

The end of nature is, of course, a spiritual catastrophe. The appeal of mediation rests in large part on its capacity to distract us from the monumental grief and guilt we would feel in the presence of this loss, if we were not distracted. It is no accident that, as we succeed in conquering the world, the trope of conquest falls from fashion. We don't want to talk about it that way anymore. Our complicity, though obvious, must be disguised—and the most effective of all disguises is custodial.

The conquest of nature drives us to domesticate whatever is left in an effort to preserve it. This is a crowning irony, perhaps the most comprehensive of the Blob's osmotic processes, for, with this one, reflexivity comes to haunt the whole planet, the very universe.

For starters, think of it this way: people who are *least* concerned with protecting nature, people who want unrestricted drilling and

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logging and hunting and snowmobiling—they are the ones who come closest to experiencing nature as real. For them, in their ignorance, it still registers as an inexhaustible given. But people who know better, people dedicated to protecting and conserving, people who “love nature”—they are the ones who experience it as limited, contingent, fragile, and, above all, *contained*. Contained by ecological understanding, by maps, by laws. And “contained” implies packaged—which always means optional. Optional, both in the sense that it is threatened and in the sense that one chooses to save it, to be in it, to appreciate it. The core experience of such a person, hiking the back country of Alaska, say, is best rendered in this way: *the wilderness around her represents itself*.