E D I T O R I A L

Good Restoration

Restorationists, like other craftsmen, talk a good deal about the quality of restoration projects, by which they usually mean the ecological quality or authenticity of the resulting ecosystems. Three years ago, however, at the fourth annual SER conference in Waterloo, Ontario, Eric Higgs, an environmental philosopher at the University of Alberta who has taken a lively and productive interest in restoration in recent years, (see, for example, his articles on the ethics and politics of restoration in *R&MN* 11(2) and 12(1)), raised a bigger question.

"What," Eric asked, "is good restoration?"

The question is a good one because it draws us beyond the product to a consideration of the whole business of restoration—not just what is a good or high-quality, restored *ecosystem* but, more comprehensively, what is good *restoration*?

Putting the question this way makes us realize that value exists in more than one dimension. A "product" such as a restored wetland has value, obviously. But so does the process of making the wetland. And so, for the individual involved, does the experience of making it—the subjective side, or "inside" of the process. And so, finally, does the performance—that is, the work conceived (or perceived) as an expressive act, and the information, ideas, values and feelings it conveys to others, who may not be involved in the work directly, but who nevertheless benefit from it as an audience benefits from any performance.

These are, as it were, the four dimension of reality. There is value to be found in each of them. And it is important to take all of them into account when evaluating a restoration project.

Doing this not only widens our conception of restoration and our awareness of the benefits it offers, it also places us in a position to evaluate projects more critically, taking into account values that may have been overlooked, or only partly realized, so that the work itself is to some extent wasted, and to that extent ugly, psychologically unsatisfying, or even wrong in an ethical or moral sense.

This being the case, perhaps what we need is a checklist of questions to use in planning and appraising restoration efforts. These may be organized under the four dimensions of value something like this:

The Product—Is it ecologically accurate—that is, faithful to the model system with respect to functions and dynamics as well as composition and structure? Over the long haul, have suitable provisions been made for responding to novel influences from outside the system, and also for allowing for (or resisting) ecological and evolutionary changes originating within it?

The Process—Has the restorationist taken advantage of the opportunities the project offers to raise questions and test ideas about the ecosystem being restored, about human relations with it, and about the restoration techniques being used? In the social and political sphere, have all those with an interest in the project been given an opportunity to participate in planning and carrying it out?

The Experience—Has the work been carried out in such a way as to take advantage of restoration as a way of exploring various kinds of relationships with the natural landscape, re-enacting historical events and processes, and exercising and developing a wide range of human aptitudes, abilities, and interests? Has it been an occasion for learning, and for emotional and spiritual bonding with the landscape being restored?

The Performance—What has been done to enhance the value of the work as an expressive act, or to develop it as a ritual for building the human community and exploring and celebrating its relationship with the larger biotic community? Have aspects of the restoration process that are especially dramatic, or that are psychologically or ethically problematic—burning, for example, or killing—and that for this reason demand ritualization, been properly ritualized? And finally what has been done to make the work performative, to identify and appeal to the audience, and to take into account its interests and accommodate its needs?

Clearly, not all restoration projects will score high in all these categories, nor is it necessary that they should. Certainly, however, good ones will at least take them all into account, never passing up opportunities to realize value in any category, and the best ones will be those that offer benefits in all four dimensions.

Taking all these dimensions of value into account when planning and evaluating restoration projects will disclose whole realms of value that might otherwise have been overlooked, making the work not only better but more rewarding.

The question of scale provides a good example. Conservationists generally assume that the value of a restoration project depends on its size: the bigger it is—or at any rate the closer to the size of the original or model system—the better. This is true, however, only in the dimension of object or product. Smaller projects may actually have more value as ways of learning about the system and our relationship with it, simply because making the system too small places it under stress, causing it to reveal processes and connections that might otherwise remain hidden.

And the very smallest projects—mere flowerpots or backyard patches—which may have negligible value in a purely ecological sense, may have the greatest value of all in the dimensions of experience and performance.

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