

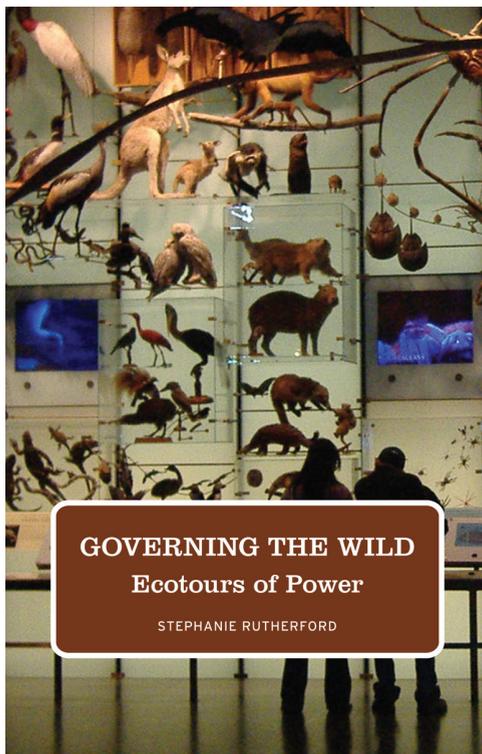
Governing the Wild: Ecotours of Power

Stephanie Rutherford. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. xxvi and 250 pp., maps, photos, diagrams, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$25.00 paper (ISBN 978-0-8166-7447-3); \$75.00 cloth (ISBN 978-0-8166-7440-4).

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Read this book if you'd like to learn how to defang "wild things" while you remake your experiences at the human-environment interface. Threading through strands of cultural and critical geography, the book *Governing the Wild: Ecotours of Power* offers a compelling treatise of how neoliberal political economy and culture have been deeply reinscribed in three popular North American tourist attractions and one film. Author Stephanie Rutherford mobilizes the work of French social theorist Michel Foucault to extend his considerations of governmentality into questions of nature and environment. Using Foucault's work to problematize the processes of governance, Rutherford works to combat the oft-encountered dominant and entrenched renditions of "wildness."

In the book's four main parts, the author takes the reader through the Hall of Biodiversity at the American Museum of Natural History; Disney's Animal Kingdom theme park in Orlando, Florida; a week-long ecotour of Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks; and Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth*. Through the tour of these iconic places



and productions, Rutherford works to explain how people come to understand, interpret, and treat the biophysical environment through associated narratives and rationalities of governance.

The central argument put forward is that the seductiveness of consumer-friendly environmentalism and green governmentality contributes to management and regulations of behavior in ways that do little to address the neoliberal order that gives rise to contemporary environmental problems in the first place. By extension then, these sites of governance serve to further entrench and naturalize these ultimately troubling ways of interpreting and engaging with the world around us.

To animate these arguments, Rutherford first tours the Hall of Biodiversity at the American

Museum of Natural History in New York City. Regarding "the most visited museum in the country" (p. 13), she argues that interrogations of how nature is depicted in the Hall—as discrete, as dead, as separate, as passive—then shed light on how green governmentality works to inspire the atomized contemporary citizen-consumer to "save it" in particularly benign ways. Second, Rutherford explores the Disney's Animal Kingdom theme park. Through her examination of Disney's Environmentality program, she unpacks how this place (and associated narratives of normal relations with nature) epitomizes consumer-friendly and sanitized sites of corporate green governance. Third, she embarks on a seven-day ecotour of Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. Through Natural Habitat Adventures, Rutherford considers notions of the romanticization of nature "out there" and animals (e.g., "wild" bison) as other, while also working through gender, race, and class issues associated with the patterns of such

consumption. Fourth, she focuses centrally on how media's representational practices shape the ongoing stories we tell ourselves, through a critique of constructions of scientific knowledge in the film *An Inconvenient Truth*. Through this case, she takes on elements of affect (nostalgia, alarm), celebrity, moral governances, and claims of truth as they relate to considerations of solutions and alternatives. In this chapter, Rutherford argues that these interventions come up short because they "remain locked within the notion that the excesses of civilization can be redeemed through the further application of particular brands of science, geo-engineering, and cutting-edge technology" (p. 165).

Through these halls and hallmarks of green governmentality, Rutherford posits that these projects enroll nature in ongoing capitalist logics that allows to them be (problematically) commodified and consumed. She asserts that the work of green governmentality is to remove the teeth of environmentalism and naturalize a utilitarian ethic where the "environment" is merely a servant of human whims and wants. Overall, Rutherford interrogates how cultural spaces become sites of power relations (p. xi) as well as places where "science and commerce meet to good effect" (p. 187).

By way of the participant observations that Rutherford recounts throughout the book, the "American-exceptionalism-meets-human-heroism-to-save-nature" stories read at times like a set of David Foster Wallace short stories. And like David Foster Wallace, Rutherford does not pull punches. She sharpens her critiques through the language of green governmentality and draws on these four emblems to force readers to confront how these narratives can bind our consideration of the environment and nature, thereby feeding neoliberal power.

Moreover, Rutherford lays out the connections between modernity, dominant human-environment relations, and capitalism. She places herself in these cases as someone working to understand and recuperate these subtle spaces of environmental "edutainment" while avoiding the potential pitfalls of (off-putting) smugness and preachiness. To the extent that readers of this book pursue similar labors of leisure, Rutherford argues that there really are not places of innocence; rather we are all actors of varying centrality in this theater of neoliberal power and cultural indoctrination.

Despite the author's best efforts at exposing varieties of green governmentality, I still found myself wanting more than the critique and counternarrative offered up.

I was left with many ongoing questions. Among them: Are these trends limited to North America or the United States (from where each case emanated)? Do these critiques extend to and hold in other parts of the Western world? To what extent do these cases inform future prospects for museums, preserves, protected areas, zoos, theme parks, shopping malls, research parks, and playgrounds around the world? How do human geographies (e.g., population densities) and cultural histories (e.g., the vaunted rugged individualism of the United States) shape the speed and efficiency of these circulations across the social body? How do desires to save the planet and get lost in nature help reveal the promises and perils of contemporary U.S. and Western society? And most important, although these are common examples, how can the call for a more relational ethics find traction with everyday people such as an average museum patron, Disney consumer, park visitor, or movie goer? And perhaps the tentative gestures toward viable, workable, and feasible ways to change have less to do with the shortcomings of Rutherford's thesis, and more to do with the current dismal conditions for a reimagining of the human-environment interrelations amid today's dominance of neoliberal political economy and society.

Nonetheless, *Governing the Wild: Ecotours of Power* manages to unsettle and disrupt the now common ways of knowing these environments through contemporary capitalist consumerism and exchange. The book therefore helps readers ponder how to think about, discuss, and formulate actions intended to alleviate environmental harms. Disney ecotours might be a relatively easy target for Rutherford, as a clearly "sanitized space of consumption" (p. 51). But more challenging work is done in the Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, where Rutherford interrogates how "aesthetic registers" (p. 90) shape the spectrum of possibility regarding ongoing environmental governance.

Ultimately, Rutherford effectively cracks open these often-naturalized pathways of engaging with nature to help readers consider that these places are frequently maintained within the cozy confines of neoliberal order. Yet she also provides insights into the remaining moments of instability even in these highly scripted sites. She prompts readers to think outside of the governmentality box and strive toward what she calls a "relational ethics," placing justice at the center of a relationship with and responsibility to nature and the environment. In so doing, she provides fundamental guidance for change: She challenges readers to consider how these encounters are made rather than found; thus they can be contested and made differently.