. He called this “receptive recreation,” a recreation that allows reception of the other. Olmsted thought that receptive recreation contributes to civic friendship and fostering it was the aim of public parks. These environmental and community developing objectives were accomplished with Olmsted’s

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7 Landy, 211.
design for Boston’s “Emerald Necklace.” By the turn of the century, one of the target goals for
greenways was to block urban sprawl by creating natural green areas that laced within and
encircled the town. In addition, greenways were supposed to connect towns to country lands, an
idea highly stressed between 1890-1920s. From the earliest implementations to contemporary
efforts, creating matrixes of corridors has become popular, growing with creativity in reason and
design.\(^8\)

The loss of species biodiversity motivated ecologists in the 1930s to outline ecological
goals for the management of ecosystems, which became the dawn of the concept of ecosystem
management. In addition to the thoughts of Aldo Leopold, in 1932, a study by the Ecological
Society of America’s Committee for the Study of Plant and Animal Communities outlined what
a protected environmental area should entail. The study held that ecosystems, focal species and
natural disturbances should all be protected within a reserve, which would then be surrounded by
a buffer zone to further ensure the survival of the organisms and processes within the reserve.
From 1935 to 1950, ecologists began arguing that an \textit{arbitrarily} large reserve is not necessarily a
“functional” ecosystem; instead, functional ecosystems should have boundaries around reserves
profiling the habitat requirements of the ecosystem’s large mammals. At the time, such ideas
about what should define and be included in an ecosystem were not successful.\(^9\)

However, in the late 1970s, Frank and John Craighead published a long-term study of
grizzly bear populations, and concluded that grizzly bears required a larger habitat than the
boundaries of Yellowstone National Park allowed. A 1985 study supported the Craighead
findings, which resulted in establishing “a fundamental criterion for defining greater ecosystems:
the area must provide the primary habitat necessary to sustain the largest carnivore in a region.”

\(^8\) Daniel S. Smith, 5.
This work propelled the concept of ecosystem management, because there was now a central
definition around which an ecosystem is defined: the habitat of the largest carnivore.\textsuperscript{10}

In the late 1980s, the ecosystem management concept was well supported by the
scientific community. Jim Agee and Darryll Johnson published the first book length discussion
“that ecologically defined boundaries, clearly stated management goals, interagency cooperation,
monitoring of management results, and leadership at the national policy level were essential
elements” in ecosystem management. Furthermore, Agee and Johnson made it clear that human
actions cannot be considered separately from nature. They believed, moreover, that ecologists
needed to recognize the “social context of their work.” After this 1988 work on ecosystem
management, many studies and papers focused on further exploring the concept of ecosystem
management.\textsuperscript{11} The major shifts in the development of the ecosystem management concept are
described in the brief historical sketch above. The history of the concept rests on three issues: a)
ecosystem boundaries and definitions, b) multi-group cooperation in management, and c) the
complex interaction between social and natural contexts in ecosystems and their management.

**Corridors: Troublesome or Troubleshooting**

Themes of boundaries, cooperation, and natural and social interactions guide my ideas,
just as they guided the historical development of ecosystem management. According to
landscape ecologists, an ecosystem is not freestanding; it exists within a more complex picture.
In fact, it may be environmentally damaging to disregard the impact adjacent lands have on
ecosystems. Ecological edges, especially in fragmented landscapes, create possibilities of
increased crossing over of pesticides, run-off, or exotic species, for example. Therefore,

\textsuperscript{10} Grumbine, 28.
\textsuperscript{11} Grumbine, 28-29.
ecological management needs to consider the “big picture.” Ecological patches, corridors, and their edges, in addition to the human settlements around such green areas, comprise the complex, big picture some ecologists try to consider. It is, unfortunately, the big picture that catalogues the increasing rate of extinction due to habitat loss.

Just as the concern for biodiversity loss spurred the maturation of the ecosystem management concept, it has launched discussions about the use of ecological corridors as a way to increase connectivity in fragmented landscapes in order to slow the loss of species diversity. Support for corridor use initially came from the theoretical evidence of island biogeography and, more recently, metapopulation models. The island biogeography theory suggests that the formation of corridors connecting populations that are patch-locked (as an island is locked in by water) decrease the likelihood of extinction. Metapopulation studies have also been used to support the use of corridors. The concept of a metapopulation refers to a set of populations over several patches that are connected to each other in varying degrees. The movement of organisms in a metapopulation is described through a focus on within-patch and among-patch dynamics. Corridors are said to increase the movement among patches and therefore increase the survival of the metapopulation.

A major influence on contemporary corridor theory has been a dialogue between a 1987 critique of corridors by Simberloff and Cox, and the response offered by Noss. Simberloff and Cox recognize that corridors may provide useful connections between small patches; however,

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13 Island biogeography was proposed by MacArthur and Wilson in 1967, and modified by Brown and Kodric-Brown’s addition of the “rescue effect” in 1977.
14 Metapopulation theory is referenced in one paper as beginning with Levins in 1970, and further developed by others into the late 1980s.
the authors maintain that the full range of negative impacts of corridors has not been reasonably explored, nor is there really evidence that corridors increase population viability. One possible repercussion to corridor use is the increase in disease transmission due to corridor linkages. Although the manifestation of diseases is initially caused by patch fragmentation (increased transmission due to crowding), the connectivity that corridors provide may increase the spread of population threatening diseases.\(^\text{16}\) On the other hand, according to Noss, because the natural landscape was previously connected, corridors should be used to provide a simulated connectivity to counteract habitat fragmentation.\(^\text{17}\) Even birds, endowed with wings, are contained within fragmented patches of land. Indeed, juvenile songbirds are less likely to cross open spaces in fragmented landscapes, suggesting that there is a period of development when open spaces seem to function as barriers. Ironically, thus, birds are bound within a patch in fragmented areas when no corridor is present.\(^\text{18}\) The Simberloff – Cox and Noss dialogue outlines how corridors can both be troublesome with negative effects, while also troubleshooting the effects of habitat fragmentation. In “Corridors in Real Landscapes,” Noss offers a balanced summary of the possible advantages and disadvantages of corridors, which appears below.

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\(^\text{16}\) Hess, 261.
\(^\text{17}\) Reed F. Noss, “Corridors in Real Landscapes: A Reply to Simberloff and Cox,” in Conservation Biology, Volume 1, Issue 2, August 1987, 162.
### Potential Advantages of Corridors

1. Increase immigration rate to a reserve, which could
   - A. increase or maintain species richness and diversity (as predicted by island biogeography theory);
   - B. increase population sizes of particular species and decrease probability of extinction (provide a “rescue effect”) or permit re-establishment of extinct local populations;
   - C. prevent inbreeding depression and maintain genetic variation within populations.
2. Provide increased foraging area for wide-ranging species
3. Provide predator-escape cover for movements between patches.
4. Provide a mix of habitats and successional stages accessible to species that require a variety of habitats for different activities of stages of the lifecycles.
5. Provide alternative refugia from large disturbances (a “fire escape”).
6. Provide “greenbelts” to limit urban sprawl, abate pollution, provide recreational opportunities, and enhance scenery and land values.

### Potential Disadvantages of Corridors

1. Increase immigration rate to a reserve, which could
   - A. facilitate the spread of epidemic diseases, insect pests, exotic species, weeds, and other undesirable species into reserves and across the landscape;
   - B. decrease the level of genetic variation among population or subpopulations, or disrupt local adaptations and coadapted gene complexes (“outbreeding depression”).
2. Facilitate spread of fire and other abiotic disturbances (“contagious catastrophes”)
3. Increase exposure of wildlife to hunters, poachers, and other predators.
4. Riparian strips, often recommended as corridor sites, might not enhance dispersal or survival of upland species.
5. Cost, and conflicts with conventional land preservation strategy to reserve endangered species habitat (when inherent quality of corridor habitat is low.)

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**Figure 2. Potential advantages and disadvantages of conservation of corridors.**¹⁹

As one author summarizes, the controversy in “corridor theory is not whether corridors will serve a connectivity function, but rather what kind of connectivity they will supply.”²⁰

Nevertheless, many ecologists support the use of corridors in conservation, albeit with hesitation.

Corridors are the best remedy for a landscape that is broken up and losing species diversity. In

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¹⁹ Figure 2 from Noss, 160.
fact, even ecologists skeptical of corridor conservation strategies remark that every corridor possibility should be judged individually. Therefore, theoretical frameworks for corridor use should not be universally employed to judge whether corridors are generally positive or negative.\textsuperscript{21} A closer examination of corridors and the boundaries that define them will help to reveal the complex nature and role they play in ecological landscapes.

Corridor Configurations

There are many possible “corridor configurations,” diversified by the various types of corridors and boundaries. Corridors can be linear and continuous, discontinuous in space or time, and/or perform different ecological functions. Temporary corridors include those: a) in which the mover only uses it sporadically, b) that are temporarily created by, for example, a fire making a pathway through a forest, c) that are seasonally controlled; for example, high water conditions in streams that may briefly provide passage to deep waters, used by fish who could not otherwise travel to such pools.\textsuperscript{22} Boundaries, too, have many shapes. For example, boundaries may take the form of: a) ocean fronts; places of accumulating plankton and other drifting organisms, b) interfaces between forests and field, c) biome delineations, d) the area between a decomposing log and soil, or e) places between areas of high and low predation.\textsuperscript{23} Corridors and boundaries are typically referenced as simple ecological hallways and lines. As these examples demonstrate, corridors and boundaries must be understood as variable and dynamic. To accommodate such an understanding, some ecologists use characteristics of movement and change to describe corridors and boundaries.\textsuperscript{24} Corridors channel movement and boundaries influence change. Different

\textsuperscript{21} Daniel Simberloff and James Cox, “Consequences and Costs of Conservation Corridors,” in Conservation Biology, Volume 1, Issue 1, May 1987, 69.
\textsuperscript{23} Puth and Wilson, 24.
\textsuperscript{24} Puth and Wilson.
degrees of movement and change, therefore, link all things and scales together. For the sake of clarity, corridors and boundaries are considered separately below.

Corridors were historically conceived as paths used by game animals to move between fragmented forests in agricultural landscapes. However, a myopic focus on game animals does not consider other movers like aquatic organisms, nutrients, or migratory birds. Linda Puth and Karen Wilson write, “Thus it is necessary to recognize the traditional definition as a special case of a more general concept of corridor that allows for various configurations but stresses movement over form.” Accordingly, corridors can be structurally diverse and, depending on the mover considered, may exist at various scales. Ecologists state that in order for a corridor to exist, there must be something traveling on it, and its traveling on the corridor should be necessary. In other words, the corridor path should be less restricted than the other paths within the patch. Therefore, it is no surprise that channelization and movement are major characteristics of corridors and that the continuity of a corridor is flexible and dependant upon the needs and situations of the mover.

Landscape ecology describes certain associations as being compatible (like two vegetation stands linked by soil type) and associations that are incompatible, which are usually kept distant from one another (like high-income housing and high level polluting factories). When incompatible systems are linked, buffers are commonly used to “cushion or lessen” the effect of the two systems. “Buffers may repel, or may absorb, those flows.” Important to note, however, is that the buffer in between is also a location of flows and movement that affect its adjacent land areas. Buffers, then, seem to differentiate, connect as well as create areas.

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25 Puth and Wilson, 22.
26 Puth and Wilson, 23.
way, the idea of buffers helps develop thinking of boundaries as intrinsically places of interaction. In spite of the attempt to create buffer zones that keep ecological boundaries flexible, recent workers suggest that such cushion zones actually function as strict limitations with politically supported, narrow regulations. Zimmerer proposes a possible solution to the rigid structure of conservation boundaries by citing ecologists and geographers who support a view of nature that “adopt[s] a multiscale framework that is sensitive to seasonal and other time-based fluctuations.” Understanding nature in this way will guide conservation efforts toward successfully utilizing “multiple boundaries” when outlining ecological areas.

Boundaries are oftentimes characterized by form. The interface between landscape patches and the places where change of ecological flow occurs abruptly (in comparison to points in the surrounding patches) typifies a boundary. Therefore, similar to the typically oversimplified conception of corridors, boundaries have also been mistakenly understood “more for their structural distinctions on the landscape than for their role in landscape function.” Boundary functions, however, are not entirely dependant on the form of the boundary. Structurally similar boundaries may have vastly different ecological effects. Puth and Wilson conclude, “Thus, like corridors, boundaries are best defined by observed changes in fluxes and processes they influence, rather than by form alone.” As a result, boundaries should be recognized for their role in distinguishing difference but also should be acknowledged for the important roles they play in ecosystems.

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28 Zimmerer describes cases in India where the zone between a core reserve and human settlement was to be used as a location for native people, but the political institutions governing the buffer zone regulated the area so as to deny access to locals. The buffer was therefore a politically charged and made impossible a positive intertwtement between society and the reserve.


30 Boundary form may include size, sinuosity, structural complexity, physical composition, and the level of contrast with adjacent landscapes.

31 Puth and Wilson, 23.

32 Puth and Wilson, 24.
Attempting to focus more specifically on boundaries, many research projects have begun to study ecological edges. Ecological studies, however, usually focus either on a rather homogeneous area within boundaries (patches), or the research is directed toward the edges themselves. Crow and Gustafson admit that neither approach really considers the interaction of communities across boundaries. These insightful landscape ecologists continue their critique in writing:

If boundaries between patches or landscape elements are absolute, no exchanges take place. In this case, patches exist as closed systems, isolated from their neighbors. Such situations rarely occur in nature. It is equally rare, though, that boundaries are neutral and completely permeable to all fluxes. Most typically, landscape boundaries act as filters, with the structural characteristics of the edge and the context in which the edge exists playing key roles in determining its permeability.\(^{33}\)

Boundaries certainly demarcate flow, but they also provide essential ground for interaction at and across differences. The structure of a patch or boundary helps to determine its function, but also the network of which it is a part influences a patch or boundary’s role in the ecosystem. Taking this idea further, some ecologists contend that any landscape structure might act as a corridor and at the same time a boundary, depending on the flow of materials and energy. Therefore, one must recognize the context in order to try to understand the multiple roles a landscape structure might play. In other words, there might be, “a multiplicity of landscape functions for any one structure.” In addition, both boundaries and corridors are flow regulators and differ only by their effects on rates and direction of flow.\(^ {34}\) Corridors can be thought of as

\(^{33}\) Crow and Gustafson, 59.

\(^{34}\) Rates and direction of energy flow can be mapped out on a permeability continuum. Thus, the distinction between corridor and boundary is defined by a continuum, an idea Puth and Wilson explore.
places that house changes in energy flow, as well as places able to effect the directions of these flows. Thus corridors, like boundaries, passively and actively interact with ecological flow. Examples of corridor conservation pervade contemporary ecology. The Chicago Wilderness is a well-known case of ecological management based on matrices of corridors and patches. During the emergence of the Chicago Wilderness, issues determining boundaries, multi-group cooperation and the incorporation of nature and society were (and still are) dealt with. The region now known as the Big Thicket is a less famous case of corridor conservation. The Big Thicket is found in East Texas, an area that defies the tumbleweed stereotypes of Lone Star ecology with its unique ecological composition. It is a meeting ground for several biomes, diverse organisms and human interests. Due to human settlement, clear cutting and oil mining, this ecological area is now fragmented. In the early 1900’s, a conservation plan began to develop and is still doing so today. Reference to the themes that guided the development of ecological management and corridor conservation will be made through a brief history of the area in East Texas. The Big Thicket’s story revolves around the difficulties of defining ecological boundaries, sincere cooperation between groups and issues dealing with the intertwinement between nature and society.

Big Thicket National Preserve

Although the first Europeans to settle Texas were the Spanish, their missions did not follow the Native Americans into the densely wooded and swamped area in East Texas. In fact, Native Americans traveled through those areas, which they called the “Big Woods,” by canoe, leaving few paths or campsites for contemporary anthropologists to find. The first English-speaking settlers arrived in Texas in the 1820’s, but the pioneers failed to pass through the forests and swamps on the eastern border of Texas. Instead, they made their trails to the north

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35 Puth and Wilson, 22-24.
and south of the geographic barrier, leaving the natural obstacle fairly untouched. The pioneers not only left alone the area, they left us the current name of the woods and swamps: out of frustration, they called the area the Big Thicket.\textsuperscript{36}

The Big Thicket served as a hiding place for armies during the Texas Revolution; during the Civil War conscientious objectors, “renegade whites, fugitive blacks and relocated Indians” all sought refuge within the dense, jungle-like vegetation and swamps. Moreover, the Big Thicket is near the Huntsville state prison and was naturally the destination for escaped convicts. However, the parties mentioned above were not the only ones to recognize the potential of the Thicket; timber companies and oil interests were residents in the Thicket in the decades after the Civil War. As a result of the destruction of large areas of the Thicket, a long history of conservation efforts ignited in the late 1920’s.\textsuperscript{37} Three hurdles created difficulty for the early conservationists trying to catalyze the preservation of the area today known as the Big Thicket: a) The lack of publicity of the area to people outside of East Texas, b) an absence of a distinct location of the area based on scientific studies, and c) the complexities of the political web that conservationists encountered.\textsuperscript{38} Defining what and where the Big Thicket is located, conveying its importance, while trying to maneuver through political hoops has created a story of the Big Thicket worth retelling and exploring as a case study. To help visualize the area discussed, figure 3 below is a map of Texas with the location of the Big Thicket highlighted. Figure 4 shows three different conceptions of the Big Thicket transposed onto one map, each shaded individually.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{38} Pete A. Y. Gunter, \textit{R.E. Jackson and Early Big Thicket Conservation: Setting the Stage} (Big Thicket Association, Saratoga, Texas, 1997), 10.
Figure 3. Location of the Big Thicket in Texas
Figure 4. Transposition of three Big Thicket maps: Biological Survey, McLeod’s Analysis, and the Bear Hunter’s Traditional Thicket.
Pete Gunter points out that the Pioneers had a general idea of the size of the Big Thicket area, but the original *Biological Survey of East Texas Big Thicket Area* specifies the dimensions, which equaled 3,350,000 acres, or, an area slightly larger than the state of Connecticut. This 1938 survey closely resembles the accounts of the early settlers.\(^{40}\) Professor Claude McLeod offered a more detailed mapping of the Big Thicket. Later, McLeod’s map diverged significantly from the 1938 survey by excluding some areas and including others. McLeod offered definitions concerning the Big Thicket’s identity and categorized the Thicket into three different subareas: the Upper Thicket, the Lower Thicket and the Stream Thicket.

McLeod also offered an ecological definition of the Big Thicket area based on soil type and plant species that exist under medium rainfall and temperatures. Gunter describes the main soil types in the Big Thicket as the Lissie Sands, formed in the Pleistocene, and Willis Sands, which were formed in the later Miocene.\(^{41}\) McLeod characterized the Big Thicket’s ecology as one where loblolly pines are found together with hardwood trees such as magnolias, beech, white oak and chestnut oak. Such a pine-hardwood association demonstrates the Big Thicket as being a part of the Southern evergreen forests, which extend south from Virginia down to Florida and west through southeast Missouri, and finally into East Texas.\(^{42}\) In addition to the specific soil and plant characterizations, there are areas in the Thicket that resemble jungles in Mexico, according to biologists researching Mexican jungle ecology. And, finally, as the name suggests, there is a thicket quality in East Texas, where the brush is so dense a person just 10 meters away is difficult to see.\(^{43}\)

\(^{40}\) Gunter, *Big Thicket: An Ecological Reevaluation*, 37.
\(^{41}\) Gunter, *Big Thicket: An Ecological Reevaluation*, 45.
McLeod’s definitions of the Big Thicket preserve, of course, have been challenged by lumber companies as being too generous, while at the same time conservationists have appealed that the Thicket extends even beyond McLeod’s definitions. Such is the problem with the Thicket; it is present and distinct yet resists easy definition. For this reason, other advocates have tried to characterize the Big Thicket “as an entire region of transition.” McLeod used indicator species as tools for defining the Big Thicket: where those species exist, the Big Thicket area exists. However, for those who believe in the transition region theory, the lack of a certain indicator species does not demonstrate that an area is separate from the Big Thicket. They argue that there are stretches alongside McLeod’s boundaries that suspiciously resemble the Big Thicket and so should be included in the area, even though these areas are missing some indicator species that McLeod distinguished for the three distinct subregions. The original survey of 1938 and the work of Professor McLeod are two well-outlined methods to describe and define the Big Thicket. Additionally, there is a third major map of the Big Thicket area. It follows the traditional hunter’s conception of the Thicket. The hunter’s Thicket is the smallest area of the Big Thicket definitions.44

The process of identifying the Big Thicket is long and interesting. Gunter outlines this history and suggests that the trouble with defining the Big Thicket area has much to do with the question of how the area initially took form. Different soil types are found in the Big Thicket and, due to the effects of erosion, different layers and pockets are exposed around the park. Some say that the variation of soil types (there are over 100 soil types45) found in the Thicket is the cause of the patchwork of plant communities, all growing on their suitable soil. Whatever the reason, ecological communities found within the Big Thicket vary in number, according to the

44 Gunter, Big Thicket: An Ecological Reevaluation, 41.
ecologist one consults. However, most researchers agree that there are 8-9 different plant communities in all. To further illustrate the ecological diversity of the Big Thicket, the Thicket forests are described in a 1967 National Parks Study: “The forest contains elements common to the Florida Everglades, the Okefenokee Swamp, the Appalachian region, the piedmont forests, and the large open woodlands of the coastal plains. Some large areas resemble tropical jungles in the Mexican states of Tamaulipas and Vera Cruz.” ⁴⁶ In other words, the Big Thicket is a location at which several ecological communities co-exist.

Furthermore, two ecologists from Cornell University made a statement in support of saving the Big Thicket in a National Parks and Recreation hearing. They described a uniqueness of ecological diversity in the area as a result of it being a “Biological Crossroads of North America.” In fact, they stated, “Nowhere else in North America is there found such a diversity of plant and animal species: nowhere else is there such a unique combination of habitats, northern temperate and subtropical, arid western and humid south-eastern, freshwater and saltwater, forest and prairie, calcareous and acid.” ⁴⁷ Due to the multiple ecologies represented in the area, the precise location of the Big Thicket is difficult to determine. As a result, there were many hurdles to overcome when people initially tried to summon support for designating the Big Thicket as a national park.

For example, during one of the many Big Thicket hearings, there was an interesting statement from A.D. Folweiler of the Texas Forest Service. He stated his support for a Big Thicket monument, but was against the formation of a national park. On behalf of the Forest Farmers Association, Mr. Folweiler cited passages from Professor McLeod’s work that demonstrated the lack of clear definition regarding what exactly the Big Thicket is. For instance,

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⁴⁶ Quoted in Gunter, *Big Thicket: An Ecological Reevaluation*, 47.
⁴⁷ U.S. House, 104.
some define the area based on ecological communities, while others define the area based on its geological features. The Forest-Farmers Association, consequently, supported recognizing the Big Thicket as an important area, but they did not support designating its status as a national park. The lack of clarity regarding the constitution of the Big Thicket, in this case, may have made a group wary about supporting a park that, to them, could not be sufficiently identified.

In 1974, 84,550 acres of land finally became the first park protected by the National Park Service, and was formally designated as the Big Thicket National Preserve. Under President Clinton, 10,000 acres were added to the Big Thicket in 1993, enlarging the preserve to 97,168 acres. At present this land is beginning to be purchased. The boundaries of the Big Thicket are still being determined by conservationists trying to buy and barter for land to add to the national park. It seems obvious that ecological preserves are no longer going to be huge tracts of land, readily identifiable and ready to be contained. For reasons having to do with development, urban growth, private ownership and interests, ecological parks are now tending toward a mosaic-like composition of patches and threads linking areas together. The Big Thicket National Preserve typifies a case of ecological management based on corridor conservation. It is not surprising, then, that the nine main units and winding corridors connecting them causes the Big Thicket to meander through seven Texas counties.

When the Big Thicket was created, a matrix preserve was the best option to secure the most land and species diversity. At the time, timber companies agreed to leave company property bordering much of the Big Thicket as wild land. Such timber company lands functioned as protective buffers for the Big Thicket preserve. When the park was created, many thought that the timber companies would always own the bordering lands. These buffer lands were expected

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to help protect the Thicket patches, which made the meager patch-corridor matrix a viable conservation plan. However, in a Houston Chronicle article from November 2002, it is reported that resident East Texas timber companies planned to sell 1.5 million acres of land, much of which comprises the buffer zones that timber companies originally set aside to aid the Big Thicket.

Selling the timberland to developers will expose more of the Big Thicket by revealing its boundaries. As a corridor conservation plan, the Big Thicket has many borders. To put it into perspective, Maxine Johnston, one of the key figures in Big Thicket conservation, says the Big Thicket “preserve has almost twice as many miles of borders than Yellowstone Park…even though Yellowstone is 23 times larger than the Big Thicket.” With the sale of the timber lands, the Big Thicket might run up against housing developments and shopping malls, neighbors not usually characterized as allies to ecological preserves; rather, concrete developments tend to be more invasive. At least, this is the fear of many Big Thicket conservationists.

Summary

Since small ecological patches oftentimes cannot support viable populations, the use of corridors is currently the best way to connect patches, linking many small pieces together to form an ecological mosaic. Such is the direction ecological management has taken. Initially, ecologists had difficulty characterizing just how an ecosystem can be defined. The concept of ecosystem management solidified when many researchers supported defining ecosystems based on the habitat requirements of the largest predator. Although this definition has since been reconsidered in ecological literature, it was an essential step in the maturation of the ecosystem management concept.

49 Richard Stewart, “In the Thick of New Fight in Big Thicket,” Houston Chronicle, 18 November 2002, 17A.
Habitat fragmentation and the decline of biodiversity led conservationists to develop a strategy that would create landscape connectivity in the presence of human settlement. Moreover, because large parks are seldom possible to establish, corridor conservation is frequently the only feasible conservation strategy. Matrices like the Big Thicket help surface important questions by demonstrating the difficulties faced when asked to define an area. By their nature, boundaries and corridors resist easy definition. It is clear that corridors and boundaries can play important, functional roles within an ecological area, and function as interactive locations with surrounding areas. Their form and function shift; therefore, corridors and boundaries must be reconsidered with each situation.

The difficulties conservationists had in delineating the Big Thicket is particularly interesting in light of the many different ecological types that converge in East Texas. The Big Thicket does not only represent a meeting place of several ecological areas, it is also a place of convergence for many human groups. Residents, local conservationists, nationally renowned ecologists, politicians, non-profit conservation groups and for profit timber and oil companies all share an interest in the Big Thicket National Preserve, even though the groups otherwise might have conflicting interests. Nevertheless, the intersecting of groups is a contemporary situation that requires careful analysis. The historical development of the Big Thicket National Park accommodates thinking through the complexities of boundaries, cooperation, and interactions between different groups or environments. Although such themes have been dealt with independently in the field of environmental philosophy, I will utilize the case laid out above as a point of departure for a study of the interplay between boundaries, cooperation and interaction.
CHAPTER III

CROSSING BOUNDARIES:
SITUATING BODIES IN THE DYNAMICS OF COMMUNITY IDENTITY

*Being singular plural* means the essence of Being is only as coessence. . . . . if Being is being-with, then it is, in its being-with, the “with” that constitutes Being: the with is not simply an addition.

? Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*

Introduction

Michel Foucault’s analysis of the history of madness describes how, in the 1600’s, lepers were excluded from society while, at the same time, being spiritually welcomed as signs from God.⁵⁰ Such a double vision of madness can be extended into a discussion about the role a foreigner plays in a community; lepers being, in a way, outsiders of the community. However, the lepers were physically removed from the community; whereas, a foreigner is not excluded as such but exists within a community. The determination of whom or what is an outsider is an intrinsic part of the formulation of community.

To analyze community dynamics, this chapter first introduces a theoretical mapping of bodies. Here I understand bodies in a general sense, as representing social, geographic and biological bodies. I consider Spinoza’s conception of the relation between mind and body, and employ Deleuze’s interpretation to understand the relation of bodies in the world. This cartography of bodies is meant to foster an understanding of the intimate relationship between an

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entity and its surroundings. Identifying a body in terms of its relations leads to a discussion of the ambiguity of boundaries and, furthermore, how boundary crossing elicits new situations.

Ecological boundaries mark differences, yet also take on important ecological functions, as shown in chapter one. Similarly, boundaries between bodies mark separation but in so doing they function as places of interaction between bodies.

An analysis of the geography of bodies shows the ambiguous nature of boundaries and furthers an understanding of the notion of boundary crossing. As an entryway to thinking about the complexity of boundaries, this chapter examines the ambiguous nature of the foreigner. Dealing with this issue, political philosopher Bonnie Honig reconceptualizes foreignness as occupying both a feared and embraced position that actually re-founds a community.

Understanding the effects that foreignness has on communities calls for a consideration of the nature of social and geographical boundaries, as Deleuze puts forth. More specifically, I follow Honig’s textual analysis of the place of the foreigner and the boundaries between the Moabite and Israelite communities as presented in the biblical book of Ruth. To further the discussion of ecological boundaries and corridors from chapter one, the foreigner is considered in relation to the Big Thicket National Preserve. And, lastly, I consider the way situated judgment allows a contextualized distinction between a good and bad foreigner.

The Question of the Body

Similar to distinctions between self and world or humans and nature, the mind and the body represent a dualism in modern thought. The dualistic pairs traditionally represent two different entities. One side of the dualism (self, humans) is usually more valued and thought to have control over the other side (world, nature). René Descartes is typically recognized as outlining the modern mind-body dualism. Baruch Spinoza reforms Descartes’ thoughts into a
mind-body identity, in which mind and body are two sides of the same coin. Gilles Deleuze refers to this concept in Spinoza’s thought as parallelism, a term originally coined by Gottfried Leibniz. Parallelism in Spinoza’s *Ethics* does not merely deny a relationship or causality between the mind and body. However, as Deleuze points out, the *Ethics* describes a *simultaneous action* in the mind and body and does not claim that one part acts systematically over the other. Parallelism, therefore, rejects a unilateral causality of mind over body. When there is an action in the mind, there is an action in the body *and vice versa*. This simultaneity of action eliminates the result that one side of the dualism (mind) is more valued and dominates the other (body). In other words, by compounding identity as both mind *and* body, Spinoza does not assign hierarchical value to either; thus, he characteristically departs from Descartes’ dualism. For this reason, many philosophers have taken up and extended the thoughts of Spinoza in relation their thinking about bodies, politics and the environment.

With the description of the way Spinoza’s metaphysics resists dualistic categorizations, it is no surprise Spinoza thought that all things are a part of one nature. Deleuze referred to Spinoza’s ‘one nature’ as “a plane of immanence or consistency.” This idea of one nature, of which all things are a part, does not simply erase boundaries and differences. Instead, existence is characterized through co-constitutive relations in which one relation is predicated upon the other. In this way, a thing is not defined by a fundamental essence. Rather, a thing can have a kind of consistency without an essence. Deleuze portrays the paper-folding art of origami in a way that nicely illustrates this conception of consistency. He writes,

> Every fold plays its part in lending consistency to the thing that is folded, and since every fold participates in the lending of consistency to ‘something = x’ without ever belonging to it,…, folds cannot be distinguished in terms of the

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52 Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 122.
essential and the inessential, the necessary and the contingent, or the structural and the ornamental.\textsuperscript{53}

Consistency allows an entity to take form, to be located. The touching folds give definition to a being, but within a contextualized place. The typical way of understanding a definition of an entity is, instead, refigured as always in relation to its surroundings. Deleuze discusses Spinoza’s ideas as leading to a contextual understanding of bodies and the world. In view of this, Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza resists classic categorization and supports situated understanding.

Mapping Bodies

Unfolding what Spinoza means by the body will help to elucidate his notion that all things exist on a geographic-like surface. According to Deleuze, Spinoza suggests the body as a new model for philosophical inquiry. A body, of any kind or size, “is composed of an infinite number of particles; it is the relations of motion and rest, of speeds and slowness between particles, that define a body, the individuality of a body.” This \textit{kinetic} proposition shows that a body is not defined by its form or function; rather, the form of a body is dependent on its own relations between motion and rest. A body is thus a complex network of relations between various intensities, defined by accelerations and decelerations. However, a body is not independent; it exists within and as a matrix, or network. A body’s situation, therefore, is kinetic and, at the same time, \textit{dynamic}. Deleuze expands on this second proposition, stating, “a body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality.”\textsuperscript{54} Both physical bodies and bodies of thought have the capacity to affect and be affected. In sum, similar to corridors and boundaries,


\textsuperscript{54} Deleuze, \textit{Spinoza}, 123.
bodies are not defined by form or function, or by substance or subjection. A body’s identity is, instead, a combination of its internal and external dynamics. In other words, bodies are described as movement in relation to others.\textsuperscript{55}

Perhaps, Deleuze suggests, a more fruitful method of defining bodies uses the geographic images of latitude and longitude as indicators of one’s place on the plane of immanence. A body’s latitude is a composition of its influences; longitude is comprised of its relations of motion and rest.\textsuperscript{56} Latitudinal and longitudinal positions locate a thing at a certain point and, therefore, they simultaneously define a body in terms of its (momentary) kinetic and dynamic position. The traditional conception of cartography must adjust to include the idea that a body’s set of kinetic relations is always changing, just as a body’s affective capacity is altered with each entity a body encounters. Mapping in this way facilitates an understanding of the tentative, or momentarily, nature of bodies.

The variable relations of movement, slowness, affectivity and ability to be affected create a temporary intersection of latitude and longitude, which resists strictly defining a body like a point on the map. Nonetheless, a degree of identification is possible. A combination of (kinetic) longitude and (dynamic) latitude, in a certain way, defines the body tentatively and momentarily, just before the latitudinal and longitudinal positions oscillate. This is structurally very similar to the form and function of corridors and boundaries, which, as described in chapter one, easily shifts, depending on the particular focus one takes up.\textsuperscript{57} In this way, any landscape structure has multiple roles, and therefore, its identity must be reconsidered with each situation. As outlined in

\textsuperscript{55} Deleuze, \textit{Spinoza}, 123-124.
\textsuperscript{56} Deleuze, \textit{Spinoza}, 127.
\textsuperscript{57} By this I refer to one looking at corridors and boundaries in terms of a focus on different energy flows; i.e., nutrient flow, paths of particular species, or even the movement patterns of juvenile and adult songbirds.
Maps have a useful function: one has to be able to trust the map. Still it is only part of the picture. The effort to keep a body ‘in place’ and a point on a map retains a static definition of a body, much like the typical understanding of maps as being objective, unchanging representations of things. As a result, this static conception of the world is addressed in recent geographic writings. For example, Marcus Doel tries to understand place as an event, with a liveliness that goes beyond the understanding of fixed places. Accordingly, he argues for a geography of bodies and places that is characterized by unpredictable spacing. Cartography, therefore, is a creative endeavor to try to understand, for a moment, the place of bodies in the world. Mapping bodies in the way Deleuze portrays allows for identification without encapsulation because bodies are always situated within change. In this way, everything exists on the plane of immanence, yet such an image of cartography does not reduce entities (or places) to a single, totalizing definition. Deleuze’s ideas suggest a complexity of a map that paralyzes the risk of reductively understanding Spinoza’s thought, or his mapping of the world, as holistic.

Ambiguous Boundaries: 
Body as World and Foreigner as Founder

As the preceding section demonstrated, a body’s internal and external relations form an intertwining that, on the one hand, distinguishes a body’s identification. On the other hand, the nature of intertwining internal and external dynamics is that the boundary itself between a body and world becomes ambiguous. A situated body necessitates the participation of entities in the world. Maurice Merleau-Ponty provides an example of a body’s activity in the world, together

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58 Doel, 7-10.
with the world’s active participation. He describes the way a painter looks at his work and sees himself, but, the painter might also say:

I feel myself looked at by the things, my activity is equally passivity…not to see in the outside, as the others see it, the contour of a body one inhabits, but especially to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen.  

The networked participation of body and world that Merleau-Ponty describes opens up an understanding of body as a composition of the world, and similarly, the world as bodies. To think of bodies as existing necessarily in relation to the world establishes bodies as world and world as embodied.

Thus, situating bodies as world highlights the mutually constitutive nature of the relationship between bodies and world, unlike simply equating the two. This section explores the relationship between body and world, with a focus on their boundaries. It is important to remember that when speaking in terms of a connection between two bodies, their difference is necessarily implied. It, therefore, seems contradictory to discuss bodies as world and simultaneously convey a relationship between these two things. Nevertheless, boundaries are limits that distinguish difference but, in so doing, they create possibilities and relationships. Boundaries, therefore, can be understood as dynamic places that facilitate the intertwinement of things.

Consider an ecological patch, with other patch-corridor networks existing within it.  This kind of patch is a zone full with dynamic interactions (longitude) and it has the capacity to affect and be affected by its surroundings (latitude). Boundaries can occupy part of both of these

60 The idea of multiple scales is discussed in Chapter III.
realms; a boundary is at once a part of both the inside and outside. However, because relationality and affectivity are always changing, boundaries also become places of change. The demarcation between outside and inside is contestable and ambiguous.

The ideas described in this chapter move away from both a strict definition between and a reductive assimilation of inside and outside. Instead, the question to ask is how rethinking an understanding of the relationship between inside and outside can facilitate an understanding of identity as difference. There is a separation between inside and outside, thus the difference between two things participates in the identity of each. In this way, Jean-Luc Nancy couples an understanding of body as world and world as embodied, but each is always found together with the presence of difference. Nancy states:

From one singular to another, there is contiguity but not continuity. There is proximity but only to the extent that extreme closeness emphasizes the distancing it opens up. All of being is in touch with all of being, but the law of touching is separation….  

Accordingly, that which is inside is different from its outside. Nevertheless, their otherness sifts, crossing through ambiguous boundaries marking difference.

The concept of community is particularly well suited to facilitate such an understanding of boundaries. The very idea of a community carries with it a distinction between those inside who share something in common and those outside of the community that are kept continually at bay. A close study of this distinction between the included and excluded must also consider the way, first, a community’s internal and external dynamics change with each situation, and, second, how this makes ambiguous the distinction between insiders and outsiders. A community, like a patch or body, is temporarily located according to the internal movements as well as its

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capacity to affect and be affected. Similarly, an outsider (or, foreigner) is temporarily distinguishable, but such designation can be altered with the slightest change in the dynamics of the community. In this way, the outsider occupies a place of ambiguity: in one instance it may function as a foreigner in the community, but if the focus of the situation changes, the outsider may temporarily hold a place as an insider. Thus, the situation determines the nature of the community, as it also determines the limits of an ecological patch.

In her book, *Democracy and the Foreigner*, Honig analyzes the role of the foreigner within Western cultural texts. She pays careful attention to the way a foreigner, to some extent, always remains an outsider. However, she describes the capacity that a foreigner has to revive, or refound, a community. The foreigner’s refounding effect brings it to the heart of the inside of a community, its foundations. Therefore, a foreigner occupies a threshold between the inside and outside. For these reasons, communities and their foreigners help to explicate the co-constitutional processes at work between two bodies and ambiguity of boundaries therein.

Dealing with the relationship between communities and foreigners, Honig first clarifies what foreignness is not. On the one hand, the foreigner is viewed negatively in order to ward off adverse modification or crumbling of community identity induced by his or her presence. This represents the typical attitude of the xenophobe. At the other extreme, those who celebrate post-nationalism hold an optimistic view of the foreigner. They welcome the foreigner, as a stick in the spokes of a wheel, because foreigners help throw off the stability of nationalistic regimes. Although different as they might seem, these two negative and positive depictions of the foreigner both share the classical understanding that foreignness is “a threat to the stability and identity of established regimes.”

By either protecting against or celebrating the presence of

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foreignness, both positions assume the threat posed by foreignness. Instead, following Honig’s lead, this essay questions the very idea of foreignness: What is it? What does it do? In addition, how can it help us rethink traditional notions of what inside and outside mean?

As Honig points out in her analysis of foreignness and its role in communities, foreignness is oftentimes depicted in cultural texts in two ways: first, as a method to define a group by highlighting what it is not, and, second, by bringing into the group a quality that the community lacks. Thus, foreignness works to re-found communities, but with a perpetual and ambiguous “double edge.” Foreignness presents both danger and uncertainty, as it plays the role of re-founder for the community. 63

An example: The Book of Ruth

Bonnie Honig utilizes many examples in order to make clear the ambiguity of the foreigner and less specifically, the ambiguity of community. One such textual example is the biblical book of Ruth. In “The Foreigner as Immigrant,” Honig writes a perceptive analysis how the Book of Ruth is an example of a “foreign founder text,” a text in which the foreigner re-establishes a community. What follows is a summary of the first few events in the story. The widows Ruth and Orpah are left in Moab along with their widowed mother-in-law, Naomi. As Naomi decides to return to her people in Bethlehem, Ruth and Orpah insist on accompanying her, at the expense of leaving their people, the Moabites. Naomi stops to direct her daughters-in-law to go back to their people, land and gods, back to the land of their mothers. At first, they both insist on staying with Naomi, but Orpah, in tears, finally turns back to Moab at the request of Naomi. Ruth, however, says she will go where Naomi goes and that Naomi’s gods will be her

63 Honig, 7.
own. The Israelite mother-in-law does not respond. She recommences travel to Bethlehem, accompanied by Ruth, the Moabite.

Ruth’s insistence on remaining with Naomi (who was herself a foreigner in Moab) signifies the chosen status of the Israelites, according to Honig’s reading. Ruth forsook her past in order to follow Naomi and join her people. Ruth’s choice to stay with Naomi, leaving her gods and people behind, is even more meaningful due to her foreignness.\textsuperscript{64} Furthermore, Ruth’s foreignness as a Moabite is extreme, because of the enemy relations between the Moabites and Israelite peoples. For this reason, Ruth’s loyalty is celebrated in Bethlehem. Ruth and the farmer, Boez, whose fields she gleans, eventually marry and produce a son, Obed. When born, the infant is immediately taken from Ruth and given to Naomi to nurse. The Israelite community celebrates the fact that Ruth, the Moabite, bore a son for Naomi. Ruth’s child, additionally, is welcomed as the establishment of a monarchy, which eventually yields King David. Nevertheless, her foreignness remains strange, or even dangerous, enough for the community to distrust Ruth’s ability to rear her son in the proper, Israelite way. The distrust of the community provides an explanation for why Naomi takes the child away from Ruth.\textsuperscript{65}

Ruth’s foreignness gently re-founds the community. First, Ruth’s choice to stay with Naomi restates the Chosen status of the Israelites. Moreover, Ruth re-establishes the community by birthing her son and, thus, a monarchy that will live by the laws of Moses and depart from the unstable rule of the judges.\textsuperscript{66} Her foreignness is rejuvenating, but also disturbing to the Israelite community: it is troubling to her Israelite husband and is the reason why her son is taken from her to be nursed by an Israelite. Moreover, Ruth’s foreignness is constantly reissued to her by her

\textsuperscript{64} Honig, 48.
\textsuperscript{65} Honig, 51.
\textsuperscript{66} Honig, 44-45.
name throughout the story, ‘Ruth, the Moabite.’ Ruth, therefore, is a double-edged sword. As a foreigner, she remains both intruder and re-viver of the Israelite community.

The analysis of boundary crossings in the Book of Ruth demonstrates, in a few short pages of a cultural text, the complex nature of community boundaries and the ambiguity of the foreigner. The insiders, in this case the Israelites, sharply differentiate themselves from other groups and exclude the Moabites as outsiders. The intricacies develop when Ruth’s foreignness is celebrated and, indeed, necessary to re-viving the Israelite community. She re-founds the Israelite community by reinforcing their past as the Chosen people and creates their future by way of the blessed lineage producing David, and later Jesus. Thus, foreignness is not so easily categorized and kept separate by native insiders. The inability to permanently encapsulate foreignness is due to the dynamic mapping of a body’s movement and relations, as described in the previous section.

The Foreigner in the Big Thicket

In the Big Thicket’s history, many human “outsiders” entered the area; for example, convicts, slaves, and anti-war southerners were all foreigners who took refuge within the forests and swamps of the Big Thicket. In a way, these foreigners helped to re-characterize the Big Thicket as a place rich with political history and folklore. The Big Thicket’s re-characterization helped to gather support for the preservation of the area as an historical and ecological treasure. This type of positive, reviving result is similar to the effect Ruth had with the Israelites.

Deciding just where the Big Thicket is located has proven difficult for conservationists; therefore, even more difficult is trying to determine foreignness in relation to the Big Thicket. Characteristics about the foreigner compound the difficulty of determining foreignness. Again, depending on the focus one has, the scale of a patch will differ. The different levels of patches
also create different levels and degrees of foreignness. Thus, a foreigner in a patch can take the shape of, for example, a virus or an army.\textsuperscript{67} The foreigner’s double-edged quality, being at once threatening \textit{and} reviving to a community, is another characteristic that challenges the identification of a foreigner.

I am interested in the way one can approach the issue of non-native species through an understanding of the foreigner as ambiguous and double-edged. There are many non-native, or exotic, species in the Big Thicket. Their characterization, of course, depends on the boundaries one uses to define the preserve. This point aside, if an exotic species is characterized as a foreigner, then it shares many of the ambiguities that characterize foreignness. To locate an exotic species requires one to first consider the situation. As discussed above, Merleau-Ponty describes the intertwining of a body and world to the point that the presence and relation of the one helps to characterize the other, and vice versa. Moreover, the mapping of bodies that Deleuze’s ideas put forth describes an entity’s existence as dynamic. Its location is dependent on the internal and external movements and relations. Thus, one can say that every thing (body, community, foreigner) exists always in relation to others.

Co-existence, therefore, necessitates a situated understanding before one can locate a native and non-native community, or native and exotic species. Because of the temporary way in which a body, in the general sense, is identified, an awareness of the details of a situation must precede any characterization of native or exotic. The corridor layout of the Big Thicket creates a great deal of borders, bringing the preserve into close association with other landscapes. Potential foreigners can arrive from these outer landscapes, or can be rethought to arrive from the

\textsuperscript{67} A more detailed discussion of issues regarding scale is dealt with in Chapter III.
inside itself. Precisely for this reason, corridor conservation is an entryway into thinking about the borders of and interaction between the inside and outside.

Judging the Boundary between Good and Bad

As mutual constitution characterizes the relationship between bodies in the world, there is a co-constitutive relationship between foreignness and the community into which it arrives. However, if a community’s existence is partially dependent on the foreigner, then one could argue that all foreigners are beneficial to communities. In other words, one can claim that there cannot be a case of an unwanted foreigner, because reviving is (traditionally) good and the foreigner has the ability to re-vive a community. Nonetheless, there is a difference between a good and bad foreigner.

The distinction between good and bad must be situated. If the foreigner's presence is too exaggerated, then it will cease to be the foreigner. It instead takes over the community, rather than living within and with it. The relationship between a community and foreigner is characterized by the degree to which a place is allowed for the other, even in the presence of conflict. Co-existence specifically indicates existing with the other. Even an intruder has the ability to live with, so long as the community it intrudes is allowed to exist. Conversely, a bad foreigner neglects to live with the other; instead, it takes over, terrorizes or destroys the community. Such a distinction between good and bad foreigners should be carefully made. At first glance, the judgment between good and bad seems to require a normative standard to implement the distinction. On the contrary, one can make a judgment about good and bad without a predetermined model by which to judge the ethical value of one foreigner over another.

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68 This idea is explored further in Chapter III.
An ethical standard is a boundary that is determined prior to the situation requiring judgment. To utilize such a standard in distinguishing the difference between good and bad is to risk a predetermined generalization of good/bad onto unique situations. As was the case in chapter one, corridors cannot be universally judged as being either positive or negative applications for conservation. Instead, each corridor must be judged individually in its context before one may characterize it as advantageous or disadvantageous. Moreover, for example, certain associations of landscapes are compatible or incompatible, depending always on the focus under consideration. A contextual analysis of a situation, therefore, allows for judgments to be thoughtfully made regarding the goodness or badness of corridors and, for that matter, of foreigners. In other words, the boundary between good and bad is much like the boundary between an inside and outside: it can be located and thus allows for judgment, but the boundary also changes and is pliable. For this reason, one can characterize good from bad foreigners, but only when a mapping of the situation is first understood.

Accordingly, the judgment of whether a non-native species is a good or bad foreigner in the Big Thicket needs always to be reserved until determination can be made on an individual basis. Such *situational judgment* distinguishes good from bad but, due to the emphasis on situatedness, situated judgment also blurs the steadfast distinction between good and bad. Conceptualizing judgment in this way exemplifies the multiple roles of ecological boundaries, the pliability of boundaries between two entities, as well as the ability for boundaries to demarcate difference. Judgment, therefore, is not based on a predetermined standard; for the standard itself can sway.
Summary

Through Spinoza’s work, Deleuze clarifies the complex and temporary way in which bodies exist. His ideas help to understand the way that, to one degree or another, things exist in the midst of dynamic and affective relationships. Thinking about how the world partially constitutes a body leads into a notion that bodies, too, partially constitute the world. Mutual constitution not only relates to relationships between body and world; it leads into to a general reconception of the boundaries and relationships between inside and outside. The intertwining of entities retains the reality of boundaries, but rethinks boundaries as being changeable and meandering. Therefore, the intertwining sketches an understanding of the ambiguity of ideas that is implicit in the concept of inside and outside. The boundary between insiders and outsiders becomes contestable, as a result. To explicate the ambiguity of such a distinction, Honig analyzes the Biblical Book of Ruth’s examples of boundary crossing between nativeness and foreignness.

As a corridor conservation area, the Big Thicket helps to further examine boundaries and the ambiguity of the foreigner. Patches exist in the same way Deleuze described for bodies: the combination of internal movement and external affectivity distinguishes a patch. But, if a patch’s kinetic and dynamic relations were mapped, then, based on the particularities of the situation, a patch could only be located temporarily. In a similar way, the foreigner is transient, and must be determined with each situation. Exotic species, therefore, cannot be generally defined as good or bad. Instead, a contextual understanding of the situation opens up the possibility of determining the goodness or badness of a foreigner vis-à-vis situational judgment.

Boundaries, therefore, are pliable and highly dependent on their social and natural geography. With a focus on the ambiguity of boundaries, one can rethink the connection between
the internal and the external. This is facilitated through a study of relationships between bodies and the world, between the foreigner and its community.

As the epigraph to this chapter suggests, entities simultaneously exist as individuals and communities. Jean-Luc Nancy’s term *being singular plural* captures an understanding of existence, which describes entities as always existing in relation to another, existing always *with* another. The geographic representation of bodies and the role foreignness plays in a community begins to articulate Nancy's ontology of *being-with.*
CHAPTER IV

AMBIGUOUS COMMUNITIES:
THE ARRIVAL OF INTRUSION WITH CO-OPERATION

Introduction

Home is a micro-version of community. The concept of home often invokes an image of coziness and comfort. Indeed, this may be the home that some people experience. However, many writers have critiqued such a notion of home because it does not also allow for an articulation of home as a place of fear, terror, unease, or even abuse. A more open understanding of home, some argue, should allow home to be understood in both of these ways; i.e., home as a place that accounts for the peaceful belonging and hurtful experiences. A structurally similar argument is sometimes made with regard to community. According to Miranda Joseph, a Women’s Studies scholar, community is typically characterized in a positive light, and the presence of community is “an indicator of a high quality of life, a life of human understanding, caring, selflessness, belonging. One does one’s volunteer work in and for ‘the community’. This customarily peaceful understanding of community, however, does not include or even acknowledge an understanding of community as a place of tension or exclusion. Furthermore, Joseph believes that the conception of the intrinsically good community does not

69 See, for example, Iris Marion Young, Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997); Bonnie Honig, “Difference, Dilemmas, and the Politics of Home,” in Social Research, Volume 61, Number 3, Fall 1994. Also, see such poets and novelists as bell hooks and Adriana Rich.
70 Miranda Joseph, Against the Romance of Community (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), vii.
account for cases in which the idea of community is invoked as a method of encapsulating, and thus controlling, a specific group as a means for continued oppression.  

In this way, like the concept of home, community is often understood as either good or bad. However, rather than reiterate such a double exclusionary vision of community, I want to foreground the ambiguity of community, a patchwork of shifting relations between good and bad. I am especially interested in momentary, or temporary, communities. They are much like Deleuze’s idea of a temporarily located body, as described in chapter two. The Big Thicket exemplifies the formation of such momentary communities. To further explore the ambiguity of community, I will deal with the function of the other in a community is dealt with by way of the intruder in the thought of Jean-Luc Nancy. I will show how his ideas about the uncertain nature of the stranger are pertinent to the Big Thicket and corridor conservation. Thus, the Big Thicket is the connection between Nancy’s thought and the implications for environmental philosophy of what Nancy calls “being-with strangeness.”

The Ambiguous Patchiness of Community

The co-constitutive nature of ecological areas brings together the inside and outside, shedding light on the relationship between a community and foreigner. Additionally, the matrices of corridor conservation outlined in chapter one enrich a discussion of community as itself a patchworking of matrices at different scales. For example, a focus on insects or loblolly pine-hardwood forests will yield a location of very different patches. Just as a patch becomes determined through a particular focus, communities are formed around specific issues, and change with each focus. Communities are patched together around issues, interlaced with conflicting pieces. I refer to this sense of community as a patchworked community.

71 Joseph, 21.
The following is an example of a simply described, patchworked community in the Big Thicket National Preserve. When attention is focused on issues of rural development, which are common in the area near the Big Thicket, diverse groups come to form collectives as part of a Big Thicket community. Thus, an association of timber companies, landowners, environmentalists and developers may arise as a patchworked-community concerned with the Big Thicket. Even though each group’s interests are usually at odds with one another, these groups can come together in order to negotiate issues determining land use policy in the Big Thicket. In this way, the different groups form a coalition around the issue, and thus form a temporary, or momentary, Big Thicket community. Such a community is not characterized as either peaceful or harmful, as the double meaning of home and community, described above, would do. This coalitional community is ambiguous: it is at once identifiable, prone to constant change, and laced with tension between parties.

A community is composed of cooperative, conflicting and obstructive relationships between its components. Such within-community dynamic is coupled with the affective relationships between a community and its outsiders. There is a resemblance between the internal and external dynamics of a community and those of an ecological patch. In chapter one, a patch was described vis-à-vis within-patch dynamics, together with the dynamics between it and other patches. Such similarities make it easier to discuss the “patchy” qualities of communities. A community is not a holistic group based on sameness. Members, instead, share commonality without being subsumed into the group. Entities of a community are diverse and, at times, can be so different that they themselves can become an imposition within the community. The tension between different entities challenges a community’s borders. There are thus patches of members even within a community.
Another patchy quality of community deals with the structure of corridor conservation. As with the Big Thicket, a conservation area’s boundaries are difficult to distinguish, although one knows that they exist. Similarly, a composition of patches, corridors and boundaries form a community, which can be thought of as a complex network, or matrix. There is not just one community body, but many pieces form a community. By its nature, then, a community is fragmented. In recognizing such fragmentation, one can understand a community as a patchwork. Disassociated pieces are (temporarily) stitched together, making thus a composition of community (which can itself be stitched to another patch in a quilt). In this way, like patches, communities are ambiguous, and momentary, with internal dynamics partially constituting the community. Moreover, external relationships to some extent characterize the community and other outside communities. Theorizing ecological scale adds another dimension to the ambiguity of communities. Issues of scale help to clarify a conceptual path to understanding communities as and in complex networks of relations of identity and difference.

Identifying Scales

Discussions of “localism” and “globalism” can serve as an entryway into issues of geographical scale and its relationship with the political. Geographer Neil Smith’s focus tends to analyze political scales, but his ideas can be carried into discussions of scale within environmental philosophy. Smith writes:

Geographical scale results from the territorialization of highly fluid social relations and differences. Scale is always a temporary fixation in the geographical landscape, of course, enduring for a shorter or longer term…. The placement of socially sanctioned boundaries around the body or the nation-state, the urban or the global, mobilizes a logic of scale that already embodies certain assumptions about identity and difference.”

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There is often the assumption that those entities falling within the same scalar circle are supposed to cooperate on the condition of their sameness, while, due to their differences, there is to be little or no cooperation with others outside their scalar terms. Certain assumptions of identity and difference are thus wrapped up in the conceptualization of ecological scale. Scaling ecological areas based on one or a few certain characteristics tends to lead toward, “the common practice of scaling the use areas so that they are static and relatively homologous.” Therefore, one should approach issues of scaling in a way that permits change, or even a way that characterizes scale with flux as an important characteristic of the landscape. The term “scale with flux” represents the combination or close association between two concepts. I want to retain the concept of scale to help order the world, but support an ordering that allows for dynamic bodies and patches to interact and change the make up of a scalar level. Characterizing scale with flux in this way determines order as a changing order. Understanding scale as functioning as a limiting factor in an area as well as a place of movement is to conceive of scale with flux.

Ecological patches are landscape structures that can be considered in different scales. Since there are many kinds of patches, a universal concept cannot be generally construed. Instead, as outlined in chapter one, a patch should be described with regard to a certain focus. The meaning of a patch, therefore, is always situational. To take this idea further, just as a patch is described in landscape ecology as a piece of a mosaic, a patch’s inside may also house a mosaic. In other words, a network of corridors, boundaries, and other patches may co-exist within one patch. Looking more closely at ideas of scale clarifies this notion of a “patch within a patch.”

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Considering Boundaries and Multiple Scales

In general, ecological study tends to organize various scales into units that provide foundations as well as offer constraints for other levels. For example, at the cellular scale, a cell can be described as foundational, a kind of building block, to the multi-cellular organism. That what constitutes the cell is a complex of foundational systems like the Krebs cycle, DNA replication, cell metabolism, etc. Therefore, at the same time, the cell is understood as both foundational to the scales ‘above’ it, and provides a limitation, or constraint, to the scales ‘below’ the cellular level.\(^74\) Acknowledging such multiple perspectives is valuable and enriches discussions within ecological theory. However, ecologists can oversimplify the analysis of scales with the use of metaphors, like “boxes in boxes” or “Russian dolls,” to show the interconnectedness of scales. Envisioning scales with these metaphors assumes that scales are clear and distinct.

Adequate attention is not given to the gap in between the Russian dolls, the space in between the boxes inside of one another, or the relationship that develops at their border. A Möbius strip is a helpful image to explore such ideas. As one author describes Derrida’s thought, a Möbius strip invokes a way, “…through which the apparently secure threshold between what is inside and what is outside gives way to an undecidable and open multiplicity in continuous variation.”\(^75\) The author recognizes a distinction between inside and outside, yet the boundary fosters such close interaction between differences. Thus, continuous variation ensues between inside and outside. The image of a Möbius strip facilitates envisioning the ambiguity of community. Patches of difference, at many scales, exist within a community; likewise, on many

\(^74\) Example offered by J. Baird Callicott, personal communication.
other levels, a community participates as a piece of networked patches. Such multiplicity within
topics of scale is important to consider in order to avoid an over-generalized approach to issues
of scale.

Multiple scales, and the patchiness that makes and is made by communities, sets up the
idea of community as necessarily existing in terms of differential relations, or relations with
difference. When a community is understood as patchy and always within a network of
differential relations, what it means to belong becomes contestable. Inter- and intra-community
dynamics, more specifically, call into question the distinction between native and non-native,
insiders and outsiders. Take, for example, a non-native species in an ecological area. If the non-
native tree helps to bring life into a community, to revive the native community, then the non-
native species is left in an ambiguous place. The plant did not originate in the community, so it is
not native. However, because the non-native plant revived the community, it is connected in a
certain way to the community. In a way, then, a non-native species is not always a complete
outsider. This case is similar to the border that Ruth occupied with the refounding of the
Israelites in chapter two.

The nature of borders is characterized by their being on both sides but not on either one. This
seems to be the role of the outsider. However, it can also be considered the role of any thing
or being. Any body, in a specific temporal and scalar instance, is a part of some “native”
community. Nevertheless, a situation may cause a wobbling of the border, creating this same
body to be described as an outsider. This juxtaposition can be considered precisely because of
the patchiness of and the many levels at which communities can be understood. With a simple

76 Marcus Doel, Poststructuralist Geographies: The Diabolical Art of Spatial Science (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman
77 Jean-Luc Nancy, The Sense of the World, trans. Jeffery S. Librett (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of
Minnesota Press, 1997), xii.
change of focus, the most intimate thing can become a stranger. Nancy’s thoughts about the stranger and intruder are described in detail below. Note, there is overlap between the concept of the foreigner from chapter two and the intruder explained below: both figures share an ambiguous place. For Honig, however, the role of the foreigner usually results in bolstering a community it enters, with a typically positive affect on the community. In Nancy’s thought, I understand the intruder as a figure that presents more of a challenge for the community. The effects of the intruder are not necessarily good for the community, but are always relative. The ‘goodness’ of the intruder’s effects can be reconsidered with a different focus. The intruder, in this way, is ambiguous. For this reason, Nancy’s ideas are more fertile than Honig’s because they encourage more philosophic wondering. Wondering is the effect of the unsettling way about his thought: the intruder’s strangeness opens up thinking about communities and living always with difference.

The Intruder: A Strangeness That Never Naturalizes

Jean-Luc Nancy offers an analysis of his heart transplant and demonstrates the many levels that strangeness occupies, as well as the ambiguous nature of the intruder. His dysfunctional heart threatened the life of his body. In a sense, his heart was an intruder, a stranger that arrived from the inside.78 There were many other strangers that played a role in continuing his existence; for example, the teams of doctors, his close associates and family, the participation of a donor, his body’s requirements of a certain blood type and his own requests about the surgery’s timeline. All of these pieces were strangers to Nancy, but also composed networks in which he existed.79

His situation is similar to the way a patchwork is a composition of scraps and different patterned fabrics. Each patch is a part of a mosaic, and each patch contains other possible mosaics. As applied to ecological patterns and communities, patchwork here also addresses the multiple scales and networks of Nancy’s transplant. His body was a patch with, inside, a mosaic of strangeness, and also he was a piece in a matrix around him. In this way, his story is an example of a patchworked community. Nancy outlines the way these networks of strangers, within and outside of him, played a role in his survival. More broadly, such patchworking typifies the existence of any biological or geographical body.

Nancy notes that even his sense of self became strange to him.\textsuperscript{80} After his heart transplant, his heart was younger than he was; conversely, the surgery and medication he took precipitated his body’s aging. Thus, he was not really “himself,” but was a composition of others, strange others.\textsuperscript{81} Nancy can thus be thought of as a “decentered subject.” Political philosopher Bonnie Honig would describe him as such because his existence is both the cause of his surroundings, as well as the effect of the world. Furthermore, decentered subjects, “continually renegotiate their boundaries and affiliations with the nations, communities, groups, networks, discourses, and ideologies that partly constitute them and enable their agency.”\textsuperscript{82} Honig’s idea of a decentered subject is closely related to the Dekuzian notion that a body is composed of its internal movements and the body’s capacity for affecting and being affected by the world around. More simply, decentered subjectivity is related to the ideas of a co-constitutional relationship between body and world, as discussed in chapter two.

\textsuperscript{80} Nancy, “The Intruder,” 5.
\textsuperscript{81} Nancy, “The Intruder,” 7.
Jean-Luc Nancy’s ideas suggest that there is tension between an intruder and a community it enters (or wherever it arrives). Nancy describes the way an intruder “enters where he has no right to be and where he has not been admitted.” A stranger is also an intruder, in that the strangeness of the stranger is only conditionally welcomed: the strangeness remains strange. If a stranger’s arrival is received without question, then she or he ceases to be strange.

An interesting point here is that once a stranger enters a community, she or he continues to remain a stranger. In this way, the stranger’s “arrival continues for as long as he stays: he continues to arrive, and this arrival never stops being in some respect an intrusion.”83 In other words, she or he is never altogether accepted into the community. A stranger’s intrusion, therefore, entails tension, or conflict. Honig’s writings on the politics of home suggest that an understanding of home (or community) calls for recognizing the necessity of the tension that exists therein. Moreover, Honig’s description of decentered subjects depends on the tension within and around the subject. Such tension both distinguishes the boundary of a subject while also crosses the boundaries of the temporarily located subject. In this way, tension distinguishes a typical understanding of community as being either good or bad from a more ambiguous and “patchy” community, as conveyed above.

Nancy wrote in the 1990’s, before the contemporary concentration on threats of terrorism. At that time, he responded to the tendency of political and moral correctness to preach a tolerance that accepted all difference. The desire to naturalize difference characterized the political and moral correctness of that time. In this way, contemporary moral correctness did not acknowledge the intrusion, the strangeness, of difference. Nancy, instead, suggested that a stranger (or difference) is continually arriving and that “To welcome the stranger must also mean

83 Jean-Luc Nancy, 1.
to affirm his intrusion.” This idea contrasts with the morally correct, unmitigated acceptance of a stranger in that the strangeness of difference remains and is not overlooked. In other words, recognizing the stranger as continually arriving retains the quality of intrusion for the stranger, in contrast to the habit to try and disregard difference and “naturalize” the stranger.84

Encountering Tension with the Big Thicket

How is this discussion about the strangeness of the intruder and the decentered subject relevant to questions about the Big Thicket, its ecological areas and communities? The problems of defining the location of the preserve shows how the Big Thicket is itself a decentered subject, similar to the strange, decentered subjecthood that Nancy described. It is important to remember that a decentered subject does not mean that locating the subject is impossible. A map represents one’s practical ability to identify the Big Thicket. For example, the National Park Service has a map of the Big Thicket on their website and, in drug stores, there is a map of Texas that can lead me from the North to the eastern part of the state, and into the Big Thicket’s visitor center. Therefore, in a sense, the boundaries of the Big Thicket National Preserve are clear, even as a decentered subject.

Nevertheless, the boundaries of the Big Thicket were (and still are) contested, which is described in chapter one and demonstrated in the transposed maps of the preserve’s different boundaries (see figure 4). The Big Thicket is a decentered subject because it “is never just the cause but also always the effects of the forces around it.”85 The networks that comprise, and are comprised by, the Big Thicket include the vegetation, variety of living organisms, and diverse human groups engaged with the Big Thicket. Like the networks of Nancy’s heart transplant, the networks of the Big Thicket have different interests and effects and, as a result, form a network.

85 Honig, “Politics of Home,” 566.
ripe with tension. This tension does not attempt to eliminate difference by trying to form a Big Thicket community based on sameness. Instead, the tension between the various parties to the Big Thicket (human and non-human) exists because of the consideration of strangeness.

Recognizing strangeness and tension is a specific kind of acknowledgement of the other, which brings forth a relationship with difference. The strangeness of the intruder challenges a community by definition of its strangeness, although the intruder does not challenge to the point of taking over the community. The community is formed, changed and formed again with the arrival of the intruder. The presence of the intruder acts to somewhat shape a community and its liveliness. Nancy described strangeness as always arriving. However, the specific articulation of the intruder (about who or what it is) is temporary since the distinction of the intruder changes with each situation. In this way, the strangeness of the intruder is also partially constituted by the community, through its inter- and intra- networks. Therefore, the intruder is indeed always arriving unexpectedly, entering anew with each situation. The co-constitutive relationship between intruders and the places where they arrive is complex. It can be understood, however, through acknowledging the many scales of strangeness and tension within a community.

A relationship that welcomes a stranger’s intruding, with an awareness of its strangeness, is a relationship that recognizes tension. To restate from above, the main tenet of contemporary moral and political correctness suggests that communities wholeheartedly embrace difference. However, communities are not based upon sameness. Assimilating, or naturalizing, the quality of strangeness thereby negates difference. Community may be better understood through contention, which specifically refers to the presence of tension as being always in relation with others.
For example, the Big Thicket community has to face the possible sale of 1.5 million acres of land that surrounds and currently buffers the Big Thicket. Dealing with the problems of who is selling, at what price, and which groups want to purchase the land surrounding the Big Thicket causes difference and conflict to arise in the Big Thicket community. As a result, the contention between the Big Thicket “patches” helps to form boundaries of distinction. These boundaries interestingly differentiate between groups and also function as a place across which parties co-operate, even with the presence of conflict. The nature of the boundary is that it touches each party that it distinguishes, doing so, however, without wholly existing on either side. The boundary between local Big Thicket conservation groups that wants to purchase and a timber company that asks a high price for the land partially touches each. As a result of their contention, the parties are always responding and relating to and with each other. Thus tension helps constitute the parties and their associations, and, furthermore, revives the human community concerned with the Big Thicket.

Notably, tension and contention both have the Latin root for the word stretched (tensus), which refers to being stretched thin and, more commonly, strained. Being stretched invokes the idea that one is moving in many directions, leaning toward some other and, consequentially, being stretched thin. This is significant for the discussion here because the tension between the patches of the Big Thicket community depicts a stretching toward others, even in the midst of conflict. This stretching out and toward others resonates with Nancy’s ontology of being-with. In his writing, Nancy describes a fundamental concept of being-with:

*Being singular plural* means the essence of Being is only as coessence. In turn, coessence, or being-with (being-with-many), designates the essence of the co-, or even more so, the co- (the cum) itself in the position or guise of an essence. . . .if

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86 In this case, the Big Thicket community consists of timber companies selling the land, developers wanting to buy the land, Nature Conservancy and other grassroots environmental organizations also trying to buy but with limited funds, and local residents torn between such narrow options, to list a few examples)
Being is being-with, then it is, in its being-with, the “with” that constitutes Being: the with is not simply an addition.  

Conflict, and the contention that results, are therefore related to understanding the nature of being as always a co-being. I highlight this relation in order to soothe conventional moral and political correctness, which hold complete togetherness and tolerance as the guide for living with diversity. Being-with, however, necessitates contention. To understand contention in another way, a patchworked community can be a “dilemmatic space or spaces which both constitute us and form the terrain of our existence. These dilemmatic spaces vary in intensity and gravity, but none is untouched by conflict and incommensurability.” In this way, Honig describes individuals as constituted by (and, of course, partially constituting) dilemmas and negotiations, and thus existing in contention.

With the recognition of tension and strangeness comes an understanding of the mutually constitutive rapport between community and stranger. The intruder helps to define boundaries as well as allows for the transgression of those boundaries, therefore, contention inspired by the intruder is integral to communities and bodies. A concrete example demonstrates how interactions, touching and spacing between different communities transform and redefine the groups’ beliefs. Karl Zimmerer looks into the current (1950-present) situation of soil erosion and loss in the Cochabamba region of Bolivia in order to foreground the many discourses that shape and are shaped by the local political ecology. The author focuses on three general perspectives that are working within Bolivia’s “erosion crisis and proposals for conservation-with-

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89 Honig speaks particularly of humans; however, I would open up her discussion to apply to individual and community bodies alike.
90 Zimmerer defines political ecology as the coupling of both environmental management and empowerment of disadvantaged groups.
development.” (1) government and non-governmental institutions, (2) peasant perspectives, and (3) rural trade unions. Dealing with the formation and interaction of such discourses on soil loss, Zimmerer writes:

Through my fieldwork I realized that people and institutions there did not form their environmental discourses in absolute isolation or, figuratively speaking, as discursive islands of self-contained dialogue (cf. The narrowly poststructuralist interpretation of Orlove 1991). Instead, they expressed and gave distinctiveness to their viewpoints through interaction with and among the groups. Processes of resistance and contestation as well as accommodation and agreement guided their elaboration of environmental ideas.91

The everyday perspectives of the peasants of the Cochabamba have been affected by and have affected other collectives in the region. Zimmerer notes how this can be noticed through examining the everyday statements of the peasants regarding soil erosion.92 It is important to recognize that the discourses between groups are not separate and clashing. Instead, they touch and affect each other, inside and outside, while at the same time each collective’s discourse helps to retain group identity.

In thinking about the Big Thicket’s different human communities, the patches of difference within a community are similar to the discourses about soil erosion in Bolivia. As Zimmerer described, the discourses of the various collectives were balanced on a border between conflict and accommodation, and therefore allowed the other to speak. Furthermore, one group did not conquer or take away the other’s potential. Each discourse, in a sense, intruded the other. This intrusion of strangeness between groups seems to have spurred and “guided their elaboration of environmental ideas.” Thus, the contention that characterizes the Big Thicket community is a model for living with the intruder without naturalizing it. As long as the

conflicting parties in the community allow for the existence of the other, their intrusion co-operates with the idea that every entity exists always in relation to, within the co-constitutorial dynamic, or as being-with.

Summary

As the difference between good and bad foreigners was discussed in chapter two, it is important to clarify that the role that the intruder plays in reviving and giving energy to a community cannot be overly generalized. Like the instability the intruder’s strangeness presents, an intricate stability between the native and non-native needs to exist. In order to avoid overpowering a community, the non-native intruder must balance on the boundary between retaining strangeness and naturalizing. This is meant as a cautionary note to resist a generalized application of the intruder; however, the preceding sentence summarizes nicely the ambiguous characteristic of the intruder. It occupies the threshold between native and non-native. The threshold shares “the paradoxical logic of the border – whereby the border separates two sides only by being on both sides at once (and on neither) . . .”, which is, in this case, the boundary that distinguishes native from non-native. In other words, the intruder occupies the sides it touches, both native and non-native communities, but the intruder is not fully a part of either one.

In addition to the paradoxical logic of the border described above, boundaries both limit and create possibilities. A boundary marks a shift in the flow of energy; it demarcates flow. Corridors are characterized by movement and channelization. As described in chapter one, a landscape structure can be both a boundary and a corridor, depending on the situation. Thus, while a boundary distinguishes between two communities, it also creates movement and is a channel for interaction like a corridor. Therefore, the limit here can create possibilities of

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93 Jeffery S. Librett (translator), Jean-Luc Nancy, The Sense of the World, xii.
newness. Looking at the interaction of entities in this way, together with the tension they share, highlights Nancy’s idea of being singular plural. A thing is a singular being, while also a plural being within and as itself a complex network.

In this chapter, the ambiguous nature of communities is explored through a focus on issues of scale. Moreover, similarities between the composition of communities and ecological patches are described, utilizing the description of patch dynamics from chapter one. Questions of scale (and multiple scales) help to draw the connections between communities and patches and emphasize the transitory quality of patchworked communities. Then, building from the idea of the foreigner in chapter two, Jean-Luc Nancy’s writings about the intruder are examined and connected to a tension that is present within community dynamics. Throughout this chapter, the theoretical discussion of boundaries, strangeness and co-operation are related to the Big Thicket and the communities formed around it. Conservation plans that are based on mosaics of corridors, boundaries and patches enable a way of thinking that lives with the limits of possibilities and the possibilities of limits. Furthermore, as an example of corridor conservation, the Big Thicket National Preserve suggests the notion of being-with others by bringing into play the ambiguity of intruders and communities, and the (un)stability resulting from the interaction in between.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The idea of the Big Thicket as an endangered park refers to the area’s instability. Through its unsteadiness, the Big Thicket provides many entryways into topics of identity, cooperation, matrices, community and contention. All of these concepts play a role in the philosophical idea of being-with otherness that corridor conservation helps to represent. In addition to the foreign Chinese tallow in East Texas, the threat of unmitigated conflict between various human groups of the Thicket’s patchworked community threatens the sustained conservation of the Big Thicket National Preserve. As the Big Thicket is a matrix of patches and corridors, the human groups associated with the preserve are also pieced and linked together. Recognizing the strangeness of the other develops a degree of contention in the community. Nevertheless, if otherness is recognized, contention then cooperates together with being-with.

As we saw in chapter one, defining an ecological area such as the Big Thicket is not simple. Such difficulty points to the “thicket” quality of the area. It is a complex networking of many diverse ecological zones, varieties of species, vegetation and soil types, and many human parties concerned with Big Thicket conservation. The assemblage of the many patches of the Big Thicket, together with tension and strangeness, make it an insightful philosophical topic for this thesis.

Corridor conservation helps to illustrate the multiplicity of the world. Such conservation plans are composed of a mosaic of landscape structures, including corridors, patches and boundaries. The idea that a landscape structure can serve as both a boundary and corridor shows
the necessity of understanding a thing as existing always within a context. Hence, the inability to universalize a general identity results in ambiguity. This leads to a more complex understanding of the multiple perspectives that constitute identity. Additionally, an analysis of corridor conservation foregrounds the mutual constitution of (or between) marking difference through boundaries and facilitating movement with corridors.

In chapter two, I further develop how the identity of a body, or entity, can be understood in a similar way. Characterizing the political identity of an entity must be seen as an ongoing process with each new situation, because bodies are contextually and temporarily located. A body not only exists within a web of relationships and can be seen as being itself a network of relationships, much as an ecological patch is a part of and houses other mosaics of patches. The dynamic of the whole complex temporarily identifies a body with respect to its situation. When the notion of temporary identity is applied to an understanding of the foreigner, the foreigner’s identity becomes clear only when situationally considered. In this way, then, the foreigner is not generally good or bad, but is ambiguous. Because of its ambiguity, judgment of the foreigner must always be contextually made.

Similarly, in chapter three I describe the idea of a community as a mosaic of group associations, which are heterogeneous compilations of connected and differentiated pieces. As such, a community is a dynamic network whose definition is ambiguous. The idea of co-constitution refers also to the way a community and foreigner are mutually constitutive. That is, the characterization of a foreigner is established through the presence of a community and vice versa.

Contemporary communities are indeed ambiguous due to the temporary, or momentary, way in which the pieces of the community are identified. If one recognizes the fundamental
relation of all things while acknowledging the strangeness of difference, the resulting ambiguity opens oneself to living with strangeness without attempting to assimilate it. As I said in the introduction, the Big Thicket exemplifies corridor conservation, and at the same time could be seen as a passage to thinking in terms of philosophical themes. Similarly, the ideas of being-with otherness are not only relevant to a philosophical or ontological study, but can also be relevant for a study of corridors, boundaries, and community. Through the Big Thicket, we have seen how being-with otherness is pertinent to empirical cases in ecological conservation. The thicket of issues addressed in the chapters above carry implications that extend to problems in social and political philosophy, as well as to topics in public policy and planning.

As I have shown, the being-with otherness is an entryway to reconsidering the role of the foreigner in communities. Furthermore, it is necessary for our times to reflect upon foreignness, especially given the fragmentation of landscapes and communities. Rethinking foreignness is thus a rethinking of how we co-exist with the foreigner and the active role the stranger plays in communities.


