

# The Work that Parks Do: Towards an Urban Environmentalism

Nate Gabriel

Department of Geography, Rutgers University, Lucy Stone Hall  
54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, New Jersey 08854-8045

Published in *Social and Cultural Geography* 2011 12(2):123-141

*Cities today are typically framed as sites of capitalist development, while the urban park is theorized as an indirect response to the emerging hegemony of industrial production in the nineteenth century. Yet, this historical framing tells us little about the process through which our notions of 'the city' and of 'nature' are produced, or how this knowledge affects the formation urban people's identities. The discursive formation of the capitalist city can be traced to specific historical moments, one of which is the construction of urban parks during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, which I argue was instrumental in producing a new knowledge of the capitalist city by creating a boundary between the social space of the city and the natural space of the park. Using Philadelphia's Fairmount Park as a case study, I draw on archival photographs and annual park commission reports to explore the formation of park subjects during this period and shed light on diverse economic practices that were once widespread in and around the city but whose erasure was ultimately a prerequisite for the successful formation of an urban discourse organized around the construction of the city/nature boundary.*

**Keywords:** urban political ecology, environmentalism, diverse economies, parks, Philadelphia

## Introduction

For decades, urban scholars have theorized the city as a phenomenon produced by, but simultaneously productive of, capitalist economic relations (Harvey 1982; Castells 1977). From this point of view, many urban geographers read the development of urban economies in the nineteenth century as a logical, almost inevitable tendency toward increasing industrialization in which capitalist economic relations drove the accumulation of capital in urban centers (see for example Harvey 1997). Implicitly taking this view for granted, many urban park historians have framed parks as external responses to the entrenchment of the industrial city and the concentration of labor in factories for the large-scale production of commodities (Schuyler 1986, Young 1995). Focusing on the views of early park managers, Cranz argues that they saw parks as “compensation for the widening split between work and leisure” (1982, p 7). In their view, parks were an external response to unavoidable urban changes, spaces of leisure to which urban workers could flee in order to relieve the tensions produced by the factory (Geffen 1982). By contrast, Rosenzweig's classic study, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, demonstrates that the establishment of parks is more politically complex than typical histories would suggest, tracing the formation of parks as a consequence of class struggle, focusing especially on the role the working class played in shaping parks according to their own desires (1983).

Urban political ecologists have taken a similar approach to the study of urban environmental politics, arguing that urban nature is 'constituted through the social mobilization of metabolic processes under capitalist and market-driven social relations.' (Heynen, Kaika, and Swyngedouw 2006, pg 5). Further, they argue that 'the material conditions that comprise urban environments are controlled, manipulated, and serve the interests of the elite at the expense of marginalized populations' (ibid. pg 6). So, while urban political ecology has helped clarify how nature is produced as a consequence of capitalist urban development and class struggle, there is significantly less attention to the ways that

urban people apprehend the capitalist city itself, how urban environmental subjects are constituted, or what thoughts, knowledges, desires, practices, and governmental technologies are complicit in its formation (c.f. Grove 2008; see also Cowell and Thomas 2002). In short, urban political ecologists have too infrequently taken up Heynen and colleagues' suggestion to ask “what constitutes the 'urban' or the 'natural'” in the first place (Heynen, Swyngedouw, and Kaika 2006, p 6). Such questions demand an accounting of the degree to which environmental discourse formation precipitates or enables shifts in urban form, as well as the the work that environmental discourses must do to produce a discursive dominance of capitalism in the city. These questions speak directly to the role that parks played in producing a particular knowledge of the relationship between the city and nature.

In this paper, I shift the focus away from an emphasis on the city and urban nature as entities whose formation is determined through the alignment of or conflict between rivaling economic and societal forces, and replace it with an emphasis on the 'micropolitics' of the urban environment as an emergent discursive construction, exploring the articulation of an ontology of the capitalist city and of the urban environment that is founded on the erasure of economic difference within them (Foucault 1979, Gibson-Graham 1996). In doing so, I treat the urban park as part of a web of power relations that collude in a discursive framing of the city that situates labor and laborers within the Western nature/society imaginary, helps to produce a knowledge of the city as wholly capitalist (social) space through the reification of the park as a non-economic (natural) space, and produces urban subjects who embody and reproduce those spaces (Latour 1993; Castree and Braun 2001). I employ a strategy drawn from the diverse economies literature to elucidate how a discourse of urban parks assisted in the production of this binary by collapsing a diverse economic landscape into one where economic activity was either visible in the form of capitalism or not at all (Gibson-Graham 1996, 2006). Finally, extending Arun Agrawal's notion of 'environmentality', a term that he uses to describe the process through which individuals become self-disciplining environmental subjects (2005), I pursue these

questions through an examination of the instruments of government that were implicated in the formation of capitalist subjects through the establishment of urban parks in the 1800s. Beginning from these theoretical starting points, I examine three such governmental techniques: the production of park space as distant, and conceptually separate, from urban space; the production of park subjects who could only temporarily inhabit the space of the park for purposes of leisure; and finally, the erasure of non-capitalist economic activity within woodlands adjacent to urban spaces.

To explore ways in which this new knowledge of the city was produced, I use documentary evidence related to the establishment of Fairmount Park in Philadelphia in the late nineteenth century. I begin with a description of a set of photographs of Fairmount Park that were widely distributed in the 1870s, taken just after the park's establishment in 1868. My account of the effects that these photographs produced is of course not the only possible reading of them, since their meaning is intertwined with wider, intractable webs of meaning. While it would be impossible fully trace the significance of any photograph, let alone a collection of them produced nearly 150 years ago, I offer an account of some of their effects on the formation of knowledge among park users (Latour 2005). Via a visual discourse analysis that entails a close examination of the images, identification of common themes among them, and an excavation of the social and cultural context in which they were produced and consumed, I treat these images as agents in the production of a knowledge of urban nature (c.f. Rose 2007). In this way, the images help describe the process by which both nature and the city came to be defined as separate but intertwined domains through the representation and concretization of the urban park as a particular kind of social space.

Next, I discuss a series of annual reports filed by the captain of the Fairmount Park Guard during the first thirty-five years of the park's existence, which report on crime, indiscretion, and deviance in the park. They demonstrate that the capitalist vision of the city, with all that it entails regarding the disciplining of bodies through the policing of the urban park, wasn't completed with the

formation of parks, but required maintenance and vigilance by those who policed its conceptual and physical boundaries. The efforts by the guard to enforce a particular set of practices inadvertently highlight a variety of alternative visions that persisted long after the formal establishment of the park, attest to the incompleteness of the city/park division suggested in the photographs, and show that that division required continual renewal through the performances of park-using and park-managing subjects. In short, the guards' efforts become entangled in the same web of power that produced governable and clearly-defined, if contested, objects of knowledge in the city and the urban park.

### **Producing a New Knowledge of the City**

The establishment of urban parks in the 1800s entailed an acknowledgment of the dominance of an industrial economy and the perceived disappearance of wilderness, ultimately permitting the erasure of non-capitalist economic practices in urban centers, such as the gathering of fruits, nuts, and other plant materials for food and medicine. A number of theoretical interventions enable an understanding of how this was achieved. Paul Rabinow urges an analytical strategy in which 'disciplinary components' of urban space are seen as 'part of a shifting field of power and knowledge in which we can see the gradual self-formation of a class, a nation or a civilization' (2003). Drawing on Michel Foucault's writings on governmentality, Thomas Osbourne and Nikolas Rose trace the effects of a range of political and governmental techniques in producing an urban space for the regulation and modulation of individual behavior (Osbourne and Rose 1999; Osbourne and Rose 2004; see also Crampton and Elden 2006; Huxley 2006). Through this theorization, they develop an understanding of the city of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a space of governance, a 'way of diagramming human existence, human conduct, [and] human subjectivity...in the name of government' (Osbourne and Rose

1999: 737). Focusing on the production of urban subjects, Huxley demonstrates the importance of 'operative rationales', which 'mobiliz[e] certain “truths” of causal relations in and between spaces, environmental, bodies, and compartments' (2006). Thus, while none of this work explicitly addresses the production of *economic* knowledge of the city, their emphasis on urban governmentalities provides a starting point for thinking through a micropolitics of urban economic and environmental discourse, where the establishment of urban parks can be situated within a field of power relations that enabled the formation of distinctly urban and non-urban spaces, in which the meaning of those spaces can be read through a moral system that was intertwined with the proper functioning of a capitalist economy and ultimately produced the urban park subject. In tracing the formation and operation of this field of power, the techniques of government associated with urban park formation become not simply as a form of violence committed against an unwilling urban populace, but productive of park subjects, who in turn reproduce park discourse through the establishment of particular forms of knowledge about cities, nature, and people (Foucault 1980, Huxley 2007). Furthermore, theorizing parks in this way illuminates not only the knowledges that are produced through environmental governance, but also the knowledges that are unmade by it. Taking care not to exclude subjugated knowledge from the narrative frame allows an accounting not only of what is lost in the process of discourse formation, as Foucault points out but also what possibilities exist for new forms of knowledge in the future (Foucault 1980, Gibson-Graham 2006).

In establishing how to combine the framework for analyzing urban space described above with an examination of environmental discourse, recent work in political ecology offers some direction. Robbins argues that the American lawn, or rather the assemblage of actors and acts that constitute it, collude in the formation of 'lawn people', whose interaction with land resources in cities and suburbs is shaped by a moral framework in which particular kinds of subjects are produced by the 'needs' of the lawn. (Robbins 2007). Through this assemblage of actors and acts, 'the subject comes to recognize

herself as a subject and responds accordingly...the subject must be “hailed”, named, recognized... interpellated.' Arun Agrawal's Northern Indian case depicts the process through which villagers' positions as environmental subjects have shifted through the production of new forms of knowledge that ascribe a particular set of cultural values to the non-human landscape, towards a community-based forest conservation bureaucracy (Agrawal 2005). Finally, with specific reference to parks, West and Brockington argue that as parks within and outside of cities proliferate, 'protected areas are coming to form a way of *thinking* about the world, of *viewing* the world, and of *acting on* the world' (West and Brockington 2006, emphasis in original). Thus, by paying attention to the practices that establish the boundary between nature and the city, I seek to reveal, at least partially, the origins not only of our notions of 'nature', which has been done quite effectively elsewhere, but of the city itself (see for example Castree and Braun 2002, Latour 1993).

Using this approach, I read the dominance of capitalist practices in cities not as inevitable or inherent, but produced and maintained through everyday practices. As an entry point into understanding how a discourse of capitalist urbanism emerged, I draw from work in the diverse economies literature, which posits that the perceived totality of a capitalist economic system are a function of capitalist discourse; material and discursive practices are required in order for capitalism and capitalist-oriented social structures to remain dominant (Gibson-Graham 1996). Within this literature, the disappearance of non-capitalist practices is often understood as the result of capitalist narratives that frame them as redundant and obsolete within a capitalist economic system, while capitalism's dominance is attained through the perpetuation of teleological narratives of development (Emery and Pierce 2005). By drawing attention to non-capitalist economic strategies and the practices that obscure them, a fundamental but often overlooked connection between discourses of environment and discourses of economy is made visible. Thus, tracing the specific technologies that call into being urban subjects who 'think, view, and act' in particular ways vis-a-vis parks illuminates the co-

production of environmental and urban knowledges.

### **Visuality and the Production of the Urban Park**

The mid-nineteenth century was an era of rapid industrialization, and saw the establishment of a number of large urban parks in major American cities. The urban park, opposite an emerging discourse of the industrial city, was a new kind of nature that, however proximate to the city, was characterized by an absence of people and, more to the point, distance from economic activity. In Philadelphia, one of the most economically and politically important American cities in the mid-nineteenth century, the centerpieces of a pre-industrial narrative of urban development of a generation before, the water-powered mills and wire bridges spanning the Schuylkill river, were now cast aside in favor of this new vision of urban development. The urban park came into being as an old vision of the city (as a hub of shipping and trade) was fading, and a new vision of the city (as the bustling metropolis and the site of industrial production) was emerging.

The establishment of Philadelphia's Fairmount Park occurred in piecemeal fashion over the course of two decades beginning in the 1850s. By 1868, calls for the establishment of a new urban park in Philadelphia carried sufficient political weight to enable the city government to appropriate or purchase vast tracts of land from both the urban gentry and manufacturing base that had grown up along the Schuylkill River over the previous hundred years (Geffen 1982). The development of a rhetorical foundation that justified the establishment of urban parks is a topic discussed frequently by park scholars, who provide a broad historical picture of the urban parks movement and the role of cemeteries and private gardens as precursors to the urban park that emerged in the early 1800s (e.g. Schuyler 1986). Newspaper commentary from the mid nineteenth century makes clear the perceived

relationship between the park and the city. For one writer, parks offered an opportunity to “get a breath of God's pure air, or enjoy the grateful shade and sweet aroma of woods...[where urban people] can be transported in a few minutes from the heat, and dust, and noise of a great city—its disagreeable sights, and smells, and sounds – into a rural scene of surprising loveliness, amid green fields, and purling brooks, and the waving forest, and flowering shrubbery...” (Philadelphia Evening Journal 1859).

Another writes in that Philadelphians “need, and must have some rest of business and labor...

[Fairmount Park is] a place not surpassed anywhere for this object” (Trenton Daily Gazette 1875).

These are only two examples -- such sentiments were common in newspapers and other outlets from the 1850s into the 1870s. In their own way, they are examples of the everyday acts that constituted the park. Much of that work was also done through the use of photography as a promotional tool.

As a technology of visual communication, the photograph can play a powerful role in fixing meaning and lending the illusion of objectivity and permanence of the objects depicted (Rose 2007, Tagg 1988, 2009). That is, photographs seem to represent things as they 'really' are, obscuring their partiality and crafted nature as representations of the world. The view of photography as objective representation can be traced at least as far back as the writings of Henry Fox Talbot, inventor of the first technique for producing photographic negatives. In the first book to contain photographs reproduced from negatives, Talbot suggested that the practice of photography allowed its practitioner to make objective records of nature's 'artistry', that the photograph is 'obtained by the mere action of Light upon sensitive paper', and that the practice of photography was to be praised 'both for completeness of detail and correctness of perspective' (Talbot 1844). This claim of photographic objectivity, of course, belies the role of the photographer in arranging the composition of the image and of choosing what to photograph, among a host of other considerations. The imagined objectivity of the photograph dissolves once one begins to examine the choices made in the process of photograph-making, as well as the larger social context in which the images were produced (Rose 2007). Furthermore, the photograph,

once produced, becomes inserted into a web of power relations that define what can be said meaningfully about the world (Tagg 2009). In this light, photographs can no longer be seen as repositories of knowledge about the world, as Talbot would have it, but as works that are productive of some kinds of knowledges and destructive of others, implicating them in the process of subject formation. In the words of one scholar, 'Photography operates in disciplinary discourses to arrest, isolate, and instantiate the body in relation to the axes of time and space; it enables the decipherment, delineation, and analysis of the body's surface' (Lalvani 1996: 33, citing Butler 1990).

Accounting for the effect of photographic technologies in producing subjects takes on special significance in the case of urban parks in the 1800s, since the era of industrialization and park development was also a time of rapid innovation in photography. A number of new technologies arose during the 1850s, 60s, and 70s that increased the reach and effectiveness of photographic practices in this regard. The collodion process, which improved on Talbot's earlier work to reproduce images from negatives, significantly reduced the cost and difficulty of reproduction, so that photographers found themselves capable of producing cheap, high quality copies of their work for the first time. Prior to the 1870s, most photographic practice involved one-off creations suitable only for family portraits or artistic exhibition. The unprecedented scale at which photographs could be produced and distributed enabled a degree of fidelity and consistency that was not possible previously.

James Cremer, a prominent photographer active in Philadelphia in the 1870s, published an extensive set of photographs of Fairmount Park shortly after its establishment. While the exact number of photos in the collection isn't known, about 150 unique images survive. These can be divided into four categories according to different ways that the park and park users are represented. Each category is roughly equally represented in the collection, and three of them have direct bearing on the present discussion. Images from the first category show wide views of various landscapes in the park. Shots of the park's tree canopy, rivers and streams, and long views of open fields predominate. Most of these are

taken from a distance, enframing a solitary man or woman so that his or her presence is dwarfed by the larger landscape. (Figure 1 is an example.) The next category depicts people, solitary or in pairs, at a medium distance, in contemplation. Such scenes are near paths, benches, or bridges. (Figures 2 and 3 are examples of these). Third, many images show solitary individuals (usually men) up close, in intimate interaction with their environment. (Figure 4 is an example.) The last category that I identify, not included in my discussion, depicts park visitors in groups, sitting in fields or on benches, or occasionally in front of historical buildings (there are only a handful of the latter). What sets these pictures apart from the others is that the people in them look directly into the camera, and do not seem to be meant as a representation of park behavior.

The images were highly popular in Philadelphia and won Cremer a gold medal in an annual competition at the Franklin Institute, at the time one of the most prestigious scientific institutions in the world (Stereoworld 1979). Artistically speaking, Cremer employed the new technology of photography in some similar ways that the old technology of painting had been employed in previous decades. Cremer's depictions of landscapes and natural scenes reflected trends found in the work of early nineteenth-century landscape painters collectively known as the Hudson River School (for comparison, see especially Kornhauser 2003, O'Toole 2005). Driscoll argues that Hudson River landscape paintings represented the beliefs that “nature had religious, therapeutic, and/or didactic values” (p. 2, 1981). The grandiosity of the landscape featured in Figure 1, compared with the small size of the man in it, suggest that Cremer's work was informed by similar sentiments as those of the Hudson River School about how one was meant to think of oneself literally within the context of one's natural surroundings. While Cremer himself left little explicit indication that he subscribed to such views, it was not uncommon to find such views among urban park advocates (c.f. Geffen 1982).

*[Figure 1 about here – Title: Peter's Island Near Rockland]*

There are, however, significant differences between Cremer's work and that of the Hudson

River School painters. For one thing, even though the river that lent its name to the movement was within reach of some of the wealthier members of the audience of Hudson School painters, the bulk of that audience had little hope of traveling outside of their immediate urban surroundings (indeed, this was one of the arguments made in favor of establishing urban parks in the 1850s and 60s). Many Hudson School painters strove to paint nature in its ideal form, and it was not assumed that the landscapes they depicted would ever be visited by its audience (Novak 2007). Indeed, in the pursuit of an ideal depiction of nature, many Hudson School painters often compiled features from multiple landscapes in their paintings, making such a visit impossible (Driscoll 1981). By contrast, while Cremer's work enjoyed national distribution, its primary audience was the people of Philadelphia and visitors to that city, and his work depicted scenes that could be – indeed, were meant to be – visited by his audience. So, while Cremer's work no doubt contained some of the same signals as Hudson School painting in his collection, the idealization of rural scenery so typical of Hudson river art was only one dimension of Cremer's photographic works. By combining the set of values associated with the Hudson River School (and the Romantic movement more broadly) with the qualities attributed to the emerging technology of photography, Cremer's images were more than innocent efforts of documentation of the new park; they were political acts that had profound effects in establishing the meaning and identity of the park and the people in it.

In this section of the paper, I limit my discussion to three of these effects: first, they produced a knowledge of the spaces of the park and the city as opposing realms, where the park was a space of trees, rivers, and clean air, while the city was a space of work. Second, the images plotted the park/city coupling within a teleological understanding of urban development, where the rise of a particular set of economic practices rendered another set obsolete. Finally, they delineated the bounds of appropriate behavior inside and outside the space of the park, and provided an ethical framing for how to use the park. In framing what could be meaningfully said about the relationship between the park and the city

in these ways, Cremer provided a narrative for a citizenry that until then lacked a coherent understanding of urban parks. The increasing novelty and ubiquity of photographs allowed Cremer's view to spread in a way it couldn't have a generation before. His work was sold all over the United States in much the same way that postcards are sold today, and its distribution cut across society, finding its way into the homes of both the rich and the poor, and ultimately enabling a coherent discourse of urban parks to emerge.

This was accomplished by depicting a park that was within, but conceptually beyond, the space of the city; spaces of nature were to be enjoyed from a distance. Figure 1 expresses a common theme in Cremer's work: it shows a male park visitor dwarfed by the immensity of the landscape that surrounds him. In this example, the distance between the man and the park is achieved by the positioning of the photographer himself -- it is taken from a high vantage point, and the emphasis is on the breadth of the landscape. The man is anonymous. Photographs like this one are explicit references to the 'natural' constituents of the park - its hills, rivers, and forests – and render the presence of humans as a temporary interruption. The stance of the visitor is precisely that, the stance of someone who only temporarily inhabits the space. Figure 1 suggests a park that isn't a place to dwell in, but a place to be gazed upon.

This point is made even more clearly on the reverse side of Cremer's photos, each of which includes a copy of the same three-paragraph essay, entitled “Fairmount Park and Water Works, Philadelphia”. In that essay, Cremer writes “the city has purchased the ground on either side of the Shuylkill River...and have [sic] dedicated it as a Public Park and Pleasure Ground, in that way controlling [sic] the banks of the streams [to prevent pollution by industry]. As a Park, it is the largest in the world, containing nearly 3,000 acres. For natural beauty, it is unsurpassed, and has every variety of scenery – cascades, green and wooded islands, meadows, uplands, lawns, rocky ravines, hill-summits and open fields.” This description, coupled with the numerous scenes like the one in Figure 1 suggests

that, for Cremer, the park is made up of scenery of a particular variety, distinct and far removed from the urban landscape.

But meaning is produced as much by what is omitted as by what is included. As a rule, Cremer's photographs omit the rough, in-progress character of many areas in the newly-established park. Despite the abundance of factories, mills, and roadways on park lands into the early twentieth century, none of these is represented in the photographs despite their place as mainstays in the framing of Philadelphia's economy only a few years before. Excluding from Cremer's visual narrative the mills or factories that operated along the banks of the Schuylkill River up until the establishment of Fairmount Park helped shape the way the park and the urban economy could be understood. In providing no place in his story of the park for these industrial sites, Cremer underscored a particular reading of the park as preserve – a holdout against the encroaching city. Maintaining such an image of the urban economy meant looking past the conscious decision that concentrated industry away from park-like landscapes. To make room for the factories in his interpretation would have meant adopting a different view of the land's history, and a vision for economic development that placed industry not in the heart of the city, but situated among the “wilderness”. Finally, in reinforcing the park's conceptual distance from the city, the bulk of the 'panoramic' photographs in the collection are taken from the east side of the river looking west - that is, looking away from the city of Philadelphia. Again, just as factories on park lands were omitted, so were views of the city itself, so that urban life is absent from the pictures. Where the city does occasionally figure in, it's shown as a thing in the distance, as in Figure 2. In fact, it is still commonly said about Fairmount Park that a person can wander the park and forget that he or she is in a city of millions, a sentiment that was fundamental to Cremer's interpretation of it.

*[Figure 2 about here – Title: Falls of Schuylkill]*

The photographs don't merely establish the conceptual distance between the park and the city. They also, as I stated above, plot the urban park/industrial city pairing along a trajectory of urban

development as the logical successor to an era when urban economic practices were more tightly woven with their rural counterparts. To that effect, many of the photos depict 'rural' scenes -- for example, a man resting against an old wooden fence that borders a pasture or field (Figure 3). The influence of this notion of 'rurality' in park design is well documented both in the academic literature on parks as well as the writings of park designers themselves (Young 1995, Olmsted and Sutton 1997). While examples of this type of scenery are a staple in the Fairmount Park photo collection, Cremer's accompanying essay again provides interpretive guidance. For example, it includes a list of prominent homes that exist on park lands, recently occupied but no longer inhabited, acquired at the same time as the lands occupied by river-side industrial sites. In this case, however, the homes were not omitted, but neither were they cast as viable dwellings. Instead, Cremer wrote about them as throwbacks to a distant past characterized by rural ways of living. For Cremer, these houses represented a romanticized way of life that was more intertwined with nature than the world he occupied; for him, as for many of his contemporaries, the old ways could now only be apprehended through the backward glance of history.

*[Figure 3 about here – Title: Near the River Road Landsdowne]*

Finally, again producing the park as distant from, but intertwined with the city, Cremer's photos established guidelines for ethical behavior of visitors to the park. Like Robbins' lawn people, park subjects were called into being through Cremer's depiction of the urban park, beckoning city dwellers to enter the park, to explore, sit, read, and think among the natural resources it contained. So, while the park was meant to be visited, those who visited it could never be anything more than transient occupants. The images implied an invitation -- visitors needed to be invited into the park since, according to the new knowledge of urban nature, they weren't already there. Many of the photos depict individuals engaged in a variety of activities to which the park was meant to lend itself; for example, Figure 4 depicts a man leaning over boulders to gaze into streams. Others show men climbing up cliff faces, or looking out over fields and forests. These maintained the park as an exotic site of exploration

while providing a behavioral template for park subjects to emulate. Fundamentally, Cremer was describing the park as a place of leisure rather than one of work, and in that way served to reinforce the conceptualization of the city as the space of work.

*[Figure 4 about here Title: Ormiston Run East Park]*

As above, this subset of photographs is also notable for its omissions, in this case the exclusion of people engaged in economic activities. Factories, as mentioned earlier, were left out of the park imagination, but so too were other economic practices, such as gathering of the abundant fruits and nuts, felling of timber for construction materials (which was commonplace not long before the park's establishment - see Contosta and Franklin 2006), collection of firewood, removal of ice from the river for use in cellars, and many others. It is with these omissions in mind that I turn to the Fairmount Park Guard, an institution that formed alongside the park itself, in whose annual reports evidence of these activities is preserved.

### **Erasing Economic Difference in the Park**

'The matter of clubbing trees [to obtain fruits and nuts] has become a serious one....Many of the best as well as the lowest class of citizens seem to be of the opinion that they have a right to club trees [in the park] and take any fruit they can obtain....There are many fruit trees in isolated places *that are of no benefit* and had better be cut down.'

(Louis Chasteau, Annual Report of the Fairmount Park Guard, 1878, emphasis added)

The same act of state assembly that authorized the formation of the park instituted the Fairmount Park Guard and charged its employees with policing the newly acquired grounds. The captain of the park guard, Louis Chasteau, submitted annual reports of his and his subordinates' efforts to police Fairmount Park that span a twenty-seven-year period beginning just after the formal establishment of the park,

from 1872 to 1899. These reports document, perhaps inadvertently, the efforts of the park guard to overwrite one set of practices associated with 'pre-industrial' subsistence use of forests with another, associated with leisure-oriented uses of urban parks. The existence of economic activity in the park as recorded in Chastreau's reports belies the notion of a clear division between the park and the city, the establishment of which was necessary in order to successfully bring them into being.

This section highlights two important functions that the guard performed in the production and maintenance of park discourse, each of which reinforces the functions of the photographs described above. First is the role that the guard played in producing the urban park as an object of knowledge through surveillance, including the calculation of park statistics and record keeping. Second is the park guard's role as a key actor in maintaining the moral landscape of the urban park just after its establishment.

Operating much like any police force, the park guard set up guard houses at regular intervals in the park, and stationed guards in each. By encouraging the guards to move about their assigned territory frequently, their potential presence at any given moment provided security for the park's visitors and a deterrent for those intent on violating the rules and customs of the park. For example, the park guard enforced strict rules about where visitors could enter the park, and provided guidelines for where they could walk, ride horses, and drive carriages. Narrative reports make it clear that the guard's role wasn't just to ensure the safety of visitors, but also to enforce a strict moral code defined through the proper use of and behavior in the presence of nature. These included the care of children and the behavior of men and women in public, the reinforcement of gender roles, and most importantly, appropriate forms of recreation.

One of the park guard captain's duties was to compile what he called 'The Statistics', a set of figures that reported to the park commissioners a range of information: the number of nuisances removed ('dead dogs', 'bands of gypsies'); a list of the types and numbers of offenses committed

('insulting women', 'throwing stones', 'females swimming'); the number of picnics enjoyed; and the number and place of entry of visitors to the park. As others have shown, such record-keeping is an important tool for defining and bringing into being particular spaces as objects to be governed or, to use Scott's language, to make them legible to the state (1998). Like Osbourne and Rose's theorization of the production of the city as governable space, so too is the park produced as a space to be governed through the compilation of this information. While Chateau's annual reports were consistent in producing a set of moral guidelines for using and managing parks, their purpose wasn't strictly to measure the park. The guard was often inconsistent in their recording of the events that took place there. Categories of data (offenses, nuisances exterminated, stray livestock found) changed frequently. This, however, is also their central point of importance: their purpose wasn't strictly to enumerate the goings-on in the park (though that was certainly one of its purposes), but to define the space of the park, to outline its contours, to distinguish it from the space of the city by describing what happened there. Similarly, a list of commandments detailing the rules of behavior in the park were posted at all park entrances<sup>1</sup>, many of which outlined prohibitions regarding the curtailment of economic uses of the park. They included the following prohibitions: "No person shall carry fire-arms or shoot birds in the Park...disturb the fish or water-fowl in the pool or pond, or birds in any part of the Park...cut, break, or in any wise injure or deface the trees, shrubs, plants, [or] turf...[or] take ice from the Schuylkill within the Park...." Together, such rules produced the park as an ethical landscape. They described its limits, its purpose, and the characteristics of those who cared for it. In short, they inscribed upon the body of the park, as well as the bodies of park goers, a specific and fixed set of characteristics that seemed to flow inevitably from the conceptual bounding of park and city.

The records of deviance in the park, the statistics and narrative reports produced by the park guard are also useful because they point to a set of economic practices that persisted despite the park guard's best efforts to quell them. The list of offenses includes: 'cutting ice' during the winter for use in

cellars, or to enable fishing on the frozen river, 'clubbing trees' (to collect fruit and nuts), 'cutting' and 'chopping trees' for firewood, 'killing rabbits', 'shooting at game', 'pulling flowers', and 'cutting sods'. The narrative portion of the reports make clear that gathering fruits, nuts, herbs, mushrooms, and other plant materials from the park was common practice. Collection of ferns, leaves, and medicinal plants, fishing in the river, and efforts to 'botanize' (a generic term for plant collection) plagued the park guard. The epigraph at the beginning of this section is an excerpt from a report in 1878 in which Chasteau relates the story of ejecting from the park two boys who were clubbing trees, and a subsequent visit to Chasteau's office from the boys' father, who was enraged that they should be prevented from doing so, arguing that he had moved to a house adjacent to the park so that the boys could 'have the advantages of all that might be obtained' from it<sup>2</sup>. Several of the reports submitted between 1872 and 1899 complain of similar activities, which suggests the existence of an alternative viewpoint for understanding the forested lands now encompassed by the park's boundaries, one that was opposed to the emerging division between leisure and work associated with urban parks, particularly in its understanding of the economic uses of forested lands.

The guard captain's eventual request for permission to cut down all fruit trees in the park to prevent their exploitation, as well as the framing of the parks as a non-economic space, seems to run counter to the sentiments expressed in a yearly event called Nutting-Day, a popular holiday when thousands of school children came into the park to collect nuts from the chestnut, walnut, and hazelnut trees found there (Burley and Kidder 1876, p 430). In 1871, three years after the establishment of the park, one writer estimated that fully 1/6 of the city's population attended the event, clear evidence of the popularity and importance of gathering in urban people's lives (Keyser 1872). The park commission's endorsement of the event could be read as evidence that alternative economic activities like gathering were consistent with dominant framings of the park. But Nutting Day was open only to children and their caretakers, not to working adults. It was seen by one onlooker as a commemoration

'of the old times when Fair-Mount was nothing more than a wildwood.' (Calkins 1871: 585). Another wrote about Nutting Day that: 'To the children, it was something which, in after years, would appear a big bright slice of their childhood. It was a new song in the dusty market-place which they would learn by heart and we fancy will never forget.... Contact with God's world outside of a town is as necessary for the development of the soul of a boy as fresh air is for his body' (Keyser 1872: 116). Clearly, Nutting Day itself, not unlike the recasting of mansions scattered throughout the park, reinforced the growing hegemony of a capitalocentric interpretation of the city, relegating non-capitalist economic forms to historically-distant 'wildlands' and to childhood. Chasteau's advocacy for removing nut-bearing trees to prevent tree clubbing reflects the desire to shape the park according to a particular vision of nature in the city, erasing economic diversity and ultimately producing in the city a space of nature that was free from its troubles. In the end, while Chasteau wasn't entirely successful in removing all of the nut-bearing trees in the park (many still exist today), Nutting Day came to an abrupt end only a handful of years after it began, and the practice has been illegal in the park ever since (though it still continues in spite the law – see Gabriel 2006).

## **Conclusion**

In Philadelphia, as in many other cities, the establishment of parks provided a discursive frame that reinforced an emerging notion of the capitalist city. Yet, the persistence of non-capitalist practices in the park suggests that the narrow strictures of park discourse were inadequate for many who sought different relationships with park lands, relationships that were to become increasingly marginalized as the industrial city became more fully entrenched in everyday ways of knowing the city. Successful establishment and maintenance of the industrial city required the alienation of such practices and

practitioners, a task well-suited to the institution of the urban park, which recast the meaning of nature found (or produced) within and nearby urban space in multiple ways. Nevertheless, it is evident from the Fairmount Park guard reports that in Philadelphia, as in many other places, people continued to resist the imposition of the urban park onto the existing landscape, to inhabit the space of the park, and by extension, of the city, according to different set of concerns not provided for in either visual representations, like Cremer's photographs, or in disciplinary efforts, like those of the Fairmount Park Guard.

The central purpose of this paper was to argue, by tracing the disciplinary mechanisms that produce park space and park subjects, that the notion of the capitalist city is neither inevitable nor inescapable, but requires a host of interventions for its reproduction, in this case by park managers and park users. Rather than take for granted that parks were the products of external economic forces associated with urban development, I have sought to add to the work on the micro-politics of urban park formation (like that of Rosenzweig) by demonstrating that urban parks were themselves agents in the formation of the industrial city, to understand how the establishment and maintenance of urban parks helped bring them into being. I have done so by documenting three specific mechanisms through which this was accomplished: first was the production, through visual representation, of park space as natural (rather than social) space and distant from the space of the city and the people who inhabited it. The second was the production of urban subjectivities that reflected the opposite and complimentary point – that (urban) people were inherently separate from nature and could only occupy the space of the park as outsiders. This, too, was accomplished through a close examination of photographic representations of individuals in the park, but also the activities and actions of the Fairmount Park guard, which present an obvious example of what Michel Foucault called 'biopolitics', or the disciplining of bodies in space (1990). Finally, I presented an accounting of the erasure of economic difference within the spaces of urban parks, which can be inferred from various documentary sources,

and which highlights the importance of establishing the monolithic status of capitalist economic activity in the city in order to allow the capitalist city to emerge.

Yet, however dominant that discourse is or was, its existence requires continual renewal and is always partial and open to reworking. The city, whatever qualities are ascribed to it, must be understood as produced through a set of disciplinary practices and the discourses that underpin them. The space that was produced through, for example, the illegalization of plant collection on urban woodlands continues to operate in the management of urban green space today, while parks and other areas continue to be touted as antidotes to the evils of the capitalist city. By tracing the edification of a new kind of nature in and through a discourse of urban parks in the nineteenth century, I tried to make explicit what economy was made possible and what economies and actual practices were closed off as a consequence of their construction, how a spatial knowledge of the city was produced, and how that knowledge was employed in the disciplining of urban subjects. In doing so, I hopefully reclaimed some of the discursive space that is lost in everyday retellings of both the history of the early American parks movement and the development of cities, putting the urban park at the center of the disciplinary project that helped reproduce the notion of a monolithic capitalist industrial economy, and ultimately the conceptual divide between the city and nature with which we are faced today.

## **Acknowledgments**

I wish to acknowledge the assistance provided by the people at the Philadelphia City Archive and Fairmount Park Commission. In particular, Rob Armstrong, archivist at the Fairmount Park Commission, was gracious enough to provide digital copies of the images included here. I would also like to thank three anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments and suggestions.

## Endnotes

1. No data are available that specifically addresses the number of people living in Philadelphia who could read in English, but indirect data can help arrive at the conclusion that, while not all visitors to the park could read the signs posted, a majority probably could. According to the 1870 US census, 88.5% of whites above age 14 could read, though not necessarily in English (literacy among blacks was much lower, about 20%)(NCES, no date). About 75% of Philadelphia residents were US-born in 1870, while many immigrants at the time hailed from Ireland, England, and Scotland (Golab, 1977). Clearly not all native-born Philadelphians were English speakers; on the other hand, many English, Scottish, and Irish immigrants were.
2. In class terms, because members of the guard were drawn in part from the ranks of the working class, park management in this case might be read as an instance of self-suppression. Such a reading, however, would risk reducing the values and activities of guards to those of a monolithic working class. It would also presume that only members of the working class engaged in non-capitalist economic activity in the park, which would be inaccurate. The overarching point is that the regulation of gathering reinforced the growing discursive divide between urban and natural spaces, of which the notion of a “working class” itself is part.

## References

- Agrawal, A. (2005) *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Burley, S. W. and Kidder, C. H. (1876) *American Enterprise*. Philadelphia: S. W. Burley, Publisher.
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Calkins, N. A. (1871) *The Student and Schoolmate: An Illustrated Monthly for Youth, vols. XXVII-XXVIII*. Boston: Joseph H. Allen, Publisher.
- Castells, M. (1977) *The urban question: a Marxist approach*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Castree, N. and Braun, B. (2001) *Social Nature: Theory, Practice, and Politics*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Chasteau, L. (1878) *Annual Report of the Fairmount Park Guard*. Original housed in the Philadelphia City Archive
- Contosta, D. R. and Franklin, C. L. (2006) Community Advocacy and Volunteerism in Wissahickon Park, 1895-2005, in Dilworth, R. *Social Capital and the City*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, pp. 56-80
- Cowell, R. & Thomas, H. (2002) Managing nature and narratives of dispossession: Reclaiming territory in Cardiff Bay, *Urban Studies* 39:1241-1260.
- Crampton, J. and Elden, S. (2006) Space, politics, calculation: an introduction, *Social and Cultural Geography* 7:681-685.
- Cranz, G. (1982) *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Driscoll, J. P. (1981) *All That is Glorious Around Us: Paintings from the Hudson River School on Loan from a Friend of the Museum of Art*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University.
- Emery, M. and Pierce, A. (2005) Interrupting the Telos: locating subsistence in contemporary US forests, *Environment and Planning D* 37:981-993.
- Foucault, M. (1979) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage.
- Foucault, M. (1980) Two Lectures, in Gordon, C. *Power/Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books, pp. 78-108.
- Foucault, M. (1990) *History of Sexuality, Volume 1: an Introduction*. New York, Vintage.
- Gabriel, N. (2006) *Urban Non-Timber Products in Philadelphia*. Unpublished thesis, Philadelphia: Temple University
- Geffen, E. M. (1982) Industrial Development and Social Crisis: 1841-1854, in Weigley, R. F. *Philadelphia: a 300-Year History*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. (1996) *The End of Capitalism (as We Knew It)*. Wiley.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2006) *A Post-Capitalist Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Golab, C. (1977) *Immigrant Destinations*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Grove, K. (2008) Rethinking the nature of urban environmental politics: Security, subjectivity, and the non-human, *Geoforum* 40:207-216.
- Harvey, D. (1982) *The Limits to Capital*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Harvey, D. (1997) Contested Cities: Social Process and Spatial Form, in Jewson, N. and MacGregor, S. *Transforming Cities: New Spatial Divisions and Social Transformation*. New York: Routledge.

- Heynen, N., Kaika, M. and Swyngedouw, E (2006) Urban political ecology: Politicizing the production of urban natures, in Heynen, N., Kaika, M., and Swyngedouw E. *In the Nature of Cities: Urban Political Ecology and the Politics of Urban Metabolism*. New York: Routledge.
- Huxley, M. (2006) Spatial rationalities: order, environment, evolution and government, *Social and Cultural Geography*, 7:771-787.
- Huxley, M. (2007) Geographies of Governmentality, in Crampton, J. and Elden, S. *Space, Knowledge, and Power*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Keyser, C. S. (1872) *Fairmount Park: Sketches of its Scenery, Waters, and History*. Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen, and Haffelfinger.
- Kornhauser, E. M. (2003) *Hudson River School: Masterworks from the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art*. New Haven: Yale University Press in association with Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art.
- Lalvani, S. (1996) *Photography, Vision, and the Production of Modern Bodies*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Latour, B. (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Latour, B. (2005) *Reassembling the Social*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES)(No Date) 120 Years of Literacy. <[nces.ed.gov/naal/lit\\_history.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/naal/lit_history.asp)>, (accessed July 15, 2010).
- Novak, B. (2007) *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Olmsted, F. L. and Sutton, S. B. (1997) *Civilizing American Cities: Writing on City*. New York: Da Capo Press.
- Osbourne, T. and Rose, N. (1999) Governing cities: notes on the spatialisation of virtue, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 17:737-760.
- Osbourne, T. and Rose, N. (2004) Spatial phenomenotechnics: making space with Charles Booth and Patrick Geddes, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 22:209-228.
- O'Toole, J. H. (2005) *Different Views in Hudson River School Painting*. New York: Columbia University Press in association with Westmoreland Museum of American Art.
- Philadelphia Evening Journal* (1859) Fairmount Park, 29 Aug
- Rabinow, P. (2003) Ordonnance, Discipline, Regulation: Some Reflections on Urbanism, in Low, S. and Lawrence-Zuñiga, D. *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Robbins, P. (2007) *Lawn People: How Grasses, Weeds, and Chemicals Make Us Who We Are*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Rose, G. (2007) *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Rosenzweig, R. (1983) *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schuyler, D. (1986) *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Scott, J. C. (1998) *Seeing Like a State*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Stereoworld* (1979) James Cremer, July-August

- Tagg, J. (1988) *The Burden of Representational Essays on Photographies and Histories*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Tagg, J. (2009) *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Talbot, W. H. F. (1844) *Pencil of Nature*. London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longman.
- Trenton Daily Gazette* (1875) Something Worth Seeing, 25 May
- West, P. and Brockington, D. (2006) An Anthropological Perspective on Some Unexpected Consequences of Protected Areas, *Conservation Biology* 20:609-616.
- Young, T. (1995) Modern Urban Parks, *Geographical Review* 85:544-560







