Postlocal Ecocriticism:
Place-Making in California’s Literary Landscape
1850-1999

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

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August 2016
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Entitled

Postlocal Ecocriticism: 
Place-Making in California's Literary Landscape, 1850-1999

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

This dissertation is an ecocritical project examining place-making strategies in a global age. Region and locality are presumed to be subordinate to the forces of globalization; as such, localist environmental practice has, in recent years, been perceived as short-sighted and provincial. Regional and environmental literary and cultural criticism have turned their attention to socio-environmental issues that are planetary in scope. Critics understand the problems of globalization as matters of scale. Contemporary criticism focuses on distance, on a separable and distinct near or far. Yet my survey of California literature since the Gold Rush reveals that in everyday practice place is the outcome of a simultaneous near-and-far. I call this condition “postlocal,” as opposed to the limited local and overdetermined global which an inordinate attention to scale predict. I argue for a clearer understanding of locality that accounts for the resilience of local meaning, even as the world’s places interact with, and are transformed by, the flow of people, ideas, and goods across the globe. Each chapter triangulates among texts depicting specific sub-regions of California, each in a different era. Chapter 1 analyzes adaptations to local conditions in the diggings of the Feather River watershed based on miners’ accounts. Chapter 2 examines the industrialization of the rural landscape in literature at the beginning of the twentieth century. Chapter 3 is a study of fictional family histories from settler colonial and indigenous perspectives. Chapter 4 is an interrogation of futurity in what I call “speculative regionalism,” or place-based science fiction. This study indicates that ground-level meaning-making is crucial to modern environmental practice.
Dedication

The real work.

For Hawk and Jennifer.

For Margery J. Lombardi.
Acknowledgements

I wish to thank those whose support, feedback, and friendship have aided and influenced this project: Sarah Nolan, whose scholarship and acumen set the standard for my graduate cohort; Jessica Fanaselle, walking partner, neighbor, radical force; Kyle Bladow, first contact and fellow traveller; and Tom Hertweck, guide to the labyrinth. I extend my sincere gratitude to Eric Morel, whose commitment to narrative and regionalism convinced me that postlocality and story are inextricable. My thanks to Sylvan Goldberg, true co-conspirator. He has consistently and conscientiously critiqued and challenged my ideas, across innumerable conversations and on the page. Sylvan’s arguments clarified my need to include an analysis of time in readings of locality. My thanks go to Wayne Cartwright for his friendship on and off the trout stream, his spectator’s interest in this project, and for providing me with the office space where the earliest stages of this project coalesced; and, of course, for being a worthy opponent on the cribbage board. Thanks also go to Jacob Harmon, southern gothic and humorist, a formidable cribbage player, a great talker, lover of music, and fly-fisherman. Jacob’s friendship made it possible for me to see this project clearly at key moments in its development. My loving thanks to Nancy Lombardi for her continued support of my intellectual endeavors and for her model of persistence.

I want to acknowledge the expedient, crucial assistance of my committee members: my thanks to Elizabeth Raymond and Paul Starrs, for their enthusiasm for my work, often across great distances; Katherine Fusco, who has provided timely, valuable
mentoring; Michael P. Branch, for his humor and diligent attention to detail; and Cheryll Glotfelty, the calm, reassuring center of it all. To them I extend my deepest gratitude for shepherding this project. Finally, fellowships awarded by the Bilinski Educational Foundation and the James Q. and Cleo K. Ronald Memorial provided me with the year-long freedom to give this project my undivided attention, for which I am absolutely grateful. Last, but not least, I want to thank my colleagues, friends, and mentors in the Western Literature Association and the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, whose work inspires, guides, and sustains me.
Postlocal Ecocriticism:
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Preface: Postlocal Now!

This project is a study of nineteenth- and twentieth-century place-making in California literature. It reviews the spaces and times of globalism as people, ideas, and things pass through, accumulate, and commingle in regional and local places. I analyze how places and things transform and are transformed, expectedly and unexpectedly, and how these transformations might lead to responsible ecosocial practice. “Ecosocial” is a neologism coined by bioregionalist Stephanie Mills. Her term denotes her recognition of the entanglement of ecological and social practice. After her usage, I mean “ecosocial” to be read as an active and deliberate indication of socio-environmental responsibility toward the world’s places.

The present work responds to and enlarges upon existing approaches to the development of a global environmental imagination. Within ecocriticism, the recognition that worldwide environmental crisis requires a greater understanding of the world’s interdependencies has caused scholars to reconsider their most basic premises about the role of place in a global age. Leading ecocritics suggest we should re-situate our environmental consciousness from local to global in order to better reflect the scale of contemporary environmental crises. They argue for a traveling, or “routed” environmental ethic rather than a “rooted” one. Yet I assert that arguments contingent on scale misjudge the temporal and geographical limits of human ethics and empathy. Distance in time and space present abstract challenges that are nearly insurmountable for the environmental imagination, as some ecocritics, their allies, and scholars from other
disciplines have shown. Instead, I suggest an emphasis on *simultaneity*, in which the
world’s interconnections are examined as they circulate, accumulate, and manifest in
layers in-place. That is, instead of attempting to apprehend the increasingly complex
connectivities of globality in the abstract realm of “globalization” across vast distances,
this project recommends coming to terms with the simultaneous experience of local-and-
global in the places we inhabit. This amendment reinforces that globalization is structural
but uneven, pervasive but indefinite, and particular to the world’s many places.

I term the ground-level conditions of the local-global exchange “postlocal” in an
effort to distinguish my sense of an interconnected, interdependent locality from the
isolated or “limited local” which “sense of place” localisms have formerly assumed. My
study of postlocality is an attempt to interpret what I believe to be socio-environmental
evidence in California literature which suggests “local” and “global” refuse to be
rendered into binary form. “Postlocal ecocriticism,” then, reconsiders how we think of
“place” as a critical term with ecosocial implications, as postlocality implies the proximal
and immanent manifestations of global cultural and biological connection. I mean to
distinguish “postlocal” from “translocal,” for example. Again, “postlocal” represents the
layered and accumulated near-and-far in any given place; “translocal” moves our
imagination out and beyond, back into binary forms of *here* and *there*. Two basic
assumptions about “place” guide my project: the first is, “the world is places” (Snyder,
*Practice* 25); and the second is, places are interconnected biologically and socio-
economically. In the first case, “place” is everywhere intrinsic and fundamentally local;
and in the second case, the inherent locality of “place” precludes isolation. The socio-economic and environmental interconnection of the world’s places is a roundly accepted commonplace. Yet, in part by virtue of our connectivity, that “the world is places” is just as often forgotten.

Each chapter is an effort to locate and illuminate narratives, forms, responses, and acts of the postlocal imagination. Chapter 1 examines orientation in temporary residency narratives from Gold Rush accounts. Chapter 2 examines the problem of simultaneity in its many postlocal forms in early twentieth-century literature. Chapter 3 considers disorientation in literature as a response to postlocality following World War II. The final chapter evaluates postlocal temporality in what I term “speculative regionalist” texts, or place-based science fictions. The common thread of place-making runs through each of these chapters, and therefore, so does “the everyday.” These threads join texts spanning nearly a century-and-a-half and several literary periods and genres. My focus on place-making exposes the difficulties, successes, and failures of inhabitation liable to a nascent and emerging postlocal world across the gauntlet of a global age.

Occurring less overtly in my analysis as critical concepts, “utopia,” “uncanny,” “speculative,” and “alienation” unify my subject in ways in excess of—but certainly related to—their connotations in Freud, Jameson, and Marx. To a lesser extent, “thing theory,” which interrogates the vibrancy of objects in their meaning-making capacity, also influences my thinking, especially as it relates to the key terms “assemblage” and “entanglement” inherited from Bruno Latour and forwarded by Jane Bennett and Karen
Barad. These thinkers provide the language through which I have imagined webs of postlocality, particularly as I understand the nature and event of place. Lastly, and certainly most significantly, critical regionalism, for its language of relation and the rhizome, and bioregionalism, for its commitment to grassroots ecosocial praxis, underlie, infuse, and inform my commentary throughout this project. In large part, I intend for my analysis to bridge these—at present—presumably incompatible, but equally viable and vibrant regionalist discourses.
General Introduction: Postlocal Expressions

Prelude: Scene from Above

The narrow, rounded bends of forested river winding through the hard geometry of agricultural lands on the cover of Robert L. Thayer, Jr.’s LifePlace: Bioregional Thought and Practice (2003) are painted from what could only be a plane’s-eye point of view. It is an oblique image, which as Bill Fox explains in Aereality (2009), is one of two classes of aerial images, the other being vertical, which produces a flat, map-like sensibility. In this case, according to Fox, the oblique image “is more three-dimensional and pictorial, and establishes context and relationships among features” (6). Certainly, the painting on Thayer’s cover asks us to consider the sere, utilitarian grid overwhelming its composition in relation to the grid’s intersections with the crooked river and its remnant valley forest. It begs to be read at once as the clash of nature and culture, as natureculture, as almost-wild, and as a landscape that has been utterly overwritten.¹ The scant but vibrant blue of the river invokes hope or resiliency, but indeed we must understand the river as the utterly managed agricultural drain it has been transformed into, a limited, toxic, but sustaining source for bioregional redress. The cleanly arching lines of irrigation ditches which parallel the river near the top of the composition escape first notice, but they are ominous in an uncannily bucolic way, speaking insipidly of the unfinished business of manipulating the landscape at its most basic levels.²

In the opening moments of LifePlace we come into the country with Thayer, looking down from his airplane window as he “lands” in his home-place. The shared
view from above is an act that joins his bioregionalist’s sense of reinhabitation to his postmodernity—the distance-crushing, mobilized, and jet-propelled with “living-in-place”—an ironic, calculating entrance for such a book. He juxtaposes this entrance with an embedded, canoe-level perspective of a Central Valley waterway, which entails his surprise at the stream’s unexpected profusion despite itself: taken together, we see the watershed of Putah Creek in Northern California first from above and then from within, the in-and-out, the near-and-far of it, separate perspectives merging into a unified whole, epitomizing one small part of the simultaneity and immanence that undergird all postlocal expression.

Pico Iyer, on the other hand, in The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home (2000) offers another version of the experience of postlocalization. He begins his book on the outskirts of the vast Los Angeles megalopolis as his house is threatened by a Southern California brushfire. At ground-level, Iyer calls himself a “postmodern neighbor,” unknown to those living closest to him, an intruder in a time of crisis (6). For Iyer, the “global soul” is a citizen of the “metaphorical equivalent of international airspace,” “part of no fixed community,” defined by flight and mobility if at all (19). In essence, home for him is an abstraction: being and belonging have been produced among elsewheres; meaning has been, of necessity, made in transit of often ephemeral stuff. Though something of the panoptic seeps into both Thayer’s and Iyer’s views from above, Iyer’s perspective is vertical, authoritative in a totalizing sense, distant, providing him with the elevation essential to what we might call “the big
picture.” Still, such one-dimensionality may only be a convincing thin-ness. At cross purposes, Thayer argues for becoming grounded in a place in reaction to postmodernity, while Iyer’s object is to come to terms with a world increasingly in flux. It is notable, then, that Thayer begins in a jet but disembarks onto the land, while Iyer begins immanently local but takes to the air. The two, it would seem, are irreconcilable, yet they both start from the central assumption that they have been displaced by the conditions of a global age.

With my project I plot a course between these two positions, to offer an alternative perspective on what locality means to us after successive iterations of global modernity. I am interested in how locality is, and has been, constituted, and how it has been portrayed in examples from California’s literary landscape. Through this survey of California literature I will uncover what it means to be what I call postlocal—not displaced at all, but rather experiencing an unexpected “cultural endurance” (Clifford 7) as well as a global “with-ness” (Moraru 8). As I see it, conceiving of our own postlocality provides a way of reframing the basic supposition that the everyday is global. To my way of thinking, imagining the postlocal is to come to terms instead with the fact that the global is everyday. In other words, I will argue not for the virtues and stability of an ideological, highly charged “local” as others have in the past, but for the durability of local meaning-making—two very different things. In this way I mean to see local and global as of a whole and in place, rather than separable, distant, distinct, and oppositional.
Postlocal Ecocriticism

At root is the matter of presences: does the existence of a global product—person, idea, thing—in a local space make that space somehow global? or does its presence suggest that the global is made local? How should we approach this seeming copresence and what does it mean to our conceptions of “place” and “home”? In her early exposition of critical regionalism, Cheryl Temple Herr explains that she sees, “individual regions [encompassing] multi-layers that host indigenous meanings, important materials, and varieties of interconnection” (9), and that this “assemblage [occupies] a continuum that includes additive bricolage, inventive code-breaking, and other forms of amalgamation and reconstruction” (11). In other words, Herr argues that locality rearranges global effects in unexpected, unintended ways; at the same time, her assertion suggests, regions are also transformed by globalization as presumed. Influence goes both ways. In his overlooked but foundational historiography of globalization and environmentalism, Frederick Buell posits a globality predicated on local accumulation similar to Herr’s “amalgamation and reconstruction,” among which “a wide variety of local actors,” whether tacitly or overtly, participate in and redefine globalization (62). That is, like Herr, Buell recognizes globalization to be the result of near-and-far, from-above-and-from-below acts which layer themselves in-place. With extreme confidence, Buell reports: “Most, I believe, would go so far as to accept that there is, these days, no ‘outside’ to this system of global relationships—that there is, at last a comprehensive and inclusive world system in place” (45). While Buell fails to consider the unevenness and coercion inherent
to the present world system in this assertion, his attention to local actors affirms what Herr and others contend in regard to shifting layers of local meaning and the distributed agency of meaning-making. The absence of an outside is postlocality.

In both *LifePlace* and *Global Soul* the metaphor of air travel and the view from above that it affords is central to the fraught notion of “home” today. The very location of home, and ultimately environmental ethics and practice, has had to be adapted to what sociologist Ulrich Beck describes in the present era as the “second modernity.” This second phase of modernity, comparable to Marc Auge’s “super-modernity,” the concept of “post-postmodernity,” or Christian Moraru’s “cosmodernity,” is defined by that rapidly expanding interconnectivity—latent or otherwise—of people and places due to the amplification of global capital combined with the ongoing triumph of time over space (Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision* 21). In turn, John Tomlinson argues that the attendant advancement of physical mobility transforms localities, that “complex connectivity weakens the ties of culture to place” (29). Tomlinson, though, distinguishes travel per se from the concept of deterritorialization, the actual dislodging of “everyday meanings from their ‘anchors’ in the local environment.” It can be said, then, that Iyer’s position on home is progressive in its engagement with circumstances as they are, and cosmopolitan in its worldview, confronting rather than rejecting his deterritorialized condition, while Thayer’s sense of place is regressive, conservative and provincial, out of step with and ill-suited for the needs and spirit of the historical moment.

To be sure, that is the perception at least. Ursula K. Heise, in the spirit of
Tomlinson and Iyer, with her focus on “possibilities for new cultural encounters and a broadening of horizons” beyond a purely American environmentalism would seem to concur (*Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* 10). She sees the greater potential in casting off environmentalists’ customary “excessive investment in the local” in favor of “eco-cosmopolitanism, or environmental world citizenship.” In other words, she urges us to refigure our environmentalism in a way that better reflects the global ecological hazards and cultural requirements constituting postmodern life. The tension, still, in ecocritical discourse lies here, in the division of—and in our attentiveness to—either the local or the global, at the scale to which our environmental imaginary extends. In the same mood as Heise, for example, postcolonial ecocritic Rob Nixon has more recently promoted an ecocritical worldview that dismantles “the well-intentioned but ultimately counterproductive project of deep ecology” that is so closely related to Thayer’s bioregionalism, because he feels it merely “[poses] as planetary” but that it is “at root profoundly parochial” (xii). In this way, Nixon too positions cosmopolitanism directly at odds with bioregionalism (238). Responding to a growing chorus of such critiques in their introduction to *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology, and Place* (2012), Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Karla Armbruster diplomatically characterize this split as a matter of emphasis rather than oversight (9), and I believe it is; they explain that they “sense that the division of the local and the global is a false dichotomy” in the first place, and that they mean instead to participate in the “integration of the local and the global” (10).
To me, “false dichotomy” and “integration” echo Frederick Buell’s contention that most scholars accept there is no outside to the present world system. These phrases are clues that lead to the heart of my project: what if we adjusted our frame of reference from vertical (totalizing) as Iyer’s work represents, to oblique (contextualizing) such as Fox suggests? What if our view from above was not directly overhead, but one less apt—by Fox’s definition—to universalize, putting everything in its place? For instance, in What is Globalization? (2000) Beck asserts: “Globality means that from now on nothing which happens on our planet is only a limited local event,” that we must “reorient and reorganize our lives and actions, our organizations and institutions, along a local-global axis” (11). Similarly, cultural geographer Edward W. Soja contends, “every local activity or event, whether associated with production or consumption or exchange or leisure time choices is in some sense not just local, but global as well” (“Taking Space Personally” 13). Taken together, Beck and Soja articulate what Tomlinson refers to as the “complex connectivity” of globalization (1-2), which imposes an intensified experience of closeness upon us, largely metaphoric, but also material and ubiquitous. By my way of thinking, though, Beck’s almost throwaway phrase “limited local” becomes a pivot point for articulating postlocality. It is customary to describe the effects of globalization on local places as a matter of expressing the influence of the far-on-the-near. In this equation, though, “local” and “global” are countervailing concepts, a notion which, to my mind, is out of step with the local-global Beck and Soja outline above and with the assemblages of meaning-makers to which Herr and Buell point. Postlocality, in contrast,
includes that transition from an expressly localized sphere to an integrated local. As I define it, postlocality marks a shift in focus from the far-on-the-near to a *simultaneous* and *immanent* near-and-far. Instead of placing our emphasis on apprehending a new globality, pursuing these same conditions as postlocal suggests the necessity of reexamining our assumptions about the ongoing constitution of our local lives.⁴

From an ecocritical perspective, complex social connections amount to complex environmental connections, especially as they pertain to environmental justice, toxicity, and shared global environmental risk. Because of this, and presaging Heise’s argument favoring eco-cosmopolitanism, Lawrence Buell argues for a kind of “ecoglobalism,” or a “whole-earth way of thinking and feeling about environmentality” that resists purely regional or national modes (227). Buell suggests we respond to complex connectivity such that the “near-at-hand physical environment” is defined “by an imagined inextricable linkage of some sort between that specific site and a context of planetary reach” (232). Admitting the difficulties of such an imagining, however, still places emphasis on the faraway. The problem with expressing this imagined linkage as ecoglobalism or as eco-cosmopolitanism is that both forms police local and global as binaries: each still conceives of them as “here” and “there,” “inside” and “outside,” “center” and “periphery,” as separate entities working either at odds or cooperatively with one another. While ecoglobalism particularly, and eco-cosmopolitanism to a lesser extent, expresses an impulse toward a both/and sense of place, both remain reliant on an either/or epistemology to get them there. Further illustrative of my point, Buell suggests, “Under
modernization… place-attachment spreads out to look more like an archipelago than concentric circles” (72). Buell’s archipelago is similar to Lucy Lippard's “multicenteredness” (5), wherein modern populations have roots in many places. Finally, then, an eco-globalist or eco-cosmopolitan perspective asks each of us to reach across those spatial and temporal distances with expressions of empathy and responsibility, an act historian Carlo Ginzburg has shown to be extremely unlikely given our “feeble moral imagination,” for which “distance in space or time [weakens] all feelings” (60; 50).

With the above comments from Beck, Soja, and Tomlinson in mind, therefore, binary reckoning is an outmoded idiom. In other words, in maintaining local and global as binaries, especially when we frame them as cosmopolitan and parochial—actor and acted upon—we lose sight of the passing of the “limited local” entirely. It is to assume a continuing limited local and an overdetermining global. I make the case that the end of the limited local, both materially and eventmentally, expresses instead what I am convinced is a postlocal condition. Conceiving of the postlocal underscores the fact that the linkage between near and far leaves little to be imagined: it is real, pervasive, and unavoidable across the usual spaces of nation, race, class, and gender; and further, the environmental, cultural, and material productions and consequences of near and far are not simply coeval but copresent. In coining postlocal I mean to acknowledge that all spaces are likewise at once local and global. For instance, examples of global trade on one hand, global media on the other, and worldwide environmental consequences on yet another, illustrate my point. Ours is a time in place when nativism is not only perilous,
but impossibly misguided. By postlocal I mean to underline that the logical manifestation of such pervasiveness is that no single place, however seemingly isolated it may appear, whether natural or built, exists or is constructed in isolation. Simply put, postlocal is an articulation of the end of the limited local and an acknowledgement that a binary understanding of local and global no longer represents the conditions on the ground at even the most basic or intuitive levels. The task before us has become, in my opinion, not a matter of learning to grasp a potentially universalizing global whole, but rather, an uninterrupted localization of the world’s places.

My elementary premise is this: we change the fundamental relationship between even the most distant places when we begin to see them in each other; that is, as they are. This is more than recognizing things in relation, accepting their causes and effects, but to see them—in the language of material ecocriticism—as entangled, as mutually constituted, as lacking a self-contained existence (Barad 33). Whether or not in the everyday we can envision the elsewheres entangled in our midst—their agencies and outcomes—and whether or not we experience them in the same ways, in sum their influences are unavoidable on registers both intimate and immense. This is true of the cars we drive, the produce we buy, and the people with whom we interact each time we leave our homes. The assemblage of constituent parts, we might say, can be parsed to denote the here and there, and their routes in and out of a locale can be traced, but we can’t escape their nearness on one hand, and we can’t escape their role in the compendium of people and things that daily create our respective places on the other.
More so, tracing such routes would only open up onto a greater web of postlocal entanglements. Put another way, as Jane Bennett sees it, in a certain sense in the face of a “giant whole,” the “part-whole relation” has had to be utterly reconceptualized (23), but perhaps, in my opinion, not as we presently go about it.

We take as given that here and there still exist, of course, as locations, but they are not separable as they once were. This is not to say that globalization, as an extension of the conquest narrative driving modernity, has produced the universal culture so many have alternately feared or hoped for, or that its effects manifest evenly; far from it.

Rather, postlocal entanglements indicate that we live our lives immanently, that for most of us on the planet our needs and our places are immediate, visible, and coherent at a basic narrative register, and so remain culturally, regionally, locally of our own making if not of our own manufacture. Immanence still produces difference, yet I believe that in practice globalization has proven cultures to be more flexible, hardly brittle in this regard, so that however inescapable our situatedness, it has proven not to be hermetic or fixed.

Philosopher Edward S. Casey, in fact, prefers the term “implacement” to describe the fundamentally bodily nature of being. Implacement means immediate placement, but also “stresses the action of getting in or into,” carrying the “connotations of immanence that are appropriate to the inhabitation of places” (xiii; 367n9). Immanence, too, speaks to the “vibrancy” others, like Bennett, point to when describing the production of local places. While emplacement implies a here-and-there, Casey’s ongoing “getting in or into” infers, I believe, an unbroken “here-ness.” According to Casey, to be in place is a matter of
being *and* becoming, body and event (xxv), and so I suggest that whether through coercion or by choice, we simply have a continuous stream of different materials from more places at hand with which to make meaning, but this does not necessarily or entirely diminish our sense of place as immediate and our own.

Local social and cultural production viewed as postlocal entanglement, then, takes a step beyond the recognized concept of deterritorialization to which both Thayer and Iyer respond from their opposing positions. Tomlinson defines it as a kind of “displacement” characterized by “ambivalence”; he asserts that, “People ‘own’ their local places phenomenologically in a sort of *provisional* sense, recognizing, at some level, the absent forces which structure this ownership” (107-8; emphasis in original). While Tomlinson’s depiction of the postmodern condition has certainly been germane operationally and structurally, the intervening years have shown the ramifications of “provisionality” at the quotidian level to be overstated. Even in instances without any overt sustained or unifying ideological emphasis on “local,” meaning-making has remained affixed to locality in all its variety. For instance, the cultural productions of communities and watersheds of the northern Sierra Nevada mountains remain linked to their extractive pasts even as how they signify depends upon a negotiated environmental determinism. Juxtaposed with deterritorialization-as-displacement in this light, postlocalization is not so paradoxical as it may seem; rather, without disregard for the inequities imposed by neoliberal capital worldwide, postlocalization represents an observable simultaneity of near-and-far coupled with a resilient place-sense we have
collectively come to accept, enhance, or endure in everyday living.

The project of postlocal expression, then, is a matter of learning to perceive in a way that contextualizes our contemporary “here-ness” rather than attempting to totalize the here-and-there. At its most visible, we might consider the problematic nativism washing through western discourse in the face of terrorist attacks and refugee crisis. The racial othering such nativism entails subscribes to limited perspectives of locality predicated on binary codes, overlooking the mutual production of the world’s places. In the vernacular sense, here-ness is a matter of re-ordering an epistemology which emphasizes difference and distance. In turn, the project of a postlocal ecocriticism is a question of grasping that here-ness—simultaneity coupled with resilient place-sense—where it is deployed in a text or set of artifacts in a manner that connotes, expresses, or promotes an environmental awareness of our entanglement.

**Narrating Postlocal Space and Place**

I want to be clear that postlocality and postlocalization as concept and condition radically depart from the key assumption of globalization, that it “fundamentally transforms the relationship between the *places* we inhabit and our cultural practices, experiences and identities” (Tomlinson 106; emphasis in original). Although this supposition is superficially apposite, I would argue that in fact, our relationships to place are fundamentally unchanged despite any greater part-whole reconceptualization, however antithetical that may seem to my larger appeal. It is my assertion that our task is
not to develop new ways of knowing, but of reperceiving what we have long known. Take for example the generalizable certainty that all routes today seem to lead outward, transferring capital and authority away from local control; and yet, no matter how centralized, remote, or abstract institutionalized socioeconomic authority surely is, the people on the ground continue making do as bricoleurs, assembling individuated versions of both their traditional culture and of modernity, consciously or unconsciously. I am thinking of something so mundane, for example, as the appropriation of music or fashion or food. I suggest that evidence to the contrary misinterprets the amplifications associated with globalism. I suspect that—however guileless—fear of displacement, for example, has been a symptom of binary thinking emphasizing outside and inside, a limited local and an overdetermined global. Evidence in equal measure shows that our places have always-never been our own, that successive versions of culture under the sign of “modernity” have had to grapple with abstract, extra local authority instituted more or less rigorously from outside and above, and that the experience of vulnerability is no more acute in the present age, even if it operates on more fronts. For instance, Chapter 2 of the present work considers Frank Norris’s *The Octopus* as a touchstone of the “New West.” Norris’s salt of the earth ranchers are in fact the forebears of California agribusiness, with their vast holdings, hired labor, and telegraph and ticker-tape connections to centers of regional power. These same ranchers, however, fall prey to successively larger interlopers. Each layer of authority denotes a certain performativity that conforms to readers’ expectations of provincial, urban, and cosmopolitan
characterizations. Still, the great paradox of the novel is that none of the players fall easily into expected categories, and all deeds in the novel matter only according to one’s perspective.

For this reason and others of similar stripe I am dubious that the experience of modernity has changed at the vernacular level. Thinking of the contemporary moment alternatively as postlocal—as simultaneous and immanent instead of purely scalar—is to look beyond it as an amplification of opposing forces that have now overspilled their traditional boundaries. As it is presently deployed, scale implies the need for critical minds and everyday practitioners to somehow find a way to express empathy and responsibility across distances in space and time and over a web of interrelated concerns. Nonetheless, critical understanding of contemporary places affirms that these connections occur in layers in-place. The challenge of scale, as I will make plain throughout the present work, is that global interconnectivity exceeds the bounds of individual and collective imagination. Place-sense, then, is less a matter of scale, and more correctly understood as simultaneous. Contemporary place-sense must be understood as temporal rather than purely spatial. Simultaneity attends to this layering affect, of cause-and-effect happening at once. When we shift our collective focus away from impossible distances and interactions, we look toward the proximal, and perhaps more ecosocially manageable work at hand. Scale attempts to expose a one-ness or whole-ness as a singularity, as a monolith, even as it purports difference. Simultaneity suggests instead the manifold nature of the whole. Simultaneity exposes the paradoxical but significant point that
visibility is not legibility. To me, this alternative rests on quotidian meaning-making: such a reperception of the postmodern condition, rather than reflecting the disembedding of culture from place, points to a resiliency attending the everyday.

Under these provisions I mean here to resist an unfettered linear interpretation that moves from locality to deterritorialization to postlocality, however handy that might be. Such a narrative would accept a nostalgic, authentic past in which human culture performed a natural or native implacement before today. Embracing linearity would be to subscribe to a continuous limited local ever more at risk, ever harder to defend, ever more indefensible ideologically. But nor do I mean that postlocality is ahistorical; ground-level responses to the global conquest narrative in its many guises have certainly made appreciable strategic adjustments to each of its iterations. To be precise, I am not wholly disavowing the perception of displacement or a rooted place-sense across a long trajectory; I am attempting to move beyond them as polestars, and I feel that addressing the push and pull between rootedness and displacement as inescapable rather than teleologic is a critical first move. My point is that postlocality is the result of an ongoing interaction of local and global, but that this process and the human response to it is not so singular or unique. Rather, I mean to follow Casey’s argument that “to be in the world, to be situated at all, is to be in place” (xv). This means that people can, are, and have been physically displaced, but that they can never truly be “unplaced” despite the atomizing, accelerated ethos of the times. Working out of this assumption, first, I contend that postlocality participates in the belief that such a guarantee is ongoing and unremitting
and, therefore, has its antecedents and iterations up and down the historical range; second, I contend that to think through the theoretical and material disparities that simultaneity poses for situatedness can revitalize discussions of place presently driving hope for a kind of reformed localism beyond limited local horizons. The third chapter of this project, for instance, which examines the negotiations of settler colonial and indigenous populations, which erase, reassert, and finally compromise on local meanings illustrates my point.

To do so, however, puts pressure on definitions of space and place. Thinking about postlocalization as an observable simultaneity of places coupled with a resilient place-sense is to apprehend how the meanings of space and place have shifted, especially as they inform ecocritical conceptions of local and global. The general move has been away from the heavily freighted “place” toward the more ambiguous “space.” In this case, space can be read as the global “whole,” as fluid in nature, while place is the local “part,” appearing, for the most part, stable. For this reason, ecocriticism has guided itself away from its initial approach to “place” as originally posited by Cheryll Glotfelty in her seminal introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996). That is, since suggesting place as an area of inquiry much like race, class, or gender (xix), place has most often been read as it is above, much as Thayer’s “homeplace”: as the site of our most intense meaning-making, at once as an ideology, a cultural act, and as the basic condition of being; hence, localism. It has followed, then, that the implications associated with “a sense of place,” at least in environmentalist circles, have been the
cornerstone for an obligation to local landscapes and ecological health. However, like discussions of race, class, and gender, such assumptions have been modified beyond their earlier, essentialist suppositions.

For ecocritics, essentialist feelings developed out of the idea of topophilia originated by Gaston Bachelard and magnified by Yi-Fu Tuan. For Bachelard, “Inhabited space transcends geometrical space” (vii), and place-attachment, it follows, reflects “the topography of our intimate being” (xxxvi). Initially overlooking the anthropocentric conceit at the root of Bachelard’s claims, intimacy—as it pertains to places generally but to the natural world especially—was adapted as a prerequisite of environmental care. But at least in part, in this regard topophilia is an act of solitary or individual meaning-making; it is an affirmation that place-sense is to some degree anti-social despite itself, that it entails a kind of territory or defensible space that each of us creates and maintains. Space, on the other hand, without such baggage, contains the sense that it can be shared, that it resists a similar balkanization, that it is there for the taking. Extending Bachelard’s original position, Tuan defines topophilia as the “affective bond between people and place or setting” (4). In this, Tuan establishes a richer give-and-take relationship predicated on a quasi-agential landscape influencing human perception, in which, at least partially, “setting” amounts to more than geometry. However, in his later *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977), Tuan provides perhaps the decisive definitions of space and place: “What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.” “Furthermore,” he explains, “if we
think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (6). It is on this definition that “local” has been aligned against globalization. Local is the pause, the place, the intimate; global is the undifferentiated space that allows movement. Local is Thayer’s “landing”; global is Iyer’s “international airspace.”

With the assumptions of deterritorialization or displacement in mind, the more recent trend in ecocriticism has been towards discovering a meaning-making without place-attachment, reflective of Iyer’s “global soul.” Heise, for instance, asserts that we are mistaken when we fail to question whether identity is formed by the local at all (42). Cultural geographer Doreen Massey argues beyond Heise’s question, insisting that at its worst, place, positioned against globalization’s “powerful and alienating webs,” represents a kind of retreat or denial. She characterizes place as a “conservative haven” that is “essentializing” and “unviable” (For Space 5-6). Situated thus, many have moved away from a troubled ideologically authenticating or essentializing “sense of place” localism attached solely to an ethics of transcendental intimacy, and for good reason. Recognizing this, Massey refigures the potential meaning-making value of space according to three propositions such that we might imagine it as the “product of interrelations,” the “sphere…of coexisting heterogeneity,” and as “always under construction” (9). In this way she seeks to circumvent the authenticity, universality, and inexorability linked to “place” in favor of negotiation, heterogeneity, and openness (10-12), and thus, to situate space as the appropriate signifier of global modernity.
Although her assessment of space sounds strikingly like Casey’s definition of place, Massey’s point is well-taken. While Casey’s intent is to rehabilitate place, Massey downplays the over-encumbered term. For the purposes of understanding postlocality, though, it is more important to recognize that in both instances Casey’s and Massey’s motives are expansive, that they represent a move toward plurality. It is more productive to recognize that it seems as if our definitions of space and place have become inextricable as local and global have merged. In terms of postlocality, this merging has formed the platform by which we can think beyond the limited local.

The ecocritical significance of these expansive gestures is that plurality requires an environmentalism prized out of its personal intimacy. This is not to invalidate feelings of topophilia or of displacement but rather to stress the potency and variability of immanence. To conceive of postlocality marks a move away from the innately topophilic, and so away from markedly first-wave ecocritical perspectives on “staying put” that veer towards mystical or essentializing rationales steeped in racial or class-based subjectivities for one’s connection to a place. This is largely good news. The difficulty with accepting space as the global sphere and place as the local sphere beyond that which I have already suggested, though, is that it implies a nested worldview, one delineated variously as concentric circles of affect (Buell, Future 72-3; Ingold 146). Such a construct doesn’t look or act like plurality at all, but the same old binary reckoning, multi-cultural or multi-spatial at best. More so, it relies on the increasingly inexact definition of place-as-pause, when Casey, for instance, perceives it to be a matter of “getting in,” as mentioned above,
or as social anthropologist Tim Ingold explains it, as a matter of movement, not pause at all (148). Similar to Casey, Ingold argues against the notion of a world composed of undifferentiated space outright, writing of the turn to space as a kind of “inverse logic” (145). He expresses this inverse logic as the difference between “occupying” and “inhabiting”—in a sense living on a space, but never in a place. Because of this inherent “in-ness” rather than “on-ness,” it is my assertion that place as coming into being or as getting in or into instead of as a pause facilitates our acceptance of the near and far as simultaneous. So while stressing immanence would appear to bind us to a nested worldview lashed to a definition of place-as-pause and thus to topophilic environmentalism, drawing out the simultaneity of local and global in everyday life adds nuance to earlier place-based ideologies. Place-making as process, as movement, as route, binds or bundles near and far, entangling them in knots much as Ingold describes the experience of place as a meshwork, of “paths along which life is lived” (151-2), or similarly to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s vision of relation as rhizomatic, as a manifestation of between-ness and becoming (19; 20). As a result, postlocality falls on the side of place rather than space, as in rather than on, and it does so on the condition that place is not pause, but a matter of process, of getting in or into, of becoming, of moving through. Postlocality reconnects with place indirectly through intimacy, certainly, but it expresses foremost the actual, unfolding products and conditions of our being.

Under Ingold’s terms, however, Iyer’s global soul can be described as an “occupant of everywhere and an inhabitant of nowhere” (151), due to his utterly routed
existence. I contend that this is the result of thinking of the global as space, geometrical and undifferentiated, and not as place, vibrant with iterations of meaning. Again, to occupy is to be located on a space; to inhabit is to be in place. My point in rehearsing the changes in theoretical approaches to space and place, especially reconnecting to the idea that place is not a pause but a matter of moving through, is that a postlocal awareness compels us to commit to being inhabitants—not occupiers—of everywhere. That is, not inhabitants in the sense of the limited local, not in the sense of going backward or falling prey to nostalgia, but in a way commensurate with the simultaneity and immanence, the routes and entanglements, that comprise an ordinary everywhere. Being an inhabitant of ordinary everywheres precludes topophilic intimacy, but not a sensibility of living in as opposed to living on, to having a sense of ecosocial responsibility for the entanglements comprising our lived places.

The transition from place as pause to place in movement has been a matter of rethinking things in relation, of understanding in more than just a metaphorical sense the practical impossibility of “othering.” We have marked a long move away from the anthropocentrism of purely human value in the making of place. Acknowledging here-ness or in-ness as the result of the movement of all things comprising a place not only increases our awareness of a greater number of stakeholders and their narratives, it mitigates the agencies of all its stakeholders as well. This further decentering works in two ways. One, it underlines immanence as openness, possibility, and agency; and two, it makes space for ecological practice. Following the spirit if not the letter of arguments
made by Bennett (111-13), Barad (185), and others before them, I maintain that the simultaneity innate in entanglement carries with it at least the potential for ethical engagement. Seen this way, for instance, at the very least self-preservation means preservation of the mesh or web within which we live, of which we are formed and constantly forming. If this is too reductive, especially if “preservation” seems antithetical to rhizomatic principles, for example, then in terms of postlocality it may be better to say that what is preservable is not a delimiting stability, but the general health of any given place, which begins with ecological health, even as the many stakeholders form and reform a culturally fluid meaning-making. An environmental ethics of care approached this way is drained of inherent exclusivity and the ability to totalize or essentialize. Admitting the more-than-human into our definition of place-making was a first step. Relearning that place is not a pause but a horizon, a moving through, among, or getting into, was a second. Apprehending the paradox of postlocality as inured in observable simultaneity and resilient place-sense should be a third.

*From Below: Postlocal Expression*

I began this introduction with two distinct ‘scenes from above’ in part to ensure that each perspective illustrated different versions of “below,” a keyword for Michel Foucault in his discussions of the decentering of power and authority in which “power comes from below” (1629), and for Arjun Appadurai for whom “below” equates to “grassroots” (3). In both cases the emphasis on below is meant to undermine notions of
totalization, the absolute instantiation of authority from outside and above. Specifically, “from below” positionality runs counter to institutions, recognizing that institutionalized power, to paraphrase Foucault, is only a terminal form, but that power actually emanates form everywhere (1628; 1629). I contend that “from below” authority and activism, as it aligns with locality, is in accord with our resilient place-sense, that our resilient place-sense asserts “from below” globalization much like Appadurai describes it, such that locality has maintained an unexpected resistance to global flattening. My thinking stems from Foucault’s reckoning that power and resistance are inextricable (1629), but too, that their bond forms a “rule of immanence” (1631); in effect, though power is universal, it just as often forms unequal arrangements, but the performance of these arrangements is always local and unstable. For instance, cultural anthropologist Anna Tsing, echoing her colleague James Clifford, remarks: “I stress the importance of cross-cultural and long-distance encounters in forming everything we know as culture” (3), and yet Tsing’s premise is that by culture she means “local” culture, and although she investigates the routes that inform “local,” she acknowledges that by default such routes manifest immanently despite the fact that they are part of a larger matrix.

While Appadurai points to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as an essential method for aiding the world’s dispossessed, I would suggest that our immanent meaning-making compels social justice activism at an even more immediate level, in the absolute grassroots, the really home-grown. Here I tip my hand in two directions: first, against the geographic determinism underlying much of bioregionalism; and second, in
favor of the grassroots activism underlying much of bioregionalism. Regarding the first, bioregionalism is problematically elegiac, literal in its approach to cause and effect, and linear in its narrative of civilization’s fall from grace. Regarding the second, bioregionalism has been remarkably ahead of its time in its approach to local solutions and to developing a planetary consciousness that refuses to undervalue local meaning-making. Bioregionalism rightly draws attention to the material singularity of a place which is finite and irreducible, but it declines to break free of the belief that there is only one “correct” way of inhabiting a place as the result of that singularity. In conceiving of a postlocal ecocriticism I am arguing for a common ground between positions, one in which from below is local, but less unapologetically romantic in its pursuit of an authentic local culture. In my own conception of “from below,” postlocality hinges on the durability of regional narratives but less so on stabilizing or normalizing them. Postlocal expression imagines locality as getting in or into, instead of that pause requiring the hard borders of fixed social or cultural territories. Conceptualizing postlocal expression depends on this revised bioregional consciousness, so that “from below” or grassroots does not specifically entail limited local engagement.

As we more fully understand that movement has come to define place-making, the ethos attached to it has been a recuperated cosmopolitanism. We need now to come to terms with this development, since on the surface it is so adverse to “grassroots.” As Kwame Anthony Appiah writes, “‘cosmopolitan’ can suggest an unpleasant posture of superiority toward the putative provincial” (xiii). Thus far most ecocritical critiques of
topophilic environmentalism have walked a fine line in this vein. Yet what Appiah sees as worth saving in the term is its overriding “habits of coexistence” (xix). Beck, too, calls for a recovered cosmopolitanism that amounts to a “global sense, a sense of boundarylessness” (*Cosmopolitan Vision* 3) that promotes what he describes as “inclusive differentiation,” in which “the result is the proud affirmation of a patchwork, quasi-cosmopolitan, but simultaneously provincial” (4-5). Tomlinson, also, before Appiah or Beck, imagined what a recovered cosmopolitanism might look like, yet struggled to get beyond the stickiness of the cosmopolitan/provincial binary (184-94). Imagining an ideal cosmopolitanism of the type Appiah and Beck have considered, Tomlinson falls on the side of “glocalism,” which he gleans from earlier work by Roland Robertson, who in turn had borrowed the term from Japanese business practice (194-5). In each case, at issue is how to resolve the problem of simultaneity and proximity. Yet inherent to each of the above arguments is an ongoing adherence to a local that is a limited local and to an unrecuperated provincial who inhabits it. Each polices the limited local as such as long as it grants ultimate irruptive authority to an abstract, monolithic globalization. This way, each argument admits the passing of the limited local but still approaches local space as continuously limited regardless. At root, each takes the paradox of simultaneity and proximity and sees connection but not coextension. Each conceives of a new and unfamiliar global whole to which each of us must conform, but not a local whole in which grassroots changes extend outward. Conceptualizing place without a sense of copresence skews any reading of globalization toward the global, toward authority and
influence as unidirectional from outside and above. Thus, all arguments take shape
around the idea that provincials need to become more cosmopolitan.

Still, underlying the connectivity that Appiah, Beck, and Tomlinson express is a
desire to push further. Beck, for instance, directs our attention to the simultaneity, the
blending of local and global, at the heart of his cosmopolitan vision. Appiah, too, points
to local places as the site of coexistence. Tomlinson also makes the case that glocalism
typifies “one who is able to live—ethically, culturally—in both the global and the local
at the same time” (195; emphasis original). Yet despite these moves, the cosmopolitan
emphasis on such a person defaults to locals in need of a larger worldview but less so to a
cosmopolitan who needs to understand place-sense. In spite of such gestures, glocalism
might task Thayer to become a more postmodern neighbor, for example, but it does not
ask Iyer to get back into place. Ultimately, even a recovered cosmopolitanism directs us
toward on-ness but not in-ness, toward rigid and traditional definitions of space and
place.

The emphasis on cosmopolitanism is understandable. It would seem that by one
way of thinking we can’t avoid making place, but at the same time that still translates to a
detached on-ness belying so much that is exploitive, destructive, or heedless for so many
of us as we conform to routine. We partition intent and/or action from consequence. In a
way, this is the argument Nixon makes in his critique of bioregionalism: “we have a
history of forgetting our complicity in slow violence that wreaks attritional havoc beyond
the bioregion or the nation” (239). So in a manner of speaking, under the banner of
bioregionalism or not, global attritional havoc is and should be the main concern of social and environmental justice movements. Nixon’s “slow violence”—meaning “violence that occurs gradually and out of sight… typically not viewed as violence at all” (2)—is an extremely useful term for describing global attritional violence, especially as it underscores the tension between simultaneity and immanence in our daily lives. Yet to assume that slow violence is relegated entirely in unequal shares to the global south is to overlook almost universal everyday vulnerabilities. It is to assume that “local” is either “here” or “there” but not everywhere. It is also to overlook the very deliberate difference between bioregion and nation as forwarded by leading proponents of bioregional activism. The bioregion subverts nation; it is an acknowledgement of the ubiquity of “inhabited risks” Nixon himself ascribes to poor communities of the global south (4) and it acts as an alternative to the hard borders of institution and territory (Berg 56). From a revised perspective, the job of postlocal ecocriticism is not, then, a matter of becoming or learning to be cosmopolitan in an effort to realign with a global present, but of grooming a greater attentiveness to the simultaneities observable within our midst, of relearning local beyond a limited local.

I am emphasizing grassroots globalization or from below practice beyond a limited local because recent discussions within ecocriticism seem to be split along this cosmopolitanism/parochialism divide, and I feel it is dangerous to recuperate cosmopolitanism while leaving “parochial” or “provincial” as certainties. I feel this way specifically because of the damage it does to locally-minded grassroots movements. The
critical juncture, I feel, is in one’s attention to the everyday, which is to say, after Michel de Certeau, in consideration of the marginal or marginalized position as universal, as it is lived across the planet (xvii). I feel that the divide as presently argued can be expressed formulaically this way: cosmopolitan-*global*-from above; versus, bioregional-*planetary*-from below. Cosmopolitanism is a response to globalization and it ultimately calls for large-scale, from above institutional responses to environmental justice issues.

Bioregionalism, as from below grassroots activism, functions at ground-level, outside of institutional environmentalism. As Peter Berg, the initiator of bioregionalism has put it: “We’re [bioregionalists] relocating ourselves from world to planet” (96). Berg explains that this relocation is the result of a movement towards decentralization predicated on the fact that, “Global doesn’t mean that everybody talks to everybody; global means that somebody talks to everybody. Somebody controls ‘global,’ that’s why that word is to be avoided in bioregional parlance” (94; 106). “Everybody” in this case equates to that marginalized position, so by Berg’s reckoning, decentralization—thinking planetarily rather than globally (or nationally)—is a matter of local empowerment of marginalized peoples, or, as he puts it, “planet-local and planet-wide” (57).

On one hand, Berg’s stance represents a traditionally rooted place-sense as I’ve noted above, one that believes too clearly in a “future primitive” (94) with all its groovy and authenticating connotations; on the other, it proffers the language of “an experimental cosmopolitanism of the powerless” (Beck, *Cosmopolitan* 104). Berg and Beck are in remarkable accord in this respect. Beck articulates the “(il)legitimate” making do of the
global dispossessed as an outcome of a “really existing cosmopolitanization” (*Cosmopolitan* 105; 19). In this case, Beck is referring to what he calls the “banal cosmopolitan” (10), that majority who have become cosmopolitan as “a function of coerced choices or a side effect of unconscious decisions” (19). The latency inherent to banal cosmopolitanism is more in line with postlocalization in a way that “glocal” falls short; but moreso, it speaks to Berg’s sense of subversion, which is evident in “(il)legitimate” meaning-making—much as Berg expresses in his earliest Digger life-acting performances and Planet Drum broadsides. The point I want to make is that while Berg challenges “global monoculture” (62; 130)—ostensibly the banal cosmopolitan situation—both Berg and Beck recognize the potential to mobilize vernacular resistance. Of institutionalized environmentalism, the kind which eco-cosmopolitanism would seem to support, Berg complains that it amounts to “a hospital that consists only of an emergency room” (109), and that we should shift our attention instead to promoting “neighborhood self-reliance,” as just one example of ground-level action that becomes a network of such resistance (111). Such activism, though, precludes becoming a “postmodern neighbor,” so Berg leaves us with a choice to make, one that is perhaps unnecessary.

Under these terms, postlocal expression reflects the truly routed existence of everyday life, and at best promotes an in-ness akin to the soft borders of a bioregional watershed consciousness. However, our pervasive marginality, our inherent banal cosmopolitanism, should not be assumed to take the form of tribalism, premodern
recapitulations, or the insularity of limited local activism. Postlocality implies that through a constant ‘worlding’ of local places we can strike a balance that affords difference without “othering.” This elemental cultural shift away from the limited local position is crucial to postlocal expression. Christian Moraru, in *Cosmodernism: American Narrative, Late Globalization, and the New Cultural Imaginary* (2011), suggests a kind of “with-ness” is afoot (8). He explains: “history and narratives… more and more are read ‘with’: with the wider world, with its stories and histories, and with these narratives’ storytellers and characters” (4). Although Moraru is speaking directly of the United States in the global age, his “with-ness” tracks across the global postlocal scene. And, as he argues, it holds forth the possibility for “vaster solidarities,” for a give-and-take across soft cultural as well as geographic borders (9). Finally, Moraru points to the insistence of narrative in this new imaginary. He suggests that stories articulate subjectivities, and, I would add, the durable-yet-evolving nature of the everyday for which I have been arguing.

**Encounters with Literary Place-Making: Postlocal California and Literature of the U.S. West**

In 2008, the same year Heise urged ecocritics to look beyond their entrenched localism, Neil Campbell advocated for a revised, fluid reading of the U.S. West in much the same vein in reaction to what he perceived as the region’s accelerated postmodern globality. Campbell’s *The Rhizomatic West: Representing the American West in a*
Transnational, Global, Media Age incorporates the language and meaning of Deleuze and Guattari’s “rhizomatic West” (19) and puts them in conversation with forms of critical regionalism that can be traced from architectural and landscape design movements, cultural and literary studies, and postcolonial studies. Campbell’s work emphasizes the wild entanglements that create and revise region, especially the cultural and literary phenomenons and currents that articulate a constant postwestern unfolding (25). Within this unfolding, I argue, lies the durable-yet-evolving nature of everyday regionalism that defines postlocality and which is supported by an arch of literary postlocalism replete with its own anticipations and antecedents.

Today, region seems to signify in all directions at once, especially by contemporary definitions. For example, most literary and cultural critics have adopted Hsuan L. Hsu's “fluid and flexible” (38) definition of region from his essay “Literature and Regional Production” (2004), which challenges the insularity of even the most committed regional texts. And yet by default, it is plain that region continues to carry the pejorative of provincialism. Postlocality, however, exposes the extreme immanence of the everyday even as it draws attention to the observable simultaneity of local and global at play in regional cultural production. Traditionally, the production of regional literature, according to Stephanie Foote, is a matter of remembering and forgetting, of “powerful, ideologically driven mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion” (25). Additionally, Foote tells us, “almost all regional texts have as an organizing principle a deep desire to understand what the local is, and what the local does.” In this reading, regionalism carries
a sense of nativity with it, much as it is described in earlier declarations by classic regionalist authors Hamlin Garland and Mary Austin, who both point to an intimate knowledge of place as the foundation for regional literature. Phillip J. Barrish explains that at its most basic, a regional story, “is one in which place—that is, the story’s geographic setting—not only serves as background but also plays a prominent role in the story’s foreground” (74). Nina Baym, in fact, makes a persuasive argument along these lines that all regional writers are implicitly environmental writers, and all environmental writers are implicitly regional (307), in spite of the fact that Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse suggest this is not the case (4-5). So at issue between “fluid and flexible” regionalism and regionalism that is deliberate in its remembering and forgetting—its including and excluding and environmentalism—are the mechanisms by which an observable simultaneity of local and global coupled with a resilient place-sense corresponds to a global age, and, how globalization can be reconciled with regional identities. In this case, simultaneity is a direct result of globalization; a resilient place-sense is the basis for the durability of regional meaning even when it is defined as a fluid space. As Hsu’s claims suggest, even the most trenchant regional literature can show us how this is so.

The simultaneous near-and-far entailed by postlocality lends itself directly to regional literature, which, formerly, as I hope to make clear, engendered difference, when now, I suggest, it provokes solidarity. This change manifests as a subtle but significant shift in paradigm well worth noting. At the same time it supports our understanding of the
continuing frictions that create difference, this new paradigm also entails the fluidity that
softens how we understand and police those differences. Historically, much of literary
regionalism is predicated on a reader’s distance from the site of the narrative, as well as
the authenticity this distance affords the characterization of a given site and its characters;
but also, distance such as this affords the reader with a subjectivity—if not an authenticity
—of their own. For example, Bret Harte’s local color stories of the California Gold Rush
were popular, as Wallace Stegner remarks, “in direct proportion to the reader’s distance
from and ignorance of the mines” (228). Yet while Harte’s stories entertained his
readership, his stories likewise told his readers what they—thankfully—were not:
marginal, peripheral, and primitive; and, what they were: cultured—if not worldly, and
sophisticated (Barrish 78). Despite the fact that, in Harte’s case, his portrait of the mines
was faulty, as with much in regional production the real-and-imagined out of which it is
comprised is irreducible. The function of literary regionalism has been, on one hand, a
kind of preservation of “a vanishing American past whose customs, dialect, and
characters the authors of the movement sought to preserve,” as Donna M. Campbell
explains (93), but also to create “others” by preserving what makes a region and its
culture different. So in a way, regionalism is directly based on elements of near-or-far, of
me-and-not-me. In a crucial sense, even by its more traditional definitions, regionalism
has functioned, and continues to function, much as recent scholarship suggests globalism
itself is playing out: difference and distance are in constant negotiation, the terms of
which are expressed across a spectrum of cultural persistence or vanishment.
Yet we can recognize in today’s regionalism a move towards pluralism rather than multiculturalism, of Beck’s “inclusive differentiation” or Moraru’s “with-ness.” Susan Kollin, in “The Global West: Temporality, Spatial Politics, and Literary Production” (2011), reminds us that with-ness and differentiation of this sort are the result of what Tsing, after Foucault, calls “friction”: those “awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (516). Tsing is clear that “cultural diversity is not banished from… interconnections; it is what makes them—and all their particularities—possible” (ix). To say “pluralism” rather than “multiculturalism,” then, is to accentuate the ways in which the balance of “interconnection” and “difference” has shifted; it is along those lines that the paradigm has been transformed. Altogether, as the weight of interconnection bears down on locality, critical attention has taken the shape of what Douglas Reichert Powell describes as the critical regionalist perspective. It is to study how “something unique and isolated seems to be going on, but something else—something complex and interconnected—is also happening” (18). Powell suggests that critical regional studies can articulate “our ‘sense’ of what is unique about a particular spot on the landscape with a critical awareness of how that spot is part of broader configurations of history, politics, and culture.” So while self and other are pronounced in regional literature, brought together in contradistinction to one another, it then becomes the task of a postlocal ecocriticism—like critical regionalism—to read through what may be a deliberately limited local perspective to reveal not just the routes that combine to create place, but the solidarities—often grassroots and/or subcultural—inhomently linking
them in what otherwise appear to be localized struggles for ecosocial justice. Solidarity, in this sense, rather than opposition through difference, is essential to this process of a mutually formed subjectivity.

Powell’s position is that by understanding the local and the regional we can begin to recognize the larger patterns of relation in which local and regional participate. At the same time, as Philip Joseph suggests, a global readership is still “preoccupied with the very real and very modern question of local belonging” (ix; emphasis original). Whether this preoccupation grows out of a sense of nostalgia or not, it indicates that the local and regional matter as much or more in the global age, and for reasons beyond binary counter-valence. Both Powell and Joseph remain in step with traditional definitions of region as part of a larger whole; however, Stephen Tatum, in “Spectrality and the Postregional Interface” (2007), imparts some of the simultaneity evidenced in regional culture and literature as I find it, explaining instead that regions are dynamic, whereby, “the local is always being globalized and the global is always being localized” (7). Krista Comer echoes Tatum in *Surfer Girls in the New World Order* (2010). She emphasizes that especially in the global era, fears of Berg’s “monoculture” have not expressly come to pass, that in fact: “if power is diffused globally, struggles over it show themselves in intensely localist ways. The new world-space of global capital simultaneously grows more localized as it grows more globalized” (17). Though she makes the argument that the routes of global subcultural bohemianism have in part forestalled global flattening, I would contend that less obviously routed efforts like Berg’s bioregional ideal have also
had a significant effect on local responses to globalization, especially for their marginalized and/or subcultural impulses. Postlocal—similar to postregional and critical regional—performs the expected function of cultural difference, of a stranded and stable (even if fungible) authenticity, but it also contains an unexpected ongoing revision that the critical concepts of postregion and critical region anticipate.

My project is to confront regionalism as a literary form that is constantly under construction aesthetically, as it responds to the cultural and material evolution of the region it depicts. Here I draw attention to what Tom Lutz calls the “embattled region” perspective (24), in which regional literature is most often positioned as a counter hegemonic force, usually to nationalist interests. Lutz explains that literary regionalism has held an either/or hegemonic/counter hegemonic meaning among critics (Cosmopolitan Vistas 27-8). Still, I insist that my sense of a postlocal both/and pushes back against traditional binary readings of regionalism in this context, too. As such, I prefer Robert L. Dorman’s clear, direct summation of the regionalist agenda: that there exists the broadly accepted “nationalist West, an amorphous region that has served as a kind of projection screen for American national identity, yearnings, and ideals,” and the “localist West,” that “diverse collection of subregions” that appears to function particularly, separately, and immanently, for better or worse (xii; emphases original). Here, Dorman facilitates both/and productions of region, including a “globalist West” that has also been insinuated into our conception of the functions and interests of regionalism. With both Lutz and Dorman in mind, it is plain that region resonates variously as a matter
of reception and mobilization across ideologies and that how exactly it resonates depends on whether region is mobilized in regional, national, or global interest. More so, as noted above, these interests are each continually being reconciled, so that a region’s resonance is likewise perspectival and constantly unstable. Because of its plasticity, regional literature is especially vital today exactly for its productions that are both starkly particular and deliberately universal. Signifying both ways, regionalism imparts what Dorman calls a “usable past” for the twenty-first century (2), and what Lutz describes as the ongoing twin goals of regionalism, the “impulse toward reconciling the cosmopolitan and the vernacular” and “imagining beyond current forms of solidarity” (56).

Thinking of regional signification as durable because it is flexible, my assessment of postlocal currents in literature of the U.S. West focuses on California literature expressly. Michael Kowalewski writes that California is, “the state perhaps most associated with rootlessness, transience, and unchecked growth” (14), and Dorman calls California the “long-standing beacon of the nationalist West” (198). Further, as George R. Stewart tellingly recalls, California is a place borne of a global imagination that continuously resonates as such (3). In one sense, then, California regionalism undoes our preconceptions about regional literature. Kowalewski’s remarks underscore that California is perhaps the place where “roots” become “routes,” and Dorman’s claim elicits the social construction of region, especially in the service of extra-regional interests. But Stewart’s pointed remark highlights the durability of regional meaning despite all this, and so California literature also affirms our notions about regionalism
across more than five hundred years of constant global desire and aspiration. Such a history—although my study only includes the era of conquest and its ongoing settler colonialism—allows for an assessment of postlocality in literary practice across a range of literary movements and a wide span of time. In this way, I mean to present a narrative of postlocality that is historically linear in form as a matter of clarity, but which coheres purposely around less linear themes that approach California literature at moments marking aesthetic and social change.

*Scope of the Present Work*

The present work is divided into four chapters that deal with specific aspects of California literature in the context of the larger body of regional literature of the U.S. West in the world. In scope, it spans California’s U.S. American era, from the Gold Rush to the end of the twentieth century, when critical awareness and analysis of a global, post-national world spiked. In content, it follows key themes in regional literature and meaning-making, while considering the postlocal connotations associated with them. Chapter 1 confronts issues of *orientation* during the Gold Rush. Chapter 2 details responses to spatio-temporal *simultaneity* in the rapidly industrializing New West. Chapter 3 focuses on *disorientation* in post-World War II California. Chapter 4 highlights forms of postlocal *temporality*. Each chapter will triangulate among texts that typify the mood, form, and/or style of the era in which they were written. Through these four themes—*orientation, simultaneity, disorientation,* and *temporality*—I hope to map a
nascent, emerging, and detectable postlocality, and I mean to draw out an untapped current of ecosocial activism attending it.

Chapter 1 is the only section of this study that examines nonfictional works. I begin my study of postlocality with the diaries, letters, and memoirs of the California Gold Rush. Presenting a decidedly nationalist, hegemonic West, these texts have been shown to contain the roots of American—especially western—literary regionalism and realism, the routes of global regional culture, and decipherable warnings and lessons about the hazards of short term inhabitation. James D. Houston, in his foreword to Bayard Taylor’s seminal *Eldorado* (1850), writes that at the time of the Gold Rush California became “synonymous with adventure, discovery, high hopes, and new possibilities” (xi), and he explains that the Gold Rush was a “formative moment for California and the nation” (xii). This “formative moment” is crucial to my project exactly because the Gold Rush was a vernacular global experience. Carey McWilliams describes it as a “poor man’s gold rush” in *California: The Great Exception* (1949), and as “the great adventure for the common man” (26; 27). Previously, the most widely read documents of the U.S. West had been written by explorers, trained writers, and other types of specialists, and affluent adventurers who formed rarified kinds of western narratives. Key figures like Lewis and Clark, Thomas Nuttall, Washington Irving, John Kirk Townsend, and any number of continental scientists and writers produced essential documents promoting a specific western imaginary. Unlike these narratives that nevertheless shaped the form and content of the West’s mythos, the Gold Rush produced
a tremendous number of diarists and letter writers whose authors were quotidian meaning-makers aware that they were embarking on something momentous. Essentially, the Gold Rush can be understood as the moment when a nationalist western imaginary was alternately put to the test or enacted in practice, and the point at which the West, always a global space, entered modernity. In effect, Gold Rush diaries, letters, and memoirs record immanent meaning-making as it directly confronts perhaps the most influential imagined geography in American consciousness, setting it in relief against personal and transnational desire. Though steeped in the scenes and language of earlier accounts, by their very personal nature and number the narratives the miners told permeated more deeply and materially into daily life in the homes they left behind than past narratives of the West perhaps had. And, in a significant example of simultaneity, the miners’ homes and families were ever-present in their minds as they toiled in the diggings. The co-presence of real-and-imagined places, and of here-and-there, accordingly, are hallmarks of this genre. When read as an anticipation of postlocality, the diaries, letters, and memoirs of the Gold Rush describe a region that signifies rigidly as remote, but fluidly as utterly intertwined with global routes.

I will triangulate my discussion among overlapping texts, each associated with the Feather River watershed, in California's northern Sierra Mother Lode: The Shirley Letters (1854-55) by Louise Clappe, Life on the Plains and among the Diggings (1854) by Alonzo Delano, and The California Gold Rush Diary of a German Sailor (1969) by Adolphus Windeler. Clappe’s text is a collection of deliberately crafted letters meant for a
regional public. It has received considerable attention from western historians and literary critics for its detail and literary value. Delano’s text is a memoir, told at a distance and gleaned from his own firsthand accounts, written for a national audience. Nicolas S. Witschi, among others, has pointed to Delano’s significance to the formation of an early California literary tradition. Windeler’s text is his private diary published a century later, and has drawn little critical attention beyond local historical citation. Shirley, Delano, and Windeler were in the region at the same time. They were often in the same places, either at once or within days or weeks of each other. Each text depicts similar scenes and events, but with nuanced differences in perspective based on gender, class, and nationality, and, I believe, on audience. Notable for my work, these differences clarify differing global subject positions as they occur in a single place.

Perhaps best known is Clappe’s text because it documents the rare educated female perspective of the mines. *The Shirley Letters* mingles description influenced by romanticism with the retelling of events in her small community, many of which are believed to be the source for several of Bret Harte’s best known local color stories. Delano, too, who had contributed many short sketches to newspapers as “Old Block” before composing his memoir, is likewise believed to be a source for Harte’s prominent work. As such, both authors can be read as being significant to the foundation of California regional consciousness as well as western literary production. Windeler’s diary was never published in his time, but it is noteworthy because it substantiates many of the claims and scenes depicted by the first two authors. The only full-time miner of the three,
Windeler writes in a raw style, without embellishment, adding his immigrant’s perspective to the others’ brahmin and midwestern points of view.

Chapter 2 bridges connotations of regional and national literature, and the regionalist and naturalist literary modes. The three novels discussed here, Jack London’s *The Valley of the Moon* (1913), Mary Austin’s *The Ford* (1917), and Upton Sinclair’s *Oil!* (1927), reflect the first pangs of a post-frontier culture, in which the emplotment of the primitive West had been replaced by what June Howard has described as “a perilous time, a period of change and uncertainty, of dislocations and disorders” driving national feeling and literature (ix). The term “New West” in this case began to appear as a popular concept in reportage and literature as settlements took hold, native peoples were displaced or hemmed-in, various technologies supporting national infrastructures had penetrated the western region, and industrial agriculture gained force. The feeling Howard draws attention to, though, was the result of a larger nexus of global cultural discomfort defining the epoch and brought about, according to Stephen Kern in *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (1983), by “a dramatic increase in available energy sources and a consequent transformation of the experience of time and space, with both transportation and communication times dropping drastically, which made for the shrinking of lived distance” (xii). As Kern points out, in the language of conquest at the same cultural moment, the U.S. frontier had closed along with the world frontier, and the lack of “empty” spaces contributed to global anxiety, especially as it pertained to nationalism, but also to resource availability and extraction (164). Viewed this way, and
as the novels I am dealing with bear out, California in the opening decades of the
twentieth century denotes: 1) an enclosed, post-frontier space still enthralled with and
coming to terms with the “freedom” associated with its “wild west” heritage; 2) a space
of spiking but unequal wealth predicated on devastating resource exploitation and the
racist exploitation of labor; and 3) a local space already contending with its unavoidable
globality. All told, California in this period provides a portrait of shifting local, regional,
and global meaning hinging on “the shrinking of lived distance” as it began to chip away
at cultural difference. These novels point to the sources of what Berg calls “live-in
colonialism” (74), to the origins of the U.S. West as a global space, and to signs of local
resistance to extra-local authority. Compared to the previous chapter, the texts covered in
this period express a diminished romanticism that is distinguished by an increased
comprehension of global economic systems in everyday local practice. They also elicit
the ongoing struggle for local control of those economies. Incongruously, each novel
grapples with— and to a degree, in the case of London and Austin, maintains— some part
of the triumphal, monolithic, western narrative serving both a localist and a nationalist
West.

Under these conditions, London’s, Austin’s, and Sinclair’s texts emphasize the
paradoxical and confusing circumstances of new models of long-term inhabitation in
California, especially as they confront local versus regional or national control of local
narrative and especially as they confront rapid change. *The Valley of the Moon* tells the
story of working class urban westerners fed up with their circumstances and driven by a
romantic view of homesteader culture. Rife with ugly nativism and Spencerian social
darwinism, *Valley* is necessary to this project for its characterization of California at the
turn of the last century, particularly as it pertains to the changing face, meaning, and
conditions of an increasingly urban West. Additionally, despite itself, *Valley* renders an
attempt at an early version of sustainable agriculture that, quite remarkably, finds its
impetus in a film the main characters watch in a crowded theater in Oakland when their
dissatisfaction with the city is at its highest. Modernity in *Valley* signifies a deeply
conflicted mixture of nostalgia for primitive lifeways and participation in a changing
culture. Like London, Austin’s *The Ford* relates the changes taking place in California at
the turn of the Nineteenth Century, but she focuses on resource disputes, specifically
water and oil—which have since come to define the twentieth and twenty-first centuries,
especially as we grow to comprehend the water-energy nexus—and the difficult
negotiations between older lifeways, acquisition of wealth, and centralized regional
control of local cultures. *The Ford* provides critical commentary on the U.S. West
narrative, especially in its descriptions of managed landscapes and the growing web of
connectivity between rural and urban places. As such, it provides a stark example of a
changing cultural and literary regionalism, one that its characters are ill-suited to address.
Lastly, Sinclair’s *Oil!* brings together themes of race, class, environment and technology
begun in the first two novels and connects them to the vast wealth for which California
would become known. *Oil!* emphasizes automobile culture and the film industry
especially, but its underlying story is of the exploitation of even those people and places
closest and most sacred to us, implying that there is no escape from the machinations of
the modern industrial West. A darker sense of the meaning of postlocal is formed in this
novel, underwritten by the issues highlighted by World War I, but also by the everyday
acts of greed that seek to flatten local culture and degrade the environment. Together,
these texts emphasize a pivotal point marking open interaction with technology and the
acknowledgment of transregional frictions and flows. In terms of a postlocal ecocriticism,
this distinct period links problems of exploitation and standardization with a sense of
loss, binding them to early attempts at ecosocial justice within the emerging, newly
“modern” West.

In Chapter 3 I attend to postlocalization as it pertains to first nations sovereignty
and settler colonialism. In particular, the novels here offer divergent perspectives on
place-making and meaning-making, but specifically as these reflect gendered and
racialized approaches to inhabitation. With this in mind, I read Joan Didion's *Run River*
(1963), Thomas Sanchez’s *Rabbit Boss* (1974), and Greg Sarris’s *Watermelon Nights*
(1998), all of which portray overlapping locales by telling family histories. The plot of
each of these essentially historical novels reaches backward to span the age of American
imperialism in the West covered in the previous chapter, connecting them topically and
thematically to those earlier works, and extending through that period when nationalism,
globalization, and their discontents coalesce after World War II. This postwar era forms
the backdrop for critical regionalism’s most forceful critiques, and is the time when
bioregionalism gains ideological force. These novels provide fertile ground on which to
come to terms with the aims of both critical regional and bioregional discourses.

Didion’s, Sanchez’s, and Sarris’s texts help to cement my own position regarding the
eventmentality of place. Each of these novels models a separate but intertwined type of
evolving residency, underscoring different versions of “territory,” its policing, and its
maintenance. These novels, which relate place-making from white and native
perspectives, articulate the unevenness of postlocal meaning-making at a time of
dramatically accelerating banal cosmopolitanism, when belonging and becoming were in
stark discord.

_Run River_, _Rabbit Boss_, and _Watermelon Nights_ span the transition from late
literary modernism to post-modernism, and in so doing reflect a critical aesthetic
transformation from an earlier New West defined by the texts in the previous chapter,
from about 1890 to 1945, and a late New West, which, in Comer’s words, is typically
associated with “civil rights and women’s liberation narratives and to revisions of the
western genre” (246) of the 1960s and 1970s. The early New West is more closely related
to the frontier narrative and its values and symbols, while the late New West participates
almost exclusively in acts of recovery and identity politics. It is the familiar New West as
conceived by revisionist social historians such as Patricia Limerick, Richard White,
William Cronon, and Forrest G. Robinson. Didion’s _Run River_ represents a transition
from a modernist to a postmodernist aesthetic, and signifies a move toward a late New
Western ethos. Didion’s perspective is vital to my project due to her rather imperialist
version of family, watersheds, sense of place, and the advent of the “second modernity”
in California following World War II. Sanchez’s voice revisits native strategies of place-making across generations of imperial displacement, providing a correlating downward trajectory that acts as a foil to Didion’s narrative. Sarris’s novel in turn seems to respond to Sanchez, presenting a reclamation of native sovereignty and “survivance,” as Gerald Vizenor puts it (vii), as it comes to terms with American nationalism and inter-tribal and local politics. In each case, the problem of thinking of local places as fixed or stable entities underscores the entrenched complexity of a fully postlocal condition. In each of these novels local place equates to local culture, and claims to place are cultural claims. Therefore, in the late New West, compared to the early New West, external pressures on local control move to the forefront of narratives in ways the novels I treat in the previous chapter could anticipate but not fully comprehend. This chapter, then, allows for an approach that extends my reevaluation of the contentious localist idiom.

Chapter 4 forwards the idea that the speculative or science fiction genre includes texts that are part of a continuum of regional literature. I recognize a critical sub-genre of “speculative regionalism” in the same mode as other recent genre developments like climate fiction. Until a recent vogue, speculative fiction had not been given much critical attention by ecocritics, and scholars of the U.S. West have yet to interrogate it in any sustained way. Yet, in both cases, examples of speculative fiction resemble environmental and/or regional literature in their key premises, formal attributes, and in the directness of their purpose. For these reasons, speculative fiction is necessary to extending our understanding of regional literature, especially in regard to postlocal expression. For
instance, Donna Campbell writes that by investigating “absence, loss, limitation, and the past,” regionalist authors “offered strategies of control, ways of countering the bewildering array of threats from an increasingly industrialized postbellum world” (Resisting 19). The work of speculative fiction of the last twenty years is to magnify similar, contemporary concerns about technology and globality, and, like regionalism, science fiction from the outset has “centered on the encounter with the exotic other, with the portrait of exotic difference” that typifies regional obsession (Luckhurst 15). Roger Luckhurst, in his cultural history Science Fiction (2005), demonstrates that science fiction evolved from the travel narratives of the eighteenth century “along the pathways of global trade routes” (15), finally displacing the dime novels depicting the Old West in the 1920s and ’30s (16). It is plain that during its early years science fiction performed cultural work comparable to regionalism. The trope of difference, and even the wondrous or marvelous found in early writing about the U.S. West, for example, found its way into the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs. At least for a time, the need for a marvelous elsewhere shared a similar—if not more masculine—readership with regionalist and naturalist novels. Indeed, in its preoccupations with material culture in the creation of verisimilitude, the formal attributes of speculative fiction are very closely related to realism for similar reasons. A speculative environmental regionalism extends a U.S. West regional imaginary that does not yet overtly include science fiction.

Much as Howard expresses critical complaints against naturalism, in my own
reading I have found that speculative fictions often “fail signally to be well-made novels; they insist tactlessly upon a relation between literature and reality; they traffic brazenly with the formulas of popular literature and journalism; and they are obsessed with class and commodities in a most embarrassing fashion” (Howard xi). However, as with naturalist texts, speculative fiction is increasingly valuable for these very reasons. In the abundant completeness of the worlds such novels create they present a reality that highlights the fears and issues of the period in which a given novel was written, and despite an often thinly-veiled didacticism, the nature of speculation is to offer solutions to those fears. As an example, Chris Baratta, in Environmentalism in the Realm of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature (2012), reminds his reader: “an ecocritical study must do two things: disconnect the reader from the culturally and socially constructed systems of thought that are grounded in the man/nature binary and establish a connection between the reader and the natural world… Science fiction and fantasy literature has been fulfilling these two goals for almost a century” (3).

In order to draw attention to texts that perform as speculative environmental regionalism, I will triangulate among Ernest Callenbach’s Ecotopia (1975), Kim Stanley Robinson’s The Wild Shore (1984), and Octavia Butler’s The Parable of the Sower (1993). Each novel considers near- or post-apocalyptic tribal futures. Callenbach’s and Robinson’s novels resonate with overtly bioregional perspectives, while Butler’s speaks to the desire to rethink issues of identity, scarcity, abundance, and empathy outside of a directly bioregional ethos. Callenbach offers an example of deliberate ecosocial measures
resulting in long-term inhabitation, Robinson considers how our present actions might force us into “future primitive” lifeways, and Butler asks us to reconsider assumptions about race, power, and the problems inherent to the formation of society. Together, these novels further evaluations of the entanglement of nostalgia and progress titular to literature of the U.S. West, but by placing them against the backdrop of utopias and/or dystopias the inherent critique of global modernity behind each text gains clarity. In a real and crucial sense, these speculative fictions are regionalist fictions in so far as there is often a utopian spirit underlying—especially—counter-hegemonic regional records.

Seen as such, Callenbach’s, Robinson’s, and Butler’s novels, much like Frederic Jameson observes, are formed around “the dialectic of Identity and Difference” (xii), and there is an underlying secessionist spirit maintaining otherness and difference in each of them (5). Jameson asserts that utopias rely on a “structural requirement of closure” (8); however, with this, and with the counter-hegemonic spirit of many regional texts in mind, the utopian ethos underlying speculative regional fictions compels critics to unravel this “dangerous and misguided hope” of closure and totalizing control (9). In this way, these, and the balance of the texts I treat in this project, contribute to a temporal and spatial portrait of a postlocal condition that refuses closure, but which includes that deep-seeded desire. As a whole, my researches into these texts complete a sketch of postlocal pasts, presents, and potential futures through which we can reframe our understanding of regional literature and culture in a global age.
Chapter 1:
“A dangerously speculative character”:
Orientation, Temporary Residency, and Place-Making in the Mines

Isolation, Improvisation, Speculation

If relation defines the interactions of things, and entanglement denotes the character of those relationships, what role does isolation—separation, solitude, or any condition of estrangement or alienation—tell us about the circumstances producing our entanglements? Is separation possible, or is it ephemeral? How complete can any isolation be? Contemplating these questions seems critical to all approaches that consider the effects of and responses to globalization in readings of regional literature and culture in a time when the world’s social and environmental connectivity is abundantly clear. On an individual level, Mark Conliffe tells us that isolation, “is omnipresent and is such a part of life that we often do not see it” (115). In like terms, asking us to think beyond the usual oppositional formation of mobility and immobility in our present social interactions, David Bissell and Gillian Fuller point out, “against the buzz of mobility and animation, a topology of stillness haunts the space of flows” (4). Similar to Conliffe, they contend, “inertia as an ontological state… is integral…to everyday life” (2). Just as Conliffe describes “countless variations” of isolation (125), Bissell and Fuller suggest that there are “modalities of stillness” (6). In both cases the either/or lines of participation and its refusal resist being clearly drawn: the isolate remains part of the whole, to
paraphrase Conliffe (119); stillness is not merely a cessation of movement, as Bissell and Fuller conceive of it (6). Key to each, though, is that in the midst of so much movement and interaction, isolation and stillness are not the exception but equally constituent conditions. In a sense, Conliffe and Bissell and Fuller remind us, we have overdetermined the extent and character of our complex connectivity, or, at least, underestimated the unevenness, plurality, and agency across those connections.

An alternate version of regionalism might come into focus. Globalization viewed as an extension of an ongoing imperialism on several fronts predicts a type of “flattening” of regional culture, though perspectives on this outcome if not on its cause are changing. It is worthwhile, then, to examine instances of global migration and their regional symptoms, if only to understand how regional culture is made and remade in relation to the rapid and/or sustained flow of people, ideas, and things, even in places that are considered geographically remote. Against this backdrop of large-scale global migration to a remote area, miners’ diaries from the California Gold Rush in the mid-nineteenth century almost universally express loneliness, a sense of isolation from the world they left behind, and from a “civilized” world more broadly. As they orient themselves to the distance separating them from the places they have known, they simultaneously had to orient themselves to the new place. The almost constant yearning for home that colors their isolation provokes an absent presence of sorts, in which the longed-for place is as vividly at hand in their accounts as the miners’ immediate landscape. The diggings, then, are a conflicted space of here-and-there, despite the starkly rigid sense of here-or-there
enforced by distance as the condition of the miners’ isolation. These diaries, then, portray an anticipatory postlocalization in which meaning-making learned elsewhere and a dubious sense of what “here” even is overwrites the immanent landscape. In the gaps and incongruities of this meaning-making, however, the gold miner-bricoleur makes do, modifies behaviors if not assumptions, and articulates a revised meaning of self and region in relation to each other. The very surfeit of primary Gold Rush documents confirms that the world-wide meaning of California, though global in scale, was ultimately refashioned from below and on the ground through everyday practice. Orientation then, is the dominant trope of these narratives, whether it be the all-pervasive expression of the miners’ distance from somewhere else, their sense of isolation forged by that distance, or their alternating wonder and disillusionment at the newness of the landscape they encountered and the freedoms it seemed to engender. Confronted by temporal and spatial distance from that which they had known, the meaning-making of these global agents became linked to their ground-level improvisations and speculations. Further, with contemporary definitions of place in mind, theirs is a place where what counts as “pause” and what counts as “movement” are indiscernible.

By improvisation I mean precisely what de Certeau calls “making do” (xv). That is, “Everyday life invents itself by poaching [sic] in countless ways on the property of others” in “mixtures of rituals and makeshifts, manipulations of spaces, operators of networks” (xii; xvi). Improvisation as I read it colors much of our work as place-makers. It separates our intentions from the intentions of the masterplan, masterplot, and master
narrative. The improvisational mode, at least on the personal level, is the most forceful—even if passive—form of orientation. The very sense of improvisation that means unscripted or unprepared is utmost in my deployment of it as a descriptive and critical term herein. It depends on the near-at-hand, and it contrives with the incidental in a way that extends the meaning and utility of “local.” Speculation, on the other hand, is far more fraught, bearing the critical burdens of “speculative fiction,” “speculative realism,” and other uses in ecocriticism and economics, as well as its traditional meaning of guessing without certainty. Like improvisation, speculation carries with it a sense of conjecture; unlike improvisation, its stakes seem higher. While improvisation often attends to the minor events and conditions of everyday life, speculation always carries connotations of broader personal and/or social import, whether it be the gold miner’s speculations and therefore the future of his fortunes, the author’s rendering of the fantastic and therefore our understanding of possible futures, or the economist’s risk-taking on the global market. While the perils of speculation are far more overt than those of improvisation, it yet contains the more insidious aspect for the simple reason that speculation follows a script, it works according to a plan. While perhaps it qualifies as risking more, speculation nonetheless implies a calculated risk, whereas improvisation operates more unceremoniously. As such, speculation, as I will show here, most often works in accord with forms of nation, capital, or both in dangerous and lasting ways. To my mind, improvisation attends to necessity, while speculation attends to desire. As orientations and as ways of orienting, then, improvisation and speculation are crucial markers of types
of postlocal implacement.

Read this way, miners’ diaries impart the idea that distance and immanence are co-implicated in one’s orientation, even as a sense of isolation is an overlooked attribute of relation. Because of this, the diaries suggest that rather than a matter of *scale*—as is most often posited by ecocritics interested in supporting cosmopolitan solutions to global ecosocial issues—we should instead be alert to immanence, and the *simultaneity* of accumulated influence inherent to the composition of any one place. In other words, ours is not a matter of imagining how to live and work “on at least two scales at once”—the local and the global (Clark 136)—but to realize that we already do so in our everyday living, even if latently or unintentionally. Confronting the exclusions and erasures attending the everyday is not exactly a scalar project, then, but the work of reexamining an already existing simultaneous socio-temporal and spatial layering that defines local or regional meaning.

**Temporary Residency**

In the introduction to his influential *California: A Study of American Character* (1886) Harvard philosopher, Californian by birth, and would-be historian Josiah Royce insists that the “American community in early California fairly represented... the average national culture and character,” and that during the first years of the Gold Rush, “Nowhere else were we Americans more affected... by the feeling that we stood in the position of conquerers in a new land” (3). In the same utterance, Royce also cites
speculation and improvisation as the two driving forces of this distinctly American character. This passage makes clear that Royce understood the exclusionary tactics of American triumphalism attending continental expansion. It is well known, as Carey McWilliams demonstrates, that in fact the Gold Rush, “set in motion a world wide mass migration” to California (California 26), not simply an American emigration, and JoAnn Levy and Susan Lee Johnson have since removed any question that Gold Rush culture was remarkably heterogeneous, though even in our boosterism today we tend to ignore this fact.10 Significantly, however, it is also apparent that Royce understood that culture is mobile, and that in the case of American imperialism on the North American continent, he believed that meaning-making came from outside and above any given region and that it could be transmitted by an imagined community in the service of American-ness. This alone avows an implicit belief in the social construction of region, even if it presumes a questionable cultural stability. Still, “average” imparts a vernacular orientation related to improvisation and speculation on the ground, which implies further that meaning-making in California at this time had been equally influenced by local social as well as local geographical conditions. The desires attending personal and imperial influences, then, were put into practice by the miners entering the region, even as immediate geographic and social conditions warped those same desires idiosyncratically. So while “the position of conquerers” implies that “average” Americans assumed and were complicit in a centuries-old current of settler colonialism in the Americas, embedded in Royce’s basic claim we can likewise read a mutually conforming relationship between localist and
nationalist Wests and an understated but pervasive geographic determinism shaping the conquest narrative.\textsuperscript{11} Thus, the impulse toward imperialism imbues the average American with a speculative temperament, while the places to which this speculation draws Americans requires adaptation to local conditions. To no small extent, improvisation implies adjustment to the real conditions on the ground as they are found. As a result, Gold Rush documents offer abundant examples of rigidity or compromise as cultures out of step with local nature come to terms with necessary adjustments to regional geographies. At the same time, these documents express simultaneous layers of local, national, and international meaning-making precisely at that point McWilliams claims had been the world’s first vernacular global moment (26).\textsuperscript{12}

Speculation and improvisation, especially in Gold Rush journals, are shot-through with requisite, compulsive movement as miners traveled from site to site in hopes of striking it rich. Along this local-regional-global, nature-culture axis, western literary regionalism surfaces as an aesthetic of transience and renewal. Transience drives the entire tradition of encounter narrative, and first-hand experience proffered as “truth” merges with exaggeration and skepticism as western regionalism’s primary literary device. For this reason the Gold Rush documents of Louise Amelia Knapp Smith Clappe (Dame Shirley), Alonzo “Old Block” Delano, and Adolphus Windeler are representative of a coalescing regional literary and cultural tropology, while providing examples of individual orientation to the Feather River watershed. As emigrants, Shirley and Delano were to some degree localist agents of a nationalist conquest narrative, with their own set
of prejudices and prevailing emplotments of west-ness already in place. Alternately, as a
German immigrant, and because he had no such literary aspirations as had Shirley and
Delano, Windeler exemplifies the international tenor of the Gold Rush foremost, but
perhaps too he exhibits an unembellished fidelity not found in these other writers.
Together, though, the exemplary Gold Rush letter writer, the memoirist, and the diarist
present us with a conflicted nexus of personal, local, national, and international desire
that can be described collectively as a postlocal temporary residency narrative.

New Stories

The temporary residency narrative epitomizes the difference between occupying
and inhabiting a place or region. In the preface to the second edition of The World Rushed
In: The California Gold Rush Experience (2002), for instance, J.S. Holliday observes
that California was “a place not of settlement with the toil of cultivating new land but
rather of immediate gain, sufficient to finance a better life back home” (7). More
pointedly, Royce concedes that, “Everybody who came without family, as a fortune-
hunter whose social interests were elsewhere, felt a selfish interest here in shirking
serious obligations; among such men everybody hoped, for his own person, soon to
escape from the place” (219). Citing an early pamphlet describing how to be successful in
the mines, Royce explains that miners were advised to carry “very little baggage” in
order to allow for freedom of movement (237), and were cautioned that “Responsibilities
must be avoided by one who wants success” (238; sic). In thinking about orientation
under postlocal conditions, then, Gold Rush diaries suggest the obvious, that mobility works in the service of occupation but not long-term inhabitation. This is as true of the social obligations within California Royce claims the miners shirked as it is the outright racism and environmental exploitation the American miners meted on the indigenous peoples, racial others, and landscapes they encountered and transformed. Certainly, theirs was an extension of “the ecosystemic colonial violence that set the continent ringing” beginning with the first European contact (Ziser 22), which Peter Berg labels “live-in colonialism” (Envisioning 74) and which has more recently been understood as “settler colonialism” by Patrick Wolfe and others. Less obvious, though, is Michael P. Branch’s insistence in Reading the Roots: American Nature Writing before Walden (2004), which stresses that although early exploration narratives (to which Gold Rush journals are intimately related) are fraught with the “assumptions, projections, hopes, and values” of those serving imperialist projects (xiii), they nonetheless enable scholars to “identify the roots of a sustainable land ethic” which may have otherwise been “suppressed, corrupted, or lost” (xxiii). So, as I argue, beyond any cautionary ecosocial lessons that can be gleaned from Gold Rush documents, lies an undervalued or unrecognized current of living-in-place found in miners’ improvisations when faced with the on-the-ground conditions of the camps.

**Improvisations: Dame Shirley and the Commonplace**

The organizing principle of the following analysis is the appreciable
improvisational mode running through the place-making described in Dame Shirley’s *Letters*. The first aspect of improvisation that I mean to draw attention to is Shirley’s relationship to things and the uncanny, and the manner in which this informs the intimate, local nature of orientation, regardless of the materials or their origins from which place is constructed and renewed. The second significant aspect of improvisation I will examine is the shock of unanticipated implacement felt by the miners Shirley describes when they are under duress. Tellingly, as his diary bears-out, Adolphus Windeler, though unnamed in *Letters*, plays a prominent role in the hanging scene which she describes and which I examine. The *Letters*’ aesthetic production animates how the faraway and near-at-hand interact. In the global space of California, the manner in which near and far are distinctively rearranged, subsumed, and incorporated highlights how real-and-imagined places are formed. Whereas we think of this conflation of near-and-far usually in terms of the systematic global circulation and mobility of people and commodities, in the *Letters* it is rather the immobility of Dame Shirley as she interacts with mobile and vibrant people and things which marks her work as an extraordinary document of everyday making do.

Shirley’s *Letters* is an effort to communicate the local experience of the Gold Rush to someone far from the experience of the mines. The text is comprised of twenty-three letters written between September 1851 and November 1852. The letters were subsequently published in 1854 and 1855 in the San Francisco magazine, *The Pioneer*, and finally in book form for the first time in 1921. In her letters Shirley portrays herself as the proper Victorian wife of a young physician. Together, she and her husband relocate
from San Francisco to the diggings, where he practices among the miners at Rich Bar and Indian Bar on the East Branch of the North Fork of the Feather River in the Northern Lode. As Marlene Smith-Baranzini’s indispensable introduction to the California Legacy edition communicates, both the *Letters*’ publishing history and Clappe’s personal history suggest that the epistolary form this document takes was artificial. Read at face-value by earlier scholars, Smith-Baranzini instead makes the compelling argument that in a prior meeting, the editor Stephen Massett suggested that Shirley report to him from the mines. Smith-Baranzini surmises that Shirley was consciously writing to a regional if not national audience, in spite of the personal tone her letters take. She was, in effect, performing a literary version of the miner’s letter home (xvi-xvii). Ostensibly written to her sister in New England, Shirley’s letters attempt to render particular conditions into a narrative that is universally understood. Put differently, Louise Clappe, the global actor, recreates local events for a distant public, reconstructing a local culture and geography that have already caused her to recast herself as “Shirley.” The real-and-imagined place of the Rich Bar diggings which Clappe produces as Shirley is formulated through her immediate correspondence with human and nonhuman local and global agents. Recognizing this latent postlocality, it can be said that despite her deliberate partitioning, near and far lack beginning or end points, undergoing defamiliarizations as they are mingled at every level or layer. In the *Letters*, distance—that is, isolation or remoteness—is pervasive, and yet it is vital to the production of the proximal.

Shirley describes her dread, excitement, and comparative liberation among the
miners and the grand landscape she encounters. The letters contain an account of her day-to-day life and include anecdotes, reveries, and descriptions typical of life in the mines that are also reminiscent of the freighted nature writing of the time. As is the case with most Gold Rush journals, the Letters begins with effusion over the newness of the landscape and the people Shirley encounters as she comes into the watershed. While the Letters is usually praised for its historical accuracy, alongside the archive Shirley produces is the less appreciated transformative personal implanation history attending its explicitly epiphanic mode.  

Janet Floyd, in Claims and Speculations: Mining and Writing in the Gilded Age (2012), links the Letters to the “truth-telling rhetoric of the travel narrative,” emphasizing Shirley’s awareness of her readers’ anticipations of both the “strange and predictable” that were typical of the genre (43; 44). This mixed effusion and truth-telling are representative of the epistolary genre when attached to the literature of encounter: the author presents the amazing or unbelievable, and, because their account is first-person and framed as nonfictional, its “truth” is self-validating. Such truth can only be gotten by “being there”; it can only be witnessed on the ground. Interwoven in this genre are references to recognizable places and things for comparison with those back home that smooth out incongruities. This presents the reader with verisimilitude and reference points. So too, such accounts are filled with references to classical literature meant to elevate the experience. At the same time, though, the inclusion of classical literature into narratives of encounter naturalizes the new place with known inscriptions, just as any
familiar reference might. Finally, as Nathaniel Lewis has shown, such encounter narratives, whether epistolary or not, were utterly interwoven with scenes and tropes from prior written accounts.\textsuperscript{18} The end result is the reinscription and overwriting of the unfamiliar, making it recognizable. On the other hand, whether a conceit or not, the personal tone the \textit{Letters} takes underscores the real change Shirley is undergoing. Indirectly and directly she proves her intimate knowledge of “the vulgar and profane” alongside the sublime (38-9).

The genre itself is entirely emplotted, then, gleaned from longstanding traditions, forming a pastiche made of genre conventions and new experiences and locales. Stephen Fender observes of western writing generally that “the more plotless the landscape, the more plotted the writing” (8). Although he is speaking of somewhat later fictions and the convolutions of their narratives, his description is apt in Shirley’s case because, in place of true emplotment, she overburdens her tales with references to the romantic canon. By virtue of her gender and education, Shirley’s commonplace is not the same as that which miners like Windeler and entrepreneurs like Delano experienced, and therefore the sublimity she often expresses is of a different kind. Specifically and starkly, because she conformed to the expectations of her gender, Shirley had very limited mobility compared to the miners themselves. She did not confront an ongoing geographic newness as the result of moving from prospect to prospect as many miners did. Her marvelous world is still the woman’s world of the period, the domestic sphere, her log cabin and its confines.

The sublimity of her document, then, is derived from the fearfulness of and
astonishment at the near at hand. Her sublime is found among the commonplace and her “truth-telling” is mostly gossip received at second-hand from her mulatto cook, Ned. For Shirley, it is an event to go down to the gravel bar on the river or over the knoll on which her cabin is perched. She observes but does not interact with the Maidu women in the area. Only once does she travel beyond the nearest ridgeline to the settlements beyond the diggings. As she puts it, she lives on a “tiny level” surrounded by mountains rising perpendicularly all around, so steep and high as to blot out the sun for months at a time (45). Her world is small indeed. As a result, the materials of her literature—and her everyday living—are those that are the most immediate. Throughout the Letters, this combination of immanence, immobility, and improvisation amounts to a particular awareness of locality that accentuates the significance of the near-at-hand in one sense, and the apparent necessity of coloring and overdetermining locality with the language of elsewhere in another.

For example, in her “Letter Seventh” dated October 7, 1851, written less than a month after she had entered the California diggings, Shirley expresses her regret over the paucity of civil pursuits and fresh food in the mines. Nonetheless, she writes to her sister Mary, whom she addresses familiarly as Molly, “I expect to be very happy here. This strange, odd life fascinates me” (50). The deliberate incongruity of this passage is telling because it balances the comforts of her past life against the freedom of her new situation. However, more intriguing is the hypothetical but moderately scandalous question Shirley goes on to pose:
How I shall ever be able to content myself to live in a decent, proper, well-behaved house, where toilet tables are toilet tables, and not an ingenious combination of trunk and claret cases, where lanterns are not broken bottles, book cases not candle boxes, and trunks not wash-stands, but every article of furniture, instead of being a make-shift, is its own useful and elegantly finished self, I am sure I do not know. (51)

By accepting things as they are at Indian Bar to the extent that she dismisses them as they should be, Shirley goes against the grain of propriety without doing more than describing the contents of her one-room log cabin on the river. Her celebration of the make-shift, though it is presented as a series of negatives, over the useful and elegant is an especially potent gendered expression of the improvisation Royce notes in the miners themselves. Here, in the faraway and primitive, yet still domestic space, Shirley strikes out against confinement, against that which is “decent, proper, and well-behaved.” Yet her comfort and reconciliation, however remarkable, are still aesthetically subordinate to the unyielding strangeness of her circumstances; hence the intrinsic “not-ness” of the objects she lists. Especially in the above passage, it is the strangeness of her appointments that promotes her “fascination,” and thus her epiphany. In “Letter Seventh” especially, Shirley has reconciled the known and the odd, the distant and the immediate in a palpable here-and-now. It is this combined effect of aesthetic expectation and material improvisation that creates her commonplace sublime. In one sense, we might compare Shirley’s above list to the concepts expressed by theorist Bill Brown as he extends his ideas about the
materialism of the period to encompass a more contemporary “thing theory,” an apparatus that resembles any number of ways scholars are expressing in-between-ness or a politics of relation today:

We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, how-ever momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. (4)

More Emmanuel Kant than Edmund Burke in his estimation of “thing-ness,” that is, that sublimity is “only in our own ideas,” Brown nonetheless directs our attention to one key point: ambiguity. Objects—in Shirley’s terms the “useful and elegant” furniture her sister in the East is accustomed to—are in her log cabin things signifying residually as that which they once were (claret cases, bottles), and presently as their current use proscribes (toilet tables, lanterns). Her furniture is and is not what it appears to be, and therefore—and more importantly to understanding how improvisation fits into postlocal expression—she is and is not who she had been. The shifting of the subject-object relation shared by the thing itself and the person who employs it in this moment in the *Letters* denotes the equalizing effect Shirley’s willingness to improvise has on her place-making. Her improvisational orientation expresses that as things—and Shirley—cease to signify as
they once had, they do so at the local level and under local circumstances.

The uncanniness of Shirley’s domestic scene results from the mutability of a thing put to an unintended, incongruous use. Though she tries to mask it with humor, her cabin exudes an oddness stemming from the fact that it is not a “well-behaved house”—eerie enough in itself—and too, that through it she has thus begun to consider being something other than a well-behaved woman. These are not just details related to “truth-telling” or authentic experience; they set a tone of incomplete unrecognizability that is at once strangely comforting to Shirley and certainly disorienting to her sister back East. The irony of the above scene from “Letter Seven” is that uncanny—in German unheimlich, meaning “unhomely” or “not of the home”—can be taken either literally, because Shirley’s cabin is ill-behaved, or not, because her strange housekeeping is utterly the point of the episode. The scene is precisely “of the home” even as it signifies oppositionally to it. We should not miss the significance of Shirley’s from below meaning-making. It is noteworthy that those objects and scenes Shirley renders sublime are commonplace things. The strange and the predictable—which were separate in Floyd’s usage but which are inextricable here—constitute a non-hierarchical near-and-far in practice. The language of the sublime (above; far), and the immanent, material, commonplace (below; near) are, in the Letters roughly equal forces, inseparable in a way that challenges us to rethink our positions on the possible closure of a limited local and an infinite global imagination.

This plastic exchange unmoors our ability to totalize and therefore stabilize a
sense of place, especially from outside and above and despite a consistent and unceasing taxonomizing that enables white—especially American—superiority in mining texts. The very nearness of her objects-turned-things-employed-as-objects (bottle-brokenbottle-bottlelantern) enables Shirley to simultaneously accept them as they are and refashion them, whereas at a distance such accommodation could hardly be so. It would unravel the epistemic nature of the system of exchange to which Brown draws our attention.

Thingness—the irruption of the flow “within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition”—stresses the exceedingly local character of everyday living in this regard. Locally, thingness disrupts but is accommodated; systemically, thingness refuses human intentionality: local = the broken bottle is a lantern; systemic = the broken bottle is trash—for a lantern can only be a lantern within the confines of capital, for wont of another term. Systems of power, be they institutional or political, exert their influences through epistemic narrative and enforce their boundaries by hard taxonomic ordering. By contrast, the experience of the lived space—as Henri Lefebvre calls it (39), or thirdspace as Soja renames it (10-11)—entails improvising within and/or against such systems. In Shirley’s case, removed from the confines of her Brahmin upbringing, the (re)ordering of domestic space at Rich Bar and Indian Bar reveals to her new ways of being. Localized accommodation and systemic intentionality together have proven necessary to our comprehension of the object and the thing—and I want to stress—to our place-making ultimately.20

Improvisation can denote a darker place-making, too. In “Letter Eleventh,”
Shirley describes the hanging of a thief at Rich Bar, “by the more reckless part of the community” (80). She remarks, “The whole affair… was a piece of cruel butchery,” because it “arose from the ignorance of those who made the preparations.” In this episode the miners perform their version of justice “in the most awkward manner.” In effect, they improvise, and do a poor job of it at that. Almost farcically, they haul the condemned man up and down several times in order to make sure their deed is done successfully. In fact, Shirley explains, both executioners and condemned seemed entirely surprised that the act was being performed at all. The thief, Shirley explains, despite his intoxication, “seemed startled into a consciousness of the awful reality of his position” once the rope was around his neck. Likewise, among those present, “almost everybody was surprised at the severity of the sentence; and many, with their hands on the cord, did not believe even then [sic] that it would be carried into effect” (80). This shared surprise underscores that all parties were performing an abstract “justice” they felt compelled towards as part of other, inherited narratives engrained from regions beyond the mines. Moreover, there is a sense that all along the trial had been a form of play, so far removed were all parties from forms of propriety they had known. Here, the residual script of court justice, because it is far more public than Shirley’s domestic construct above, does harm to the mining community. When improvisation is overtly social it can be dramatically impulsive and destructive.

Still, as the material consequence of this act washes over them, its incongruence with the place in which they find themselves comes as a shock. Within this shock that
Shirley registers lies one of the main challenges of postlocal place-making. While the Gold Rush commonsense suggests the miners’ distance from the “civilizing” influences of home allowed them freedoms to which they were unaccustomed, in this case the opposite seems true. Their unfamiliar surroundings, in fact, imparted a perceptible ethical response to the “justice” they were meting. Unexpectedly, “freedom” in the traditional western sense, attached as it is to exotic spaces and lawlessness, was often short-hand for debauchery, while here Shirley shows us that in the most intimate and immediate circumstances such spaces were actually de-exoticized, and, I would argue, to a degree decolonized. In light of the improvisational mode of place-making, although basic to western myth production, the frontier hanging is undercut in this, its earliest account, by the executioners’ misgivings. By recognizing their veritable implacement, the miners understand the implications of their task. If only for that anxious instant, their absolute implacement induces an ethical response that wishes it were and expected to be more in harmony with the place in which they abide.

Encased in the miners’ surprise is a more exact sense of their genuine location; it follows that the version of justice the miners perform has little to do with their real sense of what is just. They improvise at least in part according to script and against their better impulses. In my reading, Shirley’s explanation of the hanging ends less on a note of apology, and more like an explication of postlocality, in which the unvarnished nature of the balance of near-and-far is registered to all those present in this unfortunate episode. She explains that the hanging would have seemed less cruel had the condemned man
committed a more heinous act, or had been of an unlikeable temperament. But because this had not been the case, she explains, the outcome of the affair is dubious (81). The hanging accentuates the distance from home the miners have come, while it engenders a new realization of the place in which they find themselves. This does not, however, underwrite assumptions about the hard edges of near or far. Instead, this scene documents the co-implication of near-and-far, where both the miners’ act and their epiphany are mutually constituted.

The condemned man and his executioners realize, at once, that the thing they are doing is *out of place*. This is why the enforcement of the justice of other places dawns so suddenly on them in a manner that seems acutely unreal. In the moment when their actions are most consequential, they resonate most unbelievably. The miners’ ineptitude reenforces the sense that they only half understand the script they are following. Disoriented by their performance of the alien, or out-of-place act, the miners are more accurately and precisely aware of their immediate surroundings; or, they recognize their here-and-now in a way that had been unavailable to them. The proximal, at least for a moment, provides the moral clarity they had been lacking, even if it fails to change the course of their misadventure. While scenes such as this have been read as products of the “savage” space, when read for its elements of postlocal place-making, the opposite proves true. The poorly improvised script of justice, what we have since received popularly and inaccurately as frontier justice, instead falls flat. I maintain that nested within the miners’ shock at their own deed lies the end of the temporariness of their
residency. In enacting violent retribution upon a first-time offender their performance reaches beyond their previous, otherwise superficial, sense of place and self, into the unfortunate rapacity Stegner and others have described.

At the end of her stay on the Feather River, despite these and other harsh realities, Shirley leaves the Feather River watershed with a heavy heart. She explains that she had, “sent abroad [her] roots right lovingly” into Rich and Indian Bars’ “barren soil,” but had “gained unwonted strength” in what seemed to the outsider to be “unfavorable surroundings” (178). Shirley concludes resolutely that she is a changed person, “now perfectly healthy” (179; emphasis original). In these final lines Shirley’s trajectory moves her to reflect on her unavoidable sadness, on the roots she unexpectedly had put down, on the misconceptions outsiders might have of the mining camps on the Feather River, and on her newfound health. That all this has passed, and especially that Shirley is nevertheless leaving this place which has become so precious to her, is provocative. While Smith-Baranzini rightly names this passage one of Shirley’s “most private and powerful” (xxxii), in the same breath and more tellingly she depicts Shirley’s musings in this instance as “a fully intentional ritual.” Improvisation, then, both in its egalitarian and its more wasteful forms, is shown to be a potent form of place-making. Shirley’s time on the mountain, however brief, speaks to the traveling nature of place-making and the moving target of place. Especially, though, Shirley’s affective response to the watershed, her roots in it and ritualization of it, denote a prototypical form of reinhabitation. Her account of everyday life is comprised of both vernacular acts and genre conventions,
marks which typify postlocality

**Speculation: Delano and the Custom of the Country**

Equal to Clappe’s *Letters* in its importance to our understanding of the literature and history of the Gold Rush, Alonzo Delano’s *Life on the Plains and among the Diggings* helps to unearth and reconceptualize postlocal place-making through speculative acts. Sarah Jaquette Ray, for instance, remarks that “nature essays, promotional materials, government surveys, among other texts, wrote the way west” (86). Nathaniel Lewis agrees, arguing, “What makes nineteenth-century western literature so enthralling is our ability to witness exactly this simultaneous creation and unsettling of a regional past” (68). In this vein of conjoined aesthetic production and place-making, Nicolas Witschi calls *Life on the Plains* an “indispensable” text of the “most salient genre in the literary history of the Gold Rush, namely nonfictional prose” (79; 76). In sum, Delano’s place-making was a form of possession by reinscription. Additionally, each of these critics acknowledges that place-making of the kind Delano participated in functioned in his own self-interest as much as it did in service of U.S. imperialism. For this reason, Edward Watts, in his powerful rereading of U.S. imperialism in the West, urges that critics look beyond the binary construction of imperialism, whereby its actors are rendered simply as either self or other, inside or outside, dominant or dominated (461-2). Watts insists we recover settler subjectivity as “the double-minded settler” (461), “conceptualizing the *simultaneity* of settler identity” (462; emphasis original). To my
mind, this likewise loosens the hold of otherness marking indigeneity at the same time. Such a move gets beyond classifying every marginalized actor in the expansion narrative as “those you conquer,” and making “othered” bodies available only to violence and evanishment. Watts wants critics to remember the variety and unevenness of settlement on all sides, so that readings of the West operate in excess of mere reduction and typology as the basis for their claims. While settler colonial theory outlines a specifically deterministic “logic of elimination” (Wolfe 387) which seemingly confirms the critical work Watts hopes scholarship will move away from, as method, settler colonial critique is an effective way of illuminating territorial expansion and occupation in the Americas as an ongoing process.

Postlocal orientation like Delano’s, which operates ultimately in the speculative mode, performs the double work of place-making. Delano is, perhaps, an imperial agent by default whose place-making is in accord finally with displacement and disenfranchisement of indigenous peoples and ethnic others, even while his ground-level practices assert individual meanings. I maintain that Lewis and Watts coincidently but consequently employ “simultaneous” to their categorizations of writing like Delano’s. Again, the double work they discuss, though not put in these terms, elaborates the “in-between” space, or “thirdspace,” or “real-and-imagined” nature posited by geographers and critical regionalists, that accounts for postlocality throughout my work. In effect, each argues for subjectivities that resist type, and adhere instead to multiple, more complexly connected, aims and means.
Yet the script for speculation as it pertains to U.S. territorial expansion is narrowly conceived and clearly articulated across its archive. The speculator/agent surveys a prospect, and in his viewing, simultaneously claims and rewrites. The place-making strategy for the settlement of western spaces is even more grim. Patrick Wolfe asserts: “Settler colonialism destroys to replace” (388). Enlarging Wolfe’s fundamental precept, Lorenzo Veracini explains that at its most basic, “settler colonialism is about turning a place and a specific human material into something else, and, paradoxically and simultaneously, about a specific human material that remains true to itself in a place that is ‘other’” (313-4). In other words, the site of settler colonialism is space which can be overwritten—available, mutable, and contingent—while its indigenous populations are erasable, through combinations of genocide, assimilation, or narrative absence. Conversely, the subjectivity of the settler colonizer is fixed, assumed, and agential. We should recognize, then, too, that this mode of place-making is processional and continuing. Its constituent parts—place-as-site, limited agencies, uniform interpretations of time and narrative—should be recognizable as those means by which Tomlinson articulates modern-day deterritorialization, Auge construes non-places, and Pico Iyer realizes his position as a postmodern neighbor.

While the California Gold Rush is commonly perceived as a space of individual aspirations and its narrative unfolds as one of temporary residency, thus falling outside of present conceptions of settler coloniality, I contend that the record suggests exploitation and settlement were more closely entwined in the American mining imaginary than we
presently assume. The miners’ many letters and memoirs indicate a larger record of a nascent ecosocial imperialism that suggests an impulse toward long-term implacement in the region, in which national sovereignty and jurisdiction became the miners’ ultimate aim. As the American narrative of ownership took uniform shape in the imaginations of miners from the United States, place-making in the mines developed into the determined constitution of a new place and order.

My sense of the centrality of speculation in Delano’s work, and by extension the settler colonial project, stems from the predictive cast of his final chapters. Wayne Franklin, Albert Furtwangler, and Lee Clark Mitchell have each argued convincingly that nationalist narrative willfully preordained events on the frontier, wherein performativity and teleological emplotment reassures, stabilizes, and domesticates otherwise distant and dangerous locales. Delano’s account typifies a move across Gold Rush genres in which the speculative register exceeds the tenor of prospecting to entail instead the projections of certain conquest upon uncertain circumstances. Prediction, preordination, projection—Delano’s speculative acts are, in effect, temporal, exacting their erasures in two modes: anticipatory nostalgia and scripted certitude, each of which prefigure the systemic destruction and subsequent socio-environmental replacement Wolfe and Veracini locate at the root of settler colonialism.

*Life on the Plains* begins in the improvisational mode, with Delano recounting his personal trials and makings-do on his prairie crossing and in his first years in and around the mines. He follows the script of imperialist narrative more closely, though, as the text
closes. Improvisation enables Delano to interact successfully with the strange and volatile aspects of his environment, as it had Shirley. It is an intimate and personal act similar to hers. Finally, though, Delano performs more publicly, similar to Mary Louise Pratt’s “seeing-man,” who anchors strategies of what she calls an “anti-conquest” narrative (9). In this final phase, Delano’s clearly speculative mode falls squarely within the entrenched 500-year tradition of the New World report, in which, Wayne Franklin explains, the colonial agent relates what his government expects him to say (5). It becomes clear that Delano’s transference from improvisational and personal to successively speculative and public acts presses him toward a place-making that is totalizing and exclusive. His rhetorical strategy grows more impersonal, less culpable, more distant from on-the-ground, experiential meaning-making, exactly opposite from that of Dame Shirley.

Delano’s speculative ventures, as a miner, an artist, a land speculator, and as a muleteer and storekeeper entail a personal place-making that is very much an outcome of his need to adapt to the region. In its later phases, he participates in a cultural place-making enrapt in ideologies from outside of the region. In other words, his speculation hinges, in the beginning, on the immediate local natural and cultural conditions he finds in the camps of California, but eventually, it rests on a well-rehearsed set of imperial desires in which he, first, envisions the native peoples of California subdued, and second, the region’s wealth and settlement assured. Notably, it is at this point that Delano’s account extends the temporary residency narrative and attempts to inscribe his long-term occupation. On one hand, this move is a shift toward occupancy of the type Berg has
cautioned against. On the other, it nevertheless envisions the larger community that Royce suggests the miners refused, albeit at the expense of local meaning. Delano’s spirit of *bricolage* becomes, as it conforms to the national cause, “enterprise,” or, in Mitchell’s terms, it becomes complicit in a strain of “white energies” (15) fueling “absolutist notions of the superiority of Western civilization” (xv). The conditions of Delano’s implacement change very little, but the manner in which California signifies to him shifts dramatically as he looks ahead with certainty at the success of the nationalist project.

If objects-become-things project uncanniness on Shirley’s world in a manner that points to a pervasive local meaning-making, similar instances in Delano’s *Life on the Plains* contribute to our understanding of such entanglements underwriting place-making. Again, like Shirley, Delano is concerned with personal transformation foremost. Whereas the uncanniness of Shirley’s domestic situation is the impetus for self-transformation, in Delano the rough conditions of the diggings and the pursuit of wealth inscribes the miners’ bodies and demeanors with incongruity and unlikelihood. Delano explains that upon arrival in California, “starvation and misery stared [the miners] in the face” (242). Consequently:

> Many were happy at first in getting employment to pay their board; even those who never had been accustomed to labor at home, and who had been surrounded by the luxuries of life, were glad to get any servile employment adapted to their constitution and abilities. (242)

As a result of this urgency, California, Delano explains, “proved to be a leveler of pride,”
and indeed, “the tables seemed to be turned, for those who labored hard in a business that compared with digging wells and canals at home… were those who made the most money in mining” (242). Delano concludes: It was a common thing to see a statesman, a lawyer, a physician, a merchant, or clergymen, engaged in driving oxen and mules, cooking for his mess, at work for wages by the day, making hay, hauling wood, or filling menial offices. (242)

In other words, the actual local conditions on the ground in California dictated how one made his living regardless of who he had been before coming into the region. Although this is not incredibly revelatory, upon closer inspection we can see the same odd reversal of polarity as was present in the transformation of object to thing in Shirley’s account. First, those accustomed to luxury gladly accepted servile employment; second, the common laborer was best suited for success; and third, the best educated and most accomplished were reduced to performing the most menial tasks. The “leveler of pride” was the failure of the rigid binary arrangement of civilized and savage; or, at least, the breakdown of previous hierarchical arrangements of civil society in the strange California landscape, devoid as it was of infrastructure necessary to support such arrangements in far-flung camps.

This resulted in a parallel uncanniness in the people themselves. In Life on the Plains, people, like things, are deconstructed, revealing patent dependencies and—to borrow Karen Barad’s term—local intra-actions (33) that fragment the outcomes if not the intent of a traveling, hierarchical culture unable to fully superimpose itself on a
particularly resistant climate and geography. The “leveling” of pride, in this way, starts with the immediate, personal, and corporal, confounding reason and affirming incongruent relationships on one hand, and it exposes the absolutely constructed nature and object-order of national ambition on the other. The imposition of order from outside of the region, at least at first, was only a mixed success in California. Place, in effect, did not act as the miners wanted it to, just as the miners acted out in unexpected ways. And the two are not unrelated. From the uncertainty and incongruity expressed in Delano’s first-person account thus distilled and fictionalized in Bret Harte’s “The Luck of Roaring Camp” (1868), for example, we get:

The greatest scamp had a Raphael face, with a profusion of blond hair;

Oakhurst, a gambler, had the melancholy air and intellectual abstraction of a Hamlet; the coolest and most courageous man was scarcely over five feet in height, with a soft voice and an embarrassed, timid manner…The strongest man had but three fingers on his right hand; the best shot had but one eye. (102)

Because of passages such as this Stegner concludes that Harte was “neither very accurate nor very penetrating” in his observations of the society or character of the camps (viii). However, it is clear that Harte’s melodramas actually befit the inexorability of “the strange and predictable” attending the meaning-making playing out in the region. Indeed, Floyd writes that although Harte is often derided for his perceived “misrepresentation of mining,” she argues that in actuality he provides a valid portrait of the camps (39). She
insists that Harte addresses the environmental, social, and emotional consequences of the Gold Rush, and that the difference between Harte and Delano specifically is “not one of relative accuracy,” but rather of “authorial tactics” (40; 41). Floyd echoes the argument I have rehearsed above, emphasizing the thorniness of attempting to extricate the textual from the material in Gold Rush accounts, fictional or otherwise.

Still, as a component of Delano’s meaning-making, and western and American meaning-making more broadly, it can be said that this first form of speculation—improvisation—is mostly “dangerous” only by degrees, that in fact it is key to short-term survival. In *Life on the Plains* we see the “thingness” of Delano’s experience constantly at odds with a coherent and totalizing narrative in which California’s strangeness is made severally to conform to a predictability that may or may not be suited to the physical, material natural history of the place itself. It does, however, reflect the nationalist narrative of the times. In this fashion, Delano’s memoir emphatically expresses how speculation is demonstrative of a fluid, negotiated implacement, in the employ both of a personal ontological approach to place-making and an epistemological master narrative.

Whereas Shirley leaves the diggings convinced she has been changed by them, Delano leaves convinced that the region can be brought under control. By well-rehearsed gendered appeals that might illuminate this difference, Thomas J. Lyon ascribes certainty like Delano’s to the egotism of expansionist behavior, much as Mitchell had, but Lyon explains that an unlooked-for consequence of American expansionism was that the attitudes attending it did “not see context and relation very well, and thus [tended] not to
notice the ‘side effects’ of its activities, overlooking information that could urge self-restraint” (18-19). Instead, those engaged in speculation, like Delano, became “preoccupied with use” (19). Lyon identifies that the “focus on utility not only seems to hinder perception of basic, practical relations… but also to limit the possibility of empathy.” Lyon’s final claim is crucial to our understanding of contemporary place-making. As place-making becomes successively more remote from local contexts—more totalizing—it narrows local signification. As a consequence, that necessary empathy for a locale and its people—Shirley’s “roots” and “ritual,” for example—gets overlooked or abandoned, with, in Lyon’s words, “little apparent reflection” (19). Particularly, I would add, this lack is so in regard to the subsequent dehumanization of local groups and the regulation and transformation of local ecologies. Valued solely according to utility (reduced to “site,” available for overwriting), this unreflective mode dehumanizes the local Indians in the first case, and strips the land in the second. The ability to reinsert context and relation into the discussion about any given place, then, is to salvage meaning much as Branch advises.29

In place-making we might say that although the climate, natural history, and geography in Delano’s California are fixed, their cultural significance, in his experience, is largely variable and highly susceptible to reversals of signification. His speculation becomes a projection of the nationalist narrative, and, as such, begins to regulate that space which had only just been so threatening to his health and well-being. While Franklin explains that projections or predictions such as Delano’s in which the land is
ultimately ordered according to imperial desire conspired to undo the inherent uncertainty of encounter (7), Lyon, too, explains that this impulse is a matter of engendering security and a way of laying claim to a region where one has none (18).

Delano’s anticipatory nostalgia for the passing of indigenous peoples is the most radical of his erasures. He conforms very closely, in a distinctly American vein, to Pratt’s sense of “readability,” in which “strategies of representation” are employed by bourgeois subjects seeking “to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony” (9). The result is a kind of anti-conquest narrative in which the seeing-man’s “imperial eyes passively look out and possess.” Though his work predates Pratt’s taxonomy, in *Witnesses to a Vanishing America: The Nineteenth Century Response* (1981), Mitchell describes a similar “undercurrent of apprehension” underlying the American imperialist project in the western lands (xiv) that does the same cultural work as the seeing-man’s passive gaze. More specifically, Mitchell demonstrates that the Indian and the “wild” landscape were conjoined in the minds of the American adventurers at the time. The Indian, as “the human symbol of that evanescent experience” of the passing from wilderness to civilization, “sparked questions to trouble Americans’ complacency about themselves and their mission westward” (xiv; 10). In effect, by mingling the elegiac and prophetic modes, Delano engages in a sort of nationalist home-making, transforming the *unheimlich* California into *heimlich*. Speculation of this second kind is necessary for turning aspirations into inevitabilities. The strange is made predictable.
During his time as their neighbor, Delano presents himself to the local Maidu alternately as a magician (282) and a doctor (294), and to his reader he exhibits an interest in phrenology and their natural history (283).\textsuperscript{30} In kind, Delano records a short dictionary of Maidu words and phrases, reports on their familial and communal habits, and on their attire—all in the service of relating Maidu life-ways in the face of their impending doom. Much as Pratt’s seeing-man, finally, he comments on the inevitability of the Maidu’s fate before the “civilizing” influence of the Americans (319-20).

Speculation on loss, in this way, frames the Indian population of the Feather River region squarely as an artifact of the past before they are materially gone.\textsuperscript{31} Really, then, it is on this point that Delano’s regard for the Maidu through the lens of a seeing-man acts as a transition from improvisation to speculation, ranging from the personal to the nationalistic, from conjecture to script.

Delano’s reality, of course, was far grittier. James J. Rawls, in \textit{Indians of California: The Changing Image} (1986), explains that on the ground, “California, because it was the most rapidly developing region of the new far western territories, became the crucible in which the United States was compelled to design an alternative method of handling its Indian population” (141). Rawls emphasizes that in the eyes of the new California government the Indians had two choices: “extermination or domestication.” Delano’s narrative attaches itself to this difficult fact in the final passage relating his experiences with the Maidu:

\begin{quote}
I do not mean to appear as their apologist, but I do think that their
\end{quote}
character is not well understood by the mass of people, and that their good will might be gained by conciliation, kindness and justice, if they can be kept free from malign influences, and that the principles of civilization may be instilled into their minds. But this will never be. Once in contact with the whites, they learn their vices without understanding their virtues; and it will not be long before intemperance, disease and feuds will end in their extermination, or complete debasement, and these once powerful tribes, like those upon the Atlantic shores, will have passed away, or be but a wreck of miserable humanity. (319-20)

In this extended seeing-man’s lament, Delano asks forgiveness of his reader for acknowledging that Maidu life-ways deserve settlers’ understanding. Yet the key turn of Delano’s lament from elegy to prophecy is contained in the jarring phrase: “But this will never be.” Perhaps realizing that “conciliation” does not exist in the settler colonial milieu, Delano still refuses to concede that his version of civilization is the malign influence. With grim certainty, the ideological work of prophecy appeals to the master narrative of U.S. expansion, wherein California’s indigenous population uniformly lacks not only the cultural experience to navigate contact with the miners, but also the intrinsic moral fortitude to avoid the miners’ vices. In effect, the Maidu are too “primitive,” are too marginal to make the transition into “civilization.” The above passage moves from possibility, to ambiguity, to assuredness. Delano concludes: “the inevitable destiny of the race is beyond the power or wisdom of man to avert” (320). While this last line might
admit the short-comings of “civilized” man, as platitude it also absolves him. In both cases, turning on the phrase “never be,” it is clear that the Maidu would be “exterminated” (pass away), or “domesticated” (a wreck of miserable humanity), just as Rawls suggests the plan was all along. Delano’s account of the Maidu thus ends as he places further rhetorical distance between himself, the behavior of the miners, and the fate of the Maidu. Couched in a quotation from an official proclamation, he thus legitimizes his claims:

But these two races cannot exist in contact, and one must invariably yield to the other; and it was justly remarked by Governor Burnett, in his annual message of January, 1851: ‘That a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the two races, until the Indian race becomes extinct, must be expected. While we cannot anticipate this result but with painful regret, the inevitable destiny of the race is beyond the power or wisdom of man to avert.’ (320)

Over several pages leading up to this final passage, Delano had described his distinctly genial interactions with the Maidu, providing evidence that “the two races” could in fact coexist. Ignoring his own firsthand experience, though, his employment of Burnett’s language—“war of extermination,” “extinct,” “expected,” “inevitable destiny”—reveals the onrushing scripted certitude of the final phase of speculation, even while Burnett’s “anticipate this result but with painful regret” broadcasts the apprehension Mitchell points out as common to this genre. Indeed, Delano’s remarks and citation are not just
passive, but passive-aggressive, full of menace even as they mourn the fact that the Indians’ fate is beyond white power or wisdom to avert. These phrases mingling domination with grief function as pivot words, willing the Maidu’s demise even as they assure the seeing-man that there is nothing to be done about it.

It is clear that speculation as loss or as a form of anticipatory nostalgia such as Delano’s is intimately related to imperial erasure in the interests of empire. Here, though, too, Delano’s rhetorical work indicates a continuum with our own postlocality in the era of postnational neoliberalism. His act of scripting narratives of dominion operates against ground-level meaning-making. While the language of globalization purports inclusion, the slow violence Rob Nixon exposes is intimately related to colonial exploitation, if less overtly dramatic. The Gold Rush archive repeats this move across many of its leading texts. When registered as loss, speculation downplays the seer-eraser’s accountability in the process of displacing people and the misuse of land; in contemporary place-making it produces Iyer’s “postmodern neighbor” and metes Nixon’s “slow violence” in places around the globe. Notable in Delano’s meaning-making, then, should be that although he has maintained close personal experience with the Maidu, he inevitably adopts the nationalist attitude, ultimately performing a kind of betrayal. Postnational implacement by turns reduces one’s sense of responsibility to any of those locales with which a given region is entangled. With his particular audience in mind, Delano remains true to the imperially-scripted-known rather than allying himself with an alien culture despite his personal, immediate positive experience with them. The authority of his ground-level
meaning-making is usurped as he conforms to the conventions of the encounter narrative he is performing, as if those conventions outweigh actual experience. In sum, nostalgic erasure promotes a “virgin land,” a racial-social-environmental clearing of the space—destroying to replace—for an entirely new signification of local meaning to germinate. The Maidu become mere collateral damage of America’s strategic expansionist teleology, part of its institutional historiography."33"

From this point, Delano shifts from a strategy that foretells what will be lost to that which will replace those lost cultures and landscapes. In essence, to prospect is to speculate; yet a prospect, too, is an estimation of one’s hopes based upon that which one can survey. Delano’s prospecting by the end of Life on the Plains amounts to something that looks like plain common sense, that most insidious form of violence. For instance, Mitchell describes “absolutist notions of white superiority” attending westward expansion. This commonsense found root in California in the sad but certain elision of the Indians, justified because the miners saw “the contrast between the land of California and its unworthy, indolent [Native] population” (Rawls 28). Rawls explains that in the eyes of those who would have its resources for themselves, “California, for all its abundance, fertility, natural beauty, and potential for wealth, required a population worthy of developing it.” In other words, in the minds of miners and would-be settlers, once the lazy unworthy were cleared from the land, it could be remade as a properly pastoral landscape, or, as Michael Kowalewski relates, the miners, “saw only a mute, ahistorical landscape, physically rich but devoid of previous cultural accretions of meaning” (xix).
Delano, imagining a California of the near future, writes in the same vein: “With regard to the resources of California, Nature has indeed been bountiful, and if they are properly developed, no State in the Union can present a greater amount of real wealth” (381). Superiority, worthiness, “proper” development; each relates to a kind of ecological imperialism in which past local usage, because it does not reflect the structure or form of American pastoralism, is cast aside without regard, just as Lyon had observed.34

Delano reports that ensuing vegetable and grain production quickly supplied a surplus. Likewise, he speculates that in the foreseeable future wheat, sugar cane, cotton, and tea would each be produced in enough volume so as to end the need for their importation into the region. He remarks on the possibility of reclaiming marshland for the production of rice, the damming of rivers for power, and the harvesting of timber (383).35 All of this he “venture[s] to predict” (382). And despite all hardships he and his fellow miners encountered, he tells his reader that “the climate is delightful and salubrious” (383).

Behind his predictions, however, were the equally material changes in the lives of the Maidu to whom he had been a neighbor. The German adventurer Albert Gerstacker, in the region at the same time and whose account was published the same year as Delano’s, writes that the miners took possession of the Indians’ “former homes, destroyed their hunting grounds and fisheries, burnt down their acorn groves, and cut them off from all those means of subsistence a kind Providence had created for their maintenance, and taken away from them the possibility of their existing” (219). What Gerstacker
recognizes and Delano refuses to recognize, is the very conscious seasonal adaptations
the Maidu had perfected for long-term residency and the wild richness they already
enjoyed. If part of the elegiac tradition is that it is followed by some form of consolation,
Delano is decidedly unencumbered with more than his own partial truth as he predicts
California’s eventual fruitfulness.

Ultimately, Delano’s account reveals that the dangers of speculation are precisely
this: the entanglement of near-and-far can play out tragically unevenly. The nationalist
narrative Delano predicts and imposes imaginatively onto some near future is, Edward W.
Said reminds us, “circumscribed and socially regulated” (80). On one hand, examining
speculation allows us to contemplate the role of futurity in place-making; but on the other
and with Said in mind, considering speculation likewise enables investigations about the
simultaneity of various temporalities informing place-making as well. Delano is, after all,
composing his narrative from his journal and letters—in effect, recreating a narrative
present from notes he had made in the past regarding California’s future. Said suggests
that investigating such slippery temporality brings a “new urgency” to “understanding the
pastness or not of the past (sic),” carrying over “into perceptions of the present and
future” (7). If Said implies in this case that empire’s past is still with us, present in its
influence on our everyday lives—and hence the ongoing unevenness of exchange
between local and global, I would add—the “or not” of his claim can also call into
question empire’s rhetoric of truth, especially when it relegates California’s Indians to
victimhood and partitions the seeing-man from the repercussions of his conquest.
Isolation: Windeler, Elsewhere, Here

If Shirley provokes questions of adaptation to a place, and Delano informs critiques of the social construction of place, Adolphus Windeler is instructive because he relates private desire seemingly removed from any master narrative informing place creation. Without the audience expectations toward which Shirley and Delano wrote, Windeler’s document of place-making is not fraught with externally imposed and deliberate devices beyond those he has inherited and employed unselfconsciously. Instead, his is an account of impulses, immediate needs, and aspirations, descriptions of work, food, and weather. In this case, Windeler’s account is no different than most other Gold Rush diaries, which plot the daily successes and hopes and drabness of mining life. With its consistent subtext of yawning isolation brimming below a surface of mundane occurrences, though, Windeler indirectly creates a clear, rhythmic sense of how knowledge of a place is produced by moving in and through it, but also through its recording and retelling.

The historian W. Turrentine Jackson, who reproduced the diary from Windeler’s original, offers four reasons why Windeler’s diary is important because: 1) it provides detailed descriptions of mining practices; 2) it closely follows the routes and events of Louise Clappe’s Letters; 3) it is one of the few Gold Rush accounts accompanied by illustrations; and 4) it provides a detailed account of the miners’ day-to-day life that often proves very different from the stereotype (11-15). Jackson remarks that while
Shirley, “commented upon [events] after observing them from a discreet distance,” more often than not, Windeler participated in them, including both hangings Shirley recounts.\textsuperscript{37} Windeler’s diary and Shirley’s \textit{Letters}, Jackson concludes, “corroborate and augment” one another—but it is Windeler’s that records the practice of everyday mining life at firsthand (13). Windeler’s diary begins in Boston and ends abruptly, without incident, in the Contra Costa hills east of San Francisco, where Windeler decides to practice farming with the help of friends. During his time as a miner he lived briefly in the Yuba River drainage, and up and down the reaches of the Feather River watershed, with a brief sojourn into the region in and around Butte Creek to the north. However partially, his story figures into Shirley’s, Delano’s, Peter Lassen’s, and Squire Bonner and James P. Beckwourth’s, making his augmentations and corroborations indeed essential to the representative record of place-making in the Feather River district.\textsuperscript{38}

While Shirley was sorry to leave the mines and the odd liberties they afforded her, and Delano imagined taming and controlling the California landscape, Windeler’s journal describes a person torn between leaving and staying. For him, “here” as well as “there” are alternately full of promise and regret. These three authors together offer distinct examples of spatial orientation: Shirley’s uncanny participates in disruptive but legible routes of relation; Delano’s institutional historiography populates a space that is planned and regulated in advance according to normalized beliefs along those same routes; and Windeler’s life apart is predictable but idiosyncratic in its embeddedness—he wants to follow a script of religious obedience and redemption, and yet, again and again, he
realizes that California has marked him indelibly.\textsuperscript{39}

Improvisation and speculation are orientations. They are responses to and outcomes of an isolate’s situation. Isolation, though, is an orientation and a condition, at once active and passive as it characterizes meaning-making. To recognize these discrete nuances facilitates yet another way to illuminate postlocality and vernacular place-making. Among Shirley, Delano, and Windeler, it is Windeler alone who refuses to strike a triumphal tone. California had made him a failure according to his private aims. Windeler’s experience in the Feather River watershed is less introspective, rooted, and ritualized than Shirley’s record, and entirely unscripted according to an extra-regional ecosocial agenda. Of the three, Windeler most closely records the actual ground-level conditions of everyday implacement among the accumulated layers of near-and-far.

Windeler’s isolation is similar to Shirley’s improvisational ground-level meaning-making. His place-making through contact, through experience, through inter- and intra-action with the landscape records an embodied practice. Compared to the later chapters of Delano’s account, the dominant mode of place-making is inscription or imposition of nationalist or institutional meaning. Even in his candid moments Delano is writing to the world, manufacturing a place rather than capturing a material experience. Genre is the source of this distinction between Windeler the diarist and Delano the journalist, but it is not at the root of it, I believe. To Delano’s scripted certitude there is a kind of insularity, that inability to witness context and relation Lyon spoke of and which is related to vertical, map-like perspectives; Windeler’s account is all painful, practical sensuality—
personal, but in no way insular, for, as Jackson explains, “the miners’ environment was cosmopolitan” (18). Windeler, a moderately successful and then unsuccessful miner by 1853, the final year of his diary, like Shirley experienced a weird kind of liberty. Although he was often overcome by hunger, misfortune, disappointment, and dejection, he was mobile, on the whole healthy, and largely free from societal constraint. In a key sense, what we think of as isolation—often pointed to as the predominant condition of the mines—is a matter of place-making through quotidian activity, through self-reliance and movement, that acts more like biography than historiography. In this mode, Windeler’s lived experience advances personhood and place- hood together, in relation to and in the context of one another.

In the winter of 1852-53, by all accounts a hard one because of extreme weather and failed claims, Windeler found God and was looking for redemption. He was living outside of Ophir City (Oroville) in a cabin he and his partners had made the year before. His spiritual search became an abstraction for his last, failing hope of getting rich. Three years in the mines had taught him the realities of life in the diggings, and it seems as if his new belief in God was an extension of his journaling, an act which Fender describes as a form of staving off chaos and barbarism (68; 69), but which for Windeler by this time had become stale in the repetition of its dispiriting details. Early in the year, before he and his partners went prospecting far and wide across the middle and upper Feather River watershed, he reflects:

Live in hopes and expectation… We talk of home and friends, but if ever
we see them again or not is the question, and then when and how. Are my brothers and sister alive and well yet, I ask myself often, and I think that I had better go with my 1000$ and help them as much as I can. But then again comes the great knot, here I am now in California, and well so far. Now you must make as much as you can, for after you leave here once it will be hard to come back again, though I am getting rather old already and don't know if I will get home again… God’s providence watches over us in any place, so I trust God to bring out all things right, and with that assurance I will work all I can and leave it to him who guides all our ways, to do as he sees fit. (161-2)

Steeped in utter presentism, this passage reveals a grim resolve that is nonetheless crumbling. Windeler’s here and there—California and Germany—have an equal pull on him; the former for what it might yield, the latter for what it has meant all along. Conflicted, Windeler has reached an impasse in which he can return home moderately wealthy or, if he stays in California, perhaps very wealthy. He can only speculate on his loved ones’ well-being, while of his own he is barely confident. The “great knot,” then, is the crux of this passage: he must reconcile his desire to see home and hearth again, and yet he finds that he truly does not want to leave! Deflecting what he knows to be the paradox of his desires onto God’s will, he demurs to divine providence, and, in the process, he defuses some of the antagonistic presentism that burdens his conscience. His dilemma is one of a fully realized postlocality, by which I mean his near-and-far is
something he constantly struggles to reconcile, and the distance his empathy travels is long but often weakened from his time apart and immediate circumstances.

By the end of April, their diggings in peril of being washed away by spring floods, Windeler’s bouts with guilt and hope head toward a climax: “O how I should like to be truly penitent for my sins and transgressions, and through the help of the holy Ghost be made a Christian! God help me!” (173). He continues the following day, “I am trying but if God does not help, it will be all in vain. But I hope yet by calling on the Lord J. Christ to prevail and gain the victory over sin… God give my purpose strength.” These pleas oscillate with frank reports on his partners’ luck, his expenditures, and the weather, making a cluttered but plainspoken prayer comprised of material and spiritual facts out of which he constructs his real-and-imagined place. Immanent matters, which cannot be disentangled from those that are distant, absent, and abstract, mediate his experience. Windeler’s Christian script, rather than attaching itself to the imperialist script Delano followed, remained a matter of personal faith. Instead of leading him toward territorialization as it so often had in other globalist narratives, Windeler’s fragile spirituality intermingles with his circumstances, amending his personal landscape.

Two weeks later, Windeler and his partners sell out their claim to neighbors and head back up to the East Branch of the North Fork of the Feather River, near to where they had, for a short while, gotten good color. Desirous of home, unable to bring himself to leave, Windeler expresses his guilt and dejection as restlessness, wandering over familiar ground, encountering old friends, walking worn trails, searching for some
prospect he might have missed in his first seasons in the higher mountains. His travels in the country gain a kind of force and momentum of their own. In a sense, they are ritualized much as Shirley’s elegy on leaving had been, though they are acts more than words. Movement is foremost in his account, even if his new-found spirituality frames it. Windeler’s claims of isolation, really, become rote; he is never away from people he recognizes or landscapes with which he is already intimate. The very meaning of isolation, then, is suspect. The whole of which he is a part has shifted; his personal local attachments are enlarged; entrenched in the watershed and its mining culture, he is isolated only from a past from which he grows more detached with the passing of time.

Pressure, and the constant, immediate presence of Windeler’s passionate guilt returns us to Shirley’s description of the hanging at Rich Bar. Windeler was, in fact, one of those seemingly inept executioners who hoisted the condemned man’s body again and again to make certain their deed was done. While in Shirley’s narrative the miners’ apparent shock and surprise as they enact the deed is, to me, a sure sign of their awakening awareness of being in-place, Windeler’s very bodily connection to the condemned man even more starkly registers the power of immanent placement. Although his account lacks the sentimental tone and urgency of Shirley’s appeal, it imparts a realism that hers only approaches. For in fact, as a life-long seaman, Windeler would most likely have had direct acquaintance with such measures, and the act as he describes it implies he understood the ways and means of a hanging. Dispassionately, Windeler remembers the proceedings from the morning of the trial through the burying of the dead
man:

David Brown (this was AM 8 ocl.) condemned to be hung at 4 ocl. PM. then I, Br. & H had to go up on the burial hill & dig a grave a little distance from the graveyard. An oak tree close by chosen for a gibbet, James brought up a rope, noose fixed & greased, I hove the rope over a limb of the tree, & at 4 oCl. the prisoner led up to execution. He was asked by the sheriff if he had any thing to say. No he said. So the noose was fixed round his neck, a white cloth drawn over his face, & at the word given by the Sheriff we hoisted him up & I belayed the ropes end round a stump then he was forked up & down several times to break his neck… After having hung 1/2 hour he was put in a coffin & buried… Thus ends the life of DG Brown, Organ player by profession, Sailor by trade. He says he has a mother living in Stockholm, where he was born, but had been a long time in Holland. (127)

The succinctness of Windeler’s remarks suggest the fatalism that he and his peers were accustomed to. His class, foremost, underlies his matter-of-fact retelling. Further, despite his class, the near-and-far of the lives of all this sequence’s players extends our understanding of just how globally routed vernacular existence in the mines truly was. Shocked or not, Windeler’s “isolation” entailed the hanging of a man from Stockholm on the Feather River in Northern California, by a sailor from Hamburg via Boston, along with others, and was witnessed by onlookers from Boston, Mexico, Hawaii, South
America, and elsewhere. This underlines quite distinctly the unexpected ways in which globalization is a local event.

Windeler participates in the Gold Rush narrative despite his claims of loneliness. He chooses to be isolated from friends and family, from “civilization,” but by no means is he secluded or solitary or is his existence detached from the routes binding elsewhere and here. Thinking of the generic traits of what Conliffe calls the “isolation story,” it can be said that Windeler’s isolation is only partly social, is mental in a diminishing sense, but hardly physical (116). These facts should lessen critical attention to distance as we reconcile the interdependencies of the near-at-hand and the faraway. We should remember that connectivity cannot simply be interpreted as scalar. Conliffe writes that, most often, “one part [either the social, the mental, or the physical] is made to be separate, and that that part has roots in the whole” (117). In other words, one’s isolation is *never* complete; it is intimately and simultaneously intertwined with memory, desire, and imagination. Remarkably, isolation does not reflect difference or otherness, but rather one’s ties to every part of a changing whole (117).

Seemingly antithetically to the previous statement, Conliffe also explains that isolation “forces [the isolate] to face his immediate environment.” Thus, the very immediacy of isolation reflects a spatiality and a temporality that binds past, present, and future places into an unavoidable but instructive “nowness” (118) not unlike the burdensome, guilty presentness Windeler expresses. One’s sense of belonging, then, undergirds the isolation story just as it does implanation. What comes across in
Windeler’s diary as sequestration, in fact, dramatically resembles place-making. His diary makes manifest his “discontent and acceptance,” his “inner as well as the outer reaction” to his circumstances (Conliffe 121). Yet the narrative of prospecting, of moving to a more promising site, followed by hope and hard work, anxiety for success coupled with recrimination over past failures and unfulfilled responsibilities, diligence and commitment to the task at hand, and then restlessness, enumerates an emotional isolation that is yet undercut by the embodied participation in the demands of life among the diggings. The miner tells an isolation story; the isolation story is the story of place-making; the isolate is never wholly alone. His place of belonging is contingent; it contains, and is contained within, where Windeler wants to be. Extraordinarily poignant, then, is his readers’ uncertain ability to discern where Windeler really desires to call home.41

Kowalewski explains that “everyone was watching everyone else and confiding their opinions to friends, to barroom or campfire acquaintances who spoke the same language, or in their private journals and letters home” (xx; emphasis original). This notion of watching and confiding—seeing and retelling as one moves from camp to camp, is vital to the way we have come to understand place-making, particularly as the outcome of movement, of familiarization gotten by moving in or through. It is compelling in this regard to note that the anthropologist Tim Ingold, after Erving Goffman, figures walking as a visual activity as well as an intrinsically social one (43). Assembling pieces of narrative conventions, conventions specific to isolation stories, and
aspects of place-making with details of Windeler’s narrative, exemplifies how movement enables him to become familiar with his surroundings, de-exoticize his neighbors, and become entrenched in the culture of the place. Seeing, moving, confiding: these are acts of familiarization very different from Delano’s U.S. American version of Pratt’s seeing-man. Windeler, instead of imposing order, sees patterns:

That is California, make sluices and everything, and then find the diggings won't pay, have to up stick and away we go, leave everything behind. Well we hope for better luck next time. God knows what is best for me so I must follow. (189)

I and Strain [Windeler’s partner] hunted again, seen 2 deer, shot at one but did not kill it. Went up a pretty high mountain where there were plenty of deer trail but no deer… Went down steepest hill yet. Went by Taylor’s ranch and saw Mr Gallagher from the North fork. So we live in california. Once in a while do nothing and make nothing. Go hunting and find no game. Hard traveling over the mountains and neck breaking going down. Come across plenty of berries of which I ate as much as I wanted. Hope for better times yet, but it looks as though I would not make anything this season. (189-90)

Windeler’s knowing, his place-sense, is found in such pattern recognition. We see in his journal entries the up and down of miners’ exploits, but also the geographical up and
down. In the first passage his “that is California” speaks to the boom and bust narrative of life in the region; his “so we live in california” in the second passage does too, but it more exactly relates to geography and survivability. Body and narrative together compose the story of the region in this regard. The prospect of isolation takes a new shape as the patterns of being in place are revealed.

**Conclusion: Postlocal Entanglements**

Taken alone, it is hard to find in miners’ accounts the sustainable land ethic Branch asserts exists in such documents. As recovery narratives of the miners’ immanent meaning-making, however, miners’ accounts can become part of a new story of reinhabitation of the Northern California region, part of a deeper watershed narrative of place. With miners’ absence of baggage and responsibility in mind, the present chapter remembers that basic tenet of bioregionalism—reinhabitation—or “learning to live-in-place in an area that has been disrupted and injured through past exploitation” (Berg and Dasmann, *Separate* 217). Though the miners were the exploiters and it is largely their poor practices that set in motion the despoliation of the West generally, the same miners also had to learn to provide for themselves while in the diggings. So while Berg insists that “the Myth of the West is a biocidal beacon” (*Envisioning* 63), others have acknowledged that it contains reclaimable, usable parts, much as Branch maintains. 43

What I mean to convey is the spatiality of improvisation, speculation, and isolation. As spatial orientations each establishes an interpretive framework for
unpacking place-making today. While we think of place-making as somehow different in postmodernity—less about territory and more about mobility, less about knowing and more about being—it is likewise important to acknowledge that place-making is an unfolding experience, and that we can extend the origins of our present circumstances to far earlier, unexpected regional productions. I carry these orientations forward through the ensuing chapters, attending to how they evolve under changing regional circumstances. Speculation, especially, returns in the final chapter as a reclamation and undoing of California’s past. Ernest Callenbach particularly, but Kim Stanley Robinson and Octavia E. Butler as well, glean from a past that is serviceable, even while they argue against imperial projections that had imposed an illogical order onto particular landscapes and which set in motion a rapacious, utilitarian approach to place. The language of speculation in what I am calling speculative regionalism is utopian in this regard. However, it should not be assumed that Delano’s speculation was not equally utopian, though in the service of imposed order instead of order dictated by natural history and resilience. We still think of regionalism as something static, as backward looking, as that force which stabilizes the onrushing temporalities of modern times. Instead, in these early moments, we can see it as fluid, as an agent of ecosocial change.

The miners’ rapacity stemmed from a disregard for the individuation of places; distant from their “real” homes, they were able to impose a detached meaning or order onto the California landscape even if at first they had been dominated by it. Yet their prescriptive meaning-making missed the indivisibility of substance and meaning—the
real-and-imagined—and therefore, also missed the signs that guide a culture toward living \textit{in} (with empathy) rather than \textit{on} (with disregard for) a place. In broad terms, we too often suppose we can assign meaning, instead of recognizing the substantive, material imperative at the root of meaning. In encounter narratives like Shirley’s and Delano’s, the boundaries of signification are imposed and enforced widely, but they meet with slippage in each iteration, requiring either constant policing or ongoing consensus. Perseverance, found in equal measure in these three accounts, is our moral lesson, but negotiation is the far murkier real foundation of the trope of renewal central to what we have come to accept as western regionalism or a tangible “west-ness.” The crucial move towards delinking exploitive practices in favor of sustainable, rehabitatory practice lies in “the knot” of ground-level meaning-making.
Chapter 2:

In “Jarring Proximity”:

The Problem of Simultaneity in *The Valley of the Moon, The Ford, and Oil!*

**Regionalism, Naturalism, Simultaneity, Anxiety**

The first chapter of this project dealt with acts of orientation in everyday life. Drawing attention to the California Gold Rush as a formative global vernacular moment, my reading of place-making in texts from the Feather River watershed during that period interrogated the strategies of everyday implacement in a distant, strange, and unfamiliar landscape. I argued that *how* one approaches place-making determines how he or she perceives the entanglements of near-and-far, and ultimately his or her ecosocial obligations to any given place and to the world. Getting into place in an era of globally routed culture, I maintain, presents the challenge of coming to terms with one’s postlocality; of navigating the meaning of a *simultaneous* here-and-there rather than a *separable* here-or-there. If the Gold Rush marks a vernacular globality—or, a discernible postlocality—at the advent of settler colonialism in California, the present chapter examines fictional renderings of California’s landscape in the ensuing decades under the burden of industrialization and world-wide capital in a landscape that has been settled in the American vein. Specifically, following my analysis of individual orientation in the previous chapter, I am interested here in evaluating the social effects of simultaneity in an occupied, industrialized, inextricably globally linked environment: the New West.45
The last chapter dealt with solitary individuals getting into a new place; the present chapter analyzes the problems of remaining there as entrenched rural lifeways give way to industrial modernity. Orientation is an act of “fixing” a place in time, of stabilizing one’s environment to suit one’s personal, material, and cultural needs. Yet the inherent simultaneity of a globally routed existence precludes any such stable or static, immutable condition. Place-making is not a matter of being, but of constant becoming; in this case, of maintaining selfhood in the face of an accelerated becoming previously unknown to everyday life. The trials of postlocality, then, unfold not precisely in the tensions produced in the iteration of place, but in the problem of accelerated change and the inability to grasp the shifting copresence of near-and-far in the places we inhabit.

For, as philosopher Gaston Bachelard makes plain: “Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains” (211). That is, when characterized by stark divisions, outside and inside obscure the spatial and conceptual alternatives of ecosocial commonality and interconnection underlying life in place today. It follows, then, that the novels I treat here —Jack London’s *The Valley of the Moon* (1913), Mary Austin’s *The Ford* (1917), and Upton Sinclair’s *Oil!* (1926)—matter because, to borrow Raymond Williams’s phrase, they are “symptomatic but in some ways diagnostic” (2) of a nascent, emerging global modernity. These three novels depict valuable expressions of individuals and society coming to grips with the confusion of fluid, interpenetrating, and rhizomatic manifestations of ground-level globalization.
As these novels suggest, the challenge of confronting place as fluid stems from the destabilizing effect simultaneity has on assumptions that places can exist in isolation or that how they signify can be fixed in time. Simply put, as a matter of epistemological collapse, the conditions of postlocality are alienating. While I focus on disorientation in the next chapter, here I mean to emphasize the state of simultaneity itself. *The Valley of the Moon, The Ford,* and *Oil!* each address contemporary destabilization spatially and temporally: they exhibit the anxieties attending the simultaneity of near-and-far through the exchange of people, ideas, and things; they confirm the simultaneity intrinsic to any locale as a real-and-imagined place; but also, they bring into focus the simultaneous experience of past-and-present, in which lifeways and landscapes assumed to be unchanging prove to be in flux, mingling traces of what had been with a shifting, confusing, and often seemingly unmanageable present. London’s, Austin’s, and Sinclair’s novels are significant to our understanding of the postlocal condition precisely because each of them documents the reactions of local subjects to an increasingly uniform, increasingly connected world. They emphasize the mixed desire for, and the sheer impossibility of, a provincial life. More to the point, the plots of London’s, Austin’s, and Sinclair’s novels turn on the anxiety produced during the early stages of global modernity as they play out in local places. Each foregrounds this tension as the result of rapid, pervasive, inescapable social and environmental change.

As early examples of postlocality in settled landscapes, *The Valley of the Moon,* *The Ford,* and *Oil!* exemplify a worldwide shift in paradigm. For instance, in his
examination of the period, *American Nervousness, 1903* (1991), Tom Lutz forwards two revealing, but deceptively simple claims: the first is that neurasthenia typified the era, and the second is that novels of this period relied on economic plots, in which wealth either gained or lost led a character or characters toward their fates in an uncaring world.

Mutually reaffirming, Lutz explains, nervousness and social mobility cohered into a cause and effect relationship predicated on any number of fears related to identity and personhood. Uncertainty, then, became a fundamental social and literary theme, particularly in naturalist texts. Lutz explains that uncertainty was the result of “a society coming to terms with itself as pluralistic,” and, tellingly, that “this growing sense of pluralism did not result in an efflorescence of democratic egalitarianism; it was based, in fact, in an insistence on difference and distinction,” in which the “fluid boundaries among constituent groups of American society” were largely and purposefully denied (xi). In other words, at home and abroad, as the world’s masses became more aware of themselves as the world’s others, the old antipathies of race and class grew more deeply entrenched, and the more important it seemed to distinguish self from other, rather than recognizing new unities. Paradoxically, the enlarged lived experience of an increasingly linked world, while it magnified awareness, nonetheless contributed to increasingly localized social and interpersonal reactions. In effect, that condition of neurasthenia which Lutz outlines is predicated on Americans’ inability to maintain historic social boundaries, even as the uneven economic prosperity enjoyed in America was the primary contributor to the deterioration of those very boundaries they meant to sustain. The
uncertainty of the age, it can be said, stemmed from a feeling of displacement, from an unease with one’s location in social space.

Grounding his argument in the assertions of the prominent physician of the period, George M. Beard, Lutz recognizes that social mobility and its attendant nervousness were the result of technological advances in communications and transportation (4). This claim echoes a similar assertion made earlier by historian Stephen Kern in his landmark *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (1983), in which Kern locates the concept of simultaneity as the key characteristic of the age (xiii). Building on the work of the psychologist Eugene Minkowski, Kern understands that technological advances imparted a kind of paranoia associated with the world-wide experience of simultaneity they brought about (x). He explains that the telegraph, telephone, and film, automobiles, trains, and steamers, decreased the temporal and spatial distance between near and far, thereby increasing what Kern calls the “lived distance” of everyday life, making the world seem smaller, even as the human imagination struggled to keep up (xii). Kern points to the instantiation of world standard time, for example, as an indication of the simultaneity and newly rendered uniformity behind everyday experience, in which the world’s events now mingled with local incidents as part of the same complex, dissonant cultural horizon. As Lutz draws attention to social change, in this regard Kern points to revisions in spatial awareness, in the lived experience of place. Both Lutz and Kern imply an end to remoteness—either in terms of social or spatial distance—as a source of unease. Similarly, in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of*
Amy Kaplan argues that in this period domestic and foreign spaces grew closer to one another in American life, casting them into “jarring proximity” (1). That Kaplan emphasizes this entanglement as “jarring” underscores her accord with Lutz and Kern regarding the cause-and-effect relationship between simultaneity and anxiety in lived experience. Further, with this correlation in mind, Kaplan, too, meant to “emphasize the collapse of boundaries between here and there, between inside and outside” (15), stressing foremost an end to provincialism and remoteness even under the most banal circumstances. Each of these critics, therefore, in consecutive decades, anticipates and lays the foundation for what I now recognize as the relative origin of postlocality in the present work.

Together, Lutz, Kern, and Kaplan underline a situation. They mark an increased blurring of social and spatial boundaries and a perceived and pending worldwide uniformity. They underline a cause: developments in communications technology and an attendant wealth inequality, and an effect: nervousness, paranoia, anxiety—that defined an era and which has never really left us. Behind this social-imperial acceleration is a clear source: the harnessing of fossil fuels and the explosion of energy they produced. So while London’s, Austin’s, and Sinclair’s novels uncover an American culture and literature struggling with a sense of place outdistanced by global modernity, the impetus of the era’s unease is the dawn of what Stephanie LeMenager has since termed petromodernity. While Kern elaborates dramatic changes in the lived space of everyday lives, LeMenager illuminates these changes specifically as an ontology of “living
oil” (“Aesthetics” 62); that is, LeMenager’s work makes clear that the material and circumstantial changes Kern grapples with are, at root, predicated on the ubiquity and naturalization of oil at every level of daily life. Or, as LeMenager explains: “‘oil’ [had] become implicitly synonymous with the world” (61).

With the underlying theme of “living oil” in mind, *The Valley of the Moon*, *The Ford*, and *Oil!* fit postlocality to petromodernity. Kern points out that at the *fin de siecle*, “there was a dramatic increase in available energy sources and a consequent transformation of the experience of time and space” (xii). In other words, Kern already recognized the correlation between simultaneity and its material source in fossil fuel. While the resolutions of *The Valley of the Moon* and *The Ford* largely resist this transformation, insisting in their arguments on the lingering possibility of a static and recoverable past into which one might escape petromodernity, *Oil!* articulates a society embracing oil culture and searching for equal space within it. This difference is, perhaps, due to the fact that Sinclair’s novel was written a decade after London’s and Austin’s, after World War I, when rapid change had become the commonplace, and as a culture Americans were less likely to look backward, but toward the future. It is on this presumption that I include Sinclair’s novel in my analysis, to show how simultaneity is in tension in the first two texts, but acts as an already internalized, “lived” phenomenon in the later work. *Oil!* exemplifies the actual embodiment of petromodernity which LeMenager sets forth, in which “the petroleum infrastructure has become embodied memory and habitus for modern humans, insofar as everyday events… are incorporated
practices” (“Petro-Melancholia” 26). London’s, Austin’s, and Sinclair’s novels form a record of local places evolving into unavoidably petromodern and postlocal cultures. These novels are all the more consequential in this regard when we recall, “For several decades up to the 1920s, the West had urbanized at a faster rate than the rest of the nation, a trend fueled by oil and mining booms, railroads, agricultural expansion, and real estate speculation” (Dorman, *Hell of a Vision* 52), and further, when LeMenager points out that California produced 20% of the world’s oil during this period (“Aesthetics” 68). By faithfully and exhaustively detailing those material changes attending petromodern culture, *The Valley of the Moon, The Ford, and Oil!* each possess what June Howard has recognized as “a documentary logic” (146) typical of naturalism, a logic that I maintain exposes the tensions of simultaneity in the postlocal landscape.

**Simultaneity and Scale**

Against this backdrop of an increasingly embodied petromodernity, I want to stress this point: *simultaneity, not scale* produces the central ironies of postlocality. Most critical approaches to globality present its difficulties as matters of scale, largely following Marxist geographers David Harvey, Doreen Massey, and Neil Smith. While scale trades on inherited binaries of “near” and “far”—those “blinding” divisions Bachelard spoke of—simultaneity better represents the paradoxical relationship we now find near-and-far to occupy. As I hope the above discussion makes clear, the problem of globality is not precisely in conceiving of the distances separating interconnected places,
but rather in the changes interconnection multiplies in local places, thus complicating immanence in everyday life. Heretofore, this focus on distance has produced interventions of scale that intend to mediate the faraway, such as the vernacular recuperation of cosmopolitanism in some critical discourses; my focus on immanence communicates that while the lived distances of everyday life are enlarged both virtually and materially, postlocal logics assert that global distance is always already an untenable abstraction in vernacular place-making. Our everyday globality unfolds in-place; stubbornly, our globality is made to fit ground-level conditions, conceivable only in its banality. This is not to say that simultaneity and scale are not related, but that simultaneity exerts the greater force on local places, as I propose evidence in the literary archive bears out.

For instance, as Lutz, Kern, Kaplan, and Howard suggest, the changes wrought by petromodernity, and the vernacular response to them, registered spatially in a deliberate partitioning of material and social spaces in day to day life, creating the drama of naturalist texts. Like many texts bridging regionalism and naturalism from this period, the documentary logic of The Valley of the Moon, The Ford, and Oil! produces a record that exposes a belief in, and desire for, a knowable world, positioning such hope in a static, local sense of place. The regionalist and naturalist authors of this period answered the demands of a changing landscape with seemingly determinate spaces; their solution to radical change was an attempt to enforce the prevailing epistemological impulse of the age even as their documentary logic compelled them to include the new and the queer in
their representations. I contend that regionalist and naturalist texts recommend a resolute localism which testifies to an otherwise indecipherable immanence. The paradox being that the facts of everyday petromodernity, incommensurate with inherited epistemologies, provide a record—much like today—of a world of objects that can be experienced, but which resist singular, teleological narratives, and which create new webs of social and environmental obligation. Most naturalist authors, it seems, arrived at this conclusion, though perhaps indirectly. As Howard suggests, “The portrayal of a place or milieu provides a similarly general and abstract ordering principle of naturalist novels… The documentary project organizes the narrative according to a unity not of action but of topic, thus transforming naturalism’s descriptive and even static tendency into a strategy for ordering the text”(148). In other words, implacement as a narrative strategy provides form and meaning, if not plot, to naturalist novels, and in situating texts in exact locales naturalist authors of the period attempt to produce familiarity in the absence of actual knowability. Naturalism’s documentary logic disguises the inability to make conclusive meaning during the first unavoidable throes of an observable postlocality. The material, concrete embedment of characters among places and things rather suggests a masking of epistemological slippage intrinsic to simultaneity. The effort to portray the knowable uncovers a character’s inability to truly be at ease in her or his surroundings. Hence, the very real disconnect between the immanent and the familiar, I argue, is actually the root cause of neurasthenia during this time. The dramatic reordering of immanent space as the material consequence of petromodernity is manifested pathologically as an almost
unavoidable apprehension. Scenes of incongruousness, of “jarring proximity,” are thus repeated throughout naturalist texts. In essence, what should be familiar because it is near at hand and everyday, isn’t. The existential crisis of postlocality is simultaneity, not scale.

After Howard, Leigh Ann Litwiller Berte and others point to Frank Norris’s seminal work *The Octopus* (1901) as a pivotal text for understanding the naturalists’ spatializations. *The Valley of the Moon, The Ford,* and *Oil!* are clearly indebted to Norris’s novel, inheriting his landscape, its symptoms, and the changing field of localism from his plot. Berte insists: “Spatial scale supplements the urban geography of naturalism by exposing a larger geography of force—systems of force spanning the city, state, region, and nation—that structures modern reality” (207). In other words, Berte views the spatiality of naturalist texts, like Howard and others, as an ordering principle, but she draws attention to the basic rhizomatic entanglements upon which modernity—postlocality; petromodernity—are formed. Contrary to Howard, however, Berte makes clear, “The effect of this expansive geography is to destabilize the concept of locality as a means of anchoring the modern world.” Berte’s analysis brings the scope of the modern horizon to the forefront of our understanding of naturalist and regionalist texts.

Yet by focusing on scale, rather than on the simultaneity that Kern points to, Berte deemphasizes the persistence of immanent meaning-making, and hence the overwhelming presence of neurasthenia plaguing early postlocality. Berte views simultaneity as a subset of scale, rather than the defining aspect of the era, in which, “Spatial scale offers a framework through which fluid, intersecting, and simultaneous
layers of force can be illustrated” (206). Berte recognizes that Norris’s novel achieves, in its defamiliarizations, interconnections, and larger sympathies, a kind of aggregating affect in which an empirical understanding of place is reconsidered as the sum of “layered and competing forces” (212). While she perceives Norris’s novel as a scalar project leading toward a new understanding of global citizenship, however, I acknowledge Norris’s text as an antecedent of the simultaneous experience of near-and-far across a network of entangled locales, in which local citizenship must be redefined under the new conditions of globality. “Layering,” I assert, points not to distance—which requires reconciliation with scale—but rather to immanence, and to the simultaneous “competing forces” at play in a particular, contested, changing landscape. What Berte considers interconnected but separable, distant but nested, I interpret as inherently localized. As a transitional text, The Octopus marks the end of the idyll; it produces a “California” that stands for rurality as well as modernity, a place utterly enmeshed in the localized effects of global exchange.

With the cultural work of Norris’s touchstone novel behind them, the texts I analyze here portray the expansion and augmentation of those early symptoms. Through London’s novel I will evaluate his protagonists’ anxieties related to the simultaneity of California as a real-and-imagined place. In The Valley of the Moon technology and nostalgia conspire to provoke the confusion and sentimentality that bring about the novel’s central act of discovery and eventual implacement. Understanding that any place is a real-and-imagined place opens readings of postlocality to alternate histories and,
more importantly, alternate futures. My examination of *The Ford* will deal with the *simultaneity of past-and-present*. Austin’s under-appreciated novel records a small community’s response to the new, quickly entrenched realities of industrialized water and oil infrastructures in the arid, global West. The confusion of old and new in the rapidly industrializing landscape of Austin’s novel highlights the persistence, idealism, and shortcomings of the agrarian myth in ways that are productive to our understanding of how California’s crises of water and oil propel even the most provincial of its spaces into the world community. Finally, my interrogation of *Oil!* will encompass the *simultaneity of near-and-far* in the social and ecological landscape. Sinclair’s novel details the material and sociological enmeshment of a southern California oil family in world events. The simultaneous near-and-far of the novel, in which the faraway acts of soldiers and Soviet dissidents influence provincial industrial workers in Southern California, underlines the basic challenges of implacement facing a postlocal imagination. The types of simultaneity that I analyze are, of course, interrelated. Here, though, I parse them for the sake of visibility. I pursue that variety of simultaneous experience that appears to me to be the dominant form in each work.

Environmental historian Donald Worster has asserted, “No region on earth has had more to do with shaping the twentieth century than California” (53). He writes: “That is true of agricultural history as it is of mass culture, sexuality, urbanization, atomic bombs, and the shift from bourbon to wine.” In other words, starkly and especially during the period London, Austin, and Sinclair describe, nearly all of what we understand of
modernity—and ultimately postlocality—can be identified with place-making in California. That is not to say, to my mind, that California produced modernity; instead, Worster’s comments should highlight that all the elements from which modernity is established come together in California. We should remember that, at heart, water and oil, and the pastoral narrative attached to them both, supply the primary materials of that layering affect to which Berte draws our attention, in Worster’s words, “the universal modern predicament” (63).

_The Valley of the Moon: “a regular movin’ picture except for the talkin’”_

As should be evident by now, as it concerns the gap between immanence and familiarity, the real-and-imagined in the first decades of the twentieth century was rearranged by new transportation and communications technologies. Both “real” and “imagined” became contested terms, and “past” and “future” were set at odds. In this context, the early cinema provides the unexpected figurative device governing _The Valley of the Moon_. The clash of the modern, therefore, resounds as a simulacrum, as a hyperreal accord. The concept of real-and-imagined places is derived from cultural geographer Edward W. Soja’s reading of philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s sense of “lived” space, which philosopher Edward S. Casey concludes is tantamount to “place” as we have come to know it. In effect, Soja’s rendering recognizes that place-making encompasses personal desire and received meaning, but also and most necessarily includes one’s material, bodily implacement in a specific geography. Soja explains that inhabitation is the sum of
a combination of the individual, social, and geographical (11). It is critical to note that Soja deploys “place” in his schema rather than “space,” as his predecessor had, and that Casey likewise recognizes this distinction. Understanding the real-and-imagined as “place” highlights the inherent simultaneity of inhabitation, because it underlines the enmeshment of meaning-making and location. The imagined version of the real-and-imagined place that is California, as it stands for the mythic West, offers a solution to the realities of working-class Oakland for London’s protagonists Saxon Brown and Billy Roberts. A transformative afternoon at the movies inspires their escape, whereby a cinematic image of the agrarian idyll they dream of leads them to their destiny beyond the city. Yet the “imagined” and the “real” defy any simple resolution. The newly cinematic West, which reaffirms their pastoral desires, also provides a conflicting backdrop for the conditions they witness on the ground.

*The Valley of the Moon* is a novel in two parts: Books I and II depict Saxon and Billy’s working-class city life; Book III portrays their escape from the city, and is part road novel and part novel of settling back into the country. In the first sections, Saxon and Billy are snagged in a Fordist trap, while in the second half of the novel they are at first tourists and then yeomen farmers. London’s protagonists, grandchildren of California pioneers, take a hard look at their working-class lives in the urban-industrial landscape of Oakland on the San Francisco Bay, and, after a difficult series of events, light-out as they imagine their ancestors had done in search of land and room to put down roots away from the trials and disappointments of city life. *The Valley of the Moon* clearly accesses the
American, western tradition of escape and reinvention, it is plainly drenched in nostalgia for a Jeffersonian pastoralism, and it patently articulates the anxieties of urbanization at the turn of the last century. For these reasons, it belongs as one of the foremost works of the New West, and a significant document of an emergent postlocality. Predating the “revolt from the village” that would follow in less than a decade, *The Valley of the Moon* yields an incisive rendering of a post-frontier, newly urban, newly global, postlocal West, for which California stands for modernity in America.

To elaborate my point, the novel’s decisive moment comes when Saxon demands that she and Billy leave Oakland. After some deliberation but without a plan, and giddy from making this life-changing decision, they go uptown to celebrate. Finding themselves with time to spare before their theater engagement, they go to the motion pictures. London’s narrator lists the program: “A cowboy film was run off, and a French comic; then came a rural drama situated somewhere in the Middle West” (224). Plainly but suggestively, the cinematic program is indicative of a simultaneous mythologizing (the cowboy film), globalizing (the French comedy), and the naturalization of America’s origin myth (the banal farmyard scene). Apparently already accustomed to the proximity of the near-and-far on the moving picture screen, significantly, Saxon’s attention nonetheless falls upon the rural drama. As the barnyard scene unfolds, she whispers to Billy, “It’s a warm day and there are flies—can’t you just feel it?’.” She leans into Billy, telling him, “I’d just die of happiness in a place like that’” (225). After staying to view the film a second time, paying closer attention to its detail, Saxon tellingly announces,
“Now I know where we’re going when we leave Oakland… There” (226). In effect, the film is as real to her as the life she is living; so much so that she wants them to escape into the film, to inhabit its myth of a simple life that is at once exotic and familiar in direct opposition to the way their lives in Oakland are banal and confusing. The authentic West, as far as Saxon and Billy are concerned, has been preserved most forcefully in film.

Who belongs where, and why: these are the central questions of the novel; its “cultural work” is spatial, and its problems of race and class are postlocal. Put another way, as Judith Fetterly and Marjorie Pryse suggest, after Kaplan: the urban outsider “projects onto the native a pristine authentic space immune to historical changes shaping their own lives” (226-7); in this case, the conflict lies in those changes in global citizenship that refute Saxon and Billy’s cherished assumptions about agrarianism and their place in a globalizing world. The site of their authentic space begins—and in large part remains—encapsulated in the barnyard scene they watched in the Oakland theater. The simultaneous experience of the real-and-imagined West that Billy and Saxon inhabit, resulting as it does in the apprehensions of the age, produces a clear portrait of the simulacrum behind their desire. In an off-handed comment regarding the idyll of family life upon which The Valley of the Moon ends, Christopher Gair suggests: “Saxon’s repeated visions of her ancestors’ lives and her homemaking abilities do create at least a simulacrum of the order that is forestalled by prevailing social conditions” (430-1).

“Either way,” Gair concludes, “self-realization is redesigned as a project of standardization in which ‘individuality’ is systematically managed, via the procedures of
the production line, into a reproduction of the original” (433). A prevailing individuality rooted in an Anglo-Saxon heritage—the clear subject of London’s text—Gair argues, is just one more standardized and commodified product, its reproducibility emblematic of the times. More provocatively, however, Gair suggests that Saxon and Billy’s desire to relive a version of their pioneer origin myth points to a hyperreal arrangement in which their actions are a performance, a product of an onrushing, capitalist, Fordist real. In a post-frontier, global West, the return to the agrarian myth can only be a sentimentalization of an already re-historicized national narrative, one that trades on the rugged individualism of the West, and which conveys an isolationist retreat from history. The repercussions of this problem are far-reaching, troubling the pastoral narrative in many bioregionalist arguments that would follow, and generally forming the basis for many ecocritical arguments against locality in the twenty first century.

Gair’s argument pertaining to an emerging simulacrum resonates with this scene especially, and with Jennifer Lynn Peterson’s more recent study of the film industry during the period *The Valley of the Moon* was written. Peterson acknowledges that films like the rural drama Saxon and Billy watch, “mobilize the cinema’s complex dynamic of identification and fantasy” (xiii). That is, the rural drama that inspires Saxon magnifies the nonfiction, “educational” pieces on display in theaters at this time, which traded on nostalgia as a unifying influence. The rural drama that so captivates Saxon and Billy that they stay to watch it twice, is analogous to those nonfiction travel films Peterson terms “instructive entertainment,” or, “a form of attraction that packaged didactic intentions as
an aesthetic commodity,” combining “the concerns of pragmatism, romanticism, and commercialism.” Peterson explains that scenic or travel films of the period between 1910 and 1913, as part of the variety format of the theater experience like the one Saxon and Billy participate in, were meant to “uplift their viewers,” and yet she argues, such films were just as likely to be experienced as a dreamlike reverie, “involving notions of exoticism and the picturesque” (3). So while Saxon’s reading of the film as true marks the utterly superficial, predictable, desired response of the film’s creators, it nevertheless matches Saxon’s already imagined and decided upon desires; for Saxon, the virtual appears accurate, practical, and material.

Peterson’s “identification and fantasy,” in this case, reaffirm the necessary if artificial juxtaposition of immanence and familiarity in cinema’s suspension of disbelief. For Saxon and Billy, connected ancestrally to a pioneer past, their viewing of the film marks a renewal of selfhood. To this point, Saxon in particular has been a bricoleur of sorts, susceptible to the fictional West forwarded in the cultural moment in which she lives, and in her rumination over the inherited narrative of her pioneer mother. Through the medium of film, though, her established impulses coalesce around the fictional barnyard to contrive a “real” that is both utterly convincing and entirely synthetic. As Peterson explains regarding the impact of film precisely when London’s novel was published, “in picturing a world that does exist, early travel films created a world that does not exist: an idealized geography that functioned as a parallel universe on the cinema screen” (3). Michael Devine forwards a similar notion, citing a popular film of
the period which ended by focusing on an “exit” sign. Devine illustrates, “To exit [the theater] is really to enter—the street, the city, life, where authentic contact is achieved… Cinema helps constitute this immersion by providing what [Waldo] Frank would term *simulacra*, the pale presence that lends heft, shape, and color to the natural world” (97). In effect, Peterson and Devine articulate the mutual, reciprocal arrangement of the real-and-imagined and its shifting weight of effectiveness before the viewing public at the time. Devine especially, by again drawing critical attention to the emergence of comprehensive simulacra associated with film, expresses the enlarged emphasis on cultural imaginaries over material spaces.

London’s novel is significant to any reading of postlocality because of this portrayal of mechanically reproduced pastoralism; because, in this context, the garden *is in the machine*, indistinguishable, if not indivisible, for Saxon. The machine makes the garden possible in the postlocal landscape of London’s novel. As mechanical reproduction amounts to global connection, and is a product of the petromodern, so must we understand that the familiar ceases to be wholly immanent, entirely of a place, during this period. So while idealized geographies may not have been new, the seemingly accessible parallel universes with which the masses were confronted in the films they viewed, and the possibilities such landscapes and places contained, certainly were. The cinematic West was the product of, and solution for, the unease and disorientations of displacement. That familiarizing aspect of cinema—the ability of film to formulate that place which does and does not exist—denotes a widening of the gap between immanence
and familiarity that continues to confound postlocality in our expanding virtual
implacement. Alienation is, to some degree, an extension of disappointment. Among the
many layers producing postlocality are versions of the places and things we desire
positioned against the actual state of our affairs.

Echoing Gair’s argument about the commodification of individuality, and
remembering Walter Benjamin, Peterson underlines this universally complicated
relationship to film, in which the anxiety of the age is in part both ameliorated and
magnified by cinematic experience. Leading up to the theater sequence, and continuous
with the anxieties of the age, Billy’s refrain is an admission that the modern world is too
confusing for him. In one of his early exchanges with Saxon that cements their
relationship, as they talk about their pioneering ancestors, Billy tells her, “I don’t
understand life today… [in the past] everybody farmed, an’ shot their meat, an’ got
enough to eat, an’ took care of their old folks. But now it’s all a mix-up that I can’t
understand” (53). Essentially, Billy’s confusion is the result of his displacement at
ground-level, the outcome of the apparent end of locality. Yet as surely as Billy and
Saxon attempt to escape into a cinematic rurality, so too is Billy’s sentimental rendering
of the past just as clearly artificial. The cinematic repeats and revises Billy’s already
instantiated sentimentality, that much is certain; still, in the absence of the original, it is
the cinematic rural that proves the more compelling narrative to him. As Peterson
explains, “the path to overcoming this disenchantment was precisely through the agent of
disenchantment: mass culture” (6). While Billy’s sentimentalism confuses, the cinema
enlightens. For some directors in this period, Devine demonstrates, such an outcome was cinema’s advantage. From this perspective, “theater,” Devine relates, “is a starting point where one refreshes and reorients oneself… where spectators learn a mastery of the dynamic, potentially meaningful outside world” (97). Devine’s claim is reminiscent of a motivational phrase Saxon learns and repeats to Billy, wherein she has come to believe, “Oakland is just a place to start from” (215). That “starting point,” then, connotes the hopelessness of Oakland, but also the optimism of the cinema. That is to say, the growing emphasis on the imagined in Saxon and Billy’s lives is directly related to their amelioration of anxiety by going to the theater. It is received through the cinema’s power to magnify meaning disproportionately to their material circumstances. At least, that is, as long as the cinema substantiates essentialism of a certain order its audience expects of it.

It is notable, then, that Devine would call this a “reorientation.” He views the early cinematic experience as a form of getting back into place, when it is plain that the world which films create does not exist. Reorientation in this sense points to a superabundance and overdetermination of competing imaginaries requiring either the later impulse of modernism, in which cinema’s simulacra lead toward a fragmented futurism, or to a knowable past, as London’s naturalism does. In each case the primary act of reorientation is to situate oneself within the contradictions of industrialization. To be clear, I want to reiterate that such a focus is misleading: industrial modernity must be read for its inherent globality; as such, reorientation through unreal, cinematic landscapes that are themselves refrains in a more powerful form of an existing nostalgia, suggests an
emphasis on the simultaneous near-and-far and not simply on locality as it had been. It is
not industrialization per se that bewilders, but the simultaneous and intensifying presence
of global and local that industrialization signifies, or, the unfamiliar immanent.

That film has replaced local color fiction by this period in the everyday lives of
the working-class is also a telling marker of postlocality. On one hand, film is among
the technological advances that brings near-and-far into proximity, thus contributing to
the gap between immanence and familiarity, and hence existential unease; yet on the
other hand, by its very nature film performs the cultural work of regionalism, replacing
the mundane with a benign exoticism, and promoting a palliative nostalgia. Quite
literally, Billy and Saxon’s desire for a salvageable, rooted past, coupled with their
dawning desire to step outside of history, comes to them as a projection of the agrarian
idyll on the screen at the local theater. Saxon and Billy are, after all, provincials: Billy
“had never slept a night away from his birth town of Oakland” (104), and Saxon “had
been clear-eyed all her days, though her field of vision had been restricted” (117). Their
historical imagination is, in effect, supplanted and enhanced by the movies, even as their
subjectivity is a performance without a source. Their escape to the country and
subsequent reinvention is a reenactment of a place, time, and conditions more rightly of a
cinematic imaginary than a material past.

Their enlarged but still perplexing sense of place expands as Saxon and Billy take
to the road, traversing, over several seasons, most of rural Northern California in search
of that elusive, tranquil, rooted, and clearly writ barnyard they’d witnessed on the
Oakland screen. As an act of getting back into place, however, their mobility disenchants the cinematic implacement that inspired them to take to the road in the first place. Mobility, in this case, functions as a means to accesses a more direct form of meaning-making; that is, the very bodily, sensual act of moving through space, of sleeping rough in the elements, and meeting conditions on the ground as they are without cinematic intervention. Their traveling, after a fashion, serves them much as Adolphus Windeler’s had in his Gold Rush diary. Their ground-level meaning-making puts them back into direct contact with the local—however transformed they find it. Their mobility—on foot, by wagon, and by steamer, train, and car—recalibrates a heretofore disproportionately imagined landscape. Simultaneity, once their cinematic imagination is challenged, is made graspable even if it remains unsavory to their ethnocentric sensibilities. For instance, their experience of and interactions with racial others in California’s Delta unambiguously confirms that they are in a truly global place, while at the same time this experience and others like it express in no uncertain terms that the idyllic barnyard they desire is gone (if it ever existed). The unbalanced real-and-imagined that produced their anxiety and their nostalgia begins again to favor conditions on the ground.

The Delta “proved a foreign land” (351). The middle landscape, the local, rural, remote space where they expect to find their dream home, proves to be unequivocally global. Here, Saxon and Billy could, “go a whole day without finding any one who spoke English. They encountered—sometimes in whole villages—Chinese, Japanese, Italians, Portuguese, Swiss, Hindus, Koreans, Norwegians, Danes, French, Armenians,
Slavs, almost every nationality save Americans.” Their disgust is visceral, and their response is openly antagonistic. As they ride the steamer upstream to Sacramento, Billy reflects: “We’re settin’ on the stoop… Pretty soon they’ll crowd us off of that” (351). Again, the spatiality of near-and-far is made obvious to them, and Billy’s response is likewise spatial in nature. But the facts of near-and-far are material; Saxon and Billy are confronted with bodies in the fields, not idealized images on the screen. In this sense, postlocality—however racist Saxon and Billy’s response to it—is returned to experience, rather than expressed through simulacra. The racist response Saxon and Billy exhibit is indicative of the “insistence on difference and distinction” Lutz places critical attention upon, which is, in turn, a direct outcome of postlocality in my reading.

Notably, despite his distaste toward it, Billy is no longer confused by the world he witnesses. As his anxiety falls away, although ethnic others in “his” space appall his sense of righteousness, he nevertheless gains a kind of clarity from their proximity that had been inaccessible when he took his sense of the world at second-hand. The travel sequences leading up to their Delta experience illuminate this point. The move from city to country revives Billy in a more substantial fashion than the cinema could engender. Having traveled a year, with ground-level experience under his belt, Billy reckons that even a “dub” has a “better chance in the country than in the city” (321). At the same time, he concludes: “Say, Saxon, d’ye know I don’t care if I never see movin’ pictures again.” In their jarring proximity, these attached comments are instructive for our understanding of the tensions induced by the real-and-imagined in this period. As his latter declaration
demonstrates, the shift from confusion to confidence is mirrored in Billy’s changing attitude towards the cinema, replaced as it is with life taken at first-hand. Learning responsible agricultural practice from the immigrant population, interacting with “scientific” farmers who practice crop rotation and organic agriculture, Billy is prepared to leave behind cinematic agrarianism for a tangible version of their dream. His refrain of confusion that checkers the first part of the book is replaced with denunciations of the movies thereafter, in which spending an afternoon at the cinema is almost unthinkable and lists among the worst parts of their lives in Oakland (323; 326). Ironically, too, however, even the inimitable Mount Shasta, which they see at a distance, is like “a moving picture in the sky” (373), and one of Billy’s most memorable nights in the city had been “a regular movin’ picture except for the talkin’” (168).

Drained of its cinematic patina, California’s landscape in The Valley of the Moon holds from a purely ecocentric standpoint the promise of a successful globalization-in-place, in which the world’s farmers gather to produce a better kind of agriculture. But that is not London’s novel. Saxon and Billy’s race-prejudice proves too much for that reading. Their entrenched bigotry is too fraught and their anthropocentrism too keen to be either socially or environmentally just by today’s standards. Disturbingly, London’s modern reader must find his novel’s environmental message by overlooking this conceit, when environmental justice critic T.V. Reed has so forcefully made apparent that an “unwillingness to grapple with questions of racial, class, and national privilege has severely undermined the powerful critique of ecological devastation” (145). Instead,
London’s reader recognizes that while Saxon and Billy’s small and confusing existence in the city had opened outward toward a better life through the suggestion of the cinema, their sense of balance between the imaginary and the real had then to be reestablished by their travels among California’s actual landscape and among a cross-section of its true inhabitants. That recalibration of real-and-imagined, however, by novel’s end, fails to gain traction. To borrow Anna Tsing’s metaphor, the friction a palpable globality produces during their time on the road fails to ignite an evolved postlocal consciousness. The graspable simultaneity that might have led them towards a paradigm-shifting sense of place, instead thrusts them back into the shelter of an uncritical pastoralism, one that refuses postlocal simultaneity, their many “scientific” farming endeavors notwithstanding.

With the perfect realization of their dream-ranch achieved in the Sonoma Valley north of San Francisco, London’s reader is reminded of Saxon’s reply to Billy’s comment in the Delta. Saxon had replied, “There won’t be any stoop in the valley of the moon” (352). She means, of course, not that there will be room for everyone, nor that the collapse of the division of outside and in has been realized, but that there is no space for “foreigners” in their dream of a sustainable California. She implies this even though foreign farming practice will form the basis of their own. Refusing the in-between space—the threshold—compromise, accommodation, and global citizenship are not possible in London’s novel. Saxon and Billy insist on an outmoded, unrealistic heimlich over the undeniable unheimlich with which their encounters presented them. Confronted with
globality, London’s characters conform to a limited locality. A novel that travels from confusion with the postlocal, to a functional acceptance of it, retreats back into the hard borders of social and geographic isolationism, its progressive message of sustainability too narrow, too marginalizing to carry lasting ecosocial weight.

_The Ford: “the pressure from without”_

Before the Brent family in Mary Austin’s _The Ford_ can grasp their place within a larger regional citizenry, they first must come to terms with “the pressure from without” (56); that is, they must learn that they are actors in biospheric and economic networks at play in their own locale. While Frederick Buell is able to recognize the absence of “outside” today, this very paradox was at the heart of conflict in Austin’s novel. Like _The Valley of the Moon_ before it and _Oil!_ after it, _The Ford_ turns on the confusion and anxieties of the working class in the face of rapid change and complex socio-economic forces seemingly out of their control. Austin’s novel examines local responses to new water and oil infrastructures that threaten to transfer cultural authority from the interpersonal and local level to the regional, national, and global spheres. With the changing face of the cultural and material landscape as her focus, the layering effect of Austin’s naturalist geography imparts a tension between _the palpable simultaneous past-and-present_, in which old agrarian lifeways are threatened in proportion to the industrialization of the land.

Articulating one of the ongoing challenges of postlocal place-making, Austin’s
protagonists are torn by their desire for self-actualization within the fixed parameters of pastoralism, and their impulse to be “in” on the manic speculation making a lucky few in their community very rich. This vacillation between the belief that their own best interests are to be found in the spirit of the times and their urge to stand apart from it, locates Austin’s protagonists amidst the jarring proximity of an unaltered landscape they desire and the debauched landscape producing the wealth they crave. Tangible evidence of the past-and-present is constantly in view across this gulf, whether in the repurposing of Spanish adobe buildings into homes, or Basque waystations into oil industry offices, or in indigenous knowledge of the use and symbolism of certain plants. Though it is often sublimated, just as often the past-and-present is intrinsic to the action of The Ford’s every scene. Unlike London, Austin seeks a localist solution through community action. Ground-level activism in The Ford replaces London’s individual exceptionalism as the bulwark against the encroachment of globality, extra-regional authority, and delocalized control of resources.

Setting the tone of a simultaneous past-and-present, the opening sequence is a depiction of a classic pastoral setting. Children play beside a California foothill stream surrounded by sheep at the onset of the spring season. But their play is interrupted by two oil speculators passing furtively downstream, and the scene ends with Kenneth Brent, the young son of an impoverished farmer and sheep rancher, struggling alone to get his flock back across the flooded creek at dusk. He is abandoned by his closest friend, Frank Rickard, the son of the most powerful man in the district, to fend for himself, leaving
Kenneth speechless over Frank’s “want of any sense of obligation to the senseless flock” (16). Kenneth, on the other hand, impresses his father’s shepherd by instinctively risking his life to save a lone lamb that had been washed downstream and for returning the entire flock safely to the corral. The overall effect of the children playing, the oncoming oilmen, Frank’s abandonment, and Kenneth’s unconscious sense of responsibility to the flock foretell of the precipitous end of traditional lifeways in the West. Although *The Ford* ostensibly relates Kenneth’s *bildungsroman*, its subtext is the arrival of modernity in rural California. As symbolic of the times, Austin conflates the confusing progress of a young man’s coming of age with the complex advent of industrial incursion into the provinces. As oil development threatens the health and character of the agrarian landscape, and large water projects endanger small family farms like the Brents’, Kenneth’s sensuous connection to traditional ranch life and the natural world leads him into local activism. In this role he advocates on behalf of his community and the environment. These acts emphasize the onerous ecosocial compromises at the heart of the novel.

Divided essentially in half by a narrative of oil speculation and a narrative of water development, and tied together by sundry marriage plots, *The Ford* confronts what may be the foremost environmental issues of the age. It is among the first to fictionalize the ecological devastation of oil exploration and to demonstrate its attendant hazards on local societies, predating Sinclair’s *Oil!* by almost a decade. It provides an early illustration of the alienating effects of exploitive resource practices. The oil and water
plots are Austin’s way of interrogating how outside power manipulates the interests and desires of everyday people. Further, and of particular note regarding its prescient postlocality, unlike London’s novel before it, *The Ford* illustrates “the boundaries of rural and urban breaking down” (Klimasmith 547). While London framed rural spaces in the nationalist Western vein as the site of escape, Austin presents rurality as the site of complex connectivity from which there is no escaping. While Saxon and Billy witness ground-level globalization on the fields and farms of California’s Delta, London’s updated story of rugged individualism ultimately allows them to deny it, escaping instead into their own private idyll apart from all that. Perhaps because Austin’s novel portrays the anxieties associated with rural people entering into modernity and London’s depicts the anxieties of urban people escaping it, *The Ford* presses issues of postlocality through the lens of this unresolved enmeshment rather than as the fixed binary London still conceives the postlocal landscape to be. Saxon and Billy would step outside of history; Kenneth Brent, his father Steven, and especially Kenneth’s sister Anne, seek out their historic moment, navigating the prospect of vast wealth against deliberate, long-term implacement.

In her important essay on Mary Austin’s body of work, “‘I have seen America emerging’: Mary Austin’s Regionalism,” Betsy Klimasmith describes *The Ford* as “a revisionist Western romance” exploring “the issue of how rural communities can negotiate the future in relationship to an increasingly urban economy.” She explains that the novel interrogates “what constitutes a natural connection with the land and considers
how to translate this connection into political, educational, agricultural, or commercial action” (547). In effect, Klimasmith recognizes first that Austin attempts, with *The Ford*, to imagine environmental justice outside of the preservationism of her peers; and second, she brings to light Austin’s conviction that the appropriate site of ecosocial resistance is at the local level. To her first point, Klimasmith’s “revisionist” and “what constitutes a natural connection” point decidedly to Austin’s vision as georgic, not pastoral. Michael Ziser, after Timothy Sweet’s *American Georgics: Economy and Environment in American Literature, 1580-1864* (2001), has recently suggested that the georgic mode might be more productive than its opposite, the pastoral, as environmentalism moves toward the future and ecocritics’ sense of the definition of nature evolves (*Environmental Practice* 159-81).64 That *The Ford* is “revisionist,” then, suggests that Austin’s effort is to move beyond the ‘simple’—be it towards Leo Marx’s “complex pastoral” or Ziser’s “complex georgic.” In either case, the constitution of Austin’s characters’ natural connection is deliberately muddled by their relationship to the type and disposition of the work they do. Both Kenneth and his father long to be shepherds again—that classic pastoral symbol—yet their aim is decidedly not marked by a sense of loss, or as being resistant to the future, as Klimasmith points out. The same, to varying degrees, might be said of each of the novels I am concerned with in this chapter. Austin’s novel, in this way, operates contrary to nostalgia, even if not wholeheartedly. Klimasmith’s second point, Austin’s deliberate localizing of her characters’ struggles, registers Austin’s awareness of, but resistance to, the subtle but apparent shift in meaning-making from locally produced to the more
uniform, utilitarian meaning imposed by centralized interests thanks to distance-crushing technological advances. Klimasmith draws attention to the escalating connection between city and country via transportation and communication technologies as it coincides with the parallel evolution of the remote province into “the city’s resource-rich hinterland.”

Despite Austin’s comprehension of the dissolving borders and increasingly interconnected social space of modernity, she nevertheless imagines a locality that perseveres beyond the breakdown of binary constructions. Again, it might be said that her local may be dying but it never does die. While the implication in Klimasmith’s commentary is that Austin had registered the end of “near” and “far,” rather, her discussion suggests that Austin had in fact registered the postlocal thirspace of near-and-far: The reconception of distance, I maintain, in this light, is not Austin’s achievement. Rather, her success lies in her recognition of the simultaneity of that experience, where near-and-far are copresent, in-place, and enmeshed. Klimasmith’s commentary in this regard is apt, however, because she illuminates the significance of *The Ford*’s documentary logic in the context of futurity. That is, *The Ford*’s environmental consciousness is not concerned with fighting “progress” as it plays out locally; rather, Austin’s concern is with the location of authority as decisions about local landscapes are made, especially in the climate Klimasmith describes in which local and regional, rural and urban boundaries fade in their stark divisions. Austin’s work is representative of a staunchly localist West, one which persists despite its newly conceived globality, and one in which locality is both a site of resistance as well as accommodation.
as they reflect local interests.

Austin’s sense of the changing face of rural lifeways as near-and-far cohere plays out subtly as past-and-present, wherein the changing face of work and the spaces of work reflect industrial modernity. For instance, Kenneth Brent’s father Steven and his neighbors attempt to drill their own oil well in an effort to join in the speculation all around them. Theirs is a local response to a system of development that seems to favor wealthy and distant concerns. Redolent with all the historic symbolism the name entails, Brent and his partners call themselves the Homestead Development Company. These farmers-turned-oilmen greet their gusher with bloodied, oil-covered glee, exclaiming, “Thousan’ bar’s a day!” (107), and people come from miles around to witness the spectacle. Yet Brent immediately understands the well coming in spells catastrophe for his group. Brent’s concern is not environmental, however, it is economic. The independent pipeline between Petrolia and San Francisco they had heard promise of is not yet complete, Old Man Rickert stands in the way of its completion, and Standard Oil interests loom behind him. Without the ability to cap their well, and without the independent pipeline, the farmer-oilmen can’t capture and distribute their crude. In the meantime, oil from the Homestead well pours in lost profits across the ground. Brent rebukes his exuberant partner, “A thousand barrels going to waste, then, you booby.” Brent realizes in that instant the daunting web of complex connectivity the oil market represents, the centralizing authority it portends, and the slim prospect for locally controlled speculation and production. In a later sequence, after days of trying to contain
the gushing oil behind dirt barriers, the massed reservoir of oil breaks their levee and pours out onto the neighboring farmland (109). A “shimmering, stinking pool” spread across the fields, “fouled the ancient bed of the river” (130), and finally, after tense weeks, an errant spark catches the misbegotten sump on fire, consequently burning it out in a day and a half, the Homestead Development Company’s dreams along with it (138).

Still, the complexity of the Homestead Development Company’s situation lies, as LeMenager explains in another context, in the fact that, “American popular culture both loves and hates the lucky strike that ushers in modernity with its derricks… so much less romantic than a Wild West built on real animal horsepower” (Living Oil 5). Setting past and present at odds in the popular imagination when it comes to the trope of luck or chance in western mythology, LeMenager’s comments nonetheless illuminate the past-and-present of the Brent’s situatedness, echoing their fraught desire for both economic stability and a life on the land. For example, Kenneth had been forced to live several of his formative years in the oil town of Petrolia after his father sold the family ranch. Once there, Kenneth turns compulsively to wandering in the hills. His rambles are vexed by the imposition of the sights and smells of oil infrastructure. In these surroundings, Austin’s narrator suggests that past-and-present manifested in Kenneth as, “a kind of double consciousness toward [Petrolia’s oil culture], of public, boyish interest in the activities of the oil fields, and a contained, secret loathing” (90-1). Austin’s deployment of W.E.B. Dubois’s powerful term is conspicuous here, for the period in which she was writing, but also in its application to what we have come to know as Kenneth’s environmental
imagination or environmental consciousness. On one hand, if Kenneth wants to participate in the culture of boyhood in Petrolia, outwardly he must know “to a certainty the output in barrels of every gusher,” while attending “the installation of every new engine and iron-riveted tank” with the other boys his age (91). On the other hand, if he is to be true to himself, he must keep his disdain of those encroachments private.

Kenneth performs two selves: the uncritical working-class boyhood expected of him, and the sensual, contemplative instincts of his rural upbringing. He maintains an interest in the burgeoning technological sublime all around him, but he seeks the comfort of nature as a space of authentic retreat just the same. His environmental double-consciousness is more poignant and acute than LeMenager’s claim suggests, and in its particulars it is likewise more revealing. Juxtaposed with images of networks of pipes, wells, and tanks, the narrator tells us that just as often Kenneth found his way into fields where the first signs of spring appeared to him like a “momentous discovery” such that he was “full of the importance of these things.” The “lucky strike,” for Kenneth, has its appeal, but his latent desire for the things of the natural world suggests both his personal past, which at this point in the novel seems irretrievable to him, and a more public history that haunts the hard edges of the abundant newness of Petrolia. Later, as Kenneth spends more time in the countryside, the simultaneity of past-and-present in his life grows irrevocable. Austin’s reader learns: “Nothing suited so well with the languor of his rapid growth as walking at the head of a flock out of sight of the oppressive derricks, away from the loathed smell of petroleum, with his arms extended on the herder’s crook which
he laid across his shoulders, the dogs ambling friendlily at his knees” (135). Kenneth’s pose suggests he would go back in time, “out of sight” and “away” from the present. And yet, the present absence of the derricks and their smell bespeaks their true inescapability.

Following the above events, the oil narrative culminates with Kenneth witnessing, one murky night, his father’s farmer-turned-disgruntled-oilman partner fighting with a night watchman atop an oil tank, in a modernist phantasmagoria of pipes and tanks and derricks lit up garishly in the fog. In their struggle, the farmer sends the watchman into the tank, bathing him completely in crude. The farmer escapes and Kenneth stares in fright as the watchman emerges, oil-soaked and ghastly, a symbol of sheer petromodern posthumanity (144-7). Austin’s narrator explains: “[Kenneth] was not afraid of the night nor of the hills behind him, drawing into deep, velvety folds under the moon, but he was afraid of that mysterious quality taken on by the works of man, [of] power ungoverned by sensibility” (145). The narrator opines that the oil field at night appeared as if it had “grown suddenly too big… and was stirring in its own control.” Here, the phrases “power ungoverned by sensibility” and “stirring in its own control” make evident Kenneth’s dawning apprehension that machine culture has overtaken local lifeways, and that it has defamiliarized local places to even those—like him—with the most acute sense of place. Austin forecasts with grim certainty that oil will, in fact, materially and psychically exceed its intended anthropogenic utility.

These pivotal scenes of The Ford’s oil narrative in turn express the utter social, material, and symbolic penetration of oil hegemony into regional cultures. As Austin’s oil
narrative contends with extra-regional economic interests manifesting locally, external forces are borne out in proximal ecological disasters with which no one is prepared to deal—or even recognize as such, much less take responsibility for. Moreover, local industrial work alienates people from the products of their labor and, therefore, the land, as seen in the sequence above in which wasted oil floods usable cropland. Petromodernity left those working the oil fields neither self-reliant, self-sufficient, nor self-managing, either as individuals or as a community, despite the Homestead Development Company’s best efforts. Bioregional critic Michael Vincent McGinnis calls this, “the separation of society from the natural world” (Bioregionalism 3). It falls in line with one of Saxon and Billy’s chief concerns in The Valley of the Moon: that farming families had left the land for the city, happy to be absentee landlords in exchange for a newly accessible cosmopolitanism, leaving the world’s poor and disenfranchised to do their work for them. Separation of this kind may well be petromodernity’s enduring legacy. Austin’s novel demonstrates that under the sign of petromodernity, culture tended to dissociate from its local attachments in proportion to its material relocation within the routes of global capital; hence, the blending of urban and rural and inside and out that Klimasmith detects. And yet the decoupling from the land and the blending of inside and out was not immediately evident or desirable on the ground to key characters in Austin’s novel.

The Ford concludes with Kenneth’s attempt to unite his town against outside interests that would redirect agricultural water away from the region for urban use. His attempt to unite his neighbors ostensibly fails, succumbing to their “invincible rurality”
and limited imaginations even though plans to move the water elsewhere never materialize (221). Yet by novel’s end the Brents’ neighbors slowly come back to them, working beside Kenneth in his efforts to enlarge their ability to irrigate the land. Ending mystically, with Kenneth returning to the ford where he and the other children had first encountered the oilmen and where he had rescued the lamb from drowning, Austin’s vision of an ardently localist West influences *The Ford*’s resolution beyond a middle landscape. Like London’s train whistle at the end of *The Valley of the Moon*, sounding in the distance comfortably far enough away for Saxon and Billy’s isolation but not so far that they can’t capitalize on its proximity, Austin’s novel finds space in Kenneth’s pastoral for oil infrastructure and water development. Kenneth’s idyll in this regard represents a new construction of the working landscape, a kind of prototypical future primitive that I will explore in detail in speculative regionalist texts in a later chapter. Here, it is enough to recognize that the both/and sense of place to which Kenneth and his family arrive falls outside of the pastoral and lapserian dialectic of innocence and experience.

Though she writes primarily about the ethos of Austin’s *The Land of Little Rain* (1903) in *Mary Austin’s Regionalism: Reflections on Gender, Genre, and Geography* (2004), Heike Schaefer agrees: she explains that Austin’s recognition of the ecological limitations of specific places “moves her protest against the environmental degradation of the arid regions beyond anti-modernist provincialism,” and she concludes, “Likewise, the bioregional commitment underlying her call for the development of sustainable
economies moves her ideal of environmental communalism beyond mere golden-age nostalgia’ (218). Schaefer’s qualifying “beyond anti-modernist provincialism” and “beyond mere golden age nostalgia” lend vital clarity to my position regarding the simultaneous past-and-present. *The Ford*’s resolution marks a general move toward the concept of natureculture, wherein the two are conjoined and mutually constitutive, and “beyond”—that is, in excess of—the partitioning of past lifeways and beliefs from their present renderings. “Beyond” in Schaefer’s use means to surpass, yet it recommends on one hand Austin’s prototypical bioregionalism as an appropriate response to the conditions of postlocality, and on the other hand, it suggests something other than simple reconciliation. While London’s novel ultimately fails to respond to postlocality’s challenges, the changes Austin documents in California’s landscape under the sign of postlocality begin the hard work of politicizing the allowable inclusions and exclusions in everyday life as they are resolved from below.

Midway through *The Ford* Austin’s narrator reflects on “the epic quality of the West” (237), wherein, as part of the novel’s many subplots, an apprenticed Kenneth circulates among San Francisco’s bohemians with his childhood friend Virginia. The West’s epic nature is given similar treatment in London’s novel, and in Upton Sinclair’s *Oil!*, as if each text is haunted by the enormity of that master narrative, even as each of them, in their own way, attempts to separate that past from their contemporary subjects. Kenneth had been sent to the city by his sister Anne to learn the ways of business from Old Man Rickard, but the Brent family’s lost ranch and the goings on of Summerfield and
Petrolia are never far from his mind. In its entirety, the passage mentioned above expresses the enmeshment of town and country and universe in mystical terms, whereby Kenneth’s psychic connection to the land is demonstrated in a simile of rootedness. Austin’s language imparts a sense that complex connectivity transcends economics, implying ecological interconnection if not universal truth on a fundamental level of implacement. That which Austin views as “epic” is in fact another way of understanding the actual scope of immanent placement, for, as her narrator expresses, “a little whirl of ideas and opinions…contained like the dust devils of Tierra Longa within a very narrow reach, carried, nevertheless, dust of the cosmos.” In other words, Austin realizes that even the most localized events connote an intrinsically monumental horizon: the simultaneous experience of near-and-far confounds the scalar; to borrow Gaston Bachelard’s phrase, the wisdom of Austin’s regionalism is in its awareness of the “intimate immensity” encompassed seemingly by the most inconsequential and isolated people, places, and things.

Later, Kenneth’s sister Anne, easily the most prescient and dynamic of Austin’s characters, muses in a more practical and portentous way about water rights in the region: “It’s queer how everything that goes on in Tierra Longa always seems so important,’” she says off-handedly to Kenneth (293). In this case, the “queerness” of the immanently local lies in Anne’s blooming understanding of the inter-regional assemblage of forces out of which locality is constructed. Related to her recognition of locality’s queerness, then, is the misapprehension of power Billy feels in _The Valley of the Moon_ discussed
above. Such an assemblage of meaning-making had been inconceivable in the earlier novel, while in *The Ford* postlocalization is gradually illuminated to those characters with the imagination to see through the dialectical collapse of outside and in. Anne sees how her homeplace has entered history; Saxon and Billy aspire to step outside of it. Especially notable, then, is that to Anne’s mind a locality which had seemed so limited refuses an ancillary role within the wider world. Cheryl Temple Herr’s reading of critical regionalism accounts precisely for the nature of this relationship intuited by Anne. Herr describes it as, “a sort of parataxis between regions” (10). In other words, the queerness of Tierra Longa’s import in this scenario is symptomatic of the collapse of “near” and “far” dualism, but arises in Anne’s understanding that neither outside or inside are subordinate in this heretofore unsuspected interrelationship. Queerness expresses instead the dawning possibilities of a formerly limited local as postlocal thirdbase. Thus forecasting biologic as well as economic interconnection, easily overlooked moves such as these in *The Ford* map onto magnified forms of near-and-far that drive meaning-making and implacement even further in Upton Sinclair’s *Oil!*

**Oil!: “the same in California as everywhere else”**

A new awareness of the undeniability of near-and-far colors the intellectual and spiritual growth of Sinclair’s protagonist Bunny—J. Arnold Ross, Jr—the son of speculator turned oil baron J. Arnold “Dad” Ross. Near-and-far is expressed mystically as the dust of the cosmos in *The Ford*. The simultaneous near-and-far in *Oil!* permeates the
novel’s romanticism (“there under the springtime moon, which is the same in California as everywhere else in the world” [201]), its pragmatism (“so innocent they were of the intricacies of world diplomacy, these two babes in the California woods!” [237]), and the practical machinations upon which the novel’s plot depends (“Ask yourself how it would have been at Paradise [the rural space where the Ross ranch and oil fields are located] and then you know everything about Russia and Siberia—yes, and Washington and New York and Angel City” [273]). These few examples of postlocality in *Oil!* are representative of the sheer pervasiveness with which near-and-far had eclipsed the limited local by the time Sinclair drafted his book. That near-and-far is so casually alluded to and by turns so pointed forecasts the by-now compulsory nature of postlocalization.

In an early issue of the teaching journal *The Clearing House*, Sinclair acknowledged that any “modern” high school education must teach students to, “understand the forces in our modern world which cause poverty in the midst of plenty and are leading the nations inevitably to war” (119). Before the term “globalization” was coined, Sinclair recognized the dire need to understand the complex connectivity of global culture in terms of triumph and oppression, but more significantly, he recognized that they were always in each other’s “midst”; that is, immanent, localized, and simultaneous. *Oil!* presents a proximity of “near” and “far” which is no longer jarring merely because it exists, but rather it reveals a proximity that is jarring because of the unevenness—the vulnerability and inequality—it uncovers. In tangible ways, this unavoidable interlacing of places reflects Ulrich Beck’s sense of an equally unavoidable
“banal cosmopolitanism,” whereby coercion, the unexpected, and the unintended side effects of complex connectivity emplot everyday living (Cosmopolitan Vision 19). Latency attaches to the everyday experience of postlocality in much of The Valley of the Moon and The Ford that falls away in the narrative arch of Bunny’s coming of age in Oil!. The very act of Bunny’s entrance into adulthood is predicated on his ability to knowingly examine the cause and effect of his father’s wealth creation on the concurrent expansion of social inequality.

As has been widely recognized, the anxiety of the period is relayed through negotiations with otherness. As I have said, the prevailing otherness in that era is traceable to the overwhelming simultaneity inherent to everyday life which proved the rule rather than the exception. Bunny’s anxiety, therefore, is related to Saxon and Billy’s anxiety, and to the anxiety Kenneth displays. Saxon and Billy, however, are absorbed by the narrative of individualism, and both nationalist and racial exceptionalism. Kenneth, unlike Bunny, falls prey to certain essentialist notions about his home, even if he begins to see past them. Bunny, even moreso than Anne, reaches across class and across race, however frustratingly comfortable the confines of his father’s wealth and society may allow him to feel. Again and again, Bunny’s awareness, which is an awareness of global inequality, leads to naive but deliberate action predicated on his understanding of the entwinements of near-and-far. Simply put, directed by increasingly powerful simulacra, Saxon and Billy had been confused by postlocality and so had opted out of it; for Kenneth postlocality registered as a kind of socio-environmental double consciousness
that lead to a crisis of past-and-present; for Anne, postlocality began to dawn in light of its knowable, constituent parts; while for Bunny, the routes of postlocality became the lanes of potential transgression, where the disenfranchisement and vulnerability of the world’s working class might be overturned.

The paradox of Bunny’s resistance, of course, is that he feels no ill toward the oil industry or the act of extraction which separates humans from their landscapes and which has caused so much environmental destruction in subsequent years. Bunny feels, perhaps even more acutely than the peers Kenneth thinks he must emulate, the “excitement about the ingenuity involved in oil extraction” (Frederick Buell 286). The anxiety of the age is encapsulated in Kenneth’s double consciousness regarding the works of man and the pastoral impulse, while for Bunny the twinned and mingled exuberance and catastrophe that he senses in himself and among the working classes surrounding him indicates his inner turmoil. In his essay, “A Short History of Oil Cultures; or, the Marriage of Catastrophe and Exuberance,” Frederick Buell asserts that catastrophe and exuberance were analogs for the triumph and oppression, domination and destruction, of a period driven by “oil-electric-coal capitalism” (280). For the working class Dad Ross employs, each new strike generates the promise of the spectacle of the strike, but also employment if not outright wealth for a lucky few. And yet in most cases in the novel, working class landowners are cheated and oil workers are exploited. Bunny has internalized this ironic energy of the age, but likewise, he emblematizes its regrets. He embraces oil culture, but he searches for equal space for his father’s workers within it. The exuberance-
catastrophe nexus Buell exposes and which can be located in Bunny marks a new cultural regime signaling instability, even as oil was billed to the masses as a stabilizing force. “Stability,” Buell explains, “seems to be completely gone—gone simultaneously in a runaway dynamism” of excitement and trouble (291).

“Runaway dynamism” is, in fact, a manifestation of the unexpected, the ubiquitous, and the transformative reorganizing power of oil culture. Unprepared for the dynamism of oil-driven complex connectivity, Bunny’s belief is that extraction and energy can be separated from the domination and destruction they mete on workers and the environment. Yet contained in Buell’s “catastrophe,” of course, is Nixon’s “slow violence,” the more accurate depiction of erasure and marginalization behind the spectacular violence of single events. Buell recognizes that very quickly in the oil narrative, living oil meant it was, “almost impossible to separate out catastrophe from exuberance and vice versa,” and, more to the point, “the two were mutually reinforcing” in their earliest renderings (282). Kenneth’s double-consciousness prevented him from fully accepting a world where the oil derricks weren’t always over the next hill, but enabled him to fight for social justice. In Oil!, the near-and-far clarifies to the very nearness, the undeniable immanence of triumph and oppression in everyday life under such an energy regime. Bunny comprehends the effects of postlocal simultaneity, but he lacks the worldliness to incorporate its dynamism into his social justice practice.

Bunny learns to grasp simultaneity from Paul, the slightly older working class boy he meets in the novel’s early sequences, and who remains Bunny’s standard-bearer of
righteousness in the decades that follow. Paul had witnessed firsthand the violent implications of global capital during his time as a soldier in World War I. It is Paul who tells Bunny in the line above that the workers’ struggles are the same everywhere, in the fictional Paradise and Angel City, as well as Siberia. Paul, moreso than Bunny, recognizes the “runaway” character inflecting petromodernity. Paul, too, plants the seeds of activism in Bunny, teaching him about working class solidarity. The story of American soldiers’ mutiny in Russia which Bunny received second-hand in the newspapers, is more forthrightly depicted by Paul: “Michigan lumbermen and farmer-boys, shipped up there under the Arctic circle, put under the command of British officers, and ordered out to shoot half-starved and ragged Russian workingmen at fifty degrees below zero—these boys laid down their arms!” (263). Embedded in the recuperation of the facts of the mutiny is the interconnectivity and global character of its constituent parts. The soldiers themselves were never meant for soldiering, but are, at heart, men of the soil. They are ill-suited for their task by training, but also because they are out of place. And yet they are still heroic, having transcended, if not exactly seen-through, the enmity of their situation. Therefore, the farmer-soldiers’ grim assignment reveals the incongruity, complexity, and confusion attending the simultaneous nature of near-and-far. Again, we might remember the circumstances surrounding Adolphus Windeler’s participation in the hanging at Rich Bar to see their analogous layered effects. Nevertheless, in this scene the workers unite in solidarity against interests they barely understand. They choose solidarity based on class rather than duty to machinations which are too easily occluded
in the layering effect of discordant parts. Mutiny, in this case, the unforeseen consequence of near-and-far, travels and transgresses the same routes global capital had established for its own enterprises. This course is not in one direction, either. The lesson behind the spontaneous act of resistance against the absurdism of their orders in Siberia is applied in a calculated way to strikes in the oil fields of California. The exuberance of American nationalism contains the catastrophic act of slaughter as well as the existential catastrophe the farmer-soldiers must have experienced. But the act of mutiny, the workingmen’s ability to see themselves in those they were sent to fight, becomes a symbolic act in excess of nationalism, effecting lives both big and small in the most distant and remote places.

The far broader, unexpected consequence of the war, then, is the end of the limited local horizon in the working class’s everyday experience; unpredictably, “place” and “home” are bound to ‘Siberia’ in this assemblage, and it affects the sites themselves as well as the needs and desires of their individual cultures. This global-local interface plays out in Bunny’s life through the web of raw materials and consumer goods necessary to the exploration for, and development of, oil, his dawning understanding of the emerging banal cosmopolitanism of the working class, and the material consequences of these tensions in his most beloved landscape, the Paradise ranch. Bunny learns globalization in place. Dad had purchased the land from Paul’s family, poor homesteaders, under dubious circumstances, on a lead that the land held oil reserves beneath it. Without revealing this fact to the homesteaders, Dad sets up the ranch as his
retreat from the pressures of modernity, while Bunny uses it to imagine a kind of utopia in the middle landscape tradition. Their retreat, though, is tenuous, as it is overcome materially by their own development of the wells, but also epistemologically and existentially, as the simultaneous near-and-far presents crises of conscience usually softened by the indifference and invisibilities afforded by distance.

Learning further the hard lesson of simultaneity after one of his father’s workers is killed in an industrial accident in the oil fields on the ranch, Sinclair’s narrator describes Bunny’s realization that, “at the same moment when poor Joe Gundha had plunged to his doom, Bunny would have been yelling his head off over a few yards gained by his team…Yes, life was strange—and cruel” (154-5). The narrator continues:

You lived in the little narrow circle of your own consciousness, and as people said, what you didn’t know didn’t hurt you. Your Thanksgiving dinner was spoiled, because one poor laborer had slid down into a well which you happened to own; but dozens and perhaps hundreds of men had been hurt in other wells all over the country; and that didn’t trouble you a bit. For that matter, think of all the men who were dying over there in Europe! All the way from Flanders to Switzerland the armies were hiding in trenches, bombarding each other day and night, and thousands were being mangled just as horribly… but you hadn’t intended to let it spoil your Thanksgiving dinner, not a bit! Those men didn’t mean as much to you as the quail you were going to kill the next day!” (155)
The porousness of boundaries that had once seemed certain but which are now abstract, shows through in this passage as Bunny comes to terms with near-and-far. On one hand, he learns the value of scale—human and nonhuman, conscious and unconscious, meaningful and merely regrettable. Hesitantly, he comes to understand that he lives in a time when “not-knowing” is almost impossible, and that uniformly it does hurt you. That which had been distant is now immanent. Scale, as noted previously, is folded into the simultaneity of postlocal consciousness. For Bunny, one thing leads to another, not in a cause and effect relationship precisely, but by any number of associations. While he cheers at a college football game, a laborer dies; one man’s death is like a hundred others, only collateral damage if not exactly slowly violent; domestic industrial accidents hardly differ from those deaths abroad on the battlefield; and the cruel truth is that each event might merely ruin dinner or an afternoon in the field for those of the ruling class.

The final lines of Sinclair’s passage reflect on intention and indifference. In the confusion of distance and nearness which Sinclair captures, Bunny’s awakening is toward compassion in a space where responsibility had once been elided. In this new terrain, while we might productively imagine Bunny’s evolving place-sense as global, instead, it is grounded in a local that has ceased to be finite and restricted. Bunny must learn to regard constitutive assemblages as immanent. Intention and indifference, almost one and the same in the final lines of the above passage, are even more difficult for Bunny to accept by the scene’s end: “Dad said they might jist as well go quail shooting, and forget what they couldn’t help. And Bunny said all right; but in truth he didn’t enjoy the sport,
because in his mind somehow the quail had got themselves mixed up with Joe Gundha and the soldiers in France, and he couldn’t get any fun out of mangled bodies’’ (156).

Here, Bunny does what he is told, but already recognizes first, that maybe they can “help” what happened to Joe, and second, that Joe’s death should not be forgotten, especially in the larger context of its complex relationship to events around the world. That Joe, the soldiers, and the quail, are all “mangled bodies” after this moment, copresent in Bunny’s experience of his Thanksgiving quail hunt with Dad on the Paradise ranch, establishes that remorse and compassion transcend the usual moral limitations distance affords. Postlocal distance is spanned when “far” is placed in the context of proximal acts, as Bunny does here. That is not to say that his only recourse is to choose guilt over nostalgia, but rather to understand that postlocal near-and-far manifest at the same time and in the same place. Simultaneity exceeds the caveats and obfuscations commensurate with arguments favoring scale in attempts to understand globalization.

Bunny’s sense of obligation grows along these lines, wherein his local is continuously and explicitly tied to an assemblage of regional, national, and global products, ideas, people, and events. Still, his anxiety, typical of the age, increases according to his new-found sense of obligation. The mask of pastoralism is hard for him to cast off entirely, and so he vacillates between responsibility and the old, insular exuberance. Even after the above epiphany about Joe, the war, and the quail, Bunny still loses his resolve at times, thinking, “It seemed a shame, when you came to realize it. This ranch had been a place where Dad could come to rest and shoot quail; but now that they
had struck oil, it was the last place in the world where he could rest” (167). Of course, in these lines, Bunny overlooks for the moment the fact that Dad is himself responsible for the changes in the landscape he now mourns. Bunny’s reflection is telling because it exhibits the ironies of pastoral desire in a postlocal landscape, especially when he allows himself to ignore the many entanglements at times so evident to him. The war machine is fueled by Dad’s oil, the war is fought to protect Dad’s oil, and Dad’s oil ruins the landscape most precious to them. And yet Bunny frames his inner turmoil as a plaint to satisfy his growing remorse:

There were not so many [quail left] on the tract, but there was plenty of adjacent land over which an oil prince and his royal sire were welcome to shoot. And once you were out of sight of the derricks, and out of smell of the refinery, it was the same beautiful country, with the same clear sky and golden sunsets, and you could get the poisons of bootleg liquor out of your blood and embarrassing memories out of your soul. Tramping these rocky hills, drawing this magical air into your lungs, it was impossible to think that men would not some day learn to be happy! (379)

Bunny has already symbolically linked the quail to the exploitation of workers at home and abroad, and they plainly stand for a kind of innocence lost. Now, especially, one hundred years later, this scene is poignant for the simple fact that those places the quail might live are even smaller, even farther away, and the days of relying on endless open spaces are gone. Moreso, we have learned instead that there is no escape from our
industrial transgressions, that there is no other side of the hill, but in fact that the other side of the hill is itself likewise overcome, likewise vulnerable. Further, we know about the invisible toxins of the industry, how despite the quail on the hill beyond, that on any given day the wind might blow the stink and pollution onto that hillside, too, and that its water supply would have already, irrevocably, been tainted. In late petromodernity, after peak oil, we have come to realize that pollution does not adhere to any territorial rights, that there is no here and elsewhere, but rather, that our geographies are postlocal geographies, that the same porous social boundaries surcharged by interconnectivity, hold true for material spaces.

In the novel’s denoument, Bunny uses the money he inherits from Dad’s estate to open a labor college, a place which, “‘Shan’t be so far from the world,’” where “‘people can train for the class struggle’” (512; 513). Yet by the end, Sinclair’s conflicted sense of the postlocal is evident in his post-oil vision of the Paradise ranch returned to nature: “Someday all those unlovely derricks will be gone…” (548). Oil! demonstrates how postlocality accounts for the unexpected consequences of entanglement, but it also exudes the anxieties or pastoralism and nostalgia which seek to stabilizes places that refuse to be fixed in place and time. In spite of its utopian agonies, however, the novel succeeds by insisting that interconnectivity circulates indirectly, through a multitude of sources, and across a multitude of fields. There is no straight line, Sinclair reveals, between “near” and “far.” To his credit, he refuses to foreclose against the fact that “near” and “far” are intrinsically linked and manifest locally and conspicuously in conjunction
with one another.

**Conclusion: “dangerously squandered and essential to recover”**

In each ensuing iteration of modernity, simultaneity layers day to day life with complex temporal and spatial intra-actions. The postlocal imagination recuperates our immanent placement by recognizing these ground-level entanglements in the places where we live. London’s contemporary reader, unlike his characters themselves, wants Saxon and Billy’s dream ranch to have a threshold; s/he wants them to find a place and an ecological solution that is available to everyone and possible over the long-term. Austin’s contemporary reader celebrates her understanding of the rhizomatic character of the places we inhabit, but reflects with sadness, too, that Kenneth’s utopia, like Saxon and Billy’s, lies on the other side of the ford. His low-water crossing, whereby ecosocial stability requires getting one’s feet wet, surpasses Saxon and Billy’s threshold-less place metaphorically, but it remains ambiguous by comparison to environmental justice activism today. Finally, Sinclair’s reader finds Bunny’s lack of environmental awareness hard to accept considering his enlightened social stance. While Bunny, perhaps, arrives at the fullest understanding of the simultaneity inherent to the postlocal condition, he, too, seeks that space apart to build his school to train enlightened working men and women as activists.

In her recent essay in Blake Allmendinger’s influential *A History of California Literature* (2015) outlining the forms and strategies of literary production during the era
this chapter entreats, Geneva M. Gano points to the “new realities of modern life,”
“recent technological innovations, swiftly implemented, in transportation and
communications” as the distinguishing characteristic of California’s literature (182; 183).
Yet curiously, Gano aligns texts from this period—including London’s *Valley* and
Sinclair’s *Oil!*—with the modernist, rather than the regionalist or naturalist traditions. She
writes that these authors were “not isolated and provincial in character”; rather, she
explains, they were, “linked into an international, cosmopolitan modernist network,” and
therefore, “Modernism emerged in California as a cosmopolitan phenomenon while
remaining grounded in place” (183). Gano describes these and authors of other key texts
of the period as “‘translocal’ in the sense that they drew simultaneously from local and
transnational sources for aesthetic experimentation, political engagement, and community
building.” Although she nearly completely elides the regionalist and nationalist traditions
buoying London’s and Sinclair’s (and, by extension, Austin’s) novels, not to mention
their decided lack of aesthetic experimentation in the modernist fashion, Gano indirectly
underlines the heart of my argument for these novels as documents of postlocality. They
are undoubtedly place-based, while at the same time inimitably linked and routed. Rather
than indicating a critical regionalism and a “rhizomatic West” to Gano, as Neil Campbell
and other western critics recommend, her argument awkwardly conflates modernity with
aesthetic modernism. She misreads the cosmopolitan composition of regional works; she
finds “translocal” production where, in fact, those productions which she considers are
really layers entangled in-place. Still, the term Gano uses to denote the cosmopolitanism
she registers in London and Sinclair, coincidently like my own, is “simultaneously.” They are *post*local.

Our ongoing challenge is to find space *within* the places we inhabit for understanding and responding positively to dramatic global ecosocial perils. Remembering poet/activist Gary Snyder’s adage that “the world is places” (*Practice* 25), any language we deploy to describe the character of our globality must keep this basic tenet in mind. London, Austin, and Sinclair struggled with this single fact as they speculated on the accumulating layers of simultaneous real-and-imagined representations of place, the simultaneous past-and-present influencing the tenor of our actions, and the simultaneous near-and-far effecting material changes in the places we live.

In his assessment of culture and consciousness as portrayed in U.S. fiction during the long interregnum between the American Civil War and World War I, Warren Berthoff reflects: “Sooner or later, in the bewildering onslaught of contemporary history, certain stranded formations and obsolete simplicities of human coexistence reentered political and storytelling imaginations alike as possessions dangerously squandered and essential to recover” (488). Writing especially of the last decade before the “revolt from the village,” Berthoff recognizes that regionalist and naturalist authors like London, Austin, and Sinclair recognized the stabilizing impact of difference, authenticity, and territory even as they grappled with equitable accommodations for newness and change. The “dangerously squandered and essential to recover,” though—that is, older lifeways and the perceived simplicity of the past—in the eyes of the authors I have studied here, to a
greater or lesser extent, exposes the basic premise that nostalgia was anxiety-producing
during this period. Austin and Sinclair especially seemed to understand the inherent flaws
of attempting to maintain or reenact “the stranded and obsolete.” Still negotiating with
the restraints of the limited local, London, Austin, and Sinclair illuminate and critique the
implications of postlocality.
Chapter 3

“Whoever claims it hardest”:

Disorientation, Sovereignty, and Settler Colonialism

in Shasta Bioregion

Shasta Bioregion / Coming Into the Country

Joan Didion’s *Run River* (1963), Thomas Sanchez’s *Rabbit Boss* (1974), and Greg Sarris’s *Watermelon Nights* (1998) each tell family histories that unfold within what bioregional thinkers call Shasta Bioregion. Shasta Bioregion encompasses the northern two-thirds of California, and is defined by the soft borders of its shared geomorphic, natural, and ethnographic provinces. The borders of bioregions are “soft” in contradistinction to “hard” state borders which define political territory. Soft borders preclude those boundaries, though they may be, so to speak, hidden in plain sight by the straight lines of the grid. “Soft” also refers to the permeable nature of borders or edges, which, for bioregionalists, are not meant to separate or contain, but to express the entanglement and interconnectivity of a region’s and the world’s places. The soft borders of a bioregion are deliberately politically imprecise in order to accentuate inclusion and polyvalence, rather than ideological exclusion and division. This is the case expressly because soft borders emphasize our first allegiance must be to the biomes that support us; not in the form of nationalism, but as “a defiant decentralism” working towards “creating an interdependent web of self-reliant, sustainable cultures” (Aberley “Interpreting” 13;
Bioregionalists use alternative names for regions, like “Shasta” or “Cascadia” in reference to natural zones, in an effort to emphasize humans’ interdependence within the biologic systems on which they rely, rather than our superficial dependence on regional and national institutions. In this way, bioregional maps are paradoxically less politically precise, even as they express an enhanced, truer, ecological precision.

My use of Shasta Bioregion here is deliberate for the same reasons; I employ it, additionally, especially for its defamiliarizing aspect, in which “California,” the known place, the assumed and common sense site of vernacular existence, signifies uncannily, so that our entrenched notions of unlimited-global and limited-local dualism begin to come undone. Most of us can locate California on a map; fewer can position Shasta Bioregion, and that is my point. To many of us, such a boundary doesn’t look “right.” Yet crucial aspects of events in Didion’s Northern California in *Run River*, for example, confounded Sanchez’s and Sarris’s Washoe and Pomo protagonists, and vice-versa. Didion’s later memoir, *Where I was From* (2004), for example, which is in deep conversation with the history of *Run River*, takes a triumphalist approach to the events of the Donner Party, while those same acts utterly unhand the Washoe in Sanchez’s *Rabbit Boss*. The bioregion, then, might become the neutral common ground for white, Washoe, and Pomo worldviews to coexist. Their narratives underscore the idiosyncratic, individual nature of place-making, and the failure of totalizing narratives and cultural assumptions. I mean to approach Didion’s, Sanchez’s, and Sarris’s texts through this deeper, unorthodox
structure, which realizes each novel is embedded in place, telling a story that relates lessons serving postlocal reorientations, if not exactly the reinhabitation narratives bioregionalists strive to tell. Certainly, *Run River*, *Rabbit Boss*, and *Watermelon Nights* are not strictly bioregionalist texts after the fashion Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (1975), Ursula K. LeGuin’s *Always Coming Home* (1985), and Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Pacific Edge* (1990), for example, surely are. Yet each displays a watershed consciousness in sympathy with bioregional goals, and, more to my point, each demonstrates the critical aim of revealing epistemological slippage at the heart of this chapter. If Chapter 1 focuses on orientation, and Chapter 2 on the resulting complications of simultaneous implacement, the present chapter explores the hazards of disorientation, as experienced in its variety in the postmodern U.S. West. As I proceed, recognizing the many stories and worldviews from which it is comprised, I think this West, this California, this Shasta Bioregion, should feel foreign and familiar to us at once.

*Run River* recounts the story of Sacramento Valley oligarchs, insular in their privilege, and keenly aware and proud of their pioneer—settler colonial—roots. *Rabbit Boss* relates the personal stories of four generations of rabbit bosses, or Washoe tribal leaders, in the central Sierra Nevada mountains. *Watermelon Nights* is the story of Pomo reenfranchisement, told across three generations of tribal members living in the north-central Coast Range. All three novels share tumultuous origins in the Gold Rush, where my project began as a study of orientation. Each novel, likewise, moves forward and back among key scenes associated with industrial modernity in the region, as well as the social
realignments following World War II, thus tying this chapter to themes and analyses in the two previous chapters. All three novels plot the rise and fall of families and communities engaged in the tensions of self-rule, defending against outside threats, and reconciling their pasts, presents, and futures. Together they assemble alternate and conflicting histories of the bioregion, told from the contrasting perspectives of indigeneity and settler colonialism, as well as from their separate, but linked, watersheds. Further, each novel confronts, at least tangentially, through its non-linear narrative structure, our current, artificial, linear mode of time-keeping, thereby troubling time construed as merely chronological, as always and only teleological and in support of the narrative of civilization and progress. In this way, their tangled narrative structures deliberately disrupt expectations of exceptionalism usually associated with hagiographies, even as each document accentuates the inescapable presence of our individual and collective pasts.

Finally, because Run River, Rabbit Boss, and Watermelon Nights are family histories, I view them as manifesting similarly to bioregional assemblage; that is, just as “Shasta Bioregion” posits an alternate, albeit not “separate,” “California”—defamiliarizing the known in service of ecologic reorientation—so too do family histories disrupt the master narrative of capital-H History, inserting polyvocality and kinship in its stead. Family histories are not separate histories, but rather, they are localized variations on themes of the larger narrative as told to us. They are, in this way, analogous to postlocality in that they produce, adapt, interject, and refine given narratives, submitting
them as versions of an archive, putting them to local use. In sum, through their narratives, and by their narrative structures, these novels impart a discomfiting sense that is bound to feelings of territorial loss. For this reason, they are instructive for their challenging relationships to nostalgia, their complicated awareness of recurrence, and, particularly in Sarris’s case, the optimistic hope for reorientation that they provide. I argue that by spatially, temporally, and narratively defamiliarizing the known, *Run River*, *Rabbit Boss*, and *Watermelon Nights* articulate a significant clearing of the settler colonial field, marking a turn toward an enlightened postlocal reinhabitation.

**Family, Story, History**

This chapter confronts story and genealogy as they inform and effect modes of place-making. A study of the interplay between personal and official histories, a focus on fictional family stories extends my discussion of the practice of meaning-making explored in earlier chapters with an examination of *telling*, of truth-claims from both sides of the latter day settler colonial project in California. In accord with and in addition to force, storying and inscribing landscapes are the primary means for claiming territory, of making one’s place; however, they participate equally in the loss of territory, as Alonzo Delano’s speculative account of a future California, for instance, in which tribal claims were erased in the interests of “civilizing” the landscape, has shown us. Therefore, in our present era distinguished by the anxiety of displacement, perhaps the most crucial stories are those concerning *placeless-ness*. Enlarging my earlier analysis of the uncanny,
narratives of the failure to take root, lay claim, or maintain a foothold turn our attention to
the sense and condition of alienation, as described in the previous chapter, more fully.

This chapter concerns itself with the feeling of being out-of-place, either through
disenfranchisement, dispossession, or deterritorialization as they have been retold. My
focus is on family narratives recounting the moment when story breaks down, when it
fails to stabilize local meaning as expected and places themselves become unrecognizable
to those who have inhabited them. In this light, alienation is a return to, and amplification
of, the strange, terrifying, and uncanny often marking the experience of places that are
new to us. In other words, the narratives I deal with here resonate as records of betrayal
to the place-makers involved precisely because their very way of being in the world, their
belief in their world’s stability, has been shattered. Forced to contend with new stories not
of their own devising, what they had accepted as stable—as familiar—is formally
dislodge, and the place-maker/story-teller is cast adrift. Across the trajectory of the
several periods that Didion’s, Sanchez’s, and Sarris’s novels depict, the amplification of
disorienting feelings is palpable and real. In a sense these novels return to Pico Iyer’s
notion of the postmodern neighbor, in their own, distinctly racialized incarnations. They
chart a course beginning with the isolation that Shirley, Delano, and Windeler felt so
acutely, through the dawning feelings of relinquishment and reconciliation upon which
London’s, Austin’s, and Sinclair’s characters arrived, only to reveal an unlooked-for
rootless at their heart.

Change—especially rapid change such as California experienced during the Gold
Rush and again in the years emphasized in this chapter following World War II—stresses that place-making is cyclical, driven by and precipitating destabilizing events despite the insistence of the linear narrative of progress. The place-maker / story-teller cast adrift exists in a discomforting uncanniness, retreating into a past of stories that once made their places make sense, albeit not under current conditions. In effect, this is the central quandary posed by postlocality. Cultural geographer Doreen Massey calls this condition a “withdrawal,” in which place becomes a “locus of denial” in the face of otherwise apparent changes (5). Massey’s version of place, which runs contrary to my own, maps cleanly onto Ulrich Beck’s understanding of the “limited local” examined in prior chapters and forms the basis of global socio-environmental arguments made by many ecocritics with whom I debate throughout the present work. Yet more often than not, as I hope to make clear, the daunting task of either facing the uncanny or the impracticability of refusing it positions place-makers in a fearful middle. Ultimately, I argue that if a disquieting alienation from place is the condition of postmodernity, this is so because we still insist on telling ourselves limited-local stories. The prospect of postlocality, then, is in large part a narrative proposition. If we need “new stories” they must be narratives that account for and absorb change, that recognize place is a matter of becoming, not stories that seek to halt its advance. This is not to say that the places we inhabit are passive, or that all forms of resistance to change are misguided, and especially not that all changes are proper and fair, but to reaffirm that place-making is premised upon evolving topophilic bonds, regardless or because of cultural inscription and geographic
determinism.

In previous chapters I discussed ground-level meaning-making followed by the challenges of an expanding vernacular globalization. Being-in-place in Gold Rush narratives meant adapting to strange environments and surmounting isolation, even as they enforced the germ of the traditional errand of subduing the wilderness. Global citizens were forced to make compromises with local places in the interest of their own survival, even as their dogged determination to “civilize” the place reduced it to a “killing field” for native peoples (Trafzer and Hyer xiv). Conversely, in the New West, with the errand seemingly complete, a growing cognizance of a consolidated regional identity within settler colonial culture required an amalgamation of narrative against outside, nationalist, and/or globalist forces. As regional identity developed, tension between local, regional, national, and global meaning-making mounted. Progress and a singular narrative of stability coalesced into an effort to police regional meaning. The personal histories I deal with here, even and especially when they are of a limited local character, interrupt the singularity of fixed local meaning. They return our scrutiny to the significance of from below meaning-making by reinserting plurality into regional signification, thus complicating and filling the gaps and uncanniness of a world that seems not of our own making. They open the way for postlocality’s new stories. By analyzing the primary attributes of being out-of-place as the condition of postmodernity, I intervene on the narrative of a triumphal progress usually read as flattening, homogenizing, and deterritorializing. My intervention valorizes the particular over the
generalized in the interest of discovering the ongoing plurality of the world’s places. For better and for worse, family histories assure individuals of their rightful place materially in a landscape, as well as their rightful claim to a presence in what Marc Auge calls “big-scale history” (26), even as they lay the foundations for its undoing.

Disorient

If alienation is the condition of postmodern implacement, disorientation precedes and produces it, distinguishing that which it precipitates. Together, stories shared across generations produce a region’s most durable, often multiple meanings through the transference of essential cultural knowledge. They are also a form of claiming, a territorialization that imagines the permanence of specific meanings attached to certain places. Storytelling is a kind of ownership reflecting values and desires that once affixed are hard to dislodge. Writing about the essence of indigenous being in *Bad Indians* (2013), Deborah A. Miranda explains, “California is a story. California is many stories… Human beings have no other way of knowing that we exist, or what we have survived, except through the vehicle of story” (xi). Writing from the indigenous perspective, Miranda’s claim is striking for its similarity to Joan Didion’s equally unequivocal opening to *The White Album* (1979), “We tell ourselves stories in order to live” (11). The wisdom of these claims is found in the vulnerability they both imply, as I suggest above. These authors remind us that place-making at its most elemental is a narrative act, and, that its performance is as consequential as it is grave and fragile. Further, through these
parallel expressions, they affirm that story is the central act of place-making across cultures. In effect, Miranda and Didion remind us that the material world is discursive and that discourse itself is material for all people. This entanglement does not, however, suggest that indigenous and settler colonial stories are in accord. Far from it. In fact, it is on the matter of story that place-making across cultures also diverges, usually violently. Different stories make different worlds. Too often, while place is the sum of stories retold, those stories a culture chooses to narrate or suppress produce insurmountable differences, do violence, and mask inequalities in their own self-interest. Especially between narratives of conquest and survivance, the stories a people tells itself about places and events infer a set of values usually too incongruous for even the least agreement. This collision of stories is the focus of my analysis. While I don’t mean to suggest that indigenous alienation and that of settler colonials is the same, I do assert that they are of a whole. Dehumanization is not the same as deterritorialization; they are different traumas. Dehumanization is a too-nearly-complete, too violent denial of the selfhood of Others; it can be quick, long-lasting, and unabating. Deterritorialization is an act of more subtle, indirect, slower violence, exerted across race but especially across class; it impacts an expanding set of postracial Others. And so, they share this common affect.

Encounter narratives suggest that well before any territory was lost, first contact had thrown indigenous worldviews into stark disarray. In her tribal memoir, which demonstrates the personal and historical as coextensive and enmeshed, Miranda describes
the conflict as being almost like science fiction (xii). Trauma, then, refers to the strange and shocking violence of incomprehension. The result of both sides falling prey to their own ethnocentrism, indigenous and settler colonial stories overlap only and specifically in their cognizance of intercultural improbability, whether in plot, setting, character, or all of the above. Writers from both positions acknowledge their incongruousness with one another, expressing their utter disbelief in each other as subjects. According to historian Susan Kellogg, from the outset this incredulity registered narratively in indigenous cultures as everything being backward, or the world being turned upside down. I want to be clear that this is not simple astonishment or amazement at the inexplicable or unexpected, but rather a complicated, deeply ontological disorientation. As disagreement, from indigenous perspectives, it refers to a sense of lostness, of having been wrenched from a world that had once been ancient and familiar. Haunting the continuing exchange, disorientation articulates psychological trauma, connecting deliberate erasure to those people and landscapes that have been erased, the cause to the effect. The disorienting act or event is embedded, pervasive, and ongoing. Disorientation marks a disruption or break with the past even as it subtends its memory; it separates the known from the unknown, instantiating confusion, entropy, and mutability. Disorientation is itself traumatizing, but it is also viscous, sticking to any story it precedes.

As it concerns the settler colonial, the effect is analogous but not complete. Speaking of deterritorialization as an effect of postmodernity in the context of indigenous
removal in the Southwest, philosopher Edward S. Casey asserts: “Our symptoms may seem milder than those of the Navajo, but they are no less disruptive and destructive.” In principle, Casey suggests that the aftereffects of displacement and deterritorialization are equivalent. He explains that among the symptoms of alienation, “nostalgia is one of the most revealing,” largely because it is the one we feel most acutely today (37). He refers to nostalgia as, “a speaking symptom of the profound placelessness of our times” (38). In this parallelism, Casey accounts for symptoms of displacement but not those of dehumanization. In many situations complicated by removal on the grounds that they were uncivilized—or worse—indigenous peoples’ trauma has been magnified; therefore, their survivance is clearly in excess of settler colonial nostalgia. Or, as Anishinaabe author-critic Gerald Vizenor insists, “survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry” (vii), a very different cause than the alienation of disafflicted whites. Vizenor’s attention, however, is on moving forward after generations of immobility. My study is concerned with disorientation as the precipitant act. As such, disorientation’s causes may be various, even while its experience is catholic: hence, Casey’s “speaking symptom” refers to narrativity as reclamation; likewise, it bespeaks the vulnerability inherent to, and the concordance of, Miranda’s and Didion’s emphasis on story. Disorientation catalyzes storytelling of the kind both Miranda—expressing an indigenous survivance-dehumanization narrative—and Didion—expressing a narrative of nostalgia-deterritorialization—espouse, and which Casey reveals as symptomatic. The intent of family stories encompassed by this chapter is to regain or reconstitute a place
and/or worldview that has been swept away against one’s will. Recognizing the ubiquity of this structural feature, I will employ disorientation as an interpretive concept linking texts, in their portrayals of generational place-making from both the indigenous and settler colonial points of view, that confront the ineffability—and its psychic consequence—of being out-of-place.

**Hubris/Heartache**

*Run River, Rabbit Boss, and Watermelon Nights* come to terms with the stories colliding cultures have told themselves from different sides of the experience of conquest. They are remarkably near in form, focus, and intent, if not ideology. Reaching backwards, they bridge a shared, though adversarial past with the late-settler colonial present. Didion’s novel records the latter days of first-wave settlement and the perceived end of regional authority as it confronts globalization following World War II. With indigenous presences completely evacuated from the account, her characters’ conflict is a matter of hubris, of a triumphalist narrative arc that cannot escape the absurdist perils of its key elements, even after those aspects have grown shabby and impracticable. Didion’s characters refuse to relinquish their sense of entitlement amidst the bewildering change of globalization. Conversely, Sanchez’s novel is a reworlding of the Washoe people disappeared from the settler colonial story. Sanchez’s characters are unable to comprehend the full meaning of their narrative’s key trope. That is, stumbling on the Donner Party eating themselves in the novel’s opening scene, the Washoe thereafter
struggle with the terrifying presence of white “flesheaters,” never to overcome the horror of that first instant. Lastly, and in contrast to Didion and Sanchez, Sarris’s work contends with the prospect of reorientation. While *Run River* and *Rabbit Boss* seem to end in a permanent or at least unwavering and cyclical disorientation, Sarris’s novel plots a course out of disorientation into a new sense of being-in-place. Representing Vizenor’s survivance story more explicitly, *Watermelon Nights* seeks to depose the “nominal simulations of the Indian” replacing them with “postindian” “new stories” (viii; emphases original). All told, these novels have exceeding relevance to the project of apprehending postlocality because they register the shock of impermanence and the ongoing struggle of individual and cultural presencing attending it. Didion and Sanchez narrate the assumed end of a world, or a world that looks to be off its axis, leaving their characters riven by disbelief and reduced to unmoored acts of endurance. Sarris, on the other hand, in seeking wider solidarities through recuperation and reconceptualization of family, constitutes a postlocal presence.

Finally, because they are recapitulations of a history of violent contact, each novel ruminates on bodies, indigenous and settler alike—a family or tribe to be erased, recovered, or memorialized, but also the individual human form itself, trapped in serial or cyclical episodes. Just as Casey warns against the Cartesian bifurcation of the physical and psychological, acceding that body and mind suffer equally and contingently from displacement (*Getting Back* 35), Didion, Sanchez, and Sarris do not forget that bodies and psyches experience the agony of disorientation in equal measure. Although *Run*
River, written from the settler colonial perspective, and Rabbit Boss and Watermelon Nights, written from indigenous perspectives, are not depictions of removal, the psychogeographic outcome of the disorientation they document asserts itself correspondingly. In effect, the place the characters in these novels inhabit has been either literally or figuratively taken from them, not they from it. Although still in place, their home effectively ceases to signify as it had; or, past significations prove outmoded. In these novels the topophilic bond is uninterrupted though hollowed-out; the ability to enhance and maintain that bond through everyday practice—sometimes bodily, sometimes psychic—has been dismantled. An affective, existential parallel to displacement, disorientation implies no longer being concretely placed, through coercion, violence, or otherwise; it is to be nowhere in particular, aimless and unsettled, even as impulse or habit and location suggest differently. The ailments and misfortunes of the body and mind attending displacement and disorientation follow a narrow, parallel, predictable course.

Didion: Deterritorialization and Nostalgia

Joan Didion’s essay “In the Islands,” part recapitulation of her breakdown on Oahu and part veneration of James Jones’s Hawaii, famously articulates her semiotics of fictional spaces, declaring: “A place belongs forever to whoever claims it hardest, remembers it most obsessively, wrenches it from itself, shapes it, renders it, loves it so radically that he remakes it in his image” (White Album 146). Really, she is speaking of
the life of a novel and fiction’s ability to transform a place, even as recent geocritics remind us—after Gaston Bachelard, Henri Lefebvre, and Edward Soja’s sense of the real-and-imagined before them—that “the era when ‘fictitious’ narrations can be definitely cut off from the ‘real’ world is long over” (Westphal, *Foreward* xiii). For, as Didion goes on to say, “It is hard to see one of these places claimed by fiction without a sudden blurring, a slippage, a certain vertiginous occlusion of the imagined and the real” (147). In this, Didion’s assertion agrees with the vignette beginning Yi Fu Tuan’s essential *Space and Place* (1977), in which he recalls the physicists Neils Bohr and Werner Heisenberg visiting Kronberg Castle in Denmark, wherein they reflect how very different the castle is from others like it because—whether or not in fact—Hamlet resided there. Fiction, Tuan suggests, amplifies a place’s meaning. Didion’s “vertiginous,” in this case, far from being disorienting, is a necessary and pleasurable part of being-in-place.

Thinking about the material aspects of place-making, Didion’s claim is echoed by Wallace Stegner’s sense of place, when he argues, “a place is not a place until people have been born in it, have grown up in it, lived in it, known it, died in it—have both experienced and shaped it, as individuals, families, neighborhoods, and communities, over more than one generation” (201). In fact, writing twenty years later, Stegner seems to paraphrase Didion in *Run River*. At the heart of the novel, the central character Lily Knight recalls her father Walter having told her: “I think nobody owns land until their dead are in it” (84). The omniscient narrator of *Run River* refers to Walter’s statement as, “a familiar variation on a familiar motif” (84). Twined thus, the imagined, the fictional,
and the real point to the discursive production of place, to story, and to the clarifying
force of narrative. *Possession*, consensus seems to say, is a matter of cultural inscription:

“No place,” Stegner writes, “is a place until things that have happened in it are
remembered in history, ballads, yarns, legends, or monuments” (202). Stegner, like
Didion, like the physicists at Kronberg, recognize that even “phony” stories oft repeated
transform and make a place. Yet the undercurrent of violence in Didion’s “hard claiming”
belie the superficiality of benign burying and remembering in hers and Stegner’s
versions of place-making-as-ownership, especially when considered beside the
deliberateness of her phrase “remakes it in his image,” with its echoes of Alonzo
Delano’s speculative erasures. Burying and remembering represent the passive
inevitability with which manifest destiny assures itself. They assume an air of
predetermination that occludes the acts which precede them, including, but not limited to,
the Miwok, Pomo, and Washoe dead buried by their people unrecognized by Didion’s and
Stegner’s monolithic origin story of the selfsame landscape. The active “wrenching,”
“shaping,” and “rendering” that Didion calls radical love of place is more aptly brutal,
more fittingly descriptive of the settler colonial project, which Patrick Wolfe says follows
a “logic of elimination” that “destroys to replace” (388), in California and the West.\(^\text{82}\)

Nevertheless, as evidence of Casey’s “speaking symptom” of rootlessness, Didion
states succinctly in the 1971 “Art of Fiction” interview from *The Paris Review* that “the
impulse” for writing *Run River* “was nostalgia” (n. pag.). Her aim, she says, was to create
a complicated chronology, “to somehow have the past and present operating
simultaneously.” Immediately striking in Didion’s claims as she remembers the novel’s composition is that she wrote it from the prospect of a displaced person; as such, her impulse was to imagine herself back in place, to reconstitute her topophilic bond in an effort to overcome her alienation in New York. While she calls this reconstitution nostalgia, with Casey in mind it is more exactly a form of self-preservation. Just as above, where, in the midst of breaking down she communicates her strong admiration for authors who can make a place their own, through the remembered landscapes of her childhood she invokes the most formative aspect of her being in order to fortify her personhood in a strange environment. Having less to do with ownership and more with belonging, composing *Run River* was her attempt to ground herself in the familiar, even as she recognized its “misapprehensions and misunderstandings” (*Where I was From* 18). Against the bewildering surroundings of New York, where all of *Run River* was written, remembering and recovering the known attempts to undo the disorientations of the present. That is, to remember the known place is to remember the known self; conversely, Didion’s claims affirm that placelessness diminishes, and is the result of, an already diminished selfhood.

This is Didion’s most common motif. Her work extends across current events, but key works like *Run River*, like the essays “The White Album” and “Slouching towards Bethlehem,” like “In the Islands,” and the much later memoir *Where I was From*, are recalibrations of a sort, pointing to confusion with present circumstances but also marking a return to a psychic source. Disorientation, in sum, is Didion’s *oeuvre*. Each of
the above texts turns precisely on the interests of recapturing a time in place that had made sense to her. Though Didion is at her subtle best in these instances exactly because she transmits her incredulity when arguing that times had once been simpler, in this regard Didion’s work especially emphasizes that settler colonial place-making—its “wrenching” and “rendering”—does damage to both its victims and its perpetrators, a theme I will return to throughout this chapter. Her wary, strategic nostalgia reveals the psychic price of a certain kind of implanation, that which Peter Berg calls “live-in colonialism” (74), the stakes of which resonate clearly today as the alienation and betrayal of deterritorialization. Live-in colonialism is predicated on stability—burying, remembering, monument building—yet it trades inherently on an ethos of progress that will always wrench, shape, and radically render impersonally rather than in one’s own image as Didion suggests. As Berg maintains, live-in colonialism “becomes its own worst threat” because it requires “mammoth amounts of labor and energy” to build and retain, but also because as it reduces diversity it leads its culture “towards self-extinction.” This deliberate narrowing of contexts lies behind the destruction Wolfe asserts settler colonialism performs. In effect, the colonizer—in this case Didion’s protagonists—fall prey to the logic of elimination their ancestors put in place, and which they perpetuate.

*Run River* is effective largely because of this sense of irony Didion employs, both to the personal and the triumphalist narratives. Its layers of knowing complexity multiply the obstacles in the way of any straight-forward reading that either celebrates or indicts its characters’ roles in the settler colonial place-making project. While *Run River*
communicates the impactfulness of a fading sense of American exceptionalism on its adherents, it contemplates the harm in attempting to gloss over its elisions, too. Lily Knight-McClellan is symbolic of this contradiction. The discordance it produces is manifested in Lily’s troubled relationship with her past. For example, Lily must resolve her admiration for her father with his decades-long infidelity to her mother—the “phony” story acquitted against its counterpart in fact. Yet Lily is skeptical about her own narrative in ways that are telling. In tone the novel follows this pattern of paradoxical, predictable nostalgia even as it promotes the critical unraveling of it. The manner in which the great man, her father, died—drowned drunkenly in the river at the wheel of his car with his lover—proves he may have been great in his daughter’s eyes, but was otherwise flawed. Her relationship with her father coloring her own marriage to Everett, also an oligarch, Didion’s omniscient narrator indicates Lily’s challenging, worldly uncertainty: “She was not sure that it would be all right [between she and Everett] even if they could go back… and start again. She wanted now only to see her father, to go back to that country in time where no one made mistakes” (95). At once infantilizing and empowering, the simultaneous past and present Didion claims she had been striving for in the novel surfaces in Lily’s contingent affections for the men in her life. Notably, the temporal in this passage is spatialized, but more so, it implies a parallel, generalizable critique of settler colonial narrative commingled with evidence of personal inconstancy. It depicts the failure of the trope of reinvention by challenging the premise of western hagiography. Copresent infantilization and worldliness denote innocence coping with the realities of
experience. That Lily can entertain the belief in a mistake-proof past in conjunction with
the realization that nothing can be begun again indicates the necessary ability to entertain
contradictions simultaneously. Lily survives disorientation by the dark virtue of the
distant toughness which she alone among the novel’s characters possesses. Hers is an
insecurity founded on the absent presence of her father, who stands for the out-sized
characters of the frontier epoch. Trapped in the mire of historical privilege, she is surely
disoriented by the changes taking place around her, but she is also resilient. Unwavering
as she may be in her cosmology, it is precisely the ethos of progress driving American
exceptionalism that informs her adaptability.

In contrast, Lily’s husband Everett fares far worse. At its most basic, *Run River*
lays bare the hidden maintenance and cost of preserving one’s origin story, the stakes of
which in the novel are a matter of well-being but also life and death. While Lily’s
resilience indicates the ability to countermand disorienting circumstances through sexual
excess, it exposes the necessarily uncritical act of composing cultural origin stories—the
‘yarn’ that stands for conquest and genocide, the sordid side of which is conspicuously
absent in Didion’s telling, even as she critiques triumphalism itself. Lily’s failure at
marriage and the lies it demands function allegorically for the failures and elisions behind
the of conquest in California. Everett, on the other hand, is less of a realist and more
willing to ignore the personal and cultural contradictions supporting the narrative to
which he subscribes. Feeling trapped in the matrix of westward expansion’s past, Everett,
moreso than Lily, is also beholden to it. Everett especially is unwilling to betray even its
most inopportune truths. Without the central narrative of place engrained in them, both would be utterly unhinged. But Everett, unable to accept—even as he sometimes intuits—the fallacies inherent to the narrative of manifest destiny, fears its alternative. The threat he and Lily feel so acutely in the novel is the threat of losing their topophilic bond, destructive and misguided as it is. Everett, however, in his single-mindedness, by killing Lily’s lover Ryder Channing, commits the act that closes off any possible future for his way of life.

Beginning in medias res, Run River opens on the sound of a gun and a reference to the time the shot was fired: “Lily heard the shot at seventeen minutes to one” (3). Particular and disconcerting at once, Run River’s disorienting temporality is necessary to its narrative of declension. With time spelled out formally in words, not numbers, Didion’s reader is dropped rudderless into a particular moment of extreme foreboding; the scene is hard-edged but murky at once. The novel tends immediately backward to a scattered past, eventually returning to this penultimate scene. The gun and the clock being the principle tools of settler colonialism, that they appear in the first sentence of the novel not concretely as themselves but as augury and proof of themselves is telling. They are sure but disambiguated signs, just offstage but nonetheless imposing, meant to be understood as present implicitly throughout the novel. As Lily brushes her hair upstairs in the family home, she hears the shot from the dock on the river. Knowing the exact time of the shot because she had been winding the wristwatch Everett had given her as an anniversary present, the intervening moments establish her spectral callousness attending
the equally haunting undercurrent of violence that has played-out down by the river. In this central scene there is a flat affect of almost out-of-body clarity varnishing the narration. The defining act, the gunshot fired by Everett that kills Channing, should be intimate, as personal as the act of avenging infidelity must inherently be. And yet both Lily and Everett are utterly dissociative and academic. They are, somehow, at a distance from themselves. Although Lily wants to hide Everett’s responsibility and Everett wants to accept it, there is an unsettling abstraction to their final moments together, forecasting that each of them had been alienated from themselves and each other all along. Everett’s last act and Lily’s response to it describe an existential ambivalence related, I maintain, to the fact that their “radical” love of place was based on an incongruent “remaking.” Keeping their family together has meant everything to them, and yet they are the first generation unable to ignore the deceits of its “yarn.”

The effect, much as it had been in Dame Shirley’s place-making in Chapter 1, is a focus on the immediate, on objects that signify daily life for the characters involved. As Everett surveys the murder scene, the things he sees appear to him as symbols of his responsibilities: “A dock light first, a torn fence next, maybe the pump goes off and loses its prime: before long the whole place would come crumbling down, would vanish before his eyes, revert to whatever it had been when his great-great-grandfather first came to the valley” (13). Everett articulates the perils, but also the obligations, of patriarchy: perils and obligations he has grown weary of, but which he can’t let go of, either. The failure of each object, which in Everett’s mind shows it coming into its “thing-ness,” exposes the
hollowness of certain acts of his inscription, but it also recalls Berg’s commentary on the perils of live-in colonialism. In this reading, Everett fails to realize his postlocality because he misses the layers of accumulated meaning in his immediate landscape. He can only witness the end of his failed narrative. Or, as Berg says, because Everett has so limited the meaning of the place he inhabits, he has likewise “narrow[ed] opportunities for social and personal self-preservation” (74).

Askance of what they had been for Shirley, objects-become-things are disorienting to Everett, even as they provide him with deep insights into his place-making schema. The light, the fence, and the pump are definite, but they also require Everett’s constant attention, something he no longer wants to give. In that regard they are a veil representing his overwriting and remaking that has finally been pulled back. Clarifying but also mystifying, Everett sees with certainty that the life he has been living, the world he has been sustaining, has been, if not precisely a lie, at least not as substantial and lasting as he let himself imagine. Meaning has slipped beyond Everett’s grasp despite the generational reference in this passage. The living and dying which figure so prominently in Stegner’s sense of place are, in this moment for Everett, utterly inconsequential. Significantly, he understands that this world sweeping by him could just as easily go back to what it once had been, to the geologic, resilient, biologic eternal. That is, the material space abides outside of his place-making, and the ethnocentric human meaning he has attached to it is only a partial truth, a single version among many stories vying to define it. Encapsulated in Everett’s epiphany is the superficial nature of Alonzo Delano’s
speculations of a hundred years before. Delano’s “remaking in his image,” while it underwrites the recovery narrative forming the basis of Lily and Everett’s triumphantism, had little to do with the space Delano—and Everett’s great-great-grandfather—came into. In many ways, if Lily embodies resilience despite disorientation, Everett emblematizes the old order of changeless place. His local is a limited local. His epiphany resides in the fact that he had overlooked until this moment that the place his narrative overwrites was predicated on change, on the remaking of the likes of his great-great-grandfather and Alonso Delano, and has been preserved until now by his maintenance of it. As expressed through Everett’s dismay, the ethos of settler colonial place-making is not recovery per se, but this act of remaking in one’s own image, in supplanting other narratives by living-in-but-not-with one’s environment.

Everett’s epiphany comes to him in waves of partially formed cognitions. Whereas Dame Shirley’s unheimlich proved the adaptability of familiar objects to strange circumstances, Everett’s obsessive acknowledgement of the things with which he has surrounded himself has the opposite effect. The clarity with which Everett sees he has deluded himself, predicated on the failing objects around him, builds next to a comprehension that much of his remaking entailed wasteful practices. Addressing Lily, but equally expressive of the internal monologue washing through him, Everett remarks, “The swimming-pool lights are on again.” The reader is told that this small fact “suddenly irritated him” because it was the sum of many such irresponsible acts amounting to “waste everywhere, waste and erosion” that define his life (259-60).
Everett’s “sudden irritation” at the seemingly inconsequential details associated with the murder scene suggest how out of control he really feels. His focus on things almost within his control—things that are merely nagging—connote his unhinging. So while Didion lays the groundwork for character across the breadth of the novel in these fleeting, obsessive moments, through Everett’s fixations following his murderous act Didion also evinces everything wrong with live-in or settler colonialism’s particular “conviction of entitlement,” a phrase she uses elsewhere in a similar context (Where I was From 79). In a materialist reading of this scene, the swimming pool represents civility and privilege, compared to the river, the site of transgressive adolescence for generations among the valley’s oligarchs. Notably, the swimming pool built between the river and the house is not viewed as wasteful, but its lights being left on when no one is home, is. Further, leaving the lights on in the pool merely for effect bothers Everett, and yet it makes perfect sense in the logic of appearances he and Lily have been enacting. It cultivates an ethos of civilized implacement, yet stands, really, for nothing. Everett’s projection of the burned-out dock-light, then, in contrast, is a symbol of their failure to maintain appearances, to be true to the organizing fiction they have created. Comparatively, these small moments of clear-headedness seem to ask what good a pool with lights left on for no one is if the little things, the other lightbulbs so critical to the final scene where everything falls apart for real, aren’t attended to. Everett only sees in parts, resisting seeing the brokenness of the whole, yet his agonies over the little things denote an important lesson about the ground-level composition of orientation.
A powerful critique of place-making, the almost curious inclusion of “erosion” in this statement speaks more to deep time than to material culture and the collapse of the oligarchs. Thinking about this final scene as an extension of and conclusion to the opening moments of the novel, “erosion” recalls Everett’s fear that the land, after he is gone, will revert to “whatever it had been when his great-great-grandfather found it.” Really, it turns the reader’s attention back to the river, the binding symbol of the novel. The work of place is slow, steady, and constant, no matter how we try to manage it. So in one sense, use requires maintenance, it causes too rapid change, but is in the end a superficial act of place-making as it follows the desires of late capital. However, this passage balances the superficial with the consequential, with that which, seemingly, abides. Everett’s “whatever” proves the off-handed way the exceptionalist worldview approaches place-making. That Everett can’t imagine the landscape before incursion, or sees it as somewhat less valuable, speaks to the conceits of the settler state. Waste and erosion point to the evanishment Everett foresees at the outset of the novel, implies a return to the virgin, tabula rasa state, that which in fact never had been. Tabula rasa is the settler-colonial’s trope of rightful claiming. It empowers possession while at the same time fueling the incursions of constant change and dislocation. In short, the seemingly epiphanic in Everett’s final moments transmits his overwhelming sense of being out of place—or, more exactly, being left out. His loss of privilege insults and bewilders him, but his “whatever” suggests his cosmology would never have been suited for productive self-critique.
What makes Everett’s killing of Ryder Channing so symbolic of his disorientation is that among Lily’s many lovers up and down the river, it is Channing who represents the new order of the valley. Arriving in Sacramento as an airman in the war effort, Channing stays in California, as so many had, to seek his fortune. Channing knows the best people, goes to the best parties, and has the superficially friendly familiarity of a salesman about him. What Channing represents, then, is exactly what Everett had sought for so long to suppress: intrusions into his hermetic world; that world into which he was born and which has afforded him so many privileges. Channing was key among those changing the game. Still, with Channing as with Everett, as with Delano before him and any number of explorers before him, the conceit of the *tabula rasa* persists as essential to successive settler states. Emblematic of “remaking,” a drunken exchange between Everett and Channing uncovers that this emptying is actually open-ended. As Channing discusses outside interests buying up land Everett had always viewed as worthless from the perspective of his farming needs, Everett tells him, “it’s a free country, plenty of room for everybody” (158). It is clear from Everett’s initial response that he is still in the thrall of the West’s myth of free, wide open spaces. An yet, we are told that short of calling him a fool, “Channing seemed not to have heard him.” In a small but entirely pertinent way Channing’s “not hearing” participates in the crucial erasure at the heart of “remaking” necessary to clearing the way for new inscriptions. However, Channing’s strategic deafness is only part of the equation. Here, Everett’s utter misunderstanding of the new circumstances surrounding him facilitates the swelling changes about to overcome his
way of life. Channing tells Everett: “The point is we need everything out here. Absolutely *tabula rasa*. Christ, within the next ten, fifteen years somebody could make a fortune in the *agency* business” (158). In a compact way, this exchange reveals the fading narrative of the Old West being overcome by its adaptations to the West that is “new.” Further, it is clear in this exchange that Channing’s view of substantial culture and Everett’s are worlds apart. What Everett sees as fixed and necessary, Channing views as a vacancy. Everett and Channing show that even within the settler state’s master narrative there are winners and losers as regimes change. The irony here is that things will never go back to the way they had been, but rather that as each new settler state assumes their own *tabula rasa*, Everett’s river estate will succumb to further frantic development.

In this respect, Channing’s use of “agency,” and Didion’s deliberate italicization of it, is telling because it marks a point in the exchange where Everett is utterly at a loss for what Channing means. He asks, “You mean real estate? Insurance?… Or automobiles?” Everett’s version of speculation has only certain material forms of affluence as markers for opportunity. He thinks still of wealth and success as ownership, as the outward manifestations of authority and privilege. Even insurance speaks of a conservative protection of one’s investments. Yet what Channing, miles ahead of him as a player in the new post-War settler colonialism, means by “agency” is far different: “I mean *advertising*. Advertising agencies.” Channing already recognizes the aims of neoliberal capital as far more ephemeral, far less spatialized and material as they grow more globalized. Again, the particular is overwritten by the singular, just in another
iteration. The “new” that Everett understands is the buying and selling; Channing recognizes that “new” is an energy, the influence that fuels desire, and extension of the “white energies” of the nineteenth century I have noted in Chapter 1. “New” to Channing is the spirit that will drive the changing local climate. Put another way, Everett has ceased to be a speculator in the tradition of Delano, though he is Delano’s heir. The equation is too simple: by living in the past Everett has ceased to speculate. Channeing has more in common with Delano than Everett does, even if neither Everett or Delano would recognize that fact. Channing’s certitude ensures that he is a speculator in the fraught tradition of the West. His ability to see through the cultural structure already in place in favor of the world he envisions proves he is so. He is proof of the American idiom that a “man of vision” can see clearly into a certain future, a future that is as inevitable as it is self-fulfilling. Channing’s storying, like Delano’s before him, makes space only for what he wants to see, allowing for no conflicting worldviews. The main difference is that whereas in the old narrative to which Everett subscribes, everything was free, in Channing’s world everything is for sale.

What follows this conversation is a long paragraph describing Everett’s bafflement, which then devolves into Everett’s fleeting rage at his own miscomprehension and implied irrelevance. Petulantly, he denounces Channing as beneath his class. The keyword “agency,” then, extends beyond Everett’s misunderstanding and even beyond Channing’s sense of it. Channing is an agent of change; moreover, Everett feels his own agency slipping from him. Both, however, at
least partially grasp their need to control the narrative. Agency is the ability to tell one’s story as one sees fit. That Channing’s manner was being repeated after World War II almost everywhere, intuicing the many non-places that were to follow, and Everett’s presence as a symbol of the old patriarchal order mingle in this scene, reminds Didion’s reader of the sadly episodic nature of progress, but too, we are reminded of the very local, personally meaningful ways such conflicts of agency were being played-out. The recovery narrative feeds on itself, erasing what it has built, leaving those left behind to moulder in their nostalgia.

Finally, as the novel leads back to the murder scene with which it began, Everett’s disorientation is so penetrating that he turns the gun on himself. A victim of the leading edge of deterritorialization following World War II’s cultural upheaval, Everett sees no way forward in the place he has built on the narrative of triumphal forefathers. This passage marks the generational end of stewardship, such as it was. Knight, the lone male heir of the McClellan family, ironically, wants no part of his father’s struggles to preserve the old order. He wants capital, but not land. Really, this was the ethos from the outset. The goal was not getting infrastructure in place, but rather creating an environment that serves capital. While Everett and Lily fell prey to the ethos of the pioneer spirit attending those goals, their son Knight has no such illusions. He realizes no affiliation to the place other than what it can give to him. In effect, everything is up for sale, nothing is sacred or withheld. While Everett and Lily believe there was a golden era, Knight is disinclined to even contemplate it.
Betrayed by their own ethos of progress and futurity that drove western conquest as it drives the transformation of Sacramento after the war, Lily and Everett experience the real sensation of being disoriented: a failed graspability, where neither intimacy nor perspective can affix an image or its meaning to a place completely or for any length of time. Or, perhaps, where a sense of place can only be consigned to some incontestable past. The novel’s temporality—its simultaneous past-and-present—succeeds in its effort to impart the burden of memory on the present tense. That is, as meta-commentary on acute placelessness, there is no clear route to the present, even as the past is immanent and inescapable. In Run River, what seems direct is cloudy, the result of many possible narratives, all of which ultimately fail the narrator-teller-believer. The problem Didion’s characters face is that they have chosen a singular origin story. One that, as environmental historian Carolyn Merchant has pointed out, serves the convoluted and paradoxical interests of “Christian religion, modern science, and capitalism” (133). The American narrative of recovery Didion’s characters succumb to is fraught by its arc of Fall and recovery—it leaves Lily and Everett helpless to recover in successive iterations of self and place.

Sanchez: Disorientation and Recurrence

The linked themes of waste and power encapsulate opposing Washoe and white worldviews in Rabbit Boss, starkly dividing indigenous and settler colonial acts of place-making. From the Washoe perspective, place-making is a vibrant act in which all things
contribute, and for their contribution, all things must be honored. Power comes not from outside and above, to be wielded in self-interest, but rather it is derived, shared, and exchanged among all actors in a given place. Power is not monolithic, but rather it is composed of a plurality of agencies, all of differing natures. Very deliberately, the bioregional ethos valorizes indigenous beliefs such as this, paralleling, especially, their sense of polyvocality and polyvalence. In this cosmology, to waste is unconscionable because it dilutes the vibrancy of the whole; literally, it unmakes, bit by bit, the structure supporting the home ground. In contrast, the white cosmology is predicated on utility and entitlement, serving the interests of short-term gain by shear force. With its quintessentially different version of waste, white power is authority gotten through domination of others, human and nonhuman alike. From the Washoe perspective, white authority erases—either immediately or over time—those many actors which make a place signify. Or, again, in the bioregionalist vein, it narrows the diversity of a place until the place itself is in ecosocial peril. Yet the settler colonial is shocked, as Lily and Everett are, when, after years of such subjugation, their place betrays them. A clear line should be drawn from the McClellan’s deterritorialization and the postmodern neighbor Pico Iyer, who is amazed that in a time of crisis he is unknown to those residing nearest to him.

Like *Run River* had, *Rabbit Boss* begins *in medias res* in the novel’s climactic moment. The young Washoe, Gayabuc, witnesses in horror the Donner Party’s abominable act of cannibalism, when he is out hunting for the feast to celebrate his first
child. Sanchez establishes a powerful allegory of recurrence informing the narratives of successive generations throughout the remainder of the book. In each iteration, white appetite, so horrifyingly great that they would eat even of themselves, demonstrates to Gayabuc and his heirs a baffling yet convincing assurance that white hunger is boundless, laying waste to all it would desire. In Gayabuc’s eyes and from the perspective of those who succeed him, as white appetite exploits female bodies, mineral wealth, abundant wildlife, and expansive forests, it amounts to a moral transgression of the world’s key precepts. At odds, then, are an indigenous sense of power that sustains, and a settler colonial sense that power is gained through dominion and destruction. After what Gayabuc witnessed, the Washoe outlook gained an absolute, existential belief in the abomination of white behavior, as well as a sure if misbegotten fatalism. Unable to come to terms with the acts precipitating it, and ossified by Gayabuc’s original shock, the Washoe narrative in Rabbit Boss is one of pervasive, recurrent disorientation from that first moment onward, across time and across space.

Spreading outward from the initial, loathsome act, white atrocity against the Washoe and the land included offenses both direct and insidious, interpersonal and institutional, leaving each generation of Washoe to find their own way to survive without traditional sources of empowerment. Unable to participate in traditional lifeways, their options leave them inflexible, trapped in an increasingly marginalized personhood. In a manner that has grown increasingly uncomfortable for critics today, Sanchez’s Washoe are locked into a narrative of serial victimhood, encompassed by and functioning as a
justification for, the imperialist continuum. That generational experience which Sanchez depicts, however, falls within the controversial realm of racial memory. John J. Su, in his article “Ghosts of Essentialism,” remarks on Walter Benn Michaels’s claim that the essentialism racial memory entails is believed to “[characterize] race consciousness as a form of racism and an obstacle to social progress” (362). As it unfolds in *Rabbit Boss*, Sanchez’s narrative is in accord with the implication that “individuals can ‘remember’ events that were not personally experienced because they share an often mystical or genetic connection with firsthand witnesses.” Still, Su explains that key observations by Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday posit racial memory as “essential knowledge” (369), in addition to what Miranda and others point to in recent scholarship that asserts trauma can be distributed across generations. In effect, Vizenor and others attempt, on one hand, to move “indian-ness” beyond mere victimhood, while on the other hand, stories of recurrent disorientation that lead to victimhood like Sanchez’s point to an ongoing struggle that cannot be forgotten. Further, the trope of recurrence subtending disorientation in *Rabbit Boss* underscores the radical ontological disparities that have underwritten the resilience of indigenous culture despite attempts at assimilation and erasure. It may be that texts like Sanchez’s remind us that concepts like essentialism and racial memory are “politically palatable, if theoretically problematic” (Su 366); more to my point, they reflect the ground-level, simultaneous experience of being in-and-out of place.

The white way so radically transforms the landscape and the Washoe place within
it, that the Washoe people are left without recourse to agency in ways customary to them. Generational disenfranchisement persists because adaptation is out of the question, clearly, since white cosmology is so utterly unappealing and so fundamentally and grossly counterintuitive to Washoe belief. In contrast to Didion’s account of disorientation, which performs responses to deterritorialization and the loss of the authority to exploit, the disorienting sense that unhands Gayabuc and his heirs registers the supreme shock of their fractured sense of how to know and be in the world. While the loss of a way of life lies at the heart of both novels, *Rabbit Boss* portrays a severance with the narrative of deep time. Everett and Lily in *Run River* can at least recognize the changes taking place around them, even if they cannot accept them; conversely, in an instant the Washoe are made strangers in their homeland, with nothing in their experience to guide them into the future.

Perhaps, then, understanding disorientation in its many guises is to recognize that while its manifestation is immanent, affecting the present, its prominent threat is to that which lies ahead. Or, as Ami Harbin puts it, “felt disorientations almost always make us unsure of how to go on” (276). In the context of native survival, of course, with white and indigenous worldviews so radically in conflict, felt disorientation of the kind Harbin describes is compounded. Due to its ubiquity, for instance, Ned Blackhawk explains that because “violent histories of Native Peoples caught in the maelstrom of colonialism” define most narratives of contact, the violence of colonial disruptions form the foundation “upon which other narratives must contend,” and further, “Such painful histories also
have contemporary legacies that continue to influence these communities and their
descendants” (5). While against Blackhawk’s claims a focus on disorientation may seem
trite or disingenuous, in Rabbit Boss it is Gayabuc’s initial and thorough misapprehension
of the Donner Party’s cannibalism that leaves him and the Washoe people unequipped to
respond to each act of white violence perpetrated thereafter. It is Gayabuc’s
overwhelming sense of incomprehensibility that uproots him and ultimately his people.
Gayabuc ceases to be an actor the moment the world is changed for him so completely
that nothing in his experience prepares him for how he is subsequently meant to act; in
Harbin’s words, for him and his people there seems to be no “going on.” Disorientation
accounts for being lost in the moment, but it projects forward onto imagined hopes and
deeds, defamiliarizing the once intimately known, and increasing one’s immediate sense
of hapless desperation. In essence, existential disorientation is malignant, displacing
one’s present, one’s future, and isolating one from his or her past. That is to say, our very
layered postlocality is too readily obscured by narratives that are limited locally in scope.
We are thrust into existential disorientation in the places we live largely because our
alienation seems self-fulfilling.

Nowhere in fact or in literature is this more patent than in the shattering
disorientations of indigenous cosmology. Whereas Everett and Lily’s heir, their eldest
child Knight, Princeton-bound with little interest in his parents’ way of life, is free of the
desperation his parents feel, succeeding generations of Washoe in Rabbit Boss, lacking
Knight’s privilege, never have the chance to recover from their forebears’ alienation. Nor
do they want to. White versions of exploitive authority too absolutely conflict with the generative power of place the Washoe people have known. Psychically disembedded, and made strangers to their place, Sanchez’s characters become strangers to themselves, ghostlike in their own eyes and worthless savages in the eyes of settler colonials. Disorientation, in Sanchez’s narrative, leads only to recurrent abjection, ghosts begetting ghosts.

*Watching*

Beginning, like *Run River*, in the midst of the novel’s decisive moment, *Rabbit Boss* parallels that novel’s unsettling spatio-temporality. Yet, whereas Lily sat and listened from her bedroom to the portentous gun shot that would change her way of life forever, Gayabuc, the son of the Washoe Rabbit Boss, views the defining scene of his life firsthand and at close range. While Lily hears a distant shot, knowing in an instant what it means, Gayabuc’s proximity to the horrific acts committed by the Donner Party is both intimate and unmooring. Lily’s distance obscures her complicity in the act, which was in specific ways precipitated by her, but it also implies her comprehension of the scene unfolding beside the river. As unsettling as her husband’s murder of her lover is, Lily is ultimately flexible, she can conceptually accept that which she has contributed to and remotely, aurally witnessed. Conversely, for Gayabuc, seeing is paramount to an unavoidable disbelief that leads to a suspect and perilous form of survival that casts its shadow across four generations. Witnessing the Donner Party’s cannibalism, his initiation
to the ways of white people is catastrophic. Utterly shocked and mystified, he suffers a complete incomprehension. There is an element of justice, or at least hubris, to Channing’s death in Lily’s narrative—it had played out the same across western romance so often as to be rote. Everett’s act easily found a proper place in her psychic landscape. There was no such narrative for Gayabuc to fall back on. While he still feels his world’s intimate entanglements, it is forever beyond him to know them the same way again.

To accentuate the lostness Gayabuc feels in the opening moments of Rabbit Boss, Sanchez juxtaposes the traumatic uncanny with the comforting and familiar sound of geese passing overhead. In tersely repetitive phrases, Sanchez’s narrator intones: “The Washo watched through the trees as they ate themselves… In this silence [Gayabuc] heard a sound… that was familiar to him… a sound that was indifferent to what he was watching… the sound of Geese” (3). For Gayabuc, the violent seen is contrasted with the commonplace heard—the unnatural act with the natural one. The foreign, disorienting, incomprehensible other, engrained on his consciousness, is set in relief by the known, the long cherished, the simply and directly real. Yet the known fails to comfort him; it only makes the unknown more disconcerting and unfathomable. To lose his grasp of the known is to lose his power, his very ability to inhabit his ancestral land. The uncanniness of the Donners’ presence shocks Guyabuc violently to his core.

Told from the Washoe point of view, this opening scene establishes cannibalism as an analog for white greed and exploitation, in contradistinction to indigenous lifeways. Unable to assign any meaning to that which he has witnessed, Gayabuc feels fear and
shame. Returning back to the Washoe encampment on the shores of Lake Tahoe, he tells his father, who had been expecting meat for the celebration of Gayabuc’s firstborn: “‘I have seen the way before me and followed it as I was taught, but my eyes have now seen new things, things for which I have no teaching, no power’” (11). His father asks him what troubles him, and Gayabuc responds: “‘Them.’” Disorientation, it can be said, is an epistemological impasse in which “the way before”—all Gayabuc’s training in-place—is useless amidst the conditions of his new situation. Everything about the whites is different, but their behavior at Donner Lake, at this moment of first contact, is reminiscent of Deborah A. Miranda’s “science fiction,” and therefore more than Gayabuc can bear. This opening scene concludes with his father refusing to speak of what Gayabuc had seen. Hoping to insulate the rest of the tribe from Gayabuc’s fear, in his effort to conceal it, the elder inadvertently allows the trauma of what his son had seen to take root in all of them.

Even worse, while Gayabuc cannot forget the vision of that moment, his father refuses to believe in it. Finally, together, father and son return in the spring to the site of the Donner Party’s encampment. Finding the spot empty, in a telling passage, the omniscient narrator reports that “the shore of the lake was untouched” (97). In other words, the geomorphic space around which the tribe has formed its cosmology is seemingly unchanged. As such, their topophilic bond is—should be—intact. However, Gayabuc can see subtle differences, that, “the shore of the lake was not as it should be.” Together, the “untouched” and “not as it should be” in this passage connote a weirdly
perceptible, unwanted rupture, or subtle unyoking of conventional associations. The out-of-place act of white cannibalism imparts its residual effect, tipping the scene off its axis. In the midst of the site’s supreme uncanniness, the unimaginable-misunderstood revokes Washoe selfhood. Beyond comprehensibility, the out-of-place thing subsumes the implaced self. Reading the remains of the site—the cut trees and crushed bones—as signs, Gayabuc and his father move “further into darkness” (98). That is, losing their sense of self within the magnitude of the Donners’ act, their disorientation diminishes them. The single certainty Gayabuc and his father share is that if the whites would feed on themselves, “They would eat all.” This central truth, the last the Washoe can hold onto under the circumstances of settler colonialism, extends to white hunger for all things, human, nonhuman, and environment alike.

White hunger—that is, exploitation of landscape, other, and each other—in the successive generational stories depicted in *Rabbit Boss*, unifies the unfortunate consequences of Washoe life in tragic recurrence. Just as in *Run River*, Sanchez makes a clear connection between the opening events of contact and the formative period up to and including the years just after the second world war. Although Didion’s blurred temporality is predicated on flashbacks and nostalgic reveries in addition to its formal, non-linear ordering, the simultaneous temporal presencing built into the structure of Sanchez’s novel works comparably. By telling the story of parallel lives in successive generations interjected among one another, the causes, motivations, and conflicts each character must face are shown to be analogous, but also materially connected.
Three generations later, Gayabuc’s great-grandson Joe Birdsong embodies the long-standing alienation of the Washoe, the violence and dehumanization of the ensuing years, as well as his own dwindling self-worth. Whereas Gayabuc was confronted with the terror of the uncanny in 1846, Joe is subjected to the second-class citizenship 1950s America accords him. In Joe’s fight against the appetite of the whites, he must protect his property from being taken by land speculators who would develop it into summer properties for white vacationers, but he must also absorb the everyday indecencies of latent and institutionalized racism. Falling simultaneously in layers upon him, past, present, and future manifest as an inextricable, undifferentiated bundle of Gayabuc’s original trauma. Just as Gayabuc was bewildered by the Donners’ appetites, neither can Joe understand the vagaries of the land grab he must forestall, which feels to him equally cannibalistic and just as unconscionably wasteful. In Washoe cosmology, both acts are equally transactional, equally egregious. While the speculators promise to pay Joe, they also let him know unequivocally that they will take what they want if they have to—in effect, as Gayabuc had told his father, “They would eat all.” Put another way, Joe—like his great-grandfather—falls prey to white desire largely through a recurrent misinterpretation of contexts beyond his practical knowledge. Isolated and overwhelmed, Joe’s unspoken feeling is a dread that yet another indecency in the name of progress, in the name of civilization, is being heaped on him.

Indigenous disorientation, like deterritorialization, in the context of recurrence, reveals this other side of simultaneity behind the postlocal condition. The presumed fixity
in vernacular existence, whether indigenous or settler colonial, is unsettled by simultaneous experience. Whereas, in the last chapter, the simultaneous near-and-far vexed narratives of local authority, here the simultaneous past-present-future of indigenous experience, when it once signified as a deep and abiding connection to the land and its productions, now serves as a reminder of multiplied, ongoing, incipient, and unabating trauma. Concurrent with Joe’s predicament, Sanchez’s reader feels the pressing issues of Joe’s forefathers. In fact, the colonial “maelstrom” Blackhawk indicates, rightly describes the cyclical temporality of *Rabbit Boss*. Yet when adhering to seasonal lifeways once contributed to the power of the Washoe landscape, in Joe’s life it serves only as a constant reminder of alienation and injustice. By nature, this expanded sense of simultaneity is episodic, but also frightfully serial as rendered by Sanchez.

Ironically, Joe’s white friend Odus is the one to make sense of recurrence. Disdaining the narrative of progress as much as Joe is bewildered by it, Odus unwittingly has no conception of how acutely and inter-generationally it is playing out right in front of him, in his friend’s life. In conversation with Odus, embedded in the seemingly more civilized environment of modernity, Joe learns about recurrence. Odus tells him that history says, “life’s a bore… because the same old things keep happening one over the other” (139). In his slant wisdom Odus recognizes, “There isn’t such a thing as a modern time, only old ones with different names stuck on the faces.” Odus tells Joe: “you’ve got to know the dates if you want to understand who you are” (140). In effect, through this exchange, Odus realizes from his own limited perspective that history reveals its cyclical
nature, even if it obscures its many actors. Hardly boring from the indigenous perspective, this is not a matter of linking the past to the present in a linear, cause and effect relationship, but rather to view past and present as iterative, and, under circumstances like Joe’s, inescapably fraught. Still, Joe’s calendar is not the Gregorian calendar Odus references. Joe’s dates are not precisely Odus’s. Rather, Odus’s preoccupation with progress and modernity reflects cultural spaces that are unrecognizable to Joe. I am not insisting that Joe’s existence is located solely in the past; instead, the recurrence in Joe’s life marks a break with the past such that he cannot truly participate in the present nor influence the future under his immediate circumstances. Joe is trapped outside of time and history, marginally present, even if distractedly, traumatically. Joe is not one-dimensional—only tragic, yet this is his challenge, to find a way to signify here and now.

Reading through the formal letter the land company sends him, Joe asks Odus, “Who are these people” (141), in essence echoing the same disbelief as Gayabuc had. Slipping from his cognitive grasp, Joe understands only that he did not ask for developers to come into the valley, nor did he ask to sell his property. Among those living in the valley though, only Joe, some other other Washoe and Paiute, and a handful of other marginalized people like Odus want to fight the developers. The rest want to sell in the western and California tradition of settling, selling, and moving on, much as Ryder Channing had wanted to in *Run River*. In this iteration, at least, outcast whites don’t fit into the earlier, wasteful, cannibal mode, as the impoverished ranchers in Austin’s *The
Ford had, for example. Instead, across shared vulnerability, old animosities may continue, but there are exceptions. Especially in Odus’s case, as it pertains to shared vulnerability, he serves, in part, to keep Joe grounded in superficial, often callous, but necessary ways. Perhaps without thinking, he remarks to Joe, “There’s your cannibals for you, cannibals in tailored sharkskin suits” (142). Further, Odus points to the equal culpability of the whites in the valley who would sell to the developers. In his anger he continues: “I guess to some it seems a dream someone would actually want to buy the land they been fighting with most of their adult lives."

And yet, of course what Odus misses is that the history he knows, that with which he importunes Joe, and with which he challenges buyers and sellers alike, is patently short in California, and, in a real sense, in the whole American continent. Odus forgets the transactional violence the indigenous peoples endured at his ancestors’ hands. In looking beyond race when he engages Joe, he forgets the vast disparity between their actual, intergenerational experience, their selfhood, and, most importantly, their sense of place. Truly, Odus speaks to the common experience of place-faithfulness and topophilic moralizing, but loses sight of the particular context of inhabitation in the valley that Joe knows. Odus wants to protect his idealized version of the old order, just as Lily and Everett had, even though he is far less privileged than them. Through his nostalgia for a simpler time, he represents an oddly inappropriate ally for Joe, whom Sanchez reveals is more and more alone.

Odus’s rant concludes when he and Joe retire to the local bar, but Odus’s final
salvo is revealing. Complaining that the buyers are faceless, he concludes, “People that
don’t have any respect for their land don’t have any respect for themselves” (142). At
once, Odus rages against the disembodiment and anonymity of exchange, and the
relationship between implacement and care. First, the faceless buyers are notable because
they are analogs for the immaterial “agency” Ryder Channing and Everett McClellan had
quarreled about in Run River. Likewise, they suggest the absentee landowners the
working-class begrudged as discussed in relation to London, Austin, and Sinclair in
Chapter 2. While postwar boom cities like Sacramento grew beyond the bounds of the
oligarchs’ control, Sanchez here makes it clear that nowhere in California was off limits,
that even the smallest, most out of the way hamlets were threatened by the ethos of white
hunger. Place, he suggests, is vulnerable when dealt with impersonally. That which is
impersonal is exploitable. In Rabbit Boss, white hunger, white appetite, has consistently
conformed to this ethos. That Odus thinks he can tell Joe about land claims is guileless
but laughable. His version of ownership, just like his version of history, is racially precise
and therefore short-sighted. Still, that he binds respect for the land to self-respect is
striking.

Much later, Odus, Joe, and another itinerant worker named Jandy are resting from
work on one of the big ranches out on the floor of Sierra Valley north of Loyalton. Joe, in
the long tradition of his family, had acted as “rabbit boss” on the ranch, just as his father
had before him, as had his earlier ancestors up and down the Washoe land. The rabbit
boss would lead the seasonal round-up of rabbits for food and for pelts traditionally, but
on the ranch Joe is simply an exterminator of pests. This year, though, the ranch owner told Joe he wouldn’t need him any longer, that he had gotten a machine to do the job. Being rabbit boss is the last cultural connection Joe truly has to the past, however distorted his task had become. Odus is furious, he tells Joe: “Dixel has no right. He has no right. People here are all getting crazy. Selling off the past. Selling off the land like it was theirs to sell” (334). Odus’s compassion is real, as is his solidarity, for he had come into Sierra Valley after fighting in the Pacific during World War II because he had seen enough to “stop [him] inside (318). In effect, he, too, because of what we would now call post-traumatic stress, is a casualty of American imperialism abroad just as Joe feels the effects of settler colonialism in his homeplace. While again, Odus misses how one history had blotted out the other—that of the settler colonial overwriting that of the Washoe—he nevertheless reaches a kind of truth, understanding as he does his own vulnerability as well as the short-sightedness of speculating on land that is only marginally one’s own.

This salability marks the final phases of Sanchez’s novel. In effect, Joe Birdsong, feeling the effects of generations of marginalization which has registered in him as disorientation, faces this last, but recurrent version, of white hunger. The plan of the real estate speculators from out of town is by now made apparent. They plan to flood Sierra Valley with the waters of the Middle Fork of the Feather River, and then subdivide the land surrounding it for summer homes. They call this absurd process the “rightful and orderly progress” of the valley, telling Joe he has been manipulated by people who would have Sierra Valley “remain forever [sic] an underdeveloped wasteland” (354). Joe is told
that he and those against the sale of the valley are “enemies of what made this State of California great.” Joe is among the last hold-outs against this plan. After some talk about a fair and just price for Joe’s land, the realtors let him know with certainty:

when you to prove your right to this property, the burden of proof will fall on your father’s first assumption of title. You will find there is no title of ownership. But more than that you will find even if there were it would be null and void. You see, your father assumed this land in 1922, that was two years before the Indians were made citizens of the United States. So your father was not a citizen when he assumed the land, and it is illegal for a non-citizen to vote or own land in America. (356)

The realtor tells Joe, further, an even more difficult truth in the eyes of white law, which serves the continuum of white hunger: “Beyond that Mister Birdsong, you cannot prove you are your father’s son… there is no birth certificate for your father, your father is legally a non-person… Your father did not exist!” Joe learns, however, from an old man in Reno who had been his father’s friend and who is a distant relative, that there was a record of his father, from a time when he was a child, in an orphanage in Carson City years before (363). To retain his land Joe must work within the very system that shattered his peoples’ cosmology, and then pushed them to the edges of society. To achieve this, to beat the system at its own game, he had to rely on distant family whom he didn’t really know and who barely knew him. Joe’s selfhood, his claim to the place he thought was his and which remains his in cultural memory, contained ultimately in his father’s official
existence, and his right to the land in the eyes of those who would buy and sell it with little thought, had remained within the memory of his people, his family, separated from each other though they had been. The single narrative of dominion, in this case, largely loses to a way of being that had a very different understanding of what territory is and where it resides. Though they had the paper that would prove Joe’s father’s existence and hence his ownership of the land, in another, more important way, their ownership had been uninterrupted.

Although Sanchez’s novel devolves into mysticism that is perhaps overly contrived and nearly incomprehensible in its final scenes, his rendering of place-making as far as Joe is concerned is apt. Finding selfhood, however tenuously maintained, in tribal knowledge, and parleying that affirmation of self beyond abjection to actual enfranchisement, propels Joe into a position that his ancestors had perhaps never been in. That is, the very present sense of Washoe identity, consistently masked but never really erased by outside interests, inserts itself finally back into the world they feel they had lost but which they could never leave. Finding the paper that proves Joe’s father was a person leads to proof that Joe’s land is his, and in a small way acts as an obstacle to the unabated hunger of white speculation. It reorients Joe, at once, in his Washoe past and in the present, formally, in the context of the novel’s final mystic passages, as an agent in both lifeways at once.

Sarris: “all our histories dislocated together”
Greg Sarris’s *Watermelon Nights* is an attempt to move beyond such trauma, to more concretely position contemporary Pomo identity in the present as one of many actors in their homeplace. If Sanchez’s depiction of a similar move is somewhat fraught, it is helpful to remember that each novel entails indigenous struggles with officialdom. Both texts attend to the difficulties of preserving cultural difference alongside promoting visibility in a colonial culture that has traditionally portrayed them as vanished. Notably, Sanchez’s strategy of advancing racial memory falls in line with remarks made by Chadwick Allen, who has recognized that forwarding a particular racial sense in spite of its critical problems, is actually an “appropriation and redeployment of the U.S. government’s attempt to regulate American Indian personal and political identities through tabulations of ‘blood quantum’ or ‘degree of Indian blood’” (qtd. in Su 369). Put in other terms, Allen suggests that such a strategy counteracts quantifiable frames of “indian-ness” in a way that leaves inclusion in a band or tribe solely in the hands of the tribe itself, rather than leaving it to the artificial prescriptions exerted by the colonial body. Reginald Dyke concurs in his reading of *Watermelon Nights*. Dyke acknowledges that within Native communities, some “find tribal struggles for legal sovereignty counterproductive since they trap Native people conceptually in a continuing colonial position,” yet at the same time he points out that Sarris’s novel provides key scenes of inter-tribal forgiveness as being the first “lesson of decolonization” (342; 348). As Dyke puts it, legal and cultural sovereignty, in Sarris’s novel, find a way to coexist as tribal members find a way past their personal differences for the good of the tribe.
Disorientation as I see it is a fixed position in that it clings to former contexts and thus perpetuates its manifestations. The shock, surprise, and outright unsettling of cognition throws one so out of balance that the new circumstances to which one must adapt cannot be grappled with in the usual way. Disorientation is fixed, then, in that the conditions of the present defamiliarize those of what had been, dislodging what had been touchstones for needed and necessary consistency. For some, a past-ness is all they have to hold on to, and yet that very past is cast into doubt. Small changes in circumstances can be adapted to unconsciously. The landslide moments—the entire and utter shearing-off of indigenous cosmology—are more than human consciousness can bear. What had been is so deeply embedded that, as Gayabuc’s witnessing of the Donner Party has shown us, the startlingly new can tear us asunder. Still, while research has shown that disoriented experience is transferrable across generations,89 others have argued that such experience creates space in which we can affirm new selfhood. That is, if the trauma can be gotten through, it can form the foundation for new, concrete worldviews. Both Esra Santesso and Ami Harbin have explored this possibility in some detail. Arguing that “disorientation narratives” suggest avenues that readjust value systems (158), Santesso for example, has located a kind of strategic disorientation at work in the identity creation of female Muslim immigrants. When Muslim women are confronted with the question of who they are in the public sphere of a strange place, she explains, they are compelled to define themselves to themselves and others. In this way, disorientation forces them to confront their own selfhood under the new rules of their displacement. Muslim women,
she explains, must negotiate the new while bringing forward those parts of their past most meaningful to them. Against the backdrop of systematic Othering, a confirmed personhood might emerge. While it is arguable that the emergent self is a distortion of what had or might have been, that Santesso sees the possibilities of a revitalizing disorientation is appropriately hopeful and also practical. For instance, in light of Harbin’s earlier stance that disorientation makes us unsure of how to proceed, this disruption of agency, Santesso argues, can also be overcome (160).

Explaining that in disorientation there is the promise of moral change, Harbin contends, “we become better moral agents when we strengthen particular practices of interaction”(271). Yet what she views as disorientation seems more like disruption in my reading. Harbin views disorientation as being out of balance with one’s everyday, bodily interactions, but in such a way that recalibration is accessible. In point of fact, her argument seems directed more toward the act of reorienting oneself than the problems of becoming unhinged from the familiar and habitual. In sum, then, while neither Santesso or Harbin take disorientation lightly in claiming its revivifying possibilities, the deep and generational disorientations of indigenous cosmology that I am concerned with here seem to exceed in magnitude the hopefulness of their claims. Still, I mean to argue along with them that contexts can be negotiated and retrieved such that reorientation—coming to terms with the shock of the new—is tangible and practicable.

My case in point is Watermelon Nights, which covers similar historical and geographical territory as Run River and Rabbit Boss. Where Didion and Sanchez arrive,
so to speak, Sarris launches. In effect, trapped in their pasts, Lily and Everett and Gayabuc and Joe remain subject to a labyrinthine lostness when confronted by the landslide of newness. Instead, Sarris’s protagonists Johnny, his mother Iris, and his grandmother Elba, break free of an otherwise unbroken Pomo disorientation. Elba, after a fashion, has kept the tribe reasonably unified, or, at least proximally located, even if their personal grudges have festered. Iris, although she has left the tribe for the city, has arrived at a worldview that allows her to see beyond a limited local horizon that has made the others turn on themselves. Separately, their epiphanies reorient the Pomo people to each other and the land as they work towards legal recognition and the reinstatement of a Pomo reservation.

In much the same vein as Harbin and Santesso suggest, Johnny comes into his selfhood in bringing his people together. The unsettling of the Pomo people, transmitted through each of the families and through serial trauma, impels Johnny to come to terms with his own needs and desires. Confronted with the repetitions of indecency heaped on those he loves, he has found a way to get beyond them. Further, this is only the case because his reorientation extends beyond his own selfhood to the well-being of his tribe. He learns to reinterpret the meaning of his implacement, in the process salvaging the lives of those around him about whom he cares. This is in line with Harbin’s claim, “Disorientations can spur new ways of depending on others and more awareness of our relationality” (271). In remembering his kinship bonds he brings his people back in place in such a way it overcomes the alienation that had prolonged their embodied
displacement. Johnny forces them, in effect, to confront and act on their interdependence. While others in his tribe had settled into the relative ease of habituation, regardless of its self-destruction, Johnny finds his measure of selfhood in the dis-ease of his new recognition of his homosexuality. The entrenched disorientation of settler colonialism across generations of Pomo life, combined with the ostracism of homosexuality within his community, together so dislodges him, that, if he is to survive rather than self-destruct, he must find a way through his present circumstances. To paraphrase both Santesso and Harbin, his disorientation propels Johnny to a clearer version of his Pomo (social) and individual (personal) identity, while in sovereign terms it allows him to connect the legal to the cultural without the diminishment of Pomo self-determination.

The early moments of the novel focus on Johnny’s story as he does the leg-work of getting tribal members to fill out genealogy charts, and to promise they will come to the tribal meeting that will follow. As had been the case with Sanchez, Sarris recognizes that place for disenfranchised indigenous cultures lies in the people, no matter how fragmented. It becomes patent, however, over the course of the conversations that unfold at the meeting, that polyvocality in theory enunciates the vitality of any given place, but that harmony is not preordained. In this case, the assemblage—those who have come to the meeting—are in disharmony. Polyvocality, here, is fragmentation, the result of smallness, meanness, and short-sightedness. Reported through Johnny’s eyes, the tribal leader, Steven Pen, tells those gathered that the charts they filled out are the first part of official recognition. He tells them they “could get land and build another reservation, a
place for all of us to live and go back to” if they wanted (58). Self-determination, carried nascently within the members themselves, in effect, would be transferred back to an officially regulated place. This scene reveals the false separation of self and place that must be overlooked to gain legal status as a tribe. In some ways, such a separation seems to relinquish cultural responsibility that has been held, however precariously, for several generations of Pomo within each of them. Johnny, despite himself, is incredulous, not because he disbelieves Pen, but because he has been dealing with the many personalities within the tribe in recent weeks, and knows how divided they are. He thinks: “what’s to keep us from killing each other and losing our reservation again—for a third time!”

While Pen looks toward the future, and Johnny’s grandmother blames white people, Johnny, instead, looks within the tribe, at their own faults as stumbling blocks. So while Pen tells the group, “We can control our fates, be as one as a people again, have a home that is ours and truly ours,” Johnny considers to himself, “Sounds good, I think. What does it mean?” (58).

Johnny’s “what does it mean,” as off-handedly as it appears in Sarris’s text, underlines the ambiguity of place-making when an entire cosmology is thrown out, and those retaining it have turned on each other despite their own best interests. Sanchez’s novel shared similar moments, where Washoe acted poorly toward each other, and against Washoe interests. Dyke suggests that moments such as these in Watermelon Nights emphasize “the importance for Native people of not looking exclusively at their pre-contact experience as they revitalize their self-determination,” even if it means
acknowledging “the often disturbing past actions that Pomo characters have taken in response to colonization [which] cannot be ignored” (342). Of note, then, is that Didion’s disoriented characters refuse this opportunity to address their own faults. Somehow, this perhaps most fearful admission—one’s own culpability—is the crucial place-making act. The meeting thereafter devolves into recriminations as different members announce who they blame for the loss of their reservation twice before. Pen tries to bring the assembly’s attention back to the work at hand, telling the group: “We got to be positive. We got to look at the ways we’ve hung together, not split apart” (59), but he is crushed beneath a list of his own transgressions by the women in the group. Finally, the meeting ends in, “Embarrassment. Shame. It was enough having to turn in a chart with empty spaces. It was too much to have somebody else fill in the spaces for the whole world to see” (61).

The tribe, existing as it has in its landless people, is betrayed by the genealogy charts not only because the charts stand for a proof of personhood to a government that they feel has no right to make such a requirement of them, but in fact, the charts also seem to redact their assumptions about themselves. While it had been bad enough to not know or to want to hide who your progenitors were, it was worse, as Johnny explains, to realize everyone else might know your worst fears about yourself. Paradoxically, the tribe knows more about each other than is perhaps healthy; yet in another sense, this very intimate knowledge is what has kept them viable if not vital as a people. The remainder of the novel considers this reimagining: the tribe must learn how to stop using what they know about each other as a cudgel, and recognize the value of their shared history if they
are to share in the possibilities of the future.

Again and again, the word “nowhere” (20; 25; 37 [3 times]) and the phrase “the end of the world” recur in Johnny’s telling to this point (40; 41; 44; 63). The generational disorientation he has inherited, on display at the tribal meeting, has manifested in him as displacement. Resonating in this way, the missing element of his sense of self is in fact spatiality. As Johnny and his friend in the tribe, Felix, talk over the events of the meeting the next afternoon, in the sun beside the Russian River, Felix tells him why he believes the tribal members acted the way they did the night before. Felix tells him, “‘Because they ain’t done nothing… We’re at the bottom of the barrel, man, and nobody wants nobody to get out. It’ll make everybody confused because if we’re all not at the bottom of the barrel then who are we?’” (68). Felix finishes his diatribe: “‘Lost. Lost. Lost. Lost. A hundred years of doom. And now things is winding down complete’” (69). The fatalism of the Washoe in Sanchez’s novel is revisited here, in Sarris’s, but through Felix and Johnny, Sarris expresses matters differently. The dissociation of self and place that Felix and Johnny feel registers only as an end of days in Felix, a recurrent event that has worn itself out, so that there is no redemption left. In both novels, though, extending personhood into the future finally depends on maintaining control of, or reclaiming, ancestral lands. Johnny wants to believe that if they get their reservation back, the people will reemerge from their flat affect, or, from their immanent demise, as Felix sees it. Johnny’s impulse is toward the confluence of racial self, those narratives contained in the people who spoke up at the meeting, and the joining of them to a specific piece of
Ultimately, arriving at this very spatialized fate relies on which stories the Pomo tell themselves. Felix rebukes Johnny, who has been defending tribal selfhood beyond their collective sadness: “Everybody knows the stories,” Felix says, “they just don’t know each other” (71). The problem, of course, is that the tribe knows each other too well. Just the act of bringing them together to talk about a place of their own reaffirms this fact. Reclaiming their reservation, then, relies not on remembering old stories or creating new ones, but in recognizing those that have been overlooked or down-played in the interest of smallness and because of personal injury. They don’t know the stories but they do know each other. Felix has things absolutely backward. Later in the novel, after a series of confrontations about his sexuality that begin with Felix that day on the river, Johnny makes the difficult decision to leave the community in Santa Rosa for San Francisco, to escape the cycle of self-loathing the Pomo people precipitate on themselves and each other. In effect, he loses the social space he does possess because the hurtful story that is told among the Pomo about him. He imagines selfhood for him is elsewhere, not in tribal land at all. As the tribe seems to cave in on itself in the lostness Felix sees and perpetuates, Johnny imagines that all he can do is escape.

The scene from which the novel derives its title, though, a magical night of watermelon feasting, recounts one such story representative of those which had been elided within the tribe while under colonial rule to this point, and which has the power to keep Johnny in the community. In the process of saying goodbye to those he cares for, it
occurs to Johnny to apologize, too, for things he had said and done in anger and in retribution for indecencies related to his “outing.” His friend and cousin, Alice, apologizes to him first for her part in his undoing. This act of compassion is what compels him toward forgiveness. Thinking about the tribal member who outed him, he thinks of his own revenge: “But that kind of back and forth thinking and making excuses was all just part of the same thing. It was hitting back. Better to say I’m sorry and go out that way” (133). As Johnny thus makes his peace with the Pomo world, driving through the neighborhood where his grandmother lives, he slips into a place of timelessness, in which, “Things looked the way they looked on Sundays when [he] was a kid” (135). He thinks: “Driving down the street, I seen the neighborhood like that because leaving itself made everything stand out clear and present itself slow” (136). In essence, a different continuum begins to reveal itself to Johnny, where his own selfhood comes into view as part of the neighborhood. His apologetic mood gives him a clarity about himself and the place where he is from, and within that epiphany, by accident, he stumbles upon a completely different narrative.

Johnny sees the watermelon truck, parked and unattended. It stands out because, like so much else in his world, it doesn’t seem to belong there. Its uncanny presence on the street causes him to stop, and without asking permission from anyone, he takes a watermelon from the truck to give to his grandmother as a final, parting gift. Johnny thinks of the watermelon as, “Water on a hot day. Sweet watermelon” (136). It is the only available respite from the heat of the late-summer day, and ultimately from the
metaphorical heat that he, the Pomo people, and all the disenfranchised people in his interracial neighborhood are feeling. In this moment, Johnny is a bricoleur, making do unconsciously, absolutely in the moment in-place. The strange beauty of his homeplace rises up through the damage that had caused him to become alienated from it.

Johnny presents his grandmother Elba with the gift of the melon, but she lets it sit there, on the table, between them. She asks him innocently enough what the gift means. Johnny tries a number of old stories that the present of the melon reminds him of, thinking she wants him to remember a tribal story, but Elba refuses each answer he offers her. Exasperated by his trite metaphorical readings of the melon, she tells him, “It’s not like [sic] anything” (137). Unable to reply to his grandmother further, Johnny goes back to his old room, instead of leaving that afternoon as planned, and falls asleep. Because he cannot tell her what the melon means, because he does not get its story correct, he somehow cannot find the wherewithal to leave. If in fact his drive through the neighborhood and his theft of the melon had set him first outside of time and then placed him absolutely immanently, then it marks the beginning of the kind of disorientation Harbin and Santesso point to that is affirming rather than solely disconcerting. Johnny’s theft had been seen by two younger teenagers from the neighborhood, and, because of his action, they had taken it upon themselves to heist enough watermelon from the truck to share with every family in the neighborhood. Johnny is awakened in the very early morning to sounds of delight. Utterly out of sorts and seemingly in a dreamscape, Johnny goes outside to witness his neighbors’ joyful chatter. He says their Spanish, “was a
thread, a piece of stitch work, connecting [him] to all of the other voices in the neighborhood” (138). He refocuses his eyes, he says, but still can’t believe them. Even in these initial moments, as Johnny awakens from sleep, he likewise undergoes a symbolic awakening. His “connection” is not merely “interconnection,” but ground-level awareness of just how intimately he is attached to his community. His is a blooming sense of connection that is also compassion, an absent but essential part of any communal, let alone global, imagination.

Likening the presence of everyone on the streets at such an odd hour and so full of strange energy to what it feels like after a natural disaster or systemic failure like an earthquake or a power outage, Johnny remarks that “nothing registered” to him. In this moment he moves from worrying about his tribe, to leaving for his own sake, to realizing that the unexpected appearance of the watermelon truck and his impulsive theft of one of the melons had set off a chain reaction of good will across race, along the entire neighborhood. Acting unconsciously as he had, on his own behalf but in a state or mood of conciliation, had inspired the other boys to think beyond themselves, too. In a passage that is striking for its parallel to Deborah A. Miranda’s “science fiction”—that is, the ontological rupture which set native cosmology reeling—Johnny recounts, “The world felt inside out. The place of my dreams, which I’d just woke from, made more sense still than the here and now before me.” Put another way, the inside-out world that had set generations lurching, occurred again, in Johnny’s neighborhood, as it had for each generation of Pomo since contact. Yet here, tellingly, it has the opposite effect of
fragmentation. As Harbin and Santesso each suggest, rather, the inside-out or upside-down or science fictional world revealed an unlooked for dynamic of kinship among marginalized people. In the midst of it all, feeling in danger of floating away, Johnny’s Auntie Mollie calls out to him. Her voice is an anchor in his unmoored state. They sit together, Auntie Mollie filling in the blank spots of the evening for him that he had missed while he slept. Unsolicited and again unexpectedly, she gives him the answer to the meaning of the watermelon that Elba had asked of him hours before. Full of joy, she tells him, “You know what this is?… It’s kindness. It’s a kindness them kids done” (139). The neighborhood’s joy is in the shock of the impulsive, native act of kindness they had all thought they were no longer capable of. In their collective disorientation, they actually find the means to come back into themselves in-place. Johnny reflects: “I couldn’t tell myself then how I knowed so thorough that what Auntie Mollie said was true. It didn’t present itself in pictures or maps with connecting lines” (140). Instead, he says, “It settled in my body like peace.” The gridded space that has imposed itself on his community, classifying and ultimately dividing his tribe and the other marginalized people of his neighborhood, falls away. His peace is a matter of self-determination, but also a reorientation to community.

As the scene on the street, and Johnny’s part of the novel in which he is the narrator draw to a close, Johnny walks around the neighborhood, somehow changed by his aunt’s words. Reoriented thus, he says, “But now people’s faces was clear, matched with the names and stories I knowed” (140). Significantly, as Johnny walks he greets
each of his smiling neighbors, who “called back to [him] in the same way.” His place and its stories come together, familiar to him as he is to them. He hopes that his people in other neighborhoods had gotten word of the watermelon feast, so that they, too, might feel what he is feeling. He brings watermelons to houses that seem to be inexplicably sleeping through this moment of shared joy. As the sun rises and Johnny heads back to his grandmother’s house, he surveys the aftermath of the unexpected night of kindness, in a sense realizing that such a night is ephemeral, but also, recognizing what the night itself could mean. He thinks, “Lots of sad stories, the same stories sung over and over through the generations like a song… But there was other songs, too. Not-hitting-back songs… only we needed to see it, like on a watermelon night” (141-2). Johnny wonders if his grandmother Elba will like this story he has to tell her about the watermelon, but at the same time he understands, too, “It was just one story, but it was my story, how things meant for me” (142). The watermelon truck is an unexpected gift that gives shared pleasure across races and within race. It is the unasked-for thing, that is nonetheless precisely what was needed and desired, unbeknownst to those who receive it. Further, it is part of a system that would otherwise have been alienating; a bricoleur’s dream, the watermelon truck points to ground-level meaning-making at its rarest and most precious. Rather than an object of mere making-do, instead, the truck represents that which is overlooked and unforeseeable in the monolithic event that global capital attempts to be. A thing that Johnny had done without thinking, clandestinely, gave two boys an idea that spread.
Much as Edward Watts had suggested of the “double-minded” settler colonizer, here Sarris recognizes that tribal in-fighting has done damage to the people, that in some ways various tribal responses to colonization were so fraught as to enable and enforce colonial aims. This hard truth, though, gives vibrancy to Sarris’s theme of revitalization and self-actualization. In effect, by surmounting the idealized move backward to pre-contact, Sarris includes the many layers of cultural meaning that have accumulated under the sign of “Pomo” in the last century. By confronting the harder truths of Pomo identity, Sarris also moves them back into time, into a history and acts that assert selfhood as well as recognize the fluidity, the eventmentality, of every place. In other words, Sarris’s depiction of the unevenness of Pomo sovereignty, directly part of an ongoing selfhood rather than a disrupted, fragmented, and fixed meaning that can only erode with time, instead denotes a form of worlding, of the reemergence of the abject into view. In a way that is crucial to reviving the West’s many stories, the bioregional call for new stories, and a mode of reinhabitation, the not-hitting-back song forms a middle narrative that better expresses the simultaneous experience of time and place. Continuity is found not in the single trajectory of narrow and revised narrative, but across, under, and through, the many routes stories of sovereignty must take.

**Conclusion: “multicultural and multi species tolerance”**

I want here to pull together the three spatial concepts I have been considering in this chapter: (1) disorientation; (2) the twinned legacies of settler colonialism and
sovereignty; and (3) the bioregion. Didion’s *Run River*, Sanchez’s *Rabbit Boss*, and Sarris’s *Watermelon Nights* employ elements of each spatial concept to different effects. Although my analysis has not directed attention to the watersheds of each novel explicitly, a watershed consciousness is tangible in significant ways in all three texts. Didion’s characters live and die beside the Sacramento River, as generations fall in love on its sand bars, irrigate their fields with its waters, and come to terms with their demons on its levees. Sanchez’s Washoe protagonist Joe Birdsong stays rooted to his ancestral lands rather than selling out to land speculators who want to dam the Feather River near its source. One of the formative moments of Sarris’s Pomo protagonist Johnny Severe, his first sexual encounter with another man, his friend Felix, transpires on a beach alongside the Russian River. In each case, the watershed is the unifying space of selfhood, whether Didion, Sanchez, and Sarris intend it to be so or not. Alienated as each author’s characters are from themselves and their homeplace, they know where they belong, even if that place has ceased to register as it once had, leaving them on the outside, seemingly, of the ways in which it signifies. Sovereignty, be it in the settler colonial manner or in that of indigenous legal and cultural authority, is more localized, more adapted to particular places than we might otherwise assume.

Lostness, a sense that what makes a place a place is somehow irretrievable, binds these novels, too. Contemplating placelessness is not simply the purview of white radicals, the record seems to show, but is endemic across cultures in-place, although it registers differently to different people. The significance of locality should not be taken
lightly nor its necessity dismissed. If alienation—disorientation—is the postmodern condition, these three novels, by toying with a postmodern aesthetic, consider how individuals find the ability to go on—or not. The method to which each set of characters defaults is their family bond. Notably, the only white family of the three texts, the Knight-McClellans in *Run River*, actually falls apart. The family bond is our most intimate and intense, and yet the landed family, as opposed to those who are without a legible homeplace, are the ones who are least successful in defending what is theirs. The McClellans want to defend a recognizable territory that seems to slip from their grasp; keeping what they feel is theirs inside each member of the tribe, the Washoe and Pomo are, in the end, better able to reach an accord with the fluid nature of postlocal placehood.

Rather than staking out territory, to borrow Berg’s phrase, the bioregionalist perspective “raises the stakes.” It uproots our received notions of primacy and supremacy, deterritorializing Northern California in the best sense, reimagining it instead as Shasta Bioregion. This is not a limited local, however, but a postlocal place wherein “not-hitting-back songs,” those stories of kindness that we too easily dismiss, illuminate cooperative spaces. In his pivotal essay, “Towards a Cosmopolitan Bioregionalism,” Mitchell Thomashow puts it this way:

Bioregional sensibility should develop ways of exploring spatial and temporal relationships that show the connections between place-based knowledge and global environmental change, the interdependence of local ecology and global economies, and the matrix of affiliations and networks
that constitute ecological biodiversity and multicultural and multi-species
tolerance. (121)

First, I am arguing that for many indigenous and otherwise uprooted people, place resides
within the very corpus of the community. Second, I argue here that not just “many” or
“new” stories are available to us as we consider place-making under conditions that are
global in scope, but “other” stories as well. Lastly, I mean for my reading of these novels,
all told, to reframe the disorienting conditions under which we presently labor. Unrooted
as we may be, the very alienation we face might be leveraged in the interests of tolerance.
Chapter 4:

“Alternate temporal regimes”:

Speculative Regionalism, Postlocal Temporality, and Future California

Postlocal Time: The Return to Immanent Times

The process of worlding the West’s “many stories” and the creation of “new stories” of implacement consequently requires an ongoing interrogation of the many temporalities by which their narratives operate or might operate. So far I have examined aspects of postlocal spatiality, treating time as a subtext of those interrogations. Here my investigation turns directly toward attributes of postlocal time. This chapter introduces the prospect of a regionalism that is futurist in nature, when the storyworlds of regionalism are supposed to exist outside of time. Proceeding under the already stated assumption that there is no “outside” under late-modernity, I address an already existing affinity between regional literature and the science fiction genre, which, by its very nature, carries distinct time signatures. My term for this sub-genre is “speculative regionalism.” It is meant to imply the troubled encumbrances of speculation discussed earlier in this project, linking back to the temporary residency narratives in Chapter 1, thus book-ending this work, as well as reflecting trends in the reclassification of science fiction as speculative fiction more generally. While many scholars have asserted that regional literature strives to be, in effect, outside of history—and therefore time, and postmodern thinkers posit the compression and subordination of time, speculative
regionalism distinctly denotes a regionalism with a temporal frame. Speculative
regionalism, as I define it, is fiction that constructs futuristic alternative realities in
specifically local environments in order to address specifically local tensions in the
present beyond the storyworld.

Two related claims confronting the problem of global synchrony provide an
underlying thread joining the temporal issues I address. The first is an observation by
Christian Moraru: “Inside its shorter and shorter cycle, repetitive culture dreams its
dream of unsullied synchrony” (296). The second, by Bertrand Westphal, outlines the
actual conditions of ground-level temporality in relation to time that is prescriptive:
“Spatial analysis reveals that present is asychronic: our vision of time is not necessarily
the same as our neighbor’s. Globality implies polychrony” (Geocritical Explorations
xiv). In other words, Moraru understands that repetition appears to our spatial
imagination like uniformity. That which is simultaneous appears also to be synchronous
—almost purposefully so. The repercussions of this belief should be clear: the
accelerations of modernity intuit a mistaken commonsense that interconnection is
unrestrictedly fluid, to the detriment of local places and timescapes, which are replaced
by an uncritical universality of space and time. In this way, in conjunction with Moraru’s
observation, Westphal’s assertion belies the misconceptions of universal, globalized time,
remembering as it does—to bend the central assumption of my project toward postlocal
temporality—‘the world is made of times.’

To address polychronography (many timescapes), is to consider yet another key
part of the local/global cultural friction troubling postlocality. Polychronographic reading includes understanding different notions of time embedded in local and regional cultures, and it implies the affirmation of varied conceptions of past-present-future as well. My emphasis on simultaneity as the central mechanism by which we might frame a planetary conception of being-in-place is significantly high-stakes, since it is too easily confused with synchrony. To my mind, simultaneity should register as polychronous, uneven and resistant to the normalizations of clock time. Synchrony is akin to global flattening, while polychrony reflects a disparate eventmentality intrinsic to postlocal place-making. It should be plain that regional difference made in everyday practice entails equally conflicted timescapes, yet this aspect can be easily dismissed when we imagine the world’s places. Arguing for local time carries a whiff of essentialism akin to geographic determinism that is out of step with a global sense of place, yet it is vital to a full understanding of postlocality. Synchrony tends to obscure difference and expunge otherness in favor of efficiency (Moraru 306). Critics agree that in postmodernity space and place have been overcome by time as distances have been compressed by technology. Universal or clock time is a manufacture of this “progress” underwriting “civilization” which, for many, having proven a failed narrative and fraught with glaring paradoxes, has crumbled in places. For hopeful critics such as myself, temporality can assume a non-teleological, or counter-triumphal form that is fragmented, logging many ontological stories rather than a single epistemological one.

Universal time orders the world in such a way that deadlines are met and the
workday proceeds largely according to plan. But somehow, even as time pushes us towards sameness, telling a narrative that abolishes “others,” despite itself the clock still breaks, and the system can be corrupted, transgressed, or otherwise undermined, either by accident, circumstance, or deliberate intent. Clock time suffers its own precarity along with those it would repress. Metaphorically, when it reaches the regional level, time treads on sinkholes, languishes in backwaters, and gets itself stuck in terrain too rugged for it to flatten. Russell West-Pavlov in his recent, revealing book *Temporalities* (2013), argues forcefully for “alternative temporal regimes” (122) to counteract the “ruthless exploitation of the environment” (153) under global clock time, in effect attempting to activate those sinkholes, those temporally frictional or incongruous spaces, in the name of ecosocial justice. For, as Moraru explains, citing Scott Lash and Derrida, “difference ‘gives being and gives time.’ It is in the generous horizon of ‘differential’ time that we can be, in the ‘thick,’ fruitfully ‘out-of-synch’ temporality whose unscripted and uneven effulgence we share with others” (303). In other words, polychronal, alternative, differential time-keeping aligns with the everyday for which I have been arguing throughout this project. With them I argue against the artificial, now commonsense late industrial time imposed from outside and above, and for a renewed understanding of time as immanent and bodily, back-in-place, slower or faster not according to deadline but as a dynamic record of becoming (West-Pavlov 3; Casey 9). 92

In the balance, then, for understanding postlocal temporality are versions of “living in” or “with” the environment over “living on” it; and therefore, recognizing
biocentric alternatives to the anthropocentric way of experiencing time in place since the coming of the industrial age. To remember the rhythmic, dynamic how-where of the experience of time is the final, crucial aspect of grasping postlocality. In this chapter I will argue that the subtext of escape from the damages wrought by technocratic dominance in America in certain speculative regionalisms should impart an ignored but valuable lesson of irruptive local timescapes. By this I mean that time itself becomes a force of speculative ecosocial change as alternate versions of the experience of time are made evident.

**On Speculative Regionalism: Future Primitive / Archaeologies of the Future**

So much of place-making is entrenched in the past. Either sentimentality, survivance, or nostalgia are foregrounded, for various reasons, in stories of place, usually to make some claim on territory or authority. Even when imperialist place-makers like Delano tell stories of futurity they are attended by a feeling of loss resembling past-ness that somehow absolves the author of the violence of their erasures. However, in certain literatures, the relationship between place and story, past and future resolves itself differently. In classic regionalist form, by returning/looking ahead to a kind of “future primitive” (39),[93] as Jeremiah Gorsline and Freeman House termed it, Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (1975), Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Wild Shore* (1984), and Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* (1993) intentionally disrupt the presumed linearity and teleological authority of triumphal nationalist and globalist accounts in a
manner that short-circuits conventional narrative. In this regard these novels link the pastoral and the utopian in a temporal scheme specific to speculative regionalism. Greg Garrard classifies “three orientations of pastoral in terms of time: the *elegy* looks back to a vanished past with a sense of nostalgia; the *idyll* celebrates a bountiful present; the *utopia* looks forward to a redeemed future” (42). However, the three novels I examine here look forward and backward at once, framing—with the exception of *Ecotopia*—a decidedly unbountiful present. The storyworld of each novel deliberately exists apart from linear narratives of progress, but—and this is crucial to my reading of them—they refuse the escapist, provincial connotations of pastoralism that presumably sets regional literature outside of time and history.94

Terry Gifford argues, “Pastoral’s celebration of retreat is its strength and its inherent weakness. When retreat is an end in itself, pastoral is merely escapist” (47). Misreading the “soft borders” of Peter Berg’s “separate natural country” (*Reinhabiting* 1) as functionally similar to the hard political borders of the world atlas that strive to firmly divide places, it is exactly this escapist sensibility they see in bioregionalism that drives some leading ecocritics to shift the localist paradigm of environmental thought toward a global imaginary.95 Not surprisingly, however, Patrick D. Murphy was among the first ecocritics to recognize the potential for science fiction (sf) writing to extend ecological thought.96 Murphy emphasizes that the aim of sf is to impel people, “to think about the present and about this world in which they live” (89). Murphy contends that sf refuses to provide an alibi or escape from real-world problems, emphasizing that “the present and
future are interconnected,” forcing us to confront “the results of our actions today.”

Whatever their literary imperfections, the novels I am concerned with here forge a direct link between bioregionalism and sf as a subgenre of literary regionalism. Furthermore, read together, *Ecotopia*, *The Wild Shore*, and *Parable* represent an entire corpus of speculative fiction set in California in the wake of ecosocial disaster that current ecocritical, sf, and regionalist scholarship have not wholly accounted for.97

In *Ecotopia* stable-state environmental revolutionaries launch a preemptive strike that gives them independence from America; *The Wild Shore* depicts survivors of nuclear war engaged in subsistence living; *Parable* envisions a slow violence that compels urbanites onto the road in a small, mobile, multiracial tribal community. Echoes of the future primitive spirit are at the core of each novel. Starting over means returning to place-based subsistence living and quasi-tribalism central to bioregional thought. In bioregionalism the concept of future primitive stems from a desire to evoke indigeneity—to “reinhabit” or to become “borne-native” in Peter Berg’s language—regions that have been “disrupted and injured through past exploitation” (*Envisioning* 53; 73; Berg and Dasmann, *Reinhabiting* 217).98 How one does this is a matter of informed, ideologically charged speculation; the act and the imagining are a science fiction of a sort. By my way of thinking, with specific attention to the idealism and irruptive potential of future primitive temporality, these novels insist on the recognition of a valuable but previously overlooked sub-genre.99 Identifying speculative regionalism usefully acts as a corrective to notions that sf is global, interstellar, and incapable of implications for locally specific
Both field imaginaries subscribe, commensurate with colloquial usage as Ruth Levitas points out, to, “More’s pun: the good place is no place” (179). That is, ecocritical commentary for the most part assumes a disconnect from everyday local life in speculative literature even as it accepts its praxis on larger scales. However, the novels of Callenbach, Robinson, and Butler envision resilient or stable state responses to contemporary place-making and its concerns in specifically local, deliberately material and tangible ways, as I will show. Ecocritical readings of sf highlight lessons of scale, when in fact, speculative regionalism illuminates the simultaneous and polychronal nature of everyday time.

Formally, speculative regionalism as I conceive of it speaks first to the sf genre; in practice, though, its formal conventions correspond to the critical component of Leo Marx’s “complex pastoral,” Terry Gifford’s “post-pastoral,” “critical regionalism” as deployed severally in current scholarship, or Tom Moylan’s “critical utopia.” That is, speculative regionalism is systematic but self-reflexive. This critical element that moves beyond binary configurations distinguishes speculative regionalism from being included with either escapist fantasies or dystopias, particularly when in accord with an accentuated, environmentally inflected sense of place. Speculative regionalism operates within this real-and-imagined mode such that bioregion or watershed in *Ecotopia*, for
instance, is the real, encounterable space as well as the space of fantasy, of utopian desire—not “separate,” the unfortunate term Berg uses—but parallel to, subverting, and contingent upon, the established orthodox reality.

This blurred real-and-fantastical—not just, or more than, the real-and-imaginary—hinges on the possible/impossible nature of utopias generally. Robert T. Talley Jr. explains that utopia in the age of globalization is a “process of vision and revision that enables one to comprehend the dynamic world system in its unrepresentable excess” (*Utopia in the Age of Globalization* ix). Elsewhere he writes plainly that mimesis and fantasy are “overlapping territories” (*Spatiality* 147). In a 2009 *Guardian* interview, in fact, Kim Stanley Robinson put it similarly: “science fiction turns out to be the realism of our time.” More recently, speaking of his early reading habits in an interview in *Boom* magazine conducted by Ursula K. Heise, Jon Christiansen, and Jan Goggins, Robinson elaborates: “I thought science fiction was the literature of California. I still think California is a science fictional place.” He claims further that he feels the national imaginary “associates California with the future,” so that he views California as a “working utopian project in progress” (n.pag.). In the same interview, drawing on these long-held beliefs, Robinson points to a “special brand of California science fiction” growing out of traditions forged by Jack London and Upton Sinclair. In establishing this lineage, Robinson indirectly prepares the field for speculative regionalism, and, conspicuously, connects several of the texts I entreat throughout the present study. The balance between critical utopia and dystopia in California’s speculative regionalisms is
especially tenuous, and is coded in ways specific to itself, especially in the state’s thorny personal and social promises. Ultimately, the slipperiness of the idea of future primitive, as it forms the cornerstone of speculative regionalism, denotes our personal inability to partition the possible from the impossible as individuals even as it exposes a systemic and panoptic desire to do so.

Temporal Language: Time, Place, and Movement

Speculative regionalism underwrites a postlocal temporality that is resistant to those acts legislated by uniform clock time. West-Pavlov argues that capitalism since the early modern period, “has from the outset been the primary driving force forging the concepts of time that are hegemonic today” (120). Regionalism broadly—and especially speculative regionalism—has been resilient in the face of that kind of homogeneity. But why? Drawing on language from mobility studies, regional time is “turbulent” or “vital.” It contains an ongoing temporal uncertainty that often bends or rejects the world clock (Martin 199). That is, postlocal time is neither for nor against the presumed speed of modernity, but is seemingly comprised of both speed and its antithesis. The assumption is that “regional” denotes “pause” much as Yi Fu Tuan’s classic definition of “place” does, while “global” denotes an ever increasing, amalgamating speed. Yet when we remember that place is made in movement, as Tim Ingold, Jo Lee Vergunst, and others remind us, time and space become matters of pacing; in other words, “pause” and “speed” are just one more binary pair that exists only in a vacuum. In practice there is no speed and its
antithesis, but rather fast and slow are utterly relational, each incorporating many
valences of themselves and each other at once (Bissell and Fuller 3). Immediately, we
see time as an alive thing, kept and spent disproportionately, disorderly, and
idiosyncratically. The hard borders of clock time prove stabilizing but artificial in the
same sense as the hard political borders of a state map, in which they are unable to
contain or deny people, things, and ideas in the manner they intend. The essence or
class character of time, then, much like place, is a constant unfolding, an event or becoming
wrought of negotiation. While clock time is linear, and speaks to deliberate systems or
acts, observations of postlocal time in speculative regionalism reveal a temporality that is
far less clearly organized, a function of the many purposes and agencies at play in
postlocal places. As I will show, while conflicting modes of time surely can and have
been linked as oppositional, instead I mean to draw out their relational, entangled nature
in postlocal contexts.

At root, the entangled nature of postlocal temporality is revealed in the premise
that, “the phenomenological fact of the matter is that space and time come together in
place” (Casey, Getting Back 339), and further: “every time…is ultimately… situated in a
particular locality” (340). Time, in effect, happens in place and its expressions are
inherently localized by the people and things whose very being makes time possible, if
not necessary. In this case, time is not monolithic, or particular to a given locality, but is
performed severally by the many agents located in a place. We do not find ourselves in a
place in time, but in a time in place. At odds with the concept of local place-based
temporal expression is temporocentrism, “the subordination of space to time” as Edward S. Casey defines it (6). Temporocentrism is the result of standard clock time. Speaking to our commitments to late capitalism, it suggests we know place because we can document when and for how long we are somewhere, or how quickly we are obliged to arrive, stay, or leave. It is by our temporocentrism that we understand and accept the accelerated pace of the present era. Moreso, temporocentrism is how we have come to assume that time has overcome space. Subsequently, it is through temporocentrism that speed and slowness impose themselves as distinct and oppositional. By this, our present way of thinking, if speed is the essence of the era, slowness is catharsis; speed is complex, slowness is simple. The timescapes of *Ecotopia*, *The Wild Shore*, and *Parable*, however, complicate these assumptions.

*Ecotopia*: “a little vague about time”

Shrouded in the deliberately paranoid spatialized rhetoric of the Cold War border town—“Cut off”; “closed off”; “increasingly mysterious”; “out there”; “uncanny isolation” (1; 3)—William Weston, the journalist-interloper in the seminal nature-oriented speculative novel *Ecotopia*, crosses into the exotic secessionist nation comprised of what had been Northern California, Oregon, and Washington through a funky and debauched Reno, Nevada. Much as it was in 1975 when the novel was written, much as it is portrayed in a fictional 1999 when Callenbach’s novel takes place, and much as it is today, Reno is the shambolic last western outpost of an America considered increasingly
pathologized, riven by toxicity, and divided by race and wealth inequality. Reno is characteristic of the America Callenbach’s novel argues against. In response, emplotting his narrative within the uneasy pastoral tradition of western regionalism, the roots of Callenbach’s novel are deeply enmeshed in Jameson’s sense of utopian desire. Not surprisingly in its separatist language, then, Ecotopia embodies an isolationist ideal starkly of its era that is antithetical to an interconnected postlocality. However, through a different lens, the very poetics of space defining Ecotopia convey a complex temporality stemming precisely from its deeply entrenched tropes of separation or isolation. Easily recognizing the immediate material differences between America and Ecotopia, Weston must be conditioned to accept the slowness resulting from Ecotopia’s “deliberate throwback policy” that makes the young country seem to him to have “gone back to the stone age” (15).

For example, even if the problematic intractability of Ecotopia’s hard spatial borders overshadows the more compelling borders of its temporal frame, its temporality is what more exactly interrogates what West-Pavlov has called the coercive forces lurking behind “the facade of common sense time” (2). In this example, a fast/slow binary representing global and local time lends itself to the defining theme of Callenbach’s novel. If the machinations of globalization impart a debilitating synchrony, but globality indeed does imply polychrony, it is at times deliberate and at others accidental. Callenbach’s Ecotopia, by design, performs many of the basic tenets of bioregionalism as envisioned by Berg, against what Berg has described as the “live-in colonialism” of late
capitalist systems (Envisioning 74). To say this, in my reading, is equivalent to critiquing late capitalist standardized time. Slowness as activist practice conceived this way has discernible temporal traces in speculative regional literature. Two scenes seemingly at odds with one another in Ecotopia lend themselves to this project. Both depict instances of transportation, perhaps the primary valence of postmodern life. The first scene centers on the journalist William Weston’s ride on the high speed rail line connecting the Sierra Nevada Range north of Lake Tahoe to the San Francisco Bay Area, and the second describes a bicycle ride through the redwoods north of the city as he approaches the Ecotopian logging camps. The first scene I frame in terms of “future” for obvious technological reasons, and the second scene I frame as “primitive” because it depicts an outmoded, self-propelled form of transportation. Together, these scenes unpack specific fast/slow-slow/fast movements, demonstrating the permeability or slippage inherent to each.

Unwittingly for Weston, embedding himself in Ecotopian culture is a matter of becoming temporally aware. In his notebook, where he records his field observations before developing them into reports to the fictional Times-Post back in America, Weston writes: “Ecotopians a little vague about time, I notice—few wear watches, and they pay more attention to things like sunrise and sunset or the tides than to actual hour time” (29). Most of Weston’s frustrations originate in this fact. That is, place-making is a matter of a slowness in Ecotopian culture for which America has not prepared him. Border crossing amounts to learning a new sense of time; or more exactly, relearning a cyclical time
registered beyond the numbers of a clock, an act which seems to slow events down accordingly. Really, Weston’s is the equivalent of crossing an ideological time zone, one predicated on the end of fossil fuel dependence and its attendant speed. By liberating itself from fossil fuels Ecotopia has, in effect, slowed itself down, returning to the pace of an era before the internal combustion engine. But this does not equate to a kind of future primitive austerity. Ecotopians have developed technologies that reduce consumption on all levels, aggressively recycling building materials, repurposing existing structures for multi-use to make daily movement across shorter distances possible, and managing their waste in all forms so that the nitrogen cycle is buttressed and maintained by everyday life rather than interrupted by it. Most notably in Ecotopia, nitrogen, rather than carbon, is the cornerstone of civilization. This move is not backward, as it appears at first to Weston and to Callenbach’s contemporary readers entrenched in carbon-based late capitalism, but instead it marks a redirection or recommitment to sustainable practice, the subtext of which, I contend here, is a return to localized time.

On principle, Weston takes the absence of personal vehicles and streetlights, for example, as “stone-age” living—and indeed much of Ecotopia feels to the modern reader like the wistful and nostalgic conceits of white countercultural privilege. Yet for the same reason, these outward manifestations of reclaimed or rehabilitated slowness are also deliberate in their subversive intent. Ecotopians’ time is liberated accordingly. Ecotopians stretch an artificially compressed Americanized sense of time to fit their sustainable approach to the environment. If, outside of the novel, the oppositional
slowness Callenbach imagines doesn’t succeed because it only positions slowness as against speed, it does offer an alternative to the systemic, operational value of speed as society currently reads it. To pose slowness as ‘against’ does in fact disrupt and change the balance, representing a value system more in line with Berg’s bioregionalism, or, as against frenetic or schizophrenic modernity. In effect, future primitive is not a backward move but a move out from underneath an imposed, by now commonsense spatio-temporal uniformity. It is less a reversal than it is a refusal, and it is less a refusal than it is an ongoing negotiation or unfolding.

**Future**

*Ecotopia*, in a move that has become ubiquitous to postlocality, begins in a plane, like Robert Thayer’s, like Pico Iyer’s, and like Marc Auge’s as described in the introduction to this book. The plane is a symbol of the mobile, global age. Ecotopia’s prohibition of international flights, then, “on the grounds of air and noise pollution” is a significant example of the negation of that kind of transport for entirely separatist reasons (3). Separatism here denotes not the absence of mobility, however, but rather a conscious environmental initiative in favor of only certain types of mobility—and largely, I would say, against time as a commodity. In Ecotopia all futurity is tempered by primitiveness. Rather than fetishizing the machine, they deny its meaning beyond its practical use. Instead, Ecotopians celebrate the acts the machine enables, weighing the usefulness of speedy transport, for example, against its consequences. Refusing the “time is money”
ideology America purveys is, at its most basic level, to refuse to commodify time as well. Still, the high speed rail line Weston takes, the “Sierra Express,” is “frequent and fast,” as if to concede some aspect of futurity—the necessity of speed—as meaningful. Through Weston’s articles sent back to America, Callenbach explains that the rail system was made possible by technology developed in Germany and Japan and built by Boeing just after independence from America. The concession, then, is an effort on Callenbach’s part to show his detractors something more than a hippie dream. “Future,” in this sense read as speed, is practical or pragmatic; it is the necessary negotiation that makes “primitive” slowness easier to swallow. Speed is the result of compromise.

When we think of the fast and slow of the “Sierra Express” as compromise, it becomes quite fascinating and complex. As he describes it in his official newspaper report, the Tahoe Station where Weston embarks on his first Ecotopian train ride is, “a rustic affair, constructed of huge timbers,” reminding him of “a monstrous ski chalet” (6). With its library, fireplaces, and storage lockers the building is a kind of throwback to a century earlier, a kind of perennial Bavarian paradise, slightly out of season. Designed for relaxing and mingling and not just for entering and exiting, it represents the very antithesis of the New York train stations Weston is accustomed to. Particularly in his notes, Weston’s impression is more telling: “It’s as if [Ecotopians] have lost the sense of anonymity which enables us to live together in large numbers… The Ecotopian at the train ticket window simply wouldn’t tolerate being spoken to in my usual way” (10). Weston’s “usual way” is the gruff, terse, American idiom of any place where transactions
are predicated on quick efficiency. The speed of the movement is a goal in and of itself, and any part of the mechanism that delays this objective is disdained. In Ecotopia, however, the ticket agent refuses to be treated like a machine. Weston reflects that the agent “won’t give you the ticket unless you deal with him as a real person.” The agent for the “Sierra Express,” a triumph of speed and efficiency as we know it, refuses the anonymity generally allotted to someone in his position. In America, this scene suggests, our “usual way” is to dehumanize each other, it is to render all exchanges purely transactional. Ecotopian slowness, by refusing the dehumanizing impulse embedded in objective efficiency, reforms transaction as empathetic interaction. Again, connection can mean interaction, but it doesn’t necessarily imply a shared sense of responsibility or concern. Too often, connection is only transaction, as Callenbach unambiguously suggests. Weston’s ticket agent asks questions, makes remarks, and expects sincere responses. He is a disruptive force from Weston’s American perspective, while from the Ecotopian perspective he lives a fuller existence, one that refuses to fall prey to a timetable at the expense of retaining his personhood.

Outwardly, though, the rustic building and the ticket agent who refuses dehumanization are in sharp contrast to the train itself, which surprises Weston when he first sees it. Significantly, the trains arrive in the basement of the station, symbolically situating them beneath the interactive spaces above so that the interpersonal outweighs the mechanical. Incongruously, though, the train “looked more like a wingless airplane” with “huge windows that came down to about six inches of the floor” (10). In effect, the
train that arrives at the seemingly nineteenth century station is something out of the twenty first. In operation, passengers “feel virtually no movement at all.” The train “operates by magnetic suspension and propulsion,” making it almost noise free, the epitome of cutting edge technology (10-11). When asked how Ecotopia affords such technology, Weston’s fellow passengers respond with ironic laughter and explain that the entire route from San Francisco to Seattle cost about as much as America would have spent on ten SST missiles (11). The alternative, once again, is a rehumanizing of the transactional experience. It reveals the consequences of a status quo that has normalized the military industrial complex alongside other anonymities and abstractions. Replacing the normalization inherent to hierarchical or taxonomic world views through a direct and deliberate negation of them, Ecotopians return to a “primitive” version of humanity believed to have come before the indirect, impersonal circumstances of modernity. High speed rail rather than bombs tells an alternate narrative to absolute uniformity, one in which high tech is not lost in a labyrinth of interpersonal timescapes, and humanity is not sacrificed as a logical consequence of capitalist desire.

In a third and decisive move that takes his reader from the slowness and frustrating inefficiency of the train station, to the remarkably high-tech train itself, Weston completes his portrait of Ecotopian transport with the unanticipated view of the inside of the passenger cars, further adding to the sense that fast and slow are not binaries at all, but specifically relational parts constitutive of each other. He is shocked that the train is seatless, for example, and he describes the interior as something like a hippie
caravan, where joints are passed openly and conversations start easily among fellow passengers “sprawled on large baglike leather cushions that lay scattered about” and beneath blankets “from a pile at one end of the car” (7). The inside is a casual, unhurried version of the train Weston had been expecting based on its exterior, full of recycling bins, hanging ferns, and small plants decorating it in a mix of utility and aesthetic sensitivity. All this in a train that travels as much as 225 miles per hour and which keeps to a timetable of shocking precision, as if for every degree of slowness there is incredible speed, and contained within that speed is a core of loose, contemplative disregard that is covalent and recalibrating. Within what otherwise would have been the belly of the beast in America, where passengers would have been just that—anonymous beings in the same non-place through the result of anonymous transactions—those usual, expected borders on the Ecotopian train are broken down and repurposed through a series of disjunctures or ruptures that break the usual social agreements of a linear, prohibitive time table. So much so, that after what Weston calls his “first gesture of international good will,” that is, “a few puffs” off of the joint handed to him, he begins to refer to the other riders as “companions” despite himself (7). This unexpected filial warmth countermands the postmodern signifier “passenger.” Its typical gruffness is not condoned. Weston’s boarding of the train is instead both a literal and a figurative departure for a place and a temporality that at every level is fitted to humanity and locality instead of abstraction in the interest of “efficiency.”

In each phase of Weston’s description of his experience with the train, speed is
disrupted by slowness, while slowness is mitigated by speed. The “typical Ecotopian looseness” (9), for example, that Weston finds so exasperating is accommodated systemically by short trains that run every hour. Humans don’t conform to the schedule, the schedule conforms to humans. Time, in fact, is not foregrounded as “schedule” at all, but instead is unbound, let to do its native work of underscoring our becoming.110

Reconnecting with the fast-slow of existence under extremely localized circumstances approaches this necessary organic relationship to time. This is speed evacuated of its usual rush and hurry attending neoliberal global capital. The Ecotopian train represents a successfully egalitarian, fluid and porous temporality stemming from a rupture with single-use epistemologies that segregate non-humans, people, products, and things at all levels of existence. In the interest of apprehending postlocal time, it can be said that polychronality reflects the many actors and stories that resist meaning-making from above.

**Primitive**

If the train ride brings a kind of fast/slow into focus, Weston’s bike ride illuminates its slow/fast counterpart. Out of step with our expectations of such modes of transport, in the case of the Ecotopian train the recognizably fast can be viewed as communal and surprisingly intimate. The bicycle, on the other hand, juxtaposed against automobile culture and generalized speed in most contemporary literature, represents a nostalgic, deliberate slowness forestalling or negating modernity in all its forms. Broadly
speaking, cycling’s nostalgia harkens back to a calmer, saner, quieter and even quaint world. Yet this sentimental illusion is received despite the initial reception of bicycles as an example of modern speed. The bicycle, here, is the train’s affective temporal inverse. In *Ecotopia* bicycles are *fast enough*, and, more importantly, they require self-propulsion—the machine merely intercedes, producing only that speed of which a given person chooses. Once again, the bicycle embodies that elegiac pastoral mode behind Callenbach’s novel, in which progress takes mankind only so far and then is artificially made static. In this, bicycling is shrouded in a mildly technological golden age of human powered machinery. If the train signifies the future, the bicycle signifies the primitive.

In three conjoined scenes beginning with Weston’s reintroduction to bicycle riding, Callenbach challenges temporocentric values at the personal, the interpersonal, and the communal levels. The logos and pathos of the cycling scene extend through and bind the two scenes following it. In the first case, Weston is confronted by implanted and embodied time as his body records his fatigue. The bike ride sets up localized, bodily, immanent time keeping. In the second, in which his guide to the logging camps Marissa Brightcloud seduces him, he learns about an organic, erotic kind of quickness; in part, Callenbach’s transgressive move towards primal acts and timekeeping is central to undoing what has been policed as the civilized/savage binary in humanism. In the third instance, Weston learns about the temporal “labyrinth of contradictions” (57) of timber harvesting in Ecotopia. This last sets up discussions of what is “time-saving” and what is
truly “wasteful,” thus contrasting the systematic and temporal in compelling ways. These layers represent a succession of “regressive” Ecotopian practices that amount to a complete cultural denial of time as it is practiced today. In effect, when read together these scenes perform versions of “primitive” that are ardently primal, reminding readers that humans are organic beings—not users of, but participants in, biotic life. The first two scenes are captured in Weston’s private notebook, while the third is related in his official report. While Weston’s reports reveal his American biases, his notebooks contain his private misgivings over conflicts between Ecotopian and American lifeways as he grows accustomed to Ecotopians’ more organic way of being. In itself temporal, the effect is a kind of sidereal narrative exposing the artifice of clock time.

Weston’s first reaction to women throughout the novel is to objectify them, and Marissa Brightcloud, the woman who arrives with the bikes, is no exception. Although Weston tells us later that she is “not exactly beautiful, at least by my usual standards” (52), he appreciates her wildness and incomprehensibility, describing her as “animal and human at once” (53). His characterization of Marissa—however fraught—is crucial to this scene because she symbolizes an almost-savage nature juxtaposed against the “civilized” women he had previously enjoyed. For example, she has taken a pseudo-Indian name, she resents Weston’s imperial view of the surrounding forestlands, and she sympathizes with their “chimp ancestors” (50). Later, she is described by Weston as “a goddamn druid or something” (53). Read as a temporal symbol, Marissa’s “not exactly beautiful” body deflects the “usual standards” just as how she chooses to use it negates
standard time schedules and routines. Her bodily nature encompasses the looser, liberated Ecotopian ethos, an outward repudiation of American temporocentrism. It is appropriate, then, that she greets Weston with bicycles, which in turn fill him with panic. The bicycle affixes a kind of primitive temporality to her: the physicality of it sets up her aggressive sexuality as quick, while the languorousness accompanying her desire is slower and self-determined. Utterly present, by extension the slow/fast of her is always active and unpredictable, even as it contains an aware selfhood that Weston eventually learns he lacks. Space and time for Marissa are immediate and emotive rather than strictly organizing principles.

The embodied sense of time the bicycles necessitate is unavaoidable: “She had arranged bicycles for us. Panic: I haven’t been on a bike in years! Wobbly at first. She watched me get onto it again with calm amusement, then we headed out through the station town and into the woods. She said little, but watched me curiously” (50). Emasculated, as Weston remembers it in his notebook, there is a gendered power imbalance to their meeting that throws him off guard and which extends across their eventual relationship. At the same time, because he is accustomed to his “passenger” status, the compulsory participatory nature of self-propulsion—both its physicality, and, I would argue its temporality—contributes to his feeling of dissonance in this moment. As Casey reminds us, time is situated in a particular locality, and so, feeling out of place, Weston is likewise out of time. He is “wobbly”; Marissa watches him “curiously,” with “calm amusement.” Later, she tells Weston that she looked at him that way because he
“just seemed so—distraught or something” (52). Correctly diagnosing symptoms of what Berg would later call “the anxious atmosphere of our Late Industrial epoch” (129) in Weston, Marissa’s solicitude is a clear commentary on contemporary American life. Her way, as it happens, of mitigating Weston’s dissonance was to sleep with him; in effect, Marissa is Weston’s bodily introduction to a new place and time. Callenbach’s way of pointing out how uptight Americans are, and to promote what today is admittedly an archaic version of female empowerment, sex with Marissa amounts to a kind of reward or incentive for Weston to drop his standard, regimented, “civilized” way of being while keeping his manhood intact.

The act of bicycle riding and the sex act in these adjoining scenes mirror each other in this regard. We learn in the logging camp bath house that Marissa had already decided, while they were biking through the forest, to sleep with Weston for his own good. These scenes, then, do not form chronological temporal linkages; they do not incrementally measure duration. Instead, they are joined serially by a sustained physicality in which clock time is replaced by the temporalities of fatigue and desire. The bike ride ends, but its affect remains, entering into a more dynamic sense of “interwoven and transformational temporalities” (West-Pavlov 12) that ultimately underwrites postlocal time, explicitly forming a break with temporocentrism. The time illustrated here is rhythmic; it lacks the utilitarian beginning and ending we expect. Time as specifically native to one’s being is carried forward as clock time falls away. Manifested in a kind of mirroring effect in both the cycling scene and the sex scene, Marissa’s bodily nature
disarms Weston. After their pause to take in the view, it seems to Weston that she begins
to ride faster, and he has trouble keeping up. Notably, Weston’s initial panic turns into
fatigue. By comparison, leading up to the sex scene that follows quickly on the heels of
their bike ride, Marissa is as dubious of his interpersonal skills as she was of his cycling
ability. In short order, though, she asks him directly if he wants to make love with her
(52). Weston writes in his notebook: “her assertiveness unnerved me a moment,” and as
she pushes him to the floor of the bathhouse he realizes: “Jesus… this woman is stronger
than I am!” Parallel to Weston’s “wobbliness” and “panic” in the cycling scene, followed
by his inability to keep pace with Marissa on the bicycle, their sex replays and extends
their initial contact through the personal to the interpersonal. While Weston ultimately
finds the wherewithal to “keep up” in both cases, he does so emphatically on Marissa’s
terms. Although this latter scene translates as wistfully archaic today, however earnest its
intent, through Marissa the desire that binds the events on the bicycle and the bathhouse
to each other neutralizes the expectations of American society in such a way that it
disqualifies exploitation of landscape and—if we are of the mind to be forgiving—female
body alike.¹¹²

In Weston’s view before meeting Marissa, to be civilized is to reconcile one’s
social obligations according to the expectations of worklife. Yet their sex in the logging
camp—albeit strikingly heteronormative—is essentially unproductive. Weston’s first day
in camp is spent soaking and lovemaking. This is “wasted” time according to convention,
in which America’s protestant work ethic in the service of industry is knowingly
invalidated. The slowing down, halting, or abrogating in the first two interlocking scenes is developed in this manner through Weston’s depiction of the logging camp and the timber harvesting process. As was the case with Marissa, there is a pastness attached to the logging camp that is not just primal, but primeval. Attachments to it, therefore, are not just emotional; they approach the spiritual. Furthering Weston’s feelings of temporal dislocation, then, is his sense of the wasteful, at odds with Marissa’s spirituality. On one hand he willingly participates in “wasteful” behaviors that give him pleasure; on the other, he cannot abide them in practice when applied to industry. A spiritualized rather than a purely economic timber harvest is just too much for him.

Time in camp is sticky, viscous: Weston remarks upon arriving that the buildings are “ramshackle,” beneath “very large” (read ancient) trees (50). The structures are “old and unpainted… like old summer camps.” The air smells of decomposition, Weston tells us, and the atmosphere feels strange and soft to him. In short, the sum of the forest’s fecundity and the buildings’ arrested decay completes Weston’s journey back in time to a pre-industrial moment that had begun on the bike. In fact, he explains, in the forest, “foot trails are the only way to get anywhere” (58). He is openly outraged in his official report on the Ecotopian timber industry about the temporal thickness he experiences, even though in private he had remarked that being beneath the big trees felt like being in church. While the too obvious nostalgia and the blatant romantic imagery make the description of the logging camp difficult to swallow, the primal feel of the camp isn’t solely “natural”; it is a purposely engineered, carefully stewarded, restored nature, a
foundational part of a larger Ecotopian reinhabitation project. That is, although it appears utterly primordial in places to Weston, this apparent essence is actually the outcome of thoughtful reclamation and mindful extraction. Not specifically “wild,” the land surrounding the logging camp has been fostered back to an equilibrium in which wise use is part of its natural state.

What confounds Weston is that the Ecotopian land ethic is not self-serving. As far as Weston is concerned, Ecotopian forestry is only a matter of “tree-hugging,” yet he nonetheless notices the immediate quietude palpable in the woods that has followed from this Ecotopian ethic, even if he doesn’t connect the two at first. A significant facet of their reinhabitation program, Ecotopians have, in addition to reforestation projects and better grazing policies, designated vast roadless areas and sanctioned against “trail bikes, all-terrain vehicles, airplanes overhead, [and] snowmobiles in winter” (58). As was the case with the slowness inherent to the bicycle, this land use ethic—here manifested in silence—is predicated on a bodily insistence attending participation. Without other means of transport, self-propulsion is the only way to be mobile in the forests of Ecotopia, opening the cyclist or pedestrian up to the region’s divinity. Slowness, quietness, and reverence inform practice. Once again, participation has replaced the disaffected postmodern role of terminal passenger that Weston has accepted as routine in America.

Just as in the slow/fast of Weston’s bike ride, and the instance of the slow/fast of Marissa’s sexuality, the slow/fast of industry in Ecotopia is a matter of presence, in which being is being-in-place, and place-sense is premised on becoming part of the ecosocial
process. Culture here is indivisible from nature, and there is no clear in-and-out attending human-environment interactions that allows for the subordination of the biosphere. The “American eco-imperialist imagination” (Battista 114) to which Weston is attuned is thrown into supreme disarray. This deliberate refusal to unhinge Ecotopian culture from nature has immediate temporal implications. For example, Weston misinterprets Ecotopian logging practices related to mandatory “forest service” as, “enormously wasteful in terms of economic inefficiency and disruption” (55), when in fact they represent another example of ecosocial accountability. One can only care about efficiency the way Weston does when he or she is separated from process, where trees are themselves only by name or classification. Time, in the service of order, abstracts cause and effect until they are separable, further confusing want and need. Alternately, the kind of desire Weston is learning in the camp invalidates such abstractions.

Accustomed to the kind of division that enables exploitive practice under the sign of ‘efficiency,’ what he views as “wasteful” is responsible stewardship. It is wasteful only insofar as its goal is not to take the most board feet of timber out of the woods in the shortest amount of time. Really, it is time as much as practice that Weston is arguing against; or, time is so embedded in practice that the operations of the industry, perceived as solely chronological, are quantitative in his eyes. The split in ideologies is clearly along one’s sense of accountability to nature versus one’s accountability to the clock. In this mode time dictates practice, whether or not time’s effects are harmful. By contrast, in the Ecotopian model, practice adheres to natural temporal rhythms. Wastefulness is a
purely temporal judgement; occluded for Weston by clock time is the fact that natural
time is actually more tangible than the time-system capitalism has taught him.

In this and most bioregional readings of the period, reorienting to a primitive
animality is essential to the experience of being in place. Put this way, according to
Callenbach, primitivity is our future. Despite Callenbach's intent, however, temporality as
it is performed by his characters communicates an organic, interpenetrating sense of time
beyond his calculated past/future constructs. Happily, this unintended consequence leaves
the door ajar for realizing his utopia. Accepting time as “the multiple ongoing process of
material becoming” as West-Pavlov pleads for us to do (3), is central to the aims of
*Ecotopia*. Callenbach’s novel successfully intuits postlocal temporality in a way that it
fails to understand postlocal spatial relations. Its success lies in its ability to move beyond
the totalizing aspects of uncritical utopias and uncritical regionalisms. What Callenbach
misses spatially in terms of hard borders, isolation, and stability, he reveals instinctively
in regard to the uneven, localized, plural and cyclical nature of time.

*The Wild Shore*: “We were eating up the world”

This section considers the ecosocial consequences of a magnified animal
temporality as manifested in Kim Stanley Robinson’s speculative novel *The Wild Shore*.
My interest here is in the relationship between ways of being-in-place and the keeping
and management of time as they pertain to other subjectivities. The unevenness of
postlocal time should not be limited to human actors as we consider the broader
assemblages from which places are formed. In this case, I will track Kim Stanley Robinson’s protagonist Hank Fletcher as he reclaims his basic animality. Much as Callenbach’s goal had been with the character Marissa, Robinson’s attention to Hank’s rewilding extends how we might think of localized time subverting globally uniform time, and in so doing, to more clearly realize the primacy of immanence.

_The Wild Shore_ is the first in Robinson’s *California Trilogy*, which in sum depicts three possible futures for the same fictional southern California coastal community of San Onofre. _The Wild Shore_ imagines the year 2047, when the region is isolated from the world after a series of nuclear blasts and America itself is policed by the global community to assure it cannot return to power. This future California is composed of remote tribal groups surviving on subsistence agriculture and forms of hunter-gathering. Largely a rumination on the social construction of savagery, the primary conflict for Hank is his self-conscious reflection on what separates his community from the beasts. In the process, _The Wild Shore_ advances an indictment of the slow violence undergirding the traditional version of “progress,” replacing it with the concept of future primitivism through Hank’s biocentric conversion. Bound to a lingering American nationalism, Hank’s task is to overcome his inherited exceptionalist narrative, surmounting manufactured civilized-savage and human-nonhuman dualisms. He must disentangle his basic animality from the purely conceptual savagery embedded in contrast to notions of civilized life.

In the case of _Ecotopia_, a deliberate repudiation of the American chronotope
allowed for a counter-hegemonic, if not polychronic temporality to flourish. Due to the imposed decentralization of American communities in *The Wild Shore*, local time-keeping—like its self-government—is left to the remote communities themselves. In effect, California reverts back to a version of its pre-contact self through austerity measures meted as punishment for American hubris. Robinson pits Hank’s rewilding—as I read it, his rediscovered animal temporality—against the desires of the communities in the region to reestablish American authority; or, the regional attempt to reenter history. My intervention, then, is to argue that Hank breaks free of the artificial, hierarchical conceits of enlightenment humanism by his reacquaintance with what I view as “animal time.” By embracing Onofre’s existing precapitalist, place-based, rhythmic temporality he refuses to lead his community back into world history. That is, he breaks free of the linear, mechanical, teleological ordering of the world which has been so destructive. He renews his observance of a cyclical, nonanthropocentric, and specifically place-based polychronous cosmology. If globalism trades on synchrony and homogenous time, Hank’s recognition of his own animality disrupts this temporocentrism. His own sense of immanent placement is reaffirmed by animality, and thus his local ecosocial commitments are renewed as well. As shown above, Callenbach’s novel offered this very alternative, attempting a more complex version of a fraught pastoral dream. While Callenbach’s future California, however, is derived from an uncritical perspective of isolation—the nature and parameters of which I have challenged already in connection with temporary residency narratives of the California Gold Rush—Robinson’s
comprehends an ongoing interconnectivity, even among seemingly isolated locales. Here, I mean to build on my earlier discussion of the problems and conditions of isolation where to be an isolate actually entails a continuing bond of interconnectivity with those places from which one feels removed.

*The Wild Shore*’s key scenes hinge on its characters’ statements of comparative animality. For instance, the elder men in Hank’s community reminisce about the days when America was whole and great, contemplating how they might get back to what it had been. They speak of their plight now as if they are being kept like animals. One of the men complains, “I know best what they [the global community] did to us, and where they’re keeping us… We’re bears in the pit” (45). In effect, the elder’s complaint positions their localized inhabitation as a trap. He characterizes their reduced circumstances as undesirable and dehumanizing. Most often the old men who witnessed the blasts mourn the fact that the American president, rather than following through on the plan of mutually assured destruction, opted not to retaliate. The president’s pacifism wears on the old men’s sense of honor and patriotism. The old men feel an acute bearishness in their containment. Bearishness here represents a circumspect alterity, in which their loss of agency is proportionate to their sense of entitlement. The reference to “the pit” implies entrapment and exotification or orientalism magnified in a later statement made by the mayor of San Diego, who wants Onofre to join in an American reunification movement. When questioned by Tom, Hank’s avuncular mentor and the erstwhile shaman figure of the Onofre community, about his reasons for reunification the
mayor responds, “because we aren’t a zoo here, that’s why” (102).

While America’s borders are policed by the global community, America itself has become a kind of “world preserve” that outsiders visit in secret. The old men of Onofre, the San Diego mayor, and those like them, refuse to accept their marginalization, viewing their circumstances as dehumanizing. As such, a caged animality becomes the ontologic shorthand for being left out of world events. The young men of the community perceive their situation differently, but with the same outcome. Hank’s best friend Steve tells him, “Life isn’t just grunting for food in the same spot day after day, Henry. That’s how animals live. But we’re human beings… we can’t live our whole lives in that valley like cows chewing cud” (46). Dennis Livingston, an early, astute reviewer of the book, balances the stakes of the novel as a matter of hubris and humility in this regard, remarking that the novel asks: “Would America itself be better off if its people were humbled, brought closer to the struggle for existence that still besets most of the planet?” (683). To this, I would add in retrospect, Robinson’s characters struggle to exist under global conditions that mimic what we now recognize as the direct result of slow violence as a consequence of American prosperity. That is, Robinson directs his reader to wonder how Americans would respond if the global effects of contemporary life under the sign of “progress” were visited large-scale in our own country across all classes of people as they are worldwide today. Or, as Robert Talley, Jr paraphrases Edward Said’s argument, what if the “truth” of American exceptionalism was closer to its “experience” (94)?
Reflected in this move, in a succession of compounding similes, the avuncular Tom tries to placate Hank’s sense of Onofre’s diminished circumstances. Tom recounts the nearly ruinous days after the bombing, before the people of their valley learned to live cooperatively, in relative harmony with nature. He tells Hank that they “went through the first winter like rats” (71). As rats, we assume Tom means skulking, invasive, unparticular, living on scraps. In effect, having debased themselves, in Tom’s mind they had regressed to one of the least admirable forms of mammal life. Over the course of this exchange Tom continues: “We were just like wolves, no better. You won’t know times like those.” Transferring his metaphor of rat-like furtiveness to wolf-like ferocity highlights the brutality of their circumstances without losing the essence of his earlier parallelism. Both animals conjure a calculating image of cool efficiency and tenacity.

Significantly, both the rat and the wolf are employed here to underscore a behavior, rather than a situation, as the animals above had been—caged or pastoral animal totems are replaced by wild ones, drawing attention to their actions rather than to the conditions under which they live. The most telling line, then, is the final one: “You won’t know times like those.” Here, though Tom trades on the same hierarchical social ordering as found in the comparative animality expressed by others in earlier scenes, he upends its subject positions. For those who would not be bears or cows their animal present is distasteful; in Tom’s analogy their present is not animal, but human. The human present, as Tom sees it, closes off an unacceptable animal past. In attaching an explicit pastness to their animality, Tom attempts to affix an assured humanity to their current
way of life and to their days ahead. Put another way, according to Tom, Onofrians’ humanity rests in their ability to live without violence toward others or to their immediate environment. That which makes them most human is that they live in relative balance with the natural world; which condition, ironically, in the eyes of the other town elders, is what makes them animals of one sort or another. “Human,” that is, “civilized,” remains the essential paradigm toward which each side directs their desires. The position each side argues over is merely what constitutes acceptable standards of behavior and/or living conditions. Either way, the analogy is charged by temporal polarities of human presencing—by versions of what was, what is, and what might be again. In Tom’s case, however, his is a plea for Hank to realize the native comforts of being borne native or living-in-place. In short, Tom longs for Hank to see beyond the covetousness and exploitation that brought America to this point in the first place, much the same as William Weston had to learn from the Ecotopians.

After this exchange, the theme of a particularly American hubris colors the remainder of the novel. Far from underestimating human avarice, in a later conversation Tom explains to Hank why America was attacked and why it remains under provisional restraint. He tells Hank: “We were eating up the world, boy, and that’s why the world rose up and put an end to us… America was great like a whale—it was giant and majestic but it stank and it was a killer. Lots of fish died to make it so big” (198). In the Melvillian tradition, for Tom America was like a whale, commandeering the world’s resources and flattening global culture pursuant to the interests of neoliberal imperialism. The return to
American supremacy that the old men who support the resistance wish to see, runs contrary to Tom’s pragmatism, belying American innocence. In effect, although he swaps megafauna, Tom accepts that the “bear is in the pit” because of its wanton consumption. Before contact with the San Diegans, pastoralism in Onofre had been pragmatic; after, it can only be a conscious negotiation with a continually revised set of desires. Onofrians must begin to evaluate their lifestyle self-consciously, weighing the promise of plenitude against the comforts of a reasonably “simple” life. After the San Diego mayor’s edict that casts the Onofrians’ way of life as undesireable, isolation becomes a reckoning, clearly divided on participation or retreat. In this, like *Ecotopia*, it is a post-pastoral or critical utopia. The novel, then, hinges on whether to protect or to transform one’s place according to the pressures put upon it, as Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr puts it in his reading of the text (158).

As their awareness of their changing political and territorial position grows, the animality which Onofrians must actually reckon with is manifested as time on a bodily scale. This very bodily nature of Onofrian life works two ways: first, it exposes them to a sense of their own “savagery,” and by extension their animality; but second, it reorients them to the kind of native, polychronic time that West-Pavlov argues is inherent to the human condition. At stake is how Hank will resolve this position against the fact that Onofrians are now the outsiders of an imperial time. Wanting what America had is to want the world to run on American time again. This desire maps onto a “chronototality” that demands “identicalness” (Moraru 302; 303); in the case of the resistance movement
the Onofrians are asked to join, this condition is generated by a clear-cut American nationalism. That is why Livingston’s comment in his review is so astute. Although he only remarks on the conditions under which the Americans are living in the novel, really he is commenting implicitly but tellingly on the process of becoming othered, being made an outsider, being left out of or marginalized by the work of global capital: to be left out is to be left out of time; to be situated outside the flow of “progress” and “development” that ultimately tells us who is civilized and who the savages and animals are.

The paradox of Tom’s avuncular monologues is that he unsentimentally assays U.S. imperialism on one hand, while underestimating human avarice in his hope for a satisfied pastoralism on the other. Tom’s sense of reinhabitation imagines a satisfied human world, yet it subscribes to a golden age rhetoric, or, as Terry Gifford puts it, to a strategy that is “fundamentally flawed by its artifice and idealization” (“Gary Snyder and the Post-Pastoral 77). Still, Tom’s exchanges with Hank are considerably more complex and provocative than the worldviews of the other Onofrians. In this way Tom’s position, “both celebrate[s] and take[s] some responsibility for nature without false consciousness” (Gifford, Pastoral 148). In effect, though again animal metaphors are employed negatively, there is a critical element in Tom’s reflection that is not available in the other Onofrians’ dreams for the future. Though examples in The Wild Shore are many, two later scenes cement this critical perspective in which animality is at first obliquely and then directly valorized, emphasizing the accommodation and interrelation of all beings. This worldview, one that encompasses a robust awareness of the value of being content, drives
the remaining exchanges between Tom and Hank.

Tom’s focus on American consumption persists in a later passage, when he is lying on what Hank presumes will be his deathbed. Here, Tom pleads once again with Hank to realize the ephemerality of exceptionalism. He informs Hank: “Food, we’re slaves to it, boy, I learned that: Grew up and didn’t learn a thing about it, not really. In that America was evil. The world was starving and we ate like pigs, people died of hunger and we ate their dead bodies and licked our chops” (296). Tom’s phrase, “ate like pigs,” refers to the figurative greed driving the country prior to the world’s revenge while intimating their literal cannibalism in the interests of survival afterward. In the long view, however, Tom’s moral is simply that humans need to be less alienated from their food production; in effect, to live the way the Onofrians do now, by community agriculture and small-scale hunter-gathering in harmony with their homeplace. Either way, comparative animality is resignedly derogatory. As telling as it is damning, Tom’s plea for Hank’s comprehension seems to suggest the American narrative produced pigs and cannibals—cunning savages—once again; still, though, Tom imparts the same assurance that their animal acts are behind them.

After a climactic failed attempt to clandestinely fight in the American resistance movement ends in tragedy, Hank finds himself ostracized within the Onofrian community, which ultimately and surprisingly had voted against joining the San Deigns in the American resistance. Having gone against the pastoral will of his community, the novel’s long *denouement* turns on Hank’s final willingness to delink animality from
savagery, shattering the paradigm by which both Tom and his detractors define the present. Alone in the forest at night, Hank seems to enter a kind of dream state of his own, full of wonder and relief. In a real sense he undergoes what might be understood as an affective biocentric conversion. Echoing aspects of post-pastoral awe that Terry Gifford draws attention to, Hank experiences a similar “deep sense of the immanence in all natural things” (152). Gifford’s deployment of “immanence” connects, in my reading, Hank’s awe to the type and variety of temporal experience for which I have been arguing throughout this project. At the heart of Hank’s ontic night walk is a biocentric impulse—an animal-now which distinguishes between primal and primitive, and animal and savage. Hank’s is an egalitarian and bodily experience of living-in-place that binds him to all things and pulls him out of the persistently forward momentum of history that insists on faulty taxonomies. Absent until now, this “deep sense” is not an abstract retreat into the past, but an understanding of one’s place—and therefore time—in the world.

Robinson finally binds animality, temporality, and morality, pitting them outright against anthropocentric narratives of progress. Scale and simile, accordingly, are here intended to produce the opposite of their previous effect. In getting to the site of his own animal being, Hank thinks to himself, “It was a night to make you see how vast the world was” (333). Animal, primal, but not “savage,” Hank seems aware of the actual abundance and possibility of his immediate surroundings for the first time. “Vast” connotes the layered and locally infinite. His epiphany is affective and bodily compared to the egoistic dreams of a wide, available, and conveniently organized world-beyond promoted by
triumphalism, or, again in Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann’s words, in “the endless frontier [sic] delusion and invader mentality that came to dominate in North America” (“Reinhabiting California” 217). Hank has moved from global desire to locally specific belonging. It finally registers in him that the ocean, the cliffs, the valley, and the hills surrounding him are so large that he “might as well have been an ant” (333). This is not a moment in which being an ant precludes a worthy selfhood as comparisons to animals had before this moment, but one in which Hank comes to terms with a kind of human proportionality, whereby human worth is no more substantial than the smallest living things, and is heroic only in its essential being; that is, as Berg and Dasmann remind us, “we now know that human life depends ultimately on the continuation of other life” (217). In other words, Hank has reached a point, alone in the forest at night, where the most significant lesson he can learn is a worthy and acceptable smallness amidst the many-layered entanglements from which place is formed.

Wandering farther, Hank’s insights about time and his place in the world begin to compound as his spirit lightens. Almost whimsically, he ponders, “Still I think it may be true that [trees] are a type of nocturnal animal. They are alive, after all… Just like us” (335). Russell West-Pavlov, Kevin K. Birth, and others remind us that “calibrated chronometrical time” is artificial, and was created to serve the interests of capital. Further, they remember that it forestalls and usurps “temporality given by nature itself” (13)—the very kind that Hank has fallen back into. In rediscovering his essential animality, then, Hank casts off this artificial temporal regime along with its humanistic
hierarchies. Correspondingly, he reopens new ethical possibilities. Adopting West-Pavlov’s argument, it can be said that Hank acknowledges, “the agency and existence of all entities… inculcating a new respect for other beings and things as co-actants,” such that he re-finds his “own humble but exhilarating place within this complex but democratic order of immanent flows” (122; 157). Put another way, by embracing his “ant-ness” he is better suited to see the trees in this passage immediately following as living things, as “nocturnal animals” that creep playfully and phantasmagorically at the edge of his vision. Crucial to this passage is the phrase, “Just like us.” It clarifies the animal accord into which Hank has entered. The simile has finally equalized Hank’s worldview, incorporating all living things into his selfhood, and by extension, his care.

Problematically, however, his democratic impulse is not beyond anthropocentric conceit—he does, after all, say “just like us” rather than realizing he is “just like them.” He anthropomorphizes the trees and animals, albeit while emphasizing his enlarged sympathies through similes that countermand those which expressed the inherited antipathy of the old men and the resistance fighters. The irony, then, of Hank’s becoming animal is that as a result he accedes the personhood of flora, fauna, and things. However inopportune, he retains a spectral, remnant version of the damaging hierarchical order that positions humans foremost in nature. The plant—the tree—is an animal, while the insects and animals are like human-like, and thus, to him, both are more real. Still, he later hopes to see some of his “furry brothers” (337) when he awakes in the earliest hours of morning. He rises stiff, cold, dirty and hungry and catches a glimpse of deer beside a
creek. As if by their model he, too, drinks from the same water. What these scenes suggest is that brotherhood comes through recognizing affinities without wholly eliding difference. The implications of Hank’s epiphany are strategic, perhaps, but on this crucial point they are equally consequential. While superficially Hank’s epiphany is characterized by a clearly human sameness in which even trees have animal bodies and animals are like humans, it is nonetheless not exclusionary. Plants, animals, and humans are only the same in Hank’s analogy in so far as “brothers” are the same. That is, Hank recognizes a familiar and imperative sameness intimately linking all things, yet as siblings each asserts its own individual nature. Further, that Hank follows the act of the deer, drinking water from the stream as they had, shows that his immanence is oriented less on human centrality and more toward a human-nonhuman partnership or exchange.

In this light, coming into his animality is to embrace his implacement through an enlarged familiarity—and really a reacquaintance with—the immediate, biologic, geographic, material local which he inhabits. Now thinking beyond the trees he wanders beneath, Hank reiterates this position: “Of course there are real living things in the forest at night, mobile things I mean, animals like us” (336). So weighty is the phrase “just like them” that Robinson repeats it a page later, when Hank finally achieves his full biocentric conversion. The refrain of “like us” across the length of this passage feels like a convocation for rebirth. “Like us” implies a kind of divinity or kinship related to entanglement. Almost at peace with himself again after the trouble with the resistance fighters, the animal metaphors largely slip away from Hank’s thoughts and from the
novel after this point. Those who had wanted to return to the old ways saw themselves as animals in the present; as such, they saw animal nature as an obstacle to humanity. Conversely, Tom saw them as being animals in the past, but to the same effect. Hank leaves behind their human-or-animal dualism upon reconnecting with the experience of human-as-animal. Robinson’s reader knows, simply, that Hank will commit to his homeplace, that he will abide by its tribalism supporting local biologic rhythms. Animality, here, marks a crucial moment where the conditions of selfhood are enlarged through the acceptance of a wider set of equals; or, conversely, a diminished sense of “others.”

Altogether, animal temporality leads Hank to a committed implacement that is postlocal in its recognition of plural temporalities in-place. That is, while Callenbach’s Ecotopia tended toward an oppositional animal sense of being-in-place and therefore a human-as-animal understanding of implacement, Robinson’s The Wild Shore more fully realizes the possibility of simultaneous expressions of time from any number of subjectivities.

**Parable of the Sower: “waiting for the old days to come back”**

Like Jack London’s Valley of the Moon (discussed in Chapter 2), Octavia E. Butler’s Parable of the Sower focuses on characters living largely provincial lives within the confines of the city who then take to the road to seek a better way of life. If Saxon and Billy in London’s novel failed to accept the racial diversity of their postlocal
condition, however, Butler’s characters have embraced it. If London’s protagonists “light out for the territories” of their own accord to reclaim some past they felt was simpler and which they are due, Butler’s protagonists take to the road because it is the last option available to them after global climate change and radical wealth inequality have made most places uninhabitable. Under these conditions, like Hank and the rest of the Onofrians in *The Wild Shore*, Butler’s characters are haunted by the civilized/savage hierarchy, and by the savage/animal simile that inherently imposes a complicating order upon it. Although Butler’s people never reach the animal accord I suggest Hank was able to, their narrative illuminates still another localized temporality that subverts uniform global clock time. *Ecotopia* expressed a time-keeping that was oppositional to universal time; *The Wild Shore* revealed a broader ontological field of localized time-keepers; *Parable* discloses the manner in which local time-keepers, as ordinary practitioners, employ the tools of universal time—the clock, calendar, and gun—to enforce their own localized time. *Parable* asks what communities of the dispossessed do when finally and fully dislodged from their enclaves. In *Parable*, the Earthseed community must reclaim a normalized time that suits their own needs, to bring it along with them in a way that preserves community in the face of their rootlessness.

In an early scene establishing *Parable*’s main theme, the novel’s protagonist Lauren Olemina discusses the static nature of their walled community’s present. She tells her friend: “People have changed the climate of the world. Now they’re waiting for the old days to come back” (57). As it did for Saxon and Billy, like the Onofrian elders, like
Lily and Everett McClellan, the elegiac pastoral mode forms a trap within which Lauren’s community is ensnared. She and her friend argue about whether or not they should believe the science behind anthropogenic climate change, and then Lauren exclaims, “It doesn’t make any difference… We can’t make the climate change back, no matter why it changed in the first place. You and I can’t. The neighborhood can’t. We can’t do anything” (57). The point of this passage is that despite their learned helplessness, Lauren and her peers do reclaim a sense of agency. They begin to understand, through Lauren’s reflections, that change is the real state of the world, and therefore, that adaptation to the changes they must confront is the way to maintain selfhood and move forward. Crucially, their agency finally lies in the fact that they refuse the triumphalist narrative of the past outright. Pointedly, they find the wherewithal to get beyond waiting for the old days to come back, when so many of the characters discussed in my project were unable to.

If the presumed narrative that mobility marks the postmodern age is to be accepted, with stillness as our only respite by some accounts as we move through a reordered world of non-places, then Parable offers a postlocal—albeit dark—counter-narrative to that paradigm. Parable, which turns on coerced mobility recognizable to critics today as an outcome of ecosocial slow violence, seems to acknowledge that in our near future immobility is the logical final outcome of our present version of “progress”; extreme localism and some less attractive version of future primitivism will be our shared fate. Stillness amounts not to respite, as in Butler’s future California, but to a limited existence amid imminent peril. For instance, locked behind walls that offer questionable
protection to their Southern California community their entire lives, the young people in *Parable* have never seen the ocean mere miles away. In this and other respects, *Parable* speaks not to a “progress” of synchronous interconnectivity, but instead to a disconnected and unorganized class-based segregation as a result of global capitalism and its attendant anthropogenic climate change. In this scenario staying put is the last line of defense for clannish communities otherwise out of touch with their locales.

As such, a larger, tangible, alternate narrative arc operating against triumphalism becomes clear as it is traced from Alonso Delano’s speculative Gold Rush place-making, discussed earlier, through Joan Didion’s tumultuous family history in *Run River* interrogated in my last chapter, to Butler’s postracial new pioneer/refugee family. It is as follows: marginalized or variously displaced people brought the conditions they were leaving behind with them during the first period of settlement, reproducing those conditions in California, the outcome of which has been successive iterations of those very pitfalls to which they themselves had fallen prey. In essence, Delano’s imperial erasures brought great wealth to some for a period just as he had prophesied, only to be slowly eroded until the initial ethos of newness and change masking those erasures began to crumble around the empires of the Knights and McClellans in Didion’s book. The center, during the period leading up to and just following World War II in *Run River*, could not hold. By the 1990s, when Butler wrote her future California, she could envision a not-to-distant future in which hubris is part of this logical progression—with or without the threat or detonation of an atomic bomb that creates a world of savages, as had been
the case in *Ecotopia* and *The Wild Shore*.

In *Parable* the spectacular rupture from this debilitating master narrative is unnecessary; the system implodes of its own accord. Didion, in part, foresaw this and memorialized it in its fullest irony. In an odd inversion of Delano’s prophecy, for example, just before killing himself, Everett McClellan imagines the fate of his family’s vast holdings after he is gone. Without an heir interested in preserving what it took generations of two families to build, it occurs to him that it would simply vanish, “revert to whatever it had been when his great-great-grandfather first came to the valley” (13). That is, Everett fears his working landscape will return to that “wasteland” Delano had encountered prior to the creation of the infrastructure he foresaw. What Didion anticipated and what Butler understood is that erasure of “savages” and the environmental imperialism that went along with it was itself an act of savagery that could not be outrun and which eventually would be visited on itself. *Parable*, then, is not post-apocalyptic, but rather is the endgame the narrative of progress could not escape.

Essentially deriding this narrative arc in which *Parable* participates and critiques, Berg explains, “In globalist terms, there should be further quantification (we should pave Africa) and remove ourselves from this planet’s limits through space travel” (94). In his cynicism, Berg saw distinctly the direction in which the narrative of progress was evolving: extract, exploit, move on. This is precisely the book Butler wrote. As things fall apart her characters grow more hemmed in by a system devouring itself while offering no feasible way out. Theirs is a fight against a system that cannot be dug in and defended
against; nor can individuals or groups simply choose not to participate. When sequestration itself ceases to be an option against the forces of opportunism in Southern California, what would become the Earthseed community in *Parable* flees into new perils on the road in search of a more secluded spot, while their visionary leader, Lauren, intends to lead them off the planet entirely.

A book that invites multiple readings and is rich enough to sustain them, *Parable* is a novel about the struggle to put down roots. The biblical passage from which it draws its titular metaphor sets our attention directly on place; literally, it asks us to think about the *where* and *why* of place-making, reminding us that some sites are more suitable for inhabitation than others, but for various and divergent reasons. In this sense the novel is as much about a willingness to pull up roots as it is about digging in. The biblical parable accounts for iteration, for a sense that displacement is ongoing and adaptability is paramount. This lesson refers most precisely to cultural rather than geographical conditions, yet the types of places Butler’s characters seek to inhabit—and dis-inhabit—are telling when we consider their postlocal setting. Forcing us to acknowledge the narrative of place-making in the imperialist vein as declensionist rather than exceptionalist, in employing the future primitive trope Butler further challenges us to understand that mobility is less an object of the society she critiques and more a byproduct of its short-term goals. Of course, this too unearths its own set of paradoxes, but through its awareness of becoming through iteration, Butler’s place-based novel carries an important though tacit temporal message—like *Ecotopia* and *The Wild Shore*
before it—that time is a locally distinct phenomena after all.

Structurally, *Parable of the Sower* is a road novel bracketed by two fixed points. Fleeing from one site of isolation behind a walled-community in L.A. County for another isolated spot hidden in the vast forests on the northern California coast, place-making for the group that becomes the Earthseed community denotes a tenuous balance of movement and stillness. Hinging on this need to disentangle themselves from a maddening, dangerous, and increasingly catastrophic world, the group trades their fear-in-isolation behind walls that ultimately fail for fear-in-interaction out on the road, on foot, in pursuit of an utopic elsewhere in the American—and especially Californian—tradition. In this, *Parable* shares a similarly problematic relationship to isolation with *Ecotopia* and *The Wild Shore*; unlike them, it explores this desire in an essentially borderless space. In effect, knowing that there is no safe space in which to put down roots and hoping only for a dubious isolation that allows them some degree of security and agency, the Earthseed group trades the known for the unknown and dreamt of.

When the story moves to the road, the general fear and distrust the community is constantly confronted with fits into standard notions of coerced mobility. That they move north to find a new and isolated home for the Earthseed community predicts that “staying put” or “digging in” is the sole essential act of making place. *Parable*, in each case, conforms to standard readings of place and mobility. However, viewed as a postlocal narrative, we see essential definitions of space and place breaking down. The Earthseed community is engaged in a constant act of meaning-making, adapting to and reassigning
meaning to the places they encounter and to themselves. It is not that they are bringing meaning to a space that had none prior to their experience of it, but rather that they destabilize and remake what a place means at any given moment. Their mobility, as much as their stillness, imparts lessons about being-in-place: first, the always-already (assumed) nature of place is immediately affirmed; second, place is shown to be social and eventmental, modified by speculation and improvisation and habit; and third, the entangled nature of stillness and mobility is made patent. This last point is crucial to claims about postlocal temporality, for it affirms a key claim geographer Craig Martin has made about “turbulent stillness,” that “stillness cannot be disentangled from movement—they are always immanent to one another” (192). Contained in Martin’s claim is an implicit message that time and action (or inaction) are linked, and that temporal meaning is likewise made through relation and intra-action. For example, in preparing to leave in *Parable*, the meaning of immobility is infused with the knowledge of certain movement; in leaving, the object is to again settle into a safe haven; and upon arriving, earlier preparations for moving on allow the community to again stay put. Every act is shot through with an anticipatory stillness while each new place, in part, is a “place of memory” (Cresswell, *Place* 82); moreso, whether moving or still, past and future are mingled and contingent in each phase of Earthseed’s place-making. The simultaneous near-and-far, moving-and-still, and then-and-now found in *Parable* all point to a postlocal present.
**Gun, Watch, Calendar**

Guns are the primary vehicle and symbol of place-making in *Parable*. As expected, guns fortify boundaries, they define territories, they separate “us” from “them,” and they protect Earthseed members and their possessions. Yet in a larger and uninterrupted sense they enable the enforcement of neoliberal aims discerning “mine” and “yours” at the root of the social and environmental upheaval with which the planet in Butler’s novel is faced. While as a symbol of both local and global authority the gun is conflicted in this regard, yet its message of territorializing place through violence or the threat of violence remains consistent. The gun, then, is generally straightforward in its meaning and use in the novel. But its presence in certain circumstances is nevertheless often slippery. As more people are allowed to join the small initial band of travelers, many of them don’t know how to use guns, some aren’t trusted with them, some don’t want to use them, and Lauren herself, who is “hyperempathic,” finds the effects of gunfire almost too much to bear because she shares the pain of the wounds the gun inflicts. The gun is a burden and an incomplete barrier as much as it is a safeguard.

Conversely, the watch, the authority of which isn’t always adhered to in practice and usually to disastrous results for Earthseed, on principle is ubiquitous, its use and embedded incremental logic understood by all. However, as an obvious but almost invisible presence shadowing the gun, the wristwatch the Earthseed community carries with it has a similar territorializing effect, though by different means. Having once operated in service of global synchrony despite the fact that they were cloistered and
immobile behind walls, the watch in *Parable* functions entirely in service of localized time once the community takes to the road. Further, it is this localized time kept by their lone wristwatch that forms the foundation for Earthseed as it travels northward. The wristwatch, which clearly apportions each member’s duty to stand guard while the others sleep, structures accountability among community members. Accountability to vigilance according to each member’s turn standing watch leads to trust in their other interactions. Finally, the wristwatch delineates the future primitive from the purely primitive or savage: the Earthseed community is apparently the only group of its kind on the road; surrounded by opportunistic individuals and loosely affiliated gangs that act solely on impulse, Earthseed is guided by their goal of resettlement, which is in turn facilitated by their ability to organize themselves temporally.

The group’s first night on the road stresses a cooperative, interdependent nature. The gun and the watch are the first things they share with each other after food and medical aid in the days following the initial jolt of their combined trauma. With uncertainty magnified and constantly exposed to predatory acts from other disenfranchised people, they walk as an organized group from dawn to dusk, making hidden campsites after dark, thereby accentuating their newly animal existence. Their forced primitivism weighs heavily on them as they do what they must in order to survive and yet maintain what they view as some semblance of human dignity. Much as the Onofrians, in their diminished circumstances they want to distance themselves from their animal nature. This fading boundary between animal and human is temporal insofar as in
Parable it plays itself out in the distinction between night behaviors and day behaviors. Walking to the point of exhaustion each day and sleeping fitfully at night, the key act in each case is to manifest their agency with the least amount of visibility and exposure. In an act of reappropriation, while movement and apparent strength in numbers masks them in the daylight, their survival overnight is dependent on their weapons and their ability to keep time. Once on the road, moving and stopping, then, is dictated by time of day; moreover, clock time is only needed at night when sleep would otherwise leave them defenseless. Cyclical time and the linear time the wristwatch keeps are interwoven to create the temporal fabric by which they live. Their stationary nights are divided into the coordinated mitigation of vulnerability and therefore time is merely contingent. Clock time mimics the natural cycle of life in the elements even as it remains a regulator. It is reshaped from commodity to necessity.

As the group leaves behind their outmoded version of homelife, Lauren’s “Earthseed” writings—her journal of poems, personal philosophy, and snippets of wisdom, the main tenet of which is “The only lasting truth is change” (3)—provides a new framework that guides their place-making, restructuring their interactions amongst themselves and with outsiders. Kept like a diary, its dates frame the everyday occurrences they endure even as it guides their future. In this sense, the journal acquires aspects of a calendar. Like the gun and clock, the calendar in regular use is a device which enforces uniform conditions. Here, though, the calendar is a record. In it, Lauren records what she and her compatriots think, say, and do. It functions as a form of retrospect rather than a
datebook. Its presence in the novel reminds Butler’s reader that the small band doesn’t have to be anywhere, and, more precisely, that they have nowhere to be. In effect, the small tribe exists in the utterly local now: in themselves, in their immediate location, plainly, but their tribe is alive in Lauren’s record of their lives, too. Butler’s reader, as the community itself, knows not just the “where” of the community’s existence, but its “when.”

“Let’s pass your watch and my gun around”

The wristwatch survived the destruction of the walled community from which the band fled on the wrist of Harry, not coincidentally the lone white man of the group, symbolic of the settler colonial and imperial authority of the past. Vexed as it is by the duties it performs in service of clock time, Harry’s wristwatch straddles the two meanings of the word. First, it stands for the verb, to watch, in which to stand watch is to take your turn safeguarding the community as it sleeps. Second, it stands for the watch itself, bodily and localized because it is worn. Thus conjoined, time-keeping is time-making, and to make time is to build community. So while in the usual arrangement the clock disciplines and the gun punishes, in Parable, unlike the gun, the watch operates outside of its usual parameters. Less a matter of transgression than interpretation, to Earthseed the watch manifests one version of time, that which is most immanent and expedient. If not polychronic, as had been the result of postlocal temporalities in Ecotopia and The Wild Shore, the wristwatch symbolizes a temporality that diverges from but coexists with the
established use of the object, the watch. It represents an alternate version of time
generated by a single device. In more exact terms, as Kevin K. Birth puts it, “Even
though tools for reckoning time are clocks and calendars, the time they indicate does not
uniformly dictate rhythms and cycles throughout the world. This produces entanglements
of the logics embedded in globally distributed objects with local practices” (99-100).
In other words, Harry’s wristwatch operates as a wristwatch should and is used
accordingly by Earthseed. And yet, rather than an instrument that enforces synchrony and
globality, in localized practice the watch adheres more specifically to this particular
community’s needs. Paradoxically, as time keeping grows more local it acts in excess of
global reckoning, even as its scope or scale grows seemingly more limited. Earthseed’s
wristwatch acts asynchronously with any other watch in the world, perhaps, but does not
preclude the simultaneous enactment of other timescales.

This from-below time, represented by the wristwatch in Parable, proves
improvisational, exposing its “thing-power” just as the repurposed objects in Dame
Shirley’s cabin had as she described them to her sister in her Gold Rush letters. In this
case, to paraphrase West-Pavlov, time is still calibrated and chronometrical, it is still only
a measurement (14), although in practice it is exactly what Earthseed makes it and
nothing more. Earthseed exerts adherence to time but does not disappear into it. Again, to
borrow from Birth, Earthseed’s rhythmic, day/night strategy of time-keeping indicates
that time, like other forms of meaning-making in place, is a context-dependent cognitive
strategy (117). For example, the three original members of the group—Lauren, Harry, and
Zahra—spend their first uncertain night on the road in a camp nearby the freeway, which has become a pedestrian space, full of refugees moving northward, the same direction their group has decided to take. Having encountered many desperate and unsavory travelers, and having quarreled some amongst themselves, Lauren tells Harry and Zahra, “We’d better keep a damn good watch tonight.” She recounts to herself: “I looked at Harry, and was glad to see that he looked the way I probably had a moment before: mad and worried. ‘Let’s pass your watch and my gun around,’ I told him. ‘Three hours per watcher’” (184). In this defining early scene on the road, passing the watch and gun is to commit to one another despite lingering antagonisms. It functions as a pact to become a community in a thorough sense of the word. Harry had already questioned Lauren’s willingness to cease with certain civilities towards other refugees out on the road, though Zahra, having lived her early life on the outside, recognizes Lauren’s pragmatism. In this scene, then, the first in which the watch is mentioned—and more importantly, the first in which watch and gun are mentioned in conjunction with each other—there is already doubt and the germ of dissent brewing among the group.

During this first night, foreshadowed by two men who had threatened the party when it was still light, Lauren and Zahra recognize fear and care are essential to their well-being, even as Harry—again, the lone white man, accustomed to the relative safety and privilege unspoken by his race and gender—is slow to realize and slow to adapt. Their camp is only a place of temporary safety. Its effectiveness depends on their vigilance and their willingness to compromise with each other, adapting a new code of
ethics to their current circumstances. Evident, then, in this passage is a sense of unknowing or relearning each other and reshaping themselves. In effect, Lauren’s “mad” registers the resentment she had felt towards Harry only a moment before when he disparaged her for seeming too manly, but also Harry’s resentment towards the conditions he now faces on the road. Lauren’s “worried,” in turn, amounts to the permanent affect they must adopt and carry with them. To be sure, their places are ephemeral and worry will define their constant state. Passing the watch and gun is all they have to mitigate these circumstances. However, is that Lauren really has no right to tell Harry to relinquish his watch, to share it among them. Offering her gun along with it signifies a certain abandonment of selfhood to the group; it symbolizes a commitment to self-sacrifice in the interest of self-preservation and the preservation of the whole. Zahra, who has already experienced the outside and who knows its demands, needs not take part in Lauren and Harry’s exchange. Sharing the gun and the watch is a renegotiation of authority as well as selfhood that Zahra has already gone through and made peace with. It is place-making through objects, one of which, the wristwatch, as symbol of temporality, confirms that time and place are not exclusive of one another.

Later, after darkness has fallen and Lauren has taken the first watch, and recognizing that their little group could not “survive slowness or stupid mistakes” (187), she wakes Harry for the second guard duty. Near midnight, Lauren “gave him the gun and the watch, and made him as uncomfortable as [she] could by warning him about the dogs, the gunfire, and the many people who wandered around at night” (188). Discomfort
marks their night places, embodying the “worry” of the earlier scene that absolutely cannot slip into complacency. In the scene above they shared their authority by agreeing to share the gun and watch. Here, when putting their night watch scheme into practice, a single person controls both watch and gun at once. The changing of the guard manifests a shifting of that authority augmented by the others’ faith and exhaustion. The limited place-making left to the group, finally, is in the hands of a single person. Place—camp—is an agreed upon notion, but its safeguarding, its worth, is contingent upon the way each individual approaches her or his responsibilities as they take their turn on guard duty. Lauren understands that worry will keep them alert. Harry still conceives of place as comfort, as the pause that allows for meaning-making. So it is no surprise that on Lauren’s watch the sleeping cohort remains unmolested, while on Harry’s they are soon attacked. Depicting acts of hand to hand, close-quarter violence that will be repeated throughout the novel, the three members survive the ordeal, but learn unequivocally that place is often contained in objects, and that time entails more than duration.

Better prepared and more attuned to the real conditions of the environment in which they find themselves, the small group sets up camp in a secluded, more defensible spot the following night. On this second night, however, feeling the burden of their collective grief and needing respite from a long day of walking, already Harry and Zahra have formed a romantic attachment by which they ameliorate their shared trauma. On Harry’s watch they have sex, inadvertently waking Lauren who lies silently nearby until they finish. She explains that she, “lay awake afterward, angry and worried” (200).
Completely still, she realizes that Harry, whose watch had not yet ended, has fallen asleep as a result of his reverie, once again leaving all of them vulnerable. Confronting him, Lauren asks for the gun and the watch so that she can take his place. She recounts, “His pride had kicked in. It would be almost impossible to get the gun and the watch from him now” (201). Lauren’s sense of their vulnerability has not shifted from that original scene in which “mad” and “worried” were the appropriate affects for survival. By her own admission still “angry and worried,” Lauren continues: “Remember last night,” hoping to make him “feel angry and defensive” as she is. The repetition, across two scenes closely linked narratively and temporally, of “mad” / “angry” and “worried” / “defensive” in relation to their new material and temporal condition confirms that all told, time in both of these scenes is immediate and paramount. For each member of the group, functioning properly according to its demands is their sole imperative. Singular, incremental, but not totalizing or uniform, time is in their hands just as they are incorporated into it.

Farther on, having gathered more like-minded people to them, the group acquires more guns with which to defend itself, while still only the single wristwatch. Butler spends considerable authorial care developing the group’s need for firearms, but she spends no time at all in discussing the upkeep of the watch, either its winding or the procurement of new batteries. Perhaps only an oversight in verisimilitude, or perhaps because I’ve drawn attention to a wristwatch that Butler only treats tangentially, watching—that is, standing guard at night—remains a constant unstated gesture towards temporality. As each new member joins the group, it is clear that they must first prove
themselves trustworthy before being allowed to handle a gun. Likewise, none of the new arrivals is allowed to stand watch alone. They do so paired with another, already proven member of the community. This kind of temporality indicates that the Earthseed community is bonded to one another and that this bond equates to a sense of place. New members are like borders: permeable; marginally defensible. Long-standing members, given sole authority over the group when it is their turn to manage the watch and gun on their own, more ably embody the predicament of anger and worry, in which the watch and gun enable but do not wholly entail their reliability.

Well north, but still far from their destination on the coast, Earthseed finds themselves on the edge of violence, collaterally in harms way. The longer they are on the road, the more often this is the case. The watch and the gun, their defensiveness and worry, have done their job and they have grown better able to ensure their safety. Rarely are they attacked directly. Still, in a telling instance, in the darkness the group finds themselves too close to a firestorm of bullets as a truck on the nearby road is attacked. One of their members is hit and another is missing. As things calm down Zahra is standing watch and Lauren finds her. “‘What time is it?’” [Lauren] asked Zahra who had Harry’s watch. ‘Three-forty,’ she said. ‘Let me have the gun,’” [Lauren] said. ‘Your watch is almost over anyway.’…She passed the watch and gun over” (250-1). Crucially, no matter who has the wristwatch it is always Harry’s, while the gun, conversely, is only “the gun.” Secondly, while the watch has been absent from the action, implied whenever a guard duty is described, here it reenters the story. Having become rote in Butler’s
description of the action, at specific moments we are reminded of its continued presence. Moreover, this temporality seems less motivated to possess territory than committed to producing defensible space.

Conclusion: “something purposeful and constructive”

Near the end of *Parable*, as the group has an opportunity to settle in a remote part of the north state near the coast, Lauren confronts Bankhole, a man her group met on the road who becomes her friend, confidant, and lover. “‘You could help me,’” she tells him, “‘This world is falling apart. You could help me begin something purposeful and constructive’” (275). As this exchange progresses, Butler’s reader understands that the purpose of this community is not to fix the world, or to stay put, but to recognize they might live cooperatively beyond any larger aim than that, safe with, and for the sake of, one another. As in the other two novels I have analyzed in this chapter, learning interdependence for the sake of a greater, perhaps sustainable social, if not ecosocial, good, is the best of all possible outcomes for the characters involved.

The *Earthseed* group’s ability to resist the totalization of global time even as they adhere to its form by employing those tools that have made universal time possible, asserts a hopeful message about postlocal temporality. It implies that communities can function organizationally in-step within themselves and in accord with the world’s other places while still managing, regulating, and determining the role time plays in everyday life at ground-level. Time for the community of Onofre in Robinson’s *The Wild Shore*
likewise proffers a decentralized approach to time that resonates across postlocality as we find it today. Incorporation of nonhuman actors, even if only metaphorically, brings that community together in a way that also resists a damaging uniformity with a determined commitment to place. The Ecotopians’ outright refusal of universal time in favor of a slower, more humane pace, similarly anchors yet a third kind of time-keeping in the immediate landscape.

The anxious animality of *Parable* and *The Wild Shore* complicates the easy animal nature attending *Ecotopia* because the former novels recognize that animality is often a privilege, not a right. Therefore, that animality in one form or another figures so prominently in each of these novels speaks tellingly to how we understand the keeping of time. Animal nature reminds us of social rhythm and of solar time. The empty logic of imposed, empirical time breaks down against these already embodied forms of time, and yet to those on the verge of coerced savagery, history and the clock can be deceptively appealing. These novels remind us that there are “multiple systems of time” in any given place (Birth 124). In Kevin Birth’s extended reading of biological perspectives on global and local time and the postmodern elimination of time, he reflects that globality seems to have made biological rhythms irrelevant (128). In essence, Callenbach’s, Robinson’s, and Butler’s novels reinsert biological time into the way we understand being-in-place.

Callenbach’s Ecotopians come to it easily; Robinson’s Onofrians have to find their way back to it; Butler’s Earthseed community learns to set biological and universal time in a compromise rather than in contrast to each other. In each case, localized control of time is
essential to self-determination.

And these are not the only varieties of time. Finally, because each of these texts is located in a foreseeable future, they also draw attention to longer spans of time. Through them, we see an immediate, cyclical time-keeping, as well as the accumulation of various temporalities in a single place over the long term. Speculative regionalism, then, can be a vehicle for thinking about postlocality in deep time (Allen 156) as well as in terms of “hyperobjects” like global warming (Morton 1). In essence, these novels illustrate that time acts like place in this regard, where immanence produces localized effects on otherwise monolithic systems of order. To be clear: the speculative regionalist novels I have read here do not lead us back into a pre-modern, limited local time-keeping; rather, they expand our understanding of what time is, what it does, where and through whom it originates, and how far into the past and future it extends. Variation, in time as in place, seems to be the rule rather than the exception. Speculative regionalism allows us to see this conclusion as it is tested diversely across postlocal places.
The term “natureculture” originates with the feminist scholar Donna Haraway, and is widely circulated across the humanities. It is one of many ways scholars have attempted to confront the inextricability of nature and culture, including the prefix ‘trans’ and enlarged versions of ‘queer,’ especially in defining human and nonhuman relations. Expressly, natureculture marks the merging of discourse and materiality where once they had been considered separately. It is one more way scholars are expressing the move from rigid taxonomic ordering and binary models of being.

In fact, a nearly identical photo of the Snake River was recently featured on the cover of *High Country News* along with the caption “Idaho’s Sewer,” and a similar photo of California’s Delta accompanies the interview with Kim Stanley Robinson in *Boom* magazine, which I cite in this work. The photograph from above of the river/former wetland/agricultural land, with its gridding, remnant river bends, and several colors and textures is a popular motif for conveying complex pastoral and complex georgic landscapes.

Stephanie LeMenager, in her acknowledgements to *Living Oil*, thanks Ursula K. Heise and Rob Nixon for their “acute analysis of scale” (ix), and scale is the organizing theme of the third section of LeMenager, Teresa Shewry, and Ken Hiltner’s *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century* (180-260). Lawrence Buell considers problems of scale in “Ecoglobalist Affects” and *The Future of Environmental Criticism:Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (76-96). Scale figures prominently in Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*. Just as often, though, and throughout these and most other texts dealing with globality, the language of scale entails deploying simultaneity as a key descriptor, as is evident in many of the sources I cite in the present work. In essence, events happen simultaneously around the world, in places, while places themselves are the simultaneous configuring of near-and-far. Scale imagines size and distance; simultaneity always implies temporality and particularity; simultaneity always reflects a version of locale.
4 In an important special issue of *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, the editors Michael Callon and John Law approach locality from a similar perspective. They remark first, “each location is distributed in others” (6), but also—and tellingly: “The local is never local. A site is a place where something happens and actions unfold because it mobilizes distant actants that are both absent and present.” While their language of the “absent presence” has proven valuable to my way of thinking, based on the evidence of my researches, the editors perhaps overstate mobility; they perhaps, in reperceiving circulation, too quickly name the end of embeddedness as—today—only encounter. Their sense of encounter affirms Tomlinson’s “deterritorialization,” in a manner that loses sight of ground-level meaning-making. Instead, I would argue that the local is always local; it marks a simultaneous copresence *in-place*. The conflation of “site” and “place” in the above quote is revealing in this regard. The local is never *only* local in a limited way, yet it is always made and remade of materials in proximity.

5 Fetterley and Pryse position region as "not a feature of geography...Rather, regionalism asserts that the regionalizing premise concerns the consolidation and maintenance of power through ideology and is therefore a discourse...rather than a place" (7).

6 See, for example, Homi K. Bhabha’s essay, “Global Minoritarian Culture,” wherein, he finds evidence of extra-racial alliances in W.E.B. DuBois’s work (190-1).

7 At least since the 1970s, scholars and activists have feared and predicted that globalization would homogenize or outright “flatten” the world’s cultures. On or about 2010, however, more recent scholarship has reconsidered the resiliency of local culture to withstand uniformity. Especially as cultural geographers and social anthropologists move away from essentialist notions of stable cultures, and adapt critique to a sense of fluidity or flux, their sense of the demise of regional culture has been reconsidered. For example, consider the trajectory from James Clifford’s paradigm-setting *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997), to John Tomlinson’s ground-breaking *Globalization and Culture* (1999), to Ulrich Beck’s *Cosmopolitan Vision* (2004), to Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (2005), to Clifford’s more recent *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (2013), wherein attention moves from exchange and loss, to local agency, to immanent placement.
I derive the concept of the absent present from the *Environment and Planning D* special issue discussed above in note 4, and from Nicolas S. Witschi’s *Traces of Gold*, in which he contends that the mineral wealth of the U.S. West subtends the material wealth of the east on one hand, and claims to literary realism on the other. Witschi acknowledges this formulation as parallel to Bill Brown’s “material unconscious,” “the pressure that such materiality...exerts on literary texts” (5; n6). Further, Witschi demonstrates the ways in which California in particular has stood as “the figurative metonym by which Americans generally came to think of and about the West” (5). In this regard, the “absent presence” as I call it is reversed: in the novels of James and Howells, for example, California signifies as the distant place in the immanent literary space, while here it is foremost; here, distant American spaces comprise the absent present, further proof that “the world is places,” and that the faraway is always a matter of perspective.

In his foreword to the 2002 Heyday edition of Royce's *California*, Ronald A. Wells provides a historiography of the book that explains early and ongoing negative responses to it, which focused primarily on Royce’s, "disinclination to accept a heroic narrative" of the state (xii). Wells also represents the book as a precursor to the later New Western History practiced by Patricia Limerick, Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and others (xxv-xxviii).

See Levy, *They Saw the Elephant: Women in the California Gold Rush* (1992), and Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (2000). Other works that extend our understanding of the multicultural aspects of the era include: Trafzer and Hyer (1999), Heizer and Almquist (1977), and Lapp (1977). Secondly, and equally problematic, is that in our most heavily scripted western spaces we have reduced the West’s iconography to a narrow set of stock characters, and in turn, western tourism and the towns supporting it perform a narrow form of western idealism and individualism, erasing or ignoring the many people and ideas that actually comprise the contemporary western scene.

In his essential *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward W. Said makes the case that, at the time of his writing, “imperialism” was rarely used to describe American expansion and foreign policy (8). Since then, imperialism and its attendant terms have entered the common parlance of U.S. West history, American Studies, and literary studies. As such, the use of the term needs little explanation. However, for clarity, I want to employ imperialism here under Said’s definition: “‘imperialism’ means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; ‘colonialism,’ which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory.” Said, after Michael Doyle, defines “empire” as, “a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society.” Finally, Said concludes: “Imperialism is simply the process or policy of establishing or maintaining empire” (9). I define my sense of “settler colonialism” and its role in the U.S. West in note 15 below.
See McWilliams, *California: The Great Exception* (1949). McWilliams explains that the Gold Rush, in addition to being a vernacular experience, coincided with expanding print and transportation technologies so that news of the gold strike was disseminated widely and global routes to the mines were many (26).

The temporary nature of miners’ residency enabled their rapacity, which in turn became the region’s common theme, though it has since manifested more palatably as independence and optimism in popular forums. Wallace Stegner reminds us, “The dream of total emancipation from inhibition, law, convention, and restraint is a potent dream” (*Mountain Water* 30). However, Gary Snyder explains that contemporary environmentalism is largely rooted in fighting “the abuses of public land” wrought by this very emancipation (*Practice* 29). More directly, McWilliams characterizes the global vernacular moment of the Gold Rush as “the rape of the public domain” (94). In other words, empowered by the supposed transient nature of their residency in California, the miners set a standard of placing self before community, and of exploiting for personal gain what was—depending on one’s perspective—indigenous lands, Mexican lands, or the American public’s resources, all with little or no consequence. The legacy of the Gold Rush then is the instantiation, as Stegner emphasizes, of, “a series of hit-and-run plunderers” (*Mountain Water* 20) operating under “the old economics of pillage” (37). If place is the central feature of western—and by implication Gold Rush—narrative, it is this very transience and destructive disregard for place that has formed the core of place-making in the West. The Old West especially has been described as a space of myth-shrouded imperialism, “a scene of economic exploitation not democratic opportunity,” in which Manifest Destiny acted as “a prelude to U.S. Global domination” (Baym 815; 816). So, rightly, there is a sharp and discernible cultural lineage from California, through the West, to America by and large—just as Royce asserted. The Gold Rush, as both Royce and Stegner after him have expressed, compelled those involved to sidestep citizenship and to undervalue community in service of individualism instead (Royce 3; Stegner, *Bluebird* xvi). The ethos of California, of the West, of America, then, was formed of “a dangerously speculative character” (Royce 3) that has since undermined ecosocial responsibility in the western mainstream and in the world.

Since the 1970s, a significant and growing list of texts dealing with violence against indigenous populations and the exploitation of California’s environment includes many of the works cited in this project, and should include *Green Versus Gold: Sources in California’s Environmental History* (1998) edited by Carolyn Merchant, and *Fall into Eden: Landscape and Imagination in California* (1986) by David Wyatt, among others. In a more general sense, Alfred W. Crosby’s noteworthy *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (1986) provides an overview to the structure and logic of occupation.
See Patrick Wolfe “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” and “Land, Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race”; Lorenzo Veracini “‘Settler Colonialism’: Career of a Concept”; Jodi A. Byrd “Follow the Typical Signs: Settler Sovereignty and its Discontents”; and Altenbernd and Young “Introduction: The Significance of the Frontier in an Age of Transnational History.”

Sarah Jaquette Ray makes a similar argument more recently, spanning Branch’s work and the work surrounding settler colonialism, asserting, “The nature essay in particular, to the extent that it is written in/about/from the American West, must be closely scrutinized for the exclusionary and colonial work it has done and continues to do” (83), while she recognizes, like Branch, the necessity of expanding the parameters of nature writing (87-8).

See Witschi in the Cambridge History of California Literature, who also takes note of Shirley’s transformation (81-2).

See Lewis's claims in Unsettling the Literary West: “What made, and still makes, a western author ‘authentic’ is first some direct experience in the West; second, a willingness to write with some explicitly articulated commitment to the West; and, finally, less absolutely, the employment or parody of recognizable western genres, styles, or characters” (26). Lewis notes that letters were among the most popular forms of this discourse (31). This formulaic approach to the trope of authenticity produced a recognizable “heteroglot intertextuality” (45) that Lewis describes as a “repetition compulsion” (46). These attributes figure prominently in Shirley’s Letters.

Kant defines sublime as the “absolutely great… comparable to itself alone,” relating it to dominion and fear. Burke’s sense of the sublime encompasses more broadly the sense of any heartfelt and overwhelming experience. He finds the sublime in “terrible objects” through which we feel.

The argument I am making here grows out of Brown's "thing theory" and borrows language from Jane Bennett's Vibrant Matter in which she discusses "the agency of assemblages" (20-1). The idea that context, rather than totalization, is crucial to the concept of assemblage, or, in Karen Barad’s terms, “entanglement” (29-33), guides my reading. Fluidity, interconnection, but also friction characterize our entanglements and posit agency beyond human agency; in fact, intra-action, the nature of entanglement according to Barad (33), argues against any single agent or actant and in favor of agency created among the human and nonhuman presences in a given space. Bennett, in other terms, describes this as a "confederation of human and nonhuman elements" (21).
Several critics have speculated that Shirley’s document was source material for Harte’s trials and hangings in “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” and “Tennessee’s Partner.” The frontier hanging reappears in the dime novels that follow, and figures prominently in Wister’s *The Virginian* (1902), only to be deconstructed in Clark’s *The Oxbow Incident* (1940), wherein a reenactment of the mob’s ineptitude is restored.

See Albert L. Hurtado’s *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* (1988), which stresses indigenous survival in California over their wanton destruction (1-13).

See Ray, Lewis, Witschi, Watts, and others who highlight this double act of place-making as it concerns the settler-colonial project.

Recent scholarship by Erik Altenbernd and Alex Trimble Young, among others, brings this “logic of elimination” to bear on studies of American expansion in the U.S. West (129-31).

Franklin asserts, the language of these forms becomes a “vehicle of political and intellectual control” that possesses “a certain reassuring power... capable of domesticating the strangeness of America.” Further, Franklin maintains, speculation such as this organizes goals *and events* beforehand (5; my emphasis). By Franklin’s reckoning, this preordained ordering, this “ability to ‘plot’ New World experience in advance was, in fact, the single most important attribute of European language.” Such emplotment is, in effect, the “act” or performance of “discovery” that Albert Furtwangler would later draw readers’ attention to in the Lewis and Clark journals. Although Franklin is articulating rhetorical features at the roots of the discovery narrative, and Furtwangler comments on the performativity of westward expansion more generally, both make it plain that these rhetorics and themes stretch forward through what has become an especially American, especially western and Californian, set of conventions.
While “scripted certitude” is my term, its antecedent is Hal Rothman's “scripted space,” which he applies to present-day tourist geographies. Clearly, too, it is related to a repeated rehearsal in most recent texts dealing with the U.S. West that point to the rhetorical possession of western spaces. For example, although there are many variants, Witschi writes of Bayard Taylor and Frank Marryat, Delano’s contemporaries: “Neither one suggests that such developments are anything but the inevitable and much-wished-for progress of civilization” (77). Scripted certitude points to the repetition of rhetorical strategies of certain possession in the conquest narrative. Anticipatory nostalgia is ecocritic Scott Slovic’s term, yet an early variant of it can be found in Lee Clark Mitchell’s *Witnesses to a Vanishing America*. Slovic deploys it in conjunction with loss and the traditional jeremiad in nature writing, whereby certain loss of natural spaces in a foreseeable future encourages wistfulness and regret for them before their actual passing. See also ecocritic Jennifer Ladino's *Reclaiming Nostalgia* (2012) and Catriona Sandiland’s use of “melancholia.” Further, though, and surprisingly, these chapters devoted to the habits and fates of the Maidu relate what has been framed as an entirely contemporary problem. According to Sandilands in her essay on contemporary environmental grief, “Melancholly Natures, Queer Ecologies” (2010), “there is in late capitalist nature relations a patina of nature-nostalgia in place of any kind of active negotiation of environmental mourning” (332-3). She argues that melancholia, not grief specifically, is at the core of the modern age (333). Sandilands asks, in a way that indirectly extends Pratt’s earlier claims, “how does one mourn in the midst of a culture that finds it almost impossible to recognize the value of what has been lost?” (333). In reply she explains that melancholia has been determined to enact “a potentially politicized way of preserving [the lost thing] in the midst of a culture that fails to recognize its significance.” As nostalgia, though, which connotes more conscious reflection on the evanishment of native people or the consequences of environmental imperialism, there is yet a residual sense of palpable grief felt through the author’s conciliation, especially in Delano’s case, in which he asks not to be taken as an apologist for the Maidu after he feels, perhaps, that he has gone too far in siding with them while disparaging the miners’ behavior. It is disingenuous for the critic at this distance to be contemptuous of his professed sympathies. This is especially true when the anticipatory nostalgia he expresses is considered ultimately as a form of preserving, of maintaining some semblance of the lost thing in the midst of a culture that fails to recognize its significance.
See note 20 above. Barad explains, “The neologism ‘intra-action’ signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual ‘interaction,’ which assumes that there are separable individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action” (33; emphasis in original). Barad’s emphasis, like Casey’s, is on event; or, like Ingold’s, on movement. Her attention is on things rather than phenomena. In effect, things are activated—made vibrant—through their intra-actions. This is a key move toward my understanding of postlocality: locale is expressed beyond its separability but not its immanence.

Indeed, Delano, of the three writers discussed in this chapter, is the only one to remain in California. While Shirley lived in San Francisco for many years teaching school, in her later years she returned east. Windeler worked for a time on a farm in Contra Costa county and then disappeared from history. Delano lived the remainder of his life in mining communities in Yuba County, ultimately fulfilling the type of material richness he prophesied the region would support.

By drawing attention to context and relation, Lyon’s claims are echoed by recent, parallel spatial arguments that extend how Delano’s speculations can presently be perceived. In addressing a basic precept of the material nature of meaning-making, Karen Barad reports that, “Matter and meaning are not separate elements,” that they “cannot be dissociated,” and that, “Mattering is simultaneously a matter of substance and significance” (3; emphasis added). This is not to say that either the substance or the significance of matter is fixed, but precisely the opposite. Rather, Barad, along with a growing host of others, draws our attention to the interplay of substance and significance and the impossibility of disentangling them even as they morph conditionally. By Brown’s reckoning, then, ruptures in accepted or enforced signification are those points at which systems break down, however briefly or notably. Even if the substance of an object maintains its essential form, how it signifies—how it is used—becomes a negotiation, a problem to be resolved.
To those familiar with the trope it is clear that Delano’s account follows basic elements inherited from Columbus’s narrative as well as Cabeza de Vaca’s. So too, his interests are those of Thomas Jefferson’s in Notes on the State of Virginia (1785) in which the “aborigines” must be known before they can be made subordinate, and, particularly, in which their numbers are seen to have been drastically reduced beginning with European contact, so that, in effect, they begin to vanish before the seeing-man’s eyes (Jefferson 92-107; 96). In the period beginning about 1820 and ending with the Mexican-American War in 1846—which Stephanie LeMenager calls the “premature postwest” and Richard Slotkin refers to as a “‘predictor’ of what a post-Frontier society might become” because American expansion had stalled, promoting anxiety over the prospect of continental conquest (LeMenager 109; Slotkin 141)—Indian vanishment was registered as loss in encounter narratives, or, as an acceptable expression of apprehension as Mitchell would say. See Slotkin 109-137. The dates 1820-1845 are his.

This preordained “past-ness” in the service of empire runs through naturalist Thomas Nuttall’s A Journal of the Travels into the Arkansas Territory During the Year 1819 (1821), Washington Irving’s western trilogy of the 1830s, ornithologist John Kirk Townsend’s Narrative of a Journey (1839), Richard Henry Dana’s Two Years before the Mast (1840), George Catlin’s Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians (1844), and Francis Parkman’s The Oregon Trail (1849) to name a few prominent examples.

See Witschi on Taylor, Marryat, Delano, and others (“The Gold Rush” 77).
Elaine Jahner, writing of marginalized peoples’ narrative strategies for counter hegemonic resistance in *Spaces of the Mind* (2004), here cites DeCerteau (172n1). It is plain that a sense of loss without “active negotiation” (Sandilands 333) proves itself to be an integral part of imperial place-making, and not a new thing under the sun. As a middle-space of speculation, passivity (Pratt), apprehension (Mitchell), or melancholia (Sandilands)—by whichever name we give it—imparts a sense of authorial and imperial order if not righteousness to the patent imbalance of local loss and imperial gain. Gerstacker’s account published in the same year as Delano’s is remarkably similar in this regard. Of the Maidu he encounters in the vicinity of Delano’s townsite, Gerstacker writes: “though in reality, the whites behaved worse than cannibals toward the poor, inoffensive creatures, whom they had robbed of every means of existence and now sought to trample underfoot. But enough of this misery. The time is not far distant when the Indians of this immense territory will have ceased to exist; and it will then be interesting, at least, to know something of the tribes, if we did not care for them when living” (217). Like Delano, Gerstacker then quotes a government official to spell out the Indians’ final demise: “A younger population is allowed to enter our land and collect the riches of our soil. It does not contribute anything to support the state, but returns whence it came, encouraging others to do the same. Notwithstanding, these very men deny the California Indian, and former legitimate owner of the soil!—and I should think, in righteousness, not only the former but the present owner the right of working here, or, at least, of staying upon the spot which was once his own. A population, perfectly strange to them, a great part of it even strangers to us, has taken possession of their former homes, destroyed their hunting grounds and fisheries, burnt down their acorn groves, and cut them off from all those means of subsistence a kind Providence had created for their maintenance, and taken away the possibility of existing” (219). Note here the primary divergence from Delano’s explanation is that Gerstacker outlines the ecological imperialism driving the change in power and regional signification.
In point of fact, at earlier moments, during his lean years in the mines when he had to improvise to support himself, Delano was openly dubious of California’s prospects for long-term inhabitation. Here, he admits to his change of heart: “I have been induced to change my preconceived opinion with regard to the agricultural capacities of the country by actual demonstration. On my first arrival very little farming was done. Nearly all the vegetables, flour and grain, were derived from foreign ports, and little had been done to develop the agricultural capacities of the country” (382). He points to “the energy of man” as the reason for his reconsideration. This “energy”—remembering Mitchell’s “white energies”—amounts to a kind of certainty where ambiguity once prevailed, and, as significantly, casts aspersions on those who had lived in the region prior to the Gold Rush as less-than-men, as having failed to live up to the region’s potential. Just as often, miners were dubious of California’s potential for resource extraction, agricultural, and industrial development, usually because they were daunted by the magnitude of the landscape and the distance from “civilization.”

Amazingly, William Swain, whose letters home J.S.Holliday enhances in *The World Rushed In* (1981), and who was in the Feather River region at the same time as Delano, paints a remarkably different picture of California’s potential. Describing the regions of California to his brother back home, Swain writes: “Here too are the noble and far-famed forests of pine and fir which have no equal. In these—viz., the minerals, the power of the streams to drive machinery, and the wealth of the forests—we would naturally expect to find the enduring elements of national prosperity; but I am sorry to say that I am forced to conclude that the circumstances under which these resources exist counteract a great share of their intrinsic value… Therefore, for myself, I am satisfied that such a business [lumbering] will never be pursued in California. These forests thus situated and surrounded by obstacles which industry and enterprise cannot overcome, and which in other circumstances would constitute a source of unfailing wealth and attract efforts of the industrious and enterprising, must ever stand incapable of furnishing any element to the permanent prosperity of the state; and these beautiful mountain streams, which in other circumstances would constitute the motive power of a world of machinery, are destined to flow on in their rocky channels, untrammeled by schemes of genius and enterprise” (368-9). Hitting on the key themes of timber harvesting and harnessing the power of the river just as Delano had, Swain’s speculation, without Delano’s scripted certainty, feels shortsighted in retrospect. And yet, for its want of ecological imperialism and its portrait of an untransformed California into perpetuity, Swain’s commentary is both provocative and ironic, since, of course, it is Delano’s vision which has come to pass. The entire lower watershed of the Feather River where Delano and Swain both lived is today utterly inundated by the massive Lake Oroville Dam and the hills above the waterline have been denuded. See note 33 above.
Windeler’s partner Charley (Carl Friderich Christendorff) was a passable artist, producing a voluminous but—according to Jackson—less readable diary, and 107 pencil sketches from their four years together, many of which accompany Jackson’s edition of Windeler’s record (13-14).

Dame Shirley recounts a second hanging, in which Windeler verifies he also took part, in “Letter.” Here again, however, Windeler is equally matter-of-fact in his own version of the undertaking (140-1). Windeler’s very brief account, though, is accompanied by Charley’s sketch of the “Execution of Josh the Nigger” (141). Jackson’s note 43 related to Windeler’s account adds a macabre detail found in Fariss and Smith’s *History of Plumas, Lassen, and Sierra Counties* (1882), in which Joshua’s head was removed by two doctors, one of whom “cut off the top of the skull, cleaned it, and a few days later invited Mr. Whiting to eat strawberries therefrom” (212).

Peter Lassen, the mountain man and trailblazer for whom Lassen County and Lassen Peak are named, had a ranch in the Sacramento Valley below present day Red Bluff, and lived for a time in summer quarters in Indian Valley—which he named Cache Valley—in Plumas County. Lassen’s experiences in the region likewise figure into the reminiscences of the diarist and artist J. Goldsborough Bruff, who also spent time in Indian/Cache Valley. In addition, the mountain man Jim Beckwourth and his biographer Thomas D. “Squire” Bonner were present at Rich Bar. Both men figure into Shirley’s *Letters* and Delano’s *Across the Plains*.

The idea of place-making through movement comes from the field of anthropology, largely from Tim Ingold, as mentioned in the introduction to this project, but also from his fellow faculty member at Aberdeen, Jo Lee Vergunst. It is from Vergunst that I derive the concept of movement as biography in “Culture from the Ground: Walking, Movement, and Placemaking,” a paper given at the 2004 Association of Social Anthropologists conference in Durham, UK (3). Vergunst writes: “A place, perhaps, is somewhere where movement happens” (2); also, that walking, then, can be seen as “constitutive of place itself.” As to biography, Vergunst’s field work using journals kept by Aberdeenians suggests too that walking through places “draws together aspects of place and biography through ‘the walk’ and walking itself” (3). In other words, act and experience are conjoined, and, as such, amount to a personalized meaning of what a place is and does and allows one to do. “Personhood,” Vergunst claims, “can be a bodily orientation” (3).
Isolation, in a sense, requires of the isolate to become a place-maker, if for no other reason than to transform “a condition of newness and loss into a survivable world” (Conliffe 124). And, through this cycle of perpetual movement through the mines, and in Windeler’s case his several returns to the river bars and flats with which he was already familiar, it becomes apparent that although he is unsuccessful in his mining he has developed a familiarity with the places and people of the Feather River watershed. Certainly, returning to sites he had already left once before is to a large degree poor mining practice. Really, in doing so, Windeler had ceased to “prospect” and had, to some degree, begun to “settle.” That is, he had opted ultimately for the familiar, for the well-worn routes through the diggings. His survivability amounts to a kind of resilience. His everyday life became more bodily in this regard, his labour and his walking a type of refrain rather than a search. The isolation narrative, then, brings together the bodily nature of immanent placement and the narrative structure of what Conliffe identifies as the three generic constants of the isolation story: 1) a reference to the event that isolates the individual from the whole; 2) the character acknowledges his isolation; and 3) interaction between the new space of isolation and the character are central to the story’s goings-on (125-6). Further, narratologist David Herman makes it clear that strategies of the storyworld—whether the work of art or of everyday storytelling—follow a distinct order, too, into which Conliffe’s isolation story clearly fits (5). Herman’s basic elements are situatedness, event sequencing, worldmaking/world disruption, and what it’s like. He maintains that every story is situated in a specific context or occasion, that it is structured by a particular time-course, that some disruption propels the story, and that the story communicates the experience of that disruption (9). While I contend that the challenges of the isolation story are directly responsible for place-making, so too do they, in Windeler’s diary, give a clear account of “what it’s like,” or how “survivability” acts as a blueprint, first for everyday practice and second as the source of California—and western—literary and cultural regionalism. People and things traveling within the region are what comprises the region.

Recently, after Theodore Roosevelt’s earlier suggestion, Nathaniel Lewis has pointed to trappers, miners, and cowboys as the primary character types on the frontier of American imagination. While these figures enjoy particular mythologizing, at the same time their practices should be recognized for causing unparalleled ecological disaster, too (65).
In their “community portrait” of the Yuba River watershed, which lies just south of the Feather River and was transformed equally if not more by Gold Rush practices, “Finding the Bones” editors Steve Sanfield and Dale Pendell articulate the essence of reinhabitation as finding the answers in the land itself, “from the topography and climate, and from the people who already live there and those who USED to live there” (64; emphasis original). The editors explain that they have tried to “create a conversation” comprised of reportage, fiction, and nonfiction to capture a complete portrait of the place. In effect, they attempt to narrate a new story of the Yuba from a range of sources that are utterly entangled and explicitly layered, but not normally understood as mutually formed (64). Drawing our attention to “USED”, as in, “used up” or “ill-used,” “Finding the Bones” is an open narrative, decentralized and pluralist. Sanfield and Pendell’s text can be seen as an early attempt at what Dan Flores has since called “bioregional history” (44) or similar to what Michael Ziser has recently thought of as “ecocultural history” (13).

Sanfield and Pendell’s focus on “stories” replaces the singular, narrowly and deliberately conceived exceptionalist narrative usually appropriated from miners’ accounts and replaces it with an archive. Significantly, though, these editors do not ignore the mining narrative. Similarly, Kowalewski draws attention to problematic histories that would oversimplify Gold Rush life. Still, he remains, perhaps, somewhat of an apologist in his even-handed treatment of disparate accounts, and so, in the context of telling “new stories,” it is worth quoting him at length here:

After decades of overly heroic of 'triumphal' historical accounts of the settlement of the West, many recent historians have insisted that the darker aspects of the gold rush be illuminated. Their insights into the everyday lives and sufferings of minority groups on the frontier, and their new understanding of the environmental havoc wreaked on the landscapes of the West, have been invaluable. Yet as with any complex phenomenon, the composite truth of the gold rush cannot be found in any single story, new or old. Any perspective that oversimplifies or devitalizes the complexity and nuance of gold rush life does an historical disservice” (Gold Rush xx).

It is hard to discern whether Kowalewski is cautioning against past triumphalism or if he is warning New Western historians about going too far in their revisionist histories. At root, Sanfield and Pendell attempt to instate community into their watershed narrative where, as noted above, there had historically been only a weak or fragmented version of one; specifically, their work as editors is a matter of contextualizing a narrative that has most often been totalized, much as I expressed in the introduction to the present work.

See N. Campbell for the use and evolution of “west-ness” as a critical term (Rhizomatic 22; Post-Westerns 10).
Definitions of a “New West” vary. By the 1860s it was in common use as a way to denote settled regions where the frontier had passed on, in Frederick Jackson Turner’s sense of westward expansion. By the mid-1980s the new western history had taken hold, which reimagined the West as a process moreso than a place, in effect, linking social histories of the past to events of the present day. Thereafter, literary studies has adopted the term, which applies it loosely to genres rather than periods. Still, elsewhere I have attempted to periodize the term in conjunction with “Old West” and “Postwest” after Nina Baym (818) in order to further differentiate between authors and texts since the 1860s. For my purposes here, the “New West” marks the post-frontier, industrial West of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. This places Valley, The Ford, and Oil! in context with the New Western texts like Wister’s The Virginian (1902), Grey’s Riders of the Purple Sage (1912), Cather’s O Pioneers! (1913) and My Antonia (1918), Sui Sin Far’s Mrs. Spring Fragrance (1912), and Zitkala-Sa’s stories and essays.

See also Frederick Buell’s formative essay “A Short History of Oil Cultures; or the Marriage of Catastrophe and Exuberance” in Symploke, wherein he lays the groundwork for many of LeMenager’s later claims. Buell refers to this era as the dawn of energy history and describes an “oil-electric-coal capitalism” nexus driving individual, social, and global economies (280-1).

See note 3 above. Here I mean to reiterate that most scholars have drawn our critical attention to the problems of scale, and yet speak in terms of simultaneity, without fully examining the full spatio-temporal implications of this move. I point to Massey, Harvey, and Smith, after Berte (207).

See Carlo Ginzburg’s “Killing a Chinese Mandarin: The Moral Implications of Distance,” which unpacks the problems of abstraction attending human comprehension of, and feelings of responsibility across, great distances in time and space.

Tomlinson, Appiah, Appadurai, and others, for example, have put their focus on recuperating cosopolitanism. Tomlinson rehearses the use of “glocal”; Arif Dirlik offers “critical localism.” Calls for global citizenship in one form or another are manifold.
Again, I point to Lawrence Buell’s “Ecoglobalist Affects,” and to Lucy Lippard’s sense of “multicenteredness” (5). My sense of the untenable problems of scalar approaches which call for some form of cosmopolitanism, however, is rooted in Ginzburg, who claims: “extreme distance leads to indifference” (49), and in Frederick Buell’s contention that “Global cosmopolitanism produces, in the environmental arena, global claustrophobia, not liberation,” and that cosmopolitanism often shows an “unpleasant face” (65). Like Ginzburg, Hsuan L. Hsu likewise points to what some theorists have called “distance decay” when it comes to caring for others (36). Though Frederick Buell and Ginzburg seem to arrive at different conclusions about scale, that is, either the large or claustrophobic sense of the planet, they both suggest, to again cite Ginzburg: “to express compassion for those distant fellows would be, I suspect, an act of mere rhetoric. Our power to pollute and destroy the present, the past, and the future is incomparably greater than our feeble moral imagination” (60).

50 See Gano (184-5); Witschi (Traces 128).

51 Hsuan L. Hsu made a similar argument a year earlier, in 2004, in favor of regionalism’s global attachments during the same period. See Hsu, “Literature and Regional Production” (36-7).

52 See Soja (Thirdspace 10); Lefebvre (38-9); Casey (Getting 369).

53 See note 52 above. Both Harvey and Massey prefer “space” as the more appropriate term. See my discussion of this usage in the general introduction to the present work. Both Casey and Ingold have responded to Harvey and Massey on this issue (Casey, Getting 317-348; Ingold, Being Alive 145-55). Ultimately, perhaps, the difference lies in Harvey and Massey’s Marxist ideology, though this does not explain Soja’s use of “place” as a Marxist geographer.
Stephanie Foote, in her essay “The Cultural Work of American Regionalism” (2003), draws attention generally to the type of anxiety underlying London’s plot of escape from the city as a spatial problem. She writes, “But cities did more than produce a sense of anxiety; they produced a powerful form of nostalgia. In the heart of an increasingly anonymous urban existence, many people began to see in the countryside the source of a national wholeness” (29). Yet, many critics suggest that regional literature performed more nuanced cultural work: scholars such as Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse (2; 215; 233) and others have suggested that in fact local color fiction deliberately intended to forward the diversity of America’s regions, rather than America’s uniform desire. While Foote’s recommendation is apt in London’s case, Dorman astutely characterizes two strains of regional writing, especially as it pertains to the U.S. West. He locates a “nationalist West,” which is “an amorphous region that has served as a kind of projection screen for American national identity, yearnings, and ideals”; while, in contradistinction, he notes a second, “localist West,” or a “subregion that is differentiated in terms of its own unique cultural and natural landscapes” (xii; 11). Dorman characterizes California foremost as, “The long-standing beacon of the nationalist West” (198). Both forms, I insist, are tied to nostalgia for a stable, recognizable, knowable past, one that is resistant to a fluid, confusing present. In both senses, however, regionalism is still understood, as Fetterley and Pryse claim, “as the site of a dialogical critical conversation,” inviting critiques of “numerous cultural assumptions” (2). I maintain this is in part because of regionalism's endemic nostalgia, to which Foote draws our attention as a conventional response. Just like California itself, London’s novel walks the line between the nationalist and localist Wests, trading precisely on a combination of disillusionment and nostalgia, one that characterizes city life as confusing and which idealizes country life.

See Gair, who comments on Saxon’s position as a New Woman, and therefore, a significant new character in the pantheon of the West. See also Parrish’s comments on the New Woman (134-7).

This sentiment is reiterated across most critical works relating to the period. That is, critics note that region was often formed after the pastoral tradition, of being outside of history, and, particularly, outside of systems of labor. Regionalism and pastoralism, it is most often noted, work together ideologically but also socially, so that the backwater appears untouched, and therefore, under modern industrial practices, pristine. At the same time, that region’s inhabitants are perceived to be provincial in their worldview.

See Barrish’s comments on mass production (79-80).

Further, Gair’s analysis predates critical regionalist attempts at apprehending a decidedly postmodern ethos of “west-ness,” in which the mediascape, after Arjun Appadurai, figures into everyday life. See Tatum’s reading of Appadurai’s “scapes” (9); see note 43 above.
See my commentary on the challenges to the bioregional ethos in the general introduction to the present work.

See Kern (118), who comments on a scene in Norris’s McTeague depicting McTeague as awestruck by the cinema.

Peterson and others mark this transition from a reading public to a viewing public during this period.

Really, the sense of being inside or outside of modernity in this novel is its central claim. In this way it revises much of the regional literature of the period, which offered other spaces outside of modernity in response to a rapidly homogenizing culture; Austin, instead, attempts to work through the actual, changing boundaries of contemporary region.

Here, Ziser is echoing Timothy Sweet, who published his American Georgics in 2002. Sweet works through the many texts emblematizing labor as the primary connection to nature in America’s earliest writings.

This literal immersion in oil is symbolic of the embodied experience of oil culture LeMenager describes. Austin’s depiction forecasts the material-aesthetic matrix of living oil from which our present society is faced with extricating itself. LeMenager writes: “Decoupling human corporeal memory from the [oil] infrastructures that have sustained it may be the primary challenge for ecological narrative in the service of human species survival beyond the twenty-first century” (“Petro-Melancholia" 26). On the other hand, Ziser, in his essay “Home Again,” imagines bioregionalism as a mechanism for transitioning out of this predicament.

Of course, McGinnis’s comments echo those of Karl Marx, wherein “alienation” from the products of industry is the cause of so much strife.

Here again are echoes of Karl Marx’s “rural idiots.” The theme of an underclass that lacks the vision, imagination, and/or wherewithal to battle the systems aligned against them runs deeply across all three of the novels studied here.

“Epic” here should be compared to Austin’s satiric use of it elsewhere in the novel, when it is applied to the eastern playwright who searches for an epic West in the tone of Wister (242).
Bachelard refers to “intimate immensity,” whereby immensity takes the form of daydream as it contemplates grandeur, such that “the daydream transports the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity” (183). He suggests, “Immensity is within ourselves,” marking “the movement of motionless men” (184). Further, Bachelard attributes this sense to immediacy, to a sense of the infinite which, “accumulates its infinity within its own boundaries” (186).

“Oil-electric-coal capitalism” is Frederick Buell’s less graceful, albeit earlier characterization of what LeMenager would call “petromodernity.” Further, Buell’s sense that many features of the frenzy the period created could be embodied, so that a fictional character like Bunny might actually internalize that energy, forecasts LeMenager’s later sense of embodied oil.

Herr makes a similar claim when characterizing the meshwork critical regionalism attempts to reveal, but suggests that the “runaway” nature of the nexus is inherent to it, asserting, “the assemblage emerges in terms of its dynamic relationality” (11). Herr’s claim suggests to me a kind of out of control sensibility. An awareness of assemblages this dynamic, I suspect, is underwritten by Deleuze and Guattari’s “schizophrenia,” or, the inability to cohesively narrate lived experience. In other words, assemblage contains the daunting task of meaning-making under an ontological rather than epistemological dominant.

The exemplary beauty of the bioregion is that it can be expressed severally. For instance, Robert Heizer has identified 6 tribal culture areas in California, geographers recognize 12 geomorphic provinces within the state, and biologists record 10 natural regions. These, and other factors, contribute to the identification of a single bioregion. As Berg and Dasmann explain, “A bioregion can be determined initially by use of climatology, physiography, animal and plant geography, natural history and other descriptive natural sciences. The final boundaries of a bioregion are best described by the people who have lived within it, through human recognition of the realities of living-in-place” (Reinhabiting 218). In essence, the material space describes possible bioregional borders, while traditional and historical use clarify them. However a bioregion is ultimately construed, it is always already systemic, related to and interdependent on, the next bioregion. Shasta Bioregion is regularly defined as that area north of Tehachapi, west of the Sierra Nevada, and south of the Klamath River. See Berg and Dasmann (217); Dasmann, Reinhabiting a Separate Country (29-33); Snyder, Home! (17-20); and Snyder, The Practice of the Wild (37-44).
This is, of course, not to say that bioregions aren’t also highly charged ideological concepts. The ultimate act of thinking bioregionally is to construct a counter hegemonic rendering of place, in which the basics of life are gotten in accord with the necessities and limitations of a given geographic province. Therefore, locally, one might think of the watershed as the primary unit, which in turn is related to the bioregion, which in turn is linked to larger natural and cultural provinces. For instance, the Russian River watershed, where *Watermelon Nights* transpires, is part of Shasta Bioregion, which is often included in Cascadia, a larger shared cultural boundary encompassing what we know as the Pacific Northwest. Ernest Callenbach’s fictional Ecotopia spans the same region as Cascadia. See Berg (*Reinhabiting* 1 and *Envisioning* 96) and Snyder (*Home!* 17-20) for the way in which one rightly positions him or herself in a bioregion.

In fact, very few fictions present the bioregional ethos exactly, and those that do are often uncomfortably didactic. Key bioregional texts are usually nonfictions, like Thayer’s *Lifeplace*, for example, simply because bioregionalism is a practice and a praxis, directed toward activism.

See, for instance, Edward D. Castillo’s clear rancor for celebrating the sesquicentennial of the Gold Rush in his forward to Clifford E. Trafzer and Joel R. Hyer’s *Exterminate Them!: Written Accounts of the Murder, Rape, and Enslavement of Native Americans during the California Gold Rush* (1999), as well as Trafzer and Hyer’s dissent throughout their introduction.

I am paraphrasing remarks Kellogg made during her talk on indigenous and female representations of encounter at the University of Nevada, Reno on October 27, 2015. Hers is a commonly accepted position. For example, one becomes a “stranger in his own land” in most accounts. While disorientation was the initial indigenous response to coloniality, violence and institutionalized racism cemented the marginalization of indigenous peoples within spaces that had formerly been theirs.

Historian Kathleen DuVal, however, downplays the violence of this matter in explaining the adaptability of Arkansas Valley tribes, explaining, “I do not mean to retreat into an older perception of Indians as timeless and unchanging… Surviving Indians whose communities had been devastated had to respond, changing their living arrangements and at times even their cosmological understandings of the world, but they did not give up their world” (9). In effect, arguing for the adaptive resilience of an indigenous population able to respond to the changes wrought by European incursion, DuVal’s focus is on Indian remedies to changing social positions. In California, especially in the period my project enjoins, beginning with the Gold Rush, the native people had no such control. Debased by years of servitude in the missions under Spanish rule, the remnant populations were overrun by miners, cast out, as Ned Blackhawk explains, of history (4).
I borrow my use and sense of “entropy” as a critical term from Marovitz’s essay dealing with that condition in *Rabbit Boss*.

In his *Indians of California: The Changing Image* (1984), James J. Rawls writes, “The engine in [the evolution of white attitudes towards Indians] was the changing needs of the white observers. Needing to discredit Hispanic claims in California, American observers saw the Indians as victims; needing to acquire a cheap labor forces, they viewed the Indians as a useful class; needing to gain unimpeded access to the resources of the Golden State, they regarded the Indians as obstacles to be eliminated” (xiv). Elimination, at the advent of the American era in California, meant that the region became “a twisted Darwinian laboratory showcasing the triumph of brute force aided by a pathogenic and technological assault on the native people unparalleled in Western hemispheric history” (Castillo x). In describing the atrocities inflicted on the indigenous population during this period, Trafzer and Hyer write: “Within a matter of a few years, the people lost their parents and grandparents, sisters and brothers, sons and daughters. They lost the providers for their villages, the spiritual leaders, the tribal historians, and the leadership for future generations. The people lost their land and resources, but worst of all, they lost their security and much of their hope. People fell into a state of despair, depression, and anomie. Native peoples in California suffered from tremendous trauma that still affects them” (xiv). To put it bluntly, in the case of indigenous peoples, “nostalgia” is unapt, if not insulting to their actual relationship to their past. Remembering is an act of cultural survivance, while “disorientation” exceeds merely being “cast adrift.”

I am deliberate in my spelling of “Washoe.” As M. Kat Anderson explains in her *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California’s Natural Resources* (2005), variation in tribal spellings is often intentional, “as tribal groups change the spelling of terms used by anthropologists. Thus, the Washo of the anthropologist has become the Washoe” (xxviii-xxix).

Psychogeography is a critical concept originating in cultural geography and adapted to mobilities studies.

In fact, in her California memoir *Where I Was From*, Didion confesses: “One difference between the West and the South, I came to realize in 1970, was this: in the South they remained convinced that they had bloodied their land with history. In California we did not believe that history could bloody the land, or even touch it” (71).
Arguably, this displacement was a matter of personal choice for Didion: she was in New York following an “opportunity.” Even this, however, is telling: it suggests that privilege, so to speak, enforces uprooting; it underscores postwar movement on all sides. Didion writes in *Where I Was From*: “[I was] experiencing a yearning for California so raw that night after night...I sat on one of my apartment’s two chairs and set the Olivetti on the other and wrote myself a California river” (156-7).

For example, it is hard to overstate the fact that Didion and Chinua Achebe cite lines from the same poem by Yeats, but Achebe points to the moment of the falcon’s release while Didion invokes the approach of a strange and threatening beast. Achebe points to the desire for a new paradigm—even with its agonies—while Didion implies a longing for the status quo in a world seemingly turned upside down.

See the first scenes of Lily and Everett’s love-making and the revelation that their daughter has also enjoyed the freedoms the seclusion of the river provides.

Bioregionalism is also decidedly problematic in its similar attention to agrarianism. Too often it subscribes to a kind of golden age nostalgia where a harmonious balance was, and might again be, achieved. It lapses too easily into rural dreams and idealizations.

This wanton narrowing for the sake of efficiency, this singular focus for the sake of narrative clarity, proves, after cycles of recurrence, first the vulnerability and then the resilience of each vibrant element or realist agent, call it what you will. It is worthwhile to revisit the language of Barad and Bennett here, because there is an accord between indigenous, bioregionalist, and quantum physics ontologies.

An understanding of generational trauma has gained traction in the last two decades, especially as it explains and diagnoses behaviors in marginalized cultures.

see casey ? and miranda

See Kern *The Culture of Time and Space*; Tuan *Space and Place*; Casey *Getting Back*; West-Pavlov *Temporalities*; and many others mentioned in this project.

For many, the myth of “civilization” as a humanist pursuit ended with the atomic bomb and the events of World War II. In effect, western history had ceased to conform to its narrative of progress.

The definition of immanence should be remembered here: its almost religious sense of the divine in all things. In effect, to say immanence is to experience time as bodily and immediate on one hand, and to accept that all things participate in this, both experiencing time individually and contributing to the social experience of time collectively.
“Future primitive” originates with Gorsline and House, and gained traction within bioregionalism thereafter. See Berg (Envisioning 94) and Kim Stanley Robinson’s essay in his edited collection of short science fiction Future Primitive: The New Ecotopias (1997) for examples. The term as it is used in bioregionalism is unrelated to contemporary usage among apocalyptic anarchist movements.

To be sure, “future primitive” is in part analogous to Frederic Jameson’s “archaeologies of the future,” in which the utopian desires of the past, having exceeded the date of their imagined futures, seem to persist in instructive ways as we look backward to them. In other words, the oxymoronic temporal sensibility of concepts like future primitive and archaeologies of the future explore the parameters and utility of radical alternatives beyond the point of the futures they foretell. Future primitive suggests our fate should be determined at least in part by returning to our past; archaeologies similarly implies the unearthing of past knowledge to shape the world to come. The key difference is that future primitive conceives of a practical return, while archaeologies insists on the impossibility of such a move, distinguishing between program and impulse in this regard (Jameson 3-4). If we have seen elements of cultural friction underwriting postlocality as it pertains to place, Ecotopia, The Wild Shore, and Parable of the Sower each imagine a temporal corollary, in which slowness is the frictional agent disrupting common sense practices that influence “our sense of what is natural, normal and invulnerable to scrutiny” (West-Pavlov 2). These novels contemplate moments of slowness in its many varieties as it is believed to extend the possibility of living-in-place; that is, their moments of slowness counteract the literal and metaphoric blinding speed connecting the world today.

Such arguments either purposely elide the ongoing global commitments of bioregionalist thinkers, or are grounded in very narrow and superficial readings of bioregionalist texts. Berg, throughout Envisioning Sustainability, remarks on bioregionalism’s global reach, as does Snyder in his many essays on the subject, as well as Stephanie Mills, Freeman House, Mitchell Thomashow, Michael Vincent McGinnis, along with many others.

Murphy, Heise, Baratta, and Lawrence Buell, among others have drawn critical attention to the affinities of science/speculative fiction and ecocriticism, and more recently Adeline Johns-Putra has introduced “cli-fi” or climate fiction into ecocritical readings.
Since, perhaps, *The Sheep Look Up* (1972), California is the site of many climate related catastrophe fictions. Robinson’s *California Trilogy* relates three versions of a future California, T.C. Boyle’s *Friend of the Earth* (2000) imagines a not-too-distant dystopian future, and more recently, Edan Lupucki’s *California* (2014) and Claire Vaye Watkins’s *Gold Fame Citrus* (2015) move the genre forward. In his insightful reading of science fiction and western mythos, historian Carl Abbott treats Callenbach’s, Robinson’s, and Butler’s novels together in a helpful but cursory manner.

Perhaps among the least promising aspects of bioregional thinking is its attachment to essentialist versions of indigeneity and wilderness. Primitivity, in this regard, while Berg and Dasmann assure their readers that bioregionalism is not against civilization or modernity, is a problematic ideological stance. Too much of bioregionalism defaults to groovy constructs and limited local worldviews once readers reach beyond its primary thinkers. The pastiche of spiritualism often underlying bioregional ideals makes it especially easy to disregard from the perspective of the academy. Primitivity—even future primitivity—therefore, often undermines or precludes scholarly acceptance.

We can locate where and how sf and literary regionalism are derived from this similar utopian ideology and share corresponding modes and aims. Specifically, Tom Lutz recognizes that regionalism is often seen as a matter of center and periphery, as a “struggle for cultural authority” (25; 32). Robert L. Dorman enforces this perspective in his recognition of “localist” and “nationalist” Wests vying for control of regional meaning (11). By comparison, pointing to the utopian desire at the heart of science fiction, Jameson contends that the “fundamental dynamic of any Utopian politics” lies in “the dialectic of Identity and Difference” (xii). Finally, Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse reprise Jameson’s argument, urging their readers to understand regionalism “as the site of a dialogical critical conversation” which “[calls] into question numerous cultural assumptions” (2). In sum, the utopian impulse matters in both sf and literary regionalism because it celebrates or accentuates difference and arrays itself against dehumanizing, abstract systems of distribution and governance in local ways. Utopian desire favors, to paraphrase Tom Moylan’s *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (1986), an alliance of a variety of groups and interests with a core of “individual sovereignty and local community” (11).

In fact, Robinson echoes the sentiments of Carey McWilliams in *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (1943), in which McWilliams points to the utopian aspects of Southern California as well as its resonance within the rest of the nation and the world.
In a personal correspondence with historian Carl Abbott, Robinson remarked: “I think of myself as a Californian writer… and would be happy to be grouped with the California writers. To be grounded in that way, even regionalized, would be a very good way of giving some physicality or heft to the inclination of science fiction to be otherworldly by being set in the future” (Frontiers Past and Future 70).

See Kern (8); Following Henry Bergson’s classic study, pacing—movement—can be translated to temporality as duration, as participating in an endless stream, or flow, or flux. Read as temporal, this pacing can be outwardly public or private, local, regional, or global all at once: see Bissell and Fuller Stillness in a Mobile World.

The globalization of time occurred during the late-nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. For excellent historiographies covering railroad time, Greenwich mean time, and other forms of regulating and transmitting synchronized time see: Kern, The Culture of Time and Space; West-Pavlov, Temporalities; Allen, A Republic in Time; and Birth, Objects of Time. West-Pavlov especially provides a deeper history of the development of synchronized time (120-36).

See Casey, Getting Back Into Place, and Ingold, Being Alive, from whom I derive the language of unfolding, becoming, event, and negotiation.

Without tying it to the particular form of escapism as I contend it becomes, recent mobility studies warn against posing stillness oppositionally to speed, as an antidote for modernity, warning that such a pairing conflates stillness with “a reductive understanding of resistance” (Bissell and Fuller 2). In effect, stillness, which I equate to a specific time signature, when situated this way can only stand against. Instead, David Bissell and Gillian Fuller in Stillness in a Mobile World (2011) recommend, “mobility is always contingent: the speedy movement of some is, to varying extents, contingent on the stilling of others.” To them, paramount is, “that speed and stillness within much mobilities research emerge as relational phenomena” (4). Read as the language of postlocal temporality, it follows that the simultaneity of local and global experience is arrayed in a similar way, as relational contingencies, and hence the slow violence behind the speed of globalization.

See Casey (Fate xiii); Pico Iyer views stillness as catharsis, and an opposite, antidote for all the speed and movement in modern life. This is so because he equates stillness with simplicity, as the domain of a kind of asceticism antithetical to modernity. Even in this there is a kind of primitivism, a definition of “simplicity” and “stillness” that Iyer doesn’t seem to arrive at. He devises a corollary in which stillness=simplicity=silence; all of this predicated on remoteness v. “a madly accelerating world” (The Art of Stillness 6).

Jameson here borrows wholesale from Ernest Bloch’s earlier sense of a “utopian impulse”; See also Terry Gifford’s discussion of the pastoral impulse.
Despite the fact that [blank] has shown the problematic essentialized gender roles evident in the novel, and [blank] recognizes the looming eroticism of male sexual fantasy detracting from Callenbach’s message of ecosocial accountability, the overwhelming effect is that there is a certain attainable ecological order to Ecotopian life despite these other challenges. At least in early versions of future primitivism there is an attendant, problematic essentialism relating directly to gender and, in part, to race, that attaches itself to an ideal of slowness. The future primitive imagination in its initial phases, in which Callenbach’s novel squarely participates, seems to insist, in its sense of the “natural,” that “how we were meant to be” environmentally includes inherent social attitudes as well. The result is that an overtly reductive essentialization of gender roles extends to an aura of reduction that obscures the otherwise vital message of sane environmental practice.

See West-Pavlov (154): “Time is not some sort of yardstick for measuring those transformative processes, it is the dynamism and rhythm of these processes themselves as they occur. Their self-productivity, their becoming (or un-becoming) from one moment to another are all that there is to time.”

The cycling scene in literature since the appearance of the bicycle deserves greater critical consideration. By turns the bicycle ride or tour implies modernity, or, in somewhat later works, it entails an escape from the modern as cars enter realism’s material sphere. See Kern’s discussion of early cycling scenes (111-13; 216-17), for example, as well as instances in Frank Norris’s *The Octopus* (1901) and Jack London’s *Martin Eden* (1909). For later examples, consider the cycling tours in Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* (1947) and Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Mandarins* (1954), in which during and after World War II, cycling becomes a pastoral pursuit, evocative of quieter times. Really, these texts together show how modernity is a moving target, never what we think it is in the moment, and subject to revisions after the fact.

My reading here is tenuous. Feminist readings of the novel challenge Callenbach’s masculinist, heteronormative versions of sexuality. At root, the problems of sexuality this novel brings to light are those very issues we have to come to terms with in the present; that is, was the sexual empowerment of the 1960s and 1970s empowering or exploitive, how so is explicit sexuality perceived today?

See notes 92 and 87 above. Also, see Berg’s discussion of the Pleistocene (*Envisioning* 91-4).
In fact, the young Onofrians act as guides against their elders’ wishes. As the resistance plays out, it very closely follows the narrative of American conquest in that there are agents within the “savage” people who work against their own best interests on behalf of the imperial power. In a sense this novel replays the history of the West in a highly local setting, but with the same global implications. Bringing together key concepts of literary realism and Zen Buddhism in the context of *Three Californias*, Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. writes of this bodily nature, if not animality itself: “The reader should also be forced to recognize powerful shaping relationships, ideas, and institutions of which she/he might be unaware in daily life. In other words, there is the negative enlightenment of stripping away the illusions of imaginary relations, and the positive enlightenment of perceiving real relationships that were previously invisible” (152). In a sense, cessation does the work of “stripping away” nonessential natures and reviving those bodily, organic connections that impel us. And yet, Robinson challenges his reader by suggesting that very few of us are satisfied with lives thus stripped of extraneous meaning. The bodily life Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. recognizes Robinson championing is actually more often than not troubled by the way Robinson’s characters declare it. Rather than celebrate their wildness they hesitate to claim it. The young people, like Hank and his friend Steve, crave mobility and speed and decry their limited existence. So while Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. clearly frames the ethos of Robinson’s project, the implicit temporality underlying the connotations of “stripping away the illusions of imaginary relations,” equally as plainly argues that a complex slowness—here perhaps Csicsery-Ronay, Jr.’s “negative enlightenment”—is the result. Perhaps this is how Jameson’s version of negativity should be viewed. He says negativity is an issue inherent to utopian visions, and yet “negative enlightenment” might answer to his concerns.

By comparison, chronototality and temporocentrism are similar constructs. Chronototality speaks to the whole-earth, synchronous time of late-capital, while temporocentrism denotes the perspective adopted in modernity due to the totalizing aspects of modern timekeeping. Chronototality is the condition from which temporocentrism originates and to which it responds.

See Bachelard’s commentary on the intimate immensity of the forest in human consciousness (185-9).

Again, see de Certeau, from whom the term “ordinary practitioner” comes (93). Speaking in the context of walkers in the city who are blind to the “text” they write with their interactions on the street, such practitioners are very much the unnamed precursors of Beck’s “banal cosmopolitans” (*Cosmopolitan Vision* 10). In *Parable*, the necessity of “making do” is made all the more urgent and visible by the precarious nature of existence after global climate change.
See, for instance, Iyer’s *The Art of Stillness* (2014), and any number of examples discussed in Bissell and Fuller, and in Cresswell and Merriman’s *Geographies of Mobilities* (2011).

See Carolyn Merchant’s essay “Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative” for an extended reading of the American, Western narrative as declensionist.

Cresswell employs the term “place of memory” to describe the place-making process as contingent upon both individual and social memory, in which the combination of the two amounts to a kind of “public memory” (85). See Craig Martin on “turbulent stillness” in which he recognizes the ongoing imbrication of stillness and movement whereby he claims, “they are always immanent to one another” (192).

In a separate, but not unrelated argument, Anna Tsing makes the claim that in trying to learn about indigenous lifeways in the Philippines she had to first realize that the forest she wanted to see protected was in fact a social space (xi).

In fact, *Parable* is framed as Lauren’s journal, and as such it is structured around dates on the calendar, each scene or section related as certain days on which specific events happened. Adding a sense of verisimilitude to its futurism, the calendar functions much as the watch does, in which the intended imbedded logic of the watch/calendar functions locally, entangling the meaning of each.

Thomas M. Allen’s *A Republic in Time* (2008) is an excellent resource for thinking about time-keeping on national scales, particularly in nineteenth-century America. Here, he cites John McPhee’s “deep time,” which is the term McPhee uses to “express the abyssal character of the immense spans of time revealed by geological theory” (156). Allen continues, citing Stephen Jay Gould, by observing that deep time suggests the ineffability of such a time scale. Timothy Morton’s “hyperobjects” make a similar suggestion: “hyperobjects refer to things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans” (1; emphasis original). Such objects, Morton explains, are “nonlocal,” and yet Morton relates that they manifest themselves “interobjectively.” All told, the problem, again, in each case is scale. As with place, time, too, stretches beyond human imagination, beyond conceptualization. I would argue that rather than nonlocal, hyperobjects are always distributed locally, even if without a single source. That their effects are felt interobjectively promotes a kind of postlocality attending them, where they stretch across time and across space, in the world’s many places.
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