THE PLACE-EXPERIENCE OF INHABITED SOLITUDE:
INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES AND IMPLICATIONS

A Dissertation
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Liberal Studies

By

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Washington, D.C.
December 19, 2019
THE PLACE-EXPERIENCE OF INHABITED SOLITUDE: INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES AND IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Marshalling the intellectual and practical history and contemporary thought concerning notions of rurality, place, and wilderness, I propose that the place-experience of inhabited solitude is an experience with the non-human I, the Other, encountered in wild nature, and one that is privileged in the sense that it is an encounter that differs from aesthetic experiences with nature, wilderness, and the so-called ‘outdoors. The place-experience of inhabited solitude is an encounter most commonly experienced by those who inhabit the non-agri-rural, but also one that can occur if an individual, regardless of geographic living circumstances, spends prolonged time in places of inhabited solitude. I will present evidence of the lure inhabited solitude and, in particular, the importance of forests and mountains to this notion. Employing a lens of twentieth-century continental philosophical thought including phenomenology and existentialism, I will argue that certain themes in these traditions provide profound insight to the place-experience of inhabited solitude. Critically, this place-experience is ascribed meaning and retained in memory through language, myth, and metaphor. I will argue inhabitants of the non-agri-rural, particularly inhabitants of places characterized by sparse human populations in or adjacent to landscapes noticeably free from human economic activity, far from urban or suburban areas (far enough to preclude commuter-rural populations), and free of the sounds of human activity—
freeways, roadways, resource extraction, robust tourism—more commonly have place-experiences of inhabited solitude. The key factor is solitary, prolonged, uninterrupted exposure to the non-human I, as a matter of routine inhabitation, over time, in places of inhabited solitude. Implicit in my proposition is the conclusion and conviction that inhabitants of the non-agri-rural serve as critical stewards and gatekeepers of these places, due to their deep knowledge of, participation in, and connection to places of inhabited solitude. Engaging ideas including reciprocity, perspective, Being, attention/intention, and intersubjectivity as context, I consider in greater detail the Otherness of nature in places of inhabited solitude and humans’ relationship to that non-human I. The place-experience of inhabited solitude, while not superior to other human-nature encounters, is a privileged experience with particular characteristics that define it, one utterly indivisible from geographic place.
DEDICATION

First and foremost, I dedicate this to my husband and best friend of over 17 years, Colonel Tim Goodroe, for his unfailing, humorous, patient, and keenly intellectual support through these past six years, all-the-while excelling in his 24-hour-a-day job as a senior Air Force officer in over 30 years of service to our nation. My parents, Bob and Trish Thurston, have provided unfailing prayer support throughout and especially in my many moments of doubt, augmented by that universal parent-only conviction that your children are capable of anything, miraculously regardless of the reality of that sentiment. Dr. William Thurston, my uncle, pushed me to the final lap at a time when I may have decided that “ABD” was sufficient. Our children—Gabe and Kayla Wentlandt; Jesse and Maddie Goodroe and our granddaughter, Scarlett; Tanner and Sophia Wentlandt; and Sam Goodroe and Ashley Schreppel and her daughter, Savana—all have been resolutely supportive throughout, and I cannot thank them enough. To the people along the way who provided encouragement and invaluable advice, namely, Dr. Melissa Burn, Dr. James McGinley, Dr. Cate Johnson, Dr. Greg Havrilak, Dr. Frank Ambrosio, Dr. Terry Reynolds, Dr. Ariel Glucklich, and Mr. John Mon: thank you so very much. Finally, this dissertation would never have come to fruition, nor would I have embarked on this incredible journey of place, of my place, had it not been for the keen intellect and staunchly supportive efforts of Mr. Charlie Yonkers, who, despite his regular teaching and life schedule, agreed to be my chair: little did he know that sainthood would be his after a two-year process morphed into four and one-half years. His enduring encouragement and steadfast belief in my idea, enriched by his deep insights into the notion of place, key to this work, truly sustained me in the challenging times but, more importantly, gave me fodder for further exploration and
inspiration. Dr. Gordon Toevs, a dear family friend, agreed at a very late hour to be one of my two readers. He provided critical expert input regarding the ideas of wilderness and the rural from the perspective of the agricultural sciences, together with much-needed encouragement. Dr. Frederick Ruf also graciously agreed in the ninth hour to take the place of one of my readers and for that and for his insight, especially in the disciplines of philosophy and theology, I am exceedingly grateful.

Above all, I remain eternally grateful and humbled for guidance and wisdom from God, through Scripture and prayer, which provided inexplicable serendipity, inspiration, perseverance, and joy throughout this process.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

So near is man to the creative pageant, so much a part is he of the endless and incredible experiment, that any glimpse he may have will be but the revelation of a moment, a solitary note heard in symphonic thundering through debatable existences of time...And what of Nature itself, you say—that callous and cruel engine, red in tooth and fang?...It is true there are grim arrangements. Beware of judging them by whatever human values are in style. As well expect Nature to answer to your human values as to come into your house and sit in a chair. The economy of nature, its checks and balances, its measurements of competing life—all this is its great marvel and has an ethic of its own. Live in Nature, and you will soon see that for all its non-human rhythm, it is no cave of pain....Whatever attitude to human existence you fashion for yourself, know that it is valid only if it be the shadow of an attitude to Nature. A human life...is more justly a ritual. The ancient values of dignity, beauty, and poetry which sustain it are of Nature’s inspiration; they are born of the mystery and beauty of the world...Touch the earth, love the earth, honor the earth, her plains, her valleys, her hills and her seas; rest your spirit in her solitary places...

-Henry Beston, The Outermost House

In recent years, developed nations with an intellectual lineage in Western thought have experienced a resurgence in populism, and with this, a popular debate in those societies, particularly the United States, has centered on the “urban-rural divide.” Commentators, authors, and scholars have sought to better understand and identify the roots of this alleged divide, with the unfortunate result that necessary distillations for popular consumption have successfully obscured critical inquiries into underlying premises of what constitutes rural and rurality, presenting readers an easily-digestible dichotomy that leaves these important subtleties ill-examined.

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As contemporary rural and cultural geographers and rural sociologists have argued, the characterization “rural” itself is troublingly non-descriptive and is, therefore, a contested term; at the national level, government departments and agencies have disparate definitions for policy purposes, and public opinion regarding a definition is even less comprehensive, clear, and quantifiable. Consequently, conducting studies and sound analysis and creating meaningful public policy remains challenging. Further, rural voices, numerically eclipsed by voices of the urban, can find their concerns given less consideration in public policy and in the academic efforts devoted to support or inform it. In December 2018, the New York Times published an article about rural communities in the United States, first positing that these communities were dying (citing now-familiar tropes about aging populations, addiction, lack of high speed Internet, poor access to healthcare, and persistent un- or under-employment) and then asking how to bring them back to life. Far more informative than the article itself was the response. A first observation: likely due to the readership of the New York Times, over 90 percent of the hundreds of comments were from urban residents. A strong majority of these commenters saw the proposed reinvigoration of rural communities as a zero-sum public policy question—resources devoted to the rural would reduce resources available to remedy ills of the urban. This was summed up in a particularly sharp condemnation (interestingly, of a reader who claimed to have been raised in Appalachia), “It’s a breeding ground for hatred and despair dying with a Bible in one arm and a heroin needle in the other. Let it die.”

2 From a collection of responses to the New York Times article “Small-Town America Is Dying. How Can We Save It?” by Rachel L. Harris and Lisa Tarchak, December 2018. The majority of the 296 responses that were submitted as of my collection date were from urban inhabitants and a very small minority were from rural readers or readers who had previously lived in rural communities. Many comments from urban readers were decidedly political (a platform to criticize
the sheer percentage of majority vs. minority responses): Perhaps unsurprisingly, comments by rural inhabitants included recommendations for economic revitalization, a solid defense of the benefits of rural life, criticisms of urban life, overlooked (and ongoing) success stories of the rural, and admonitions to decentralize rural policy-making to the state and local levels, all in their own way rallying cries that validate a privileged experience of the rural. In support of a 2018 series on innovation in rural journalism, reporters spent time sitting in on different “liars tables” in rural Kentucky. (A “Liars Table” is a moniker for “a hub of local information in rural communities” usually at a diner, general store, or library where individuals from the community gather daily to have coffee, etc., and share information about local events and local sentiment.)

In conversations with the journalists (who were guests to these conversations), the residents expressed deep frustration with media coverage of their rural communities. “Portrayals of rural Kentucky in the media . . . [are not] reflective of who we really are . . . [a] lot of us are working for positive change in our communities.” Another resident commented that when people relied on the media for knowledge about his community, they said, “well, you don’t want to go up there. This place is . . . drug infested. It’s this or it’s that.” You know? And it’s good to hear some of the good stuff that’s going on in the communities.”

A local writer commented that he

Donald Trump), were harshly critical of rural communities, and reflected a profound ignorance of the realities of small town life and differences between rural communities themselves. It is entirely plausible that the article would have engendered likely fewer, but possibly more thoughtful answers under a different Administration.


4 Wenzel and Ford, “Truths from the liars table.”

5 Wenzel and Ford, “Truths from the liars table.”
worked hard to fight stereotypes of ignorance, noting his frustration that grammatical errors of
his, discovered too late, would give people from larger, urban areas “‘more fodder to say, ‘well,
yeah, they can tell a story but they sure as hell can’t write.’”

Flora and Flora argue that “American society has become so deeply urbanized that one
almost assumes urbanization to be a natural law.”

“Most popular culture is predicated on ‘urbanormativity:’ the assumption that the institutions and conditions found in metropolitan areas
are ‘normal.’ It is normal to live in a place with art museums, shopping malls, professional
sports teams, universities.”

The rural is seen as inconsistent with normal—lacking these
institutions. Other biases commonly associated with rural identity and rurality itself are laden
with positive or negative value judgments in terms of cost or benefit to society and individuals.
These biases include but are not limited to homogeneity; a sense that things remain static—the
proverbial hometown where things “never change”; rural residents viewed as socially backwards
or uneducated in the ways of society; a blurring of socio-economic lines; and rural places
perceived as the bastion of protestant notions of hard work, honesty, and strong family ties.

These biases regarding the rural are not confined to the United States. In Finland, for example,

6 Wenzel and Ford, “Truths from the liars table.”


9 In their study of rural communities in the United States, Flora and Flora note that in the
town of Irwin, Iowa, “social-class distinctions are generally ignored. A ‘just-plain folks’ atmosphere
“the countryside has been perceived as a cultural backwater compared to the civilized cities (Luthje, 2005). Similarly, the country people have been represented as ignorant rednecks who drink and do not have any social skills (Apo, 1996).” Further, many of the biases mentioned here are not necessarily only held by the outside observer; a number of them are claimed proudly as part of a rural identity. Writing in 2012, Shucksmith et al. note that “rural areas as idyllic places of peace, as repositories of national identity and yet also backward areas in need of modernization continues to dominate popular perception and policy in both the U.S. and UK.”

In a 2013 study on cooperatives in the UK, Cabras found that “the vast majority of cooperatives . . . are located in villages and rural areas”; further, “membership is a lived as a group experience, rather than experienced as a business initiative,” and “once people start to identify with their group, their welfare becomes intertwined with the welfare of the group.” Comprehensively, these complicated and sometimes contradictory perceptions of rurality are instructive and contain elements of truth and, in the case of the positive, represent a yearned-for-reality, but, as will be discussed later, are not always factual; further, some assessments are not as easily delineated into categories of political correctness or right and wrong as they might seem at first blush. For example, the claim (critique) of homogeneity as it relates to identity in rural areas bears closer examination. Writing about long-standing ethno-historic place-based identities in Scotland,

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Burnett observes that “the rhetoric of cultural uniqueness and specialness is a discourse tainted by past and present abuses . . . [and has been subject to criticism for] somewhat unsavoury overtones regarding ‘supremacy’ and ‘moral worth.’”\textsuperscript{13} In a somewhat similar vein, many rural communities in the United States are denounced for their ethnic and racial homogeneity, something that in almost all cases is unintentional, the product of the community’s settlement history. However, as global tribal histories attest, homogeneity can be a strong source of personal identity. One Norwegian college student, raised in a rural fishing village but attending University in an urban area, summed up the importance of this rural place-based identity for many people. “‘People know who you are, you have the dialect, you know people and the culture. Then you don’t need to discover that you do not belong, because you know you have grown up in the region.’”\textsuperscript{14} Shucksmith notes the “paradox” that “rural values are proclaimed as inclusive and neighbourly, and yet these can only be protected from corrosive urban values through being exclusive and drawing tight bonds.”\textsuperscript{15} Malpas agrees that “[i]deas of home and heritage can indeed become associated with an obsessively introverted perspective or with forms of xenophobic resistance to the unfamiliar or the foreign,” but argues “it would be a serious mistake to take such ‘pathologies of place’ as the norm and on that basis, reject place as inherently problematic or dangerous.”\textsuperscript{16} In fact, biases regarding homogeneity can have


\textsuperscript{14} Agnete Wiborg, “Place, Nature and Migration: Students’ Attachment to their Rural Home Places,” \textit{Sociologia Ruralis} 44, no. 4 (October 2004): 422.

\textsuperscript{15} Shucksmith, “Re’imagining the rural,” 167.

unintended consequences in practice. In a study of the legal dispute brought by Earthjustice regarding the siting of an industrial hog farm adjacent to both a rural community and national park in Arkansas in 2014, the researchers determined that “not only did Newton County’s collective white privilege (McIntosh, 1997) not protect it from the siting of the CAFO [concentrated animal feeding operation], the place’s whiteness appear in some ways to have aggravated its vulnerability.” The researchers further observed that “…outsiders [the Earthjustice attorneys, as noted in the article, were based in New York City] strategizing the litigation may have seen the poor white residents as violating wilderness—as having trashed the rural by their very presence, another manifestation of ‘white trash.’ (Wray, 2006; Pruitt, 2016).” These observations by research conducted at home and abroad present compelling questions regarding the role of cultural, or place-based “uniqueness” in the formation and maintenance of identity, which remain the subject of academic interest across a number of related disciplines.

While not necessarily intended, a strong bias in favor or urban studies also exists in academia. One could argue this is to be expected, considering a vast majority of the global population now resides in places that demographers and governments refer to as urban or suburban. This historical emphasis on urban studies has implications for rural studies, including epistemological approaches. Interpreting rurality, then, becomes an exercise in the application of


18 Pruitt and Sobczynski, “Protecting people, protecting places,” 334.
ultimately urbanocentric academic theories and discourses designed to produce hard statistical data for policy development and implementation. “Landscape ecologists have devised approaches based on multivariate statistics applied to environmental and socio-economic data…while geographers have employed paradigms where rurality was ‘equated…with particular spaces and functions.””¹⁹ However, as I will show, by-products of a primary academic literature with witting or unwitting predilections for the urban can reinforce oppositional biases of the rural.

As we will see, the rural is decidedly complex and difficult to summarily define. Recent rural research on the idea of community contends that contemporary rural communities, much like their non-rural counterparts, are composed of “many different communities existing alongside each other (sometimes overlapping, sometimes not), each with their own meanings, practices and sites and structures that construct boundaries of exclusivity.”²⁰ This necessarily has a direct impact on policy initiatives, rejecting the “one size fits all” approach typical of rural policy. Across the spectrum of rural in the United States and the West, one finds vastly different physical surroundings, types of economic activities, political inclinations, recreational pursuits, educational attainment levels, ethnicities, and socio-economic strata. Deserts, rangeland, forests, and cultivated fields are home to rural inhabitants. Farmers, ranchers, shopkeepers, salespeople, residential and business building industry workers (carpenters, plumbers, electricians, HVAC),

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medical staff, local, state and federal government workers, educators, industrial factory workers, miners, personal care professionals, distribution center workers, and even software developers make up the myriad rural economic employment landscape. According to a 2018 National League of Cities report, “[i]n many states, rural areas actually outpace the high-value business growth of their urban counterparts,” and, “[o]n average, across states urban areas only had 3% greater growth in trade sector establishments than rural areas.”

Radicals and Leftists exist alongside Libertarians, Socialists, and majoritarian Republicans and Democrats in the rural as much as the urban, albeit in somewhat different proportions. Rural residents belong to fitness centers and participate in the same organized youth and adult sports that urban residents do. Rural residents hike, cycle, run, camp, canoe, kayak, ski, hunt, fish, play golf, ride mechanized recreation vehicles (snowmobiles, motorcycles, and all-terrain vehicles), and rock climb. Today’s rural residents practice Yoga and related meditative/fitness activities, are active Gamers, and paint, sew, quilt, crochet, garden, and write. Art thrives in the rural.

A 2015 UK government policy report suggests that “rural areas demonstrate greater engagement with art, although funding for creative practices remains more limited compared to urban areas…”

Rural residents, like their urban counterparts, have middle school educations, GEDs, high school

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22 In fact, although difficult to qualify, determining an “art score per resident” comparing rural to urban in terms of artists per a fixed number of people might yield interesting and perhaps surprising results.

diplomas, associates’ degrees, varying levels of professional trade certifications, bachelors’
degrees, masters’ degrees, and doctoral degrees. While still majority Caucasian, rural residents
in the United States include Native Americans, growing numbers of individuals and families
from Central and South American countries, and multiple ethnicities from across the globe. In
2016, researchers from the Center for American Progress considered the impact of immigrants
on rural communities experiencing population and economic declines. They found that
frequently, increases in foreign-born residents were positively correlated with subsequent growth
of local rural economies. Socio-economically, rural inhabitants in the United States earn across
the entire income spectrum, from below the poverty line to the highest income levels. A U.S.

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24 In 2016, the U.S. Census Bureau found that 15 percent of adults living in the 704 counties
delineated as “completely rural” had a Bachelor’s degree or higher; 16 percent of adults living in the
1,185 counties defined as “mostly rural” (at least half of residents lived in rural areas) had a
Bachelor’s degree or higher, and 23.1 percent of adults from the 1,253 “mostly urban” counties (less
than half of residents lived in rural areas) had a Bachelor’s degree or higher. Kelly Ann Holder,
Alison Fields, Daphne Lofquist, “Rurality Matters,” United States Census Bureau, December 8,
(accessed May 7, 2019).

25 According to the United States Department of Agriculture in 2018, the race/ethnicity
population distribution of the 1,974 non-metropolitan counties in the United States was 80 percent
Caucasian (as compared to 58 percent in metropolitan counties); 9 percent Hispanic (as compared to
20 percent in metropolitan counties); 8 percent Black (no information was provided for metropolitan
counties); 2 percent Native American (as compared to 0.5 percent for metropolitan counties); 1
percent Asian; 0.1 percent Pacific Islanders; and 1.8 percent representing other races. United
Edition,” Economic Information Bulletin 200, November 2018, 3,
(Note: The U.S. Census Bureau clarifies that “non-metropolitan counties” and “rural” overlap but
are not identical and should not be used interchangeably. See:

26 Silva Mathema, Nicole Prchal Svajlenka, and Anneliese Hermann, “Revival and
Opportunity: Immigrants in Rural America,” Center for American Progress, September 2, 2018,
https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2018/09/02/455269/revival-and-
opportunity/ (accessed October 10, 2018).
Census Bureau analysis conducted in late 2016 found that the median household income difference between urban and rural was a mere $2,000, and a U.S. Department of Agriculture analysis conducted in 2018 found the 2017 poverty rate in non-metropolitan counties to be 16.4 percent compared with 12.9 percent in metropolitan counties. Indeed, it might seem that rural as a valid category of analysis is “…at best passé,” as recent studies of the peri-urban, rural-urban fringe, and “’exurbia’” have examined “how rural and urban distinctions (as both materially and discursively drawn) are being blurred by the hybrid sociospatial forms produced

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through these processes.” 28 29 Yet, rural inhabitants embrace an identity (in my view, rightly so) that while difficult to define, exists as a valid category of analysis.

“‘Social relations were therefore characteristically many-stranded’” 30

Perhaps the initial key quantitative characteristic separating the urban from the rural, then, is population density. Accordingly, and despite many cultural, economic, and social similarities to their urban counterparts, those who inhabit sparsely populated areas, over time, develop certain unique identity characteristics—components of a “rural identity.” Rural identity is comprised of those elements of personal identity manifested in particular ways of living and interacting on a daily basis, that are specifically place-based, tied not simply to landscape, but to

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28 Michael M. Bell, Sarah E. Lloyd, and Christine Vatovec, “Activating the Power of the Countryside: Rural Power, the Power of the Rural and the Making of Rural Politics,” Sociologia Ruralis 50, no. 3 (July 2010): 209. The researchers are presenting what they see as a common argument against the notion of the rural as a particular idea, one with which they disagree. “As a result of this new material connectedness the very idea of the rural is becoming at best passé. We live in a hybrid world now and anyone can put together the identity they choose. We each make, unmake and remake cultural boundaries and connections, albeit guided by discourse and power–knowledge. The rural is now little more than a cultural trick, a fading myth to be marketed to the unsuspecting and romantic or a desperate grab for political power.” This perspective may be one of a number of the rural that has evolved from strong trends in twentieth century scholarship, where human behavior, culture, and society are explained ultimately in terms of economic interactions.

The pre-eminent British Geographer Doreen Massey (1944-2016) discussed her initial rejection but later adoption of Marxism, after reading Althusser in the 1970s. Her observations regarding place are consistent with the statement above. “...place... has to be re-thought, re-imagined, reconceptualised...Hardt and Negri say that you can’t have a concept of space which doesn’t have boundaries...I think that is a classic counter-position like striated space and smooth space [referring to Deleuze and Guattari] and I would say there is no such thing as either, there never was place that was a container.” Doreen Massey, Human Geography Research Group, “The Possibilities of Politics of Place Beyond Place? A Conversation with Doreen Massey,” Sophie Bond and David Featherstone, eds., Scottish Geographical Journal 125, nos. 3-4 (September-December 2009): 403-404 and 416.


sparsely populated landscape. And these uniquely human personal experiences of sparsely-populated landscapes that are specific to rural inhabitants, vary themselves depending on the relative solitude and measure of human manipulation of the landscape in question. Irish literary critic, John Wilson Foster, asserts the following regarding rural west Ireland: “‘…these places…are places of solitude and retreat (flight and succor), of passion and timelessness, and they exist in the west, in a permanent recess of the Irish psyche.’”31 The same can legitimately be observed regarding some rural experiences in the United States and Canada.

The concept of rurality offers a framework in which to examine a mode of human inhabiting of the land, but one that assumes a degree of non-human, natural components to its condition; this perspective enables a rich ecocritical approach to interrogating human relationships with the natural environment and the multiple forms of human crossings and penetrations of it.32

Certain components of rural identity have been identified in academic research. These include routine engagement with the natural world for recreation or in economic activity as an external phenomenon that shapes identity-praxis rooted in geographic experience, over time; a sense of man at once at odds with, overcome by, and achieving small temporary gains against nature; relatedly, a lived, profound sense of stewardship of land; a preference for solitude; and, sustaining traditions through festivals and celebrations throughout the year which engender


“norms of reciprocity and mutual trust” (social capital). The degree to which these components manifest themselves in a comprehensive rural identity, and the collection of identities comprising a rural community vary and are affected by external factors—time in history, weather and geography, social norms, and economic realities.

Of these, it is the preference for and particularly, interaction with, solitude that I will explore; more specifically, it is the experience of solitude in landscape unmanaged, unworked, and presently unmodified by human manipulation.

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33 Flora and Flora, *Rural Communities*, 119.

34 Pertaining to the stewardship notion, Ashwood theorizes a “‘moral economy of the land.’ Landowners...experience a ‘virtue-infused conception of private property rights that stems from the landownership ethic, an approach to landownership as a sacrosanct right achieved through self-toil or family labor to ensure independence and sustenance in the face of scarcity’ (Ashwood, 2015).” Pruitt and Sobczynski, “Protecting people, protecting places,” 332.

35 A 2015 study of rural Ontario, Canada landowners’ understanding of government policy regarding endangered species found that they had “very positive attitudes toward conservation and endangered species” referencing “their enjoyment of nature and the splendor of diversity,” and all had consistent and regular experiences of “wonder in nature . . . [p]ersonal connection to land and other living things emerged as a theme in virtually every interview,” Andrea Olive and J.L. McCune, “Wonder, ignorance, and resistance: Landowners and stewardship of endangered species,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 49 (2017): 17, 18. The study found that this “deep sense of wonder and appreciation for nature...translates into a desire to steward land.” Olive and McCune, “Wonder, ignorance, and resistance,” 20.

36 For example, people who were raised in rural communities in the southeastern United States, especially after the advent of air conditioning, arguably spent much less time recreating outdoors than those raised in rural areas in the western United States where the climate was more conducive to outdoor recreational activity throughout the year. Cultural norms were also at play in this instance: exercise, indoors or outdoors, was valued in the West before it was accepted as a norm in the southeast. The loosely-defined Victorian notion that polite women didn’t sweat was alive and well in the southeastern United States (at least in the social echelon that drove societal norms and was reinforced in literature and upbringing) to a degree it was not in the rest of the United States. Obviously, the working class experience was different, but novels and stories from the south make it clear what could be referred to as the “parlor lifestyle” was what was emulated, across all social strata.
Many facets of rural identity are strongly driven by agricultural production and are, therefore, ultimately economic in nature. As will be discussed, there is a strong bias in research and policy toward rural as understood predominately through the lens of agriculture. Since the Industrial Revolution and enhanced by globalization, large-scale production and policies support producers, systems, and governments involved in agricultural production, and funding for research tends to flow along the lines of public policy. The Greco-Roman/Christian patriarchal heritage of Western civilization is evident in the United States in the attitudes of eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century Europeans and European Americans who settled in the forests of the East Coast, across the Great Plains, the Mountain West, and on to the deserts of California and the Southwest. Today’s agri-rural bears the lineage of their “pioneer spirit” and claims of Manifest Destiny (in classical thought, the human vs. fate/human vs. nature dialectic—the eternal, impersonal conflict between blind fate and thinking human). Indeed, literature, biography, and history tell us that humans welcome the struggle and accord their opposition great respect, recognizing victory in the connectivity to nature the battle itself brings. It’s the “instinct for survival” found in Gretel Ehrlich’s cowboy: “It’s not the toughness but the ‘toughing it out’ that counts. In other words, this macho, cultural artifact the cowboy has become is simply a man who possesses resilience, patience, and an instinct for survival.”

This ideal has also been referred to in research as “independent agency,” and has been identified as a broader and particularly American value. In their research on different types of rural

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38 While the heritage of “independent agency” arguably hearkens back to our fight for American independence, it was precisely the settlement of the vast majority of the United States, rural settlement, which gave this value structure and generational history. It was man alone
communities in the United States, Flora and Flora traced the history of a small community in the West Virginia mountains, noting that the founding individuals of this community, like others in the region, were “hardy adventurers” (many from the Balkans) and “fiercely independent” families who traveled along Cherokee Indian trails into the rugged Appalachian Mountains from the Virginia coastal and piedmont areas to set up homesteads.\(^39\)

Undoubtedly, a preference for solitude is a component of agri-rural identity as well as non-agri rural identity, however, the differences are important and compose a key element of my proposition. The agri-rural preference for solitude was and is at once temporary and managed. By this I mean that the encounter with solitude has as its ultimate goal the elimination of chaos and transformation of nature into something “useful” and orderly. A preference for solitude as a component of agri-rural identity has at its roots the striving of man to control nature, a battle sometimes won and sometimes lost. The agri-rural preference for solitude is no less authentic against nature, in a very fate-centered existence: the individual was being tested, not the collective. A group of researchers from the Northwestern University Kellogg School of Management asked the question, “Why did some people leave New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina was imminent, and others stayed?” The people who evacuated “shared notions of independence and control—common elements of the independent model of agency that permeates mainstream American culture...’ Mainstream American culture tends to focus on this particular model and assumes that individual actors are responsible for their behavior.” The study didn’t place higher value on so-called “independent agency” than it did on the values cited by those who chose to stay—values of interdependence over independence, standing strong in the face of adversity, and faith in God’s providence. Further, the study acknowledged that the values cited by those who stayed were consistent with most other countries in the world, and the value of “independent agency,” is largely confined to the United States. Tim De Chant, “Why Did They Stay?” (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Kellogg School of Management, April 5, 2010).

\(^{39}\) Flora and Flora, *Rural Communities*, 18.
than that of the non-agri-rural, it’s simply different, due to the perspective one takes toward nature itself.  

Especially in recent years, with the mental health debate that has arisen as a result of shootings in public places by those suffering from severe depression, anxiety, or delusion, the idea of isolation has acquired a negative connotation. In the sense I mean, it is not the negative—valuing isolation from all human contact, but the positive—valuing rural solitude as strong component of good mental and spiritual health. It is daily life in a rural, largely unmodified-by-humans, place, away from noise and light pollution and easy conveniences, which promotes self-reliance, character, and introspection. It’s not intentional isolation from all humans; instead, it’s experiencing regular separation from large cells of human activity, with small cells of closely-knit human groups—strong individuality tempered by reliance on a few others, politics aside.

My research also aims to address gaps in analysis in rural academic literature which are the product of the moves to devalue geographic place in the face of social constructivism and network, actor-network, and mobility theories as methods and modes of analyses in recent decades, which includes a predominant privileging of political economic analysis and its

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40 Author Gretel Ehrlich recounts a conversation with an old Wyoming rancher. “Irrigating is a damned contemptible job. I’ve been fighting water all my life. Mother Nature is a bitter old bitch, isn’t she? But we have to have that challenge. We crave it and I’ll be goddamned if I know why. I feel sorry for these damned rich ranchers with their pumps and sprinkler systems and gated pipe because they’re missing out on something. When I go to change my water at dawn and just before dark, it’s peaceful out there, away from everybody. I love the fragrances—grass growing, wild rose on the ditch bank—and hearing the damned old birds twittering away. How can we live without that?” Ehrlich, Solace, 82.

41 Daniel Kemmis, Community and the Politics of Place, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 78.
necessarily exogenous focus. Agency of rural dwellers, as noted by Shucksmith, “went unacknowledged, and instead they were viewed as acted upon, whether by environmentalists, big business, [or by the government]…”42 The place-experience of inhabited solitude re-invigorates agency into the analysis and understanding of certain aspects of rurality, as it is grounded in specific, geographic places and experiences of human agency in interaction with agencies of the non-human I.

Research Methodology

“Nonsense (when all is said and done) is still nonsense. But the study of nonsense, that is science.” -Talmudist Saul Lieberman43

My research methodology is qualitative and uses secondary rather than primary data—existing research and literature across multiple relevant disciplines. While there is empirical value to using quantitative research methods rooted in data points to reinforce or refute claims or to test hypotheses in many fields, qualitative research is better suited to this study of a particular component of rurality. The qualitative approach will allow me to best utilize cross-disciplinary sources and engage case studies/documentary analyses, narratives, and ethnographies as I consider implications for the place-experience of inhabited solitude across Western culture and geographic place.44 A multiplicity of narratives, for example, has the power to bring to the fore

42 Shucksmith, “Re-imagining the rural,” 164.


44 My research materials are almost exclusively sourced from what the literature refers to as the “global north” and Western philosophical thought. As rural researchers have noted in the past decade, there is a dearth of information and focus on rurality outside the “global north”: “...a considerable void still exists in the literature both in central and (mainly) in more peripheral
certain truths about place-experience. The ebb and flow, indeed, in some cases, the utter disparity of multiple narratives reveal realities about the deeper truth of a place, over time, while also confirming the consistent flux of human experience with place.45

My academic perspective can be most closely equated with the ontological school of “critical realism.”

Critical realism is the perspective that there is a knowable consensus reality that can be discovered through repeated, replicable observations, and that these observations are shaped by the observer’s social location (Bhaskar [1975] 1997). In these epistemological perspectives, observations are repeated, both by individuals and by epistemic communities, and are grounded on experience.46

As an example of the application of critical realism to research methodologies, in a 2016 Finnish study of forest owners’ discourses about forests, the researchers assert that “critical discourse analysis…is tightly connected to critical realism that inter alia means that discourses are seen as one, but only one, form of social practice (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999 19-36; Fairclough et al., 2010).”47

45 For a brief discussion on narratives and place-writing, see Tim Cresswell, Place: An Introduction, 2nd Ed, (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 57-58.


Jürgen Habermas criticizes postmodernists for “putting forward ‘truth claims’ in the very act of uttering that there are no truths, and that they are effectively a socially conservative force in that ‘they have abandoned any hopes of conscious social change.’”\(^{48}\) For Habermas, knowledge is “intersubjectively produced”; in the course of everyday communication and in academia, “people raise and use ‘truth’ or ‘validity claims’; and “knowledge can change things.”\(^{49}\) These truth claims emerge from the three dimensions of reality, namely, “an ‘external world’ of objects and events, an ‘inner world’ of our personal experience, and a ‘social world’ of expectations and obligations.”\(^{50}\) In short, Habermas asserts that researchers cannot avoid making judgements, and should instead use this fact of the human condition to provide a truer representation of the subjects of study.

The social scientist basically has no other access to the lifeworld than the social-scientific layman [sic] does. He must already belong in a certain way to the lifeworld whose elements he wishes to describe. In order to describe them, he must understand them; in order to understand them, he must be able in principle to participate in their production; and participation presupposes that one belongs…this circumstance prohibits the interpreter from separating questions of meaning and questions of validity in such a way as to secure for the understanding of meaning a purely descriptive character.\(^{51}\)

In Habermasian terms, I belong to the “lifeworld” of the non-agri-rural; I was raised on the outskirts of a small, remote rural mountain community in North Idaho, and my entire family and

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49 Cloke, et al., *Writing the Rural*, 110.

50 Cloke, et al., *Writing the Rural*, 111.

51 Cloke, et al., *Writing the Rural*, 114.
much of my extended family (parents, 3 married siblings, and my father’s four siblings and their children and grandchildren) still live in the rural Pacific Northwest. Accordingly, I bring to this study an insider’s perspective to the non-agri rural.

For Habermas and other critical theorists “[s]cientism does not remove values and interests from the practice of science: instead, it recognizes only a particular and very narrow set of values related to prediction and control and denigrates all other values and interests by suggesting they are irrational.” In the nineteenth century, Goethe observed

In New York there are ninety different Christian sects, each acknowledging God and our Lord in its own way without interference. In scientific research—indeed, in any kind of research—we need to reach this goal; for how can it be that everyone demands open-mindedness while denying others their own way of thinking and expressing themselves?

British rural geographer Paul Cloke writes, “‘[c]ritics need to let go of their distanced and false stance of objectivity and…expose their own point of view – the tangle of background, influences, political perspectives, training, situations, that helped form and inform their interpretations.’” In defense of narrative as a valid analytical approach, Barry Lopez asserts

Of the sciences today, quantum physics alone seems to have found its way back to an equitable relationship with metaphors…The other sciences are occasionally so bound by rational analysis, or so wary of metaphor, that they recognize and denounce anthropomorphism as a kind of intellectual cancer, instead of employing it as a tool of

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54 Cloke, et al., *Writing the Rural*, 149.
comparative inquiry, which is perhaps the only way the mind works, that parallelism we finally call narrative.55

Abram comments “[t]he living pulse of subjective experience cannot finally be stripped from the things that we study...without the things themselves losing all existence for us.”56 Husserl’s ideas propose that “…quantitative science remains an expression of…the qualitative world of our common experience…supported by the forgotten ground of our directly felt and lived experience, and has value and meaning only in reference to this primordial and open realm.” [my emphasis]57 Probyn argues “that the use of ‘the self in [particularly] ethnographic accounts and theory is motivated by the postmodern claim that science, along with other metanarratives, is no longer sufficient to the task of describing the world.”58

Schama takes somewhat of a middle view, grappling with the question of the appropriate role of myth in analysis. He asks whether it is possible to take it seriously “and to respect its coherence and complexity, without becoming morally blinded by its poetic power.”59 He cites this as a dilemma both for the anthropologist as well as the historian, namely “how to reproduce the ‘other,’ separated from us by space, time, or cultural customs, without either losing ourselves

57 Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous, 43.
59 Schama, Landscape and Memory, 134.
altogether in total immersion or else rendering the subject ‘safe’ by the usual eviscerations of Western empirical analysis.”

He goes on to assert:

that not to take myth seriously in the life of an ostensibly ‘disenchanted’ culture like our own is actually to impoverish our understanding of our shared world. And it is also to concede the subject by default to those who have no critical distance from it at all, who apprehend myth not as historical phenomenon but as an unchallenged perennial mystery.  

Epistemologically, I incline toward moderated social constructivist trends in theoretical approaches that aim to re-introduce a physical reality to social constructivism and relational theory, sometimes characterized as blended theory, as opposed to a positivist approach, but I will, as warranted, employ quantitative data from concrete observations to ascertain and verify research insights. A social constructivist/critical realism methodology and perspective provides the opportunity to ask questions at the outset, and consider people, experiences, and stories in comparing and contrasting answers in order to inform theory. Woods’ lends academic credence to the “first-hand stories of rural life” as the best access to how people truly experience rural life, in his discussion of “lay discourses of rurality.”

As a generalist, I approached my sources as humbly as possible, while also working to understand and apply what the writers and thinkers intend and mean. I come educationally equipped to this task with a strong background in political science and religious studies, which

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60 Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 134.


includes supporting academic work in philosophy, history, literature, and some sociology. My academic experience with the hard science disciplines of geography, ecology, anthropology, and environmental science is limited to single courses or self-learning. As such, at the outset, I wish to excuse any misappropriation of my sources resulting from my multi-disciplinary approach. Also, in a mild defense of a generalist approach to this subject, I note an observation by Morse and Mudgett, a geographer and an historian who conducted a 2014 cross-disciplinary study on the enduring rural sense of place among Vermonters from the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries.

Too much of today’s academic research is conducted within the small sheds of our sub-disciplines. This particular collaboration between an historian and an geographer uncovered a long-lived emotional attachment to place that neither one would have been able to identify working alone…to do such research requires interdisciplinary communication, [and] mixed methods research agendas…63

In a gesture of humility regarding the sum of what follows and in defense of my generalist interpretation of the profound thinkers I employ to help me illuminate the place-experience of inhabited solitude, Doel, in an essay on Derrida, says it best.

Writing, all writing, including this writing, is guilty of silencing everything which has not been phrased and everything which will never have been phrased. And yes, we are obligated to extract, graft and extend the ‘silenced’ and the ‘forgotten’ from the margins, the lower strata, the shadows, the folds and the creases. And yes, we are obligated to relentlessly plough through all manner of materials, lifting and reinscribing innumerable voices, gestures, meanings, phrases and positions – everything which has been held in reserve by a repressive and restricted economy. Indeed, writing is obligated to the forgotten and the silenced (End of Story).64


64 Cloke, et al., Writing the Rural, 143-144.
Selected Terms of Reference

Landscape

The term “landscape,” while frequently used today, is ambiguous when probed with any rigor, a few hundred years of English language having done its messy work of adaptation. Rooted in the Dutch landschap (German: landschaft), meaning “a unit of human occupation,” it came to represent, in seventeenth and eighteenth century England, the quintessential pastoral scene, the truth of which “was to be thought of as poetic rather than literal.” However, as Schama notes, this, too, was culturally derived “reaching back to the myths of Arcadia…that made landscape out of mere geology and vegetation.” Ingold suggests a possible explanation for the shift in meaning, from unit of land (implying an area bounded and characterized by some sort of agricultural activity) to that of a pastoral scene, could be a mistake over the years among scholars regarding the suffixes scape and scope, with scope (from the Greek skopos and verb skopein, which means to look) and scape (from the Old English sceppan/skyppan, which means to shape). Landscape, as a genre of painting in the Middle Ages, therefore took on a meaning better attributed to “landscope,” Accordingly, a brief retrospective on landscape painting, popular for more than a millennia across the East and the West, provides more insight into the

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65 Schama, Landscape and Memory, 10-11.
66 Schama, Landscape and Memory, 12.
history of visual and spiritual experiences integral to this term, especially the socio-cultural intricacies bound within it.

According to Tuan, the first (European) landscape painting, as the genre is interpreted today, was completed in Switzerland in 1444, depicting a scene on Lake Geneva.\(^{68}\) Symbolism in landscape painting, since its inception, addresses many more elements than \textit{inhabited solitude}, and many of these works do not speak to that theme at all. Wilderness, the closest idea of landscape to \textit{inhabited solitude}, “…came very much later than the appreciation of gardens, productive farmlands, and bucolic scenes.”\(^{69}\) Like most art, these paintings reflect the culture, politics, and social realities of the time in which they were completed.\(^{70}\) Masters of the Renaissance incorporated landscape richly in their representations of sixteenth century life in Italy. “From the Bellinis, through Giorgione and Titian to Bassano, Tintoretto and Veronese, landscape formed the setting for Venetian paintings, increasing their subject matter…both the reality and the illusion of Venetian landscape were grounded in Euclidian geometry.”\(^{71}\) Cleary, landscape art was reflecting advances in the scientific understanding of our world. Discussing


\(^{69}\) Tuan, \textit{Topophilia}, 123.

\(^{70}\) “Metaphorical thinking ignores the sharply set limits of scientific classification. As scientific terms, ‘mountain’ and ‘valley’ are types in a topographical category. In metaphorical thought, these words carry simultaneously the value-laden meanings of ‘high’ and ‘low,’ which in turn implicate the idea of male-female polarity and antithetical temperamental characteristics.” Tuan, \textit{Topophilia}, 141.

Leonardo da Vinci, Tuan observes “…unlike medieval artists and most of his contemporaries Leonardo was a keen observer of nature. Painting for him was a science, that is, a rigorous way of knowing reality rather than aesthetic indulgence.”\textsuperscript{72} Further, “Nature…revealed God’s will: conceived in a humble spirit the portrayal of landscape was a means of conveying truth and moral ideas.”\textsuperscript{73} Landscape painting was an experience of the sublime. Indeed, Baillie (Scottish physician, essayist, and dramatist), writing about the notion of the sublime in the middle of the eighteenth century, said of Enlightenment landscape painting that “…the space of a yard of canvas, by only representing the figure and colour of a mountain, shall fill the mind with nearly as great an idea as the mountain itself.”\textsuperscript{74}

As the Industrial Revolution gained strength, landscape painting reflected the paradigm shift to a more “mathematized worldview”: “The realism and naturalism characteristic of seventeenth-century landscape painting was achieved by the technique of linear perspective, which is an artistic application of projective geometry.”\textsuperscript{75} The science-inspired eighteenth century paintings of Joseph Wright include works that “depict the types of scenery and landscape

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\textsuperscript{72} Tuan, \textit{Topophilia}, 123.
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\textsuperscript{73} Tuan, \textit{Topophilia}, 126.
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features discussed by [eighteenth century geologist, John] Whitehurst, and can be read in the light of Whitehurst’s theory of ‘Subterraneous Geography’.”

Scholars differ on when landscape painting developed in China: According to Tuan, landscape painting emerged in the tenth century, and according to Nash, it developed in the sixth century. Both, however, agree that the artists immersed themselves physically in their intended subject, prior to reproducing it. (Incidentally, according to Tuan, the Chinese call landscape art shan shui, which means mountain and water.) And, similar to landscape painting four and five centuries later in the Renaissance West, Chinese landscape painters intended to reflect an experience, rather than reproduce a faithful rendition of the physical features that were the subject of the painting. A recent observation about landscape painting, especially wild landscape, by an American wilderness writer, points to the profound difference between aesthetic appreciation and experiential appreciation.

I wonder why…landscape painting…fails to give a real sense of the depths of forest shade, why trees don’t dominate the paintings to the extent they do real landscapes. Is it because scholarly or urban painters didn’t go far enough into the woods, preferred to look from a safe distance? Or is it because the depths defy pictorial interpretations? It’s hard enough to describe them with words.

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76 David Fraser, “‘Fields of radiance’: the scientific and industrial scenes of Joseph Wright,” in The Iconography of Landscape, eds. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 2000), 125.

77 Tuan, Topophilia, 127; Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 21.

78 “These efforts were an attempt at capturing the essence of place. The artist did not go out…and try to copy a particular scene...he entered a world, to wander there for hours or days so as to imbibe and atmosphere.” Tuan, Topophilia, 127. “Frequently the artist-philosopher made a pilgrimage to the wilderness and remained there many months to meditate, adore, and penetrate, if possible, to inner harmonies.” Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 21.

Art historian W.J.T. Mitchell argues that the appropriate question to ask is “not ‘what landscape ‘is’ or what landscape ‘means,’ but what it does,’” proposing that landscape is “a process by which social and subjective identities are formed” and, “an instrument of cultural power” (Mitchell, 1994: 1-2), through which particular sets of social relations are produced and reproduced. Accordingly, political and academic concerns regarding detrimental commodification of the rural have raised questions about depictions of rural landscape in media and art, with critics charging that depictions of “‘sensual unity with nature’” obscure “‘the underlying truth of material conditions’” making us “‘unaware of the distancing that separates us from the natural world.’” Watt explores the cultural and historical geography of landscape, noting that “[o]ver time, the visual and material details of landscapes reflect the ideas and values of those who live and work in them, as the landscape is socially produced and reproduced by those people’s activities…” A contemporary perspective on Gibson’s notion of “affordances” provided by landscape demonstrates the intense, interwoven relationship between moving bodies and the land.

These affordances are not oriented towards a passive, sedentary perceiver (as is common in cognitivist, Cartesian models of perception) but towards an organism that actively and

predominance of the sky. “In a landscape painting...by contrast to a map, a large part of the picture often consists of the sky.” Tim Ingold, Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 127. This is true for many seascape paintings as well.


81 Daniels quoted in Woods, Rural, 108.

intentionally explores the environment…Indeed, affordance becomes intrinsically social insofar as for people, activity is always culturally invested. As we move through the landscape, the affordances we perceive reflect our circumstances as embodied, cultural beings.  

Ingold proposes that “the forms of the landscape…emerge as condensations or crystallisations of activity within a relational field…through walking…landscapes are woven into life, and lives are woven into the landscape…” Additional contemporary definitions of landscape include: “…an intermediary layer between nature and human, an obscuring cultural superimposition resulting from human entry into an abstracted, alienated relationship with nature”; “a way of seeing things, a particular way of looking and picturing the world around us…not just…what we see but…how we look”; and a “human encounter with the land [that] opens ‘richly figurative spaces, where imagined and material zones coexist’”. Casey writes,

[i]f we meditate on the place-world and look for its most characteristic and specific embodiment, we soon reach the landscape as that by means of which the place-world appears. Construing ‘landscape’ to include cityscape, seascape, plainscape, mountainscape, skyscape, or whatever—any form of ‘placescape’—we find that it has two primary features: ‘layout’ and ‘surface’.

Landscape, as Casey distills it, then, is how we visually (at least initially) perceive the “place-world” as “extended regions in which natural entities are not only located but afforded the

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85 Bakhtin, Williams, and James quoted in Parry, “Pits, pylons and posts,” 115.

chance to do various things...build houses, pursue prey...or just stay put." Tilley proposes that landscape is “not a physical constant,” but “given only in relation to it inhabitants, to their live, movements and purposes...people and landscape...are ‘mutually constituted.’”

Another view sees the human experience as exogenous to landscape. In an exposition on representations of rural landscape in British cinematography of the 1980s and 1990s, Cardwell observes that “[a] landscape elicits a stance of distance and specularity: we view and admire landscapes from an ideal vantage point—by definition, once one is ‘in’ a landscape, one is no longer able to see it as one.” Today, the term “landscape,” as applied to sparsely or predominately unpopulated geographic places generally references a visual experience that privileges the naturally-occurring features (layout and surface) of a geographic place. “In most definitions of landscape the view is outside of it.”

Similarly, for my purposes, in most instances, I will use the word landscape to describe the visual (as opposed to metaphorical or cultural) phenomenon of physical features of a particular geographic space. Further, I have attempted to provide enough context or needed explication when I use this term to allay any concerns regarding negative social and/or cultural implications.

*Nature*

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88 Tilley reference in Ingold, *Being Alive*, 129.


The word nature, like the word wilderness, is vague and generally ill-defined. It is an old word, rooted in the Latin *natura* which means “sort, kind, quality, or character.” Lewis notes that for the Greeks, nature, instead of referring to a system of things, referred to “some force or mind or *élan* supposed to be immanent in them.” Nature, in its meaning of character, refers to something “innate” in a thing; in this sense, the understanding of nature (natural) as not created by man, e.g., the natural world, is an accepted definition. In other words, nature in this sense refers to all plants, animals, and inanimate objects of the world not created by man. Sufi doctrine sees nature, as part of the “substance of the cosmos,” as “a mercy emanating from the Divine Mercy and is to be treated as such.” For Kabbalists, nature “is potentially free and self-willing, and corresponds to the name *Elohim*, usually translated as God…but…in Kabbalah Nature as *Shekhinah* must be united with the worlds above and hence with the transcendent. Thus Nature is creative but it is not self-creating.” Further, necessary to this understanding of nature is the very real existence of and our fraught relationship with, the Other. However, while nature is...


93 Lewis, *Studies in Words*, 44.


96 Lewis articulates well the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment, contested view of nature documented by environmental historians and others. “...nature is all that is not man-made...This is one source of the antithesis (philosophically so scandalous) between nature and Man.
not created by humans, the term does not imply unmodified by human activity. “For most purposes…Nature in them means the country as opposed to the town…It may also…sometimes cover the rustic way of (human) life. It is the country conceived of something not ‘man-made…That the landscape in most civilized countries is through and through modified by human skill and toil…is overlooked.”\textsuperscript{97} Contemporary UK scholar Perry, also reflecting her British experience with rurality, writes that because the “plants, landforms and animals” in rural places “have habits, physical forms, and locations at least partly shaped by human intent…creating ‘nature’ as the world that is ‘not us’ is an ontological conceptualization that struggles to be meaningful in rurality.”\textsuperscript{98}

In the twenty-first century, nature, like similar terms, is contested and fraught with multiple meanings. Ecophenomenologist Neil Evernden describes “nature” as “…a mode of concealment, a cloak of abstractions which obscures the discomforting wildness that defies our paranoid urge to delineate the boundaries of Being.”\textsuperscript{99} Environmental philosopher Irene Klaver writes that today, as we are questioning traditional Cartesian dialectics as well as theories of social construction, “there is no nature ‘out there’ as radical other—either to be reduced to

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We as agents, as interferers, inevitably stand over against all the other things: they are all raw material to be exploited or difficulties to overcome…When we deplore the human interferences, then the nature which they have altered is of course the unspoiled, the uncorrupted: when we approve them, it is the raw, the unimproved, the savage.” Lewis, \textit{Studies in Words}, 46.
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\textsuperscript{97} Lewis, \textit{Studies in Words}, 73.

\textsuperscript{98} Parry, “Pits, pylons and posts,” 114.

utilitarian value or to be revered because of its intrinsic value. Neither is nature a sheer social construction…waiting for us to give it meaning and value.”

Instead nature and culture “co-constitute.”

The French concept of terroir, although approximately 150 years old, provides an interesting example of the co-constitution of nature and culture. Terroir, “the correspondence between the physical features of a place…and the character of its final products, often mediated by human experience accumulated over centuries,” determined the quality of the wine produced: “In some places nature was generous and nourishing, and yielded noble cultures for both plants and humans…In other places nature was coarse and hostile . . . [and] [t]he resulting wines were then thought to be ordinary.”

As with landscape, and unless referencing its use by another, I will use nature in its physical sense as that around us, animate and in-animate, which is not man-made. As Snyder delineates the same term, for my purposes “it will come up meaning ‘the outdoors’ or ‘the-other-than-human’…”

As I use the word nature, inhabited solitude, apart from the presence of very intermittent man-made dwellings, is nature, but not all nature (such as my garden, a park, maintained trail with heavy use, open space, bodies of water with consistent and/or mechanized recreation use) is inhabited solitude.

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Wilderness

According to Nash, one probable etymology of the word “wilderness” is self-willed (wild is a contraction of willed) land, or land that followed its own will as opposed to the land subject to the will of humans (i.e., settled, farmed, or grazed land). In another probable similar lineage, one of the earliest uses of the Anglo-Saxon compound word, wildēor (Old English for animals not under the control of man) was in the epic Beowulf from the eight century, where it referred “to savage and fantastic beasts inhabiting a dismal region of forests, crags, and cliffs.” As it evolved, the Anglo-Saxon word wilderness came to mean “the place of wild beasts,” and in Northern Europe was understood to mean a forested place, as the word wild is also related to Old English words for forests (weald, woeld). The earliest English translations of the Bible used the word wilderness to denote the arid desert lands of the Biblical Near East (west of Jerusalem running north-south along the Jordan River, the Dead Sea, and the Sinai Peninsula), and it was subsequently defined as “‘a desert; a tract of solitude and savageness’” in an English dictionary in 1755. In the United States from the sixteenth century to the twentieth century, as environmental historians (Nash, McKibben, Cronon, Merchant, and others) attest, the word wilderness has a contested history, wrought with cultural, social, historical, and religious undertones and overtones. We understand the term in its metaphorical complexity today because


of these influences and how they can be traced back to the etymology of the word itself. “Wilderness has implied chaos, eros, the unknown, realms of taboo, the habitat of both the ecstatic and the demonic. In both senses it is a place of archetypal power, teaching, and challenge.”

Today, as an adjectival noun, it applies well beyond the scope of a denotation of land untouched or untamed by human efforts; however, metaphorically, the idea it conjures up remains surprisingly true to its Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic roots. For the purposes of my study, I will use the word wilderness in its non-proper noun form to refer specifically to remote geographic places, visibly and generally understood to be unmanaged and unaltered by human activity. Any reference to the areas set aside originally and since under the Wilderness Act of 1964, the legal definition of which is “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain,” will be capitalized. It is important to note that wilderness and inhabited solitude, however, are not interchangeable terms. As I use the word and concept of wilderness, all wilderness is inhabited solitude but not all inhabited solitude is wilderness.

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108 Snyder, The Practice of the Wild, 12.

109 Gary Snyder, reflecting on a visit to the remote regions of the Arctic, inhabited for the past seven thousand years by peoples such as the Inupiaq and Athapaskan, observes that “[t]here has been no wilderness without some human presence for several hundred thousand years. Nature is not a place to visit, it is home – and within that home territory there are more familiar and less familiar places.” Snyder, The Practice of the Wild, 7.


111 §2 (c) (2) of the Wilderness Act (the legal definition) reads that wilderness “has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.” P.L. 88-577,
solitude precisely because of the burdensome history and debate surrounding the word wilderness today.

**Brief Literature Review**

While the *place-experience of inhabited solitude* is a derivative, unique term of my own development, an examination of such a notion necessarily amalgamates multiple disciplines. It engages the elements of place (e.g., geography, ecology, environmental science), people (e.g., human geography, sociology, history, cultural anthropology), the non-human (e.g., biology, ecology), and what has traditionally been understood to be the realm of the mind (e.g., philosophy, theology, art, literature). Additionally, as science has encountered the revolution of postmodern thought and shifting attitudes regarding naturalism and Enlightenment scientific methods and world views, the development of sub-cross disciplines in these fields, such as eco-phenomenology and neuro-aesthetics, is ongoing and robust.

An appropriate foundation to an elicitation of the *place-experience of inhabited solitude* must begin with a review of the academic history of the notion of place, and rural place in particular, found in the disciplines of human, cultural, and rural geography and rural sociology. Studies of rural place in these fields often provide extensive analysis of individuals interacting with physical and mental aspects of place, while also interacting with others (community) and with the non-human (landscape, flora, fauna) within the boundaries of the physical and mental space of the rural.

Some researchers have criticized a place-based sense of rural identity, alleging that it suffers from “essentialist” thinking.\textsuperscript{112} The application of a phenomenological view of place (as outlined by Yi-Fu Yuan, Paul Cloke, Nigel Thrift, Michael Woods, P.E. Malpas, and others) to an understanding of rural identity helps address this critique. A phenomenological view of place sees place as consistently replicated in experience, which makes it dependent on physical geography, but tied to that geography in time and personal interaction. Thus, rural identity, as a function of place as experience, necessarily includes culturally and socially-driven interactions with rural place over time.

Consideration of the idea of the place-experience of \textit{inhabited solitude} as a component of certain (by no means all, and perhaps, in developed nations, surprisingly small corners of) rural places, must also include a review of the nature elements of geographic rural area of interest found in ecology, environmental science, and environmental history. As explained previously, the metaphorical ideal propounded by the word wilderness is closest to the idea of \textit{inhabited solitude} (however, again, they are not always interchangeable). Accordingly, the extensive academic body of research into the idea of wilderness in the United States has revealed physical, cultural, and social elements that are important to the understanding of the human interaction with \textit{inhabited solitude}. Environmental historians, philosophers, and writers such as William Cronon, Kenneth Worthy, Monika Langer, Roderick Nash, Carolyn Merchant, Mark Stoll, Kenneth Worthy, J. Baird Callicott, and Norman Wirzba provide insights to the physical place of

\textsuperscript{112} Thomas, et al., \textit{Critical Rural Theory}, 10.
inhabited solitude from a postmodern perspective. Their research and insights raise important questions of meaning, responsibility, humility, and implications for action or inaction in our human participation in inhabited solitude.

Finally, a comprehensive understanding the place-experience of inhabited solitude is without meaning lest key ideas and trends in philosophy, history, art, literature, and theology are included. These disciplines reveal elements of knowledge, aesthetics, myth and metaphor, identity, and belonging in the place-experience of inhabited solitude. French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) tells us about the non-Human I, and French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) provides the foundation for the notion place-experience itself in his advancement of Husserl’s concept of phenomenology. Contemporary American philosopher Edward Casey also provides a compelling comprehensive contemporary philosophical inquiry into place with implications for the place-experience of inhabited solitude. Historian Simon Schama faithfully and extensively recounts the cultural experience of Western human history with landscape, through records found in literature, art, history, philosophy, and other scholarly works. Rural literature and literature about wilderness, nature, and landscape unsurprisingly reveal evidence of the place-experience of inhabited solitude, emerging in the pages of works by John Ruskin, John Muir, Gretel Ehrlich, David Abram, William Cullen Bryan, Robert Moor, Henry David Thoreau, Annie Dillard, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mary Oliver, Goethe, Barry

Lopez, Nan Shepherd, David Macfarlane, Aldo Leopold, Paula Gunn Allen, Wallace Stegner, William Wordsworth, Henry Beston, and Ranier Marie Rilke (to name a small, small fraction) in the same way it does in those who write about the rural from Iran, Palestine, Israel, Japan, India, Europe, Russia—anywhere the rural exists.\(^{114}\) Stories can provide critical context and thus evoke a sense of the familiar, even if the culture itself is unfamiliar. These stories transmit specific themes and values, to which the listener responds, “ah-ha.”\(^{115}\) Even (and perhaps especially) in the pages of theologians, from the St. Francis of Assisi to the Protestant founders of Yale to contemporary theologians such as Leonard Hjalmarson, we find evidence of the place-

\(^{114}\) “Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
Which on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky...
Though absent long,
These forms of beauty have not been to me,
As is a landscape to a blind man’s eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration.”
William Wordsworth: *Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abby, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798.*

\(^{115}\) It must be remembered, however, that a fundamental appreciation of the literature of the Other requires, just like attending a community meeting, a willingness to listen to the writer, and accept what lies behind it on its own terms. (This is different from changing a belief system; that is not required.) “American Indian and Western literary traditions differ greatly in the assumed purposes they serve. The purpose of the traditional American Indian literature is never simply pure self-expression. The ‘private soul at any public wall’ is a concept alien to American Indian thought. The tribes do not celebrate the individual’s ability to feel emotion, for they assume that all people are able to do so...The tribes seek...to embody, articulate, and share reality, to bring the isolated, private self into harmony and balance with this reality, to verbalize the sense of the majesty and reverent mystery of all things, and to actualize, in language, those truths that give to humanity its greatest significance and dignity.” Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 55.
experience of inhabited solitude and its recognition of an encounter with something fully outside of ourselves and not of our conception or creation.

To summarize, as many researchers on rural, on place, and on wilderness continue to assert, these notions cross many disciplines. In the following chapters, I aim to plumb them in a comprehensive enough manner to successfully argue both for a privileged, rural place-experience of inhabited solitude and for the importance of that experience to individuals, and by extension, to the larger society as a whole.
CHAPTER 2- A PROLEGOMENON¹ TO AN EXAMINATION OF THE PLACE-EXPERIENCE OF INHABITED SOLITUDE

Three major fields of study, that of the notion of “rural,” that of the notion of “place,” and that of the notion of “wilderness,” are integral to an understanding of the place-experience of inhabited solitude. In Chapter 2, I will provide a brief overview of the history and current status of the various academic disciplines and theories involved in explorations of the rural, of place, and of wilderness. I will include research and thought primarily from the United States and the United Kingdom; however, rurality has also been the subject of research in the Nordic countries and Europe, and I have included those sources, as appropriate. While rural research has also been conducted in Asia, the African continent, and South America, in order to reasonably scope my subject matter, specifically as it pertains to the history of Western thought, I do not include these sources, other than incidentally (as in the history of landscape painting in China and Japan, discussed in Chapter One). In her introduction to a case study on rural Zambia (approximately 2013) Siwale writes, “there are large differences between the experience of rural life in Africa compared to that of the more developed world, making the two rurals almost incomparable.”² Rural areas in Western nations often “are valued for their


picturesque landscapes, their natural environments and dense social structures (Woods, 2010),” whereas in Africa, “[t]he rural is often seen as a place that is lifeless, rigid in expectations of attitudes and behaviour, and unchanging… (Iliffe, 1987).” While the negative attitudes toward rurality in Africa and in Western nations, upon closer examination, actually resemble each other, the positive views of the rural in Western nations, tend not to be replicated in Africa. My research intentionally explores Western culture and thought with regard to the subject, and I acknowledge those limitations presented by my operative language of research, breadth of focus, and the cultural modalities imposed by these limitations.4

A Brief Overview of Rural Studies

Sociology, Geography, and Anthropology

In the United States, academic study of the rural was first articulated through the discipline of sociology: the first rural sociology course in North America was held at the University of Chicago in 1894, and the second at the University of Michigan in 1902.5 In the late 1930s, the Rural Sociological Society was formed as an independent breakaway body from the American Sociological Society, and an independent journal, Rural

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Sociology, was formed. Sociologists studying the rural saw key differences in fundamental societal and economic structures between the urban and the rural, and they uncovered a decided devaluing of the rural across the field, more broadly. Rural geographer Michael Woods observes that rural sociology, due to its parent field’s roots in Tönnies, Weber, and Durkheim, “was more engaged with conceptual theories than rural geography.”

As in the field of rural sociology, rural geography developed as a sub-discipline during the twentieth century. Although its beginnings can be traced to the 1950s, rural geography gained traction and depth in the 1970s. As the field grew, UK rural geographers took the lead and today form the intellectual backbone of the field of rural geography for the UK and the United States. Rural studies are also a focus of anthropology, with a spate of “‘rural community studies’ arising in Britain and Ireland in the 1940s and 1950s.” As a contributor to the broader field of rural studies,


7 Thomas, et al., *Critical Rural Theory*, 2. According to the authors, as recently as this past decade, the urban bias in the field of Sociology persists. “As rural sociology seeks an interested audience in a society that increasingly stigmatizes the subjects of their discipline, urban sociology continues blithely along as if the countryside matters only to tourists.”


anthropology has emphasized the identity aspect of the rural, rural communities, and ethnographies as valid methodologies for and approaches to studying the rural.\textsuperscript{11}

While geography, sociology and anthropology constitute the majority of academic effort devoted to engaging with and understanding the rural, the study of rurality reaches across a multitude of disciplines. In the preface to their 2014 volume, \textit{Interpreting Rurality: Multidisciplinary Approaches}, Bosworth and Somerville write that in order to “shed some light on why ‘rural’ evokes idyllic imagery, strong feelings and lifelong commitments,” they “brought together a wide variety of researchers, from many different disciplines – history, economics, literary criticism, sociology, operational research, cultural studies, criminology, housing studies, social gerontology, tourism studies, geography and social policy…”\textsuperscript{12} Undoubtedly, rural thought is necessarily multidisciplinary.

\textbf{Epistemologies of the Rural}

The introduction and hegemonic growth of highly mechanized, industrial farming in support of capitalist economies set a research framework for key questions regarding how productivist agriculture influenced, perhaps greatly, the evolution of both epistemologies and ontologies of the rural in the Post-World War II years through the 1980s, as governments strove to set social and economic policy in response to emerging

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{11} Woods, \textit{Rural Geography}, 22.}

structural, economic, and social challenges. For these reasons, together with the reality
of centuries of farmed rural across much of the British Isles, the preponderance of
twentieth century rural studies, implicitly or explicitly, focused on the agri-rural. “Urban
economics can trace much of its heritage to microeconomics…By contrast, rural
economics tends to be a residual or bound up in agricultural analysis.”13 However, the
emergence of postmodern/critical theory and poststructuralist theory toward the close of
the twentieth century led to changes in academic approaches to the rural, including the
application of social constructivism, as explicatory frameworks of the rural, among
others. “…this movement brought with it a very clear condemnation of social scientists’
capacity for—and the political implications of—determining how the (rural) world is and
operates through reference to broad theoretical claims.”14 Structural Marxism and other
political economic approaches tended “to overlook everyday, ‘messy’ accounts of social
life which [did] not necessarily fit into models of either-or.”15 The epistemological
progression of rural studies has not rejected a political economic approach, but instead
altered it to reflect postmodern theoretical approaches, inclusive of considerations of the
relevance of myth, metaphor, and the human imagination, as well as a concern for rural


others, and their particular experiences of and with the rural, as traditional communities of exclusion.

Koziol, et al., divide contemporary rural theory into two groups: “place-based” and “social constructivist.”

Placed-based theories that are “[d]emographically and spatially based” allow for easier quantification, and those that are “political-economic” or “socio-cultural” create a lens through which to see the elements of “‘locales’” that “‘often create a powerful context for collective identity and social interaction.’” Social constructivist theories of the rural are closer to political-economic and socio-cultural place-based theories, but consider “non-tangible indicators of space such as cognitive structures and social representations.” Social constructivist rural theory consider “place identity construction… ‘the difference between country life and city life may only ever be true in the mind.’”

Clearly, there is overlap in these two categories, attesting to the difficulty of developing a comprehensive, applicable theory of the rural, but suffice it to say, as early as the 1990s, rural was being explored through the lenses of idyllic landscape, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, although economic theory (e.g., commodification and consumption of the rural) albeit more implicitly, remained the

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preferred framework with which to understand the rural. Postmodern theory, particularly a recognition of the social and cultural construction of the rural, included “morphologies of settlement, desires to settle, versions of home, knowledges of locality, views of landscape, values of environment, languages of authenticity, categorisations of people, articulations of power.”

As social constructivist methods of analysis gained popularity, critiques began to emerge regarding their ultimate failure to fully explain the full range of rural relations. “‘There is something beyond the ‘social’ at work as the countryside displays a material complexity that is not easily reducible to even the most nuanced social categories.’” Rural sociology and rural geography engaged post-productivist and post-structuralist social theories that emphasize the relational over the spatial. Marsden and others applied actor-network theory, developing “a relational rural epistemology…that…'explicitly links knowledge (the discursive capacity to formulate interests), social action (the opportunity to act on such formulations), and materiality (the distribution of economic resources that facilitate certain courses of action).’” Halfacree and Murdoch engaged different perspectives on the countryside, Halfacree, in order to “re-engage with ideas of

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the differentiated countryside…through the Lefebvrian notions of the production of space” and Murdoch “via a network sociology developed from Deleuze and Latour.”

For example, in 2006, Halfacree conceptualized a geometric model as a way to understand the rural in social constructivist thinking. The three points on the triangle of rural space are “representations of the rural,” “lives of the rural,” and “rural locality.” In this way, Halfacree asserted that the physical space (rural locality), signs, symbols, and concepts (representations of the rural), and accounts of rural residents (lives of the rural), converge, overlap and produce what is understood to be “rural space.” Using this conceptual framework, Woods considered the rural space across multiple disciplines under eight approaches: imagining, exploiting, consuming, developing, living, performing, regulating, and remaking.

Echoes of Woods’ formulation can be heard in Morse, et al., who find that the rural Vermont landscape is “performed.”: “the stage is…terrain. The props are tools, machines and farmhouses. The actors include laboring landowners, recreating neighbors, growing forests, a changing economy, and tourism ads.”


26 Woods, Rural, 9-11.

27 Woods, Rural, 13-14.

As rural theoreticians reconsider the relevancy of political economic approaches to studying the rural, thinkers on commodification assert that Baudrillard’s concept of simulacra applies to our “post-modern cybernetic society…in which exchange is carried out at the level of signs, images and information, and in which commodification is in an abstract sense the absorption of the object into the image so as to allow exchange to take place in semiotic form.”

Ultimately, “the commodity is eclipsed by the sign, which can be unrelated to the reality of the commodified object altogether.”

(This may be what Lopez and Schama had in mind when they argue that metaphor can be taken too far—discussed in Chapter 3.) With this in mind, does an approach couched in the language of political economy, that of commodity exchange, diminish in importance the notion of the non-agri-rural as a valid understanding of a reality of the rural, worth academic focus? Rural as simulacrum may be an understanding based on one exchange of the commodified rural, but is it true that while what I will call non-agri-rural is certainly commodified (a situation which is increasing), must it be true that non-agri-rural is ONLY that which is represented, exchanged, reproduced, bought, and sold? Further, is the rural only imagined? For Cloke

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\text{Rural life reflects at one and the same time the boundlessness of the imagined landscape and community and the restrictiveness of access to the material and cultural conditions which permit the imagined to be lived out other than in imagined form.}^{31}
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\[29\] Cloke, et al., *Writing the Rural*, 169.

\[30\] Cloke, et al., *Writing the Rural*, 170.

\[31\] Cloke, et al., *Writing the Rural*, 171-172.
This perspective is likely true for many rural inhabitants in Western nations, but not all, and could reflect the fact of Cloke’s necessarily British experience with the rural, different from the “boundless” landscape prevalent in parts of the United States that is home to the very “material and cultural conditions” required for the imagined to be lived in reality.\textsuperscript{32}

Despite his otherwise aforementioned commodity/consumption-focused framework of analysis, Woods aforementioned framework, based on Halfacree, does include a consideration of “embodied rural consumption” that suggests a different relationship with the nature aspect of the rural by its inhabitants or those who physically immerse themselves in it, over time.

’He is not merely a spectator of the panorama of nature, but a participator in it. He experiences the country he passes through, --tastes it, feels it, absorbs it…Limbs and lungs are working hard in a haptic…engagement with nature-matter. Walkers…find themselves in such a close, visual, tactile and sonorous relation with the earth, the ground, mud, stinging vegetation…encounters with elemental configurations of land, sea and sky are…more a seeing-with’.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{32} Cloke discusses rural as imagined landscape, imagined because from the British perspective, rural is an ideal based on something that in England, practically speaking, either existed in a partly idealized past, or never was a true representation of rural as lived by its inhabitants (economically disadvantaged farmers and others)—the “rural idyll,” a rural that includes principally material conditions in the form that gives the sense of open, wild, and if not boundless, fewer boundaries. I posit here that it is, in fact, “wilderness,” and not just wilderness, but the presence of vast physical space in the United States as a component of both agri- and non-agri-rural, that provides the material and cultural conditions for Cloke’s otherwise “imagined” rural to be lived out. The word boundless, used here, describes the physical as well as the mental construct engaged in contemplation and experience of vast, rural (sparsely populated) places.

\textsuperscript{33} Woods, \textit{Rural}, 120-121.
Indeed, in order to explore how engagement with rural places creates meaning, recent rural researchers “have focused on activities such as walking (Edensor, 2010; Powell, 2010; Wylie, 2005; Ingold, 2011), farming (Carolan, 2008), wilderness rescue training (Yarwood, 2012), and angling (Eden and Bear, 2011).”

Gibson, the founder of ecological psychology, argued that humans “perceive…not from a fixed point but along…a ‘path of observation.’…what we perceive must, at least in part, depend on how we move.”

While seemingly more broadly interpretive, a preponderance of these approaches remains consistently anthropocentric and retains strong vestiges of the political economic approach centered on commodification and consumption—the rural is constituent of human action, rather than the human being acted upon. (Interestingly, in 1948 in “The Land Ethic,” Leopold argued “[t]he fallacy the economic determinists have tied around our collective neck, and which we now need to cast off, is the belief that economics determines all land-use. This is simply not true.”) I think his exhortation also applies

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to influence of Marxist traditions in postmodern thought regarding the rural. “Marx seized upon the notion of alienation as a diagnosis of social ills . . . [as capitalism grew] [f]or many nineteenth century social critics—and most famously for Marx—capitalism brought material progress to a few at the price of alienation and exploitation of the many.”

The “alienation” brought about by capitalism, then, was the root of social ills. “The truth of knowledge for critical theorists lies not as a mirror or representation of things as they are, but rather in the extent to which it makes the world more intelligible to people and enables them to act in less constrained ways.” [my emphasis] Indeed, Somerville, Halfacree and Bosworth conclude “…both the urban and the rural as we know them today have been largely created by capitalism…and need to be understood, first, in this way.”

However, regarding the Western Marxism developed in the Frankfurt School, Foucault noted that the explanation of historical events “that assumed the a priori importance of transformations in the economic structure…ignored the multiple contingencies and practices that constituted historic events.”

Even less explored in academic rural theory is the question about underlying bias against the rural

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in Marxist theory, and how that bias may unconsciously shape rural political economic theory of today. “Socialist policies towards rural areas were informed by Karl Marx’s characterization of the ‘idiocy of rural life’, by which he meant the persistence of superstition and traditional authority in rural society.”

It could be argued that political economy-centered/lensed analyses of rural communities ignored, under-emphasized, and subsequently under-valued social and cultural norms and the knowledge toward emancipation those aspects of rurality provide.

As the first decade of the twenty-first century was drawing to a close, actor-network theory, among other hybrid and network-based theories, were found somewhat inadequate to the task. Most recently, “efforts to ‘capture bodily actions and impulses, emotions and affective relations’ (Thrift, 2007) present ongoing challenges to rural studies scholars,” and some have proposed a practice of “‘theoretical pluralism’ in constructing more complex and multi-faceted accounts of the changing countryside.”

Through denying the capacity of any one critical perspective to adequately portray spatial complexity, and rejecting the premise that any one methodology can sufficiently unpack this complexity, minor theory is intent on changing theory and practice simultaneously and in a way that can be ‘conjoined with the critical and transformative concerns of Marxism, feminism, antiracism, and queer theory’

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43 Importantly, Paul Cloke notes in his own progress as a rural geographer, the realization that “It seemed that however sensitively the political economy version of rural change was written, taking full account for example of the effects of locality, history of social composition and the like, the charge of being reductionist always had some validity in the non-compliance of individual places and communities to more general theoretical expectations.” Cloke, et al., *Writing the Rural*, 161.

44 Heley and Jones, “Relational rurals,” 211.
and in a form that can ‘pry apart conventional geographies and produce renegade
cartographies of change.’

Multi-theory engagement and application may even include reconsidering seemingly
“outdated” but persistent structures of rurality. In a recent study on the British notion of
the parish as a valid contemporary “organising principle in rural communities,” Herron,
et al., observe that “[t]he parish, it seems, still suggests locally recognisable ties of space,
social dependence, responsibility and identity – at a human scale . . . ‘the parish, that
‘indefinable territory to which we feel we belong, which we have the measure of’.”

And while all parishes are not rural, “in rural locations the identification with a particular
parish may be much more apparent,” primarily due to affiliation with a bounded, separate
geographic space not characteristic of urban parishes, but also because these places are
and have been places where people “knew each other as persons as well as actors in
particular roles; social relations where therefore characteristically many-stranded’
(Obelkevich, 1976).”

Reflecting on the trajectory of contemporary rural studies (as of 2014), Paniagua
notes the impact of the popularity of mobility as a framework for analysis, resulting in a
strong focus on “counter-urbanisation, gentrification, lifestyle migration and rural place
marketing, with emphasis on the opportunities of social change in the rural world

45 Heley and Jones, “Relational rurals,” 213.

46 Rebecca Herron, Jennifer Jackson, and Karen Johnson, “Rural parishes and
community organisation,” in Interpreting Rurality: Multidisciplinary approaches, eds. Gary

and proposes that debates over analysis of rurality have “reached a crossroads,” with one path turning back to “a combined analysis of material realities and the rigorous subjectivity of qualitative studies (Crang, 2005),” and a second, moving “forwards based on studies of nonrepresentational worlds, emotions and affections (Riley, 2011).” Paniagua observes “[i]t is evident that the same material substrate does not always result in the same identity or morality, nor do changes in it follow the same temporal rhythms,” and cautions against the trap of “over-generalisation” in the study of rurality.49

Differences in Understanding the Rural—the United States and the United Kingdom

Due to the preeminence and longevity of British scholarship of the rural, it is important to make distinctions when it comes to certain concepts that have emerged over the years, not the least of which is the concept of the “rural idyll.” British scholarship of the rural has significant relevance for and application to the agri-rural in the United States, especially in its mature and comprehensive scholarship based in political economic theories. The agri-rural, and sometimes urbanocentric flavor of British rural studies requires an examination of some underlying assumptions or simply some re-evaluation, when applying British-based rural theory and scholarship to the non-agri-rural


49 Paniagua, “Rurality, identity and morality,” 49, 57.
in the United States. Hildyard recounts that Romanticism emerged at “the peak of the parliamentary enclosure movement” and expressed a search for “a deeper meaning in Nature” than that perceived in the British agri-rural (by urban elites) as a “mere background to human activity.” Further, some poets (educated urban dwellers) of the period expressed “anti-pastoral” sentiment, offering “more realistic and often bitter representations of country life.” However, it was the Victorian depictions of the rural as a place of “harmony and happy poverty” in nature poetry, that survived throughout the twentieth century promulgating a preference and respect/admiration/reverence for the agri-rural and the pastoral in the UK. It is this centuries-long misrepresentation of rural life in the UK, claim leading twenty-first century British scholars of the rural, that has “influenced the denial of the existence of rural deprivation by British policy-makers” by obscuring “the physical, social and political” aspects of “rural deprivation.” Despite these contentions, the preference for a distinct, pastoral (admittedly often imagined) rural idyll persists in the UK. In her study of representations of rural landscape in British cinematography of the 1980s and 1990s, Cardwell asserts as artifice attempts to delineate


51 Hildyard, “A case study in literary construction of the rural idyll,” 134.


landscape “shaped by centuries of farming, coppicing, enclosure, and so on…with the wild, free, “natural” landscape…valorizing the second over the first…[because] ‘Landscape represents traditionally the domain of nature as opposed to culture. It also represents what human understanding and skill have done over time to improve and embellish nature.’”

In her exposition on writing about the rural idyll in the UK, Parry states “[a] rural landscape is one of domesticated nature…rurality is an intermediate zone between urbanness, as dense human land occupation, and wilderness as an absence of human occupation…” These observations reveal a reluctance to privilege the non-agri-rural above the agri-rural. As noted, British rural researchers have explored many aspects of the rural. However, in considering the nature of what defines rural, and British thought related to the place-experience of inhabited solitude, the exploration of the “rural idyll” provides helpful background.

Etymologically, the Latin word for country, *rus*, is the origin of rural, and idyll “‘means little picture.’” The notion of the rural idyll, a portrayal of the countryside targeted to an urban audience, can be traced back to pastoral poetry penned by Greek poet


Theocritus in the second century B.C., through writings of Virgil and Horace, and subsequently resurfacing in the Renaissance “as part of the larger humanist rediscovery of classical thought and culture.” 57 The incorporation of Romanticism into the understanding of the rural idyll indeed expanded the notion to encompass more than a “mere background to human activity.” 58 Cloke does note the importance of recognizing the contradiction between strict economic decisions and feelings of belonging and identity and quality of life found in some rural communities (largely restricted to rural communities, and not all, in Western Europe and Canada and the United States). More specifically, he asserts (writing 25 years ago), regarding the rural idyll “‘Much more needs to be known about the degree to which it is important in representations of the rural; the varying nature of idyll; the relative significance of ‘pro-rural’ factors as opposed to anti-urban factors; and so on.” “I have become increasingly interested in unpacking the notion of different experiences of different rural idylls.” 59 Cloke also emphasizes the growing validity of ethnographic research and including lay voices in research routing “academic discourses through lay discourses.” 60

The scope and scale of British studies on rurality differ somewhat from what is considered, for policy purposes, rural in the United States, due primarily to differences in

57 Hildyard, “A case study in the literary construction of the rural idyll,” 132-133.
58 Hildyard, “A case study in the literary construction of the rural idyll,” 134.
59 Cloke, et al., Writing the Rural, 176.
60 Cloke, et al., Writing the Rural, 185.
geographic size and differences in government history and policy with regard to the rural. Consequently, generalizations of the rural are sometimes made by UK researchers that do not apply to all rural settings in the United States. In particular, the British notion of the “rural idyll” cannot necessarily be applied to some rural areas in the United States, largely because of the differences in historic patterns of settlement and development of land in the United States. It follows then, that employing a particularly British understanding of the “rural idyll” universally and as a foundation for analysis of other rural elements, may not be sufficient for analysis of the different rural places and experiences in the United States. In his essay, “Reinventing Common Nature” in Uncommon Ground, Kenneth Olwig notes of British national parks today that

They are not…pastoral landscapes preserved from evidence of human labor, but working agrarian landscapes. Unlike their American counterparts, they tend to be conserved precisely because of their evidence of ancient habitation and stewardship, and it is widely recognized that the landscape must continue to be worked by the local community if it is to exist.61

The enclosure movement of fifteenth century England resulted in the fencing off of public land for private interests and, by the middle of the nineteenth century, “almost five million acres were transferred to private ownership, one acre in every seven.”62 In short,

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the forests in England (and in Western Europe) have been managed at some level for a millennia. As Schama details, when William the Conqueror arrived in England in 1066, no more than 15 percent of English territory would have been wooded...By the time of the Anglo Saxon kings...the essential familiar pattern of the English countryside—broad tracts of cultivated field and pasture punctuated with copses and limited stands of trees—had already been established.63

Looking more broadly at the European continent, by the 1700s, the woods in present day Germany were being logged, and German geographers responded by extolling places like the Black Forest “not as barren wilderness but as the place where the finest beef cattle...were raised.”64 The forests were “reimagined as domesticated woodlands, intersected by arable land and orchards...places of health and wealth.”65

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63 Schama, Landscape and Memory, 142. “...in the early Middle Ages...[h]ardwoods were cut at regular twelve-year intervals four to six feet from the ground, sufficiently high to prevent deer from eating the new shoots. The base “stool” would then be left to regenerate itself rapidly into the kind of light timber that could be used to meet all manner of essential needs: fencing, wattling, tools and implements.” Schama, Landscape and Memory, 143.

64 Schama, Landscape and Memory, 96.

65 However, Schama later writes of the forest regulations drafted by Renaissance princes in the 1700s to protect coveted hunting grounds and the inadvertent protection accorded some forest land in Germany due to the “fragmentation into countless principalities” that prevented the possibility of a countrywide economic deforestation plan. Schama, Landscape and Memory, 114. The results of protected hunting grounds 300 years ago is evident in the land around the small village of Waldenbuch in Baden Württemberg (BW) where we lived for three years between 2015 and 2018. Local legend holds that due to restrictions implemented by the local nobility in the 1800s, rail lines were not allowed to be constructed through the valley (the noise from trains would disturb the deer population and consequently ruin the hunting); however, the author could find no formal history supporting this contention, only that a short-lived rail line through the valley existed from the late 1800s to the early-mid 1900s. Today, the area boasts one of the larger natural wooded parks in BW, between the metropolis of Stuttgart and the smaller university city of Tubingen. Once hunting grounds of the Dukes of Württemberg now play forested idyll host to walkers, cyclists, runners, and horseback riders in a network of 10s of kilometers of trails and forest roads.
Schama describes the forests of Germany (or what was left of them) at the turn of the eighteenth century.

For what little of the mixed hardwood stands had survived the Thirty Years’ War and the Wars of the North at the end of the seventeenth century had been laid waste by greedy and prodigal princelings, eager to cash in on the demands for naval timber from the Atlantic and Baltic powers, England, France, and the Dutch republic.⁶⁶

The Odenwald (the area between the Main and Neckar Rivers in western Germany) was cleared, turned to farmland, and then replanted with conifers in the 1800s. In the 1980s, the German government determined that this region, together with the Bayerischer Wald and Schwartzwald “had suffered dreadfully during the heyday of uncontrolled industrialism.”⁶⁷ The forests in Central Europe today are only two-three hundred years old.⁶⁸ Contemporary thinkers on the future of the mountain rural in Europe (in this case Scotland, France, Norway, Switzerland, Slovakia, and Greece) assert that Europe’s mountain areas are complicated places. Important reserves of biodiversity and natural beauty, they are also the home to several million people. The linking factor here is agriculture, low intensive farming systems giving rise to the extensive areas of semi-natural and cultural landscapes of great diversity, due to the natural, socio-economic and cultural variations throughout Europe.⁶⁹

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⁶⁷ Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 120.


In 2006, British geographer David Bell identified three types of rural idyll: pastoral farmscapes, natural wildscapes, and sporting adventurescapes. The farmscape envisions a “traditional agricultural landscape (not modern agribusiness), the wildscape portrays the countryside as sublime wilderness; pre-cultural, pre-human and untamed,” and adventurescapes are rural as “adventure playground, drawing on wilderness motives but adding a focus on physical endurance and ‘limit experiences.’”^70 Parry observes that

’[w]ilderness’ as a state of being is often considered to be irrelevant to England’s densely populated, heavily farmed and altered landscapes…the idea of wilderness nevertheless persists variously in the imagination on a scale from an ideal condition of pure nature to land which has yet to be developed – a condition Heidegger termed ‘standing reserve.’^71

Clearly, recent thinking on the British notion of the rural idyll reflects progress toward a more nuanced definition: “There are, in practice, many different rural idylls, with different cultural and moral emphases and different pictoral representations.”^72 The authors of a 2012 study on the subject of “local” food and rural product branding in Ireland note that critical commentators on the notion of the rural idyll assert that the “‘relic’” rural processes upon which this notion is based, are not actually local but in fact, and due largely to globalization, “have become increasingly blurred and fuzzy and are often associated with counter-urbanisation, the dilution of ‘local’ stakeholder networks


^71 Parry, “Pits, pylons and posts,” 120, footnote 3. This Heideggerian notion of a “standing reserve” supports the contention that Heidegger ultimately understood nature to be a resource for human use and exploitation.

and trust, and the commodification of the ‘local’ (Yarwood 2005; Wilson, 2007).” This may reflect an urban bias. This notion of a “relic rural” arguably held by urbanites may indeed exist and be a manifestation of globalization, but these so-called “relic rural processes” may be decidedly more complex and illuminate truths about rural experiences. Signs, in the Baudrillardian formulation of semiotics, in certain circumstances may not (ever?) supersede that which they are intended to represent.

One notable exception to the historical, enclosure-conceptual understanding of rural in the UK is that of the Scottish rural, particularly the Scottish highlands. As Nan Shepherd’s (Chapter Three) writings attest, the Scottish highlands represent the closest approximation to the large tracts of largely unmodified/untamed landscape identified as Wilderness in the United States. Schiller contrasted the “‘inspiring disorder of a natural landscape’” and the “‘insipid regularity of a French garden…’” extolling “‘Scotland’s wild cataracts and misty mountain ranges’” over “‘the straight lines of Holland’s bitter, patient victory over the most stubborn of the elements.’” Writing about the prevalence of Scottish films centered on the rural highlands, James notes that the rural “highland scenery represents a powerful discourse of national identity,” including rural spaces that are “enchanted places, land and sea, and wilderness.” In fact, in the early nineteenth


75 Annie James Morgan, “Enchanted Places, Land and Sea, and Wilderness: Scottish Highland Landscape and Identity in Cinema,” in Representing the Rural: Space, Place, and
century, Scotland was promoted as “the last great wilderness,” of the newly-established Kingdom of Great Britain, predecessor to the United Kingdom of today.

**Government Policy and the Rural**

Some of the difficulty in studying rurality is settling on parameters within which to base research, due to the fact that different federal departments in the United States define rural differently. According to the General Accounting Office, the three primary Federal Agencies and/or Offices and/or Departments whose definitions of rural serve as standards for others across the government are the U.S. Census Bureau, the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service (USDA ERS)\(^76\).

The U.S. Census Bureau defines rural as “any population, housing, or territory NOT in an urban area.”\(^77\) To better explain their standards, the Census Bureau notes that in order to understand its definition of rural, it is essential to understand the history of definitions of urban in the United States. In the late 1800s, urban was defined as incorporated places with minimum populations of 4,000 and 8,000, and in 1910, the

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Census Bureau established its first official definition of urban: incorporated places with minimum populations of 2,500. In 1900, rural residents constituted 60.4 percent of the population. After 1940, the Census bureau designated as urban, “urbanized areas of 50,000 or more” and those places outside of urban areas with populations of 2,500 or more.\textsuperscript{78} In the 1950s, the rural population had fallen to 36 percent of the population; in 2000, rural residents constituted a mere 21 percent of the U.S. population; and in 2010, just 19.3 percent of the population of the United States was considered rural. For the 2000 Census, the Bureau made changes to the definitions of urban to account for “densely settled areas adjacent to small towns,” and it added “urban clusters” in order to extend the concept of an urbanized area “to smaller concentrations of population.”\textsuperscript{79}

Further, most rural communities in the United States are located around urban areas. A 2010 map of rural population density shows the sparsest population density west of the Missouri River in the continental United States, save the obvious population centers of the Great Plains, Southwest, West Coast and Intermountain West. Large agricultural tracts in the Great Plains, but even greater holdings of Federal land in the Intermountain West, and Alaska, are the least-densely populated areas in the nation.\textsuperscript{80} In fact, a mere 10 percent of the population in the West region (Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, and West to the Pacific Ocean, including Alaska and Hawaii) are designated as

\textsuperscript{78} U.S. Census Bureau, “Rural America.”

\textsuperscript{79} U.S. Census Bureau, “Rural America.”

\textsuperscript{80} U.S. Census Bureau, “Rural America.”
living in rural areas. Indeed, these geographic spaces of high plains and plateaus, mountain deserts, and forests are the places in the United States most likely to be characterized as inhabited solitude. As detailed below, a minority of the U.S. population (less than two percent) has, if not ownership, then proximal responsibility for and primary phenomenological experience (livelihood, recreation, daily interaction) with just over 27 percent of the land in the United States.\textsuperscript{82}

In its most recent update, in 2010, OMB, like the Census Bureau, defines what is urban, and leaves the definition of rural to that that is not definitionally urban. OMB designates “Metropolitan Statistical Areas” as those regions with “at least one urbanized area of 50,000 or more population, plus adjacent territory that has a high degree of social and economic integration with the core as measured by commuting ties.”\textsuperscript{83} “Micropolitan Statistical Areas have at least one urban cluster of at least 10,000 but less than 50,000 people, plus adjacent territory that has a high degree of social and economic integration with the core as measured by commuting ties.”\textsuperscript{84} Further, OMB also created a special designation, pertaining only to six New England states, called the New England

\textsuperscript{81} U.S. Census Bureau, “Rural America.”

\textsuperscript{82} Michael Ratcliffe, Charlynn Burd, Kelly Holder, and Alison Fields, “Defining Rural at the U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey and Geography Brief,” United States Census Bureau, December 2016, 7, https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/reference/ua/Defining_Rural.pdf (accessed May 10, 2019); author’s additional research on county square miles, according to U.S. counties’ Wiki pages.


\textsuperscript{84} White House Office of Management and Budget, “OMB Bulletin NO. 13-01,” 2.
City and Town Areas (NECTAs), “in view of the importance of cities and towns in New England.”\textsuperscript{85} Together, metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas compose 94 percent of the U.S. population; in terms of geographic distribution, of the 3,143 counties in the United States, these statistical areas encompass 1,808 counties, leaving six percent of the population of the United States spread across 1,335 counties.\textsuperscript{86} A map of these areas provides a different but key perspective to population distribution in rural America, especially the area referenced in the preceding Census Bureau discussion (the Dakotas south to central Texas and west to the Pacific, Alaska, and Hawaii). The inclusion of commuting ties into the definition reveals a better glimpse of the human footprint, so to speak, across these otherwise sparsely populated areas. We see from information from the 2013 census bureau that even areas of vast federal landholdings contain populations that commute to larger urban cores for work.\textsuperscript{87} The remaining areas, exclusive of those in agricultural production, and including grasslands, high plateaus, high desert, and forests are located primarily in Montana and Alaska, but also encompass significant areas of Idaho and Utah.

In 2016, the Census Bureau divided the counties in the United States into three categories, based on 2010 Census information: “mostly urban” (less than half of the


\textsuperscript{87} “Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas of the United States and Puerto Rico, February 2013” Source of Map: U.S. Census Bureau.
county residents lived in rural areas), “mostly rural” (half to 99.9 percent of county residents lived in rural areas), and “completely rural” (all county residents lived in rural areas).\(^88\) Using these parameters, the authors considered age, education, relationships, and socio-economic status. The data comparison revealed that “[w]hat we can see from these comparisons is that rural does not imply a single type of community.”\(^89\) Additional analysis of the data and county geographic area reveals that in 2010, the 704 100 percent rural counties in the United States were home to 1.7 percent of the entire U.S. population, and those counties contained 27.4 percent of the total land and water area of the United States.\(^90\)

The USDA ERS recognizes both the Census Bureau definitions and those of OMB of urban as delineators for determining what is rural. Taking the fencepost position, USDA advises that “the choice of a rural definition should be based on the purpose of the application, whether that application is for research, policy analysis, or

\(^{88}\) Kelly Ann Holder, Alison Fields, Daphne Lofquist, “Rurality Matters,” 8 December 2016, United States Census Bureau, [https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/randomsamplings/2016/12/rurality_matters.html](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/randomsamplings/2016/12/rurality_matters.html) (accessed May 7, 2019); “Rural is defined as all population, housing, and territory not included within an urbanized area or urban cluster. [Urban clusters contain 2,500 to 50,000 people; urban areas contain 50,000 or more people.] As a result, the rural portion of the United States encompasses a wide variety of settlements, from densely settled small towns and “large-lot” housing sub-divisions on the fringes of urban areas, to more sparsely populated and remote areas.” Ratcliffe, et al., “Defining Rural,” 7.

\(^{89}\) Holder, et al., “Rurality Matters.”

\(^{90}\) Ratcliffe, et al., “Defining Rural,” 6, and the author’s computation of the square miles of each of the 704 counties, using Wiki County Pages, (accessed May 10, 2019).
program implementation.” For USDA, definitions of rural ultimately rest upon considerations of land use for production, and implications for the populations involved in that production.

In U.S. public policy, then, a preponderance of the focus on rural issues is on the agri-rural (places inhabited by people engaged in agricultural production) and attendant policy issues with a more recent, but smaller, emphasis on key issues in rural development, notably broadband (as a component of broader economic development) and healthcare. The $867 billion 2018 U.S. Farm Bill provides a comprehensive picture of policy foci and fiscal allocation for the rural United States. Unsurprisingly, ten of the twelve titles in the legislation explicitly or implicitly concern agricultural production. The Forestry Title addresses production and conservation of forests, and the Rural Development Title seeks to enhance current economic and health vitality in rural communities. In its recommendations to Congress generated by its “Special Task Force on Rural America,” the Blue Dog Coalition (official Democratic caucus in the U.S.

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92 Approximately every five years, the U.S. Congress passes an updated version of the Farm Bill, which serves as the policy and authorizing legislation concerning agriculture (including trade, credit, energy, crop insurance), nutrition, conservation, and forestry, and rural development. (H.R. 2, “The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, https://www.congress.gov/115/bills/hr2/BILLS-115hr2enr.pdf (accessed April 10, 2019). The legislation was first passed in 1933 as the Agriculture Adjustment Act.

House of Representatives) declared five priorities in 2018, including improving the rural economy, greater access to affordable healthcare, increasing opportunities for younger workers, linking rural businesses to global markets, and better assisting veterans in rural areas.  

As noted, public policy discussions of the rural in recent decades have focused primarily on improved access to healthcare and broadband connectivity. The tragedy of opioid addiction has been added to the chief areas of concern for rural communities as well. Accordingly, many researchers have concentrated their efforts in these key areas, which are critical to rural economies and the health and well-being of rural residents. As a non-scientific example, my daily Google news alert using the terms “rural” and “identity” over a period of six months, consistently featured 9-10 articles (only 10 are sent in the daily email) that covered rural healthcare, broadband, economic issues, and drug addiction. Most articles were from U.S. news sources; however, some articles were sourced in the UK, Australia, Europe, New Zealand, and the African Continent. Further, in the United States (and to a lesser degree in the UK and France), the news media, perhaps in its ongoing attempt to explain in simple, nonetheless misleading terms, the rise of populist candidates, has over-emphasized and thus enlarged and distorted the idea of

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the “urban-rural divide,” so much so that upon closer examination, this characterization covers a surprisingly narrow explicatory range; as noted in the introduction, some of the broad themes in these discussions are significantly more nuanced when the data emerges and is subject to thoughtful apolitical analysis. In 2018, for example, Oregon State and Penn State researchers found that intergenerational upward economic mobility of low-income children was greater in rural areas than in urban areas, and high school dropout rates were associated more negatively with upward economic mobility in urban than in rural settings. At the same time, children from urban single-mother households had better upward economic mobility than in rural single-mother households. These trends have left other aspects to rurality, especially those aspects that serve as the foundation for rural identity, under-examined.

In September 2018, a poll was conducted prior to a statewide symposium on the future of rural Texas. Texas is statistically somewhat similar to the United States when considering rural/urban population distribution: Less than 15 percent of the population is rural, but 172 of 254 counties are designated as rural.

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96 Ross Ramsey, “They wish there were more jobs, but rural Texans are happy where they are, poll finds,” The Texas Tribune, November 13, 2018, https://www.texastribune.org/2018/11/13/wish-more-jobs-rural-texans-happy-where-they-are/ (accessed November 15, 2018).
designated rural areas were interviewed. When asked the open-ended question, “What do you like most about the place where you live?” a majority (34 percent) of respondents said simply that it was rural. The responses regarding neighbors/community and peaceful/quiet garnered the next-highest percentages at 17 and 13 percent, respectively. The rest of the responses included town size, location, familiarity, outdoor activities, safety, scenery, cost of living, education, family around, local government, weather, other, and don’t know/none. The survey broke down the open-ended questions by demographics, revealing, in the case of the question about what people liked most about where they lived (remembering that all respondents lived in rural areas), that the response “rural” was relatively consistent (varying only by a few percentage points) across race/ethnicity demographics, gender, ages 30 and up, college/no college, and varied only by 7 percentage points for incomes below and above $40K. Also, the length of time of residence in the rural area (less than five years; five-20 years; over 20 years) showed little variance as well, as did this response among those who said religion was important and

97 Demographically, approximately the same number (30 percent) had a high school diploma or some college; 24 percent had a college degree and 10 percent had a post-graduate degree. Of the 70 percent that chose to answer the household income question, 33 percent made less than $40K and 39 percent made over $40K. Sixty percent of respondents were white, 30 percent were Hispanic, and less than 10 percent were Black/African American. Sixty-nine percent said religion was “extremely important in their lives, and the same percentage said they attended church at frequencies of more than once a week to a few times a month. James Henson and Joshua Blank, “The 2018 Future of Rural Texas Poll,” Strategic Research Associates, LLC, Principals James Henson, PhD and Joshua Blank, PhD, Austin, Texas, SRATEXLLC@gmail.com, October 24, 2018, 24-25.


those who said religion was not important. It seems, therefore, that “rural” is a notion that is something people agree upon regardless of many demographic factors; however, the challenge remains: What does rural mean? Can it be clearly defined? Bell, Lloyd, and Vatovec address this “ideal” of the rural in their discussion of population density as a determinate of rurality. “…we have to come up with some way to draw the boundary that we will use to measure density – we have to come up with some categorical fix – and thus the material is always dependent upon the ideal.” And, I would add, the ideal is equally dependent on the material.

**On the Urban Bias**

Western academic tradition, reflecting the society and history of its origins, has been unavoidably and often unabashedly biased toward the urban. Although the food and raw natural resources required by cities for their survival and flourishing are overwhelmingly produced in rural places, the rural has been categorically perceived and defined as all that is not urban. This urban bias ranges from the benign to the malignant. On the benign end, it is evident in un- or ill-examined assumptions. “[r]ural areas are understood to be space into which cities expand”, “not as space already integral to the functioning of the system.” Abram goes so far as to say that ancient urbanization of many human populations, and the attendant philosophical tradition that emerged in the

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101 Thomas, et al., *Critical Rural Theory*, 64.
population centers of Greece and Rome, are conclusive evidence of humankind’s “withdrawal from direct participation with the natural landscape.”\textsuperscript{102} The emergence of atomic theory in the fifth century reflected a broader urban Greek conceptualization of a world that was “profoundly disconnected,” and one in which individuals were “utterly independent of one another...Atomism grounded an ontology that removes relation.”\textsuperscript{103} While it may not be that starkly divided, as evidenced by the possibility of Socrates’ more nuanced understanding of the relationship between man and nature, Worthy continues: “Plato’s metaphysics of transcendence” amplified the division of people from nature in ancient Greece: While those involved in agricultural production needed to remain familiar with nature’s processes, “most elite decision-makers and much of the public could remain somewhat innocent of the complex of natural processes of the natural world.”\textsuperscript{104} Mirrors of the soul of culture, poets, novelists, and philosophers over the millennia from Virgil, Homer, early Christian theologians, and on through the Renaissance, Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, the World Wars, to contemporary writers, record the perpetual rural-urban dialectic. Tuan presents an example of this tension in the writings of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. “Tolstoy equates life in the country


\textsuperscript{104} Worthy, “Divorce from Nature?” 45.
with the good life…Dostoevsky, by contrast, is wholly immersed in the city. The city
may be inferno but salvation does not lie in the land; it can be found only in the Kingdom
of God.” Tuan also finds this tension among American contemporaries, citing the
differing representations of the city by T.S. Eliot, Carl Sandburg, and E.E. Cummings.
“Eliot’s are consistently grim, sometimes sordid…Sandburg’s Chicago is full of gloating
affirmations…Cummings …concentrates on the telling detail but his urban images are
more kindly.” In his discussion of the 1960s literati of the central California Coast and
the Big Sur area in particular, Wallace writes “[Jack] London’s and [Henry] Miller’s
books have a universal theme: the attempt to escape an urban existence that degraded and
corrupted to find a more independent, peaceful life,” but,

[n]either London nor Miller stayed at Big Sur [both returned to the large cities in
California]…They could not break with a civilization that defined them…not
even a near-perfect climate and a landscape of surpassing grandeur could keep
them where sea birds and trees were their main audience.

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105 Yi-fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and
Values*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 49. Reflecting the nature of
scholarship and differences in interpretation, Dostoevsky is also cited by another scholar, but
as a proponent of the sacredness of the natural world and our stewardship responsibility to
it. (From *The Brothers Karamazov*) “Love all God’s creation, the whole of it and every grain
of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light. Love the animals, love the plants, love
everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things.” John
Chryssavgis, “The Face of God in the World: Insights from the Orthodox Christian

106 Tuan, *Topophilia*, 50.

Press, 1984), 35.
Raban discusses the “collision” of world views between British colonialists and natives of Vancouver, BC in the late eighteenth century, observing that the colonialists “couldn’t grasp that for Indians the water was a place” instead, “they viewed the sea as a medium of access to the all-important land.” In a similar fashion, some urban-led wilderness preservation organizations see certain sparsely-populated rural land as wild space, whereas the rural residents of those places view them as places in which they live and know as deeply as the urbanite lives in and knows the city. And these biases are not restricted to the objects of study; sometimes, as noted later in Cronon’s case, scholars (hopefully unwittingly) themselves convey urban bias through word choice and in pursuit of creating a narrative from whence to construct a sound argument. In a recent study of English historical perspectives on the rural, (somewhat ironically, considering the purpose of his study) Walker asserts that “rural inhabitants might have difficulty recognizing the representation of the landscape in which they have lived and worked,” due to its urban portrayal as a “place of refuge” and “imaginary landscape.” To the contrary, many rural residents, perhaps a preponderance, across generations, as noted already in this study, continue to live in the rural precisely because of a (very real) landscape that provides refuge from the city.

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Sociologists from Karl Marx and fellow German Ferdinand Tönnies to others throughout the majority of the twentieth century repeatedly compared rurality “collective, tradition-bound, and largely agricultural” (or less complimentary terms, i.e. Marx’s rural as a place of “‘idiocy’”) with the inherently superior urban, a place that promotes “individualism, innovation, and a variety of economic activities.”¹¹⁰ And these sentiments only reflected existing biases in the greater society, prevalent for millennia, dating back to the establishment of city-states in Mesopotamia in approximately 4000, BC, as discussed previously.¹¹¹ Bell, et al., point out that even in the postmodern study of mobility, “[t]he image one gets reading most mobilities research is the familiar one of urbanism and all its associations with capital, technology and globalization, flowing out and over a passive rural, washing it steadily away.”¹¹² Clearly, over the centuries, the landscape, analysis, promotion, and paradigms of the rural in Western culture, as everything “not urban,” has a pervasive history that continues today. Further, historical contempt for the rural by the monied classes is evident in the cultural descendants of this heritage today, most glaringly in current urban-rural divide debates and criticisms of the alleged backward nature of rural inhabitants in American politics, which has gained even greater currency since the 2016 U.S. presidential election.¹¹³


¹¹³ “Even William James, an open-minded philosopher, caught himself entertaining ill thoughts of the unkempt farms that belonged to the pioneers of North Carolina”, however, “[u]pon reflection he concluded that his view as someone merely passing through was
Due to population density and the concomitant myriad economic and social interactions in the urban/suburban environment, sociological, cultural, anthropological and human geographical research topics are plentiful, and arguably, critical for public administration. However, by-products of a primary academic literature focus on the urban and suburban can reinforce oppositional biases of the rural. “…most popular culture is predicated on ‘urbanormativity:’ the assumption that the institutions and conditions found in metropolitan areas are ‘normal.’ It is normal to live in a place with art museums, shopping malls, professional sports teams, universities…” The rural is seen as inconsistent with normal—lacking these institutions. Even suburbanization prioritizes urban values over those of the rural. In her study of the suburbanization of three rural towns in Illinois, Salamon finds that

[O]ur enduring national vision of arcadia—a small-town way of life in a rural landscape—has newcomers refashioning rural communities into suburban enclaves for small cities…potentially [diminishing] the national diversity of small towns by eventual homogenization of those qualities natives value as special: public spaces that confer a unique place identity; strong ties that form overlapping, supportive social networks; rich social resources; and taken-for-granted relationships that cross generations. What makes a community work for

superficial and frivolous…’In short, the clearing which to me was a mere ugly picture on the retina, was to them a symbol redolent with moral memories and sand a very paean of duty, struggle, and success.’” Tuan, *Topophilia*, 64.


115 Thomas, et al., introduce the concept of “urbanormativity,” understood to be “…a form of cultural domination that is decidedly urban in its orientation—the ideology that what we have come to refer to as urbanormativity, or the general view of urban as normal and real, and rural as abnormal and unreal, or deviant.” Thomas, et al., *Critical Rural Theory*, 5.
its members, we are learning, is answered differently for suburban people than it is for rural, small town people.\textsuperscript{116} Flora and Flora argue that “American society has become so deeply urbanized that one almost assumes urbanization to be a natural law.”\textsuperscript{117} In his otherwise well-researched and argued piece depicting the history of the idea of wilderness in the United States, Cronon regrettably reveals an urban (and agri-rural) bias, perpetuating the myth of the disadvantaged rural dweller. “Ever since the nineteenth century, celebrating wilderness has been an activity mainly for well-to-do city folks. Country people generally know far too much about working the land to regard unworked land as their ideal...the romantic ideology of wilderness leaves precisely nowhere for human beings actually to make their living from the land.” (my emphasis)\textsuperscript{118} Cronon’s view may reflect a broader, erroneous, generalization in the United States that understands rural to mean only agri-rural, but as many rural inhabitants from both agri- and non-agri-rural places will assert, they remain, despite difficult economic circumstances precisely because they value and ‘celebrate’ those places seemingly unaltered by human activity. In his attempt to acknowledge a reality of the contemporary debates about Wilderness, Cronon glosses over the nuances of living in places deemed to have “wilderness” landscape qualities, and reinforces


unfortunate stereotypes that fuel such debates. When Relph delves into the idea of the “unselfconscious sense of place,” he discounts “primitive” (and very rural) cultural experiences of sacred place as no longer attainable or even part of “modern” society (Portending Massey?). An urban bias is lurking: Relph’s “I-You” construct is one of equals, not a thing and the Other. “That there has been a relative desacralising and desymbolising of the environment seems undeniable, particularly for everyday life.” Incidentally, even David Abram speaks to the urban as he asserts this loss of placelessness happened aeons earlier, with the advent of written language among “civilized” cultures, and consequently begins anew in human beings as they learn to read. “The human senses, intercepted by the written word, are no longer gripped and fascinated by the expressive shapes and sounds of particular places. The spirits fall silent. Gradually, the felt primacy of place is forgotten, superseded by a new, abstract notion of ‘space’ as a homogenous and placeless void.” Again, Relph’s observations regarding landscape reflect a decidedly urban bias, or perhaps less pejorative, urban perspective; his

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119 Later in the essay, Cronon works to articulate understanding or a sympathetic mind to “rural people” as he describes what he sees as their role in the debate, but again manages to depict rural inhabitants as monolith. William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 85.


121 Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 65. I contend that this reflects an urban bias. (He states later that “For most of the time, landscape is of little or no interest to us [referring broadly to the general population].” It is unlikely this sentiment can accurately reflect the sentiment of many rural inhabitants. Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 123.

summary of the contemporary relationship between man and nature cannot be applied universally, only as a broad generalization.

There has, in brief, been a separation of man from landscape and nature. This is true in the very literal sense that we are not as close to land, sea, wind, and mountain as our ancestors…This society has its own landscape—a rational, absurd, confused present-day landscape that had to equivalent prior to the nineteenth century.\(^{123}\)

Other urbanocentric biases, or representations, that are commonly associated with rural identity and rurality itself convey both positive and negative value judgments, in terms of cost or benefit to society and individuals. These representations include, but are not limited to, homogeneity; a sense that things remain static—the proverbial hometown where things “never change”; residents viewed as socially backwards or uneducated in the ways of society; a place where socio-economic lines are blurred; and places perceived as the bastion of protestant notions of hard work, honesty, and strong family ties.\(^{124}\)\(^{125}\)

\(^{123}\) Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 124.

\(^{124}\) In their study of rural communities in the United States, Flora and Flora note that in the town of Irwin, Iowa, “social-class distinctions are generally ignored. A ‘just-plain folks’ atmosphere prevails.” Flora and Flora, *Rural Communities*, 20. This was also true in my hometown of Sandpoint, Idaho, in my youth. We knew who had money and who didn’t (the doctors, the attorneys, the family who owned the ski resort, etc.), but in a relatively remote community of 7,000-8,000 people, the realities of life dictated that these socio-economic distinctions were secondary to participation in the social fabric of daily small-town life. In short, in the 1970s and 1980s there, it was not seemly to flaunt your wealth.

Importantly, many of these biases are not necessarily only held by the outside observer; many of them are claimed proudly as part of a rural identity.\textsuperscript{126} To that end, the urban Western view of the rural has not been consistently critical over history. Indeed, by the eighteenth century, the German woods were becoming emblematic of German patriotism, standing in opposition to both Italian and French culture. These decades witnessed the transformation of the myth of wild people of the woods “made over into exemplars of the virtuous and natural life…the wild men and the ancient Germans had merged together in the imagined woodland home. Their adversary, after all, was the same: the court and city culture of the Latin south.”\textsuperscript{127} A century earlier, court painter Roeland Savery “painted the definitive image of the Bohemian forester, clad, shod and hatted in fustian and hides, the ancient hirsute wild man evolved into a wholly sympathetic Waldmann—the man of the woods.”\textsuperscript{128} In a testament to the staying power of culture, even today, 400 years hence, this image is alive and well across at least the southern half of Germany.


\textsuperscript{127} Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 97.

\textsuperscript{128} Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 100.
These myriad and complex perceptions of rurality are instructive and contain elements of truth, but as demonstrated, often a representation or understanding based upon historical bias, social, or cultural construct provides an insufficient understanding of the rural itself. This is one of the more compelling reasons to continue to study the rural: to understand the fundamental shift that rural communities have undergone in recent decades and will continue to undergo into the foreseeable future. Far from being a place of stasis, social and economic elements of the rural are thriving and shifting, in response to both exogenous and endogenous influences. Further, as Bell, et al. argue, the rural is not only not declining (as they assert, a trope dating back to 20 B.C. and the Roman poet Horace), but it has inherent material and symbolic power, emanating at once from without and within.\textsuperscript{129} Indeed, contemporary rural researchers have emphasized the contributions of the rural to our nation, including food security, stewardship of the land, a land-based sense of human relationships, and protection of diversity.\textsuperscript{130}

**Agri-Rural and non-Agri-Rural: Differing Engagements With Rural Place**

*In the vast world of the non-I, the non-I of the fields is not the same as the non-I of forests. The forest is a before-me, before us, whereas for fields and meadows, my dreams and recollections accompany all the different phases of tilling and harvesting.*

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*\textsuperscript{131}

\textsuperscript{129} Bell, et al., “Activating the Power of the Countryside,” 206, 217.

\textsuperscript{130} Flora and Flora, *Rural Communities*, 21.

\textsuperscript{131} Bachelard, Poetics, 206.
Reflecting the dominant sociological and philosophical paradigms at work through the close of the twentieth century, many of the exploration and insights into the nature of the rural are presented as the emplacement of the rural in the means of production, and in juxtaposition to the urban. With the advent of the phenomenon of globalization, (which tends, perhaps inaccurately, to be articulated as something that “began” and exists as a force in and of itself that imposes itself as a power dynamic “on” society, rather than an acceleration and differentiation of existing cycles of commerce, brought on primarily by the Internet), streams of discourse about the nature and condition of the rural have been predominately economic, incorporating themes of Marxism and descendant philosophical traditions, emphasizing economic disempowerment by the urban or the transnational. 132 Like their UK counterparts, contemporary U.S. scholars of the rural, in this case Flora and Flora, frame and analyze their research on and findings of the rural using economic and power structure conceptualizations— their notion of seven “community capitals” of the rural including natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built. 133 These political economy-framed analyses are predominately focused on the agri-rural. “[F]or rural geographers, the examination of agricultural legislation is crucial, because it has such an extensive impact upon the lives not only of

132 Bradley Macdonald, discussing Foucault’s criticism of the Marxist Frankfurt School, notes that “…in their theories they tended to draw only upon those historical explanations that assumed the a priori importance of transformations within the economic structure, a reliance that ignored the multiple contingencies and practices that constitute historical events.” Bradley J. Macdonald, “Marx, Foucault, Genealogy,” Polity 34, no. 3 (Spring, 2002): 273.

133 Flora and Flora, Rural Communities, 10–11.
farmers but also of rural residents, migrant workers, consumers, businesses at home and abroad, and a host of other groups.’

Wilson writes

‘the dominant political economy discourse has...inevitably led to a heavy emphasis on the importance of the state and policies, a strong focus on the importance of macro-economic factors in actor decision-making...As a result, the farming community has often been viewed as responding almost entirely to outside forces, with little acknowledgement of possible changes from within.’

The agri-rural of today has a storied lineage in the settled rural of Europe spanning centuries. ‘“It [the countryside] is grazed countryside…There is a safe countryside where humanity nurtures and is, in return, nurtured by an accessible, appropriated and unthreateningly recognizable nature.”’

Indeed, the evolution of British/European and American ideas of the rural and of wilderness from the eighteenth century to the present is complex. For example, Tuan notes the adoption of “European nature-Romanticism” by “the growing leisured classes of America. A gap in environmental evaluation opened and continued to grow between the farmer who struggled against the wilderness and the cultured gentleman who appraised it as scenery.”

This brings to the fore yet another nuance to address in any attempt to clarify differences between understandings of rural. The rural of the monied classes,

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137 Tuan, *Topophilia*, 63.
steeped in British and European class heritage going back centuries, is a tame, orderly rural, intentionally shaped by human activities, the cultural-intellectual vestiges of which, some argue, can even (perhaps surprisingly) be found in the establishment places such as Yosemite National Park.\textsuperscript{138}

In contrast and as discussed previously, for most public policy purposes, rural in the United States is agri-rural. The government definition of rural is directly related to population density and the commodification of food production during the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{139} By 2017, “nearly a third of the northern Great Plains…from central Nebraska to southern Saskatchewan and Alberta, had been converted. In that year alone, more than half a million acres were plowed under.”\textsuperscript{140} Consequently, the productivist agriculture narrative has necessarily privileged agri-rural over non-agri-rural definitions. Decades of policy driven by this and implemented agnostically across all rural communities have

\textsuperscript{138} See, among others, the essay by Anne Whiston Spirn in \textit{Uncommon Ground}.

\textsuperscript{139} In a telling prediction of the American experience with productivist agriculture in the 20th Century, an early German sociologist, Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl (1823-1897), asserted that “[t]he most sharply opposed countryside worlds were those of the open fields and the forests—respectively, commercialized agriculture and the wilderness. They even produced different rural types. Foresters and woodcutters might statistically rank as the more impoverished of the two populations. But it was the field-villagers who, according to Riehl, constituted a true ‘proletariat’ since they felt themselves exploited and turned into ‘heartless skinflints.’ Having to live on their wits the woodlanders were more mentally spry than the ‘heavy-jowled’ villagers, and while they were coarser, they were also better-humored.” Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 114.

blurred or obfuscated facets and elements of the non-agri-rural. Even the large national rural advocacy organizations have historically had, as their primary focus, the specific concerns of agri-rural communities. A brief review of the federal programs created to address largely non-agri-rural communities nationwide show dollars being spent, but not nearly the amounts found in the Farm Bill ($867 billion in 2018). The Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program, enacted in 1972, allocates federal dollars to local governments with populations of 50,000 or less that contain “entitlement land” (certain categories of federal land), to be used “for any governmental purpose.”\(^{141}\) From 1981 to 2000, PILT totaled $100 million to $150 million. Gradual increases occurred, and since 2008, PILT has totaled approximately $350 million to $450 million, with the largest amounts allocated to local governments in states from the Rocky Mountains west—Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Arizona, Nevada and California—and Alaska.\(^ {142}\) Other programs, including the Refugee Revenue Sharing Fund (16 USC Chapter 7 § 715s) ($5.6 million in 2018), the Mineral Leasing Act, and the

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Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (16 USC Chapter 90) (approximately $231 million not including Chapter II, or an average of $1.22 per acre), also provide critical funding to non-agri-rural communities. The largest federal programs enacted to provide financial assistance to non-agri-rural forested and plateaued regions of the United States generated approximately $710 million nationwide. The view of what landscape is and how public money should be spent in support of and in preservation of the non-agri-rural, generally means offsetting the negative fiscal effects of untaxable state and local land and or debating over preservation efforts. Wendell Berry serves as a standard-bearer of the defense of the agri-rural in the United States, most notably in the “New Agrarianism” movement which began in the 1970s.

According to Rural Geographer Michael Woods, as family farms were “marginalized by the expansion of industrial agriculture,” the “new agrarians” (inspired by the writings of Aldo Leopold) worked to reinvigorate an “important sense of connection between community and place” advocating for “a rediscovery of the landscape and place, support for small-scale agriculture and sustainable farming methods, local food systems, and the reinvigoration of rural communities that are based around farming.” Woods, *Rural*, 171-2. Other noted new agrarians include Wes Jackson and Gene Logsdon. Large-scale farming in the United States has invoked derision by some who see these large farmed regions of the central United States as “nonplaces, interchangeable with the rest of agro-industrial America, a land of enormous, irrigated fields, concrete culverts, and endless, flat, herbicided roads, with only a freeway gas station sign to relieve the monotony of the horizon.” David

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we have before us now is still abounding and beautiful…The health of nature is the primary ground of hope—if we can find the humility and wisdom to accept nature as our teacher.”

In a 2009-2012 study of Vermont landowners, over 50 percent of whom owned 100 acres or more, researchers found that a majority managed their property in some way for aesthetic reasons including mowing, trimming, clearing, and brush-hog work “and [to] otherwise physically limit the transformation of open land to forested land…reproducing, by choice and through hard physical labor, a 19th century agrarian landscape.”

Incidentally, a minor theme that emerges periodically in contemporary studies of the rural is the assertion that the focus has shifted from the agri-rural to the non-agri-rural (examples used are often non-agri-rural tourist destinations and their development and models of analysis applied include “performing” (rural as experienced and used by

Rains Wallace and Morley Bear, *The Wilder Shore*, (Covelo, CA: Yolla Bolly Press, 1984): 80. Somewhat paradoxically, later in the text, Wallace cites a passage from a novel set in the 1880s that describes the impressions of a woman, raised in eastern Ohio, of the California ranch she now lived on. The 500-acre Ohio farm of her childhood was “neatly partitioned into the water lot, the cow pasture, the corn lot, the barley field, and the wheat farm: cosey, comfortable, home-like: where the farmers loved their land, caressing it, coaxing it, nourishing it as though it were a think almost conscious.” The California ranch “bounded only by the horizons” was land “bullied into a yield of three hundred and fifty thousand bushels, where even when the land was resting, unploughed, unharrowed, and unsown, the wheat came up…The direct brutality of ten thousand acres of wheat…stunned her a bit.” Wallace and Morley, *The Wilder Shore*, 84.


visitors and natives, often in the context of providing tourism services) and “contesting” (rural as a site of oppression of historically disadvantaged communities) the rural), citing as one of the reasons, a turn from large-scale productivist agriculture. As an example of this theme, in the early 2000s, Woods, building on Mormont’s assertion in the late 1980s that the focus of rural policy questions had moved away from an agri-centric focus to questions of appropriate use (development, protection) of rural places, proposed that the emerging dual focus of the rural on questions of development and social issues had created a “‘politics of the rural’ in which the meaning and regulation of rurality itself is the primary focus of conflict and debate.”

Woods attributes the shift away from an agri-centric focus to a reduction in the contributions of agriculture to GDP (UK, United States, Australia, other developed countries), greater influence in policy circles of “environmental and consumer interests,” in-migration of those drawn to the rural by the “amenity-value of the countryside” with no viable interest in agriculture, and the effects on agriculture from the imposition of neo-liberal economic policies implemented globally.

As a result of this shift, issues such as rural services (public utilities, broadband, schools) and rural rights began to emerge, and “threats to public services in rural areas [were] presented both as threats to a rural way of life, and as discrimination against rural people.” The subject of discrimination, not just against rural communities


but within rural communities also gained ground in public discourse. Questions of race, homosexuality, gender, and ethnicity have revealed the complicated nature of social relations in sparsely populated areas, and study and theory of these issues, applied to the rural question currently consume not just geographers, but sociologists, historians, ecologists, anthropologists, and environmentalists. As Woods’ observes, “the ‘politics of the rural’ is as much about an internal conflict within the countryside as it is about a struggle of rural interests against external threats and challenges.”

While these analytic frameworks have structural and referential validity, there is evidence to the contrary that renders them suspect as applied comprehensively. Burton and Wilson argue that “…problems have emerged with the implied linearity of the productivist/post-productivist transition model…this bipolar assumption does not fully encapsulate the diversity, non-linearity and spatial heterogeneity that can currently be observed in agricultural regimes (Wilson, 2001).” This raises the question: Is this proposition another unintentional urban bias among a largely urban-based academia and the result of the explosion of posthumanist, post-postmodern, and poststructuralist (to name a few) epistemologies? As is evidenced in the most recent U.S. Farm Bill, the agri-rural is still the predominant focus of government interest and investment. Further, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 1987, 964 million acres (42 percent of all land in the

150 Woods, “Redefining the ‘Rural Question,’” 592.
151 Burton and Wilson, “Injecting social psychology theory,” 96.
United States) were devoted to farming, and in 2017, 900 million acres (39 percent of all land in the United States) were devoted to farming (a decrease, in 30 years, of seven percent of farmed land and only three percent of all land).\textsuperscript{152} Ultimately, the question here is not one of validity or scope, but one of degree. The subjects raised by Woods as worthy of rural academic study and public policy focus (public services, concerns of historically disadvantaged populations) were under-emphasized for decades and should be considered and investigated; however, the demise of an agri-rural focus in the field of academia and public policy, is, to borrow a phrase, “greatly exaggerated.”

To be sure, land and land-use as a component of place identity exists across many rural inhabitants, agri-rural and non-agri-rural alike. The notion of coaxing life from the soil, through the work of our own efforts, is part of our human psyche. “‘The getting of country foods is about understanding the land in which one lives. It is about building an awareness and knowledge of one’s place in the natural world of living and non-living beings.’”\textsuperscript{153} Those who work the land in any capacity, enjoy a special “intimacy” with it. The “entry” in a most physical sense, of nature into the body is evident in “muscles and scars” of farmers.\textsuperscript{154} Hjalmarson discusses the participatory nature of working the land, in this case, farming. “Wendell Berry reminded us above all that action in the world


\textsuperscript{153} Woods, \textit{Rural}, 221.

\textsuperscript{154} Tuan, \textit{Topophilia}, 97.
implies both place, and others. Elsewhere he notes that, ‘an authentic community is made less in reference to who we are than where we are. I cannot farm my farm as a European American—or as an American, or as a Kentuckian—but only as a person belonging to the place itself.’ Belonging references a people and a place. Gardening and farming, as place and embodied practices, teach us this as few other practices can.”

And while farmers and others who work the land are less likely to wax eloquent about that experience, they are “profoundly aware of its beauty.” In her study of a French rural film series produced between 1942 and 1945, Fowler contends that

As exoticized, picturesque landscape, the rural becomes a universal space to which one might escape, as well as an image in which to invest or an idealized memory to be invoked. As nourishing land, the rural is represented instead as a specific place, a live presence, and a contested present; the relationship between land and one who ‘pictures’ the land is real, intimate, and attentive.

However, the “nourishing land” experience of the rural (one of multiple experiences of the rural) necessarily lends itself to interpretation under the guise of commodification, and the larger post-Industrial and globalization-reinforcing productivist narrative. Again, the predominant epistemology of the agri-rural remains connected to the productivist conceptualization. Writing about the UK, and also applicable to the agri-rural in Europe

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156 Tuan, Topophilia, 97.

(but notably not applicable to much of the large agri-rural regions in the United States, as these regions would not revert to woodland, if left alone), Burton and Wilson note,

> researchers have repeatedly observed that farmers have a strong cultural resistance to applying non-agricultural uses to existing agricultural land (McEachern, 1992; Allison, 1996) and, in particular, its use for timber production . . . ‘the idea that ‘farmers were not foresters’ was prevalent beneath the surface . . . it would be ‘wrong’ to allow productive, hard won arable land to revert back to woodland.’

Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of smooth space and striated space also address the difference between the agri-rural and the non-agri-rural. The pastoral nomad of Deleuze and Guattari lived in the smooth, ever-fluid space of “sand, steppe and snow” while …the original architects of striated space were farmers who literally shaped the land by straking it with rigs and furrows…life for them was a matter of counteracting the friction of an immobile and often unyielding earth.” From the perspective of the earth itself, Wohlleben writes “…when we step into farm fields, the vegetation becomes very quiet. Thanks to selective breeding, our cultivated plants have, for the most part, lost their ability to communicate above or below ground.” Even nature itself is different in the agri-rural.

In short, the focus on the agri-rural in Western academic thought cannot be easily extracted from the intellectual, historical, and policy framework from which it has

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158 Burton and Wilson, “Injecting social psychological theory,” 103.

159 Ingold, Being Alive, 133.

160 Wohlleben, The Hidden Life of Trees, 11.
emerged. Rural as understood through the norms of social and economic activity in these places, the agri-rural, remains the dominant interpretive rural paradigm in the West. Tellingly, this leaves the category of non-agri rural, some of it designated national park or wilderness area, but much of it private and state land (in the United States), yet another category that warrants continued intellectual inquiry.

The abundance of research on the agri-rural points to a dearth of research on rural mountain or forested, non-mining communities. Examination of these under-studied economically diverse rural communities can provide insight to aspects of rural identity heretofore understudied as well, in particular, as rural identity intersects with notions of place in places of inhabited solitude. In an examination of the role of hunting in rural communities, Michael Woods cites Perrault (2001): “‘place identity’ is particularly important to indigenous peoples because land and land-use is often central to their way of life and their understanding of themselves.”

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161 The Flora’s Rural Communities itself, in 2013 in its 4th Edition, lacks case studies of rural mountain western communities. There are references to logging communities and rural western water issues are addressed, but the analysis of rurality focuses on rural towns in the Appalachia, the rural South, and rural Midwest, arguably all agri-rural communities to varying degrees. This is not meant as a criticism, but to point out academic focus across the discipline.

162 In a discussion on solitude, Bachelard references Rilke’s meditation on solitude, but one inhabited by a sole human dwelling: “Rilke and two friends perceive ‘the lighted casement of a distant hut, the hut that stands quite alone on the horizon before one comes to fields and marshlands.’ This image of solitude symbolized by a single light moves the poet’s heart in so personal a way that it isolates him from his companions...‘Despite the fact that we were very close to one another, we remained three isolated individuals, seeing night for the first time.’” Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, (New York: Penguin Books, 1958/2014), 56.

163 Woods, Rural, 221.
bias that Perrault, and Woods in citing him, imply that this is only true for “indigenous peoples.” In another example, Moor, in recounting the dominant narrative in wilderness history writing in the United States, including the advent of Romanticism and its aesthetic rapture for mountainous landscape among the urban, educated classes of the early nineteenth century, writes “[t]he people who lived at the base of the peaks—who were necessarily fixated on extracting economic and subsistence value from the land—were unlikely to ever climb them.”164 He cites one farmer’s comment as his basis for this assessment. Could it be that these “subsistence” farmers and other rural inhabitants simply had no “voice” in the academic world of their day? It is entirely plausible that those who thought to ask the questions would likely never have stepped out of their cities or neatly-tamed towns to query the uneducated who lived geographically on the fringes of their world, but in another social, not just economic universe. Later in his book, (perhaps unwittingly) Moor ventures a bit deeper into this idea when he is discussing his Berber guide’s reaction to the mountain landscape in Morocco, where the guide lived and worked. He observes that wild landscapes “inspire awe in Euro-Americans,” as opposed to the Berbers “who never rebounded into the romantic love of wild nature”; however, Moor has just relayed the very intimate place-identity of his guide, who recited “fondly,” from memory “the names of each town, mountain, and landmark” they had passed in the preceding week.165 Moreover, Moor recalls that his guide “would climb a high peak so


165 Moor, On Trails, 294-295.
that the immensity of Allah’s creation would help put his problems in perspective.”\textsuperscript{166}

Perhaps the delineation, then, is a deeply aesthetic love/awe/fear, a rendering of the sublime, to be exact, of \textit{inhabited solitude} (by predominately urban dwellers), and an intimate, daily worked in and lived in long-lived experience of \textit{inhabited solitude}, at once pragmatic, coveted, and reverent.

Proximity and experience of forested space, as lived by rural forested communities in the Appalachia region of the Southeastern and Eastern United States, the Adirondack region of the Northeastern United States, forested regions in the Great Lakes area, and the Mountain West and West Coast, throughout the Rocky, Cascade, and Coastal Mountain Ranges, is rural place experienced differently than agri-rural place; it is the source of contemplation and creativity, as is demonstrated in literature and art, as well as a subject of philosophical consideration.

‘Forests, especially, with the mystery of their space prolonged indefinitely beyond the veil of tree-trunks and leaves, space that is veiled for our eyes, but transparent to action, are veritable psychological transcendents’ . . . [in the forest] one is in the presence of \textit{immediate immensity}, of the immediate immensity of its depth…It accumulates its infinity within its own boundaries.\textsuperscript{167}

In fact, Tuan proposes that “raw nature or wilderness, and not the countryside, stand at the opposite pole of the totally man-made city.”\textsuperscript{168} The countryside is situated between the two. “Vertical elements in the landscape evoke a sense of striving, a defiance of

\textsuperscript{166} Moor, \textit{On Trails}, 295.

\textsuperscript{167} Bachelard, \textit{The Poetics of Space}, 203-204.

\textsuperscript{168} Tuan, \textit{Topophilia}, 109.
gravity, while the horizontal elements call to mind acceptance and rest.”

Nash adopts a similar view, “[i]n the middle portions of the spectrum [between civilization and wilderness] is the rural or pastoral environment (the ploughed) that represents a balance of the forces of nature and man.” Yet, as is evidenced by the reaches of the Alps, the agri-rural is less about topography than it is about human’s perpetual carving out a place of control in the face of the wild. In those places of ancient, persistent domestication, with subtle delineated pastures for grazing livestock, among the scree and granite, and carefully tilled and planted neat rows of plants, humans persistently fend off the chaos of wild nature, much like the careful but vaguely frantic fencing of our minds into neat ontological epistemological rows of domesticated understandings of life, firmly fencing out the mystery, the uncertainty, the wilderness of reality, as Bugbee suggested. “The more we experience things in depth, the more we participate in a mystery intelligible to us only as such…our true home is wilderness, even the world of every day.”

Bell, writing in 2006, delineated the rural into three types: “pastoral (‘farmscapes’)… natural

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171 Henry Bugbee, *The Inward Morning: A Philosophical Explanation in Journal Form*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 76. “No doubt what I have been leading up to may seem extremely disappointing: It is the proposal that creation is inexpungably mysterious, and can only be understood through participation in it. Bugbee, *The Inward Morning*, 223.
(`wildscapes`) and … sporting (`adventurescapes`), reflecting an `artisanal` agricultural landscape, `untamed` nature and the `rural as adventure playground`.”

One aspect of academic interest in non-agri-rural communities is that of the richness of these small rural communities’ investment in the arts and fostering art. As part of their exploration of local America (towns and cities from just over 1,000 people to cities such as Pittsburgh, San Bernardino, and Washington D.C.), over the course of five years between 2013 and 2018, James and Deborah Fallows visited the town of Eastport, Maine, population 1,400, and notably the easternmost town in the United States. In this small, remote port town on the rocky, remote north Atlantic coast, the Fallows discovered a small, but thriving art community, including the Tides Institute and Museum of Art, and a majority Native and international women arts cooperative called “Women of the Commons.” Similarly, they found that the 3,500-strong town of Ajo, Arizona supports artists of many mediums, providing affordable rentals, places for art classes, and opportunities for artists to contribute to improvements and future education and art tourism venues and lodging. Both Eastport and Ajo, a continent apart, provide insight to creative inspiration rooted in proximity to the inhabited solitude of forest and desert.

A 2001 Canadian study determined that one of the five variables resulting in the

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significant presence of “performing, visual, and literary artists within some Canadian towns and villages” was landscape appeal. 175 “Artistic obsession with natural and rural places is a well-recognized phenomenon in the visual and literary arts.” While not confining this observation to remote, sparsely populated areas, Bachelard links solitude of a specific place as a wellspring of creativity. “…all the spaces of our past moments of solitude…remain indelible within us…the human being…knows instinctively that this space identified with his solitude is creative.” 176 177

To segue to an overview of the study of place, I will summarize a 2014 cross-disciplinary study conducted by a geographer and an historian on the idea of rural place in Vermont. Morse and Mudgett were interested in the perspectives of rural out-migrants of Vermont, over time. They compared diaries, letters, and other personal narratives of nineteenth century rural out-migrants and results of questionnaires and interviews with contemporary rural out-migrants. In these accounts of out-migrants spanning two centuries, they found, in addition to Vermont being “an ingrained part of [their] identity,”


176 Bachelard, Poetics, 31.

177 Mahon, McGrath, and Ó Laoire caution, however, that “urban-focused...discourses of rurality and creativity...[can and still] produce an ‘imaginary geography of creativity,’ often associated with marginality, isolation, lack of sophistication, and limited dynamism and scale: an urban-rural creativity dualism that becomes reinforced through policy that downplays the richness and developmental potential of rural creativity (Woods, forthcoming).” Marie Mahon, Brian McGrath, and Lillis Ó Laoire, “Guest Editorial: The transformative potential of the arts and culture in sustaining rural futures,” Journal of Rural Studies 63 (2018): 214.
a profound, persistent, and pervading sense of place revealed in narratives of
homesickness.

Put in dialogue with the rural migration research conducted elsewhere, findings
suggest that migrants moving away from rural areas may have deep attachment to
non-human aspects of places, in addition to the social worlds they leave behind, a
point overlooked in much of the migration research. Findings suggest that the
homesickness felt by contemporary rural out-migrants deserves deeper
consideration for what it may reveal about place-based identities of mobile
people.178

Further, the researchers note that studies of “homesickness as a longing for place drops
off in geographic scholarship during the twentieth century,” similar to the decline in
“studies of place attachment” at the same time, and that “the study of relationships
between Self and place…have been displaced by the politics of identity and more abstract
notions of place and space.”179 They conclude that “[i]n arguing that over centuries
Vermonters have felt strong ties to their home geography, we are working against recent
scholarship that has argued for a global, postmodern, and rootless definition of place that
is fluid and transportable.”180

**A Brief Overview of the Study of the Place**181

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178 Cheryl Morse and Jill Mudgett, “Longing for landscape: Homesickness and place
attachment among rural out-migrants in the 19th and 21st centuries,” *Journal of Rural


181 In his philosophical work, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, Jeff
Malpas defines place in his glossary as “at its most basic, a bounded openness or opening:
when treated as derivative of space, place becomes a mere location in space, or a location
that has some subjective quality of meaning attached to it: in its fullest sense, space is that
complex and yet unitary structure that encompasses space and time, subjective and
“When I woke up, the sun had risen high enough to throw its rays on the range of mountains across the valley and presented me with a scene, totally alien to my experience up to that time, of such unearthly beauty that I felt transported to a supernal realm and yet, paradoxically, also at home, as though I had returned after a long absence.” 182

-Yi-Fu Tuan, relating a college camping experience in the California desert in 1952.

“Place is perhaps the key term for interdisciplinary research in the arts, humanities, and social sciences in the twenty-first century.” 183

-Jeff Malpas, 2010

(At the outset, it is necessary to give full credit to Cresswell for his review of the history of place as a sub-discipline of geography, and to Casey for his in-depth consideration of place in the history of philosophy. I have used Cresswell’s text as a roadmap of notable names and developments in this intellectual history, and in the cases of Casey, Heidegger (to a limited degree), Bachelard, Tuan, and Relph, I have endeavored to discuss their texts directly as they pertain to the history of the academic study of place. However, Cresswell is responsible for directing me to these important pioneers in the field.) Plumbing the depths of Western thought with regard to the emergence of a concept of place as opposed to space (initially understood as empty, and even today, despite knowledge provided by the sciences of physics and chemistry, still

objective: empirically, place appears in those many different places, often named, in which persons and things are situated, and within and between which they move.” Malpas, Place and Experience, 219.

182 Tuan, Topophilia, xi.

implies something where something is not), Casey considers at length the *ex nihilo* implications for place, found across human creation stories. He argues place pre-exists in the concept of regions, ultimately found in descriptions of the pre-cosmological universe. “In the Miltonic account, place is still very much around—as much as it is in Hebraic or Platonic cosmologies.” He proposes that Plato’s Receptacle (in *Timaeus*) provides “‘in-gathering’…giving place to what otherwise might be depthless or placeless—thus allaying the most acute metaphysical anxiety.” Aristotle writes “‘For everyone supposes that things that are somewhere, because what is not is nowhere—where for instance is a goat-stag or a sphinx?’” *Timaeus* and *Physics* conceptualize creation differently—Plato saw it as “‘imposition’” (of geometric order onto Chaos), and Aristotle saw instead “‘immanence’” (“the physical world takes care of itself by appearing from the start as fully formed”). In his in-depth consideration of the differences between Platonic and Aristotelian understandings of place, Casey finds in the phenomenology of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty a descendant of an Aristotelian “call for a recognition…of the

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184 Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 47. Here, Casey cites the lines regarding the pre-history of the Cosmos in *Paradise Lost* to emphasize Milton’s elicitation of the basic human anxiety with regard to a lack of place, either in the Void of Genesis, or in our lives today. “‘The secrets of the hoary deep, a dark: Ilimitable ocean, without bound; Without dimension, where length, breadth, and hight: And time and place are lost: where eldest Night: And Chaos, ancestors of Nature, hold: Eternal anarchy, amidst the noise: Of endless wars, and by confusion stand.’” Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 46.

185 Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 48.

186 Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 51.

187 Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 56.
world’s immanent shapeful order.”

Casey tells us that the thinking on place was almost (but not entirely) subsumed under the theological and philosophical (and later formal hard science disciplines) “obsession with infinite space from the thirteenth century onward.”

After the death of Thomas Aquinas and the issuance of condemnations by the church against teachings limiting the power of God, [t]he universal presence of God therefore required spatial infinity, and the idea of space triumphed.”

It must be noted, however, before church history is utterly condemned as fully complicit in the abdication of place for space, that Hjalmarson reminds us that in abandoning the Aristotelian view of place, the Nicene Fathers saw in the Incarnation “that place is more than merely a setting in God’s work in the world: place is the seat of relations, of meeting and activity between God and humanity.”

Although Christianity replaced the Temple in Jerusalem (geographic place) with the Body of Christ, bodies are themselves, and particularly the Incarnate God, are emphatically emplaced in the world. Still, in the world of science and philosophy, “[p]lace barely survived discussion by the end of the seventeenth century. By the end of the eighteenth century, it vanished altogether from serious theoretical discourse in physics and philosophy.”

For Kant, “Places are not just phenomena…but

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188 Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 57.
189 Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 125.
190 Hjalmarson, *No Home Like Place*, 55.
191 Hjalmarson, *No Home Like Place*, 86.
192 Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 133. Casey cites some of Isaac Newton’s thinking on place, which reinforces the observation that place was a) relative, and b) “a part of space
epiphenomena in the literal sense: ethereal appearances that sit upon the sturdier backs of particular spaces...’they can be thought only as in it [space].’”

Cresswell highlights the contribution of medieval scholar Albertus Magnus (1193-1280), noting that for Magnus, a place “was a unique combination of cosmological and environmental influences that shapes the things that exist in that place.” However, as he goes on to state, this type of “environmental determinism” was later the basis for racist ideologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It wasn’t until Heidegger (1889-1976) addressed the notion of place in his later philosophical writings that place as a separate valid phenomenon re-entered the realm of academic discourse. Casey distills an otherwise complex Heidegger observing that in Being and Time, Heidegger uses the notion of closeness to address the concern of place. “Heidegger sees closeness as determined by two nonmetric matters: Dasein’s ‘circumspective concern’ (umsichtiges Besorgen) and its ‘directionality’ (Ausrichtung).” Place is the result of the “conjoining which a body takes up’...places have no integral, much less differential, being of their own.”

193 Casey, The Fate of Place, 193.

194 Cresswell, Place, 2nd ed., 26.

195 Charges of environmental determinism remain the subject of academic debate, with Malpas, for example, contending that such charges leveled at ideas of home place and of heritage do not apply in the majority of situations. See Malpas, Place and Experience, 197, footnote #22.

196 Casey, The Fate of Place, 247. For reference, Heidegger defines his concept of Dasein in a lecture at the University of Freiburg in 1935. “Dasein should be understood, within the question of Being, as the place (Stätte) which Being requires in order to disclose itself. Dasein is the place of openness, the there...Hence we say that Dasein’s being is in the strict sense of the word “being-there” (Da-sein).” Casey, The Fate of Place, 261.
of circumspective concern with directionality.”¹⁹⁷ “…only Dasein can be somewhere, but where it is, is in the world, a world it has not created by its own efforts: a public, shared world.”¹⁹⁸ For Heidegger “[t]o lack limit is to lack place, and conversely; not to be in place is to be unlimited.”¹⁹⁹ As his thought on place develops in later years, Heidegger determines that place does not pre-exist, but comes into existence as “locator” for a thing, and “locator for the fourfold” (Heidegger’s identification of earth, sky, mortals, and gods).²⁰⁰ Heidegger’s notion of dwelling is acutely tied to place as well. Dwelling, for Heidegger “signifies the way ‘we human being are on the earth’”.²⁰¹ Heidegger provides an example of what he means by dwelling, describing a 200 year-old farm in the depths of the Schwarzwald:

Here the self-sufficiency of the power to let earth and heaven, divinities and mortals [the Fourfold] enter in simple oneness into things, ordered the house. It placed the farm on the wind-sheltered mountain slope, looking south, among the meadows close to the spring. It gave the wide overhanging shingle roof whose proper slope bears up under the burden of snow, and which reaching deep down, shields the chambers against the storms of the long winter nights. It did not forget the altar corner behind the community table; it made room in its chamber for the hallowed places of childbirth and the ‘tree of the dead’—for that is what they call a

¹⁹⁷ Casey, The Fate of Place, 248.
¹⁹⁸ Casey, The Fate of Place, 249.
¹⁹⁹ Casey, The Fate of Place, 262.
²⁰⁰ Casey, The Fate of Place, 274. David Farrell Krell, the editor of a volume of translated selected works by Heidegger, says of the concept of the Fourfold “No introductory word of ours can explain what Heidegger means by this fourfold. We can only point back to the essays on the work of art, technology, and modern science and metaphysics, and elsewhere to the poetry of Rilke and Hölderlin and the archetypes of mythology, for possible comparisons and contrasts.” Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings, David Farrell Krell, ed., (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 345.
²⁰¹ Heidegger, Basic Writings, 345.
coffin there: the Totenbaum—and in this way it designed for the different generations under one roof the character of their journey through time.\textsuperscript{202}

Similarly, French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty links place to embodiment:
“human thought and experience is essentially grounded in the corporeal and the concrete and is therefore also intimately concerned with the environing world in its particularity and immediacy.”\textsuperscript{203} Malpas notes that for both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, “it is not merely human identity that is tied to place, but the very possibility of being the sort of creature that can engage \textit{with} a world…that can think \textit{about} that world, and that can find itself \textit{in} the world.”\textsuperscript{204}

French philosopher and contemporary of Heidegger, Bachelard (1884-1962), focused his work on the idea of place. As Cresswell discusses, Bachelard argued that “memories and poetic images…are located in place.”\textsuperscript{205} Although subject to later criticism based on his assumption that the notion of home as a house cannot be universally applied, his development of spaces and rooms in a house as the situated place of memory (“the more securely they [memories] are fixed in space, the sounder they are”) for our lives (and subsequently our daydreams and imagination) served as a key philosophical development in the history of the study of place.\textsuperscript{206} Bachelard seeks,

\textsuperscript{202} Heidegger, \textit{Basic Writings}, 362.

\textsuperscript{203} Malpas, \textit{Place and Experience}, 7-8.

\textsuperscript{204} Malpas, \textit{Place and Experience}, 8.

\textsuperscript{205} Cresswell, \textit{Place}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., 30.

\textsuperscript{206} Bachelard, \textit{Poetics}, 31. For later feminist critiques of Bachelard’s notion of home, see Cresswell, \textit{Place}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., 40.
through his discussion of different rooms and spaces in a house as well as nests and shells, to “give concrete evidence of the values of inhabited space, of the non-I that protects the I.” 207 In a distinct philosophical foreshadowing of a privileged understanding of place apart from space, Bachelard advocates “[m]ay all matter be given its individual place, all sub-stances their ex-stance. And may all matter achieve conquest of its space, its power of expansion over and beyond the surfaces by means of which a geometrician would like to define it.” 208

Despite important philosophical musings on place, as Creswell tells us, “[w]hile geography was self-evidently about places, it was rarely explicitly about place.” 209 However, as the inter-relatedness of culture, space, and place found a foothold in the twentieth century, in the face of what Entrikin saw as scientific geography’s “fascination with abstract space,” the particularity of place and its implications became objects worthy of study in the field of geography. 210 It was against this backdrop that, in the 1970s, the field of humanistic geography emerged, with Edward Relph (UK) and Yi-Fu Tuan (United States) at the vanguard of this sub-discipline that includes the formal study of

207 Bachelard, Poetics, 27.

208 Bachelard, Poetics, 219.

209 Cresswell, Place, 2nd ed., 30.

210 Cresswell, Place, 2nd ed., 31. “Since Plato, Western philosophy – often times with the help of theology and physics – has enshrined space as the absolute, unlimited and universal, while banning place to the realm of the particular, the limited, the local and the bound.” Arturo Escobar quoted in Cresswell, Place, 2nd ed., 34.
Their still-referenced works serve as fertile ground for the growth of contemporary studies of the notion of place. Both thinkers were responding to the changing technological and ever-shrinking world of the 1970s. Relph begins to question the idea of rootlessness, proposing that in order to defend the importance of place, we must uncover its deeper meaning. The human affectation for a geographic place, as an idea worthy of academic study, began with Tuan. People, he believed, found in environment “sources of assurance and pleasure, objects of profound attachment and love.” Hence was borne his detailed explication of the notion of “topophilia,” or the “affective bond between people and place or setting.” His exploration of this phenomenon includes considerations of sensual perception, attitude, world view, and systems; he makes a convincing case for attachment to physical places, through experience, his work, and that of the first humanistic geographers, represent waypoints in the tradition of over a century of thought concerned with phenomenology, beginning with Husserl. “To the humanist, ontological priority was given to the human immersion in place rather than the abstractions of geometric space…place is therefore a pre-scientific

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211 Anne Buttimer and David Seamon were also early pioneers in this field at the same time. Cresswell, *Place*, 2nd ed., 35.

212 Tuan, *Topophilia*, xii.

213 Tuan, *Topophilia*, 4. Tuan did not create the term, topophilia, but he gave it full academic credibility as a specific idea worthy of study. In an earlier reference to the same idea (1958), Bachelard discusses “felicitious space . . . [the explorations of which] deserve to be called topophilia.” This space, “the space we love...is eulogized space...Particularly, it nearly always exercises an attraction. For it concentrates being within limits that protect.” Bachelard, *Poetics*, 19.
fact of life – based on the way we experience the world.” Malpas cites the persistence of an externalist view of knowledge, of our way of understanding and knowing the world and ourselves, in the 1980s and 1990 writings of Burge, Davidson, and Cavell. Cavell, invoking “Freudian object-relations theory,” observed that “without a grasp of the spaces and places in which others can be encountered it is arguable whether there can be any relation to others at all – and if no relation to others, then no relation to self either.”

Influenced by twentieth and twenty-first century thought (Marxism, feminism, poststructuralism, queer theory), place began to be theorized as socially-constructed and seen through the lens of consumption, commodification, and exclusion. As discussed above, many contemporary (U.S. and UK) human geographers and rural geographers embrace critical theory, engaging in the consideration of place in the context of exclusion resulting from market interactions and relationships based on power. In the past decade, geographers have considered the implications of assemblage theory (“An assemblage is a unique whole ‘whose properties emerge from interactions between parts’”) on the study of place. However, since turn of the twenty-first century, a few voices in geography

\[\text{214} \text{ Cresswell, Place, 2nd Ed, 38.}\]

\[\text{215} \text{ Malpas, Place and Experience, 10.}\]

\[\text{216} \text{ Cresswell, Place, 2nd ed., 41.}\]

\[\text{217} \text{ Cresswell, Place, 2nd ed., 52. Assemblage theory has emerged from Deleuze and Guattari, and was fully developed by Manuel DeLanda. In reviewing Cresswell’s description of assemblage theory as it relates to place, and caveating my comments by noting I have not read any further than Cresswell on this theory, application of this theory applies to urban and otherwise settled places, not inhabited solitude. As Dovey notes “It is the flows of life, traffic, goods, and money that give the street its intensity and its sense of place.” Cresswell, Cresswell, Place, 2nd ed., 53.}\]
and philosophy have sought to rescue place from the placelessness of social
constructivism. “Place’s role in the human world . . . is a force that cannot be reduced to
the social, the natural, or the cultural. It is, rather, a phenomenon that brings these worlds
together and, indeed, in part produced them.”\textsuperscript{218} Studies continue to reinforce the integral
role place plays, especially in situations where people have lived in a specific place for a
long time. “‘This is a different way of experiencing place and belonging from that which
the culturally privileged exhibit…They present themselves in passive terms, not choosing
their location, but literally placed by it.’”\textsuperscript{219} (Incidentally, in the field of ecology,
research on traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is seeking to “reach beyond the
realm of science, to incorporate a more personal and perhaps holistic understanding of
place.”\textsuperscript{220}) Malpas asserts that while place is ordered, in part, socially, “‘this does not
legitimate the claim that place, space or time are merely social constructions…It is within
the structure of place that the very possibility of the social arises…place is that on which
subjectivity is founded.’”\textsuperscript{221} In his 2018 work, \textit{Place and Experience}, Malpas proposes
“Proust’s Principle,” namely,

\textsuperscript{218} Cresswell, \textit{Place}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., 47.

\textsuperscript{219} Mark Shucksmith, “Re-imagining the rural: From rural idyll to Good

\textsuperscript{220} Laura Alice Watt, “Landscape, Science, and Reproduction,” in \textit{After the Death of
Worthy, Elizabeth Alison, and Whitney A. Bauman (New York and London: Routledge,
2019), 215.

\textsuperscript{221} Malpas quoted in Cresswell, \textit{Place}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., 48-49, 50.
That the identity of persons is inextricably bound to place, and not merely to place in some general, abstract sense (which would be meaningless), but also as a consequence, to those particular places, multiple and complex thought they may be, in and through which a person’s life is lived.\textsuperscript{222}

In this lively, ongoing, and compelling intellectual debate, the \textit{place-experience of inhabited solitude} rests more comfortably within the thinking of Malpas, Casey, Relph, Tuan, Cavell, and others who view place as the confluence of carried memory and knowledge of a human subject sensually encountering external, independently-existent objects, human and non-human, in a bounded, physical space or region. As Malpas asserts,

\begin{quote}
Place is thus not restricted to the human – place always involves that which goes beyond the human . . . place cannot be regarded as a function of the human or as constituted by it . . . [place] must be understood in terms of complex conjunctions of factors including the natural landscape, the pattern of weather and of sky, the human ordering of spaces and resources, and also those individual and communal narratives with which the place is imbued.\textsuperscript{223}
\end{quote}

\textbf{A Brief Overview of Wilderness in the United States}

Wilderness advocacy in some form in the United States pre-dated the discipline of environmental history by approximately a century. The first national park, Yellowstone, was established by Presidential Order in 1872. In the following decades, writers, artists, scientists and activists joined a growing movement of wilderness and environmental advocacy. John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, Aldo Leopold, and Robert Marshall are just a few of those in and outside of government who advocated for the preservation of flora and

\begin{flushright}
\textcolor{gray}{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{222} Malpas, \textit{Place and Experience}, 12.}\protect\footnote{\textcolor{gray}{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{222} Malpas, \textit{Place and Experience}, 12.}}\textcolor{gray}{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{223} Malpas, \textit{Place and Experience}, 53, 188.}\protect\footnote{\textcolor{gray}{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{223} Malpas, \textit{Place and Experience}, 53, 188.}}
\end{flushright}
fauna from the late nineteenth through the first third of the twentieth century. The turn of the century also saw the effects of Theodore Roosevelt’s “bully pulpit” lionizing frontier “values,” and the visceral response to Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1903 declaration that “the 1890s…was the first decade without a frontier.”224 In 1900, the Yale Forest School opened (established by Gifford Pinchot and Henry S. Graves, both European-trained foresters).225 By 1910, the Boy Scouts of America was established to promote “activities in the great and healthful out-of-doors where may be the better developed physical strength and endurance, self-reliance, and the powers of initiative and resourcefulness…for the purpose of establishing…the very highest type of American citizenship.”226 The Wilderness Society was established in 1934 and, led through the 1960s by Howard Zahniser, worked to obtain wilderness designations across the United States.227 The 1960s were a pivotal decade for wilderness in the United States: In 1964, Congress passed the Wilderness Act, and in 1967, Roderick Frazier Nash published *Wilderness and the American Mind*, considered the foundational work that launched the field of environmental history. Since that time, that field has grown and sub-divided in


response to government activity, economic activity, increased lay knowledge of the impact of humans on the environment, changes in knowledge paradigms, and shifting philosophical perspectives. In the following paragraphs, I will lightly trace the history of the idea of wilderness in the United States, and highlight significant changes, ideas, and individuals along the way.

Wilderness, while applicable to a particular geography and characterized by a lack of human inhabitants, is first and foremost a metaphor, and one deeply ingrained in western thought and culture. In much of contemporary wilderness scholarship, environmental history, and ecology, the Biblical notion of wilderness is often depicted as negative, as a place away from the Presence of God, a place of hardship and sojourn (the place where Moses and the Hebrews wandered before they were brought to the Promised Land; Jesus’ wilderness of temptation by Satan in the wilderness;), as well as a place inhospitable to humans (prophetic texts proclaiming both fulfillment of God’s covenant with the Faithful envisioned as barren, dry wilderness transformed into a place habitable and prosperous, as well as a place of condemnation for the disobedient). Wilderness historians in the United States cite numerous examples of the narrative of wilderness as evil and threatening among Early European Americans and Europeans. While the intent of the poem was a protest of sorts against land laws in England in the late 1700s, in The

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228 “Chief Luther Standing Bear of the Ogalala Sioux explained that his people ‘did not think of the great open plains...as ‘wild.’ Only to the white man was nature a ‘wilderness.’” Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, xxi.

229 Deuteronomy 2:7; Mark 1:12; Isaiah 40: 3-5; Jeremiah 50: 12-13; Ezekiel 6:14.
Deserted Village, British poet Oliver Goldsmith describes the wilderness of the “New World” to which the British villagers, bereft of their homes as a result of “imparkment,” were “exiled,” recalling the Edenic narrative. “Those matted woods where birds forget to sing…While oft in whirls the mad tornado flies, Mingling the ravaged landscape with the skies.”

As Stewart writes, “[m]en found the mountains strange, and sometimes fearsome,” which was reflected in names: “The English [settlers in the United States] did not often name rivers for streams in England or of the Bible. But mountains were constantly called for Biblical mountains.”

These Biblical notions and images acquired visceral execution in the notion of “manifest destiny.” As enunciated in Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1894 essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” the frontier man achieved “heroic victory,” redeeming the wilderness (and the unfortunate native inhabitants) of America during the Westward expansion of the 1800s.

Humans,
and men in particular, were the “heroes” who “conquered” the forces of darkness. European American humans (most often assumed to be the men, but women were understood to be contributing to this) were essentially charged with leading the effort to tame the unruly wilderness, standing against the forces of chaos.

While I take exception to implications of Nash’s all-too-neat narrative, his work is exhaustive with regard to the effects of European American settlement of wild lands in the United States, and it is undeniable that deforestation of at least the eastern United States was widespread during the nineteenth century, the reversal of which has taken over a century. “‘By the 1960s and 1970s, the pattern of forest, field, and pasture was similar to that prior to 1800, its appearance much like it must have been prior to the American Revolution.’”

Prior to the arrival of European Americans, Indians regularly conducted limited burns of forested land and cleared some land for agriculture, but these events were part of a cycle of moving, leaving the forests to regrow. Wood, writing in 1634 “noted that ‘in those places where the Indians inhabit, there is scarce a bush or bramble, or any cumbersome underwood to be seen in the more champion ground,’” but in areas where Native Americans had succumbed to disease or “where rivers prevented wildfires

\footnotetext{233}{Douglas MacCleery, U.S. Department of Agriculture quoted in McKibben, Hope, 15.}
from spreading, there was ‘much underwood’” that “‘tears and rents the cloths of them that pass.” European American immigrants treated the forests differently, from logging pines and cedars (encouraging follow-on deciduous growth) to the more destructive clearing required for agriculture and subsequent grazing. Only when economics drove people West across the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, did the forests in the East begin to regrow. These economic conditions coincided somewhat with the embrace, in popular art and literature, of a more Romantic view of “wild places.” Landscape in the Western United States began to be sacralized, the first National Parks were established, and American writers and naturalists succeeded in altering the narrative and understanding of the idea of wilderness. Landscape was a place to be revered and loved, the purview of the non-human, but a place in which to find

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234 Moor, On Trails, 170.

235 McKibben, Hope, 23.

236 “Wood provided 90 percent of America’s energy in 1850 . . . [and only] 10 percent by 1920.” McKibben, Hope, 24. McKibben later writes that a comparison of “polygons”—farm fields, clearcuts, and other definable boundaries” in the Ohio valley diminished from 2,146 in 1938 to 710 in 1988. McKibben, Hope, 26.

237 Cronon cites the influence of the Romantics converging with a “post-Frontier” ideology the roots of which are found in the writings of John Muir, William Wordsworth (about the Alps), and Henry David Thoreau. Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” 73-74. In March, 1872, President Grant designated Yellowstone National Park (two million acres), and in 1885, the State of New York established a Forest Preserve in the Adirondacks (715,000 acres). These were the first instances of large-scale preservation of wilderness in the world. Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 108.
Mountains as cathedrals were places man could connect with the Creator, and should be preserved.\textsuperscript{239}

Certainly, the American West of the nineteenth century was hardly untouched, as it was inhabited by Native American tribes who lived on and worked, the landscape in ways previously mentioned. In the most vivid example of the selling power of a park-like recreation area, the establishment of Yosemite National Park in 1864 was promoted and realized in prose, paintings (i.e., Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Cole), and photographs (e.g., Charles Weed and Carleton Watkins’ glass-plate stereographs), each medium extolling the meadow/park-like setting of the valley floor itself, one that was rather orderly for “wilderness,” and one that called to mind a very European and British vision of nature.\textsuperscript{240} In fact, John Muir himself “praised its valleys as ‘a grand landscape

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{238} Olwig, “Reinventing Common Nature, 385.
\item\textsuperscript{239} Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” 75.
\item\textsuperscript{240} For information on Bierstadt and his paintings of Yosemite and the Sequoias of Northern California in the 1800s, see Simon Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}; (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 195-197.
\end{itemize}
Wilderness, then, for 19th Century America consisted of a complicated dualistic embrace of a place with European and British Romantic era park-like qualities—tame, peaceful, idyllic—and wilder place inhabited by and given to the young nation.

Oliver Wendell Holmes...extolled the pictures [of Yosemite] as fully the equal of the greatest productions of Western art and their subjects...Yosemite became a landscape that was beyond the reach of sectional conflict, a primordial place of such transcendent beauty that is proclaimed the gift of the Creator to his new Chosen People.244

The discovery and subsequent reproduction in paintings and photographs of the Sequoia stands in Northern California at the same time, did nothing but further the undercurrent of America’s singular and widely-embraced idea of manifest destiny. In one particularly compelling photograph, a large man with a robust local reputation as a mountain man, stands next to one of the largest specimens:


242 “...the oak forests of the English aristocratic estates—all products of the eighteenth- and nineteenth century crazes for picturesque and Romantic ‘improvements’—these ancient woodlands seem thinner and almost patchy, with swathes of grassy meadow and wild flowers blooming between pollarded and truncated broadleaf trees. The exact opposite of what is now considered to be the ideal norm of a forest habitat—the untended wilderness—they have light and space and variety...” Schama, Landscape and Memory, 143.


244 Schama, Landscape and Memory, 191.
But the great column that towered above him, almost an extension of his own heroic American personality…it spoke of an elemental chronology: not the chronology of classical European civilization, but the chronology of wild nature, America’s own time and scale, inherited directly from the Creator, without the supervening mediation of human pretensions.\(^{245}\)

Writers such as William Cullen Bryant promulgated “the essential naturalness of American identity.”\(^{246}\) Freedom, for Bryant, was “a hoary warrior, ‘scarred with the tokens of old wars,’ in fact, a grizzly; cut about, blasted, and shaken, but always with the power to throw out new life.”\(^{247}\) For Bryant, as with other writers (e.g., James Fenimore Cooper) of the time, the American forest “supplied America with the visible form of the primitive church…It is from this primordial vegetable matter, celestially sanctified and unspoiled as yet by the touch of man, that America was born…”\(^{248}\)

Aldo Leopold, a founder of the Wilderness Society in 1934, was one of the pre-eminent pioneers of the early preservation movement in the United States. \textit{A Sand County Almanac} served (and still serves) as a foundational text in the early wilderness and environmental movements in the United States. Leopold left multiple legacies: restoration, especially cranes and prairie ecosystems, wilderness advocacy, and land stewardship.

We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us…That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and

\(^{245}\) Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 195.

\(^{246}\) Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 199.

\(^{247}\) Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 199-200.

\(^{248}\) Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 200-201.
respected is an extension of ethics. That land yields a cultural harvest is a fact long known, but latterly often forgotten.\textsuperscript{249}

While considered one of the fathers of wilderness preservation in the United States, Leopold’s seminal work approaches nature and land from an agri-rural perspective, even despite his clear critique of farming practices in “The Land Ethic.” The \textit{Almanac} embodies the care, concern, and love for a productive, diverse landscape in which human and the non-Human I exist in a balance of in-, inter-, and co-dependence. The non-Human I, both animate and inanimate, provides lessons as well as opportunities for improvement. (Leopold himself planted 48,000 pines in Wisconsin where he lived, many more than the original population.)\textsuperscript{250} Leopold is perhaps best known for his articulation of “The Land Ethic.” In this essay, Leopold argues for “the extension of ethics” to “man’s relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it” and is both “an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity.”\textsuperscript{251} With the understanding that ethics is based upon the notion that “the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts,” he argues that a land ethic “simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.”\textsuperscript{252} Prophetically, at the close of his argument seventy years ago, Leopold says that the “true

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{250} Leopold, \textit{A Sand County Almanac}, 14.

\textsuperscript{251} Leopold, \textit{A Sand County Almanac}, 168.

\textsuperscript{252} Leopold, \textit{A Sand County Almanac}, 168.
\end{footnotesize}
modern is separated from the land by many middlemen, and by innumerable physical
gadgets…to him it is the space between cities on which crops grow. Turn him loose for a
day on the land, and if the spot does not happen to be a golf links or scenic area, he is
bored stiff.” 253  Leopold’s “Land Ethic” underwrote the ideology of environmental
advocacy in the twentieth century.

The ideation of wilderness today rests most comfortably under the broader social
movement and attendant academic disciplines of environmentalism. Langer presents a
continuum between “reformist” or “radical” environmentalism, noting that reformist
environmentalism “aims to ameliorate the environment primarily for the benefit of
‘anthropos’ (‘man’)” and radical environmentalism “is ecocentric and seeks to improve
the life of planet Earth as whole.” 254  Ecofeminism, rooted in the writings of French
feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne in 1974 and further promulgated in 1980 with the
publication of The Death of Nature by Carolyn Merchant in 1980, seeks to reconsider
environmental history with a recovery/discovery of feminine historical narratives and a
critique of taken-for-granted or unconsidered masculine meta-narratives underlying
historical accounts and cultural histories. Merchant’s work proposes that as a result of
the Scientific Revolution and the delineation of the natural world as something that can

253  Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, 189.

254  Monika Langer, “Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty: Some of Their
Contributions and Limitations for ‘Environmentalism,’” in Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the
Earth Itself, eds. Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine (Albany, NY: State University of New
York Press, 2003), 103.
be objectively studied and assessed, the essential connection, held by humankind to this point, was severed, resulting in the “death of nature” itself.

‘Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the image of an organic cosmos with a living female earth at its center gave way to a mechanistic worldview…The new mechanical order and its associated values of power and control would mandate the death of nature.’

Merchant’s narrative then incorporates the impact, as she sees it, of the Enlightenment, on the emerging mechanistic worldview.

The eighteenth-century Enlightenment (ca. 1815-1889) that followed the Scientific Revolution was a period of great optimism. The [Newtonian] advances in science…led to a sense of the human ability to understand and control nature. The ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith, Voltaire, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and other philosophies promoted scientific understanding, religious freedom, political, independence, and equality.

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255 Carolyn Merchant quoted in Rolston, “From Organism to Anthropocene,” 104, and in Debra Hammond, “Reflections on Women, Nature, and Science,” in After the Death of Nature: Carolyn Merchant and the Future of Human-Nature Relations, eds. Kenneth Worthy, Elizabeth Alison, and Whitney A. Bauman (New York and London: Routledge, 2019): 146. Incidentally, Lewis saw the so-called “death of nature” as the death of the soul. “The advance of knowledge gradually empties this rich and genial universe: first of the gods, then of its colours, smells, sounds and tastes, finally of solidity itself...As these items are taken from the world, they are transferred to the subjective side of the account: classified as our sensations, thoughts, images or emotions...The masters of the method soon announce that we were just as mistaken...when we attributed “souls”, or “selves” or “minds” to human organisms, as when we attributed Dryads to the trees. Animism, apparently, begins at home...Man is indeed akin to the gods: that is, he is no less phantasmal than they.” Stewart Goetz, C.S. Lewis: Great Minds, (Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 49.

Generally, scholars acknowledge the fact of this separation, but the evolution of it is a matter of debate. For example, French anthropologist Philippe Descola sees it rooted in the development of “linear perspective” in the fifteenth century, which eventually led to the separation of “knowledge into the social and natural sciences. The resulting system of “metaphysical and epistemological commitments” has made it challenging to respect and afford legitimacy and currency to narratives that “speak of land, plants, and (human and nonhuman) animals as one vast moral community.” Nasr asserts that our current ecological crisis is largely due to “the desacralization of both man and Nature and the preeminence of science and technology in which the religious and spiritual significance of Nature is considered …scientifically meaningless.” Eaton writes that Merchant’s scholarship reveals how “ecological issues are as entangled within cultural ideologies and worldviews as within economics, technology, sciences, social organization, and ecological management.”

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257 Brady discusses the aversion or simply the ignorance of many in the ecocriticism school of thought to the legacy of what has been referred to as “the sublime” found in British Romanticism, particularly poetry. See Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 101-102.

258 “A subjective impression serves as the starting point for the rationalization of a world of experience…it creates a distance between man and the world by making the autonomy of things depend upon man; and it systematizes and stabilizes the external universe even as it confers upon the subject absolute mastery over the organization of this newly conquered exteriority.” Descola quoted in Wirzba, “Fidelity Ethic,” 78.

259 Wirzba, “Fidelity Ethic,” 79.


of approaches and perspectives . . . [with the] basic claim that there are interconnections between cultural ideas about and social construction of women and Nature, the oppression of women, and the degradation of the natural world." Postmodern approaches to environmental studies and wilderness as a matter of course reflect the same trends as other disciplines. Hammond proposes an application from systems theory, shifting from "an atomistic and dualistic orientation to a concern with networks, patterns, and processes . . . [one that emphasizes] the role of perception, interpretation, and creation of meaning;" and "the involvement of the observer." Currently, ecological schools of thought are divided on the otherness of nonhuman nature. Carolyn Merchant, Whitney Bauman, Val Plumwood and others maintain that humans are, indeed, different from the rest of the living other of our world. A number of deep ecologists view, alternately, that we are essentially in unity with all other things, and in some cases, even non-living organisms. "Rejecting the fact/value split, many of them…stress the inextricable intertwining of all life forms and seek ‘self-realization’ in the widest and deepest identification with ‘nature.’" Bauman argues that "we need epistemic anthropocentrism because this simply acknowledges our positionality: bodies do matter


and there is no objective position.”

Carolyn Merchant writes “The new postmodern sciences of ecology, chaos, and complexity theory are consistent with the idea of nature as an actor.” Sandilands, an eco-feminist, offers an appealing ontology, asserting that only a “discursive construction of nature” is possible, because the “alterity,” or “wild strangeness” of nature, or indeed “human identity” itself cannot be satisfactorily disclosed through language, being “both in and beyond ourselves.”

As discussed previously, the influence of philosophical worldviews shaped by economic processes imbues descendant disciplines with those perspectives and values. In the case of some postmodern environmental history narratives, Norman Wirzba proposes that our conceptualization of the environment, being understandably socially constructed in a commodity-centric world, expects that we characterize “the world as basically one big warehouse, store, or shopping mall that we enter to get the things we need.”

The problem with this position is, as he points out, “…there is nothing sacred about the world. The things we meet are more or less reducible to commodities that people engage with via the various modes of shopping, and the actors within this narration are basically shoppers who move through the world surveying, inspecting, purchasing, and enjoying


266 Merchant quoted in Bauman, “Materialization,” 257.


268 Wirzba, “Fidelity Ethic,” 73.
the things they freely choose. If we don’t find our current place appealing we can simply move to another place much like we visit another store.”

This is, ultimately, a view of the world that reduces human beings to nothing more than economic maximalists/pragmatists (making the best profit from a given circumstance). While this provides easy mathematically rendered and coherent quantitative data, and feeds a neat narrative, it falls subject to the same criticism as when considering the subject of rurality: it is disastrously reductive when considering human interactions, motivations, etc.

**A Minority Reading of the History of Wilderness in the United States**

After reviewing the literature on the history of the concept of wilderness, a bias emerges among the scholarship that lodges the blame for environmental degradation writ large with monotheism, especially Christianity. Examples and surrounding commentary are resoundingly critical, and voices and sources to the contrary are dismissed as out-of-the-ordinary and not representative of the predominant view. However, these easily dismissed or readily discredited sources suggest the validity (or co-history) of a slightly different perspective to the prevailing Christo-critical narrative, one that reveals a long history of less referenced, and decidedly more reverent notions of wilderness in Western religious, social, and philosophical thought and history. Reconsidering these less-heard voices will provide insight to the non-human I, the Other, encountered in the place-experience of inhabited solitude, despite the fact that the promulgation of such a narrative is somewhat at odds with the neat history of man against nature/wilderness that many

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269 Wirzba, “Fidelity Ethic,” 73.
U.S. wilderness scholars and writers of the mid-twentieth century present. “St. Jerome wrote: ‘A town is a prison, the desert loneliness a paradise.’”\textsuperscript{270} As an example, Schama’s account of the Italian poet Petrarch’s climb of Mont Ventoux (6,000 ft.) differs slightly, but meaningfully from Nash’s account of the same event. This variance bears some examination, if we are to grasp the nuances of the idea of wilderness in Western culture and avoid a neat historical narrative intended to support a particular assessment and agenda. According to Schama, Petrarch, as a poet contemporary of Dante, records his ascent in similar fashion, using the same “humanist device.”\textsuperscript{271} For Schama, Petrarch’s summit of the mountain, coinciding with his noting of a section in St. Augustine’s confessions, warning of beguilement by the physical world around us (in this case, mountains and the sea), speaks to “the most acute dilemma for humanists of Petrarch and Dante’s generation: the problematic relationship between empirical knowledge and devout introspection.”\textsuperscript{272} Petrarch goes on to conclude, “If we are ready to endure so much sweat and labor in order that we may bring our bodies a little nearer heaven, how can a soul struggling toward God up the steeps of human pride and human destiny fear any cross or prison or sting of fortune?”\textsuperscript{273} For Petrarch and others of the age, “the panorama showed nothing so clearly as the scenery of their inner selves.”\textsuperscript{274}

\textsuperscript{270} Tuan, \textit{Topophilia}, 52.

\textsuperscript{271} Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 419.

\textsuperscript{272} Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 421.

\textsuperscript{273} Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 421.

\textsuperscript{274} Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 422.
Schama’s conclusion, then, seems not to be a rejection of the mountain wilderness, but a reinforcement that, for the cultural creators at the time, these places of solitude were places of self-learning and revelation. This partly implicit conclusion is at subtle odds with the conclusion drawn by Nash in *Wilderness and the American Mind*. In a much briefer accounting of Petrarch’s summit of Mont Ventoux, Nash records Petrarch’s anger with himself that he “should still be admiring earth things who might long ago have learned…that nothing is wonderful but the soul,” and that he returned to his lodging “muttering imprecations at the way the world’s beauty diverted men from their proper concerns.”

The reader is left with two reasonably disparate conclusions as to the meaning, for Petrarch, of his experience, however, Schama’s incorporation of the wider philosophical elements at work during Petrarch’s life bring a more convincing ring to his conclusions. This account is one of a few that Nash uses to further the claim that wilderness, or in my telling, *inhabited solitude*, historically carries a negative correlation (although Nash consistently tells his reader that wilderness is historically viewed as moderately to absolutely negative throughout Western history, his text consistently, often explicitly, expresses the opposite view, sometimes in adjacent sentences and paragraphs). Additionally, Nash is particularly and excessively critical of Christianity, and what he sees as its malign influence on attitudes toward untrammeled nature in the United States from the sixteenth century to the present day. However, as I’ve said, cracks of light show

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around his otherwise neatly constructed narrative. One example he provides reveals the
decidedly Greek pre-Christian history of the idea of nature as requiring control and
conquering. Citing René Dubos, a noted French microbiologist (and firm humanist)
writing in 1976, “‘The natural channels…are not necessarily the most desirable, either for
the human species or for other species.’ He thinks of a gardenlike earth, shaped and
controlled by man, as the logical fulfillment of human potential.” Regrettably, Nash’s
critique of the history of Christianity as it relates to environmental degradation since the
Industrial Revolution is not unique to Nash; it remains a recurring reflexive metanarrative among many contemporary environmental historians. In response, a body of
literature and research has emerged which Santmire divides into three groups—
“reconstructionists,” “revisionists,” and “apologists.”


277 While discussing reclaiming nature “from the jaws of division and
meaninglessness,” Susan Griffin writes “One [way] is…to retreat into fundamentalist
religions that in their own ways rob nature and humanity of our infinite complexity and
creativity, reducing life to the literal interpretation of ancient texts, often out of context and
unjust (if not lacking in common sense altogether.)” Susan Griffin, “Foreword,” in After the
Kenneth Worthy, Elizabeth Alison, Whitney A. Bauman (New York and London: Routledge,
2019), xx. See also implicit or explicit themes/narratives on this history in writings by Gary
Snyder, Robert Moor, William Cronon, and others who have likely used Nash’s detailed,
foundational work seemingly without questioning some of his underlying assumptions and
assertions, possibly unwittingly falling into the (very human) trap of confirmation bias.

278 Craig G. Bartholomew, Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place, (Grand
Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 190. As Bartholomew explains,
reconstructionists insist that theology must be reconceptualized from its roots: apologists
find ecologic defenses within the text: and, revisionists “work within the classical Christian
tradition” but seek to “reexcavate the biblical and theological traditions in search of
resources for a robust theology of nature.” Bartholomew, Where Mortals Dwell, 190. For
example, in the last decade, Norman Wirzba, Whitney Bauman, Willie James Jennings have
pointed to the profound “misunderstanding” of creation “ex nihilo” by Christians themselves,
as the source of a theology of domination and subjugation of nature. Norman Wirzba, “From
different perspective on the role of Christianity in environmental history. Theologian and Ecologist Norman Wirzba writes that scripture reveals God’s desire to be with Creation, rather than separated from It.

God is transcendent, but not in the sense of distance. God’s transcendence is a feature of God’s reality being of fundamentally different kind than creaturely reality. And because God’s reality is unlike finite, creaturely reality, that means God can be present to and immanent within every creature as its creating and sustaining power...God ‘makes room’ for what is not God ‘to be,’ and then commits to nurture it into the fullness of its life.279

St. Francis of Assisi, in his Canticle of All Creation, captures the filial relationship between humans and the natural world he understood from Scripture. “…’my lord Brother Sun, through whom you give us day and light’; ‘Sister Moon and Stars,’ created


279 Wirzba, “Fidelity Ethic,” 81.
bright, precious, and beautiful in the heavens; ‘Brother Wind and air and cloud and calm
and all weather’ . . . ‘Sister Water,’ . . . ‘Brother Fire’, and ‘Sister Mother Earth’.”

Cordovero, a Kabbalist, wrote “‘[o]ne’s mercies should be distributed to all the creatures,
not destroying and not despising them. For so is the highest Wisdom distributed to all
the creatures, silent, growing, moving and speaking [i.e., mineral, plant, animal, and
human].’” (my emphasis) Pope Francis, in his recent encyclical, _Laudato Sí_. Pope
Francis writes “[n]ature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a
mere setting in which we live. We are part of Nature, included in it and thus in constant
interaction with it…” Kim writes that “[e]arly and medieval theologies treated
humanity in association with the natural world as the common creation of God. ‘God-
world-humanity: these form a metaphysical trinity.’ And ‘cosmology, anthropology, and
teology of God formed a harmonious unity,’ as expressed in Hildegard of Bingen,
Bonaventure, and Aquinas (Johnson, 2000, 6).”

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280 John Hart, “ _Laudato Sí_ in the Earth Commons—Integral Ecology and

281 Cordovero, quoted in David Mevorach Seidenberg, “Eco-Kabbalah: Holism and
Mysticism in Earth-Centered Judaism,” in _The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and


283 Heup Young Kim, “Integrating Ecological Consciousness in Daoism,
Confucianism, and Christian Theology,” in _The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and
Even though the Romantics are often credited with establishing the positive view of wilderness and wild places, ambivalent feelings toward the non-human I, the Other of nature, can be seen emerging in the Renaissance period and in the pre-history of the Alpine idyll in Switzerland. Schama detects shifts in the understanding of mountains in sixteenth century painters such as Albrecht Altdorfer and Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

Apprehension had been overtaken by perception. Even though mountains, unlike the arboreal garden and the sacred stream, had gone unmentioned in the account of Creation given in Genesis, they were at last admitted to the universe of blessed nature…By the middle of the fifteenth century [in the literature of Christian humanism]…nature became not merely compatible with awe of the Creator but a way to affirm his omniscience…The possibility that mountain peaks and valleys might not be the accursed places of the world coincided with the recovery of classical texts of natural history…By the end of the sixteenth century printed guides indicated the location of hospices, inns, chapels, and mountain paths. This was no longer wilderness, but a recognizable human society.284

The growing European affinity for the mountain ideal (“mountain utopia”) “was not invented, so much as reinvented, in the eighteenth century. In the homegrown sixteenth-century eulogies of city Swiss…there was already the making of an Alpine idyll.”285 And, while, as Schama details over a number of pages, this Swiss “Alpine idyll” was at considerable odds with a fact-based assessment, it contributed to a strong sense of love and appreciation for the Alps, across Europe, thanks chiefly to Rousseau, the idyll’s more expressive disciple, but also others (Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron) disillusioned with the trappings of “vile modernity: fashion, theatre,

284 Schama, Landscape and Memory, 427-429.

285 Schama, Landscape and Memory, 479.
cosmopolitanism.”286 Incidentally, Schama’s detailed account of the European Alpine legacy is somewhat at odds with the sweeping conclusion that for the people of Middle Ages Europe, wilderness “was instinctively understood as something alien to man—an insecure and uncomfortable environment against which civilization had waged and unceasing struggle.”287 In the nineteenth century, Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm understood Wildnis to be contradictory, “on the one hand it is inhospitable, alien, mysterious and threatening; on the other, beautiful, friendly, and capable of elevating and delighting the beholder.” [my emphasis]288

As previously noted, many historians attribute the advent of Romanticism in Europe in the eighteenth century with the shift in perspective of the idea of wilderness for Western society as a whole, with caveats as noted later. As the writings of Goethe attest, eighteenth century reverence for inhabited solitude was not restricted to the faithful. Goethe, unlike many of his contemporaries who record their experiences of the same, rejected Christianity.289 According to numerous accounts, he deeply revered Jesus as a moral figure, but wrote that he was “decidedly non-Christian.” These reflections of Goethe, then, provide an example of an Enlightenment-era place-experience of inhabited

286 Schama, Landscape and Memory, 480.


288 Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 4.

289 Although it must be acknowledged that despite his rejection of Christianity, as a Lutheran by birth and subject to the deep Christian influence in society in his time, his writings inescapably evoke vestiges of a Christian awe of God’s Creation.
Solitude at least notionally outside Christian reflective thought. In his essay “On Granite,” he writes of the desire for that sublime tranquility which surrounds us when we stand in the solitude and silence of nature, vast and eloquent with its still voice... In this moment [while standing “high atop a barren peak”], when the inner powers of the Earth seem to affect me directly with all their forces of attraction and movement, and the influences of heaven hover closer about me, I am uplifted in spirit to a more exalted view of nature. The human spirit brings life to everything, and here, too, there springs to life within me an image irresistible in its sublimity. ‘This mood of solitude,’ I say to myself as I gaze down from the barren peak... ‘this mood of solitude will overcome all who desire to bring forth before their souls only the deepest, oldest, most elemental feeling for the truth... I survey the world with its undulating valleys and its distant fruitful meadows, my soul is exalted beyond itself and above all the world, and it yearns for the heavens which are so near to me.’

Nash, (whose work, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, first published in 1967, had its fifth edition published in 2014, with few changes save a new foreword by the author), develops an historical narrative regarding the evolution of the idea of wilderness, principally from the seventeenth through the twentieth century. As mentioned previously, his perspective, in a rather broad swath, paints the religious European American immigrants to the United States from the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries and the pioneers who moved west to settle away from the East Coast as people with a predominately negative view of wilderness and its inhabitants, as something to be tamed, by Divine Command. He says of the Romantic movement that “it never seriously challenged the aversion in the pioneer mind. Appreciation, rather resulted from

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momentary relaxation of the dominant antipathy.” Further, he implies that the appreciation for wilderness rested with the educated, urban classes, rather than those who lived and worked the land. I wonder if those without a voice, much like the Italian subsistence farmers mentioned by Moor, without the means and education to leave an historical record, would have disputed this portrayal. I present this somewhat “alternative” narrative of the evolution of the idea of wilderness to address my concern regarding the possibility of an incomplete representation of the history of the idea of wilderness across widely-read analyses of the same, prevalent among U.S.-based wilderness historians.

**On the Interrelationship of Wilderness and the Rural**

A key aspect to the *place-experience of inhabited solitude* is that it is precisely a privileged experience constituent of extended time living in places of *inhabited solitude*, that is, in places characterized as non-agri-rural and often those places in direct proximity to what is referred to as wilderness. Visitors to areas of *inhabited solitude*, as will be explored in the next chapter, encounter *inhabited solitude* aesthetically, frequently in a manner that can be defined as sublime, in the classic sense of that word. This encounter, evocative of feelings of awe, fear, and appreciation, is a legitimate encounter with inhabited solitude, and as I’ve asserted previously, no less authentic than the *place-experience of inhabited solitude*, just different. Both time and the notion of sublimity, as

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they apply to the *place-experience of inhabited solitude* will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Three, but a few words about the relationship between rural and the term wilderness are important, due to the fact that wilderness as a term has been defined by the urban. This means that wilderness, as a term, carries with it inherent urban biases that can be inimical to rural dwellers as well as to the idea of the rural.

Because ‘nature is constructed as a place where people are not present, or as ‘nature out there’’ (Sze, 2011:9), human habitation is anathema to places constructed as wilderness…This conservation concept of wilderness obscures the fact that some people do live closer than others to wilderness.²⁹³

Pruitt and Sobczynski make a crucial distinction between those who “consume” the wilderness (visitors) and those who actually live “in the open space, rural settlements, and small towns abutting what in the United States is popularly thought of as wilderness.”²⁹⁴ Thus, as many rural residents of these communities nationwide are well aware, wilderness conservation is a local, not distant set of public policy challenges. “A violation of wilderness may thus also be a wrong to rural people…Yet rural residents may not be worthy of conservationists’ solicitude if the residents are seen as transgressing wilderness by the very presence of their homes.”²⁹⁵ Øian, writing in 2013, notes that the more recent branding, by the tourism industry, of rural forested areas in Norway as “wilderness” has evoked both positive and negative responses from local

²⁹⁵ Pruitt and Sobczynski, “Protecting people, protecting places,” 331.
residents: pride in the “spectacularness and uniqueness” of the forests and mountains in
which their communities are located, and skepticism, due to the fact that what is billed as
“wilderness” actually holds deep, place-associated “cultural and social aspects,” that such
a term “[makes] irrelevant or [denies].” The inherent urban biases of the word
wilderness is one of the primary reason why I have chosen to articulate these places as
inhabited solitude instead, in the hope that this term better reflects these places as
understood by rural inhabitants.

In Conclusion…

In this chapter, I have examined the history and current status of the concepts of
rural, place, and wilderness, the three primary constructs that constitute the place-
experience of inhabited solitude. I have reviewed both the scholarship of these notions as
well as their appearance and role in public policy. Importantly, we find that rural and
physical place matter when it comes to our life experiences and our identities. Further,
the non-agri-rural and its proximity to the non-human I of what is conventionally referred
to as wilderness but is much broader and encompasses inhabited solitude, necessitates an
awareness of the history of the term wilderness itself. This exploration reveals that in a
number of cases, analyses must work to extricate the place-bound, physical realities of
this term from what it ultimately represents as a social construct today, in order to
uncover the very real and privileged experience of the non-agri-rural with inhabited

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296 Hogne Øian, “Wilderness tourism and moralities of commitment: Hunting and
angling as modes of engaging with the natures and animals of rural landscapes in Norway,”
solitude. An examination of the term wilderness also brings to light the biases in modern scholarship that, in formulation, set up an oppositional relationship between monotheism/God and humanity. By focusing on the those very real aspects to the religious institutions and dogma of Christianity since Aquinas that treat wild nature as evil or as something to be conquered, a framework can be built which leaves the Creator, the Other, out of what It has Created, and works to affirm the dogma of a human-centric perspective instead. As discussed previously, this is a shallow reading of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, when it comes to nature. A recognition of the existence, alterity, and dignity of the non-human I of inhabited solitude, and its role in the place-experience of inhabited solitude, firmly accepts the existence of that which exists apart from humanity, which is mysterious and unknown, and which is ultimately outside of the control of humans, save our ability to destroy (at least temporarily). Yet, and perhaps most importantly, alterity does not absolve us from responsibility or stewardship, based in part on that which we share with the Other.
CHAPTER 3: THE PLACE AND THE EXPERIENCE

In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, I will argue that the *place-experience of inhabited solitude* is an authentic experience with the Other, the non-human I, one that is privileged in that it is an encounter that differs from an aesthetic experience or an experience of the classical sublime, namely, that it is an encounter most commonly experienced by those who dwell predominately in the non-agri-rural, but also one that can occur if an individual spends prolonged time in places of *inhabited solitude*. I will present evidence of the lure *inhabited solitude* and the particular importance of forests and mountains. Employing a lens of twentieth century continental philosophical thought, including phenomenology and existentialism, I will argue that certain themes in this thought, including perspective, reciprocity and participation, intersubjectivity, notions of Being, and finitude, when they encounter *inhabited solitude*, result in a particular *place-experience* of that *inhabited solitude*. Further, that *place-experience* is ascribed meaning and retained in memory through language, myth, and metaphor. I will then discuss the particular connection to this experience that is the purview of the rural, and particularly, the non-agri-rural. I will argue that inhabitants of the non-agri-rural, particularly places characterized by sparse populations, in, adjacent to, or ready routine access to regions noticeably free from human economic activity, far from urban or suburban areas (far enough to preclude commuter-rural populations), and free of the sounds of human activity (freeways, roadways, resource extraction, heavy tourism), more commonly have a *place-experience of inhabited solitude*.

To reiterate, the key factor is solitary, prolonged, uninterrupted exposure to the non-human I, as a matter of routine inhabitation, over time, in places of *inhabited solitude*, or in those rare instances where otherwise urban or suburban inhabitants leave their urban setting and spend months in *inhabited solitude*. Implicit in my proposition is the conclusion and conviction that
inhabitants of the non-agri-rural, particularly in the United States, serve as critical stewards and gatekeepers of these places, due to their deep knowledge of and connection to places of inhabited solitude. Finally, I will examine a potential critique of my proposition, that this experience can be included in the spectrum of what was classically referred to as the sublime, and I will explain why the place-experience of inhabited solitude cannot, in the end, be relegated to the narrower spectrum of an aesthetic human experience, with an erstwhile contention that the sublime and other experiences in the spectrum of what is considered “aesthetic,” are nonetheless authentic, engaging, and serve as impetus for action.

My conceptualization of the place-experience of inhabited solitude has yielded a fascinating, interdisciplinary academic, spiritual, and practical expedition of multiple disciplines, a journey through the places of philosophy, theology, literature, history (cultural and environmental), geography, and the natural sciences in pursuit of a better understanding of the enigmatic, but very real, place-experience of inhabited solitude.

**Inhabited Solitude: “Degrees of Aloneness”**

In an attempt to further delineate what I mean, qualitatively, by inhabited solitude, it is sparsely populated geographic place and, as stated in the introduction, extensively and visibly unmanaged or unmanipulated by large-scale productivist agricultural, forestry, or natural resource extractive activity. While I cannot provide a map of exact boundaries, the notion of inhabited solitude infers a place in which humans are necessarily a very small component of the plant, animal, and geologic aggregate. Accordingly, many state parks, some or parts of some national parks, and suburban areas or farmed land with hiking corridors or trail networks do not have the characteristics of inhabited solitude. If persistent and routine sounds of human activity (traffic, mechanized activity, save the unavoidable passing of commercial aircraft) are anywhere present,
this is not *inhabited solitude*. If the mark of human activity such as developed and maintained non-primitive campsites is present, this is not *inhabited solitude*. For example, while the woods in the Northeastern United States have regrown and many regions today are home to dense, young forests, there are not many places, save perhaps north central and northwestern Maine in designated state park, public land, and Wilderness areas that can be called *inhabited solitude*.

“Since 1970 about twelve thousand miles of road have been built so that no spot in the North Woods is more than two miles from a road,” and “[n]inety percent of the southern Appalachians is within half a mile of a road passable by a four-wheel-drive-vehicle.”

“America’s national parks are being ‘loved to death.’ . . . Some of America’s most cherished wildlands are also among the most congested . . . national park visits regularly top 300 million people per year.”

At the same time, as I have said previously, it is not my intention to denigrate or devalue otherwise authentic experiences of nature and of the wild. As Leopold rightly asserts,

> [t]here are degrees and kinds of solitude. An island in a lake has one kind . . . [but] there is always the chance that [a boat] might . . . pay you a visit. A peak in the clouds has another kind; but most peaks have trails, and trails have tourists. I know of no solitude so secure as one guarded by a spring flood; nor do the geese, who have seen more kinds and degrees of aloneness than I have.\(^3\)

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Leopold captures the notion of inhabited solitude in his identification of this extreme degree of “aloneness” in the wild, but allows for authentic “degrees and kinds of solitude.” Within the past few years, I had experiences in the Swiss Alps similar to that of Eric Julber, an American wilderness critic in the 1970s. My persistent observation, running the Jungfrau Marathon (from Interlaken to Kleine Scheidigg) in September 2016, hiking a rather crowded trail high above Lauterbrunnen along the ridgeline that passes the base of the Eiger Wall at Kleine Scheidigg and down to Wengen in June 2017, hiking for a short time below the Matterhorn in August 2017, and driving through the Italy-Switzerland border region in November 2017, was that the smell of untrammeled nature—native trees, flowers, and shrubs so pronounced in the forests of the central Appalachians, Pacific Northwest coastal range, and the Rocky Mountains of the Inland Northwest and Colorado (of which I am familiar) was noticeably absent in the Swiss Alps (in the areas mentioned). Ancient structures, many still inhabited, dotted the grand, grassy sweeps of the peaks and valleys in the Swiss Alps, and cattle and sheep grazed intermittently but widely. I had the distinct sense of a land sparsely populated, but long-inhabited by agricultural humans. And, true to the nature of centuries of tourism, very few places, save the tops of sheer granite walls of the Alpine peaks where a friend and his fellow wing-suiters would chopper to ride the wind waves, were inaccessible to most people. Julber found, four decades prior to my visits, that “the Swiss Alps were readily accessible by mechanized conveyances, heavily used by people, and [yet] still beautiful and satisfying,” commenting that his visit to Switzerland was “the end of my purist ethic.”

Indeed, in an essay for Harper’s Monthly in 1875, Muir writes:

In the Swiss Alps carriage roads approach within a few hundred yards of some of the low-descending glaciers, while the comparative remoteness and inaccessibility of the Sierra glaciers may be inferred from the fact that, during the prosecution of my own

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explorations in five summers, I never met a single human being, not even an Indian or a hunter.\(^5\)

As was explained in Chapter One, the notion of *inhabited solitude* can include wilderness as we understand it generically and legally, but it is not exclusive to Wilderness under the legal definition in the United States. As discussed above and in Chapter Two, there are few places on earth of which it can be said are truly untouched by the work and life of humans over the course of the history of our species. Further, evidence of the work and life of humans may not simply be restricted to the immediate and sensual impressions of human engagement, but include place-related memories as well. Nan Shepherd instructs us regarding the imprint of memories of human place-experiences in *inhabited solitude* as a measure of humanity’s legacy in that place. “Up on the plateau nothing has moved for a long time…Man might be a thousand years away. . . . Yet . . . I am touched at many points by his presence . . . in the cairns, marking the summits, marking the paths, marking the spot where a man has died, or where a river is born.”\(^6\) It can be said, then, that solitude is *inhabited*, through physical dwelling (Heidegger, Bachelard) or by memory of past dwelling. It is also *inhabited* through the act of having been assigned a name, either on a map or in oral tradition, stories, and folklore. “Man’s presence too is in the map and the compass that I carry.”\(^7\)

A compelling metaphor for the *inhabited* component of *inhabited solitude* is Bachelard’s discussion of the archetypal “hermit’s hut” in *The Poetics of Space*. To the imagination, he proposes that the hut universally represents “centralized solitude” leading “us on toward extreme

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\(^7\) Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, 77.
solitude. The hermit is *alone* before God.”\(^8\) For Bachelard, the hut as refuge (and the lamp in the window of the hut as vigilance and eternal waiting) in an otherwise entirely unfamiliar, non-human place is the primary metaphor. In the concept of *inhabited solitude*, Bachelard’s hut represents the tenuous, visually insignificant human mark in an otherwise non-human place. Further, the *place-experience of inhabited solitude* requires, in Bachelard’s terms, in-dwelling, in such a place, over time. The solitude of the hermit is as much experiential as it is material. In a 2015-2016 ethnographic account of Romanian shepherds (*ciobani*) that focused on their experiences of silence and solitude in a pastoral setting in the mountains, Archer observes that weather, animal sounds, wind, and water converge in “a cacophony of sound within the silence and interaction within the solitude.”\(^9\)\(^10\) Additionally, the experience of/encounter with weather, considered at length by Ingold, is as much a component of the non-human I met in *inhabited solitude* as are the more “animate” participants. “To inhabit the open is…to be immersed in the incessant movements of wind and weather, wherein substances and medium are brought together in the constitution of beings that, by way of their activity, participate in stitching the textures of the land.”\(^11\)

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\(^10\) He focuses, in part, on the experience of the *ciobani* with weather, noting that anticipating and responding to the changing seasons and weather “is central to the everyday practice of *ciobani* at pasture. The weather is . . . constantly making and remaking the landscape, marking not only spatial features but the temporal dimensions of the human experience of landscape.” Archer, “The men on the mountainside,” 109.

Unequivocally, authentic and meaningful experiences of and with nature happen across a spectrum of “degrees of aloneness,” and contribute, critically, together with the place-experience of inhabited solitude, to the human experience of the non-human I, as well as personal health and longevity. In fact, a 2017 analysis of 64 international studies of Shinrin-yoku (SY), or “forest bathing,” as well as nature therapy (NT), found that “positive health benefits” were associated with forest bathing and NT (although these studies included studies on individuals exposed to nature virtually as well). The reviewers also determined that “[t]he Biophilia Hypothesis supports SY and NT because it is steeped in the idea humans have an inner biological attraction to nature and its importance in our human development.”12 Similarly, a 2015 analysis of multiple studies of the relationship of time spent in and around nature with health outcomes, for the purposes of determining what health outcome benefited from the greatest diversity of experiences with nature, found that enhanced immune functioning was the outcome most broadly and positively affected by time spent in nature. Further, while “existing literature speaks to the value not only of “wild” nature but also “everyday” nature,” two-hour “forest walks on consecutive days increased the number and activity of anti-cancer NK cells by 50 and 56%, respectively” and “extended time in a forest decreased inflammatory cytokines implicated in chronic disease by roughly one-half.”13

Wilderness and open space advocacy in the United States and Europe in the twentieth century reveals important nuances between urban and rural ontologies/epistemologies of inhabited solitude. While rural place identity can predict some attitudes toward open space and

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the environment, findings can vary greatly, depending on survey terminology and cultural understandings of land use, particularly with notions such as “open space.” For example, a 2002 survey of 1,000 Italians found that when it comes to “legislating land-use change,” residents who lived farther from national parks with “relatively low place identity” had higher rates of positive attitudes toward these preserves than did people living close to the parks who were found to be “most concerned with local economic and pragmatic benefits from the spaces.” For some, this may seem counterintuitive. Why would those who elect to live in rural places, closer to undeveloped and unworked landscape, be less inclined (generally) to exhibit what is understood to be “pro-environmental” attitudes? Much of the confusion lies in the terms of reference. For example, in a 2010 or 2011 household survey (exact dates of the survey were not provided in the article) conducted in a township in rural Pennsylvania, adjacent to state forest lands where the land is predominately agricultural and developed neighborhoods were separated by private farmland, researchers measured (in part) respondents’ answers to a question about their “connection to nature.” As was previously discussed, “nature” is too nebulous a term across demographic groups to provide relevant data concerning the answer to the question. Nature, as a term without further clarification can means anything from a flowerbed outside the backdoor of an apartment in London to the untrammeled wilderness of Alaska or Death Valley. Similar concerns can be raised about the phrase “pro-environment,” as has been noted across many environmental controversies in the Pacific Northwest—both sides of the notorious Spotted Owl controversy in the early 1990s in Oregon, legitimately, claimed to be “pro-environment.”


previously cited Pennsylvania research, the researchers did, however, ask pertinent clarifying questions about the definitions of open space, and the range of responses provides insight to the challenge of terminology. Seventeen percent said open space was a parcel of land, large or small, public or private, predominately undeveloped, that if preserved remains in its current state and if enhanced, allows it “to be adapted for common use.”\textsuperscript{16} A majority of respondents (34 percent) simply defined open space as “’a parcel of undeveloped land’”; 20 percent of respondents defined it as “’[s]pace where there is protected natural habitat’”; 15 percent defined it as “’[a] parcel of land that is used for recreational purposes and is developed for that use,’” and seven percent said it “’was a place that the town could use together.’”\textsuperscript{17} Examples of open space provided by the respondents included “’farmland,’ ‘fields, no house,’ ‘pasture land or woods—unused space.’”\textsuperscript{18} As a graduate student in 2001, I conducted a study of open space outside of Colorado Springs, along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains. The literature and community surveys of those communities at that time almost uniformly understood open space to be land left undeveloped and unused in any agricultural manner, open to the public for foot, cycling, and limited motorized use. The only “enhancement” would have included trail maintenance (in an effort to keep people on trails so as to preserve the flora and the fauna). Working farmland and pastureland was not typically considered open space, as people recreated in open space to enjoy land not altered or worked by humans. Further, unlike in Europe and the UK, farmers and ranchers in the United States generally do not allow people to traverse their private property in routine outdoor


\textsuperscript{17} Swim, et al., “Environmental Identity,” 142.

\textsuperscript{18} Swim, et al., “Environmental Identity,” 142.
recreational pursuits, aside from instances of hunting and some land set aside for conservation.\textsuperscript{19} Along those lines, I also note that open space, even in Colorado, was land intentionally set aside for public recreation and by definition, was carved out of or directly adjacent to, housing developments. (Suffice it to say, open space, as an element of rural and suburban land development, is neither wilderness nor \textit{inhabited solitude}.)

To reiterate my position: A deeply emotive aesthetic experience is no less authentic, less instructive, or less meaningful a part of human experience than the \textit{place-experience of inhabited solitude}; instead, the difference lies in lived experience and engagement over time, including prolonged aloneness with the Other, the non-human I. Without a doubt, a deeply aesthetic experience provides important distance from the mortal reality associated with the non-human I that allows for the human imagination, in the act of contemplation, to attribute meaning to such experiences. Snyder proposes that landscape poetry in China developed for the very reason that “the Chinese had become removed enough from their own mountains and rivers to aestheticize them.”\textsuperscript{20} As will be discussed later, this distance is critical to the Kantian notion of the sublime, which lives on today in contemporary theories of the sublime. Further, implications for moral and ethical action do not spring only from the \textit{place-experience of inhabited solitude} or deeply aesthetic experiences of the sublime in nature. Even everyday experiences with nature, along

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[19] There are exceptions to this generalization, including in Vermont (where approximately 86 percent of the land in privately owned), where state law allows people to access private property unless the owner has gone through a process with the local government to obtain and post “no trespassing” signs. Landowners in Vermont maintain “old roads and trails on their property for walking, skiing, and other activities, and [allow] others to use them.” Cheryl E. Morse, Allan M. Strong, V. Ernesto Mendez, Sarah T. Lovell, Austin R. Troy, and William B. Morris, “Performing a New England landscape: Viewing, engaging, and belonging,” \textit{Journal of Rural Studies} 36 (2014): 231.
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with improved health outcomes mentioned above, can be a source of moral or ethical action. Embree discusses the predominant human-nature experience (at least humans in the developed world), what he calls “a great deal of visiting nature.” These encounters can inspire valuations of nature and sometimes, concrete action, toward conservation and preservation, and “can be considered aesthetic in a broadened signification.” Subsequently, he poses the question:

Can walking in the woods be an encountering not merely of the beautiful wilderness or wild-seeming environment, but also an encountering of community with tree and mountains, who have moral status for the humans walking among them, so that in relation to them one is in contact with higher powers?

My answer is yes, but this is not what is meant by the place-experience of inhabited solitude. Still, and perhaps most importantly, Embree’s, Cronon’s, and others’ treatment of the nature of wilderness and where it can be rightly found imposes a necessary humility upon the place-experience of inhabited solitude and its intended lack of currency to explain the entirety of human experience with the non-human I.

**The Lure of Inhabited Solitude**

...the spare arctic landscape suggested the soul’s emptying itself in readiness for the incursions of the divine.

-Annie Dillard

In a United States Department of Agriculture-Environmental Research Service report on the attraction of place-related natural amenities in 1999, the Department found a direct correlation

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22 Embree, “The Possibility of a Constitutive Phenomenology,” 44.


between high population growth from the 1970 to 1996 in counties in the West and Southwest and those counties’ richness in natural amenities, as compared to counties in the Midwest (dearth of natural amenities and loss of population). The study found that population changes were “more highly related to these natural amenities than to urban proximity, population density, or economic type…” The report defines natural amenities as “mild climate, varied topography, and proximity to surface water—ponds, lakes, and shoreline” and have “mountains, and lakes or coastal settings.” However, this lure of solitude is certainly nothing new. The existence of large tracts of uninhabited forests from pre-Medieval Europe through the Middle Ages are not supported by historical record; in fact, people lived and flourished in most of these forests. “From at least the seventh century, then, many monasteries were established in woodlands not as retreats but to take advantage of the thriving natural economy…” However, it seems that even in these sylvan settings, people sought out the deeper reaches of the forests, the inhabited solitude.

From Ireland to Bohemia, penitents fled from the temptations of the world into the woodland depths. In solitude they would deliver themselves to mystical transports or prevail over the ordeals that might come their way...The indeterminate, boundless forest, then, was Europe’s version of the Hebraic desert wilderness...


27 In the report, topographic variation was characterized by the presence of forested mountains, and the Intermountain West and West Coast of the United States rated the highest on the natural amenities scale. McGranahan, “Natural Amenities Drive Rural Population Change,” 11.


29 Schama, Landscape and Memory, 227.
In a quick glance eastward, we find that in the Shinto religion, “[a]nomalies and curiosities of the landscape are all signs of kami – spirit-power, presence, shape of mind, energy. The greatest of all kami centers is Mt. Fuji.”

Certainly, a component of this attraction for mountain and forest-scapes seems to be tied to that of an attraction for varied topography. Human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan discusses findings in the field of human psychology that could explain, in part, an innate affinity for varied geography. He notes the human preference for binary opposition (in organization). Humans have a “tendency . . . to pick pairs among segments perceived in nature’s continuum and assign opposite meanings to each pair. This tendency may reflect the structure of the human mind, but the emotional force of some bipolar antinomies suggests that the total human being, at all levels of experience, is involved.”

He points out that some worldviews have long identified this dualism, and see the human world as that of mediator. “Mediating between the extremes, and receiving influences from both, is madiapa, the middle world of man.” In concept, this is not too different from a Christian worldview that sees God as Other, Christ Incarnate (perfect human) as mediator, and God’s Creation, including fallen humanity, as separated (temporarily) from God. In any case, the psychological and cultural heritage of these ancient understandings of the natural world, and humans’ relationship to it, could well undergird our contemporary, seemingly quite un-mythological, but as difficult to explain, preferences for the varied (natural) geography and

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30 Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, 94.


32 Tuan, *Topophilia*, 22.
flora found in areas left largely undisturbed by human economic activity. For Dillard, these gaps include “the cliffs in the rock where you cower to see the back parts of God . . . the fissures between mountains and cells the wind lances through, the icy narrowing fiords splitting the cliffs of mystery.” Time and physical laws of nature impose mandatory variations in matter, which are constantly in flux, with which we also engage. Abram observes a compelling variance between interactions with the natural world and that of the man-made. (This is different than the point he makes regarding the slow but constant change happening in every object (the bowl), as that is generally largely imperceptible due to the length of time involved.) “The patterns on the stream’s surface is it ripples over the rocks, or on the bark of an elm tree, or in a cluster of weeds, are all composed of repetitive figures that never exactly repeat themselves. . . . In contrast, the mass-produced artifacts of civilization, from milk cartons to washing machines to computers, draw our senses into a dance that endlessly reiterates itself without variation.”

Incidentally, ultimately, Tuan takes a privileged, but dim view regarding the place-experience of inhabited solitude. He does not believe that “common humanity” can, let alone desires to, access such an experience. “In our daily contacts with people we take for granted that eccentric attitudes exist and that they are not explained exhaustively by cultural factors such as family background, upbringing, and education... We are on surer ground when we relate the range of human attitudes to the biological categories of sex and age.” (my emphasis) Tuan, Topophilia, 53. While Tuan’s determinism in this regard may be due in part to the time period in which he wrote Topophilia, in the early 1970s, prior to the promulgation of poststructuralism, social constructivism, and the attendant affected fields of academic study that emerged in the 1980s and beyond, Tuan seems to have an unwitting urban bias.

Dillard, Tinker Creek, 274.

perception with the human-created world and the natural alive-by-its-own-being world differ in a fundamental way.

The lure of inhabited solitude is admittedly not universal, but is observable most often (and logically) in rural places in which people have chosen to move to, or remain or return to (if born there), given the relative freedom of residential electability in Western society, despite the promise of economic gain in more suburban and urban areas. The rural will be discussed in greater detail later, but many who abide in rural places come to experience, over time and frequency of encounter, inhabited solitude. And, time is critical here. Shepherd comments on the intrusion that other humans often, initially, introduce to the place-experience of inhabited solitude. For her, too much, and superfluous, conversation when walking with another in the mountains “silences” the mountain. But, she acknowledges, this is a learned capacity.

Beginners…want the startling view, the horrid pinnacle – sips of beer and tea instead of milk. Yet often the mountain gives itself most completely when I have no destination, when I reach out nowhere in particular, but have gone out merely to be with the mountain as one visits a friend with no intention but to be with him.36

“The mountains are calling and I must go.”

Certain aspects of nature defy easy human control: these are the mountains, deserts, and seas. They constitute . . . permanent fixtures in man’s world whether he likes them to or not. To these recalcitrant aspects of nature man has tended to respond emotionally, treating them at one time as sublime, the abode of the gods, and at another as ugly, distasteful, the abode of demons.37

Across cultures, the mountains, the deserts, and the oceans challenge us. Discussing the early American Indian tribes’ naming of places, Stewart writes that the ambiguity of mountains tended to prevent their naming. “Mountains generally went unnamed. They were huge and vague; they mingled with one another, and faded off into their own shoulders; no one was really

36 Shepherd, The Living Mountain, 15.

37 Tuan, Topophilia, 70.
Dillard observes that “mountains…are a passive mystery, the oldest of all. Theirs is the one simple mystery of creation from nothing . . . the given. . . . You can heave your spirit into a mountain and the mountain will keep it, folded, and not throw it back.”

While the Eastern cultural heritage of the notion of inhabited solitude is not the primary focus of this study, it is instructive to periodically note cross-cultural coherences, demonstrating the shared human experience of inhabited solitude. In that vein, the opening sentences of Sansuikyo (“Mountains and Waters Sutra” thirteen century) point us to a common understanding of the mystery and subsequent lure of inhabited solitude as it relates to mountainous regions.

“‘Because mountains and waters have been active since before the eon of emptiness, they are alive at this moment. Because they have been the self since before form arose, they are liberated and realized.’” And, similar to Western cultural conceptualizations of mountains, in China the idea of what mountains represented has evolved. In fact, Tuan notes a similar pattern of the shift in cultural perceptions of mountains in Eastern and Western traditions: “[I]n both civilizations the change was from a religious attitude in which awe was combined with aversion, to an aesthetic attitude that shifted from a sense of the sublime to a feeling for the picturesque; to the modern evaluation of mountains as a recreational resource.”

Also, according to Tuan, the shift in attitudes occurred for a few reasons, including shedding the idea (across many academic fields


41 Tuan, *Topophilia*, 71.
in the 18th century) that a circle represented perfection, opening the door for appreciation of all geometric forms; the growing accessibility of mountains to human visitors; and the promotion of the health benefits of mountain air. Schama also finds congruence in the religious significance of mountains in Eastern and Western traditions, namely that the sentiment with regard to mountains is similar in Christian asceticism and in Taoism. “Instead of being a place that would testify to the loftiness of human ambition, to the devout a holy mount might still be a place of terror and awe, the trial chamber of the spirit.” [my emphasis] The mountain-as-redemption symbolism is foundational to the physical structure of Dante’s Inferno. Dante ascends, in a “labor of atonement,” the rocky cliffs of purgatory to the “terrestrial paradise…In the late medieval imagination, then, the high mountain slopes were imagined as a cloud-wreathed borderland between the physical and spiritual universe.”

The cultural myth of reverence, awe, and adoration for European Alpine regions revealed in art, literature, and history from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries both sprang from and fed the imaginations of an educated urban elite. However, it is in first-hand accounts of explorations of the Alps and summits of Alpine peaks that we find examples of the place-experience of inhabited solitude. Schama records observations by Ramond de Carbonnières in Voyages au Mont-Perdu, (1801), as well as Shelley’s quite different response to Mont Blanc, affirming yet again the variance in human responses to the place-experience of inhabited solitude. Schama also recounts Horace Bénédict de Saussure’s Mont Blanc legacy which

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42 Tuan, *Topophilia*, 73.


44 Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 417.

yielded *Voyages dans les Alpes* (1786), as well as the appeal Saussure’s work had for Ruskin, “convert[ing] him to the cult of mountains for the rest of his life.” Delightfully, Schama also includes the stories of two of the first women to climb Mont Blanc, Henriette d’Angeville in 1838 (the “green notebook” about parts of that climb, was published in 1839), and her much-less-well known predecessor of 30 years, Marie Paradis, “an illiterate peasant woman,” who summited in 1808, and who d’Angeville showered with significant praise during her lifetime. The Swiss legacy of mountaineering and mountain climbing provides historical insights into the fundamental place-centered aspect of the *place-experience of inhabited solitude*, namely it is an emotionally immersive, multi-sensual physical experience that cannot be replicated through viewing and appreciating a painting, a photograph, or through the medium of text.

Perhaps what beckons from places of *inhabited solitude* to that wild part of our souls are the denizens of those places themselves. These are places of 2,400-year-old fungi, and trees thousands of years old.

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The poem depicts an encounter with the vastness of the highest peak in the Alps that is at once reverent, awestruck, and deeply humbling to his human spirit. “Now lending splendor, where from secret springs/The source of human thought its tribute brings. . . . Thy giant brood of pines around thee clinging,/Children of elder time, in whose devotion/The chainless winds still come and ever came. . . . The wilderness has a mysterious tongue/Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild. . . . The works and ways of man, their death and birth...All things that move and breathe with toil and sound/Are born and die: revolve, subside, and swell./Power dwells apart in its tranquility./Remote, serene, and inaccessible. . . . Mont Blanc yet gleams on high:—the power is there,/The still and solemn power of many sights,/And many sounds, and much of life and death.” Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni,” 1817, public domain.

46 Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 491.


Place as Experience—Geography Encounters Phenomenon and Meaning is Born

Le mond est grand, mais en nous
il est profond comme le mer.
-R.M. Rilke

(The world is large, but in us
It is deep as the sea.)

The canoe slides to shore and I get out. A cloud tears, letting sun through; then closes again. I get down on my hands and knees and touch my tongue to water: the lake divides. Its body is chasm after chasm. Like water, I have no skin, only surface tension. How exposed I feel...

-Gretel Ehrlich, Islands, The Universe, Home

The human experience in the world as a source of meaning has been considered throughout the history of philosophy. Accordingly, we can plumb this discipline in our quest for evidence, or lack thereof, of the place-experience of inhabited solitude. To begin, an exploration of phenomenology as it relates to the notion of place will determine its strengths and flaws as a comprehensive explicatory framework for the place-experience of inhabited solitude. While phenomenologists are not necessarily uniform in their perspectives, Brown and Toadvine assert one point of agreement as “their criticism and rejection of the tendency of scientific naturalism to forget its roots in experience.”

Further, the emerging field of eco-phenomenology helps illuminate the particular relevance phenomenology has to the place-experience of inhabited solitude, juxtaposing the concepts of phenomenology with the geographic place that is inhabited

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49 Rainer Marie Rilke Quoted in Bachelard, Poetics, 201.


solitude. “…phenomenology . . . becomes a philosophical ecology, that is, a study of the interrelationship between organism and world in its metaphysical and axiological dimensions.”

Abram provides an exposition of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology in support of his proposal (The Spell of the Sensous), and contributors to environmental studies and the emerging field of eco-phenomenology, including Casey, Wood, Toadvine, Marietta, Langer, Llewelyn, Embry, Kohák, and Wirzba, each provide insights from their primary disciplines to the concept of phenomenology as it relates to the non-human I.

**Perspective as Body-Subject**

As Macfarlane observes, Shepherd contemplates the visual aspect of her sensual experience:

> The changing focus in the eye, moving the eye itself when looking at things that do not move, deepens one’s sense of outer reality. Then static things may be caught in the *very act of becoming* [my emphasis]. By so simple a matter, too, as altering the position of one’s head, a different kind of world may be made to appear…From the close-by sprigs of heather to the most distant fold of the land, each detail stands erect in its own validity. . . . *Details are no longer part of a grouping in a picture of which I am the focal point, the focal point is everywhere. Nothing has reference to me, the looker. This is how the earth must see itself.* [my emphasis]

These observations contain echoes of medieval philosophical thought as well that of the later development of phenomenology. Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) challenged long-standing Aristotelian dogma, asserting that “‘as the world-image of a given observer is determined by the place he occupies in the universe, [and none of these can be the center], we have to admit the

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possible existence of different, equivalent world-images, [and] the relative—in the full sense of the word—character of each of them.”

Merleau-Ponty writes that our system of experience is not spread out before me as if I were God, it is lived by me from a certain point of view; I am not the spectator of it, I am a part of it, and it is in my inherence in a point of view that at once makes possible the finitude of my perception and its opening to the total world as the horizon of all perception.

Discussing the act of looking at a table, Merleau-Ponty declares “I must acknowledge that the table before me sustains a singular relation with my eyes and my body: I see it only if it is within their radius of action.”

C.S. Lewis’ “Meditation in a Toolshed,” is ultimately about the existence of God; however, it is also a compelling analogy regarding perspective. Standing in a dark toolshed, he notices a beam of sunlight coming in through a crack in the top of the door frame. “From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. . . . I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it.” He then moves into the beam of light, and “saw no toolshed, and (above all) no beam. Instead I saw . . . green leaves moving on the branches of a tree . . . and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun.” He concludes “Looking along the beam and looking at the beam are very different experiences.”

J.B. Pontalis attests to the “continuity” of our lives provided by our physicality and our body as the point of perspective.

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57 Stewart Goetz, C.S. Lewis: Great Minds, (Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 46. “...light is fundamentally an experience of being in the world that is ontologically prior to the sight of things. Though we do not see light, we see in light.” Ingold, Being Alive, 96.
We think it is our memory that assures us a certain continuity, when in fact it is because of our body that . . . we are able to recognize this life as our own, to derive actions, emotions, and thoughts from the same point and relate them to the same pronoun ‘I,’ to go so far sometimes as to confuse the world with our gaze on it.\textsuperscript{58}

Macfarlane says of Shepherd that her “intense empiricism is the first step to immanence.”\textsuperscript{59} A contemporary externalist, Davidson sees embodiment as \textit{a priori} to knowledge. “We must understand ourselves as already ‘in’ the world if we are to be capable of understanding at all.”\textsuperscript{60}

Of interest, Macfarlane notes the coincidence of Shepherd’s observation that “‘the body may be said to think’” and Merleau-Ponty’s work—Merleau-Ponty happened to be working on this theory of the phenomenology of perception at the same time Shepherd wrote \textit{The Living Mountain}. “‘Flesh is not annihilated but fulfilled. One is not bodiless, but essential body.’”\textsuperscript{61}

Intriguingly, Merleau-Ponty proposes that since “relations among things or among the appearances of things are always mediated by our body, then the setting of our own life must in fact be all of nature; nature must be our interlocutor in a \textit{sort of dialogue}.” (my emphasis)\textsuperscript{62}

\textbf{“The Flesh” and Reciprocity: Participation}

When considering the \textit{place-experience of inhabited solitude}, phenomenology centers on critical notions of sensual encounters with the world. Abram describes the Husserlian notion of \textit{Lebenswelt}, or life-world: “The life-world is the world of our immediately lived experience \textit{as}}


\textsuperscript{60} Davidson, referenced in Jeff Malpas, \textit{Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Edition, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 10.

\textsuperscript{61} Merleau-Ponty quoted in Macfarlane, \textit{Landmarks}, 74.

\textsuperscript{62} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Phenomenology of Perception}, 334.
we live it, prior to all our thoughts about it.”

Dillard captures the idea of Lebenswelt in her observations about newly sighted people, concluding with a question. “Why didn’t someone hand those newly sighted people paints and brushes from the start, when they still didn’t know what anything was? Then maybe we all could see color-patches too, the world unraveled from reason, Eden before Adam gave names.”

Marcel, in his inquiry into Existentialism and response to Sartre’s Being and Nothingness, alludes to this concept when he questions a philosophical position resting on empirical verification, asserting that “it [the philosophy in question] ends by ignoring presence—that inward realisation of presence through love which infinitely transcends all possible verification because it exists in an immediacy beyond all conceivable mediation.”

Merleau-Ponty observes that in the act of sensual perception “there is an intuition of an essence, a sense, a signification. The sensible thing is the place where the invisible is captured in the visible.” In fact, it is Merleau-Ponty’s detailed development and extension of Husserl’s phenomenology that integrates the whole of the human experience with physical place.

If this body is my very presence in the world, if it is the body that alone enables me to enter into relations with other presences, if without these eyes, this voice, or these hands I would be unable to see, to taste, and to touch things, or to be touched by them—if without this body, in other words, there would be no possibility of experience—then the body itself is the true subject of experience.

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63 Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous, 40. See also the explanation of “the perceptual presence of the world,” in Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, 28.

64 Dillard, Tinker Creek, 32.


66 Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, xli.

67 Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous, 45.
Indeed, as I consider the pea green of the black walnut husk I picked up on a run yesterday, I understand that green, as a distinct color, is not culturally imposed; rather, it is sensorily imposed. My eyes “see” variance across the color spectrum, based on the mechanisms of my eye and brain. The connotations of the color green, however, and the things that come to mind when I think about the color green as I turn this black walnut encased in its pea-green rough husk over and over in my hand—that of fecundity—is a cultural imposition, even though many live plants are the color I know as green. However, all the culturally imposed understandings of the color green do not negate the truth that this black walnut husk is something I physically see as pea green, different from the color of the gray-brown fence post or the grey-black gravel path. Both, simultaneously, have claims to truth about the color of the object I hold in my hand. Further, Merleau-Ponty argues that “in terms of its intrinsic meaning and structure…the sensible world is ‘older’ that the universe of thought,” because the “invisible” universe of thought “has its truth only on condition that it be supported on the canonical structures of the sensible world.”

Perhaps ironically, as it turns out, the green of the black walnut husk that I see is simply the light that the tree cannot use, reflecting back to my eyes, “waste light” as Wohlleben calls it.

Abram, armed by Merleau-Ponty, argues that a human body’s “actions and engagements are never wholly determinate” because a human body, at its comprehensive level as described above, is required to constantly “adjust . . . to a world and a terrain that is itself continually shifting”, accounting for our ability to be “genuinely startled or surprised.”

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68 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 12. Ingold pointedly disagrees with this perspective.


self rejects a supposed determinate system of perception (in fact, Abram uses the word “thwarting,” which suggests an engaged, active resistance to this rejection), confirming that perception itself stands in opposition to a closed system. Further, it’s not simply body as a system of systems but, (and this is where the notion of *Lebenswelt* comes into play) “[u]nderneath the anatomized and mechanical body that we have learned to conceive, prior indeed to all our conceptions, dwells the body as it actually experiences things, this poised and animate power that initiates all our projects and suffers all our passions.”

**Intersubjectivity**

Building on the sensory aspect to perception as a unified whole, Abram also discusses the “inherently synaesthetic” characteristic of “our primordial, preconceptual experience.” “Direct, prereflective perception is inherently synaesthetic, participatory, and animistic, disclosing the things and elements that surround us not as inert objects but as expressive subjects, entities, powers, potencies.” Interestingly, Abram argues that distilling our perceptual experience into distinct sensing modalities is a Western cultural phenomenon. Merleau-Ponty uses the example of mescaline-induced experiences of indigenous tribes in North America and Mexico to demonstrate what happens when physiologically cognitive barriers between subject and object are weakened, and sound “looks” like a certain color. “Everything happens as if he were seeing ‘the barriers between the senses, established in the course of evolution, occasionally falling down.’”

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74 Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 130.
This concept has found coherence in scientific applications based on the fact that colors have frequencies. In recent decades, researchers have created a device (an electronic eye) that translates color into its sound frequencies. For those who are completely colorblind, the device can be permanently attached to the skull and transmit color frequencies “through bone conductions.” According to one wearer, “I can listen to a Picasso, for example. So it’s like going to a concert hall 'cause I can listen to the paintings. And supermarkets, it's like going to a nightclub. It's full of different melodies, especially the aisle with cleaning products. It's just fabulous . . . today, I’m dressed in C major so it’s quite a happy chord.”

Blindness itself renders other senses infinitely more powerful, and in some cases, one sense can, in a sense, compensate for the loss of another, in ways that radically change and expand our perceptions of the world. In his autobiography detailing his experience of being blind from the age of eight, Lusseyran writes about learning to see differently. When he “began to look . . . from an inner place to one further within, instead of clinging to the movement of sight toward the world outside”, he describes feeling light as it “threw its color on things and on people.”

He tells us that people “all had their characteristic color” previously invisible, but now visible to his sightless self.

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77 Raz and Harbisson, “What’s It Like to Hear Color?”


79 Lusseyran, And There Was Light, 13.
As “conventional scientific discourse” and “[n]ew Age spiritualism” prioritize object or subject, respectively, they avoid “the possibility that the perceiving being and the perceived being are of the same stuff.” This is Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “The Flesh.”

We understand then why we see the things themselves, in their places, where they are, according to their being . . . --and why at the same time we are separated from them by all the thickness of the look and of the body; it is that this distance is not the contrary of this proximity, it is deeply consonant with it. . . . it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication. . . . The thickness of the body . . . is . . . the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh.

Abram writes:

The striving for objectivity is thus understood, phenomenologically, as a striving to achieve greater consensus, greater agreement or consonance among a plurality of subjects, rather than an attempt to avoid subjectivity altogether…The mutual inscription of others in my experience, and (as I must assume) of myself in their experiences, effects the interweaving of our individual phenomenal fields into a single, ever-shifting fabric, a single phenomenal world or ‘reality.’

Further, for Abram, the phenomena, those that are not “my images, my phantasies and fears, my dreamings . . . are intersubjective phenomena—phenomena experienced by a multiplicity of sensing subjects.” Ingold writes that an “animal lives and breathes in a world of earth and sky – or becoming earth and becoming sky . . . to perceive the environment is not to look back on the things to be found in it… but to join with them in the material flows and movements.” And the non-human I “sensing subjects” are not limited to the animal world. Poet and essayist Mary Oliver describes this intersubjective place-encounter with the forest:

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84 Ingold, *Being Alive*, 88.
Through these woods I have walked thousands of times…Eventually I began to appreciate—I don’t say this lightly—that the great black oaks knew me. I don’t mean they knew me as myself and not another—that kind of individualism was not in the air—but that they recognized and responded to my presence and to my mood. They began to offer, or I began to feel them offer, their serene greeting. It was like a quick change of temperature, a warm and comfortable flush, faint yet palpable, as I walked toward them and beneath their outflowing branches.\footnote{Mary Oliver, \textit{Upstream}, (New York: Penguin Press, 2016), 151.}

Bachelard, discussing his concept of “intimate immensity,” first points us to the “\textit{immensity of the forest},” asserting that apart from the visual experience of the trees themselves, “one feels that one is in the presence of an ‘essential’ impression seeking expression…one is in the presence…of the immediate immensity of its depth.”\footnote{Bachelard, \textit{Poetics}, 203–204.} Deloria recounts the words of Walking Buffalo, a Canadian and Stoney Indian, on trees. “Did you know trees talk? Well they do. They talk to each other, and they’ll talk to you if you listen. Trouble is, white people don’t listen. . . . I have learned a lot from trees; sometimes about the weather, sometimes about animals, sometimes about the Great Spirit.”\footnote{Walking Buffalo quoted in Vine Deloria, Jr., \textit{God is Red}, (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1994), 90.}

As is often the case, modern science vindicates traditional knowledge. Trees, we now know, communicate with one another and with the fauna around them. As Wohlleben describes, trees in Africa use scent (a gas) to warn neighboring trees of browsing giraffes and send toxins to their leaves to repel the giraffes themselves.\footnote{Wohlleben, \textit{The Hidden Life of Trees}, 6–7.} Damaged leaves send out slow electrical signals to the tree, triggering “defensive compounds,” and trees also transmit electrical impulses as well as chemical compounds from their roots, to other trees, often via fungal networks. “The fungal connections transmit signals from one tree to the next, helping trees exchange new about insects,
drought, and other dangers. Further, research has shown that scents trees exude affect humans differently on a psychological level. Conifers planted in regions that are too arid, make the trees susceptible to bark beetles. In response, they “scream” via scent, exuding alarm signals warning of the beetle’s invasion. Wohlleben proposes that this could be one reason why the blood pressure of visitors to planted (suggesting here planted in areas not where conifers are not native or best suited to the climate) coniferous forests rises whereas people visiting “ancient deciduous preserves” report improved feelings of well-being. “Possibly it’s because in ancient beech forests, fewer ‘alarm calls’ go out, and therefore, most messages exchanged between trees are contented ones, and these messages reach our brains as well, via our noses.”

The theme of the forest as animate, particularly trees as sensing subjects, is recurring. Abram writes in detail about his experience in the forest as an example of Merleau-Ponty’s thesis of perceptual reciprocity: “to listen to the forest is also, primordially, to feel oneself listened to by the forest . . . to feel oneself watched by the forest.” In an extension of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the intersubjective trans-sensuality of our bodies and the bodies we encounter, to one of its logical and perhaps mystical conclusions, Abram points out that when we walk in a forest, we encounter the many facets of the forest with our five senses. We may, after a period of frequent and solitary visits to forests, experience the sensation that the trees are watching us. Finally, “[i]f we dwell in this forest for many months, or years, then our experience may shift yet again—we may come to feel that we are part of this forest, consanguineous with it, and that our


experience of the forest is nothing other than the forest experiencing itself." Or, said differently, “[t]he differentiation of my senses, as well as their spontaneous convergence in the world at large, ensures that I am being destined for relationship: it is primarily through my engagement with what is not in me that I effect the integration of my senses, and thereby experience my own unity and coherence.” As Abram points out, this idea is not so new or otherworldly. In fact, it reflects conceptualizations across many indigenous peoples.

This reciprocity, as it applies to the place-experience of inhabited solitude is the result of acquired synaesthetic attention to (which includes intention/will), with respect to the persistently existent non-human I, which passes otherwise muted or eclipsed in most places of human inhabitation by the general confusion, clamor, and hum of human-produced (artificial) sensory fillers. While the setting of Woolf’s novel is not inhabited solitude, she evokes an image of this phenomenon in a passage from To the Lighthouse. Here, Woolf articulates first a distillation, then reciprocity, and finally a sense that one is on the cusp of sensing the ultimate unity among the quieter, non-mechanized sounds of evenfall, an attending to that which persistently exists and exudes in the background of daily town and city life.

And now as if the cleaning and the scrubbing and the scything and the mowing had drowned it there rose that half-heard melody, that intermittent music which the ear half catches but lets fall; a bark, a bleat; irregular, intermittent, yet somehow related; the hum of an insect, the tremor of cut grass, dismembered yet somehow belonging; the jar of a dor beetle, the squeak of a wheel, loud, low, but mysteriously related; which the ear strains to bring together and is always on the verge of harmonizing, but they are never quite heard.

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92 Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous, 68.
93 Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous, 125.
Kimmerer writes, “[d]eep attention calls us inevitably into a deep relationship, as information and energy are exchanged between the observer and the observed, and neither partner in the exchange can be anonymous.”

Graham describes it thus: “‘And as you sit on the hillside, or lie prone under the trees of the forest, or sprawl wet-legged on the shingly beach of a mountain stream, the great door, that does not look like a door, opens.’”

Bachelard’s phenomenological inquiry into poetry provides clues to the phenomenological place-experience of inhabited solitude. In a contemplation of the root of poetic inspiration, what he refers to as a “phenomenology of the soul,” Bachelard observes that “a consciousness associated with the soul is more relaxed, less intentionalized than a consciousness associated with a phenomenon of the mind. Forces are manifested in poems that do not pass through the circuits of knowledge.” He goes on to write that “the soul comes and inaugurates the form, dwells in it, takes pleasure in it.” This attending to the Other, in our intentional awareness, makes the Other real to us, not simply the shallow real of a look, but intentionality coupled with sensory perception that makes possible a different relationship between the human and Other, the non-human I. Wood says of intentionality that while it is “naturally embedded” (manifested in bodily existence) it “is itself an indirect natural relation. It is indirect because it is mediated by such functions as imagination, transformation, delay, and memory.”

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Further, Merleau-Ponty declares that what we sense, we sense because the object presented itself to our senses. “My attitude is never sufficient to make me truly see blue or truly touch a hard surface. The sensible gives back to me what I had lent to it, but I receive it from the sensible in the first place. . . . I abandon myself to it, I plunge into this mystery, and it ‘thinks itself in me’”99 Abram provides this explanation: “In the act of perception . . . I enter into a sympathetic relation with the perceived. . . . Perception, in this sense, is an attunement or synchronization between my own rhythms and the rhythms of the things themselves, their own tones and textures...” (my emphasis)100 Within the intention inherent in the action of reciprocity, the human cannot but approach the relationship with the non-human I in the place-experience of inhabited solitude with an attitude of sympathy.101 Bachelard provides an instructive insight to sympathetic perception with inhabited solitude. “When human solitude deepens, then the two immensities [“the space of intimacy and the world space”] touch and become identical.”102 Bachelard also sees this “interiorizing” of physical place by human experience in literary works concerning deserts. The poet Philippe Diole observes that “the desert must be lived ‘the way it is reflected in the wanderer.’”103 Humboldt, writing in 1850, asserted that

99 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 222. With regard to Hegel’s “hole in being,” footnote 17 on page 535 explains the concept a little more, also mentioning Sartre’s later claim that “Everything happens as if the Present were a perpetual hole in being – immediately filled up and perpetually reborn.’ Being and Nothingness, 170.”

100 Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 54.

101 In this construct, I am using the Mirriam Webster Dictionary, fourth definition: “the correlation existing between bodies capable of communicating their vibrational energy to one another through some medium.” Mirriam Webster Dictionary, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sympathy (accessed May 19, 2019).


103 Bachelard, *Poetics*, 221.
the physical world is reflected with truth and animation on the inner susceptible world of the mind. Whatever marks the character of a landscape: the profile of mountains . . . the deep gloom of pine forests; the mountain torrent . . . all stand alike in an ancient and mysterious communion with the spiritual life of man.\textsuperscript{104}

**Language and Meaning**

We find evidence for the *place-experience of inhabited solitude* through the medium of language. In general and without surprise, the relationship of human language, in all its complexity and breadth of multivariate expression, to place is one of meaning assignation. Accordingly, Abram notes the deeply connected language relationship indigenous cultures across the world have with landscape. “There is no element of the landscape that is definitively void of expressive resonance and power: any movement may be a gesture, any sound may be a voice, a meaningful utterance.”\textsuperscript{105} In fact, Macfarlane argues the growing loss of the scope of words used to describe non-human nature will lead to loss of the meaning of those places. And, loss of meaning for landscape has as detrimental an effect as the loss of other elements of landscape including beauty, freedom, wildlife, and vegetation.\textsuperscript{106} Kimmerer writes:

> Ethnobiologists tell us that our great-grandparents . . . knew the names and personalities of dozens of bird and hundreds of plants. Today, a typical American schoolchild can recognize more than 100 corporate logos but fewer than ten plants…How can we care for


\textsuperscript{105} Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 117.

> “Tired of all who come with words, words but no language I went to the snow-covered island. The wild does not have words. The unwritten pages spread themselves out in all directions! I come across the marks of a roe-deer’s hooves in the snow. Language, but no words.”


\textsuperscript{106} Macfarlane, *Landmarks*, 9.
them, monitor their wellbeing, and fight for their existence if we do not even know their names?\footnote{Kimmerer, “The Covenant of Reciprocity,” 374.}

In his discussion of language and meaning, Macfarlane cites research conducted by Keith Basso, an ethnographer of the Apache people in Arizona. For the Apache, “place-names . . . are used and valued for other reasons [other than referentially] as well: aesthetically, ethically, musically.”\footnote{Macfarlane, \textit{Landmarks}, 21. A number of sources in this work referenced or discussed the singing of place-names by Aboriginal people in Australia. For example, see Robert Moor, and also Malpas, \textit{Place and Experience}, 190.} Ingold discusses the naming of animals as verbs, rather than nouns, by the Koyukon (Alaska natives), “animals do not exist, either as subjects or objects; rather they \textit{occur}.”\footnote{Ingold, \textit{Being Alive}, 175.} Indeed, for cultures across the world, language and “place-speech” functions to, as Macfarlane concludes, “en-chant the land – to sing it back into being and to sing one’s being back into it.”\footnote{Macfarlane, \textit{Landmarks}, 22.}

\textit{Inhabited solitude} (“wilderness” for Schama) “does not venerate itself.”\footnote{Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 7. Here I believe Schama is referring to our act of attributing meaning to the non-Human I. Hearkening back to Shepherd, Lopez, and others, the non-Human I components of \textit{inhabited} are complete in being what they are, nothing more. There is no need for veneration. Veneration is a human emotion and human act dedicated to placing something outside of one’s self in a status of aw or reverence, for a number of reasons including absolution, humility, worship, etc.} Even this independently existing and thriving non-human I must be named, identified, and located in the mental geography of our imagination and aspirations. In order to perceive and engage \textit{inhabited solitude}, we must create the place-ness of it, situate it geographically. Further, the assignation of a name, the marking of boundaries, the imposition of meaning is as much shared collective representation as it is individual communion. Lopez disputes the conclusion of a Hopi language
researcher of the early 20th Century, Benjamin Lee Whorf, who asserted that “language was something man created in his mind and projected onto reality, something he imposed on the landscape, as though the land were a receptacle for his imagination.” Instead, it is the landscape that is doing the work, necessarily over time. “A long-lived inquiry produces a discriminating language. The very order of the language…derives from the mind’s intercourse with the landscape.” While I am uncertain his assertions differ in a particularly meaningful way from Whorf (in fact, Whorf may likely have agreed with Lopez on this count), either way, this assertion helps further clarify the externality that is landscape, and for the purposes of this study, inhabited solitude. Humans are, in many ways, confined to the boundaries of human language to express the place-experience of inhabited solitude. Perception and understanding

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113 Lopez, Arctic Dreams, 278. Here, I think Lopez alludes to another point: that is, the very active role of land in the intercourse with human history. We are wrong to think that we act and the land re-acts in a predictable manner. In fundamental ways, we have no control over how nature will respond to our incursions, and nature’s certain response determines our human history in more ways than we accord credit. Leopold discusses the time period when three groups (Indians, French and British traders, American settlers) were vying for control of Kentucky’s cane-lands. As a result of the pioneers who ended up settling the region, the cane-lands turned to bluegrass. Leopold then poses a series of questions. “What if the plant succession inherent in this dark and bloody ground had, under the impact of these forces, given us some worthless sedge, shrub, or weed? Would Boone and Kenton have held out? Would there have been any overflow into Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri? Any Louisiana Purchase? Any transcontinental union of new states? Any Civil War?...We are commonly told what human actors in this drama tried to do, but we are seldom told that their success, or lack of it, hung in large degree on the reaction of particular soils to the impact of the particular forces exerted by their occupancy. In the case of Kentucky, we do not even know where the bluegrass came from—whether it is a native species, or a stowaway from Europe.” Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, 172.

114 In my research, especially reading some of the twentieth century philosophical thought regarding language and Being, it seems that there is perhaps an overstated concern regarding the performative use of parts of speech, particularly nouns. Today, we can all acknowledge, based on physics and other physical sciences, that everything is in some state of motion, be it wave particles or sub-atomic particles, with the difference lying in the structure of the thing to which we are referring, including air molecules. Calling something a tree, a fence post, a blade of grass, or a hawk in flight assumes that we know they are
occurs (as will be discussed later), but meaning assigned to that perception is articulated through language. Tuan observes that many people who have not spent time in the Arctic see a barren landscape, with few visible landmarks—in short, a place of nothingness. However, Eskimos sense the wind which fills this nothingness to such a degree that they have no fewer than 12 words for wind. (The same observation can be made about people who live in desert regions. For example, in the Modern South Arabian language, *Mehri*, spoken in Oman, there are no fewer than 27 single words for camels in different stages of life.)

During times of the year when “sky and earth merge,” the Eskimo “must depend on the shifting relationships of snow contours, on the types of snow, wind, salt air, and ice crack. The direction and smell of the wind is a guide...On horizonless days he lives in an acoustic-olfactory space.”

Writing in the 1974 on the Wilderness debate in the United States, and on the subject of whether or not humans could speak for nature, Bugbee ponders a deeper view.

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composed of different compositions of the same types of circulating particles, bound together in the forms to which we have assigned names. Leaving the discussion of their “invisible-ness” or meaning as such, each is physically in a state of growth, or more often, in a state of decay, which is also movement. Accordingly, verbing nouns, in order to emphasize their “becoming” or their temporal growth or decay seems increasingly unnecessary. Observation, increased awareness of the structure of indigenous languages and general understandings of physics and biology, makes evident to most people, the truth that noun as static is a feint of language. “These [indigenous] are languages that are dominated by verbs rather than nouns because the verb phrases have a better capacity ‘to define the environment in terms of its actions, motions, and processes’.” Norman Wirzba, “From a Partnership to a Fidelity Ethic: Framing an Old Story for a New Time,” in *After the Death of Nature: Carolyn Merchant and the Future of Human-Nature Relations*, eds. Kenneth Worthy, Elizabeth Alison, and Whitney A. Bauman (New York and London: Routledge, 2019), 77.

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115 Domenyk Eades, Janet C.E. Watson, and Mohammed Ahmad al-Mahri, “Camel Culture and Camel Terminology Among the Omani Bedouin,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 58, No. 1 (Spring 2013): 178-179. This includes something as specific as a word for a camel that shares its calf with another camel whose calf has died.

Wilderness, it would seem, may lie closer to the whence of speaking than to the thematization of a speaking about . . . If wilderness may yet speak to us and place us as respondents in the ambience of respect for the wild—for Nature as primordial—it must be liberated from the ultimate subsumption to human enterprise. That is, its voice will be heard anew only as we come in decisive forbearance into its presence.\textsuperscript{117}

While accepting the necessity of language, Abram takes a dimmer view of written language, arguing the loss of oral tradition and the adoption in the West of representative letters as opposed to the pictogram-centered languages of indigenous tribes and East Asia, and the consequent binding of the expression of human experience to abstract lines and circles (written letters that function only for the utterance of sound from a human mouth), have detrimentally separated the human community from its sensual surroundings.

the written characters no longer depend, implicitly, upon the larger field of sensuous phenomena; they refer, instead, to a strictly human set of sounds. . . . There is no longer any flow between the self-reflexive domain of alphabetized awareness and all that exceeds, or subtends, this determinate realm. Between consciousness and unconsciousness. Between civilization and wilderness.\textsuperscript{118}

That Which Precedes Articulation

However, human language can only ever be inadequate to and a secondary representation of the entirety of place-experience, and particularly the place-experience of inhabited solitude. Lopez recounts his visit to Axel Heiberg: “In the walls of Axel Heiberg I found what I had known of mountains as a child; that from them came a knowledge that was received, for which there were no words, only, vaguely, prayers.”\textsuperscript{119} J.B. Pontalis considers a similar idea when musing on the keen perceptivity of childhood, less contingent on language.

In the age of childhood, there are no notebooks, no dates, nothing that might make one think: I mustn’t forget that. . . . And yet, precisely because there’s no appeal to memory .


\textsuperscript{118} Abram, \textit{The Spell of the Sensuous}, 257.

\textsuperscript{119} Lopez, \textit{Artic Dreams}, 404.
no concern to differentiate the essential from the incidental, everything can then come to lodge in us, leaving living imprints without our intervention. . . . It’s not their precedence in time that gives our childhood images this aura of something eternally alive . . . it’s that they pertain to a state, no longer recoverable except in fleeting moments, when we were receptive to everything around us.120

Yi-fu Tuan also examines the physiology behind this child-view of environments.

To see the landscape and evaluate it aesthetically one needs to be able to identify an unbounded segment of nature and to be aware of the coherence of its spatial characteristics. . . . Though the landscape escapes the young child, he is intensely aware of its separate components. . . . As the child grows older his awareness of spatial relationships gains at the expense of the quiddity of the objects that define them. . . . The young child’s world, then, is animated and consists of vivid, sharply delineated objects in a weakly structured space . . . the older child . . . is capable of conceptualizing space in its different dimensions. . . . He can see the landscape as a segment of artfully arranged reality “out there,” but he also knows it as an enveloping, penetrating presence, a force. Unburdened by worldly cares, unfettered by learning, free of ingrained habit, negligent of time, the child is open to the world.121

Casey writes, “the extraordinary sensitivity of a child’s lived body opens onto and takes in a highly expressive place-world that reflects the…complex character of the particular places that compose this world.”122 Snyder says “[t]he childhood landscape is learned on foot, and a map is inscribed in the mind…all of us carry within us a picture of the terrain that was learned roughly between the ages of six and nine.”123

This experience of mutuality and interconnection is a phenomenon Macfarlane sees in John Muir’s deep connection to the natural world and wilderness. “His own experiences of ‘diffusion’ came close to the Greek concept of ‘metempsychosis’, the transmigration of the spirit

120 Pontalis, Love of Beginnings, 78.
121 Tuan, Topophilia, 57.
122 Casey, The Fate of Place, 237.
123 Snyder, The Practice of the Wild, 28.
– or, to give it its beautiful German name, *Seelenwanduerung*, ‘soul-wandering’…the mountains were mineralizing him.\(^{124}\) Of Wyoming, Writer Gretel Ehrlich observes:

> To rise above treeline is to go above thought, and after, the descent back into bird song, bog orchids, willows, and firs is to sink into the preliterate parts of ourselves . . . Here the world is only space, raw loneliness, green valleys hung vertically. Losing myself to it—if I can—I do not fall . . . or if I do, I’m only another cataract of water.\(^{125}\)

Roger Deakin, a man who wrote about his experience swimming in open water in an aquatic journey across the UK (in rivers, lakes, canals, ponds, the sea and even moats) observed that “‘all water . . . holds memory and the space to think.’”\(^{126}\) French psychologist and author Philippe Diolé, an avid undersea explorer who wrote about spending extended time in the desert in *The Most Beautiful Desert of All* (1959), said, “‘neither in the desert nor on the bottom of the sea does one’s spirit remain sealed and indivisible.’”\(^{127}\)

**Myth and Metaphor**

Snyder advocates for the retention of and respect for myth, which “requires a lively appreciation of the depths of metaphor, of ceremony, and the need for stories. Allegorizing and rationalizing myth kills it. That’s what happened in later Greek history.”\(^{128}\) Lopez relates the story of an early American (1920s) artist and illustrator who traveled to an island in Alaska with his young son, to find “‘Northern Paradise.’” While his foray was short-lived (six months), Lopez comments on the artist’s “metaphorical experience with the land.”\(^{129}\) These “intensely

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\(^{126}\) Roger Deakin, quoted in Macfarlane, *Landmarks*, 97.  

\(^{127}\) Philippe Diolé quoted in Bachelard, *Poetics*, 222.  

\(^{128}\) Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, 62.  

metaphorical” relationships with the land “are a lofty achievement of the human mind. They are a sophisticated response . . . that grows out of a certain landscape. The mind can imagine beauty and conjure intimacy. It can find solace where literal analysis finds only trees and rocks and grass.”\textsuperscript{130} Malpas contends that prioritizing the literal meaning of language over the metaphorical is a “philosophical approach that looks to reduce complex structures to concatenations of simple components understood in separation from one another rather than in relation to the larger structures of which they are a part.”\textsuperscript{131} However, Lopez cautions against exceeding the limit of metaphor: “The risk we take is of finding our final authority in the metaphors rather than in the land.”\textsuperscript{132} Schama observes similarly, “Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock...once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents.”\textsuperscript{133} This seems to be the concern of Langer, writing about eco-feminists’ assertions that Heidegger’s use of language such as “home” and its derivatives threaten to erase nature’s, and by extension, Being’s “alterity.”\textsuperscript{134} I contend that myths and metaphors are linguistic cultural mechanisms of meta-knowing, and while one should be cautious and sensitive in the use of metaphorical language, it remains a key manner in which

\textsuperscript{130} Lopez, \textit{Artic Dreams}, 391.
\textsuperscript{131} Malpas, \textit{Place and Experience}, 36.
\textsuperscript{132} Lopez, \textit{Artic Dreams}, 247.
\textsuperscript{133} Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 61.
humans derive understanding of and assign meaning to concepts, preserve collective and
individual memories, and sustain place-based identities. In partial disagreement with Burnett
(Chapter One of this work) James writes:

Scottish landscape as an ‘ethnoscape’ is an emotional territory, an ancient depopulated
space where history and geography combine to create a Scottish identity steeped in myth.
‘Myth is what can be collectively remembered, collectively imagined’ . . . ‘you cannot
separate what is remembered from what is imagined.’

Language, the primary conduit (but not the only one) through which we communicate
metaphor and imagination as they ascribe meaning to the place-experience of inhabited solitude,
reflects our mythologized human history of making sense of the non-human I, imposing
civilization’s order—man’s aspirations for power, dominance, and meaning—onto the
topographic canvas in which we live our lives. Our identification and subsequent claim of the
necessarily privileged place-experience of inhabited solitude can only be verified based upon
reflections of that experience, principally through the medium of language. The place-experience
of inhabited solitude itself exists apart from language, but the transfer from the experience to
representation and the assignation of meaning to that experience occurs in the signs of language.

In his evaluation of trends in anthropological thought from the Enlightenment forward,
Schama highlights the resolute dismissal of “the idea that myths might be highly complex
systems of understanding, with the power to generate and determine social behavior, rather than
the other way about.” However, while the persistent relationship between the steady churn of
human history and the pedantic, antiseptically empirical retrospective of these events provided by

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135 Annie Morgan James, “Enchanted Places, Land and Sea, and Wilderness,” in Representing the Rural: Space, Place, and Identity in Films about the Land, ed. Catherine Fowler and Gillian Helfield, 185-201 (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2006), 199.

136 Schama, Landscape and Memory, 209.
academic disciplines of this era (such as history, anthropology, sociology, and psychology) remained predictable, anomalies occurred.

For even before the war to end all wars had finally interred the Enlightenment in a muddy, bloody grave, there were those (Nietzsche, for example) who thought myth and modernity not at all irreconcilable... [For Carl Jung]... [t]o embrace myth and to readmit primitive religion in social behavior was not...to flee modernity but to face up to it.

Indeed, Schama says of German art historian Aby Warburg, who traveled to the United States in 1895 to observe Hopi Indian rituals that “Warburg began to lose this conventional confidence that knowledge could supersede symbol as a way of dealing with terror.”

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137 Schama, Landscape and Memory, 209.

138 Schama, Landscape and Memory, 211. The information that follows is a short history, provided by Schama, of the Warburg School. “The identification and classification of symbols inherited from antiquity and transmitted through the generations of Western culture...became the official vocation of the ‘Warburg school,’ first in Hamburg, later in London, where Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, is literally inscribed over the doorway...An unconventional metaphor, a strikingly strange and recurring motif (like a talking tree) could not be adequately accounted for by lazy invocations of ‘historical background’ nor a dumbly mechanical dictionary of emblems. Tracking that motif from archaic sources through all the mutations and permutations of form and meaning over time would not only yield the deep connections between past and present: it would also reveal...its cultural and cognitive significance for human apprehension. This was not just art history, not even cultural history. It was the pursuit of truth, revealed not in some vast metaphysical Platonic design, but as a parti-colored mosaic of discrete pieces of our nature from which a coherent image might emerge.” Schama, Landscape and Memory, 213.
CHAPTER 4: THE ENCOUNTER AS RELATIONSHIP

On the Other-ness of Nature and Humans’ Relationship to It

I believe it is quite possible that no other human being has experienced natural landscape as intensely and fully as Muir did. . . . Readers are sometimes led by his effusively Victorian prose, his avowals of bosom friendship with trees and birds, into thinking him a sentimentalist. But no sentimentalist could have undergone the hardships and dangers Muir not only underwent but welcomed in seeking the other that lives in nature.

-David Rains Wallace, A Wilder Shore

The snow continues. I keep thinking of the Crow word for loneliness, which translates literally as “I can’t see myself.”

-Gretel Ehrlich, Islands, The Universe, Home

In the foreword to the 1949 edition of The Outermost House, Henry Beston writes,

Something else is emerging from the pages which equally arrests my attention. It is the meditative perception of the relation of “Nature” (and I include the whole cosmic picture in this term) to the human spirit. . . . Nature is part of our humanity, and without some awareness and experience of that divine mystery man ceases to be man. When the Pleiades and the wind in the grass are no longer a part of the human spirit, a part of very flesh and bone, man becomes, as it were, a kind of cosmic outlaw, having neither the completeness and integrity of the animal nor the birthright of a true humanity. As I once said elsewhere, ‘Man can either be less than man or more than man, and both are monsters, the last more dread.’

Harrison asserts that culture is not “an epiphenomenon of nature,” but rather “modes by which human beings organize their relationship to nature.” [my emphasis] In Beyond

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Objectivism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis, Bernstein discusses Heidegger’s hermeneutical circle, concluding that:

We are essentially beings constituted by and engaged in interpretive understanding . . . we must learn the art of being responsive to works of art, texts, traditions (and, we can now add, other persons or forms of life) that we are trying to understand. We must participate or share in them, listen to them, open ourselves to what they are saying and to the claims to truth they make upon us.³

Further elaborating and citing Gadamer, he says “we must listen to [‘the things themselves’] and open ourselves so that they can ‘speak to us’; we must be receptive to the claims of truth that they make upon us.”⁴ Goethe writes “[i]n observing nature on a scale large or small, I have always asked: Who speaks here, the object or you?”⁵ However, per Bernstein, “we do not do this by bracketing or forgetting all our prejudgments and prejudices. To the contrary, it is only because of the play of these prejudgments that we are enabled to understand the ‘things themselves.’”⁶ Importantly, these acts of contemplation are not without cost or consequence, both for ourselves and for that which is the subject of our experience. In recounting a Tillamook coming of age legend, Duncan reminds the reader of the criticality and intensity of learning to respond to the non-human I. The young Tillamook warrior has left his community and family for

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⁴ Bernstein, Beyond Objectivism, 138.


⁶ Bernstein, Beyond Objectivism, 138.
the solitude of the wild, and embraced a time of waiting until “hunger and cold, 
weakness, pain, and people, they all left him in peace. The young Tillamook grew still. 
Because he stayed still, the animals began to come.” After his experience of prolonged 
solitude, some years later when he became a man, a hunter, “the animals could sense, in 
that hunter, the boy who waited so long by the water: that hunter would sing them to 
him, would kill them quickly, and would speak softly to their spirits. And there would be 
no violence in their deaths.” Of the experience of indigenous peoples withdrawing to 
places of solitude, Bugbee writes, “[h]is withdrawal . . . marked a bringing of the 
manifold of his cares into closer proximity with that sovereign spirit to which he felt 
himself to belong: gatherer of the world of fellow creatures and sustainer of the ancestral 
voices which might speak to him again.”

Shepherd’s work, already cited a number of times, relays her place-experience of 
inhabited solitude in the rugged Cairngorms, rock-strewn remnants of ancient mountains 
in the Scottish Highlands (the largely treeless terrain, except for the Caledonian Forest, is 
similar to tundra areas in Northern Canada). Her writing reveals the profound sense-
ability with regard to the Other, the non-human I, of inhabited solitude, as well as a 
compelling humility with regard to the ultimate unknow-ability of the non-human I. She 
writes that behind her experiences and those of people she encountered “is the mountain


8 Henry G. Bugbee, “Wilderness in America,” *Journal of the American Academy of 
itself, its substance, its strength, its structure, its weathers. It is fundamental to all man
does to it or on it. If it were not there, man would not have done these things.”9 Despite
the breadth and depth of her frequent encounters with the mountains over the span of
years, Shepherd acknowledges a failure to completely “know” the mountains in their
wholeness, nor her relationship to them, referring to their physical characteristics and
geographic history as “a pallid simulacrum of their reality . . . which is a reality of the
mind.”10 Pieper writes regarding Aquinas’ theology that “things in so far as they are
creatively thought by God possess these two properties: on the one hand their ontological
clarity and self-revelation and, on the other hand, their inexhaustibleness; their
knowability as well as their ‘unknowability.’”11 When Proust arrives at this
philosophical juncture, he, different from Shepherd and others, ultimately concludes that
one can only ever perceive the externality of the Other as a frustrating reflection of the
self’s understanding and meaning assignation; the Other never surpasses self.

For even if we have the sensation of being always enveloped in, surrounded by
our own soul, still it does not seem a fixed and immoveable prison; rather do we
seem to be borne away with it, and perpetually struggling to pass beyond it, to
break out into the world, with a perpetual discouragement as we hear endlessly,
all around us, that unvarying sound which is no echo from without, but the
resonance of a vibration from within. We try to discover in things, endeared to us
on that account, the spiritual glamour which we ourselves have cast upon them;


10 Shepherd, The Living Mountain, 1.

and Daniel O’ Connor, (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 1957), 69.
we are disillusioned, and learn that they are themselves barren and devoid of the charm which they owed, in our minds, to the association of certain ideas.\footnote{Marcel Proust, \textit{Swann’s Way}, transl. C.K. Scott Moncrieff, (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2005), 90. I found it intriguing, and possibly worth pursuing in another effort, the frequency with which Proust emerged in my research for this work. Both the philosophers and scholars of place I encountered in my research consistently cite or reference Proust in their work.}

Proust’s is a frustrating and frustrated idealism, ultimately bound to self, disallowing the Other the possibility of its independence.

Buber’s “I-Thou” and, to a degree, a Levinasian understanding of nature as Absolute Other, helps explain the relationship, and consequently a key component of the \textit{place-experience}, between humans and the non-human I in \textit{inhabited solitude}. My juxtaposition of two “I”’s, the human and non-human I, and inspired by Bachelard’s reference to “the non-I that protects the I,” is intentional and meant to represent a dual subjectivism, as opposed to the construct of subject-object.\footnote{Gaston Bachelard, \textit{The Poetics of Space}, (New York: Penguin Books, 1958/2014), 27.} Bartholomew writes that “I-It is the attitude characteristic of science, whereas the I-Thou evokes meeting and encounter.”\footnote{Craig Bartholomew, \textit{Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today}, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 17.} Tirosh-Samuelson explains that “I-Thou” is humanity’s direct and unconditional encounter with the world, whereas “I-It” is humanity’s indirect, conditional, and functional encounter with the world.\footnote{Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, “Jewish Environmental Ethics: The Imperative of Responsibility,” in \textit{The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology}, ed. John Hart (UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2017), 187.} As Tirosh-Samuelson notes, the
“I-It” construct resembles Heidegger’s “standing reserve,” seeing nature as function, not For-Itself, but for human use. Buber’s I-Thou relationship, which he extended to nature, “enables us to see the other as moral subject with intrinsic worth that cannot be exhausted by the Self”; the other is both “irreducible and inherently valuable” and “utterly vulnerable.”\(^{16}\) Crucially, an I-Thou relationship with nature is possible because God, the “Eternal Thou” is omni-present.\(^{17}\) Regarding Levinas, while he held that ethical responsibility should be extended to animals, his concern, born of his experience in the Holocaust, was principally with humans’ ethical concerns vis-à-vis each other and the “Absolute Other.” The place-experience of inhabited solitude can be understood as a dual encounter with nature as “Other,” which “resists all attempts at assimilation or conceptualization,” and to which “we stand in a relation of ethical accountability.”\(^{18}\) Simultaneously, we directly encounter the alterity of “Absolute Other” in a manner Toadvine proposes as the “Il y a.”\(^{19}\) In the writings of Eastern Orthodox Christian mystics, spanning over a millennia between the fourth and fifteenth centuries, Sherrard finds that a “‘full Christian understanding’” of the Divine recognizes “‘both the total


\(^{17}\) Tirosh-Samuelson, “Jewish Environmental Ethics,” 188.

\(^{18}\) Tirosh-Samuelson, “Jewish Environmental Ethics,” 189.

transcendence and the total immanence of the divine.”20 The place-experience of inhabited solitude as an encounter with simultaneously Other and Absolute Other both acknowledges and embraces this full understanding of the Divine. Hart presents the notion of the “sacramental universe” and the “sacramental commons” as a way to understand human’s relationship to the natural world and to place. “The terms sacramental universe and sacramental commons, which express a profound sense of divine immanence in, and divine engagement with, creation and creatures, articulate the special relationship of Creator and creation.”21 The place-experience of inhabited solitude reveals the sacrality of a particular place because, in Hart’s words, “[w]hile creation mediates—reveals—the Creator in different dimensions of reality, spiritual vision provides a deeper encounter with the Spirit than what the eyes perceive.”22 Toole, referencing Bugbee, writes “We must learn of wonder . . . from our encounters with the things themselves—hence the importance of those occasions when we are ‘most awake’


to the world and find ourselves called upon and invited to participate in the ‘universe of things.’ On such occasions, ‘We are laid hold of.’”

“Being Itself”

The place experience of inhabited solitude reveals the in-and-of-itselfness of the Other, the non-human I. A sense of the ultimate unity of the Other also emerges. For Shepherd, “the mountain is one and indivisible, and rock, soil, water, and air are no more integral to it than what grows from the soil and breathes the air. All are aspects of one entity, the living mountain.” In Shepherd’s contemplation of the Wells of Dee, a river in the region, she writes:

This is the river. Water, that strong white stuff, one of the four elemental mysteries, can here be seen at its origin. Like all profound mysteries, it is so simple that it frightens me. . . . *It does nothing, absolutely nothing, but be itself.* [my emphasis] . . . The water is too much for me. I only know that man can’t live without it. He must see it and hear it, touch and taste it, and, no, not smell it, if he is to be in health.

Here, she addresses the perceptual experience of water, and water in its primal element, flowing by the force of gravity, through previously graven paths, unaltered by man’s

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manipulation. Borgmann writes that while we value water for its human utility (agriculture, power, commerce), and commend ourselves on making it clean for consumption, “something has been lost. The water that flows from a faucet is no longer the water that has flowed together from many streams so that one may ‘be steeped in the river, constantly alive to its ever-unfolding.’” Borgmann writes that while we value water for its human utility (agriculture, power, commerce), and commend ourselves on making it clean for consumption, “something has been lost. The water that flows from a faucet is no longer the water that has flowed together from many streams so that one may ‘be steeped in the river, constantly alive to its ever-unfolding.’”

Shepherd’s “being itself” coupling is intended to be verb-subject, suggesting being for itself. Invoking Muir’s insight into the “whys” of some of the more insidiously seeming parts of our natural world (in this case, poison ivy), “[l]ike most other things not apparently useful to man, it has few friends, and the blind question, ‘why was it made?’ goes on and on with never a guess that first of all it might have been made for itself.”

Almost a millennia earlier, Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) wrote, “‘it should not be believed that all the beings exist for the sake of the existence of man. On the contrary, all the other beings too have been intended for their own sakes.’”

Lopez relates his encounter with a herd of muskoxen in the wild in the Arctic, noting that unlike seeing domesticated muskoxen, “they were so intensely good at being precisely what they were. The longer you watched, the more intricately they


seemed a part of where they were living, of what they were doing. Their color, their proportions against the contours of the land, were exquisite.”

In *Studies on Words*, Lewis writes, “the nature of a thing [is] its real character, over against what it is thought to be or represented as being or treated as if it were. Thus poets and painters are said to be imitating nature. Nature in this context primarily means the real character (the phusis or what-sortedness) of the things they are representing.” Poet and essayist Mary Oliver observes “form is certainty. All nature knows this... Clouds have forms, porous and shape-shifting, bumptious, fleecy. They are what clouds need to be, to be clouds...in the blue water, see the dolphin built to leap... Each form sets a tone, enables a destiny, strikes a note in the universe unlike any other.”

The unity and being-itself-ness of the non-human I becomes evident in the place-experience of inhabited solitude, where, in the persistent mental quiet of inhabited solitude, and expected relegation of human to one of many sensing and extending subjects, their unity and singular purpose is revealed. And, with Shepherd’s fortuitous grammatical construction providing the transition, we can briefly explore the idea of the non-human I as it may apply to Heidegger’s thought.

The thinking of Heidegger, particularly his notions of the Fourfold, dwelling, and *Dasein*, is pertinent to our relationship to the Other in the place-experience of inhabited solitude.

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solitude. In his discussion of Heidegger’s notion of the Fourfold, Llewelyn notes no priority among the four regions (earth, sky, gods, mortals). Further “each is implicated in and implicates the others…if any of these regions is for the sake of another, it is also for the sake of itself.”33 Applying Heidegger’s notion of Being to the non-human world, Zimmerman explains that “Dasein does not invent or create nature, as in some kind of subjective idealism, but is dependent on nature. . . . The apparent ‘alreadiness’ of natural beings and their resistance to human intervention are basic features of beings that Dasein discloses in encountering them.”34 Clarke observes that “enworldment is also and at the same time an ‘enfoldment’ of man’s being along with others: the world is a miteinwelt, a world of shared mutuality with others.”35 Quoting Nancy, Clarke continues, “‘[i]f the world is mitwelt, shared world, Being insofar as it is ‘in the world’ is constitutively being-with, and being-according to the sharing’…Being human then is this ‘being originarily with others.’” Beston writes:

In a world older and more complete than ours they move finished and complete, gifted with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear . . . they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth.36


36 Beston, The Outermost House, 25.
Intriguingly, we find in Nasr’s explanation of *Al-Muhit* (Quranic reference to the characteristic of God as all-encompassing, which also means “environment”) an echo of Heidegger’s *Dasein*. Nasr explains, “humans are immersed in the Divine *Muhit* and are only unaware of it because of their own forgetfulness and negligence (*ghaflah*), which is the underlying sin of the soul to be overcome by remembrance (*dhikr*)”.

One possible understanding of the *place-experience of inhabited solitude* is that it is *Dasein* in its authenticity, affirming “one is the mortal, temporal historical openness in which beings can manifest themselves. Dasein cares for other beings when it lets them be . . . allowing them to manifest themselves in terms of their own inherent possibilities.”

This language is, admittedly, strongly anthropocentric, and there is debate among scholars regarding Heidegger’s position on nature, for example his notion of the “standing reserve.” Llewelyn writes, “the world occupied by everyday Dasein [*Umwelt*] is . . . a totality of utilities and disutilities . . . that are expected to answer human needs and desires.” Further, “ontologically and existentially, Dasein is the ‘where,’ the *Da*, that makes being possible, makes being its possibility.”

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38 Zimmerman, “Heidegger’s Phenomenology,” 79.

39 Llewelyn, “Prolegomena,” 56.

40 Llewelyn, “Prolegomena,” 58.
understands the concept of Dasein as a frustrated, almost helpless human reality: In Heidegger’s formulation of “the clearing,” Ingold sees beings “trapped in the dilemma of a creature that can know itself and the world in which it is viscerally a part…only by renouncing its very existence in that world.” Holland helpfully provides further insights that reveal a more equitable, but admittedly still unresolved view of the non-human I in Heidegger’s philosophy. “The actuality [of a being] is independent of perception, but the perceptibility is not. This is what underlies Heidegger’s doctrine of what one might call ‘metaphysical respect.’” Bugbee may offer a way forward from the existential philosophical heritage at work here, in echoes of Merleau-Ponty and one realized precisely in the place-experience of inhabited solitude. Of wilderness, he says:

From within the lived relationship in which the presencing occurs must arise the sense of the occurring, if at all. . . . Things are in place and stand firm. Beings stand forth on their own. They do not ask our leave. They invite mutuality. That measure of trust. If one agrees to live with them, rather than summarily to reduce them to the service of intention. In contrast with the subordination of attention to intention, to be intent in attending is to give heed, and therein the perceived may work evocatively, to cumulative effect. Together the perceived and the perceiver enter into the working of the world: things in their meaning as responded to, taking shape. In wilderness the partnership of man and nature . . . seems to be a dialogic affair . . . even as the things of the place command attention in the presencing of the world they are discovered to us from within the depth of responsiveness in confirmation of our mutuality with them.

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42 Zimmerman, “Heidegger’s Phenomenology,” 85.

This intentional mutuality of which Bugbee writes inheres the *place-experience of inhabited solitude* with meaning-rich dialogue that the restrictions and veiled anthropocentrism of social constructivism otherwise bind and delimit.

Spirn, professor of landscape architecture and regional planning, writes about the legacy of Frederick Law Olmstead, planner of New York’s Central Park, the Biltmore, and Boston Fens and Riverway, and a leading advocate for the designation of Yosemite as a National Park. She concludes thus:

> All landscapes are constructed. Garden, forest, city, and wilderness are shaped by rivers and rain, plants and animals, human hands and minds. They are phenomena of nature and products of culture. There is always tension in landscape between the reality and autonomy of the nonhuman and its cultural construction, between the human impulse to wonder at the wild and the compulsion to use, manage, and control. . . . nature may be constructed, but it is not only a construction.”

James Proctor, professor of geography and environmental studies, in an essay on environmental ethics examining the spotted owl controversy in Oregon in the late 1980s, observes that while much of nature’s complexity for humans is derived from its social construction, “what the postmodern mind is aware of is that there are problems in human and social life with no good solutions. . . . Making moral sense of these places entails embracing the paradox that they are both social constructions and realities that transcend

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social constructions.”45 Regarding his time in the Arctic, Lopez reflects “I came to believe that people’s desires and aspirations were as much a part of the land as the wind, solitary animals, and the bright fields of stone and tundra. And too, that the land itself existed quite apart from these.”46 Klaver documents an experience she and a few colleagues had while camping in a remote area in western Montana, in which they witnessed, quite unexpectedly and through by no human, weather, or animal interference, a large boulder become dislodged from a steep hillside and roll to the bottom. “The other’s presence was suddenly present but remained utterly other.”47 In reflecting on the experience, Klaver observes that “We [the campers and the boulder]…participated in the same space/place. At the moment it rolls down, [we become] part of its world. We sense its being-in-the-world. At that moment the place has become consciously shared with…a rock.”48

**Nature as Self, or Nature as Other-Subject?**

Evernden, in seeking to bridge the gap of a crucial philosophical debate (albeit one with immediate social, cultural, and political implications) in environmental and


46 Lopez, Artic Dreams, xxii.


ecology communities, that of nature-as-object and nature-as-self, proposes that “the idiosyncratic experience of nature to which each one of us, as an individual, is privy is itself contrary to the laws of nature with which we are indoctrinated.” He argues that in the nature-as-object paradigm, nature must be “homogenous and continuous” to enable “consistent causal relationships to be established…there can be ‘no pockets of resistance, no surprises.’” However, this view is inconsistent with our “individual, unique experience of nature” which Evernden concludes is “‘miraculous.’” Toadvine contends that ultimately, nature-as-miraculous is unlikely to yield to the confines of language, therefore making it challenging to criticize, discuss, or build upon, and the turn toward “metaphysics” may be uncertain ground for “an ethical imperative.” As an alternative, Toadvine argues that the concept of Il y a (there is) “is a more radical version” of Evernden’s “miraculous”; a la Merleau-Ponty, it is “the invisible that cannot, in principle, be brought within the sphere of the visible.” Further, as opposed to representing an “‘absolute other,’” Il y a “is the other side of the perceivable and the thinkable; it is the call that gives rise to sense.” Crucially, Toadvine proposes “It is at the margins of our


50 Toadvine, “The Primacy of Desire,” 142.

51 Toadvine, “The Primacy of Desire,” 142.

52 Toadvine, “The Primacy of Desire,” 143.


54 Toadvine, “The Primacy of Desire,” 149.
experience, in the desirous response of our flesh to the *Il y a*, that we are confronted with a wildness with which we can never come face to face.”  

I cannot see how in any way this cannot be an encounter with the Divine Other. As such, both Toadvine’s *Il y a* and Evernden’s “miraculous” are possible explanations of an integral component of the *place-experience of inhabited solitude.*

**Confronted With Mortality**

The *place-experience of inhabited solitude* necessarily includes grappling with that which would cause us physical peril, laying bare for our contemplation, our incarnate limitations. This is not the experience of nature that most people have or seek to have. Managed, manicured, cultured nature, such as parks with paths, delineated, “maintained,” recreational places, and modern conveniences characterize most urban and suburban preferences for experiences with nature. A 2014 study of almost 1,300 visitors to the *Grunewald* urban forest in Berlin (a 100-year-old, 7,400-acre forest in Berlin that, by 2015, was visited by 100 million people annually) found, in part, that urban visitors to the forest approached that experience with some ambivalence—people visited to experience “nature and wilderness” but simultaneously sought “a managed infrastructure with


56 After Toadvine questions the adequacy of Evernden’s nature-as-miraculous in terms of language and ethical grounding, somewhat oddly, he reverses himself in his own defense, asserting that nature, under the construct of *Il y a*, is “the refusal of the hegemony of perception, language, and thought...” and any ethical grounding must reside in “an attentiveness to the resistance of what cannot be thought or perceived, to the opacity of a wild being that circumscribes our concepts and percepts.” Toadvine, “The Primacy of Desire,” 150.
dustbins and toilets . . . [further] “the desire to be in nature [was] often contradicted by the negative byproducts of nature, which are not desired (e.g., wild animals and emissions).” For most, encounters of potential mortality are rarely, if ever sought.

Yet, these existential, difficult-to-explain encounters that confront our incarnate being are an element of *the place-experience of inhabited solitude*. There is no reasoning with That which does not reason. Our humanity is effaced in the face of the irrationality of the Other, as we confront our animal nature and are transformed. For Shepherd, encounters with the clearness of a deceptively deep loch transformed fear into “a rare exhilaration: not that it ceased to be fear, but fear itself, so impersonal, so keenly apprehended, enlarged rather than constricted the spirit.” In her musings on different types of rain, she identifies a “rain without beauty,” in which “the desolation of these empty stretches of land strikes at one’s heart. The mountain becomes a monstrous place.”

Muir famously embraced the solitude he found in the wild, a place due respect and reverence, but ultimately not a place to be feared.

We are now in the mountains and they are in us, kindling enthusiasm, making every nerve quiver. . . . Our flesh and bone tabernacle seems transparent as glass.

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59 Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, 44.

60 In a journal he kept in Alaska in the 1890s, Muir wrote “I am often asked...if I am lonesome on my solitary excursions. It seems so self-evident that one cannot be lonesome where everything wild and beautiful and busy and steeped with God that the question is hard to answer—seems silly.” Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 5th Edition, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 127.
to the beauty about us . . . thrilling with the air and trees, streams and rocks, in the waves of the sun,--a part of all nature, neither young nor old, sick nor well, but immortal.\textsuperscript{61}

Emerson, however, in a letter to Muir urging him to visit him in Massachusetts, voiced a different perspective. "Bring to an early close your absolute contracts with any yet unvisited glaciers or volcanos’. . . . The solitude of the wilderness . . . 'is a sublime mistress, but an intolerable wife.'"\textsuperscript{62}

At its most querulous, the \textit{place-experience of inhabited solitude} harries the human with the question of existence, starkly confronting us with the fundamental reality of our animal nature. "I was skinning a bearded seal on a small ice cake with another man, in silence… I thought how the ice under my feet could suddenly melt. I was standing on water over water. My heart went into my neck. Later we ate. I ate the meat of the seal."\textsuperscript{63}

To say it otherwise, I am at odds with my death. I am cursed by an awareness that nature’s demands don’t answer my demand that my having been born and my being here make a difference that makes sense to me. I am nature’s exception and nature’s negation insofar as my self-awareness is aware of nothing—a nothing that separates me, isolates me, individuates me, forcing me into a relation, mediation, and intention, call it language.\textsuperscript{64}

Lopez’s description of human-polar bear encounters evinces, once again, the implications of human finitude learned through the \textit{place-experience of inhabited solitude}.

\textsuperscript{61} Muir, "My First Summer in the Sierra," 161.

\textsuperscript{62} Nash, \textit{Wilderness and the American Mind}, 126.

\textsuperscript{63} Lopez, \textit{Arctic Dreams}, 244.

\textsuperscript{64} Harrison, “Toward a Philosophy of Nature,” 435.
To encounter the bear, to meet it with your whole life, was to grapple with something personal. The confrontation occurred on a serene, deadly, and elevated plain. If you were successful you found something irreducible within yourself, like a seed. To walk away was to be alive, utterly. To be assured of your own life, the life of your kind, in a harsh land where life took insight and patience and humor. It was to touch the bear. It was a gift from the bear.65

Toole writes:

All our powers of description come up short when we walk around the bend and find a grizzly bear standing in the trail. Even...the best of bear biologists will fail to capture the meaning of the encounter now underway. All bets are off; nothing can be taken for granted. To encounter a grizzly bear is indeed to be placed on the spot and radically positioned amid things.66 (my emphasis)

Like a small number of individuals who spend considerable, regular time in the woods of the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, my brother had a close encounter with a grizzly bear and recalled similar feelings. In my brother’s case, he had been watching a “small” grizzly bear (larger than any black bear he’d ever seen) on a ridgeline across from the one on which he waited, about 125 yards away. Despite my brother’s silently-uttered pleas, the bear began making its way toward him, and, due to wind direction, unaware of this human interloper ahead. My brother lost sight of the bear when it was 100 yards away, but he could hear it breathing as it approached, a sound he described as the bear “pushing air out of its chest in short, great, whooshing bursts.”67 Finally, my brother realized he had to make a stand, literally, before the bear got any closer as the Alpine firs

65 Lopez, Arctic Dreams, 110.


67 Interview with Tim Thurston, January 2019.
surrounding my brother had no limbs low enough for him to reach in order to climb to safety, and he only had four shells for his rifle, not enough to keep the bear from harming him, or worse. He said that at that moment, while as yet not debilitating afraid, his heightened senses “were at 100 percent.” He stood and began beating his chest, jumping up and down, and yelling at the bear to go away. (Grizzly bears are unafraid of humans and can run at speeds of up to 30 mph in open terrain.) The bear, now abruptly aware of this new presence, stood up on its hind legs to look at my brother, about 40 yards away. My brother continued to yell, beat his chest and jump up and down, in an entirely primeval prey-predator standoff. After long moments of consideration, the bear dropped to four legs and disappeared down the slope away from my brother. The emotional encounter was not entirely finished; although the bear had disappeared from sight, my brother’s way out was in the direction the bear seemed to take, a hunch confirmed when he saw it once more, 150 yards away, when it stopped to turn back and look. He recalled considerable trepidation as he made his way down the steep ridge through heavy underbrush, telling me that “I did not want to be in that thick Alder brush with a grizzly bear.”

In his recollection of this potentially fatal (for him) encounter, my brother, an avid, experienced hunter and woodsman of over 30 years said,

The sounds it made as it approached me gave me a new respect for that animal. It walked the woods in a very different manner than a black bear walks the woods.

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68 Interview with Tim Thurston, January 2019.
69 Interview with Tim Thurston, January 2019.
It walked like it owned the ground; black bears lumber . . . that grizzly bear walked with a purpose. Yes, even though I had a high-powered rifle, that experience definitely made me uneasy.\footnote{Interview with Tim Thurston, January 2019. Time and again, writers from the Pacific Northwest and Alaska recount these keenly-felt encounters with grizzly bears, and by definition, their own finitude. Montana writer Rick Bass, in the span of three days in early October in the 1990s, recounts his meeting with three different grizzly bears, in a passage in \textit{The Book of Yaak}. Rick Bass, \textit{The Book of Yaak}, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 48-58.}

Grizzly bear encounters run throughout nature literature, especially and unsurprisingly, from Alaska, western Canada, and the Pacific Northwest. Hoagland writes about an acquaintance, living in a remote area in British Colombia, who survived a grizzly attack. For him, it wasn’t the physical injuries that left the greatest impression on his memory. Instead it was the smell: “odious suffocation—violent, vile aversion. It was not like pyorrhea, nor like a garbage pit; it was everything fetid and scarifying and strangling rolled into one disgusting cloud that was more frightening than all the injuries and pain.”\footnote{Abram says this about such experiences: “Indeed, the synaesthesia between the human eyes and ears is especially concentrated in our relation to other animals, since for a million years these ‘distance’ senses were most tightly coupled at such moments of extreme excitement, when closing in on prey, or when escaping from predators. When backing slowly away from a mother grizzly protecting her cubs, or when watching intently the movements of an aroused rattlesnake...these are the moments when visual and auditory foci are virtually indistinguishable...” David Abram, \textit{The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World}, (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 129.}

Harrison observes that “nature is the outer boundary of human nature. It is that which we come up against whenever we come to terms with ourselves. We live not in nature, but in our relation to nature . . . our relation to nature is the correlate of our
relation to ourselves.” Nature, the natural order, is death. We cannot escape it. Wohlleben writes of the forest, “[f]or out there under the trees, the law of the jungle rules. Every species wants to survive, and each takes from the others what it needs. All are basically ruthless.”  The place-experience of inhabited solitude brings us closer to that banal biological truth; our experience in that physical, non-human place, which includes response and attempts at articulation in language, is particularly, solely human in its happening/process. An anonymous backpacker hiking in the forests of California summed it up, “‘this place doesn’t care at all whether I exist or not.”

Authors Henry Miller and Robert Roper (1977) both wrote about “the extreme otherness of the mist forest [in California].” In his 1957 novel, Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch, Miller wrote “At dawn its majesty is almost painful to behold. The same prehistoric look. The look of always. Nature smiling at herself in the mirror of eternity. . . . Toward eventime, when nothing speaks, when the mysterious hush descends, envelops all, says all.” Roper, in his 1977 novel On Spider Creek, describes the redwood forest prior to the arrival of European Americans, invoking demonic


76 Wallace and Bear, The Wilder Shore, 53.

77 Wallace and Bear, The Wilder Shore, 53-54.
imagery. It was a place “where animals that ‘never saw the light of day in their whole life’ prowl. . . . All kinds of weird creatures with double heads and magic poisons in their beaks and feathers and fur mixed up amongst their scales.’” Lopez recounts his experience of sailing between two mammoth icebergs: “They were monolithic; their walls, towering and abrupt. . . . I would walk from one side of the ship to the other, wondering how something so imposing in its suggestion of life could be approached so closely, and yet still seem so remote.”

Tuan discusses the “ascetic temperament” as it relates to topophilia and desert landscape. For Tuan, this desire to seek the wilderness, in its “sacrifice of worldly goods” “transcends social norms” and is therefore, “a symptom of deep-seated bias; the behavior that it conduces cannot be explained solely by the cultural values of the time. . . . Ascetic practice can be perceived as will, the lordship of spirit over matter, and the desert the austere stage for epiphany.” Central to the Seven Pillars of Wisdom, the desert for T.E. Lawrence was a place where the human spirit encountered the “indifferent” non-human I that, while not entirely antithetical to man, was its profound Other, challenging man’s search for meaning. “For years we lived anyhow in the naked desert, under the indifferent heaven. By day hot sun fermented us; and we were dizzied by the beating wind. At night we were stained by

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78 Lopez, Arctic Dreams, 206.

79 Tuan, Topophilia, 51.

80 Tuan, Topophilia, 51.
dew, and shamed into pettiness by the innumerable silences of the stars.”

In his discussion of “the absurd landscape,” Relph writes, “the absurd landscape is the landscape we experience as being there, apart from and indifferent to us.” And quoting mountaineer Jean Proal, “there are landscapes which can force their absurdity upon our attention almost regardless of our predispositions. . . . ‘In the zone where the rocks and glaciers begin the mountain has lost all trace of what one might call its humanity. . . . It is not superhuman, it is ahuman.’” Harrison observes:

Those realists who insist on reminding us that human beings are nothing but tiny microorganisms on a speck of cosmic dirt called Earth are not wrong in their analogy. They are merely feckless. Humans are those beings for whom being nothing but tiny microorganisms on a speck of cosmic dirt is a source of anguish.

He goes on to proclaim that nature “offers us the spectacle of a longevity and an endurance that are denied us” and often we “stubbornly refuse (tense changed by me) . . . to come to terms with our finitude, to accept our fundamental limitations.” For Harrison, this results in abuse of nature; however, I offer that the place-experience of inhabited solitude allows those willing, to come to terms, to some degree, with this existential “anguish,” to use Harrison’s term. As he wryly concludes, “Acknowledgment

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81 Lawrence, quoted in Tuan, *Topophilia*, 52.
83 Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 128.
84 Harrison, “Toward a Philosophy of Nature,” 434.
85 Harrison, “Toward a Philosophy of Nature,” 436.
does not save us from ourselves; at most it spares us the indignity of leaving the world kicking and screaming like the infants who came into it.”

A Double Loss: Loss, or Willful Ignorance? Of the Alterity of the Non-Human I and the Separation from Place

Due to a confluence of historical factors, the details of which are and culpability for is still a matter of considerable, lively debate, much of the civilized world has lost its critical relationship with that physical reality in which we are full participants. The world of the Internet and conceptualizations such as “The Cloud” are, in a way, direct descendants of the Platonic world of ideas. Knowledge, in the form of information, exists in otherwise meaningless sequences of 1’s and 0’s and, while entirely dependent on physical structures for repositories (data centers), is conceptualized as existing “out there” in invisible space. Increasingly, what we deal with daily and throughout our months and years, center entirely on a translation of numeric sequences into language onscreen with which we are familiar and which, other than referentially, is bartered,

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86 Harrison, “Toward a Philosophy of Nature,” 437.

87 Many environmental texts lay the blame for contemporary mistreatment, or worse, of natural resources at the feet of Western Christendom’s religious heritage. Some more enlightened critics, like Abram, point to the world of ideas (see following footnote). However, while Buddhism and some other non-Western religions, specifically indigenous religions but also Jainism, for example, have clear notions of preservation of and respect for the natural world, the military and economic history of the great civilizations across the world have used the land and its flora and fauna for human conquest and enlargement of civilization for millennia.

88 “A long line of recent philosophers, stretching from Friedrich Nietzsche down to the present, have attempted to demonstrate that Plato’s philosophical derogation of the sensible and changing forms of the world—his claim that these are mere simulacra of eternal and pure ideas existing in an nonsensorial realm beyond the apparent world—contributed profoundly to civilization’s distrust of bodily and sensorial experience, and to our consequent estrangement from the earthly world around us.” Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous, 94.
bought, and sold quite independent of the natural or even physical world around us, from financial holdings to public policy to the growing popularity of virtual reality. Not too many decades ago, the idea that humans could carry on a sufficient and satisfying lifelong mind-only based existence, plugged into a machine, provided they had someone or something to maintain their physical life, was thought-provoking (and box office proceeds gaining) science fiction trope at best, and a chilling, imagined, dystopian end to humanity as we knew it, at worst. It doesn’t seem the former so much, and we face the latter in the prospect of the utter negation of our communion with the physical, animate world, our psychê irrevocably turned away from the world of the sensuous in a Platonic dream-cum-nightmare.

Nigel Thrift asserts that humanity’s relationship with Nature has changed—humanity has “unbound (sic) itself from the soil”; “the other of our society is in (a) sense no longer Nature at all, as it was in precapitalist societies, but something else which we must now identify”; “nature’ can no longer survive without human intervention”; “the ‘end of nature’ means that the natural world has become in large part a ‘created environment’, consisting of humanly structured systems whose motive, power and dynamics derive from socially organized knowledge-claims rather than from influences exogenous to human activity.”89 This position seems to reflect both an exaggerated anthropocentric view, one obfuscated by urban experience and perspective. Malpas

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contends that Thrift (although “ambiguously”) “valorizes” a “purely spatialized view” of the modern world, in which there are no “genuine ‘places’, but only the representation of unbounded spaces containing nodes, lines, and flows.”

With these thoughts in mind, I wish to contest the proposition of the “relational approach” (rejecting space and place as fixed entities) held by Massey, Marston, Ingold, and others, as it pertains to the *place-experience of inhabited solitude*. By “collaps[ing] the dualisms of nature and society and human and non-human” and assigning equality of participation to all, a purely relational approach retains an idea that man is still in control of the non-human. The non-I is understood entirely in the context of human engagement, rather than existing in and of Itself. As with social constructivism in general, engagement with nature is confined to cultural norms and personal experience. Apart from this, no independent variable acts on the individual. Ingold, invoking Massey, Deleuze and Guattari, and others, proposes a *haecctic* view of our ability to know the world, one of a convergence of intersecting spatial and temporal paths (Deleuze understood an individual organism as a “bundle of lines,” or “a *haeccity*.”).

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91 Michael Woods, *Rural*, (London: Routledge, 2011), 41. Malpas contends that “Harvey and Massey often employ a somewhat simplistic view of place, even while they appear to be reacting against some of the oversimplifications in the work of many humanistic geographers.” Malpas, *Place and Experience*, endnote 5, 42.


93 Ingold, *Being Alive*, 84.
explicitly rejects a notion of place as a fixed entity. “…we would be wrong to suppose
that sensory experience is embodied, or that through it, people are tied to place.”94 Yet, as I consider the impossibly tall, ancient, and dense Idaho forest community consisting of, among other forest dwellers, Mountain Hemlock (up to 100 feet tall, and as old as 250 years), Lodgepole Pine (up to 110 feet tall, and as old as 150 years), towering Ponderosa Pine (up to 180 feet tall, and as old as 300 years), and the more rare but truly ancient Western Red Cedar (up to 160 feet tall, up to 8 feet in diameter, and as old as over 1,000 years) all visible in the pre-dawn light through the mesh of my tent, and I smell the faint, damp undercurrent of sweet cottonwood in the air while the rolling, steady sound of the St. Joe river flowing over rocks inundates my ears, I can experience the present space and the present time synaesthetically, augmented by memory and knowledge, but simultaneously know the place-experience carries something ineffable, something intangible, something more than what I bring to it. This “more” can only be external to me—the trees, the smells, the sounds of this place of inhabited solitude. While undeniably, as Ingold, Merleau-Ponty, Goethe, and many others have observed, nothing, not even the granite of the mountains themselves, are static, and motion is a constant, my physical body and soul augmented by memory, by knowledge, meet those trees, that river, those smells and the rest of the physical world outside myself in captured temporality, from which springs memory and greater or different knowledge in a wave ever-unfolding, past, through present, into future. Of her encounters with birds, Shepherd

94 Ingold, Being Alive, 134.
notes no need to document that which she has seen, for these moments are “in lived encounters, moments of their life that have crossed moments of mine.” 95 They are engraved in memory. 96 That dawn cool summer morning experience, as it lives in my memory and serves as a foundation for future moments of understanding and insight, and, I would argue, compels moral responsibility resulting from a connection to and with the other participants in those moments, is lived and recalled not as a function of mobility but distinctly as a place-rooted experience at a fixed time. Further, considering Ingold’s proposition of convergences of paths, the trees, the river (with a nod to Ingold, I mean the river as a holistic entity—the water, the rocky bed, and the bank, which in themselves as

95 Shepherd, The Living Mountain, 67.

96 Memory is a component of the phenomenological experience of inhabited solitude, part of a host of human engagements brought to bear in the place-experience of inhabited solitude. One of the most exquisite expositions of memory rooted in taste and smell in literature is that of Proust and the madeleine in Swann’s Way. “And so it is with our own past. It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect...What an abyss of uncertainty whenever the mind feels that some part of it has strayed beyond its own borders: when it, the seeker, is at once the dark region through which it must go seeking...Seek? More than that: create. It is face to face with something which does not so far exist, to which it alone can give reality and substance, which it alone can bring into the light of day...I place in position before my mind’s eye the still recent taste of that first mouthful, and I feel something start within me, something that leaves its resting-place and attempts to rise, something that has been embedded like an anchor at great depth...I can hear the echo of great spaces traversed. Undoubtedly what is thus palpitating in the depths of my being must be the image, the visual memory which, being linked to that taste, has tried to follow it into my conscious mind...Will it ultimately reach the clear surface of my consciousness, this memory...But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest: and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.” Marcel Proust, Swann’s Way, transl. C.K. Scott Moncrieff, (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2005), 46-48.
a river experience different rates of temporalities that together give us the notion of “river,” a concrete, fixed notion), the release of scent by the cottonwoods, the birds bustling through their morning ministrations, and I, lying next to my sleeping husband in the tent, live lives of vastly different temporalities that just so happened to coincide that chilly mountain July morning. We can no more travel the same path for any length of time than an ant crawling along steadily on the side of the freeway and the car passing it can.

While we can, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, paraphrased, “blend in our duration with the other durations” of the Other whose temporality is closer to ours, the fact of the divergence of our durations and that of the Other cannot be set aside as periphery to the understanding of our experience. Thus, we are in motion, but place-bound by our temporality among the physicality of the world in which we live and breathe, quite literally. Place and the physical externalities independent of our bodies afford us the ability to affix our memory, knowledge, and emotions, amid a world bigger than our perceptions. It could even be proposed that mobility theory, keenly urbanocentric, stands in direct opposition to native peoples’ understanding of reality. Deloria writes

> American Indians hold their lands—places—as having the highest possible meaning. . . . Immigrants [non-native Americans] review the movement of their ancestors across the continent . . . placing history—time—in the best possible light. . . Western European peoples have never learned to consider the nature of the world discerned from a spatial point of view.

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History is a function of place, not time. “Indian tribes combine history and geography so that they have a ‘sacred geography,’ . . . every location within their original homeland has a multitude of stories that recount the migrations, revelations, and particular historical incidents that cumulatively produced the tribe in its current condition.” Indeed, this should not sound unfamiliar to the three leading monotheistic religions of today. The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, Jesus’ ministry, Paul’s travels, and the Prophet Mohammed’s life as told in the Koran center on “sacred geography,” locations in a homeland that hold in their geographic memories stories of “migrations, revelations, and particular historical incidents” that have produced Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as we know them today.

Many proponents of the theory of the Anthropocene assert a “death of nature,” a sundering of the unity of man and nature as a result of the advent of Cartesian duality, manifested in the broader social and intellectual changes wrought by the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. It is argued that this has shown itself to be a false dualism, in the face of modern scientific discoveries in the fields of physics and biology. Social theory based on atomistic views are rejected for their lack of a holistic understanding of the true nature of humans and the world in which we live. “Physics routinely teach that the building blocks of nature are discrete particles, such as the electron or quark. That is a lie. The building blocks of our theories are not particles but fields: continuous, fluid-

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99 Deloria, *God is Red*, 122.
Indeed, Ingold, Latour, Deleuze and others use theoretical models (entanglement, *haecccities*, networks) explicitly derived from the latest findings of physics and biology. Further, the Hegelian notion of “becoming” seems to persist in the current trend toward mobility analysis. I suggest only, here, that we consider whether we are permitting, once again, scientific theory regarding the physical world to drive philosophical and other social science theory regarding human experience/understanding. Have we traded atomistic thinking for field-istic thinking?

Employing a rigidly social constructivist perspective of nature separates humans, in a critical and damaging way, from the non-human I with which we have profound intersubjectivity and to which we owe a profound responsibility—perhaps the greatest responsibility. Bugbee asserts that wilderness “will not let one off the metaphysical hook . . . we are there as on the spot with respect to the meaning of what we behold . . . the

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101 For Hegel, reality can be conceptualized as “a system of essences whose more or less adequate expression is the existing world...Existence is a necessary expression of essence. History is the manifestation of essential being under the conditions of existence. Its course can be understood and justified. A courage which conquers the negativities of the individual life is possible for those who participate in the universal process in which the absolute mind actualizes itself. The anxieties of fate, guilt, and doubt are overcome by means of an elevation through different degrees of meaning through the highest, the philosophical intuition of the universal process itself.” Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 2nd ed., (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 133-134.

102 See the discussion in Malpas on the evolution of thinking on space and place in philosophy and related scholarly thought, as it has followed mathematical and physical scientific thought over the past millennia. Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 28-29. Casey also sketches this history.
relationship is one of participation in what occurs, the presencing of heaven-and-earth . . . one is brought to realize one is held within the embrace of what is proffered in its being proffered. No behind or beyond the things themselves.”

Merchant writes, “this disorderly, ordered world of nonhuman nature must be acknowledged as a free autonomous actor, just as humans are free autonomous actors.”

Similar to Murdoch’s proposal to treat the countryside (rural) as “hybrid” space, valid truth claims about the place-experience of inhabited solitude can be derived from this “hybrid” encounter of geographic place and “relational” aspects that affirm the “‘non-representational’ – emotions, impulsive body actions, affective relations.”

Further, as humans, we have the unique characteristic—a response-ability, in fact, to preserve, conserve, and protect. Hardy writes that the human capacities of “human language, cognition, and culture are . . . profoundly unparalleled in the animal kingdom” and observes that human language “allows us to talk about the past and the future, to refer to things that are physically distant and to things that do not exist” and “allows humans to influence and affect the cognition and the culture of other humans by symbolic means – a feat unequalled among other animals.”

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105 Woods, Rural, 41.

106 Louise Röska-Hardy quoted in Malpas, Place and Experience, Endnote 14, 77.
Back to the Boundaries?

This subject of boundaries is an obvious element of the place-experience of inhabited solitude. The Arctic is a region of boundaries of many sorts—water, ice, land, sky, inhabitation, man, animal. Lopez uses the physical realities of the borders in the Arctic to wrestle with the problem of existence.

The edges of any landscape—horizons, the lip of a valley, the bend of a river around a canyon wall—quicken an observer’s expectations. That attraction to borders, to the earth’s twilit places, is part of the shape of human curiosity. And the edges that cause excitement are like these where I now walk, sensing the birds toying with gravity; or like those in quantum mechanics, where what is critical straddles a border between being a wave and being a particle, between being what it is, and becoming something else, occupying and edge of time that defeats our geometries.  

Deakin grapples with the notion of boundaries and borders, and experiences beyond those ‘frontiers’ in works on the woods and on water. “To enter water is, of course, to cross a border . . . you arrive at a different realm, in which you are differently minded because you are differently bodied. . . . ‘To enter a wood is to pass into a different world in which we ourselves are transformed.” Klaver writes that boundaries are “places of heterogeneity and diversity that call for negotiation or translation.” At a biological level, boundaries are not even what they appear to be.

The somatic integrity of the organism is formed in communication with what is other, through a process of constant response and adaptation that integrates the environment into the body and reintegrates the body into the world. . . . ‘biology

107 Lopez, Arctic Dreams, 123.

108 Macfarlane, Landmarks, 104.

109 Klaver, “Phenomenology on (the) Rocks,” 162.
requires preserving the identity of selves in an environment with which the self must be in constant exchange.”¹¹⁰

Wood writes that boundaries “are the way stations between insides and outsides, the sites of negotiation, of transformation, of sustenance, of protection. Boundaries are real, and yet they are often recessive and ambiguous.”¹¹¹ They are, in Wood’s formulation, the limits of “organized integrity.” Hayles concludes that the “most productive” place for selfhood in experiences with nature lies “at the cusp between the beholder and the world.”¹¹² Without detailing here Hales’ conceptualization of what she calls “constrained constructivism,” detailed in her 1991 essay “Constrained Constructivism: Locating Scientific Inquiry in the Theater of Representation,” she concludes:

An alternative approach is to follow the lead of Merleau-Ponty when he suggests that situatedness, far from being a barrier to knowledge, enables it. Given that we are not God, we can only come in touch with the universe through particular sets of sensory apparatus located within specific cultures and times. Constrained constructivism has this double edge: while it implies relativism, it also indicates an active construction of a reality that is meaningful to us through the dynamic interplay between us and the world. Renouncing omniscience and coercive power, it gains connectedness and human meaning.¹¹³


¹¹¹ Wood, “What is Eco-phenomenology?” 220.


Klaver describes this as a co-locatory, ongoing event. It’s “the location where the abstract is the concrete, the concrete is the abstract . . . all these relations, that are in fact always movements, occur at the border. . . . At the border, coconstitution and operative intentionality take place.”\textsuperscript{114}

\textbf{It Reaches Into Us}

In the cusp of the \textit{place-experience of inhabited solitude}, the Other comes to inhabit us “in memory and imagination. . . . For some people, what they are is not finished at the skin, but continues with the reach of senses out into the land. If the land is summarily disfigured or reorganized, it causes them psychological pain [and]…a sense of dislocation.”\textsuperscript{115} I can attest to this experience. During the final semester of my undergraduate year at Willamette University in the early 1990s, I lived 40 minutes from campus, some miles up the Little North Fork of the Santiam River on the pine-forested flanks of the Cascade Range that bounds the east side of the Willamette Valley. The rent was free and the location, more than a mile down a gated forest road and overlooking a significant salmon spawning location, was the perfect setting for the peace and quiet needed for the contemplation of study as I was completing my senior year. I spent many evenings and weekends with a background symphony of wind, birds, and the ever-present roaring stream below the cabin, and I logged many mountain running miles on the Bureau of Land Management roads that plaited the ridges and valleys. Half a dozen or so

\textsuperscript{114} Klaver, “Phenomenology on (the) Rocks,” 164.

\textsuperscript{115} Lopez, \textit{Artic Dream}, 279.
years later, my old roommate (whose parents owned the cabin) told me that the land
around the cabin had been leased to a logging company, and that they had subsequently
clear-cut the timber above and beyond the cabin, leaving only a thin treed border between
the forest road and the river. I had an opportunity to return for a visit, and found myself
unable to commit. The stark sight of stumped slopes where once rose comforting, thickly
matted Douglas Firs, other pines, and a few broadleaf species, would have compromised
my memories of those months to a degree I was unwilling to accept, not unlike the
platitude sometimes offered to those who were not able to see an older or sick relative or
friend, long unvisited, before they died—“Don’t feel bad, it’s best if you remember them
the way they were.”

Goethe writes “[t]he manifestation of a phenomenon is not detached from the
observer—it is caught up and entangled in his individuality.”\textsuperscript{116} The \textit{place-experience of
inhabited solitude} is comprehensive phenomenological engagement with the non-human
I, affirming the very human participation in that experience. Indeed, Malpas asserts that
place is simultaneously physical location, “as a place of experience,” and “as itself
something experienced.”\textsuperscript{117} Accordingly, the \textit{place-experience of inhabited solitude} may
also be understood in Edward Relph’s concept of “perceptual space” as “the realm of
direct emotional encounters with the spaces of the earth, sea, and sky or with built and

\textsuperscript{116} Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, \textit{The Essential Goethe}, Ed. Matthew Bell,

\textsuperscript{117} Malpas, \textit{Place and Experience}, 175.
created spaces.”

And, “perceptual space is essential to his identity as a person, existential space makes him belong to a social and cultural totality.” Here, Relph may run afoul of later social constructivist thinking that dictates that perception itself is culturally and socially derived; however, Relph’s distinction is important as it keeps encounters separate that, at least for natural space, are not experienced in culturally derived space—“earth, sea, and sky” for example.

The Place-Experience of Inhabited Solitude as an Aspect of Rural Identity: “Life Has Not Much Margin Here”

When considering the elements that both compose rurality and form the basis for an aspect of rural identity rooted in the place-experience of inhabited solitude, it is important to bear in mind that the rural is not monolith, instead, the rural, as discussed in Chapter Two comprises both agricultural geographic places—settled, tilled, farmed, and perpetually re-farmed land, no matter how sparsely populated—and the non-agri-rural, landscapes un- or greatly less modified by direct human interaction over time. Land in perpetual productivist agricultural does not provoke the response people generally have to mountain wilderness, desert, high plains, or remote seashores, what I refer to as inhabited solitude. The non-agri-rural identity is partly a function of the place-experience of inhabited solitude. I will first review the literature on the role of place in


identity, then narrow my discussion to that of rural place and identity, and conclude with observations regarding the component of non-agri-rural identity that is rooted, for some, in the place-experience of inhabited solitude.

Relph made strong claims about the role of place and identity. “The fact that we do not attend continually to our landscape and place does not make it insignificant . . . it is a fundamental part of personal identity.”¹²⁰ And, personal encounter with place, whether at the level of “abrupt and ecstatic experience, or a slowly developed, gently grown involvement . . . is uniquely and privately your own because your experience of it is distinctly personal.”¹²¹ Malpas writes that the identity of a place “must be understood in terms of a complex conjunction of factors including the natural landscape, the pattern of weather and sky, the human ordering of spaces and resources, and also those individual and communal narratives with which the place is imbued.”¹²² The confluence of what humans bring to an encounter with landscape, together with the physical interaction with that place produces the place-experience itself, and those experiences, while perhaps similar for some, are universally particular. As Bugbee asserts, while the “necessity” and “simplicity” revealed in our experiences are universal (“omnirelevant”) in their characteristics as such, “the necessary – whatever can be appreciated as necessary – is not necessary as an instance of a class…The necessary is

¹²⁰ Relph, Place and Placelessness, 33.

¹²¹ Relph, Place and Placelessness, 37.

¹²² Malpas, Place and Experience, 188.
individual, and whatever is appreciated as necessary is appreciated as individual, unique.”\textsuperscript{123} Malpas contends that identity is “bound up with particular places, or localities, through the very structuring of subjectivity and mental life within the overarching structure of place.”\textsuperscript{124} Relph concludes similarly, “the essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence.”\textsuperscript{125} Research, in fact, has identified a phenomenon called “place identity” in which people “form emotional and cognitive bonds to a specific place, allowing that space to become part of the person’s identity (Devine-Wright & Clayton, 2010; Stedman, 2002).”\textsuperscript{126} Nicholas Entrikin, in \textit{The Betweenness of Place}, asserts:

To understand place requires that we have access to both objective and subjective reality. From the decentered vantage point of the theoretical scientist, place becomes either location or a set of generic relations and thereby loses much of its significance for human action. From the centered viewpoint of the subject, place has meaning only in relation to an individual’s or a group’s goals and concerns. Place is best viewed from points in between.\textsuperscript{127}

Further, as Relph explains, the image of place for an individual is ultimately phenomenon-based, including “the mixing of experience, emotion, memory, imagination, present situation, and intention.”\textsuperscript{128} Lopez observes that “[w]hat one thinks of any

\textsuperscript{123} Henry Bugbee, \textit{The Inward Morning: A Philosophical Exploration in Journal Form}, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 104.

\textsuperscript{124} Malpas, \textit{Place and Experience}, 180.

\textsuperscript{125} Relph, \textit{Place and Placelessness}, 43.


\textsuperscript{127} Nicholas Entrikin quoted by Proctor, “Whose Nature?” 275.

\textsuperscript{128} Relph, \textit{Place and Placelessness}, 56.
region...is the result of at least three things: what one knows, what one imagines, and how one is disposed.”

When discussing topophilia, Bachelard writes “[s]pace that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space...it has been lived in not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination.” In a sense, we bring contours, or a topography, of memory and emotion to meet Alterity, the non-human I. Malpas discusses Proust’s “binding of persons and places in memory – one recalls not just the person, but person and place.”

Liepins/Panelli’s research (cited in Woods, Rural) presents critical insights to the questions of rural identity and the notion of belonging as a component of rural identity.

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129 Lopez, Artic Dreams, 271. He spends a bit more time on the question of disposition, noting that one's emotional state—or mood, based on life circumstances, will affect the experience of place. In my case, in three years of frequent weekend travel around Europe at all times of the year, my first impressions of a place were impacted by the weather. I generally prefer sunshine, especially when visiting a new place. Places we visited that were drenched in rain or even overcast carry decidedly more melancholy or mildly dispirited memories for me than those visited in the sun. Further, without deeper reflection, I feel disinclined to return to the “rainy weekend” destinations, despite even a promise of better weather.

130 Imagination is a persistent theme for Lopez. “At the heart of this narrative, then, are three themes: the influence of the arctic landscape on the human imagination. How a desire to put a landscape to use shapes our evaluation of it. And, confronted by an unknown landscape, what happens to our sense of wealth.” Lopez, Artic Dreams, 13.

131 Bachelard, Poetics, 19.

132 Malpas, Place and Experience, 179.

133 Relph, Place and Placelessness, 64. Ultimately, however, Relph’s notion of an authentic experience with place is firmly grounded in materialism, which leaves little room for the mysterious, but self-conscious engagement with what he sees as the “unchangeable forces” of inhabited solitude. In fact, the Divine aspect is the “unchangeable” nature of inhabited solitude.
Members of rural communities experience belonging due to participation in and support of that community, but that sense of rural belonging and identity is “articulated in terms of a sense of belonging to place.” For Liepins, community is “a social collective of great diversity’ (2000a, p.27), a social phenomenon that entails four elements: people, meanings, practices and spaces.” Further, as Woods writes “[a] sense of belonging to place hence is not just about familiarity with local landmarks and recognition of territorial boundaries, but also implies a deeper knowledge of, and engagement with, the physicality of place [my emphasis]”. In *Topophilia*, Yi-Fu Tuan offers this: “we may say that only the visitor (and particularly the tourist) has a viewpoint; his perception is often a matter of using his eyes to compose pictures. The native, by contrast, has a complex attitude derived from his immersion in the totality of his environment.”

Generally, the idea of rural identity rooted in the notion of *inhabited solitude* can be explained, in part, through Relph’s identification of empathetic insidedness (“emotional and empathetic involvement in a place”), and existential insidedness (“belonging to a place and the deep and complete identity with a place…knowing implicitly that this place is where you belong”). (Beston’s experience on Cape Cod

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137 Tuan, *Topophilia*, 63; see also Tuan, *Topophilia*, 65.

might be an example of “existential insideness.”) Certainly, “empathetic” and “existential insidedness” speak to rural identity in general, not simply rural identity as it relates strictly to inhabited solitude. A long-time rural resident and landowner of Vermont told researchers that if the Vermont landscape changed a great deal, “we would lose a part of who we are.”\(^{139}\) The researchers went on to speculate on the subject of place-based identity and the implications for identity if those places were to undergo significant transformation. “If one’s identity is crafted in part from embodied engagements with place . . . what happens to those aspects of identity that no longer have a place to ‘take place’?”\(^{140}\) A 2014 cross-disciplinary comparative analysis of homesickness among nineteenth and twenty-first century rural Vermonter out-migrants found feelings of homesickness were inextricably interwoven with sentiment regarding the natural environment and the rural way of life, consistent across and between both centuries. Among the over 1500 contemporary respondents, “words describing topography, seasons, and other environmental qualities are mentioned nearly 1000 times, constituting the most frequently named category . . .[and represented “embodied engagements with place.”]\(^{141}\) Malpas, referencing Heaney’s discussion of Wordsworth’s


\(^{140}\) Morse, et al., “Performing a New England landscape,” 234.

Michael in *Lyrical Ballads*, notes the effect of the landscape on the subject, Michael, principally that “the Westmoreland mountains were . . . much more than a picturesque backdrop for his shepherd’s existence . . . things flowed in from them to Michael’s psychic life. This District was not inanimate stone but active nature, humanized and humanizing.”

Malpas is unequivocal about the connection of place to human identity. “The idea that human identity is somehow tied to place in a quite fundamental way is given support . . . by a great many purely philosophical considerations as well as by recent work in other more empirical disciplines,” and later “the articulation of a sense of self-identity, which is often presented in terms of a search for place, is invariably a search that is both spatial and temporal.”

Lovelock, in his intriguing Gaia hypothesis, asserts that in indigenous, tribal communities, “the interaction with the environment is intense and where conventional wisdom and Gaian optimization conflict, the discrepancy is rapidly seen and the correction made.”

As society became more urbanized, Lovelock continues, the information coming from the “biosphere” to the “pool of knowledge that constitutes the wisdom of the city decreased” and “city wisdom” (the pool of stored knowledge required to address urban challenges) “became almost entirely centered on the

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142 Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 3.

143 Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 7, 181.

problems of human relationships,” as opposed to the information needing resolution from the biosphere.\footnote{Lovelock, \textit{Gaia}, 126.}

Accordingly, rural identity assumes learned knowledge, through praxis, of the land, whether through routine exposure to the natural world not suffocated or sealed under by concrete, asphalt, and buildings, or through agricultural and related work activity. Recent recognition of the contributions to the biological sciences of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) speaks to the growing acceptance of knowledge rooted in long-term affiliation with rural geographic places. “Continuous history of inhabitance over time shapes a particular way of knowing about and caring for the landscape that weaves together religious, spiritual, political, and empirical ways of knowing.”\footnote{Elizabeth Allison, “Bewitching Nature,” in \textit{After the Death of Nature: Carolyn Merchant and the Future of Human-Nature Relations}, eds. Kenneth Worthy, Elizabeth Alison, Whitney A. Bauman (New York and London: Routledge, 2019), 90. TEK is defined as “a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief about the inter-relationships of living beings and their surroundings.” Allison, “Bewitching Nature,” 90.} Watt writes that the stories that emerge from TEK reveal both “the ways in which the land itself has been produced and reproduced through human and nonhuman interactions accumulating over time” and “a level of complexity that often goes beyond the reach of science.”\footnote{Laura Alice Watt, “Landscape, Science, and Reproduction,” in \textit{After the Death of Nature: Carolyn Merchant and the Future of Human-Nature Relations}, eds. Kenneth Worthy, Elizabeth Alison, and Whitney A. Bauman (New York and London: Routledge, 2019), 206.} We find in TEK, then, evidence for the particularly rural place-experience of inhabited solitude. Snyder recalls a Crow Elder in Bozeman, Montana, observing, “if
people stay somewhere long enough – even white people – the spirits will begin to speak to them. It’s the power of the spirits coming up from the land . . . they just need people to be around long enough and the spirits will begin to influence them.”

Relph’s notion of “existential insidedness” has explicatory value for the place-experience of inhabited solitude. Lopez’s experience with the Eskimo people leads him to a realization of the deep confluence of identity and the Arctic landscape, their “existential insidedness” with respect to that place.

The evidence of continued intimacy with a local landscape—practical knowledge of it, a sensitivity toward it, a supplication of it—is still clear. The incorporation of the land into traditional stories—evidence of close association with the land and the existence of an uncanny and mesmerizing conformity of human behavior in response to subtleties in the landscape—is also still evident. The people, many of them, have not abandoned the land, and the land has not abandoned them. It is difficult, coming from cities far to the south, to perceive, let alone fathom the richness of this association, or to assess its worth. But this archaic affinity for the land, I believe, is an antidote to the loneliness that in our own culture we associate with individual estrangement and despair. [my emphasis]

“Hard and Astringent”

Shepherd highlights the particular identity the inhabitants of inhabited solitude in the Scottish Cairngorm region bear, an identity born of sparse population and direct interaction with the non-human I.

These crofts and farms and gamekeepers’ cottages breed men of character. They are individualists, gritty, tough, thrawn, intelligent, full of prejudice, with strange kinks and a salted sense of humor. Life here is hard and astringent, but it seldom kills grace in the soul. The best of them are people of many skills, inventive at

\[148\] Snyder, The Practice of the Wild, 42.

\[149\] Lopez, Artic Dreams, 265-266.
supplying their needs, knowledgeable on their own ground and interested in a number of things outside it. . . . Life has not much margin here.\textsuperscript{150}

Edith Durham, in her early twentieth century travels through the mountains of modern day Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo, writes of the “wild heart of [the] wild land” and people of the Shala River region.

It has the charm of infinite possibilities—if it would but grow up in the right way. It has crimes and vices . . . it has primitive virtues, without many of the meannesses of what is called civilization. It is uncorrupted by luxury. It is cruel—but so is Nature. . . . It can be trusting and faithful. And it plays its own mysterious games, that no grown-ups can hope to understand. . . . I think no place where human beings live has given me such an impression of majestic isolation from all the world. It is a spot where centuries shrivel; the river might be the world’s well-spring, its banks the fit home of elemental instincts—passions that are red and rapid.\textsuperscript{151}

Her mild, implicit paternalistic colonialism notwithstanding, Durham captures the at-once-ness of a land and its people, where the land, after centuries of integration has molded and shaped its people into sentiments and reflections of itself.

An echo of Shepherd’s observation, life without much margin, is also found in Kemmis’s work on the notion of the \textit{res publica, Community and the Politics of Place}. He uses the backdrop of his native rural Montana to argue for recapturing the idea of place as a grounds for finding neutral meeting space (he invokes Hannah Arendt’s “table”) in the debates that confound our ideological public space in contemporary

\textsuperscript{150} Shephed, \textit{The Living Mountain}, 81.

Kemmis describes people with widely disparate views on society and politics, setting aside those very deep-seated differences to, essentially, survive.

Avoiding people you did not like was not an option. . . . The eastern Montana of my boyhood still echoed of the frontier. From Plymouth Rock onwards, Americans on the frontier had found themselves united with their neighbors in the face of an often hostile and precarious existence. . . . However Albert and Lilly may have differed in some of their personal values, they differed not at all in their experience of winter on the high plains. For both of them alike, the prairie winter was cold and deadly, and absolutely required a good barn.

Stegner says of the open, rural places of the west, “it does contribute to individualism, if only because in that much emptiness people have the dignity of rareness and must do much of what they do without help, and because self-reliance becomes a social imperative, part of a code.” Woods’ consideration of the moral values of rural residents may also provide insight into values covalent with a communion with inhabited solitude “rural life is associated with resilience, perseverance and self-help.” Bob Marshall, whose name was given to a most exceptional Wilderness area in Western Montana, wrote that “the wilds demanded self-sufficiency: away from the ‘coddling of

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152 Kemmis’ work examines the Latin notion of “res publica,” the public thing. He notes Hannah Arendt’s perspective on “the relationship of the public and the res: ‘To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.’” Daniel Kemmis, Community and the Politics of Place, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 5.

153 Kemmis, Community and the Politics of Place, 71, 78.


civilization’ men had to depend on their own resources, and this was of no small value for a country that coveted ‘individuality.’”  

It is important to make a distinction, too, about rural inhabitants and the place-experience of inhabited solitude. Living in the non-agri-rural is not in itself the place-experience of inhabited solitude. Bugbee rightly observes that even for those who live “in the immediacy and constancy of wilderness,” “some measure of placement in withdrawal from everyday life” is necessary for wilderness to speak to those individuals. As discussed above, encounters with finitude are not commonplace in everyday life, even in the non-agri-rural. However, those who live in close proximity to places of inhabited solitude, as the literature bears out, are more likely to have their lives include such encounters.

**On the Privileged Aspect of the Place-Experience of Inhabited Solitude**

*The only conclusion I have ever reached is that I love all trees, but I am in love with pines.*  
-Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, 128

American environmental historian William Cronon concludes that what lies behind the idea and meaning of wilderness can be appreciated, even without the experience of spending time in large tracts of landscape “untouched” by human intervention. “For wilderness (as opposed to wilderness) can be found anywhere: in the seemingly tame fields and woodlots of Massachusetts, in the cracks of a Manhattan sidewalk, even in the cells of our own bodies. . . . ‘It is a quality of one’s own

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consciousness.” The critical qualifier used here by Cronon is “appreciated,” which infers an aesthetic or sublime experience. Brady, in her study of the idea of the sublime, notes that environmental scholars today recognize “that many of our interactions with nature exist not only in the context of distant wild places but also within more cultural contexts, for example rural and urban environments.”

Schama, too, aligns himself with the Thoreau-ian perspective that ultimately, it is folly to run “after the esoteric.”

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160 Simon Schama, Landscape and Memory, (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 577. In “The Trouble with Wilderness,” Cronon notes that “when…I myself have come closest to experiencing what I might call the sacred in nature, I often find myself remembering wild places much closer to home.” He desires to consciously avoid what he labels “privileging wilderness “at the expense” of other parts of nature. Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” 86. The notion of “privileging wilderness,” in the context of the policy debate Cronon is engaged in is different from privileging inhabited solitude as a place of particular and singular place-experience. In his protest against what he views as narrow calls for protection of so-called (but factually false) “wilderness” by many environmentalists, he seeks to dispel the argument that human aesthetic experience with nature can only happen in such places. This makes sense. Public policy efforts that promote preservation of any nature generally don’t have the political or financial clout of other types of policy efforts and further delineating them into categories such as “wilderness” and “national parks” and other designations can dilute policy efforts, resulting in less action on behalf of the natural world. I disagree with Cronon’s overly sensitive conclusion, however, that somehow our American culture has taught us to “fetishize sublime places and wide open country.” Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” 86. See also the discussion and critique of Cronon’s views, namely his “one-sided caricature of the ‘romantic legacy,” in James C. McKusick, Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 10-11. As Schama and others demonstrate, the place-experience of inhabited solitude has foundations in multiple ancient human civilizations. What is appropriate in his critique, however, is any move to privilege that human experience above routine, and even exceptional aesthetic and emotionally moving experiences with even the smallest flower “in the cracks of a Manhattan sidewalk.” Privileging the place-experience of inhabited solitude, which is, by definition, restricted to those with access to such places, can bring on accusations of exceptionalism and elitism, which, while radically unfounded in this case and perhaps many others, can distractedly and unnecessarily fall victim to current academic and social sensitivities.
view holds “that the whole world can be revealed in our backyard if only we give it our proper attention.”\textsuperscript{161} This speaks to Thoreau’s lifelong belief that “wildness” “is the bog in our brain and bowels, the primitive vigor of Nature in us.”\textsuperscript{162} We hear close echoes in Blake’s familiar couplet from “Auguries of Innocence”: “To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower, / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour.”\textsuperscript{163} Instead, I propose that there is a fundamental difference between an aesthetic experience of beauty or an experience of the sublime—appreciation of Blake’s “Heaven in a Wild Flower,” and others, and a deeper, more profound \textit{place-experience of inhabited solitude}, as evidenced in the authors and scholars cited and discussed in this study. Thoreau was less concerned with the import of a \textit{place-experience of inhabited solitude} than he was with the interiority of man’s search for meaning. “‘Our limbs indeed have room enough but it is our souls that rust in a corner.’”\textsuperscript{164} Thoreau is true to his intellectual heritage: Abram writes that the Platonic (and Socratic) psyche “is refined and strengthened by turning away from the ordinary sensory world in order to contemplate the intelligible Ideas.”\textsuperscript{165}

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\item \textsuperscript{161} Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 577.
\item \textsuperscript{162} Thoreau quoted in Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 578.
\item \textsuperscript{163} William Blake, “Auguries of Innocence,” Public Domain, circa 1803.
\item \textsuperscript{164} Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 577.
\item \textsuperscript{165} Abram, \textit{The Spell of the Sensuous}, 113.
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Tuan also considers different aspects of the sentimental enjoyment or appreciation of nature that include an unconsidered reaction to its beauty as well as appreciation born of scientific or historical knowledge of what is being appreciated.  

And, although his subject matter is rural places, and not exclusively those understood to be categorized as *inhabited solitude*, Woods’ discussion of Foucault’s concept of “the gaze” provides insight to the difference between aesthetic appreciation of *inhabited solitude* and the *place-experience of inhabited solitude*, a result of engagement over time.  

Foucault’s gaze is “an act of power in which collective social norms define not only how we interpret the things that we see, but also what we actually see (and do not see).”  

Using Foucault’s concept, Urry (1990) suggested that the way tourists see “landscape, or cultural events, or other objects of their visual consumption, is socially conditioned.”  

According to Woods, the tourist gaze results in an inability to “see the people who live and work in the landscape” in fundamental ways. Simone Abram (2003) modified Urry’s concept to argue the existence of a “rural gaze.”  

As a social construct, the rural gaze, detected in the sentiment and behavior of rural in-migrants, “aestheticizes land uses in a nostalgic way in an attempt to distance it from contemporary capital and globalizing

166 Tuan, *Topophilia*, 94.
processes” emerging particularly in “attitudes to conservation and preservation,” “land use planning policies and development control,” “land management decisions,” and in “obscuring the recognition of problems such as poverty and deprivation in rural areas.”

In a similar manner, confusing an appreciation for inhabited solitude, even a deep appreciation, for the place-experience of inhabited solitude obscures the revelations of the place-experience of inhabited solitude that arise from a deep apprehension of the non-human I as existing outside our socially constructed interpretations of the sensual. In other words, it anesthetizes inhabited solitude to the biological fact of our infinite finitude.

Debates over what constitutes a real or authentic experience of inhabited solitude can be found at least as far back as the nineteenth century. In a prolonged debate among the original cohort of the British Alpine Club (1857-1863), including members such as Leslie Stephen (The Playground of Europe), Edward Whymper (summited the Matterhorn in 1865), and George Leigh-Mallory of Mount Everest fame, those who had first-hand climbing experience asserted that their experience was authentic, whereas that of those who gazed upon paintings or read accounts of such places and events, could not speak with authority to those places and experiences. John Ruskin, a member of the club, in Stephen’s eyes’, had no access to the “‘mountain truth’” to which he lay claim, because Ruskin had never climbed a mountain.

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171 Michael Woods, Rural, 103.

172 According to Schama, the climbing members of the Alpine Club “could never quite grasp the implication of what Ruskin was saying about Turner: that while accuracy of detail
‘The steepness is not expressed in degrees, but by the memory of the sensation produced when a snow-slope seems to be rising up and smiting you in the face; when, far away from all human help, you are clinging like a fly to the slippery side of a mighty pinnacle in mid-air. And as for the inaccessibility, no one can measure the difficulty of climbing up a hill who has not wearing his muscles and brain in struggling against the opposing obstacles.’ It was this confident belief that physical experience yielded the truth about the relative scale of mountains and men that most separated Stephen’s generation of climbers from the Romantics. Though they anticipated Stephen’s awareness of the peculiar intensification of the senses experienced at high altitude, for Ramond, Cozens, Saussure, and Shelley access to the summit was a kind of pyrrhic victory, a denial of omniscience. Instead there was an infection of semicircular canals, a disruption of balance, the unhinging of all the usual markers that fixed bodies in space.173

However, while Ruskin did not have access to this place-experience of inhabited solitude, his aesthetic and philosophical observations reveal the authenticity of an aesthetic experience with inhabited solitude. ‘“Believe me, gentlemen,’ he told an audience of Oxford undergraduates, ‘your power of seeing mountains cannot be developed either by your vanity, your curiosity, or your love of muscular exercise. It depends on the cultivation of the instrument of sight itself.”’174

In a postmodern take on what constitutes an authentic experience with inhabited solitude, and highlighting what sets aside the place-experience of inhabited solitude as a privileged experience, different from an aesthetic experience, it is instructive to consider

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is important to absorb by way of preparation, what he called the ‘truth’ of mountain art could never lie in their literal transcription. Rather, it was in finding a visual idiom to convey the essence of the thing: the beautiful whateveritwas that drew men to mountains in the first place.” Schama, Landscape and Memory, 506.

173 Stephen quoted in Schama, Landscape and Memory, 505.

174 Schama, Landscape and Memory, 511.
what Ingold writes about animals’ experience with their environment. Discussing the
theories of Gibson, Clark, and Deleuze, Ingold arrives at an observation about the
authentic nature of animals’ experience with their environment that can aptly be applied
to the place-experience of inhabited solitude, which assumes the time and aloneness it
takes to be attentive to what animals naturally attend to for survival. “To perceive is to
align one’s movements in counterpoint to the modulations of day and night, sunlight and
shade, wind and weather,” further, “there is an extraordinarily fine topology that relies .
. on sets of relations (winds, undulations of snow or sand, the song of the sand or the
creaking of the ice)”

The reference to Ruskin raises a salient point about representational sensual
experience as opposed to direct sensual experience of the same reality. The expansion of
artificial intelligence and virtual reality experiences promise a more comprehensively
sensual, but still virtual, experience of an environment. Comparative studies of exposure
to real and simulated landscapes explore the nature of our perception and how we
respond to and understand it. Hayles writes that impressions emerging from paintings or
photographs of landscape, becoming objects for “visual consumption” have “already left
the realm of firsthand experience and entered the category of constructed experience that
we can appropriately call simulation.” While such appreciation of landscape touches a
part of the human soul, the place-experience of inhabited solitude is a different and more

175 Ingold, Being Alive, 88.

complete phenomenal experience, necessarily including what Wright, via Hales, observes: “Confronted with nature in the raw, people registered its impact on their bodies . . . calluses on hand and feet, sweat dripping off brows, muscles sore and aching after a day’s battle with a river.”

Regarding the difference between representation and the real, Merleau-Ponty writes that after one tears a painting apart, there is nothing left but “pieces of canvas smeared with paint,” but if one breaks a stone into small pieces, the “fragments” of [the] stone . . . are still pieces of stone. The real lends itself to an infinite exploration, it is inexhaustible.”

Barry Lopez sees the elusiveness, the mystery, the reticent understanding and knowledge held closely by inhabited solitude. The place-experience of inhabited solitude comes only with time and exposure. The tourist view is one-dimensional. “Whenever we seek to take swift and efficient possession of places completely new to us, places we neither own nor understand, our first and often only assessment is a scientific one. And

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178 Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. Donald A. Landes, (London, New York: Routledge, 2014), 338. As many scholars writing recently about the relevance of phenomenology to ecology and environmental history have noted, Merleau-Ponty never developed a phenomenology of nature or the environment per se. Application of his phenomenology in particular to the relationship between humans and nature is speculation, in part, based on some of his writings. For example, Merleau-Ponty, in a reference to animals, noted the difference between humans and animals included the fact that “animal behavior aims at an animal milieu” whereas “human life ‘understands’ not only some definite milieu, but rather an infinity of possible milieus, and it understands itself because it is thrown into a natural world.” Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 341. This view of Merleau-Ponty’s echoes Heidegger’s perspective on animals, as such. “Although the animal mingles freely in its environment, it lacks the capacity to apprehend the things it encounters there for what they are, as things. It has an environment but remains deprived of a world.” Heidegger referenced in Ingold, *Being Alive*, 11.
so our evaluations remain unfinished.”^{179} Here, Lopez speaks to the aspect of phenomenology that rejects a purely naturalist view of landscape and the natural world.

Still, and in some contradiction to his assertion in the prologue, he says

> Whatever evaluation we finally make of a stretch of land, however, no matter how profound or accurate, we will find it inadequate. The land retains an identity of its own, still deeper and more subtle than we can know. Our obligation toward it then becomes simple: to approach with an uncalculating mind, with an attitude of regard. . . . To intend from the beginning to preserve some of the mystery within it as a kind of wisdom to be experienced, not questioned. And to be alert for its openings, for that moment when something sacred reveals itself within the mundane, and you know the land knows you are there.^{180}

As the tourist view or tourist gaze (Woods) is one dimensional; an aesthetic experience of *inhabited solitude* is multi-dimensional, but still incomplete.^{181}

**A Possible Critique: What About the Sublime?**

Malpas is critical of accounts of place that, in his telling, are “objective physical space” given the nomenclature “place,” simply due to human responses to it; however, these emotive responses to physical geography “need not be grounded in any concept of place, as such.”^{182} His contention bears merit in the larger argument he makes,

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^{179} Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*, 228.

^{180} Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*, 228.

^{181} “When you have walked for days under the enormous sky; when you have felt the remoteness of the world from the Thomsen River country of Banks Island . . . or been shown how some very small thing, like a Lapland longspur eating the lemmings bones for calcium, keeps the country alive, you begin to sense the timeless, *unsummarized* dimensions of a deeper landscape.” [my emphasis] Lopez, *Artic Dreams*, 285-286. Again, the emphasis on the experience of totality, as Shepherd also observed.

^{182} Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 30.
especially in light of challenges posed by social constructivist positions on place, with which he disagrees. However, the whole of human experience, from whence spring memories, convictions, imagination, and ideas, is rooted in that which is perceived. Merleau-Ponty stresses the centrality of sensual perception in humans’ encounters and experiences with the world.

Literature, music, the passions, but also the experience of the visible world are . . . the exploration of an invisible and the disclosure of a universe of ideas. The difference is simply that this invisible, these ideas, unlike those of science, cannot be detached from sensible appearances . . . there is no vision without the screen: the ideas we are speaking of would not be better known to us if we had no body and no sensibility; it is then that they would be inaccessible to us.\textsuperscript{183} And sensual experience is explicitly tied to the physical environment. Indeed, as Malpas notes, “place is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience.”\textsuperscript{184} I raise this point because the characteristics of the place-experience of inhabited solitude lend themselves to an analysis of it that would place it in the category of “the sublime,” which, as will be discussed, principally concerns itself with the aesthetic experience of a place (or a painting, or an idea). However, the place-experience of inhabited solitude differs from the sublime in important ways. Narratives of awe, fear, tension, and ambivalence characterize both sublime, aesthetic encounters with inhabited solitude as well as the place-experience of inhabited solitude.\textsuperscript{185} However, the predominant thinkers on the

\textsuperscript{183} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Visible and the Invisible}, 149-150.

\textsuperscript{184} Malpas, \textit{Place and Experience}, 30.

\textsuperscript{185} Eighteenth and nineteenth century notions of the sublime point to the characteristic of ambivalence. “The idea [sublime] is consistently expressed as a mixture of negative and positive valences, with certain negative feelings (awe, terror, etc.) felt alongside positive ones (exaltation, admiration).” Brady, \textit{The Sublime in Modern Philosophy}, 40.
sublime during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries conveyed an idea of the sublime that was intensely subjective. While there was an acknowledgement of something non-human, the sublime as a concept an experience that falls under the broader category of aesthetic experience. Unlike the necessity of specific geographic place as integral to the place-experience of inhabited solitude, as the leading thinkers on the subject delineate, the sublime, while most appropriately applied to nature, is equally attributed to and descriptive of encounters with ideas and human-made things.

Eighteenth century notions of the “empirical sublime,” as mentioned, were primarily concerned with intimations of the great and the grand, inspired by nature, which is a “sublime that would be developed explicitly within aesthetic theory.”

For one of the noted thinkers of the time, imagination provides the mechanism to engage with the “great,” that which is “unbounded and disordered” as opposed to “ordered,

186 Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 13. As Brady discusses, it was during this era that there was “a notable shift from style to materiality” in conceptualizations of the sublime. Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 15.

187 Although the field of aesthetics has evolved from its eighteenth-century roots, contemporary aesthetic theory still grapples with Kantian thought regarding aesthetics. Kant distinguished between the moral (an action is morally good both because “one has a duty to perform the action” and this awareness triggers “a desire to perform it.”) and the beautiful (finding something beautiful “is disinterested because such a judgement issues in no desire to do anything in particular.”). James Shelley, ”The Concept of the Aesthetic”, ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017), 1.2 Disinterest, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/aesthetic-concept/ (accessed September 5, 2019). Along with Kantian disinterest, aesthetic theory considers the idea of immediacy, namely, that judgments of beauty are “straightforwardly sensory judgments” rather than judgments “mediated by inferences from principles or applications of concepts.” Shelley, “The Concept of the Aesthetic,” 1.1 Immediacy.
designed, and formal." Further, the sublime, for thinkers such as Addison and Burke, was different from the beautiful. “Beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive.” Admittedly, the Burkean notion of the sublime likely comes the closest of all eighteenth century thought on the sublime to the place-experience of inhabited solitude, in that it acknowledges feelings of human mortality in the face of the Other, and it also acknowledges the centrality of a synaesthetic response. However, because Burke sees terror “as the ruling principle of the sublime”, the Burkean notion of the sublime and its descendants remain focused on describing the anthropocentric experience of the Other as opposed to acknowledging a mutuality of encounter. Kant, who ultimately makes a tripartite division of the sublime, maintains the division between the sublime and the beautiful held by Burke and other thinkers of the eighteenth and his contemporaries in the nineteenth centuries, calling a “snow-covered peak above the clouds . . . a raging storm’ and ‘lofty oaks and lonely shadows in sacred groves’” sublime, and labeling as beautiful “valleys with winding brooks and covered with grazing flocks’ and ‘flower beds, low hedges, and trees trimmed into figures.’ But, as is the case with Burke, Kant ultimately formulates his notion of the sublime as an

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188 Brady, The Sublime in Modern Philosophy, 17.
189 Edmund Burke quoted in Brady, The Sublime in Modern Philosophy, 23.
experience that points to the capacity for moral adjudication and ethical behavior humans find within themselves, not that which is reflective of the complexity and respect-worthiness of the non-human I.\textsuperscript{192} The sublime is, in the end, “an object (of nature) the representation of which determines the mind to regard the elevation of nature beyond our reach as equivalent to a presentation of ideas.”\textsuperscript{193} For Kant, “sublimity, therefore, does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our own mind.”\textsuperscript{194} “Nature, considered in an aesthetic judgement as might that has no dominion over us, is \textit{dynamically sublime}.”\textsuperscript{195} Crucially, Kant asserts the identification of a form or activity of nature (“thunderclouds piled up the vault of heaven . . . volcanoes in all their violence of destruction, hurricanes leaving desolation in their track . . . the high waterfall of some mighty river”) as sublime because, viewed from a place of personal safety, “they raise the

\textsuperscript{192} Although I am by no means an expert on Kant, after reading Brady’s interpretation of Kantian notions of the sublime, with the text and references provided, I remain unconvinced at her conclusion that “the Kantian sublime . . . is other-regarding.” Brady, \textit{The Sublime in Modern Philosophy}, 87. One can still ultimately value self over nature while holding that nature contains immense power. I agree that Kant can provide a starting point for an aesthetic experience of nature that results in an application of “moral law;” however, I don’t think Kant goes so far as to make the leap from the recognition of a “deep connection” to nature (“something understood as metaphysically greater than ourselves”) to a philosophy that affords objects in nature as worthy of moral consideration, as moral is a human construct. Brady, \textit{The Sublime in Modern Philosophy}, 88. Indeed, Kant ends his section on “Nature as Might” by asserting that the notion of the sublime is cemented squarely in our two-fold capacity to a) recognize the life-endangering might of nature from safe quarters (without fear”), and b) “[regard] our estate as exalted above it.” Immanuel Kant, \textit{The Critique of Pure Reason, The Critique of Practical Reason and Other Ethical Treatises, The Critique of Judgement}, pub. William Benton, (Chicago, London, Toronto: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Great Books of the Western World, 1952), 505.

\textsuperscript{193} Kant, \textit{The Critique of Pure Reason, et al.}, 506.

\textsuperscript{194} Kant, \textit{The Critique of Pure Reason, et al.}, 504.

\textsuperscript{195} Kant, \textit{The Critique of Pure Reason, et al.}, 503.
forces of the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace, and discover within us a
d power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us courage to be able to measure
ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature.”

Kant makes it clear that in
his sublime, we can only measure ourselves (and find ourselves superior) by restricting
our encounter to that of the disinterested, safe aesthetic, armed with our imagination.
Accordingly, like other aesthetic experiences, Kantian sublimity functions causally, for
our benefit; we don’t engage “with” it intersubjectively. Schopenhauer’s aesthetic theory
suggests something closer to the place-experience of inhabited solitude; however, it
remains anthropocentric rather than intersubjective, is causal as it relates to providing our
souls solace and certitude, and is universally applicable to any experience that engenders
such a response in us. “When, however, an external cause or inward disposition suddenly
raises us out of the endless stream of willing . . . the attention . . . comprehends things

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197 In a contemporary take on Kant, it seems that Alpinists, wingsuiters, big wave
surfers, and others who engage in very high-risk sporting activities in nature have a Kantian
endgame, but a very un-Kantian method of getting there. My friend, a wingsuiter, flies off of
cliff faces, icebergs, bridges, and other high points around the world, in a way exalting
himself above nature by the very act of placing himself in mortal danger at nature’s
indifference. Nick Heil, himself a climber, made the following observation in an article about
the tragic death of three worldclass Alpinists on Canada’s Howse Peak in April 2019: “I
marveled at the power of such pursuits to override our hardwired instinct for self-
preservation. How close one needed to stand—or fly, or ski, or surf—to their own mortality
was, to me, a question of infinite fascination with no correct answer.” Nick Heil, “The
Tragedy on Howse Peak,” Outside Magazine, August 29, 2019,
https://www.outsideonline.com/2401264/david-lama-jess-roskelley-hansjorg-auer-deaths-
howse-peak?utm_source=twitter&utm_campaign=tweet &utm_medium=social, (accessed
September 3, 2019).

198 See the discussion on “astonishment,” Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason, et al.,
507.
free from their relation to the will. . . Then all at once the peace . . . comes to us of its own accord, and all is well with us.”

While I maintain that even sublime as understood by British Romantics is not the same as the place-experience of inhabited solitude, this understanding of the sublime falls far closer to it than found in the works of the Enlightenment, German Idealism, and other Continental thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. “This relationship is characterized by experiencing nature via the senses . . . imagination, and the emotions. . . . Wordworth’s aesthetics of nature can be described as participatory and situated, inspired by immediate atmosphere rather than distance.” Yet, “Wordworth’s interest in the natural world is largely developed in relation to places that have long been inhabited by human communities . . . he evinces relatively little interest in remote or exotic wilderness areas.” While working on Duino Elegies, Rilke recorded what he simply entitled “An Experience,” but what, in a letter to a friend, he described as “in a certain sense, the most intimate that I have ever written down.” He was sitting in the fork of a small tree, overlooking the Italian coastline outside of Trieste above the Adriatic Sea, contemplating nature, when he felt “pulsations were passing into him from the

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199 Shelley, “The Concept of the Aesthetic,” 2.3 The Aesthetic Attitude.

200 Brady, The Sublime in Modern Philosophy, 102.


inside of the tree” and “his body was being treated, so to speak, like a soul.” He was unable to discern through whence of his five senses the feeling was emanating, and ultimately determined “he had passed over to the other side of Nature.”

A periwinkle that stood near him and whose blue gaze he had already met a number of times, touched him now from a more spiritual distance, but with so inexhaustible a mean that it seemed as if there were nothing more that could be concealed...he was looking, as if over his shoulder, backward at Things, and their now completed existence took on a bold, sweet aftertaste, as though everything had been spiced with a trace of the blossom of parting.

Foreshadowing Rilke’s experience in the tree above Trieste, part of Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abby,” for Bate, points “to a holistic view of the earth, not unlike the Gaia principle.” However, Wordsworth’s sublime, as just noted and similar to Thoreau, is that of an experience with safe nature, not quite Kantian, but certainly that of finding wonder and beauty in an aesthetic experience of nature close to or interspersed with human-managed spaces. In his “Guide through the District of the Lakes,” Wordsworth writes critically of the wilder regions of Scotland and Wales.

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203 Rilke, Ahead of All Parting, 290.

204 Rilke, Ahead of All Parting, 290.

205 Rilke, Ahead of All Parting, 291.

206 Jonathan Bate, referenced in Brady, The Sublime in Modern Philosophy, 104. The lines referred to and cited in Brady are:

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air...
In Scotland and Wales are found, undoubtedly, individual scenes, which, in their several kinds, cannot be excelled. But, in Scotland, particularly, what long tracts of desolate country intervene! so that the traveler, when he reaches a spot deserved of great celebrity, would find it difficult to determine how much of his pleasure is owing to excellence inherent in the landscape itself; and how much of an instantaneous recovery from oppression left upon his spirits by the barrenness and desolation through which he has passed.207

In decidedly less Rilkean or Wordsworthian terms, I, too, have had similar experiences with different manifestations of nature. Sometimes the feeling is like a gentle touch, at once on soul and skin, and other times it takes a more ominously Other sense . . . not quite suffocating, but one that brings to mind a theme of Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind*, that of an ambivalent mindset with regard to wild places.

Quoting noted American landscape painter Thomas Cole’s journal entry during a trip to the White Mountains, Nash writes “‘man may seek such scenes and find pleasure in the discovery, but there is a mysterious fear [that] comes over him and hurries him away. The sublime features of nature are too severe for a lone man to look upon and be happy.’”208 Nash also notes the reaction of Thoreau to Mount Katahdin: “‘What is this Titan that has possession of me?’ a near-hysterical Thoreau asked on Katahdin. ‘Who are we? Where are we?’ Identity itself had vanished.”209 I was not familiar with these


reflections when I went for a run one overcast morning in the Lauterbrunnen Valley of Switzerland in 2017. All I knew, with conviction, was that in the act of directing my thoughts toward the massifs rising above me on that still, mist-filled morning, bereft of people or any sound save the wind, I encountered an ancient Other that filled my soul utterly with the void of eternity. It was so overpowering that I was forced to break my contemplation of this experience out of a nagging, faint, absolutely irrational, but persistent fear of losing myself, similar to Thoreau’s Katahdin experience or those recounted by nineteenth century visitors to Mont Blanc and other regions in the Alps.

I’ve spent a significant amount of time in inhabited solitude over the years, including years of remote tent camping, fishing, hiking, trail running, huckleberry picking, gathering firewood, and accompanying my father when he hunted, as a child and young adult in the Kootenai, Kaniksu, Coeur d’Alene, Saint Joe, and Lolo National Forests of North Idaho and the Bitterroot Mountains of Western Montana, as well as hiking half a dozen 14,000 foot peaks in Colorado as an adult. However, this interaction with the non-human I was the most powerful and mysterious I’ve ever experienced.

Brady concludes her discussion of the history of the sublime with the writings of Muir. Although Brady proposes that Muir’s experience is one of sublimity, I contend, instead that his was one of a place-experience of inhabited solitude, as the historical development of the sublime to that date subscribed to a broader span of experiences than the more narrow and intersubjective of that with the place experience of inhabited solitude.
solitude, as argued above. Indeed, she writes that “rather than a brief romantic adventure into a wild place such as Mont Blanc, Muir had a different agenda, one that was deeply interested in exploring — and inhabiting — wild places.”

Muir’s experience is not simply one of aesthetics. And, as Brady writes, the sublime is ultimately an aesthetic assessment. “Beauty, the sublime, and ugliness can be positioned along a scale of positive and negative aesthetic values.”

The sublime as a concept has shifted somewhat in contemporary thought. Hepburn, a late twentieth century thinker on aesthetics, employs an admittedly deeper notion of aesthetic experience when discussing aesthetic appreciation of landscape, something he calls “metaphysical imagination.”

Metaphysical imagination connects with, looks to, the ‘spelled out’ systematic metaphysical theorising which is its support and ultimate justification . . . it is no less and element of the concrete present landscape experience: it is fused with the sensory components, not a meditation aroused by these.


212 Ronald W. Hepburn, “Landscape and the Metaphysical Imagination,” Environmental Values 5, no. 3 (August 1996), 192. Still, Hepburn rejects an “exaggeration” of the authority of metaphysical imagination, arguing that interpreting landscape experiences as being over “revelatory” introduces the possibility of contradictions that would undermine value and truth claims. “Idyllic, formally magnificent nature now seems to witness to a benign, intelligible source of its ordered beauty [i.e., God]; but then desert- or wilderness-nature seems, no less strikingly, to proclaim its unconcern for any value.” Hepburn, “Landscape and the Metaphysical Imagination,” 195. This seems to suggest in Hepburn a particular idea of God promulgated by certain, but not all, Christian and Jewish theology, and which reveals a rather limited, God-in-a-neat-box, understanding of the Divine. God, as a source of value and truth is “benign and intelligible,” revealed only in “formally magnificent nature”; God does not exist in what he sees as value-less, wild nature.
Hepburn’s formulations reveal a shift in contemporary aesthetics, when considering landscape in particular, to something structurally different than immediacy and disinterest. He proposes “degrees of intensity, at the pole of which an experience centres upon the *metaphysical-imaginative* component.” Hepburn writes of an “intense realization of the metaphysical-imaginative annexing of ‘oneness’ [with nature]” as “the nature’s mystic’s, when it seems to him or her that the subject-object distinction is overcome, and the God-world distinction no less annulled . . . all is in God.” Hepburn concludes with a proposal that the sublime is, in fact, different from aesthetics.

The concept of sublimity was fashioned in response to a need – a need to name a memorable, powerful and perplexing experience (or range of experiences) of undoubted aesthetic value, yet not experiences of beauty as understood in neoclassical aesthetic theory. It combined, or fused, dread at the overwhelming energies of nature and the vastness of space and time with a solemn delight or exhilaration. Landscapes, notably, could evoke the experience . . . it is still seriously possible to look on a substantial set of recorded experiences of the sublime as having a phenomenological center – approached but maybe never captured by aesthetic theorizing in all its variety.

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214 Hepburn, “Landscape and the Metaphysical Imagination,” 198. Later in the same section, Hepburn writes that many secular writers who experience “awed solemnity” of/in nature, “would not confidently assent to the underlying implied metaphysics of mysticism.” He writes that such experiences lead to “intriguing...questions about a person’s ‘entitlement’, as it were, to aesthetic experiences of nature whose metaphysical-imaginative component rests on theoretical presuppositions which cannot perhaps be met.” Hepburn, “Landscape and the Metaphysical Imagination,” 199. Hepburn later concedes that a way to make “partial” sense of the notion of the sublime is “theistic,” the characteristics of the experience “pointing’ to a yet greater Reality – something of whose mystery and splendor is glimpsed in the experience. The duality is essentially that of St. Augustine’s: ‘*et inhorresco et inardesco...*’, I shudder to think how different I am from it: yet insofar as I am like it, I am aglow with its fire” (Confessions, XI, ch.9).” Hepburn, “Landscape and the Metaphysical Imagination,” 202.

Hepburn continues that such a “core experience,” then defies efforts to adequately explain philosophically. Consequentially, “[a]s critical philosophers, we may see ourselves as under an intellectual obligation to turn away from such experience. . . . Alternatively, we may judge ourselves obliged . . . to remain open . . . and to see it as continuing to challenge us to make sense of its presuppositions.”

Brady finds in Hepburn the notion of metaphysical imagination as a component of the sublime that can move it toward modern relevancy. She also discusses the notion of mystery as it pertains to aesthetic appreciation, going so far as to include Godlovitch’s “acentric” perspective which “places the aesthetic subject in a position of radical de-subjectivity where all cultural, and even scientific, knowledge is removed . . . the subject is acutely aware of nature’s independence, and that it lies beyond human knowledge.”

However, Brady’s discussion, in her closing arguments, of a different sublime, felt only in the presence of nature, brings us to the cusp, but not into the fold, of the place-experience of inhabited solitude. This sublime, “a new, felt awareness of ourselves in relation to nature,” the sudden realization, in the face of immensity that there are things beyond our kin that precede and outlive us, become “a form of illuminating aesthetic experience which can feed into the development of self-knowledge.” Confronting human finitude, as previously discussed, is a component of the place-experience of inhabited solitude, but

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218 Brady, The Sublime in Modern Philosophy, 199.
this aspect is one among equals. Further, Brady’s sublime remains in the realm of Kant, retaining the “safe distance” from an existential threat. “If we were subject to harsh desert conditions in some actual life-threatening way, our appreciation – or lack thereof – could be quite different. The lens of the sublime enables us to appreciate the distinctive qualities of the place, rather than seeing it as merely life-threatening.”

Although ultimately different from the place-experience of inhabited solitude, Brady’s sublime delineates a complex, authentic, and morally relevant aesthetic experience with nature.

As noted in Chapter Two, Cronon, embracing a postmodern ontology, sees man and nature as one, solidly renouncing dualism. For Cronon and others, the proposition that nature is Other, is the non-human I, is inimical to the broader environmental movement for the various reasons laid out in Chapter Two. Crudely summarized, in this perspective, an experience of nature as Other allows for bad behavior on the part of immoral and/or unethical people and policies. The problem with this view, as I’ve implicitly argued throughout this work, is the fact that if we fail to recognize authentic privileged experiences with wild nature, and wild nature as utterly, wondrously, and mysteriously Other, as is encountered in the place experience of inhabited solitude, and instead content ourselves as a society (and hence imbue our understanding of nature) with highly satisfactory, sublime, aesthetic experiences of the stately, gnarled trees in Central Park, the resplendent flowers of Kensington Gardens, day or weekend trips from apartments in Manhattan or Boston to the mountains of Vermont or the heavily-trafficked

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asphalted road and trail loops of Acadia National Park, or even end-of-stressful-workday contemplations of the stubborn stand of residual, pre-subdivision black locusts, hawthorns, cherrys, and black walnuts ranging like the final stalwart of a bedraggled line of soldiers in a losing battle across the back of my suburban Pennsylvania lot, we risk the very real threat of the irrevocable loss of critical regions of skillfully and respectfully stewarded nature that is inhabited solitude. The fact is, as I’ve also argued, a broad range of experiences with nature are authentic and legitimate, have essential value to society, and are simply different. Further, as I’ve also said above, this view of Cronon’s, to my thinking, represents an urbanocentric view of the issue, a view that needs to be questioned if any real work on respecting and preserving the Other, the non-human I, which includes rural and urban populations in unity of effort, is to commence.

The final, brief section of my work will address the implications of my proposition as it relates to public policy and moral and ethical imperatives. I will conclude with a short discussion on areas of further study.
CHAPTER 5- IMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER STUDY

It’s so hard to write about such nearly indefinable abstractions as yearning or mystery, or to convince someone who’s not yet convinced about the necessity and holiness of wilderness.¹

-Rick Bass

What was once rural due to geographic place has been largely permeated by global perspectives and awareness. (While not the subject of this study, the introduction of the Internet to the traditional rural intellectual, political, and social space has functioned in some ways as the proverbial apple in the Garden of Eden.) Research concludes that, among other factors, the arrival of aesthetic, or “amenity” in-migrants to otherwise multi-generational rural locales, in the form of second home-owners or commuters, have fundamentally altered many traditional rural communities across Western nations, particularly those close to population centers and those home to vacation destinations. Today, many people who live in definitionally rural places commute to and spend disposable income in nearby urban, suburban, and so-called “rurban” centers. Naturally, this results in these residents having “commitments and responsibilities” outside of the rural areas in which they reside.² “Consequently, while these residents may embrace their local services and community, they simply do not want to or cannot afford the same level of commitment that previous generations had.” In an economic study of British rural communities (approximately 2012), Gray notes, “the commutable rural is wealthier…the commutable and non-commutable rural have distinct characteristics that put them in separate


territorial groupings.” However, I would argue the lines aren’t so clear, as globalization has changed the consumption patterns and preferences even of life-long rural inhabitants. What can be said is the phenomenological experience, writ large, of the rural has been fundamentally altered and a neo-rural has emerged—a fusion of global experiences and norms transposed onto traditional rural identity.

Regrettably, our preferences for negative headlines revel in the litany of calamities and misfortunes of rural areas that fill the headlines today, stories of dying communities, persistent lack of economic development, limited access to quality healthcare, an opioid epidemic, graying populations, and unstoppable brain drain. In this pervasive narrative, promulgated by a largely urban media, the rural is disadvantaged—shamelessly objectified by globalizing factors and wealthy in-migrants who care little for long-standing small communities, preferring to live their “imagined” rural on a few acres, all the while commuting to and shopping in the exurbs or urban. At the same time, according to this narrative, true rural inhabitants are hopelessly biased, racist, not very intelligent, and really don’t know—can’t know—what is best for the larger society.³

Upon deeper examination, however, this telling is far too neatly delineated for the reality that is the rural today. Consider the largely unheard voices of the rural, those who live in the rural, who love the rural, who stubbornly remain in the rural, despite dire predictions of imminent demise. What if the headlines were only part of the story? What if the love for and loyalty to the rural is partly rooted in a vague susurration, something difficult to rigidly define and not easily captured by statistics and metrics, something that stubbornly refuses to obey some neat and tidy rules of economic theory? Indeed, cities have their own tales of woe, of crime, of

³ Incidentally, it can be argued that urban prescriptions to cure the ills of rurality, particularly economic development, inevitably lead to communities that are no longer rural.
difficult economics, of poverty, of drug abuse. Perhaps the sky isn’t falling on the rural.

Perhaps we begin with a consideration of what rurality provides to individuals and to society, writ large. Identifying these factors may be the first step toward the resurrection of the real rural, and the end of the decidedly unhelpful “imagined” rural of the urban perspective.

Rural inhabitants are not simply the people who happen to live in the flyover states, interesting fauna to briefly ogle as one visits or drives by a sparsely populated landscape. Rural inhabitants are not simply those who happen to fill roles of food and natural resource production or tourism for urban consumption. This is where social constructivist views of the rural as disadvantaged by exogenous forces a bit ironically confine the rural to these very roles and definitions. To say, as Somerville, Halfacree, and Bosworth do, that the rural and the urban of today “have been largely created by capitalism” not only ignores the history of millennia of largely unchanged urban-rural relations but makes an assessment bound by a worldview that sees human relations and value systems as ever only a result of the means of production of goods and services.4 In his article on the British rural idyll and literary criticism, Hildyard writes, “discussion of the ‘rural idyll’ can too readily fall into the habit of seeing it as merely an artificial construct, a middle class fantasy originating in hierarchical class structure and sustained by media representations.”5

In fact, rural inhabitants are, in part, the keepers of the knowledge of the land, and its non-human inhabitants. Somerville, Halfacree, and Bosworth even concede, “what is distinctive


about the rural is that its structured coherences and, from these, its distinctive spatiality, foreground ‘nature.’”  

Said foregrounding is not simply backdrop for an otherwise economic exchange between two groups of people; it is deeply at the heart of the rural as experienced by those who live in these places. Further, of the myriad of critical resources it protects, inhabited solitude provides sustenance, vision, and a proper perspective of the real human place in the natural world, and what we know of that of which we are not the creators.

The United Nations projects that in ten years, by 2030, 60 percent of the global population will live in an area categorized as urban. More tellingly, “one in every three people will live in cities with at least half a million inhabitants.” The future of the rural is at once ever more critical and ever less visible to a surging urban population, and in a political and social time that decamps like-minded people to enclaves embracing zero sum public policy outcomes, the importance of authentic stories of rural place that reach deep into our shared humanity’s inner depth cannot be overstated. Indeed, the recognition of particular value of rural place in and to the larger society can only come from these stories, recounting unique and privileged experiences of the rural.

Bob Marshall, after whom is named a large wilderness area in western Montana, felt passionately that

A democratic society . . . ought to respect the preferences of those who coveted wilderness. The majority had its roads and hotels; wild places . . . were vanishing rapidly. . . . Marshall reminded skeptics that only a small minority enjoyed art galleries, libraries, and universities. Yet no one would suggest making these facilities into bowling alleys, circuses, or hot dog stands just because more people would use them. Quality had

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a claim as well as quantity, and Marshall felt the principle applied equally well to the allocation of land.\textsuperscript{8}

Still, and perhaps now more importantly than ever, the question must be asked: Are there elements of rural identity—distinctly place-based—that must be preserved and promoted for the good of the greater society?\textsuperscript{9}

**Phenomenological Implications**

Wirzba, reflecting on Merleau-Ponty, writes that we don’t have bodies, we are bodies.\textsuperscript{10} We are sensible, sensing beings that beget awareness of other sensing beings on multiple levels. Further, the greater the length of exposure, the greater the knowledge learned from sensory exchange with other sensing beings. The place-experience of inhabited solitude brings rarely-experienced contemplative humility to humans’ interaction with the non-human I, the Other with whom we share our lives on this planet. Knowledge gained from this particular experience continues to provide wisdom to human society, to others without the benefit of such an experience. In Wirzba’s formulation, echoing Ingold and Deleuze and Guattari, the place-experience of inhabited solitude enables us to a moral entangling with the non-human I.\textsuperscript{11} This entangling awakens our response-ability and our obligation to responsibility. Objectification is rendered impossible in the Face of the Other, with whom and with what we intentionally and

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\textsuperscript{8} Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind, 5\textsuperscript{th} Ed.*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 205.

\textsuperscript{9} An additional thought: Does exposure to the outside world in these ways inspire rural individuals to seek out education opportunities and ways to better their social, intellectual, and educational situation, or is this seen as a threat to rural community’s cohesion?


\textsuperscript{11} Wirzba, “Framing an Old Story,” 77.
emphatically engage. The place-experience of inhabited solitude can help the greater society see our Levinasian “encumbered [ness]” with regard to the non-human I, raising awareness of our ethical responsibilities to that community.\textsuperscript{12} Wood’s explanation of phenomenology as it relates to temporality can be satisfactorily aligned with the place-experience of inhabited solitude. It “activate[s] and reactivate[s] the complex articulations and relations of things, restoring . . . a participatory engagement (bodily, imaginative, etc.) with things.” It is in this place that we find “renewal, transformation, and resistance.”\textsuperscript{13}

The confluence of what humans bring to an encounter with landscape, together with the physical interaction with that place produces the place-experience itself, and those experiences, while perhaps similar for some, are universally particular. In our increasingly overlapping world of disappearing frontiers, appreciation of this reality makes for improved outcomes in contentious situations. Lopez, in considering different researchers work on the Eskimo, says that these studies:

have made clear the integrity and coherence of a different version of the Arctic; misunderstandings that arise when a view of reality similar to our own is assumed to exist; and the ways in which the Eskimo’s view of the land presents us with growing ethical, political, and economic problems, because we would prefer that ours was the mind of record in that landscape.\textsuperscript{14}


Casey argues rightly that familiarity with someone’s “local environment” is equipped “to tell . . . if this environment is in trouble, and even if it is only starting to head for trouble.” \(^{15}\)

However, he goes on to propose that in order to feel an imperative to action, something he calls “intensity on and of the very surfaces that draw our attention in the first place” is required. \(^{16}\) If the landscape in question is “pleasant and healthy,” it “lacks intensity”; crucially “[o]nly when a landscape is sublime does tension arise . . . [this tension] is between an imagination that is not able to comprehend the complexity of the scene and a reason that claims to go far beyond it.” [my emphasis] \(^{17}\)

Casey’s “sublime” can describe the intensity characteristic of inhabited solitude. Awareness and knowledge resulting from the place-experience of inhabited solitude moves us to his “imperative to action,” particularly when that place is under threat. Writing about clearcut logging in a remote area of northwestern Montana where he lives, Bass says, “the bare gullies, the gouges of eroding soil, cut deeper and deeper . . . up at the source of wildness. I cannot look at them without feeling physically – not emotionally, but physically – the sensation of injury. . . I have become too much of this place.” \(^{18}\)

A component of this imperative to action is also the realization of the time-experience of that which inhabits solitude, the Other, the non-human I. Wohlleben writes that preservation of particular landscapes tend to fail precisely because we see only the briefest moment in time, like a photo, almost. “The illusion is almost perfect in the forest, because the trees are among the

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\(^{15}\) Casey, “Taking a Glance,” 198.

\(^{16}\) Casey, “Taking a Glance,” 199.

\(^{17}\) Casey, “Taking a Glance,” 199.

slowest-moving beings with which we share our world and changes . . . are observable only over
the course of many human generations.”

Theological Implications—Responsibility with a Healthy Dose of Finitude

Some argue a religious ethic is insufficient to engender an effective environmental ethic of responsibility. This approach ignores the understanding that God is profoundly inherent in Creation. While humans, as the only moral beings in Creation, are expected to steward the rest of Creation, the monotheistic faith traditions revere nature as Sacred. Further, these faith traditions impose and reinforce the necessary humility of finitude onto our actions and life. From dust our human bodies emerged, and to that same gritty, muddy, forgotten dust our bodies shall absolutely return.

Rolston writes that the Hebrews saw the Promised Land as a “sacred gift,” that also served to ground their identity. They “discovered who they were as they discovered where they were.” For Jesus, “the birds of the air, the flowers of the field” were “divinely given . . . the original act of grace.”

While the Kabbalistic tradition does not accord the non-human I agency or will per se, delving into the notion of the lights that inhabit the five worlds of the whole of reality (inanimate, vegetable, animal, human, and Godliness), the source of which is the “Ein Sof [Infinite],” may be helpful in understanding the presence of God, of the Sacred, in nature.

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21 Rolston, “From Organism to Anthropocene,” 113.

Although Calvin is not writing about the Kabbalah, his conceptualization also helps illustrate the concept. “There is no portion of the world . . . that does not exhibit at least some sparks of beauty.”

In somewhat of a closer echo of the Kabbalistic idea of creation, Wirzba argues it is precisely God’s Other-ness, God’s “reality” as “unlike finite, creaturely reality,” that “means God can be present to and immanent within every creature as its creating and sustaining power.”

For the Kabbalists, in Creation, God established “a difference of form” from Itself, however, “that which the souls attain of God’s light comes directly from His Being . . . [and at the level of the “will to receive”] no separation exists between the essence of God and between themselves, as the light which they receive is a direct emanation of His Being.”

We and our fellow creatures are in the same relationship with God and to God, but we bear a special burden of specific responsibility as humans, different from the rest of Creation. Bass asks, “How important are our lives anyway? . . . Do we have any more import than a mushroom or a spruce

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24 Wirzba, “Framing an Old Story,” 81.

25 Ashlag, In the Shadow of the Ladder, 36. For the Kabbalists, “the essence of the One is unknowable. Only through the light which emanates from Him/Her can we know the One. . . . These emanations of light come to fill the various vessels that are formed. From the point of view of the vessels, creation and its continued existence represent an incredibly complex dynamic of emanations of God’s light coming and going and having cause and effect relationships on each other.” Ashlag, In the Shadow of the Ladder, 219.
cone? The fact that we can even ask that question means the answer is yes, but we must not coast. We must hurry and look, pay attention, learn.”

In the final chapter of The Christian allegory *Hinds Feet in High Places*, the main character must return from her arduous but successful quest to seek the glory of God, back to the valley of her daily life, in order to complete her journey. It always, ever, was and is a round trip. Jewish and Christian biblical narratives admonish believers to leave the Mountain, the Presence of God, in order to bring God’s succor, instruction, and salvation to other humans (e.g., Elijah, Moses, or Jesus to his disciples at the Transfiguration). Snyder, in a secular take, writes “one should not dwell in the specialness of the extraordinary experience. . . . The best purpose . . . is to be able to come back to the lowlands and see all the land about us...as part of the territory. . . . It can be restored.” The *krummholz* mountain-top, dense pine or jungle forest, shadowy riparian, hidden valley, stark desert, horizon-rich ice expanse, billowy steppe, grass-and-pine-stubbled seashore *place-experiences of inhabited solitude* call us not only to worship but to a Sacred stewardship of and responsibility to the non-human Is, the Others of Creation.

Further, together with a Sacred responsibility, we confront and embrace the fact that the *place-experience of inhabited solitude* necessarily reinforces our earthly finitude. At the same time, our faith traditions reveal this experience to be a window to our soul’s eternal existence. Webb, writing on Bugbee, observes, “to know things and oneself as finite beings standing forth in ‘the light of eternity’ is to receive ‘the ultimate gift of things in their finality, in a universal

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significance which embraces them, and which, in embracing us, transfigures us and renders us whole.”

Profound Respect for the Authenticity of All Experiences with Nature
As we contemplate the privileged notion of the place-experience of inhabited solitude, we can consider its role in the legitimate and beneficial but necessarily different experiences of human interaction with nature in places of agriculture and in managed nature such as urban and suburban parks and green spaces. It is precisely in these places that collaboration on creative ways to provide continued and greater access to some form of the natural world can be achieved. Zwinger writes, “I believe that knowledge of one’s neighborhood, of the plants and animals and insects and rocks (and everybody else I’ve left out) that share our space, ought to be a part of everyone’s lexicon of place.”

Webb writes, “our very uniqueness and dignity in the natural world is defined by our capacity and responsibility to bear witness to the final significance in which nature stands revealed to us.” The place-experience of inhabited solitude is but one authentic encounter among many needed to move society to greater care and concern for that which we did not create but upon which we depend.

Societal Implications
Philosopher Charles Taylor asserts, “one of the great needs of the modern democratic polity is to recover a sense of significant differentiation, so that partial communities, be they geographical, or


cultural, or occupational, can become again important centres of concern and activity for their members in a way which connects them to the whole.”

Mutual respect and equality of opportunity should not lead to societal homogeneity in any realm. The value of difference, of diversity, is cause for celebration, and this extends to different human experiences. In this vein, the place-experience of inhabited solitude, as a privileged experience (like many other unique human experiences), contributes to the gallimaufry of experiences and learning that we gather in the effort to improve the overall health of society.

Ed Hoagland, writing in 1973, remarked, “we seldom lose interest in solitude. . . .Like anybody else, I’m lonely enough right in the bosom of family and friends. But excitement, the hope of visions and some further understanding—that old, old boondoggle perpetrated by the wilderness—draws me on.”

Bass muses:

If one runs deep into the woods simply to wallow, root hog-like, in the natural world – might one’s sensitivities to these variations be nurtured? . . . What lies out there just above our heads in the spirit world, and just around the corner in the dark woods? What thrumming powers murmur beneath our feet? If there are men and women whose hearts and minds fill too full with the nearly infinite systems of artificial intelligence, then surely there are woods savages who similarly indulge themselves by rooting among the infinite systems of natural intelligence.

Parry, writing that the field of literary criticism has “tended to be culturally contextual and uninterested in the non-human world,” concludes “that the concept of rurality offers literary criticism a field in which to explore the continuities, discontinuities, identifications with ‘nature.’” Parry’s observation can be applied not just to literary works of the British rural idyll, but to the significant body of nature writing that recounts the place-experience of inhabited solitude. Moreover, this particular nature writing, quite naturally, is a form of “life writing,” a genre that centers on the notion “that what is


important in life is our inner development as human beings, that the epic human narrative is not the outer story of war or politics or money-making but the coming-into-being of the self.”

Hildyard finds that nature writers “show a respect for the ‘more-than-human’ world, an interest in nature and closeness to the non-human that is arguably proto-ecological.”

Implications for a Twenty-First Century Inhabited Solitude “Land Ethic”

I recently went to a pick-your-own strawberry patch near my home in central Pennsylvania, nestled amid rolling hills, among farms and newer amenity-migrant homes with acreage. After filling two gallon bags with deep red juicy berries, I returned to have my purchase weighed at the small temporary field shack set up for the season. While the farmer was calculating the amount, I chanced a question I guessed I already knew the answer to (based on the pristine condition of the berries). “Do you use pesticides?” He frowned slightly, nodded, and proceeded to tell me that testing done on organic berries showed at least 50 percent pesticide contamination. “That organic stuff, that’s all a government conspiracy.” Increased mistrust of government, although sometimes fairly earned, will ultimately have negative consequences for public environmental stewardship. The very people that need to actively support larger conservation and preservation efforts see government programs as suspect and inauthentic, often as a result of larger views of government itself.

Despite this troubling political environment, local, state, and federal government entities must continue to work to encourage buy-in by all stakeholders. Recognition of the authenticity of the place-experience of inhabited solitude, and the land ethic wisdom it brings, can play a role in these efforts. Carolyn Merchant’s “partnership ethic,” is a pertinent example of a contemporary approach to a land ethic that could be enriched by those with this particular experience. Her ethic has five components:

- equity between human and nonhuman communities,

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35 Hildyard, “Literary construction of the rural idyll,” 137.

36 Hildyard, “Literary construction of the rural idyll,” 143.
➢ moral consideration for both humans and other species,

➢ respect for both cultural diversity and biodiversity,

➢ inclusion of women, minorities, and nonhuman nature in the code of ethical accountability, and

➢ an ecologically-sound management that is consistent with the continued health of both the human and the nonhuman communities.\(^{37}\)

Merchant’s ethic must, however, more explicitly respect different, place-based understandings of the relationship between humans and nonhuman communities. For example, some may contest the first component out of differences in understanding of what is meant by “equity between human and nonhuman.” Further reading of Merchant seems to suggest that she does see a specific, human-only, moral role with regard to the partnership ethic, which suggests her use of equity here has a more specific meaning than might otherwise be understood.

The place-experience of inhabited solitude can contribute to a greater appreciation of rural experiences as they contribute to a more universal “land ethic.” The implications of not recognizing as authentic the place-experience of inhabited solitude, and consequently not preserving the geographic places in which this occurs are troubling, at the very least. As Worthy observes, the “ramifications” of “phenomenal dissociations in the form of our loss of sensual engagement with living, pulsating nature…are not merely that have lost contact with the realm of the natural, upon which our lives . . . depend. . . . we have lost contact with the consequences of our own choices and actions in life, which play out somewhere ‘out there,’ beyond our perceptual (and usually even cognitive) horizon.”\(^{38}\) The


immersive place-experience of inhabited solitude is actually “coimmersive.” “As we step into the wilderness, it steps into us; as we walk into the wilderness, it walks into us; as we climb the mountain, it climbs into us.” This coimmersive experience instills wisdom that must be shared with the broader society.

The implications for place-experiences of inhabited solitude touch faith, philosophy, environmental concerns, culture, and society, proving its worth as an authentic human experience with the non-human I of nature, its relevance for the validation and protection of the rural, its importance to the world of inhabited solitude, and to human society itself.

Areas for Further Study

Chapter 4 concludes with a brief comparative analysis of the notion of the sublime and the place-experience of inhabited solitude. My research into this philosophical subject and the larger notion of aesthetics could be considered at greater length. I argue that the notions fundamentally differ, but late-twentieth-century considerations of the idea of the sublime by Brady and Hepburn, especially reconsiderations of certain eighteenth century thinkers such as Schopenhauer, could reveal a closer relationship between the two ideas. On a related note, further exploration into the “value” component of the place-experience of inhabited solitude could reveal how it differs in substance from the spectrum of aesthetic values that encompass beauty on one end and ugliness on the other (between which falls the sublime).

The picture of the evolution of thinking about wilderness in the United States seems to have a strong, singular academic line. Nash and others provide the same narrative account of society’s ideas of wilderness in the United States since its founding, ideas and conceptualizations which are largely negative until the early twentieth century. After locating two subtly, but critically different renditions of the same event (Petrarch’s climb up Mt. Ventoux), it became clear that one account, and one that fit neatly into a

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much broader narrative, gained significantly greater credence. Further, as noted earlier, the less-comprehensive narrative has become a small data point in a greater historical narrative formulated to arrive at a pre-ordained conclusion. How many other Petrarchian summits have been subject to only one interpretation in order to present a sequence of events that present a trend, for more political ends? This is only to say that re-examining some of the, even minor, foundational narratives that abound in environmental history in the United States might recover a more accurate past, within which wisdom for the future of wilderness could be revealed.

In the broader study of the rural, it would be interesting to explore the “art gallery per capita” or “historical society per capita” of urban and rural communities in a comparative analysis. Recently, in an interview with NPR the morning after the partial destruction by fire of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris in April, Bernard Henri-Levy noted with frustration the lack of appreciation and conscious preservation across France’s cities, towns, and villages, of the history and architecture of French monuments across the country in cities, towns, and villages. He said:

> We are not conscious enough of the spiritual prize, of the quantity of beauty embedded in these sorts of monuments . . . in a way, we care less than you do, Americans. You are a young nation, but maybe for that, you are more attached, you take care more of your young monuments, than us of our old monuments . . . we have the duty of being the custodians, the guardians of our memory and of our treasuries, as you do in America with all of your museums, all around the country, even in small towns, you have a piece of beauty, of spiritual wealth, you make a museum around it, and you take care of it as you take care of it as you would a child or a baby. This is what we have to re-learn as French people.  

Another area of research might explore the intersection of the place-experience of inhabited solitude and the Kabbalistic notion of the Shechinah, the feminine “inner presence of God in the heart.” For the Kabbalists, the process of “giving up listening to the strident demands of the will to receive for ourselves alone” raises “the Shechinah from the dust,” according Her “value,” “respect,” and “care,”

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40 Bernard-Henri Levy, WBUR Boston, “Here and Now” radio broadcast, April 16, 2019: Hour 1, 29:44-30:40 and 35:10-36:12, https://podcasts.google.com/?feed=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cubnByLm9yZy9yc3MvcG9kY2FzdC5waHA%2FaWQ9NTEwMDUx&episode=OGNlODIyNGMtMWRhNS00NGUwLWIyN2YtZjZhNzBlMTI4 (accessed May 20, 2019). (THIS IS CORRECT FOR ONLINE CITATION FORMAT)
restoring Her to “Her rightful place.”41 When this occurs, “the world becomes alive and vibrant again, and life assumes a meaning, purpose and joy that was previously absent from it.”42

Wirzba, Holmes, and others continue to consider the Judeo-Christian history of wilderness. In the same vein, and likely with much overlap, these findings and considerations could be applied and tested against the place-experience of inhabited solitude.

From the perspective of philosophy, a more detailed examination of the application of the philosophical notions of extension, intention, and attention to the place-experience of inhabited solitude might reveal further insights with implications for the field of eco-phenomenology and philosophy in general, and perhaps the fields of psychology and sociology as well.

Finally, due to the breadth and depth of related literature, and the fact that I have not studied American Indian literature and culture formally (aside from personal interest over the years), I only briefly touched on a very rich topic, the role of the place-experience of inhabited solitude in American Indian religion, history, and experience. Arguably in this tradition, the place-experience of inhabited solitude is more the norm than the exception. Further exploration into this perspective will undoubtedly yield already identified profound insights, especially with the growing scientific interest in traditional ecological knowledge (TEK).

41 Ashlag, In the Shadow of the Ladder, 222.

42 Ashlag, In the Shadow of the Ladder, 222.


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Levy, Bernard-Henri. WBUR Boston, “Here and Now” radio broadcast. April 16, 2019: Hour 1, 29:44-30:40 and 35:10-36:12. [https://podcasts.google.com/?feed=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuMj93b3JkLm9yZy9yc3MvZGV2L2Fzdy9wYXRoL2NwZWNpZmljZQ==&episode=OGNlNDkyOTItZmZjYi00MGI1LTllY2IyLTc4MmYyZjUzNjYy](https://podcasts.google.com/?feed=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuMj93b3JkLm9yZy9yc3MvZGV2L2Fzdy9wYXRoL2NwZWNpZmljZQ==&episode=OGNlNDkyOTItZmZjYi00MGI1LTllY2IyLTc4MmYyZjUzNjYy) (accessed May 20, 2019).

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