Chapter 12

The Return to What Has Never Been

A View on the Animal Presence in Future Natures

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This chapter is based on data collected during ethnographic research initiated in 2014 in the Faia Brava Reserve, considered by the Institute for Nature and Biodiversity Conservation/Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests (ICNB/ICNF)[1] to be the first Private Protected Area in Portugal.[2] A specific characteristic of the Faia Brava Reserve is its purpose of ecological restoration, which has been promoted by the association that manages it—the Transhumance and Nature Association (ATN). This designation made the reserve the starting point of an ambitious project to renaturalize the western region of the Iberian Peninsula, one that foresees the reintroduction of large animal species in Portuguese territory through its integration into the Rewilding Europe network.[3] The motivations behind the rewilding initiative stem from the broad discussion on the impact of climate change on the planet, and especially in Europe. More than encouraging isolated reflections, the rewilding agenda gives rise to the possibility of directly intervening in these processes of climate change. This particular direct action, based on ecological restoration, aims to interrupt cycles of forest fires, which are lethal to several species in the affected areas and also secrete large amounts of CO_2 into the atmosphere. In addition, the regeneration of food chains involving large predators, herbivores, and necrophagous birds allows the dispersion of nutrients in the soil that are essential for the growth of local vegetation and for the future of recovered forests. Forests that are properly managed and in good condition can contribute to the capture of atmospheric carbon.

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An Ethnographic Approach to the Field

I woke early to catch a bus that would take me to the bus station in Guarda,[4] a city where I would later rent a car to reach Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo. The trip to Guarda took around five hours, the last of which I spent admiring the contours of the Serra da Estrela, the highest mountain range in continental Portugal, situated in the middle west region of the country. On my way to the car rental store, I came across a public market that gave off the strong scent of aged handmade cheese, as well as some "Chinese" stores.[5] There was a Brazilian working at one of the stores who retained his accent from the countryside region of the state of São Paulo, even though he had lived in Portugal for fourteen years. I ate something in one of the twenty-four-hour gas station's convenience stores, where I bought a weekly newspaper of the region called *Terras da Beira* (which freely translates into English as "lands of the edge").

The news published in that issue of 28 August 2014 was particularly interesting, because it offered clues of what I would come across later. The main headline read: "The City of Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo Joins the 'New Populators' Program and Seia Shows Interest in Joining It as Well." "New Populators" was the name given to the rural repopulation program that offers assistance in the implementation or transfer of company projects into the Portuguese countryside, created in 2007 as an outcome of a chat between neighbors, one a sociologist and the other a technician from a local development association. This dynamic project aims to register "new populator" families for their later establishment in areas compatible with their profiles. This way, the concession given to each family also depends on the identification, made by a technical team, of the business potential for each region. In the case of Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, the plan is to establish five families that fulfill the immediate need for people willing to work in cattle breeding and granite processing.

The territory's repopulation shared the front page's space with the news story, "Wildland Fires in the District: Less Scorched Area than Last Year." The wildfires that spread all over the region at that time of the year (the end of summer) are triggered by the low levels of rainfall and the constant change of wind direction. The forest firefighters are forced to work on many fronts to cover the large area of rocky terrain and ground vegetation. Even though the news reported an annual reduction of the scope of burned areas to that date, over the following days the TV news showed the rapid spread of the fire outbreaks. As I was told later, the wildland fires are one of the main concerns of the Faia Brava Reserve's managers. In order to prevent them, the perimeter is monitored daily by a watcher who looks for possible outbreaks that could threaten the reserve. On the very

first day of research, I was able to accompany one of those night watches, and we observed a great arc of fire spreading with the wind over a region close to the Côa River Valley.

The theme of wildfires recurs in the memories and motivations that are part of the work of the Transhumance and Nature Association's general manager and the Portugal coordinator of the Rewilding Europe initiative; for now, however, it is important to discuss a short piece of news published in the weekly column of the newspaper: "The National Republican Guard (GNR) Identifies Suspect of Arson Fire in the Corujeira Area."

The fire that destroyed approximately sixty to eighty hectares of the Serra da Estrela Natural Park was caused, according to a source from the Territorial Unit of the GNR, by a man who was motivated by vengeance against his siblings concerning family heirlooms, "since the arson fire started next to the suspect's home and all around was burned, except for his property" (*Terras da Beira*, 22 August 2014). This notable event seems to be deeply connected to people's lives in this region. Such personal instigation as described in the newspaper seems to point to an inextricable presence of people in each place, in each route, and in each stone wall, which after centuries becomes mingled with the natural landscapes. There, life is all about the surrounding area.

In the same issue of the weekly paper, there appeared a column titled "Men and Wolves: A Summer Tale," written by the Wolf Group from the Animal Biology Department of the Faculty of Science at the University of Lisbon. It was a tale about Mondego, a sheepdog that would accompany a herd of cows alone:

> He basically stays there, watchful even if lying down; observing a dozen cows that went uphill with him and that soon will take him back down: his family. At least the only one Mondego ever knew; about his true origin, the siblings from his brood, no memory is left. He has found there, in the immensity where the herd wanders and grazes, his home, his freedom, and also his mission.

Years later, Mondego's owner would not tire of telling the story of what happened that night, now recounted with fanciful traces but still faithful to the core of what really occurred:

> When the cows went downhill, I noticed that a calf was missing. And Mondego also stayed behind on the hill. But there was a heavy fog, and I had to wait until the morning to go after them. When I came across the calf, it was lying down next to some rocks, to take shelter . . . with the dog leaning on him, as if they were two dogs. Mondego didn't want to leave the small being alone and spent the whole night watching over him. And I don't know if he had to defend him against some wolf . . .

The text finishes the heroic narrative:

> The one thing we know is that the story really happened, someplace in our fields. And if our hero was a Castro Laboreiro or a Serra da Estrela dog,[6] or any other, that is the least important thing. Because that is the life of many sheepdogs that accompany "their" cows, goats, and sheep every day, risking their lives in the face of the wolf, but also of the men, always ungrateful, with their traps, their cars, and their poisons. (*Terras da Beira*, 24 August 2014)

This is a story of adaptations and elements like everything in the everyday life of traditional Portuguese land use. Instead of a celebration of a nature that preserves insoluble borders, what is found is a message about a "re-nature," which survives through its compositions. Family is that to which an individual adapts once adopted. Dogs and cattle are no longer distinguished one from the other, each becoming antagonists of equally accepted enemies, the wolf and the man. Against the first—its agility and its pack—the dog's strong features (historically modeled by human hands) would not be enough. It is also necessary to refashion the anatomy of the dog, giving them thick collars full of spiky nails, a tool for protection against wolf bites. Against the "man," in a Hobbesian recombining inversion, the wolf becomes the man's wolf.

The return of the great predator to European terrain provides a new sense to old practices. The wolf reinvents the (once again purposeful) dog, which recreates the (again vibrant) pastures, with the purpose of giving a whole new sense to life in the countryside and to people's lives. Therefore, merely by renouncing their old (and new) machinations, human beings could rebuild this cycle. Instead of posing a tacit opposition between human activities—such as transhumance and regulated hunting—and the elements that are part of "nature" (fauna and flora), an agreement of coexistence is what emerges. In such agreement on mutual reinvention of "nature" and of human practices resides the hope of a future that, while it evokes a mythical past on the one hand, it is guided on the other by new terms capable of preventing the predatory actions of the past. In this manner, in yet another reported story, the news about the detention of two men for "hunting crimes"—one hunting with neither a firearms license nor a hunter's license and the other hunting nonauthorized species—the matter raised by the local newspaper is closed and becomes another beginning.

The research that I have been developing since 2014 mainly aims to follow up the implementing dynamics and practices of the several agents involved in a new kind of nature reserve that is adapted to the conditions established in Europe for the reconstruction and conservation of its

environment. It also aims at the establishment of guidelines regarding "rewilding," its materialization, including natural parks that in the history of conservation biology are recent, no older than a decade. Along that line, it has been observed that one of the peculiarities of this sort of renaturalization program is its inextricable engagement with the proposition that human activities be guided by the idea of sustainable economic development. As far as they are opposed to the argument of preserving a "state of original nature," environmentalist partisans of renaturalization contend that nature should and could be recomposed through processes regarded as artificial. From this, it can be inferred that a vast range of interaction possibilities among species (human and nonhuman) is granted at the moment that the belief in a non-entropic nature is renounced.

I will start with the story of an encounter that, in its telling, identifies new possible areas for the expansion of the renaturalization project. This event, which took place when Rewilding Europe was celebrating its third year of existence in the region of Beira Alta Interior in Portugal, marked the beginning of a new stage of the renaturalization project in the western portion of the Iberian Peninsula. At that moment, after the establishment of the experiment at the Faia Brava Reserve, planning was initiated to extend the area along the valley of the Côa River.

First Act: In Search of the Void, Tracing the Course

Our encounter was around nine o'clock in the morning, at the crossroad of a small village along a Portuguese highway. The group—formed by two anthropologists (me and an intern from the reserve), two biologists who worked for the Faia Brava Reserve, and two directors of Rewilding Europe—went along a tortuous road, which soon became a narrow path of dirt and rocks, in a four-wheeler. After a steep ascent, we continued on foot to the top of a hill where it was possible to see a landscape that stretched for miles around us. Standing on a gigantic granite block, we looked through binoculars with one hand and pointed to the horizon with the other, as if with our fingertips we could scan the terrain.

The silence that is always present in that bucolic landscape was only interrupted by the enthusiastic conversations and the rushed steps of visitors. After initial surprise that a Brazilian anthropologist had just learned about the Rewilding Europe initiative, one of the directors started his explanation (being careful to be as didactic as possible in the presentation) of the aims of that field visit to Portugal. At one side of the valley, it was possible to find approximately "40 to 60 percent of human occupation;" at the hillside, rocky formations of granite, enthusiastically referred to as "the

future of the rewilding project in Portugal," could be seen. He patiently explained that the aim of the Rewilding Europe initiative was to act in regions where human presence was scarce. As he spoke of the next stage of Portugal's renaturalization project, the terminology of percentages was used once again, since it would be implemented in territories that were "80 to 100 percent abandoned." According to the director, these demographic voids presented good conditions for nature to be reconstructed, and as would be stated later, in the future they could also represent a "good opportunity" for people that inhabit that region.

As we wandered along a path that crossed villages with a few dozen inhabitants—the majority of them elderly—rewilding action plans for the coming years began to take shape. The trails we covered led us to places where the ruins of stone walls prevailed, traces of century-old human occupation mingled with the originally rocky terrain, which resembled a mosaic of symmetrical shapes of green and gray. There were also traces of old windmills and irrigation canals, parts of a system that made the harvesting of vegetables viable due to the extraction of water from the creek that ran alongside. Many times, the director stopped and expressed his view on what the future landscape of these places would be like. Invariably, there were youngsters hitchhiking with their backpacks and riding mountain bikes along the valley trails. In the surrounding area, there would be herds of wild horses and bovines, as well as mountain goats balancing on the cliffs. Also composing the scenario, eagles and vultures would be flying in the sky. The focus on a viable future, as clarified here, is the main difference between the Rewilding Europe initiative and other identically named rewilding projects already carried out. While some of the proposals of renaturalization projects point to a return of the state of nature attested to in the past—as is suggested by the American "Pleistocene rewilding," Rewilding Europe concentrates its efforts on creating future interactive environments between human beings and the natural habitat. Within such logic, asking what the optimal point to be reached in renaturalization would be is no longer a relevant question. Renaturalization, according to Rewilding Europe's orientation, is primarily about what "nature" could become rather than what it was in the past.

The Genesis of the Rewilding Concept

Coined originally in the late 1990s (Soulé and Noss 1998), the term "rewilding" related to the idea of fomenting an alternative model to wildlife conservation reserves, mainly in North America. Also known as "Pleistocene rewilding," such proposals, formulated by a group of renowned

specialists in conservation ecology, had the purpose of stipulating a concrete basis for the reintroduction of animal species, mainly herbivorous megafauna and great predators, in areas that were presently uninhabited. In evoking a past time, the reference to the Pleistocene was intended as an allusion to the environmental conditions found at the beginning of human habitation and expansion on the planet. Although they acknowledged the difficulty in "bringing back to life" animal species that had already been extinct for millennia, the proponents of this kind of "renaturalization" showed in two articles (which had significant repercussions in academic and environmentalist circles) what they considered to be the concrete basis for the recovering of these degraded ecosystems. The first of their principles argued that human beings have the moral authority, and even the ethical duty, to intervene in the natural environment, since their irresponsible actions directly or indirectly caused the extinction of several other species of animals and plants. Even so, according to Donlan (2005), human beings will continue to cause extinctions, to modify ecosystems, and to alter the course of evolution; this makes attempts to reach a solution political, although, and without denying human participation in the problem, also a highly desirable posture.

Such a perception seems to place the problem in a much broader arena of contemporary discussion: that is, the discourses relating to the imminence of a new geologic "era," widely known as the "Anthropocene." This latter is characterized as an event-moment that affirms the role of the human species as a new constant force of intervention in the planet's biophysical processes.

> However much we would wish otherwise, humans will continue to cause extinctions, change ecosystems and alter the course of evolution. . . . Our proposal is based on several observations. First, Earth is nowhere pristine; our economics, politics, demographics and technology pervade every ecosystem. . . . humans were probably at least partly responsible for the Late Pleistocene extinctions in North America, and our subsequent activities have curtailed the evolutionary potential of most remaining large vertebrates. We therefore bear an ethical responsibility to redress these problems. (Donlan 2005: 436)

> Far more than any other species in the history of life on Earth, humans alter their environments by eliminating species and changing ecosystem function. . . . Earth is now nowhere pristine, in the sense of being substantially free from human influence, and indeed, most major land masses have sustained many thousands of years of human occupancy and impacts. . . . Human-induced environmental impacts are now unprecedented in their magnitude and cosmopolitan in their distribution, and they show alarming signs of worsening. (Donlan et al. 2006: 660–61)

In a certain sense, the "naturalization" of human presence and action causes the rewilding model of conservationism to take on unique characteristics, because it attributes to humans some agency in the duty of returning the Earth to its old ecosystems, for which the proactive intervention in its dynamics and vital processes is necessary. Consequently, it makes sense that the notion of an untouched nature becomes detached from the vocabulary of the promoters of renaturalization strategy. Nature, therefore, would reserve within itself a great potential for artificialization, inasmuch as it could not be discussed in terms of the existence of isolated species but rather to a range of relations integrated into the actions of such species (which inevitably would include humans).

After overcoming the initial obstacle sustained by the myth of untouched nature, it is necessary to aim at restoring the functional "health" of ecosystems. For this, it is indispensable to adopt a proactive stance, or in the preferred terminology, an "optimistic" perspective toward twenty-first-century conservationism. Several possibilities for reconstructing certain ecosystems have been studied, identifying their functional processes of interaction and their trophic chains to evaluate the viability of species reintroduction, for instance, whether it is possible to relocate individuals from other areas or whether it will be necessary to use "proxy" species to fulfill the functional role passed on by those already extinct.

In this way, the program seeks not only to return independent species but also to favor the re-composition of functional interactions among them, and fundamentally to recreate their food chains. Such a characterization leads to the understanding that it would be necessary to prioritize the reintroduction of large predators or herbivores, or both. In this way, the recovery of the entire trophic chain from top to bottom would be ensured. It would entail that the reintroduction of a top-of-the-chain predator would demand appropriate conditions for its nutrition and survival. However, the reason for the highlighted entreaty for large animals transcends the organicists' explanations, even though it still preserves a certain pragmatism. According to the champions of rewilding, the emblematic animals of the megafauna are clearly those endowed with greater charisma, a fact that would mobilize interest, resources, and empathy more easily among human beings. This is a fundamental point considered throughout the renaturalization enterprise. Having the support of public opinion is vital in connecting sustainability and fundraising. Furthermore, the notion that the environment would recover to a state of economic sustainability becomes an outstanding strategy of persuasion regarding the viability and "rationality" of such enterprises, which at first sight may seem hardly reasonable.

Rewilding Europe

Although the proposal formulated by Donlan (2005; Donlan et al. 2006) has become a global reference point for the term "rewilding," it is far from being the only possible definition. Projects inspired by renaturalization are underway in different parts of the world, and all have their technical and ideological specificities. For example, the idea of a return to the Pleistocene is shared among North American and Russian initiatives, but it does not really represent the interests of the Rewilding Europe network, which focuses on what ecological niches could become in the future. The Rewilding Europe initiative contrasts with its corresponding programs even in terms of its viability of implementation; while projects aiming to return to the Pleistocene seem to exist only as marginal projections, Rewilding Europe's work has been underway since 2011.

With its headquarters based in Nijmegen, Holland, Rewilding Europe is composed of a network involving large and small conservationist NGOs, investors and banks that subsidize local projects, researchers linked to universities who provide the technical basis for the implementation of planned actions, rural landowners and agricultural producers, and tourists and volunteers who circulate around the eight rewilding model areas in Europe.

In the activities promoted by Rewilding Europe, the concept of "renaturalization" assumes a particular character that sees in the generation of social and economic opportunities a way of returning wildlife to Europe, and vice versa. It is therefore about committing to the planning of a future nature without perpetuating the old kind of ties inherited by natural history. Through the reappropriation and reoccupation of lands abandoned due to a historical process of rural exodus experienced in Europe during the twentieth century, renaturalization provides an ecologically viable model for the areas considered economically unproductive.

The effect generated by such intervention is the creation of private reserves in areas that are progressively purchased with the funds of small and big investors, who in turn become partners in the renaturalization enterprise. The reserves are generally managed by local NGOs that represent a broad range of shareholders. There are also alternative ways of integrating the rewilding project: for example, leasing land for the management of reintroduced natural resources, generally animal species, and establishing partnerships consisting of services related to ecotourism, primarily through rural hotels and small restaurants.

However, the extent of the model areas of renaturalization related to the Rewilding Europe initiative does not always coincide with the limits of the private reserves, and frequently transcends them. This occurs because

the animal occupation areas may exceed the parks' borders. The renaturalization areas are conceived as large territorial extensions that must afford the animal and plant species' survival, whether they are reintroduced or recovered through management plans. The fact that a good proportion of the animals in question are migratory and, therefore, cannot be restricted to the reserves means that a renaturalization area must be understood as the occupation area of those species. The reserves themselves would function as future hot spots from which the animals could migrate, defining routes and ecological corridors that, with some human investment, would integrate the whole system.

While the rewilding areas in Europe are defined by the vital fluxes of the animals, they are also marked by their long records of anthropization. This element is regularly considered in the action plans of Rewilding Europe. At the same time that these zones are prepared to host animal reintroduction projects, the necessary conditions to ensure visits by tourists and researchers interested in wildlife are also put in place. An example of investment dedicated to this sort of visitor is the building of shelters inside the reserves, from which it is possible to observe and photograph the animals with the full discretion required. An effort is also made to improve the commercial activities involved in tourism around the protection areas, through training courses in the hospitality business, gastronomy, and sales of each region's traditional products.

In considering the reintroduction of species, there exists a prevalent consensus among the ecologists involved with Rewilding Europe, who understand that management of a reserve entails rural property. Wolves, bears, lynxes, equines, bovines, and goats in a wild state, as well as eagles and vultures in the sky, are some of the animal species envisioned in the project of the future repopulated European nature. Avoiding in particular the introduction of exogenous species, the intention is to recover native species, even through use of genetic research and direct environment intervention, when creating sanctuaries and food zones for the animal populations. The focus is to return them to the remodeled landscape in accordance with interests that combine environmentalism with sustainable economic development. To achieve these ends, there are a few restrictions on human intervention in the processes that are regarded as being "natural." It is common to hear that in areas historically abandoned by human occupation, "nature returns" not wholly at once but in a progressive manner to regain its space. Typically, this is how the process has been observed in some regions of Europe in the last decades. However, it is well known that the time required for autonomous recomposition of such alterations is reasonably long and that it is therefore beneficial for humans to provide an "initial boost." Nevertheless, the artificialization of nature is seen as a

trigger rather than a substitute for nonhuman agents that will gradually drift to autonomy.

Second Act: A Good Trade, Strengthening the Strategy

After the new pathway for renaturalization in Portuguese territory had been defined, based on the exploratory excursions into the field during the technical visit paid for by Rewilding Europe's team, it was necessary to put the strategy into practice. Certain proceedings and measures were consequently carried out.

First of all, it was necessary to reexamine property maps and registers in order to precisely identify the overlay of the areas singled out for rewilding. Concurrently, meetings with the representatives from county and local entities were scheduled to inform them about the initiative that was underway. I had the opportunity to attend one of these events that was carried out at the Council Chamber of a county in Beira Alta Interior. The proposal was presented by the local coordinator of Rewilding Europe, who explained all the project's advantages: that is, the revaluation of the territory that had been abandoned for a long time due to the soil depletion that had rendered it no longer fruitful for conventional agricultural activities (i.e., farming and pasturing). The readjustment would be made possible by the redirection of economic activities toward ecotourism agriculture. As it was plausible to imagine that the replacement of one activity by another could result in an even greater depopulation of the fields, the coordinator explained that investing in nature could be a "good trade" that would even allow the resumption of some traditional activities, such as the artisan production of sweets, cheese, olive oil, jams, and various utensils for commercial objectives, given the presence of tourists.

The coordinator started to explain that the partnership system offered by the rewilding initiative would entail credit for the readjustment of herds, since the replacement of cattle and horses was considered exogenous to the actual reintroduction interest. The system would also include the possibility of land leasing and, finally, the implementation of small businesses connected to the rewilding enterprise. The development of a network of services, such as outdoor activity operators, photographic safaris, hotel businesses, and rural cuisine, needed to converge in a manner that would provide, in what is considered to be the motto of Rewilding Europe, an "experience with the wildlife" of European domain. After listening to the explanation in silence, the Council Chamber representative asked with some interest what was, in fact, required on their part. The coordinator replied that on that particular occasion he wanted only to notify

them about Rewilding Europe's work in the region and to be able to count on the efforts of public representatives for the project's promotion. This request was successfully granted.

From that moment on, Rewilding Europe's strategy of action entered the next level of persuasion: the search for local supporters with the goal of expanding the renaturalization area. For this purpose, in the months following the exploratory survey, connections with the public and community representatives would be established to enable reliance on these groups as mediators between the organization and possible partners.

Rewilding Europe in Portugal

Originally, the area destined for the renaturalization in the western region of the Iberian Peninsula was also intended to be integrated with other conservation initiatives in Portugal and Spain. The territorial strip that stretches from the northeast of Portugal—the Guarda region—to the west of Spain—the Castilla y Leon region—has at its far reaches the Faia Brava Reserve (in Portugal) and the Campanarios de Azaba Reserve (in Spain). This borderland area presented common historical and geographical elements indicating a past of agricultural activities that slowly lost their relevance and interest among the new generations of inhabitants. This caused a progressive disinterest in the villages of the region. Some were even totally abandoned. Due to the migration of young people to big urban centers, such as Lisbon, Porto, Salamanca, and Madrid, and also to other countries, local and elderly people faced difficulties in maintaining their occupations, like pasturing and raising livestock in smallholdings.

After the first three years of action in the region, an evaluation of the outcomes up to that date was conducted, after which, in 2014, it became possible to start the renaturalization of the western Iberian Peninsula. While, on the one hand, the Portuguese initiative was highly praised for reaching its goals within the established deadlines, on the other, activities conducted in Spain did not achieve the desired results, and the partnership with Rewilding Europe was canceled in that country. It became necessary to rethink the organization's strategy for the subsequent years; Rewilding Europe in consequence revisited Portugal in order to explore new zones for the project's expansion, which, in light of the Spanish partner's withdrawal, would take a new course starting from the Faia Brava Reserve. Excursions were made along the course of the Côa River, a region that currently possesses a low demographic rate and few registers of agricultural and pasturing activities but that, in compensation, is composed of a terrain characterized by rocky cliffs and crystal-clear water.

Some Issues Rewilding May Bring to Anthropology

The transition from the twentieth century to the twenty-first has presented an ambiguous panorama: On the one hand, the depletion of ecosystems and the consequent threat to the survival of several animal and plant species has intensified, especially in the region between the tropics. On the other hand, some considerable advances have also been achieved in environmental legislation in the northern hemisphere and in public opinion mobilization concerning the need for an integrated ecological project for the planet.

The appearance of such ecological thought derived from the evident deforestation of huge areas along with the breakdown of cultivable regions, mainly in Europe. This situation has driven those of us participating to adopt two measures—with opposite moral footing—in the face of the decline of European agricultural production. The first measure expanded upon the exploratory nature of agricultural production, redirecting and creating new commercial and transnational pacts together with emerging economies from the southern hemisphere. This expansion of agricultural borders (on a global level) was equally responsible for the diffusion of deforestation problems on a global scale while taking advantage of local environmental legislation. Consequently, the ecological crisis has gone from being an easily located issue to a more systemic one, with global effects and causes propagated throughout history.

The rural exodus in Europe and the devaluation of parts of the traditionally cultivated lands caused the appearance of what Bernardina (2011) would call a "post-rural society," essentially, the resumption of a lifestyle determined by a certain defined "rurality" combined with an interest in providing viable conditions for accelerating local economies through rural and ecological tourism. The last dimension leads to the patrimonializing of customary field practices (such as local techniques, hunting, manufacturing, festivities, commensality, and cooperation) and the creation of natural parks (through reforestation and reintroduction of animals).

Both strategies aim to generate capital, though they diverge in focus through either the actions of multinational companies in Africa or Latin America or through those of small entrepreneurs who live in rural European regions. Such a duality, which is not redundant, helps to illuminate the original contexts of the programs discussed in this chapter. It is important to state here that rewilding projects are fundamentally oriented by the motivational principles that rule a capitalist system. The mobilization of resources, the way they communicate, their proposals, and their leeway to manage nature policies render these projects as another idyllic update of capitalism. However, once nature is no longer seen simply as a sup-

plier of raw material but also as the product itself to be commercialized after certain transformations, a new setting for the production chain is presented. It is, thus, beholden to think of the business of environmental renaturalization as the main part of what is named the "Anthropocene" (or "Capitalocene") (Hache 2014). To add to the definition already suggested above, the "Anthropocene" is a term used by the biologist Eugene Stroemer and popularized since the 1980s by the famous chemist Paul Crutzen, who defends its use as follows: "It seems appropriate to apply the term 'Anthropocene' to the present days, a geological age which is dominated by the human kind in too many different ways" (Crutzen, cited in Kolbert 2015). Accordingly, the geologic age that we officially live in, the Holocene, would give way to a new context defined by the advance of human action as a geological force able to drastically interfere in those processes said to be "natural" for the planet. This concept evolved from the denomination "Capitalocene," which aims to make clear that the (peculiarly destructive) agency of human beings toward the planet is not an intrinsic characteristic of our species but rather a complicity with a certain manner of worldwide appropriation: capitalism. The term "Capitalocene" forms part of sociologist Jason Moore's (2017) perspective, in which, according to Danowski and Viveiros de Castro (2014: 28), "the Industrial Revolution initiated in the beginning of the 19th century is just a consequence of the social-economic mutation which generated capitalism in the 'long 17th' century, and therefore, the source of the crises is, ultimately, in the production relations, ahead of (and rather than) the productive forces, if we can express ourselves in such terms."

At first glance, it is possible to assume from preliminary ethnographic data, usually associated with the cataclysmic and destructive effects of human actions in nature, the clear logical deviation from the Anthropocene of forms of human intervention that intend instead to reconstruct nature. But what can appear to be the altruistic actions of so-called "Green Capitalism" can also reveal in certain cases (such as that of the Breakthrough Institute) a megalomaniac and technophile presumption.

> Certain relatives close to the Singularity people, however, have dedicated their attention to the problem by asking themselves about the immediate technological conditions to the survival of capitalism and its main achievements, freedom and security, in a scenario of increasing energetic consumption and persistent dependency on fossil fuels. Breakthrough Institute, an American think tank[7] (from California, as the Singularitarians[8]), with an uncertain political tendency, is maybe the most highlighted name among the defenders of that Green Capitalism which relies on centralized solutions able to implement ambitious techno-engineering projects through the Great Capital, with huge material investment, organically (if such adverb fits here) based on Big Science: the hydraulic frag-

> mentation of rocks to obtain fossil fuel, expansion and improvement of nuclear factories, great hydroelectric projects (barrages in the Amazon Basin, for example), generalization of transgenic vegetables monoculture, environmental Geo-engineering and so on. (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 2014: 66–67)

If both motivations—negative and positive—seem to come from the same capitalist source, and this source determines the destruction of ecosystems, they also adapt and present themselves as a solution to its reconstruction. As Stengers states, "It is from Capitalism's nature to explore opportunities, that cannot be avoided. Through Capitalism's logical system, it is impossible not to identify the inclusion of the Earth with the appearing of a new field of opportunities" (Stengers 2015: 47).

However, I see the rewilding dream as being of a lesser utopian scale compared to the abovementioned Singularitarians, represented by the "Breakthrough Institute." The model of recovery and environmental management presented by Rewilding Europe intends to reorganize productive activities based on a sense of opportunity, in which investing in nature seems to be a good deal, but there is no idealistic notion that cutting-edge technology and large-scale projects may substitute the local—and deeply human—responsibility for "boosting" those processes recognized as vital.

In light of this it is essential to ask, exactly what issues are rewilding initiatives able to bring into the discussion in relation to the Anthropocene? To what extent do they enter into dialogue with the other initiatives of a collectivist nature that are receiving more visibility in this context?

Implications of the Reconstruction of a Natural Heritage

Taking into consideration some issues from the global level—at which Rewilding Europe is presented—and conversations about the Anthropocene, it can be concluded that the greatest contribution to this topic is to describe ethnographically the actions taken locally in partnership with the renaturalization project in Portugal. This leads us to a second dimension of this research, one that focuses on the processes of patrimonialization implicit in renaturalization programs. As previously mentioned in debates regarding the awareness of cultural heritage, the "nature patrimonialization" undertaken in a rewilding context no longer follows the standard parameters of inviolability and "authenticity" given to a specific natural landscape. Renaturalization theorists argue that the artificialization necessary to reconstruct these environments is part of the preservation of species and their own ecosystems. It is therefore said, according to

Gonçalves (1996), that if the authenticity and proximity to the past can be reevaluated regarding the attested cultural heritages, the same can be said about a natural heritage that was deliberately constructed by humans. In this latter case, it would be necessary to focus on the interactions of the species that allowed the reproduction of the functional roles that each one of them performed and not on the analysis of the species that inhabited a certain biome. As can be inferred from the following quotations, for those that support renaturalization, some features of the species disappear, and the interaction benchmarks remain.

> Such benchmarks would be defined not only by the presence or absence of species, but also by the presence or absence of species interactions—the true functional fabric of nature. (Estes, 2002, quoted in Donlan et al. 2006: 661)

> The focus of conservation biology is expanding to include not only species but species interactions. (Soulé et al., 2003, 2005, quoted in Donlan et al. 2006: 662)

In fact, the amount of intervention in the landscape through the reintroduction of animals and plants is measured by the evaluation and the technical capacity to put such measures into practice. Thus, frequent meetings take place with specialist ecologists about the reintroduction of wild animals, since, besides their expertise, thorough knowledge of the veterinary, sanitary, and legal requirements in each country is necessary. Only then is it possible to understand and manage a species reintroduction project and establish partnerships between organizations that foster renaturalization and public and private institutions (universities, research centers, regulatory organizations) that are in agreement with the consultants of the reintroduction processes. Those professionals, besides giving information about the ecology of the species in focus, have broad knowledge about the possible problems involved in the introduction of a specific animal or plant. Therefore, it is necessary that the choice of the species meets the viability criteria such as avoiding conflict with the human population, its trophic and territorial sustainability, the hunting legislation, the species reproductive cycles, and even the aesthetics efficiency with focus on public opinion sensitivity.

The relationship with the local inhabitants is of ultimate importance for the execution of a rewilding project. Not only are the adults constantly seen as possible partners but the new generation of children are also considered perfect mediators of the reappreciation of the natural landscape. To reach the children, the rewilding teams pays constant visits to schools. There are also social-environmental speeches and programs for the "adoption" of native seedlings that will later be planted in reforestation zones, including Faia Brava.

This fact leads to another issue regarding the way rewilding initiatives are locally implemented: the inclusive aspect of the human presence from the beginning development of activities in the reserve. If anthropization is not an epistemological problem, neither is it a practical barrier to the renaturalization actions. The consolidation of this model of natural reserve foresees the continuous mobilization of associations and local inhabitants, who will coexist with great predators such as wolves, Iberian lynxes, and birds of prey, as well as pigs, equines, bovines, shepherds, small local producers, and sometimes hunters, who will need to have their actions legalized by regulatory organizations.

However, there is some controversy between artificiality and authenticity in the way these natural parks are created. New landscapes arise as the environment is readjusted, and, therefore, human and nonhuman elements are responsible for the good functioning of their systems. If the elements that in the past ensured the subsistence of families—such as the unmeasured extraction and exploitation of natural resources—can no longer exist, it is necessary to replace them with new forms of interaction that will have a similar role. In this context, new "boosts," such as family hotel businesses and rural gastronomy, together with the farms, are considered to be proper sustainable methods to reestablish the ties between humans and nature.

The relationship between the intention of evoking an image reflective of a past lifestyle and its land management, hunting, and rusticity and the need to satisfy the contemporary requirements associated with outdoor experiences, such as preservationism, animal rights, photographic safaris, and new communication technologies, produces a tension between the idealization and execution of an enterprise. An example is the way that populations traditionally established their ties with the natural landscape, in opposition to the expectations generated by new projects of commercializing such lifestyles. From this perspective, it is possible to infer that a variety of landscape transfiguration has always been carried out by the villagers, when they brought home elements of the wildlife surrounding them, such as hunting trophies, luck charms, decorations, and healing substances. Nevertheless, the model of rural tourism currently proposed imposes on that population the need to welcome visitors into their everyday lives. Far from going through this conversion without a trace, when villagers are obliged to engage with nature, which has always been "outside," owing to their accommodation of visitors, this does not take place without leaving behind a certain lifestyle change that brings the natural landscape closer to the domestic sphere. Modern life demands that these people rethink, for example, the place of the hunting trophies (or taxidermy displays) that decorate their fireplaces and walls

and start identifying the outdoor home of those natural, living trophies. Going from hunting to a photographic safari is, therefore, a significant change of behavior, and one that deeply resonates in the manners of local existence.

References to the past always conjure up idyllic images about what might be done in the future, but they also manifest as barriers to what must be done. For this reason, one of the main (self-)definitions of "renaturalization" initiatives is that they promote an "optimistic" and "positive" view of ecology. The perception of humanity's role as a proactive agent in the process of environmental recovery, and in an environment destroyed by previous human agency, means that such projects represent a privileged locus for anthropological analysis that understands nature as a human coproduction. Perhaps a good example of this can be found in the Faia Brava Reserve. At the time of its acquisition, ruins of old abandoned dovecotes were found near the reserve. These constructions, which are very common in that region of Portugal, had in the past a double function: producing animal excrement to fertilize the poor soil for farming and providing a meat supply, that of pigeons, to the people who lived in the region, especially in times of lack of food. After the reserve was created, the dovecotes were remodeled, and their functionality was partially recovered. It is now providing an increase in the pigeon population in order to feed the eagles, which are in danger of extinction, that live in the rocky cliffs near the Côa River. The incorporation of these dovecotes into the landscape of the reserve also justifies the function of such artifacts in the interaction chains that exist in rewilding projects. Similarly, the vegetable harvest in the reserve provides another food option for rabbits, which are in turn eaten by eagles, foxes, and, occasionally, lynxes.

The "return" of reintroduced or recovered animal species brings a consequent redefinition of animals and also of the environment itself, as seen in the recent return of Iberian wolves to the region. The return of this predator was possible due to several factors: its easy adaptation and transportation, the national protection policy for the Iberian wolf, and the demographic voids that enabled the gradual regeneration of the forests, which create ecological niches that work as a refuge for the wolves' territorial integration. However, the presence of wolves becomes a huge problem for the rural producers when their livestock is eventually attacked and their losses are not compensated for by the state. The presence of wolves, which can be identified by traces left behind even though they are rarely seen, has already been attributed to the rewilding environmentalists. In this way, new myths appear locally, such as the one stating that the wolves are reintroduced into the area during the night via helicopters. Obviously, due to the potential conflict presented by the wolves, the species has never been

thought of as a viable candidate for reintroduction. However, in thinking about the rejection of the wolf, the problem brings about a redefinition by the defenders of renaturalization, who observe that the reintroduction of herbivore species would decrease the shepherds' losses by redirecting the predatory attacks on the livestock to the wild fauna.

It is possible to conclude, therefore, that the reconstruction of natural environments happens through the evoking of survival modes and ancestral landscapes, even if it is carried out by human hands. The reintroduction of long-gone animals is, thus, further connected to the recovery of myths, narratives, and images articulated in an anthropic environment. It is possible that the greatest contribution of rewilding thinking is to point to a future perspective of what nature could be. This statement, considered by many to be utopian, gains effectiveness in everyday changes implemented by conservationist initiatives in the field. Although the scale of impact seems microscopic when each specific action is probed, the rewilding initiative demonstrates incrementally that its mission is significant to big questions, like climate change. This is precisely because the objectives it incorporates are concrete and visible to nonexpert eyes. Rewilding Europe showcases a pragmatic approach to dealing with major, global issues, such as global warming and its disastrous consequences for the Earth's populations. Abandoning any interest in reconstructing the past, Rewilding Europe focuses on producing a future for nature that is better than the present scenario. Even if this means triggering images from the past, these only matter as long as they can be useful for planning the forthcoming landscapes.

The reintroduction of the concept of nature as an important category in the social sciences is also occurring at a good moment. Without returning to the ecomaterialist traditions that permeated anthropological theory from the second half of the twentieth century, we are currently observing the reinvention of nature as a concept that can adjust to innovations in the ethnographic field. Taking advantage of the rewilding spirit, we are entering a period in which a culture of creativity allows us to imagine possible futures for anthropology and for the planet.

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Notes

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1. This is the governmental office responsible for nature and biodiversity conservation administrated by the Portuguese state.
2. A private reserve for nature conservation covering 850 hectares, located between the counties of Pinhel and Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo in Portugal. It was founded in 2003 and is managed by the Transhumance and Nature Association. In 2011 it became part of the Rewilding Europe network, being one of the model rewilding areas in Europe.
3. The term "rewilding" refers to a process of "resavaging" or "renaturalization." I have chosen to preserve the idea of "renaturalization" in this chapter because it highlights the strong character of artificialization that exists within the dynamics of this environmental construction.
4. Guarda is one of the main cities in the region of Beira Alta Interior in Portugal.
5. These are stores where a miscellaneous range of things are sold, from domestic utensils to stationery and clothing.
6. Two notorious Portuguese sheepdog breeds.
7. The Breakthrough Institute is an environmental research center located in Oakland, California. Founded in 2003 by Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, Breakthrough Institute has policy programs in energy and climate, economic growth and innovation, and conservation and development.
8. Singularitarianism is a movement defined by the belief that a technological singularity—the creation of superintelligence—will likely happen in the medium future and that deliberate action ought to be taken to ensure that the singularity benefits humans.

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