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Place-produced Thought: The Agency of Place and the Co-production of Knowledge in Heidegger, Baudrillard, and Others

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PLACE-PRODUCED THOUGHT:
THE AGENCY OF PLACE AND THE CO-PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE
IN HEIDEGGER, BAUDRILLARD, AND OTHERS

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Submitted to the faculty of
The Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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They walked on, thinking of This and That, and by-and-by they came to an enchanted place on the top of the Forest called Galleons Lap… It was the only place in the Forest that you could sit down carelessly without getting up again almost at once and looking for somewhere else. Sitting there they could see the whole world spread out until it reached the sky and whatever there was all over the world was with them…

- A. A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner*
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Greg Blair
Aberdeen, SD
August 2014
ABSTRACT

Gregory Joseph Blair

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Place has been a central consideration in much philosophical discourse since at least the ancient Greeks. This dissertation will argue, however, that in certain instances in the history of thinking, place has played a significant and unique role, one beyond typical considerations.

In these specific intellectual projects, place is a method for situating and focusing the development of thought. This relationship with place produces a particular type of thought, one that ontologically fuses place and thinker together. I regard this merger as a topographical convergence of situated contemplation that creates a localized episteme, or in other words, “place-produced thought.” Within this reciprocal relationship between place, thinker, and thought, I argue that the agency of place plays a far more significant role than it is routinely ascribed.

Throughout this thesis, I also argue for the distinctive possibilities of indigenous knowledge. Much of this argument is built upon certain instances of thinking with/in place, in which the place itself asserts its agency and influence.
into the actual production of thought. My argument is constructed in a manner that illustrates how this relationship between thinker and place is much different than other approaches of creating a relationship with one’s surroundings. Finally, I have tried to elucidate the innovative and irruptive possibilities for place-produced thought—important sources of new identities, thoughts, boundaries, and modes of being. In an increasingly globalized and technological world, the potential value and efficacy of such thought needs to be considered.
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INTRODUCTION

Place is something most people don’t think about on a regular basis, yet most would agree that place is profoundly important in their lives. It is deeply woven into the nature of our being. Place is often a source of identity, position, security, clarity, and a sense of our own subjectivity. And while place is not a principal preoccupation for most people, it has long been a central consideration for philosophers. From Plato to Heidegger, philosophers have incorporated the concept of place into their own discourse. While place has been a staple in much philosophical discourse, this dissertation will argue that in certain intellectual projects, place has played a unique role, one in excess of typical considerations. In these instances, place is a method for situating and focusing thinking. This engagement with place engenders a particular type of thought, one that ontologically fuses place, thinker, and thought together. I regard this merger as a topographical convergence of situated contemplation that produces a localized episteme, or in other words, “place-produced thought.”

In order to articulate a typology for “place-produced thought,” I consider several specific projects to reveal how thinking can have a vital interconnectivity with place. The hyphenation of “place” and “produced” in this phrasing is meant
to emphasize the imbrication of location and activity, echoing Heidegger’s attempt to diminish the chasm between being and the phenomena of objects by expressing the constitution of being as “being-in-the-world.”¹ In a similar fashion, the connectivity between the place and production in place-produced thought is conveyed through a shared ontological status. Within this reciprocal relationship between place, thinker, and thought, I argue that the agency of place plays a significant role. Part of this argument, set forth here, considers ways in which places have much greater agency than most people ascribe to them. This assertion attempts to reassess human centrality and privilege in many of our encounters with place in exchange for greater recognition of the power of place.

DEFINING TERMS

Throughout this analysis of place-produced thought, the word “place” is repeatedly used as a central term. Therefore, it is useful to note at the outset why “place” has been adopted, instead of another similar term such as “space” or “region.” Both “place” and “space” carry a plethora of meanings. The Oxford English Dictionary lists nineteen different definitions for the word “place,” an abundance which poses its own set of problems. Because of its ambiguous plurality, the constitution of a “place” is not easily defined. Moreover, along with “space,” “place” has been an ongoing source of dispute and conjecture in differing strains of philosophy, social science, and geography. It should be noted that this investigation of place is focused on the modern conception of place; the
case studies that comprise most of the remaining chapters occur between the 19th and 21st centuries.

Despite the multiplicity if the term “place,” philosophers of place do share some conceptualizations about their central term and what it denotes. In his book *Place: A Short Introduction*, Tim Cresswell provides a distinction between “space” and “place,” devoting a chapter to “work that uses place as an analytical concept that involves the process of shaping meaning and practice in material space.” For Cresswell, space is more abstract than place, serving as the stuff from which places with particular meaning emerge. The environmental writer Lawrence Buell provides a similar differentiation between space and place: “Place entails spatial location, entails a spatial container of some sort. But space as against place connotes geometrical or topographical abstraction, whereas place is ‘space to which meaning has been ascribed.’” This is a significant point because it denotes an ontological shift – from abstract “space” to meaningful “place.” Another less explicit, yet parallel, conceptualization of place is evident in Miwon Kwon’s genealogy of site-specificity and locational identity in artistic practices. In describing contemporary “site-orientated” practices, she claims that “site [what we are calling place] is now structured (inter)textually rather than spatially… a fragmentary sequence of events and actions through spaces, that is, a nomadic narrative whose path is articulated by the passage of the artist (Kwon’s italics).” For Kwon, site (or place) implies meaning and narrative that is more than a basic spatial form. Each of these writers seem to share the sense that place is different from space. While space is often considered more abstract, describing a relative
position, place is considered something like “space to which human meaning is ascribed and value is felt.” Marc Augé calls this “anthropological place” in the recognition that it is “established and symbolized.” An understanding of place as a location for intertextual meaning and value is of the sort that will be put into action throughout this typology of place-produced thought. At the same time, the anthropocentrism inherent in many of the claims about place will be challenged by returning to place itself—by examining the importance of materiality and the agency of place within place-produced thought.

CONCEPTS OF PLACE

One especially noteworthy philosophical effort to articulate the constitution of place is Phenomenology. Many of the key thinkers of place have a Phenomenological bent, including Martin Heidegger, Gaston Bachelard, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Edward S. Casey, and Jeff Malpas. In general terms, Phenomenologists have proposed that it is the direct relation to the phenomena of place constitutes that place. “The world is not what I think,” writes Merleau-Ponty, “but what I live through.” This relationship is ontological, as Heidegger strives to make clear by hyphenating da-sein, or being-there. By directly conjoining “being” with “there,” Heidegger implies that being necessarily involves presence in a place.

A similar relationship between being and place is evident in Gaston Bachelard’s The Poetics of Space, in which he describes his own
Phenomenological concept of place: “A house that has been experienced is not an inert box,” states Bachelard, “Inhabited space transcends geometrical space.” In describing a Phenomenological place, Bachelard illustrates how geometrical or abstract space can become intimate, precious, fetishized, or even “areas of being” through engagement or experience. For Bachelard, the place of the house is very much akin to the “there” of Heidegger’s *da-sein*. The lived experience of the house gives being its Being. “The house remodels man,” claims Bachelard. His critical contention, and that of many other Phenomenologists, is that place is constructed through the experience of phenomena and space. This relation between the constitution of place and the necessity of experience identifies a direct connection to the shift from space to place. As Jeff Malpas, another Phenomenologist, asserts, the “starting point for philosophical reflection is not a world of empty space… but is a world given in relation to activity.” Bachelard calls this activity the inhabitation of space. What all of these articulations share is the sense that embodied apprehension of phenomena is key to defining place.

At times, my analysis of place-produced thought draws upon aspects of Phenomenology that accentuate the vital and significant role of place phenomena in the development of place-produced thought. However, this analysis is not purely Phenomenological. Instead, it also incorporates other theories that explore how places are constituted. In addition to Phenomenologists, Poststructuralist and Marxist thinkers, in particular, others have expressed important ideas about place that will be utilized to develop a more pluralistic notion of place as it operates within place-produced thought.
Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey and Edward Soja are some of the major Marxist thinkers who consider place. In his opus, *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre proposes that the constitution, or production, of space [what we are calling place] occurs through economic spatial relations. “Absolute space,” he argues, is consumed by the spatial relations of capitalism (spaces are structured and arranged according to the dispersion and flows of capital) as a means to reproduce its dominance, and is transformed into “abstract space.” Lefebvre calls for a “differential space,” as a dialectic of the two others, which serves as a resistance to the homogenization of “abstract space.” For Lefebvre, space is not a blank neutral canvas, but is rather the stage of an ongoing production, reflecting the spatial relations of social/economic hegemony. For Lefebvre and other Marxists, the main constituting force of place lies at the heart of these relations and exchanges. In place-produced thought, economic exchanges are recognized as important determinants of the constitution of place, but are viewed as only one of the many layers of exchanges/relations that accumulate and converge into the constitution of place.

An alternative position concerning the constitution of place has been articulated within the Poststructuralisms of Foucault, Derrida, and Baudrillard. For the Poststructuralists, the constitution of place occurs through language and semiotics. For these thinkers, the reading of cultural signs within individual spaces initiates the shift from an abstract “space” into a “place” saturated with meaning and value. In an oft-cited essay, *Des Espace Autres (Of Other Spaces)*, Michel Foucault discusses his notion of “heterotopias,” spaces rendered disparate
from other spaces by the ways that they are utilized, and via the ordering of space by discursive structures of language and knowledge. The semiotic markings in these spaces become seemingly naturalized significations, where space is no longer abstract, nor an object to be merely seen, but a place marked by a litany of active ideological signs. Because of their naturalization within place, these signs often become unnoticed. For poststructuralists, even in their invisibility, these cultural signs serve to frame the understanding and meaning of place. For instance, the space of a national park, often thought of as one of the last truly “natural” places, can be understood as a delineated heterotopia wrought with impositions of power. Like Bachelard, Foucault maintains that places are not empty. However, in distinction from Bachelard, Foucault sees place as constituted not only by lived experience, but also through culturally “superimposed meaning[s]” and their “precise and determined function[s].”

ZONES OF ACTIVE EXCHANGE

In order to understand what occurs through the development of place-produced thought, and how place itself operates as an active agent, we need to think differently than has been suggested in the theories mentioned above. Clearly, these divergent philosophical considerations offer varying accounts of both what place is and how it is constituted. However, in the context of this argument about place-produced thought, I propose that none of them provides a sufficient understanding of the processes and forces that converge to constitute a place. Because of this inadequacy, I begin with two separate, but mutually effecting,
claims about the constitution of place in place-produced thought. First, in the instances of place-produced thought surveyed in the following chapters, the manifestation of place is best understood by incorporating a hybridized notion of place that draws upon various components of Phenomenology, Poststructuralism, Postmodernism, Marxism, environmentalism, ethnography, object-orientated philosophy, and thing theory. By not adhering solely to a single approach for understanding the constitution of place in place-produced thought, we can allow varying conceptions to remain in unresolved dialogue.

This dialogical methodology has inherent challenges. As the anthropologist Arturo Escobar noted, “precisely because they are grounded in different epistemologies (and in some cases ontological assumptions), there are levels at which the positions are incommensurable.” However, as will be shown in some instances of place-produced thought, this weaving together of critical appreciations of place has already occurred. Therefore, we can think of the “place” in place-produced thought as being perpetually modified in a feedback loop of varying forces.

This notion of place leads to a second claim: in place-produced thought place is nourished through a type of perpetual ellipsis in which constituting forces operate on the thinker’s perception of place, while at the same time, place itself pushed back against some of the cultural impositions and presumptions of the thinker. Place is never static; its constitution continues to transform throughout the development of place-produced thought. Therefore, we can understand place as a bio-socio-historical zone of active exchange between subjectivity, experience,
This definition indicates one of the key distinctions between this project and some of its antecedents because it presents a sense of place as complex and elusive, immanent and cryptic. These characteristics point us toward understanding place as a subject with agency that remains in a continuous negotiation between its own desires and motivations, and those of other forces acting upon it. This understanding of place stresses the notion that places are not merely receptacles of human inscriptions. Instead, it identifies the ability of place to resist and push against inscriptions as they touch upon place, move off, and then perhaps return again, in an ongoing elliptical exchange.

Tim Cresswell describes the elliptical exchange of place in similar terms: “Place involves a multi-faceted understanding of the coming together of the physical world (both ‘natural’ and ‘physical’), the processes of meaning production and the practices of power that mark relations between social groups.”¹⁶ This understanding of place recognizes an unfinalized in-betweenness, or liminality, due to the movement and fluctuation of the polyvalent forces that constitute place. Nicholas Entrikin calls this liminal quality “narrative,” because it links material phenomena with social practices and collective identities. In Entrikin’s words, “geographer and geography are hermeneutically joined.”¹⁷ Even with these expanded and more complex definitions, place still remains elusive and dynamic. The constitution of place is slippery; once we think we have it pinned down and defined, it can shift and transform into something new.
That elusiveness is evident in the instances of place-produced thought investigated here. In them, place is formed through a complex and evolving process. Just as the thinker transforms place and leaves marks upon it, the place also pushes back on the thinker, modifying his or her perceptions, thoughts, and ontology. Therefore, the agency and subjectivity of both place and thinker are central to the development of place-produced thought because thinking occurs through a dialogical negotiation between thinker and place that reworks the nature of their beings.

The role of subjectivity and agency within place-produced thought is also important as a source for strategic disruption and negation. Through the development of place-produced thought, the redefinition or destabilization of both place and thinker emerge as points of epistemic origination. Thus, place-produced thought allows—potentially—for radical transformation. Indeed, a vital rupture in the regulating discourses and discursive practices acting upon a place or thinker may occur, allowing for the generation of a new reading or understanding. While the operations generated through place-produced thought vary (the term “operation” is meant to stress the performativity of working, functioning, and thinking), each relies on a negotiation between the thinking subject and the agency of place. In order to look into the nature of this negotiation a little further, we can start with a discussion of the thinking subject.
THE THINKING SUBJECT

In some recent philosophy, one finds evidence of a desire to move beyond the linguistic turn and the dominance of language in philosophy represented by the poststructuralists. Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière, Judith Butler, and Giorgio Agamben, among others, have reinvigorated the notions of action, embodiment, and individual subjectivity. Within this movement is a turn towards agency enacted in the world, in the realm of place. For example, in his extension of the Foucauldian analysis of apparatuses, Agamben identifies and investigates their effects on the subject. In a departure from Foucault, however, Agamben advocates finding new ways to dismantle them through individual agency, and indeed points out that “this problem [of reclaiming the desubjective power of an apparatus] cannot be properly raised as long as those who are concerned with it are unable to intervene in their own process of subjectification.”Agamben asserts that the subject plays a part in the production of his or her own subjectivity.

Judith Butler makes similar claim in her discussion of subjectification when she candidly asks: “how can it be that the subject, taken to be the condition for and instrument of agency, is at the same time the effect of subordination, understood as the deprivation of agency?” In the following pages, it will be demonstrated that the thinking subject does exercise a degree of agency in place-produced thought that is reflective of Agamben and Butler’s ideas.

In developing place-produced thought, one of the methods in which agency is exercised by the thinker is in locating or determining the margins of a
place. In each specific case, these (often temporary) boundaries are perceived by the thinker based upon what is most appropriate for their project. While the boundaries and constituting forces of a place are present before it is engaged by a thinker (and those forces frequently appear as natural or embedded), they are often reconfigured by the subjective agency of the thinker as they engage with place as a locus for thought. In most of the instances of place-produced thought, the subject/thinker has some conception of the thought that will be developed in situ. Therefore, through the exertion of agency, the thinker actually contributes to the making or production of the place as an optimal environment for his or her project.

One may want to argue against the power afforded to the subject within place-produced thought by pointing out that this view privileges the individual ego or opens up the possibility for the violent imposition of power. Indeed, there is a concern that giving too much power to the agency of the thinking subject could mean that place becomes merely a stage in which the desires of an individual are acted out. This concern has been addressed by Kwon in her assessment of several historical site-specific and community based art practices. An alternative to this scenario entails an understanding of active subject formation and its own constitution as an agent in the world that is a departure from the traditional segregation of self and other – of self and world. In place-produced thought, the relationship between thinker and place is one that acknowledges a mutual link—an ontological bond—in the making of thought. This type of connection to one’s environment is phenomenological in nature and contradicts
the constrictive separation of subject and world evident in empiricism (Locke and Hume), rationalism (Descartes, Spinoza, Kant) and even in the linguistic turn. In order to re-articulate and critique the traditional binary estrangement of thinker and world, I propose an adaptation of Hannah Arendt’s discourse on ethics.

The basis of Arendt’s discourse is derived from a reading of the Socratic dialogues. In many ways, her reading of the dialogues can be considered a re-reading, one that is directed at the core of Socratic philosophy, leaving aside the intermediary rhetoric of his student, Plato. In the context of her own meditations on collective responsibility, Arendt focuses on Socrates’ concept of the inner dialogue, or what he called dianoëisthai (a reflection on the nature of something), in which thinking occurs through conversation between self and I (being-one).

One crucial aspect of Arendt’s Socratic re-examination is how she circuitously navigates the critical connection between the singular subject and the plural (or the political as Arendt names it). Arendt, like Socrates, advocates for solitude as the situation in which the inner dialogue can best be realized, and thought may properly occur. Any contact during dianoëisthai is considered unsettling and detrimental; “if somebody addresses me, “Arendt writes, “I must now talk to him, and not to myself.” Socratic estrangement, however, is given a clever hermeneutic twist by Arendt when she ponders that “the Socratic ‘being-one’ is not so unproblematic as it seems; I am not only just for others but for myself, and in the latter case, I clearly am not just one. A difference is inserted into my Oneness.” What Arendt points toward is the interdependence of the singular and collective. She also deftly, yet subtlety, pokes at the unity of the hermetic singular
subject – the metaphysical “oneness” – into which Arendt inserts a difference. The interdependence between subject and world emphasized by their Arendtian inseparability is significant in the context of place-produced thought because it raises them both to the positions of co-producers of thought.

The ontological links expressed in Arendt’s inseparability of subject and world share similarities with Heidegger’s *da-sein* because they both work at reducing the illusory divide between the subject and the world. Heidegger’s phenomenology is significant because it re-articulated the ontological status of the singular so that being is melded with the world it is thrown into. Extending Heidegger’s ontology of being-in-the-world, Jean-Luc Nancy also attempts to navigate the terrain between singular and plural. Nancy pushes toward an even more radical ontological bond when he posits that being itself depends upon a “being-in-common,” upon an understanding that inextricably locates the collective within the singular. Nancy deems this ontological status as being “singular plural,” in which the individual is given through the plural, and where “consciousness is never mine, but to the contrary, I only have it in and through community (Nancy’s italics).”

A comparable melding of the individual and community operates in the thinker/place exchanges of place-produced thought. This critical connection disavows a pejorative “un-siting,” in which place is pressed into, or appropriated for, the servitude of an individual agenda. In place-produced thought, the community, the plural, remains an active influence on place identity. The Arendtian “difference” that is inserted into the subject is uncovered as the
presence of the polyphonic multiple of community. Therefore, community can be understood as being active in two different stages of place-produced thought. Firstly, as Arendt and others have illustrated, the collective is preserved within the singular subject. Secondly, community is also evident in place as one of its constituting forces – part of the intertextual dialogue of events and actions occurring with/in place.

I have included this discussion of the thinking subject in between the sections about the definition of place and the delineation of place in place-produced thought in order to further emphasize the presence and effect of the collective in the individual subject – the perpetual to and fro between the inside and the outside. Just as the strict division of the singular and collective is deconstructed in some of the theories discussed above, there is a similar relationship that marks the delineation of place in place-produced thought.

This brief discussion of the “I-Other” relationship is significant because it is reflective of the “thinker-place” relationship in place-produced thought. While I do not continue a more in-depth examination of the “I-Other” in each instance of place-produced thought, it is important to note the Arendtian problematizing of Socratic solitude because place-produced thought provides such a vivid illustration of how the outside or collective touches upon and is ontologically embedded into the seemingly divided, the hermetic, and the contained.
DELINEATION OF PLACE

In many ways, the multi-faceted process of constituting place (as described above) is paralleled by the act of delineation. As has already been noted, even though the individual thinker arrives at the determination of the margins of place, the process can’t be considered as univocal or unilateral, but instead is infused with the polyphony of community. The term “margin” is used to imply a sort of fluidity and malleability to the boundaries of a place. The parameters of the places in place-produced thought often reflect these semantics, remaining elusive and enigmatic – like the horizon line on a foggy winter morning. Even setting the boundaries of place does not entail an absolute break from what is external: “A boundary is not that at which something stops…,” Heidegger advises us, “the boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding.” In the instances of place-produced thought explored in the following chapters, that which is outside the margins of a place matters as much as that which is within place.

Jacques Derrida provides some insights into why this must be the case in his theory of the ergon and parerga in works of art. Calling upon the traditions of aesthetic discourse, he conveys that to even “think art in general” is to adopt a series of oppositions –form/content, inside/outside, subject/object. By identifying these oppositional presuppositions, Derrida is able to build a discourse about liminality; and through that method, he begins to explore a space of in-betweeness where nothing is fixed or certain, where différance resides. The deconstruction of the frame between the artwork (ergon) and the ostensibly
extrinsic (parerga) is one of Derrida’s critical gestures. In fact, he argues, the two spaces are entwined: “a parergon comes against, beside, and in addition to the ergon… but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside.” Giorgio Agamben conceives of a similar contingency among *stasis* and *dynamis* in a work of art. “Every image is animated by an antinimous polarity,” announces Agamben, “[the dynamis] always refers beyond itself, towards a whole of which it is a part.” Within place-produced thought, we see the same connectivity between the inside and outside of place; between place and the wider environs. In most instances, discerning a locus of thought reveals the presence of two (or more) significant places and an exchange between them. All of these places, together, comprise the actual site of indigenous knowledge production.

As Derrida demonstrated within works of art, the juxtaposition between the ergon, and the demarcation of its exterior, are locked in a mutual relationship of epistemic production by a “link which rivets [the parerga]… to the lack in the interior of the ergon.” As a means of delineation, the seemingly diametrically opposed places and the liminality between them are temporarily and contingently defined for the purpose of the thinking project. However, the place of thought is continuously produced, deterritorialized, and produced again in a process that “stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface (my italics).”

In many ways, the approach taken by the first few thinkers whom I’ll consider—notably Thoreau and Heidegger—involves finding a place to situate
thought that relies on a strategy of negation. Within this tradition, negation is destabilizing and creative, used to “celebrate a genuine point of beginning – with its attendant hope and promise for the future.” Such negation can be especially effective when ideological impositions have become fixed in place as normative or as part of tradition. Strategic negation in the delineation of place affirms as it denies, erases as it generates, and can function as “a kind of provisional erasure.” In that regard, this action of erasure can be apophatic – enabling the derivation of knowledge through negation.

Other strategies that a thinker may use to delineate a locus of thought often begin with the established and recognized borders of a place. Thinkers have approached the demarcation of these pre-existing boundaries in various ways. Some thinkers work to reaffirm and reassert existing borders in order to accentuate their importance or call attention to the circumstances of their formation. In Gordon Matta-Clark’s Fake Estates project (Chapter 3), for instance, he purposefully draws attention to the peculiar shapes of the properties that he purchased from the city of New York in order to underscore the arbitrariness and the absurdity of their creation. A thinker may also begin their strategy of delineation with the existing borders of a place in order to undermine or think beyond those borders. This may be a crucial component for some instances of place-produced thought that attempt to question the limitations and impositions of the pre-existing borders of place.

Whatever strategy is deployed in the development of place-produced thought, place is temporarily and contingently delineated in order to focus
thinking. At the same time, the delineated place of thought remains attuned and responsive to the parerga outside of its boundaries—continuously challenging the inside/outside division. Even though the margins of place remain recalcitrant, the key point is that in place-produced thought, some form of delineation occurs. The demarcation of place by Thoreau, Heidegger, and others can be understood as a strategic exegesis, an instrument to position a localizing center of knowledge production – a *centrum cogitationis*. Within the strategic delineation, place becomes activated as “we intend within it; we critique intentions within it; we play with it through significations as well as references.”

Even though I have argued for the role that human agency plays in the development of place-produced thought, I am wary of over-emphasizing the power of the human subject in a way that is anthropocentric and does not “recognize objects [and places] as participants in the reshaping of the world.” In fact, the agency of place has a vibrant and central role in place-produced thought.

**AGENCY OF PLACE**

While the last section mostly focused on the way that the agency of the thinker can redefine a place, in each of the case studies in the following chapters, I also examine how place resists the thinker, how places make evident their own wants and desires. Bill Brown broaches these concerns in his “thing theory” when he asks: “What claims on your attention and on your action are made on behalf of things?” Just as many recent theories have reinvested agency in the subject, I
argue that places also have agency, and that the agency of place plays a significant role in place-produced thought.

As place exerts itself in place-produced thought, an intimate and distinctive relationship between the thinker and place emerges. The thinker enters into interdependence with place, a relationship that reduces the unilateral authority of the thinker in favor of a shared and co-constitutive production of knowledge. It may seem startling, at first, to seriously consider the questions of “What do places want?” and “What desires and motivations might a place have?” But such questions are of a piece with those of other contemporary thinkers. When W.J.T. Mitchell asks the question “What Do Pictures Want?” he also wonders if the exploration of non-human agency will be met with suspicious incredulity. He addresses these doubts head on: “I am well aware that this is a bizarre, even objectionable, question. I am aware that it involves a subjectiviziting of images, a dubious personification of inanimate objects; that it flirts with a regressive, superstitious attitude toward images.” Nevertheless, Mitchell proceeds to explore his question and is able to demonstrate the real possibility of agency in images. Just as Mitchell describes of pictures, I argue that the role of place in place-produced thought “makes an appeal or issues a demand whose precise effect and power emerges in the an intersubjective encounter.” The agency of place is inscribed and woven into the thinking produced with/in it—the force of this agency lies in the co-produced nature of the thought. Place-produced thought can be understood as a record, a trace, of the agency of place. One of the most powerful ways that the agency of place is manifested in place-produced
thought is through material irruption. The insurgency of the materiality of place is a crucial component in the production of indigenous knowledge.

MATERIAL IRRUPTION
What ties together the various instances of place-produced thought, and helps clarify their difference from other place-influenced thought, is that place-produced thought is not only a method of thinking, but it is a mode of producing radical knowledge. Indeed, as will be demonstrated over the following chapters, the production of radical knowledge is one of the most significant functions of place-produced thought. Even for artists and thinkers steeped in an awareness of how discourse or cultural constructs can impact being and knowledge, those cultural discursive constructs often become fossilized and accepted. I am not implying that place-produced thought offers an absolute return to the real or a way out of discourse; rather, I believe that it holds the potential for disrupting established norms and calcified modes of thinking that have become entrenched in cultural consciousness.

What place-produced thought can do is suggest some of the ways that we can experience and understand place in a manner that admits to the agency of place itself. The writer Seth Kim-Cohen documents an example of how a place can assert its own agency and interrupts the apprehension of a thinker or viewer when he describes his experience of Janet Cardiff’s 1999 walking piece in London, *The Missing Voice: Case Study B*. After taking the audio tour, Kim-
Cohen wrote that “the environment in which the walks take place is much more than a narrative setting... They are not passive sets, but constantly transforming social-architectural-commercial organisms. As the listener navigates the fictionalized version of the environment as presented in the audio, one is simultaneously navigating the factual physicality of the actual locale,” and as he continues a little later, “the fiction of the audio and the fact of the streets become confused. Just as a not-real sound can cause the listener to turn toward it, the sound of a very real oncoming car can be ignored as part of the audio.” When Kim-Cohen is nearly hit by ignoring an oncoming car as he walks through London’s East End, he is experiencing the place pushing back – the real physical materiality of place interrupting his experience as a viewer/listener. Even though Kim-Cohen is not the maker of the artwork, his experience of the power of irruption by place as part of the artwork, is tantamount to the disruption of existing knowledge. In the same way that the oncoming car interrupts the fictional narrative of Cardiff’s audio, the agency of place can interrupt the established perceptions and beliefs about a particular place, putting the solidity of these pre-existing notions into doubt. This power of irruption is one of the most vital components of place-produced thought as it offers the means to think beyond current categories, delineations, or descriptions.

Place-produced thought is a method of thinking that recognizes the potency, agency, and—to use Jane Bennett’s language—the “vibrancy of matter,” in non-human places and things. This recognition does not completely disregard or abandon the discursive presence that also shapes our understanding and
experience of places and things. Instead, place-produced thought encompasses a multiplicity of constituting forces, even if they are not actively acted upon or acknowledged by the thinker. The power of the forces acting upon a place can’t be underestimated, as they often influence the production of thought without the thinker having full consciousness of their significance. Whether one is conscious of their impact or not, the entanglement of knowledge production with/in the forces of place suggests a relationship between thinker and place that is symbiotic, dialogical, and active.

The embodiment of agency in the production of place-produced thought calls for a reconsideration of the anti-humanism so prominent since the linguistic turn. This reassessment is not to suggest an abandonment of signification in the discourse of subject formation; rather, it promotes an elliptical approach that resists a singular, univocal and dominant model. In this reconsideration of Postmodern anti-humanism and the primacy of language, each philosophical theory can retain some of its efficacy and validity. Therefore, rather than focusing on the divergence between theories, we would do well to analyze the relation, impasse, expression, and violence between the constituting forces of place, as they trace onto one another. Both the agency of the subject and the agency of place within place-produced thought work in tandem to negotiate those traces. The relational and temporal organization of the constituting forces of place includes the disruption and continuous redistribution of these forces by the coalescing actions/thoughts of the thinker/place.
AGENCIES IN NEGOTIATION

What I am edging towards with this assertion is no less than an incursion into the history of the discourse on the formation of the subject. I am certainly not going to attempt a thorough analysis of subjectivity here, but I do want to touch upon the shifting notions of subject formation (beginning with Descartes) to further my case for the presence of the collective in the singular subject, and to argue for the powerful role that place plays in human subjectivity.

Descartes imagined the formation of the subject as autogenic through thought – res cogitans. Against indictments of solipsism towards the subject conceived of in the early Enlightenment, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau countered with a subject that acknowledged an external world, but also remained pure, unified, and singular. Indeed, the intelligibility of their theories is grounded in the productive autonomous subject. If we could imagine the formation of the later Enlightenment subject being translated into an equation, it might appear as such: purity + unity + autonomy = subject. After Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, the prominence of the individual mind in the formation of the subject was extended by the transcendental idealism of Kant, who positioned the mind as central to all experience and epistemology. Kant suggested that all phenomena were interpreted by the a priori Concepts of the Understanding. Therefore, the pre-existing structure of the subject’s mind formed the foundation of experience and thought. This notion of the centrality of the individual human mind stood, basically intact, until the 20th century.
In the 20th century, the shift toward the anti-humanism of Poststructuralism emerged from Structuralism’s tendency to negate the primacy of the subject in favor of structures, signs, and discourse. For Claude Levi-Strauss and other Structuralists, the subject was given through the underlying structures of society – the driving force of universal patterns in human thought subsumed individual agency. During the latter part of the century, the postmodernist critique of the subject effectively dismantled each of the variables in the subject formation equation so that it came to read: multiplicity + fragmentation + imposition of outside power = subject (with no subjectivity). For Foucault and other Postmodernists, the critical distinction of the Enlightenment subject was that it was brought to the discourse of subject formation. As Foucault suggests, the concept of the autonomous subject was an invention of the Enlightenment, a product of a specific episteme. For Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, it was a historical moment when the subject could finally slide out from under the thumb of the monarchy and church, and emerge from the shadows of the Platonic cave into the world of light, knowledge, and self-formation.

Much like Foucault, his contemporary, Louis Althusser also claimed that the modern subject was a construct. As a Marxist, Althusser believed that the state produced subjects that would best sustain and solidify its own power and ideology. Through the determination by Ideological State Apparatuses (mass media, cultural institutions, educational institutions and so on), and not by individual agency or autonomy, the individual subject is produced.
In the development of place-produced thought, human subjectivity is considered as an active instrument of organization for constituting forces. This is not a device of unitary power, but one that is encumbered by the plural, as both an active and receptive epistemic organizer of meaning. While the human subject is recognized as being active and possessing important agency in place-produced thought, it is also shown to be one among many sources of agency, power, force, and change. Therefore, in the creation of place-produced thought, the postmodernist version of the subject formation equation has been modified as such: multiplicity + fragmentation + imposition of outside power + subject + place + agency = negotiation. We have retained and added to the variables leading to the postmodern negation of the subject, but have recalibrated their sum. In place-produced thought, an active subject and place operate within the fractured, multiple, and collective terrain(s) of their formation to generate a continuous negotiation.

While this typology does criticize the near complete annulment of subjective agency in poststructuralist thought, it simultaneously recognizes that it was those very thinkers who deconstructed the grand authority of the cohesive singular subject. Many of the poststructuralists were quick to point out the fractures and slippages in the logos of Western metaphysics, including the concept of a free willing, self-contained subject. The intimate negotiation and connectivity between thinker and place in place-produced thought achieves this very proposition, as it resists the absolutism and ferocious autonomy of the singular Enlightenment subject. This resistance echoes the same pitfall that
Derrida read within Heidegger and others, namely the megalomaniacal centrality of the self-creating subject.

Jacques Rancière offers a similar deconstruction of a primary and singular source of meaning in his description of a viewer’s emancipation while interpreting a work of art: “It means that every situation can be cracked open from the inside, reconfigured in a different regime of perception and signification.” A reconfiguration of place also occurs in the creation of place-produced thought. However, in each instance of place-produced thought, the thinker is also transformed. Through the negotiation and close production of knowledge, both thinker and place emerge as unretractably marking one another. This type of connection means that localized knowledge is given concomitantly through the agency of the existing place and the thinking action of the subject; the production of indigenous knowledge is a collective exchange.

In framing place-produced thought as a negotiation, we embrace yet another tenet of Poststructuralism, the notion of maneuvering the slippages between systems and constituting forces. In thinking of the relation between different philosophies, Derrida makes an announcement that can be adapted to the methodology of place-produced thought, as it stresses the importance of dialogical play. Similarly, we note that the negotiation of constituting forces in place is “to meditate upon the circularity which makes them pass into one another indefinitely,” and furthermore “to let some *elliptical* displacement be produced in the difference of repetition: a deficient displacement, doubtless, but deficient in a way which is not yet – or is no longer – absence, negativity, non-Being, lack,
silence (Derrida’s italics)." The displacement detailed by Derrida is akin to the re-configuration or un-siting of place in place-produced thought, and indeed it does not emerge as an absence of non-being, but rather as a powerful and productive epistemic source.

Before moving on to examine other historical relationships with place that are distinct from place-produced thought, I want to make a further note about the intersection between epistemological production and ontological transformation. As already suggested, the ontological melding of place and thinker occurs in the development of thought with/in place. Both Foucault and Butler have written about how epistemology can both limit and bear the possibilities for being. What is knowable about a subject or place limits the potentiality of its being. For Foucault, an “a priori is what, in a given period, delimits in the totality of experience a field of knowledge, [and] defines the mode of being (Foucault’s italics).”

In her text, Gender Trouble, Butler criticizes Foucault’s presumption of the body as a static tabula rasa awaiting cultural inscription. In a similar manner, I want to suggest, through this typology, that place-produced thought provides methods to negotiate and navigate an epistemological space that includes, but relinquishes the predominance of signification (or any other singular constituting force), in the formation of knowledge. Instead, the development of place-produced thought maintains the potential of acting and thinking (what Butler calls performance) that “suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization.” The key point is that place-produced thought holds
ontological weight, as the emergent localized episteme becomes a part of the being of both place and thinker. The unretractable marks of thought etch themselves into thinker and place, causing the distinction between place, thinker, and the thought produced to fade – thinking, doing, and place coalesce.

OTHER CREATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH PLACE

As we move toward a better understanding of place-produced thought, it will be helpful to clarify the engagement with place developed through place-produced thought, by contrasting them with other relationships that thinkers and creators have with their surroundings. I would like to draw an important differentiation between “thinking places” generally and sites of “place-produced thought” in particular. “Thinking places” have been the focus of several studies; for example, Carolyn and Jack Fleming recently published Thinking Places: Where Great Ideas Were Born. They recount many of their visits to, and observations of, famous thinking places throughout Europe and the USA. The description and conceptualization of thinking in place as portrayed in their text is an important counterpoint to the relationship between thinker and place that I maintain is cultivated through the making of place-produced thought.

Instead of recognizing place as an active agent in the production of thought, some historical thinkers have cultivated a correspondence with place that casts the “thinking place” as a “creative muse.” In such cases, place is denied some of its agency and is often considered an object or experience meant to
inspire the thinking subject. For example, in the general account of the thinking places surveyed in their book, Carolyn and Jack Fleming describe them as a “structure or memorable site where a visitor may receive his [sic] own inspiration and, perhaps, as if in some mystical way, tap into the creative muse and be energized by its power.” In these instances, the thinker is not in a genuine dialogue with place, as they are much more likely to “use” place as means toward a particular end. In place-produced thought, the place is much more than an utilitarian object; it is a co-producer of situated knowledge.

The use of place as a creative muse in the thinking places described by the Flemings is also related to a noteworthy distinction in the intentionality of the thinker. Many of the creative people who have utilized thinking places that are included in the Fleming’s book, demonstrate an intentionality in their projects, but one that is mostly focused on finding seclusion in “a special cloister place to nurture the creative process.” In place-produced thought however, there is often a desire for more than sheer solitude (although that may be important for some). In these instances, each thinker has attempted to converse and to think “with/in” place. This turn of phrase should not be taken as merely a puckish neologism, for it points to the heart of a place-produced thought as the fusion of thinker, place, and being. “Thinking with/in” place implies a co-mingled interdependence of polyphonic agents, each sharing in the production of indigenous knowledge.

By conjoining the actions of thinking “with” and “in,” a distinctive sort of connectedness is implied. The intrinsic conjunction between thinker and place in place-produced thought means that the “with” and “in” of thinking are also
necessarily merged and expressed as “with/in.” The thinker does not merely think “within” place – by developing place-produced thought, they enter a sort of marriage with place, each their own bringing desires and ideas to the table, but also remaining responsive, reflexive, and attuned to the other. Both place and thinker push one another to realize new insights, applications, and sensibilities in a dialogical exchange. Thinking occurs both with, and inside of place, as the participants assert their agency on the other in an ongoing ellipsis of transforming production.

NATURE WRITING/ LANDSCAPE PAINTING

Another method of developing a relationship with the environment that contrasts to “thinking with/in” is found in some traditional nature writing and landscape painting. Both nature writing and landscape painting are genres that evoke an appreciation of, and connection between, the writer/artist and the environment. In recent years, “new” nature writing has surfaced that more directly attempts to think with/in place by “looking more closely at how the local feels.” In this sense, much of the new nature writing is “personal and intimate” with place. As such, new nature writing seems to be, potentially, one of the prodigious avenues for place-produced thought. Certain projects by writers such as Robert MacFarlane, Kathleen Jamie, Rebecca Solnit, John Elder, C. S. Giscombe, and Brenda Hillman are creating connections with place that can often be considered as place-produced thought.
While newer forms of nature writing may be more akin to place-produced thought, the type of engagement with place in some historical nature writing is often pervaded by clichéd tropes such as the “country/city divide” or “nature as redemptive other,” in a manner that does not acknowledge the same level of agency that is present and so crucial to the development of place-produced thought.

Many of the narratives in some historical nature writing epitomize the transformative journey or struggle and rely on the cult of nature for redemptive catharsis. For example, Farley Mowatt describes one such narrative about his work for the Canadian government in northern Canada, where he collected information about the diets and mobility patterns of wolves. Although his account of the experience documents amazingly complex wolf behaviors and the beautifully intimate relationship that he was able to develop with the pack of wolves, at times it slips into the problematic and reductive contrast of the country/city binary. This classic contrast typecasts the exploitive, careless, and consumerist urban existence against one that is more mystical, magical, in tune with, and respectful of nature. This often “simple” existence is believed to connect human beings with a more truthful and wholesome mode of being. In John Krakauer’s account of Christopher McCandless’ journey into the Alaskan wilderness, there are some remnants of the moral and ideological divide between the country and the city. For example, McCandless underlined the following passage in his copy of Doctor Zhivago: “Oh, how one wishes sometimes to escape from the meaningless dullness of human eloquence, from all those sublime
phrases, to take refuge in nature.” In examples of nature writing such as these, nature and place often function more as signifiers of cultural meaning, than as active producers of knowledge in their own right. Many of these kinds of usages in nature writing can be collectively referred to as promoting “the cult of nature” and are historically rooted in the ideas of Romanticism. The relationship between Romantic cultural concepts of nature and place, and their similarity to the cult of nature is explored in the next section.

In the cult of nature, nature becomes a signifier in a sort of Barthesian shift—that is, it takes on a mythic dimension, often carrying paradoxical significations for moral purity, healthy living, longevity, death, fortitude, justice, intelligence, simplicity, and altruism (to name a few). Such significations are often based upon the notion that some intangible spirituality or deep ethereal connection that humans once had has been lost and if we could only regain it, our culture could be radically transformed for the better. In this sense, nature is used as a signifier for an absence and loss. The cult of nature also often defines nature as a moralizing and redemptive other. These representations of nature tell us more about the cultist than about nature. As Arendt reminds us, we need to be aware that “representations are formations, they have purposes.” Each of the myths of nature have been created for a specific purpose, one that does not necessarily lead us to recognize the ways that place can become active and push back against the attempted impositions of culture or thinker. The greatest point to be made here is that these meanings are inscribed onto nature (and place) in ways
that do not recognize, to the full extent, the appeals or demands of the agency of place.

To illustrate this disparity between the more passive roles that nature or place may play as a mythic signifier or creative muse versus the active role of knowledge co-producer, I often think of Albert Bierstadt’s paintings of the American West (Fig. 1). Many scholars have criticized Bierstadt for his romanticized notions of the picturesque and his glorified and embellished use of light. While I understand many of these critiques, I would also argue that the role of the landscape in the painting is akin to the role of place in the Flemings’ “thinking places,” as neither of them endows place with its full role as productive agent, nor do they acknowledge – to once again use Bennett’s term – the “vibrancy of matter.” Instead, images such as Bierstadt’s are anthropocentric because they are the “direct descendant of the scenery cult’s key concept: the picturesque. This term literally means ‘picturelike’ and indicates a mode of
appreciation by which the natural world is divided into scenes, each aiming at an
ideal dictated by art, especially landscape painting.” In these types of
representations, place is restricted to being an object for aesthetic contemplation
and reflection. Even though landscape painting is often celebrated for its
expression of the harmonic relation between nature and humans, it can also be
read as fetishizing the landscape, turning it into an aesthetic object functioning as
a creative muse.

By contrast, in the instances of place-produced thought included in this
discussion, place often pushes back against these types of fetishizing, urging the
thinker to “acknowledge a force that, though quite real and powerful, is
intrinsically resistant to representation.” Therefore, the role of place in place-
produced thought is much different than that of a creative muse, as it involves a
more dialogical and inter-subjective exchange.

ROMANTICISM

Other notions about how thinkers have historically created a relationship with
their surroundings, is described in the philosophical and artistic ideas of
Romanticism. As industrialization arose in the 19th century in Germany, France
and England, so, too, did Romanticism, as many thinkers began to find inspiration
in the natural world. These writers and artists were interested in the “pursuit of
natural supernaturalism, of divinity in nature” as well as a spiritual connection
with nature. As a reaction to both the mechanized urbanization of the Industrial
Revolution and the Positivist rationality of the Enlightenment, Romantics turned to nature for a sublime encounter as means to counteract or escape the ills of modern society. Nature was prized for its ability to remove or cleanse the thinker from the debilitating realities and restrictions of rationally structured urban life.

Many of the Romantics sought out specific places that suited their sensibilities. In England, most of the Romantic writers and artists either migrated to, or frequented, the mountainous Lake District in northwest England. For many, the Lake District represented the harmonious existence of human beings with a picturesque natural landscape. After visiting the region in 1855, American Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote, “I question whether any part of the world looks so beautiful as England—this part of England, at least—on a fine summer morning. It makes one think the more cheerfully of human life to see such a bright universal verdure; such sweet, rural, peaceful, flower-bordered cottages… and such nice villas along the roadside, so tastefully contrived for comfort and beauty.” Much of the attraction to this region was because it matched the discursive aesthetic ideals that the Romantics sought in the landscape – the rustic, pastoral, and interdependence of humans and nature (Fig.2).

The interpretations of the Romantic ideas of nature and place are so widely varied that they include everything from a celebration of ecological thought in Romanticism, to a critique of the projection of cultural attitudes and beliefs onto nature. Without favoring either side in this debate, an important differentiation between place-produced thought and Romanticized “thinking
places” can still be discerned. Many of the Romantic thinking places were established as a means to escape, as a negation of another place, as a means to get out of an unwanted place. For example, the writer William Butler Yeats purchased a tower (Thoor Ballylee Castle) in the countryside near the Irish town of Gort, in some part because he wanted to escape from the world and find a solitary place to be creative. Thoor Ballylee became Yeats’ retreat, as he was “attracted to the beauty of the remote site.” The remoteness of the site was one of the most redeeming qualities for Yeats, since he “had always seen himself as one in a line of solitary searchers after a hidden wisdom.”

Many of the “thinking places” in the Flemings’ text are also drawn from a tradition valorizing solitary thinking, one that can be traced as far back to at least Aristotle. Informing this tradition is the idea that the best and most productive thinking occurs when one is sequestered from the world without distraction.
However, the complete removal from one’s surroundings is at least improbable, perhaps impossible. Place-produced thought, on the other hand, is not created as a means to get out of place (both Thoreau and Heidegger rejected escapism), but rather as a method of getting into, and engaging with, place. The development of place-produced thought is driven more by a desire to work with/in place rather than to disengage from the world.

SITE-SPECIFIC ART

Place-produced thought involves a deployment of place that is also in contrast to the exchange conventionally understood as site-specific. The traditional relationship of site-specific art to place is described by Robert Morris’ minimalist site, in which the “total space is hopefully altered in certain desired ways by the presence of the object” (my italics). This type of “total” site transformation through the intervention of an artistic object is far more imposing, prescriptive, and dialectical than the un-siting of place that occurs in place-produced thought. Through the development of place-produced thought, the reconfiguration—or un-siting—of place is achieved when it becomes an active co-producer in the creation of thought. This type of ontological transformation of place does not imply a total transformation, but rather an addition of new “implications” to its identity. Once place-produced thought has been developed, the place should not be considered as completely “new,” as suggested by Okui Enwezor, but as a sort of progeny, made “anew” through the additional meanings, values, and identities affixed to its being. I want to stress here the fundamental imbrication of place, production, and
thought that occurs in the process of developing place-produced thought. The “anew” ontology includes its preceding identities, practices, and significations, but is augmented and negotiated by the process of engendering place-produced thought.

As described earlier, the ontological connection between the existing place and its transformation by the thinker/place exchange in place-produced thought has echoes of the relationship between the singular and the community expressed by philosophers such as Hannah Arendt and Jean-Luc Nancy. Each of them contends that the individual is never singular. In the enactment of subjective agency within place-produce thought, the thinker does not think/act in pure solitude. In his concept of the heteroglossic “sideways glance,” Mikhail Bakhtin also claims that every person carries the influence of others, so that no one subject can be isolated. “The self is an act of grace, a gift of the other,” asserts Bakhtin.59 Even within the supposed solitude of the Socratic inner dialogue, recall how Arendt also illustrates the role of community in the turn toward interiority: “this faculty of thought, which is exercised in solitude, extends into the strictly political sphere, where I am always together with others.”60 I return to the relationship between the singular and the collective again here to further stress the dialogical (rather than dialectical) nature of place-produced thought that is always reaching beyond its boundaries. As a form of re-composition or un-siting, the development of place-produced thought occurs through a networked negotiation and generates what Kwon portrays as a “relational sensibility [that] can… transform passing intimacies into indelible, unretractable social marks.”61
ENVIRONMENTAL ART

Another approach that artists have used to build a relationship with their surroundings is through producing earth art or environmental art. These art practices are typically conducted outdoors and often utilize local materials, forms, and histories to create a work of art. Andy Goldsworthy, a renowned environmental artist, creates works of art utilizing the natural materials found at particular sites. Goldsworthy manipulates these materials into visually pleasing creations inspired by organic forms. The meandering path of a river, the smoothness of a sphere, the order of a rectangle, all repeat throughout Goldsworthy’s work. His work often emphasizes the beauty in nature. Yet, it is evident at times that “valuable beauty” originates from, and is placed upon nature by, the aesthetic appreciation of Goldsworthy and his audience. He states, “When I see a snake I am fascinated by its form and movement. It draws beautifully the surface over which it travels…the perfect sculpture.”

The valuation of the formal qualities of nature or a place is derived from what Allen Carlson calls the “object model of appreciation.” Carlson describes this type of appreciation and value placement vis à vis our appreciation of a visual artistic object. The object is admired for its inherent form, color, and texture but not actually as a thing in of itself. Carlson explains the model as such: “natural objects are granted what is called artistic enfranchisement, and they, like artifacts as Marcel Duchamp’s Urinal, …become works of art. Appreciating a sculpture that was once driftwood is, therefore, no closer to appreciating nature than is appreciating a purse that was once a sow’s ear.”
Carlson’s assessment suggests that environmental artists typically do not engage with place in the same manner as is inherent to place-produced thought. The distinction is that environmental art does not always recognize the active agency of place. Many environmental works do exhibit sensitivity and an accord with the specific contingencies of a site, but I argue that this is executed in a way that renders and values the place primarily as a passive aesthetic object (as per Carlson’s definition) – rather than an active producer of knowledge.

In all fairness, Goldsworthy’s outdoor earthworks do seem to exhibit a genuine attempt to think with/in place, but often his least successful works fall a little short of this goal. They key point here is the contrast between being receptive and attuned to place, and working with/in place as an active co-producer of knowledge with its own desires and motivations. The repeated themes and formal qualities of Goldsworthy’s work, utilized regardless of where he is working on the globe (Fig.3, Fig.4 & Fig.5), seem to indicate that the artwork is sometimes overlaid or mapped onto place, rather than being inscribed into it.

One may argue that some of Goldsworthy’s work and his writings give evidence of a desire not to control and dictate nature, but rather to actually work with nature/place. As Goldsworthy states, “that these works appear to have grown in place is an indication I have understood something of the internal stone and tree. They are not an attempt at mimicry.” He continues by stating “I don’t see them as being under my control.” These statements demonstrate his belief in his equality with nature. This is further evidenced by the fact that Goldsworthy takes great care not to leave behind any completely verifiable traces of a human mark.
Figure 3. *Wichita Arch*, 2004 – Installed on the campus of Wichita State University, Wichita, KS. Image Courtesy of the Ulrich Museum of Art.

Figure 4. *Striding Arch*, 2008 – Installed on Colt Hill, 3 km from Benbuie, Dumfries And Galloway, UK. Image Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.
There is an ambiguity in his work, where what we are seeing is in-between natural phenomenon and human intervention. However, working “with” place is not the same as working “with/in” place. The former seems to grant the place some level of equivalence, but this remains granted by the thinking subject, and does not go as far in recognizing the intrinsic power of place that is vital to the co-creation of place-produced thought.

THINKING WITH/IN PLACE

Having clarified the distinctions between place-produced thought and the other types of relationships that thinkers have with their environments, I would like to focus on place-produced thought itself, especially some of its inherent by-products, as well as its potential for innovation and insurgency as new forms of thought. Place-produced thought is a particularly vital form of localized epistemology because of its ability to generate heterotopic knowledge. In that regard, place-produced thought can be unlike any other knowledges; the unique
interaction between place, thinker, agency, materiality, and discursivity can be powerfully irruptive and can produce alternative readings or understandings of people, places, or things.

Part of the reason for the uniqueness of this knowledge is that in place-produced thought, the distinction between thinking and acting, as presented in the Arendtian-Socratic model, is undone. Indeed, thinking is posited as action, as a process that is forceful and subversive. The development of place-produced thought occurs through an engagement with place and not through disinterested transcendental contemplation. The thinker actually lives the place of his or her thought. The conjoined action-thinking of place-produced thought allows us to distinguish it from the passive and tacit relationship with place that continuously permeates thought and being.

Place is commonly part of our being and thought processes—we are all shapes by the places that we inhabit. However, those who generate place-produced thought develop a particularly deep link between thought and location. Heidegger, for example, articulates a profound bond of place with being when he hyphenates da-sein: being occurs “there.” Being has a presence in place, explains Heidegger, before the truth of being is covered over and concealed by time. However, neither place as the location for being, as Heidegger alleges, nor the exertion of place that we experience everyday, fully coincide with the function of place in the operation of place-produced thought. Instead, in each instance of place-produced thought there is a concerted effort to make something occur – to
derive a new body of thought. Place acts as locator for, and a participant in, the emergence of a new episteme.

In the realm of postcolonial discourse, Enwezor maintains that something like place-produced thought can act as a “series of healthy counter discourses to colonial modernity’s self-authorized decisions.” And, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, that capacity is not limited to challenging colonial modernity’s discourses. Rather, the focus of thought in a particular place has often led to creativity and innovation, in no small part because place has the capacity to react with or affect a thinker in a special way, through the concomitance of subjective action and indigenous knowledge. This process is not without risks, but it does exhibit an intrinsic bond – a nexus and shared ontology between place and production.

METHODS OF THINKING WITH/IN PLACE

One method for developing place-produced thought can be called think place. This term refers to an actual location for thinking, an environment that the thinker chooses as a locus for thought. In order for place to serve as a point of convergence, the thinker often establishes margins or borders for a place for thinking. These boundaries may be permeable, transient, and seemingly arbitrary, but their existence remains significant. The threshold of a place can be given through various means – physical topography, cartography, relations of power, the perceptions of the thinker, or through some combination of these. This
delineation may radically depart from established boundaries. The deterritorialization and reterritorialization of borders can prompt questions about the circumstances of their original demarcation, leading to a new understanding of what is and isn’t delineated by a certain place.

Another possible method for establishing place-produced thought is thinking of place. This refers to an instance when place is called upon to put the thinker in a certain state of consciousness, emotive disposition, or intellectual framework. This does not necessarily occur during the actual physical engagement with place. Instead, thinking of place can be achieved through recollection and imagination. It is a vicarious embodiment, where place is virtually engaged, to provide the thinker with particular intellectual guidance, even from afar. Thinking of place enables the thinker to extend place as a focus for thought well beyond the initial encounter. Thinking of place involves recalling place for the continued creation of place-produced thought.

A third possible method for developing place-produced thought is thinking through a place. This entails positioning place as a sounding board, in which thought is drawn out of the negotiation with place. In this capacity, place can act as a type of semi-conductor or as a point of resistance. Thinking through a place engages place in a dialogue that can emphasize or diminish the constituting variables of place. When one of the constituting forces is muffled or softened as the place pushes back, it may still remain active, but may not act upon the thinker (and the thought produced) in a substantial manner. In contrast, the enlargement or expansion of a particular quality of place may also occur so that it becomes
central and formative in place-produced thought. This diminishing/enlarging can be subversive because it calls for the thinker to recognize an unrealized aspect of place or turn a blind eye towards a constituting force that is hegemonic or autocratic.

While the emphasis or restriction of certain qualities of place is often productive and innovative, it can also be problematic, leading to myopic conclusions in which place is used as a means to calcify hegemonic behavior. The possibility of using place-produced thought to justify politics of rejection or exclusion does exist.

ETHOS OF PLACE
A newly developed localized epistemology of place-produced thought will also inherently include an ethos of place. In the close negotiation between place/thinker, the value, idiosyncrasies, and agency of a specific place are brought to the forefront of the thinker’s consciousness. Thinking with/in place encourages the thinker to build a sense of respect for said place. Even though the push back from place might by discomforting, perhaps even irritating, the thinker becomes irrevocably engaged with/in his or her locus of thought. This type of engagement disallows apathy. Even though the thinker may not be in love with his or her locus of thought, by thinking with/in place an indelible awareness is developed, as the place inscribes itself onto the very being of the thinker. By generating thought with/in a certain locale, place is also recognized as an active agent rather than a
passive object. As such, place-produced thought holds the potential for producing an original and radical ethos that is both embodied and dialogical. Ewa Ziarek describes this type of ethos as *transformative* because the “shift from moral law to the event locates responsibility in the always asymmetrical, embodied relation to the Other and redefines freedom as an engagement in the experimental praxis aiming to surpass historically sedimented identities and to create new modes of life.”

To think with/in place is to be engaged with place – forming a contextual and idiosyncratic relationship to place. This crucial connection does not mean that the thinker can’t develop the same sort of engagement with another place down the line. Because thinking with/in place is a mode of encounter that not only ontologically entangles the thinker with place, but also importantly creates an intimate co-producing relationship, respect is an intrinsic part of that engagement. As previously mentioned, the act of thinking with/in place is a process in which being, place, and thinking are merged. Emmanuel Levinas describes this type of thinking when he writes: “to think is no longer to contemplate, but to be engaged, merged with what we think, launched—the dramatic event of being-in-the-world.” Through this union, a place-produced ethos of care can be fostered as part of the development of place-produced thought. In many of the instances of place-produced thought examined in the following pages, we can discern how a place-produced ethos of care was developed as part of the overall creation of place-produced thought.
POLITICS OF PLACE

While a place ethic is an inherent aspect of place-produced thought, each instance of place-produced thought also demonstrates a negotiation between knowledge, place, and power in the form of an indigenous geospatial politic. If we return to our definition of place as a *bio-socio-historical zone of active exchange between various forces and ideologies—and therefore, a dynamic space of negotiation,* then we remember that a negotiation of power is inherent to these exchanges. By seating the development of thought within the swirling mass of ideologies that occur in place, each of these thinkers is confronted with an engagement of politics. By immersing themselves, and becoming part of, the exchanges and distribution of power within a place, each thinker develops a politics of place that is reflective of, and informed by, the micro politics of place.

By engaging with place, each thinker is confronted with the dispersal of power through the various forces acting upon or within it. As a zone, or a bracketed site of exchanges, these assorted forces are utterly intertwined within place. As Rebecca Solnit writes “something as tangible as soil is embedded with something as immaterial as ideology.” Consequently, and critically for our understanding of place-produced thought, place and politics are inseparable. This means that the development of place-produced thought is always political, as each instance demonstrates a corollary politics of place. In fact, there is often a mutual dependency between the thinking and politics produced with/in place, as they both stem from the close encounter between thinker and place.
Heidegger’s thinking with/in with the landscape surrounding his mountain hut near Todtnauberg is a good example of how a place-based politics is intertwined with place-produced thought. While Heidegger’s interaction with the landscape was highly determined by his pre-existing thoughts about da-sein and being-in-the-world, his direct experience of the landscape between mountain hut and city house was profound and illuminating. His affinity for the particular place of his thought (especially the valley surrounding the hut), and the politics associated with it, was undoubtedly built upon his immediate material encounters—wandering along its wooded paths, hearing the placid gurgling of the brook which fed his water pump, or the perhaps the brush of the wind on his face as it whipped through the valley. For example, in “Why Do I Stay in The Provinces?” Heidegger writes that “The gravity of mountains and the hardness of their primeval rock, the slow and deliberate growth of the fir-trees, the brilliant, simple splendor of the meadows in bloom, the rush of the mountain brook in the long autumn night, the stern simplicity of the flatlands covered with snow – all of this moves and flows through and penetrates daily existence up there.” In statement such as this, Heidegger’s writing certainly seems to indicate that he was smitten with the materiality of the place.

When I visited Heidegger’s hut at the beginning of a recent summer, with the intentions of exploring its materiality, I found myself struggling prior to arrival with how I should experience such a place. I wanted to remain open and receptive to the direct confrontation of its phenomena—to best simulate Heidegger’s own experience as best as I could. But I also knew that because I had
studied and thought about the place so much prior to my visit, that there was no way that this pre-existing knowledge could be excluded from the encounter. My hope was that I could come a little closer to understanding what the place meant for Heidegger—maybe to get a sense of his own being in the landscape. Perhaps it was the overall peacefulness, accentuated by the sleepy serenity of the midday sun, but I was suddenly struck by a specific sound as my wife and I walked along a path near the cabin. The sound was the clanking of a cowbell and I immediately turned around to find the source of the bell. To my surprise, it came from a cow grazing far away on the other side of the valley. I was startled by how clear and close the sound seemed. By hearing the cowbell, I suddenly became conscious of the presence of the cattle even though they were far removed from my immediate vicinity. Was this a sort of awakening to being-in-the-world that Heidegger wrote so extensively about? I am still not really sure… but I do know that my own physical encounter with the landscape of Heidegger’s thought did provide me with some insight as to why Heidegger was so captivated by that landscape. The natural amphitheater of the valley and the views it affords are certainly picturesque, and the materiality of the encounter—smells, sounds, and textures of the place—seem to stay with you, even after you have made your way off of the mountain.

The materiality of phenomenological encounters however, was not the only force acting upon Heidegger as he developed his place-produced thought. Heidegger’s thinking with/in place was also defined by the discourses and cultural ideas about the place that he brought with him. Some of his discursive baggage
included the ideology of the Black Forest peasant as being pragmatic, hardworking, and unpretentious. While both the material and the discursive conditions of the landscape informed the cultivation of some beautiful thoughts for Heidegger, the cultural ideas about the place and its people likely also contributed to his development of a *blut und boden* (blood and soil) politics. As described in Chapter Two, the landscape of Heidegger’s thought was thoroughly imbued with his beliefs about the Black Forest peasant. Heidegger apparently came to believe that the Black Forest peasants’ mode of living was better than other types in its ability to embody being-in-the-world. Viewed as being undistracted by the vacant charms of technology and urban life, Heidegger considered the Black Forest peasants’ way of life as the best means to understand the nature of being.

The political ideology of *blut und boden* represents the dangerous and destructive side of a place-based politics. As geographer David Harvey makes clear, when a place is believed to be pristinely and positively hermetic, separated, and highly distinct from the Outside, the notion of *blut und boden* offers great potential for breeding fear and xenophobic reactions that can be part of a placed-based politic. The horrific consequences of an ideology based in *blut und boden* were demonstrated in the actions and propaganda of the Nazi party. Unfortunately, Heidegger was also committed to a exclusionary politics of *blut und boden*, and to the belief that the German landscape and ethnicity was superior to all others, a belief that culminated in his involvement with the Nazi party.73 While Heidegger’s politics of place are certainly not agreeable, they emerged in
conjunction with his place-produced thought, which does not carry the same negative elements. This example illustrates that not all place-produced thought is necessarily positive or entirely constructive, and that the same situation can give rise to thoughts and politics that are themselves divergent. Heidegger is a polarizing and conflicting thinker for many scholars because his philosophy mixes the beautiful with the atrocious. The task of untangling Heidegger’s constructive thoughts on being from his disturbing politics (both arguably a product of his place-produced thought), is certainly tricky, complicated, and perhaps, even impossible. In Chapter 3, I revisit Heidegger’s politics and thought to further examine the relationship of one to the other.

What is perhaps most intriguing about the politics of place developed in each instance of place-produced thought, whether those politics be troubling or constructive, is that the experience of power, knowledge, and space at the micro level is translated in some manner to the macro level. This translation provides each thinker with a political ideology that is a component to his or her place-produced thought. In this sense, the politics of place (and we could make this claim about an ethos of place as well) exceeds the specificity of the locus of thought, as it is imprinted into the continued and lasting thought of each thinker.

Rebecca Solnit has made a similar claim about the connection between landscape and politics when she exclaims “those who deny that nature and culture, landscapes and politics, the city and the country are inextricable interfused have undermined that route for us all… this makes politics dreary and
landscape trivial.” Place-produced thought reveals that landscape or place is hardly trivial.

LIMITATIONS OF PLACE-PRODUCED THOUGHT
While we have noted the potentially damaging use of place-produced thought to justify bigotry or xenophobia, another possible detriment to thinking with/in place can be the formation or reification of boundaries. While using place to focus thought typically requires establishing margins, too much emphasis on borders runs the risk of otherizing. Labeled as the “other” to place, and defined by that which is “outside” of place, the “other” can be threatened by the normative power of place to define, delimit, or dissolve. This form of binarism has the potential to jeopardize and contaminate place-produced thought. Otherization through place has often been deployed in establishing radical nationalisms. The fervor of dangerous nationalistic rhetoric has historically been grounded in reactionary and antagonistic politics derived from place-based identities.

“Thought based on place haunts us still,” claims Augé, recalling horrific extremist marginalizations and genocides of the past. David Harvey also worries about how geographies of difference are used to exacerbate the separations among communities. According to Harvey, the notion of place as a hermetically, locally bound identity is in tension with the mobility of global networks and capital. This tension produces anxiety over the potential loss of place and identity. When such a climate of fear and loss permeates thought produced with/in place, it can lead to
destructive politics of exclusion. These limitations of thinking with/in place thought do not mean, however, that the methodology of using place as a focus for thinking is a doomed or futile venture. Just as with other methods of generating thought, place-produced thought is susceptible to the prejudices and fallibilities of human thought. But, we should not throw out the baby with the bath water. As demonstrated through the case studies in the following chapters, place-produced thought can be a valuable means of making innovative indigenous knowledge, and should therefore remain a component of human thought development.

PLACES OF THOUGHT
Because place-produced thought is not a unified field, it should come as no surprise that its articulations use disjunctive methodologies. The scope of the various projects analyzed in the following chapters is, therefore, also intentionally diverse, encompassing different types of places that have engendered distinctive bodies of thought. Ranging from the 19th to the 21st century, encompassing tropes of idealism, isolation, identity, walking, nature, the real, and enlisting methodologies that include Phenomenology, Poststructuralism, and Post-colonialism, these projects were not created by makers intent upon placing them in conversation with one another. However, when they are regarded in that way, we can see that they share a crucial attribute: the production of a localized episteme through a deep entwinement of place, production, and thinker. In each case, indigenous knowledge has been produced by situated contemplation. Each instance of place-produced thought also extends the role of place beyond
everyday experience and the latent influence of place on one’s identity or physiology. In each of these cases, the agency of the thinker and the agency of place emerge as co-producers of knowledge. In the following chapters, I explore five instances, probing the relation between the formation of the subject, the constitution of place, and the performativity of agency. These instances do not encompass a comprehensive taxonomy, but they do comprise significant cases of the close intimacy that place can have with thought. They are offered as a starting point toward a typology of place-produced thought. I have arranged these case studies not only chronologically, but more importantly, on a trajectory from the highly localized and materially engaged to a global de-materialized engagement. This transition will push us to consider broader assessments for the role of the tangible and the articulations of place in place-produced thought.

In Chapter One, I examine Thoreau’s Walden experiment as an important instance of place-produced thought. When Thoreau made the decision to seek “the essence of things” by living in a cabin in the woods outside of Concord, MA, he put into motion a thinking project focused with/in place that would impact his philosophy far beyond the two years of his actual Walden habitation. Through this analysis, Walden and Concord are depicted as the *mise-en-scène* of Thoreau’s place-produced thought, emerging as (some of) the places that have become inexorably connected to his thought. In the examination of Thoreau’s relation to Walden, we begin to better understand how places exercise their agency by resisting the intentions of a thinker. At the same time, the Walden experiment also demonstrates the ontological link that is established in the creation of place-
produced thought, fusing the thinker and place together in an inextricable bond. The chapter will also look at some of the specifics of Thoreau’s overall philosophy and demonstrate how they are connected to the intimate encounter between Thoreau and Walden’s landscape.

Chapter Two explores the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and his relationship with a small cabin in the Black Forest outside the quaint German village of Todtnauberg. Much like Thoreau, Heidegger sought out a place suitable to develop his thinking. Heidegger’s cabin, or die Hütte as Heidegger called it, was built as the optimal place for philosophical meditations on being and existence. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes of existence and its relatedness to place: “it is true that we also say of da-sein that it occupies a place.”

Beginning in 1922, Heidegger did almost all of his writing while staying at the cabin. However, rather than considering only the cabin, I argue that the movement back and forth between the cabin and Heidegger’s Freiburg residence comprises the landscape of his place-produced thought. The slow walks between his home in Freiburg and the cabin are examined in order to glean revelations about the development of Heidegger’s concept of *aletheia*. I show how the movement between modes and places of being produced some critical insights for Heidegger about the continuous cycle of concealment and disclosure that characterizes the nature of being. By thinking with/in place, Heidegger was able to generate a form of indigenous knowledge – marking an important historical instance of place-produced thought.
Chapter Three analyzes the 1973 artistic project *Reality Properties: Fake Estates* by Gordon Matta-Clark. This project served to focus Matta-Clark’s thinking in a place comprised of fifteen small lots of property within New York City. Matta-Clark’s acquisition of several small, unwanted, “unusable,” and often-inaccessible properties will be examined as an attempt to develop a locus of thought. In reaction to the slicing up of the urban landscape by the freeway system during the 1950s and ‘60s, Matta-Clark’s *Fake Estates* project mirrors Foucault’s critique of how ideology and thought “operate upon the entities of our world, to put them in order, divide them in classes, group by name.”\(^78\) This kinship makes sense, as Matta-Clark developed this body of thought as a spatial strategy of resistance against the “regulatory systems that dominated urban environments.”\(^79\)

Chapter Four focuses on the travels of Jean Baudrillard throughout the United States in the 1980s. In these wanderings, Baudrillard established a particular connection to the deserts of the southwest. While he came to America hoping that his experience would present him with support for, and evidence of, his theory of simulacra, the place of the desert triggered a new direction of thought. Thus, through place-produced thought, he crafted a philosophy of the desert – a “place of signs void of all meaning.”\(^80\) As Baudrillard discovered, the exchange between the immanent signs of the real and the cultural signs of the hyperreal was not fixed. Instead, Baudrillard’s engagement with place demonstrated how the lived experience of a material encounter can push back against the cultural assumptions and significations imposed upon place.
Chapter Five investigates the bond between the post-colonial critiques of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and the third space of the Indian collective imagination. Within Spivak’s concerns about the neo-colonialism of capitalism and globalization, as well as the Eurocentricity in the major works of Western philosophy, there is evidence that the third space of the Indian collective imagination was activated as a locus for her thought. I show how the negotiative and transformative power of the Indian collective imagination has informed the very nature of her thought. Of particular sway on Spivak has been the third space’s ability to enable certain subversive disruptions in the hegemonic practices of British rule. In her lecture *Nationalism and the Imagination*, given in Hyderabad, India in 2007, Spivak reveals that by thinking with/in the third space of the Indian collective imagination, she has been able to develop alternative readings of national identity and of the Subaltern to counter those produced in dominant discourses. These place-produced thoughts have furnished Spivak with alternative strategies for nationalist concerns that employ equivalence rather than equality, and oscillate from within and without dominant discourses. Her hope is to generate dialogue that searches for a “critical regionalism with trans-frontier jurisdiction.”

The epilogue circles back to the discussion of a typology of place-produced thought; this includes reaffirming place-produced thought as a distinctive type of encounter with/in place, one that occurs through a unique process of situated cognition that produces indigenous knowledge. Included in this discussion is an overview of key conditions, variations, and processes for
situating place as a focus for thought, leading to the development of radical and innovative thinking. This postscript serves as a call for continued analysis and understanding of the potentialities of place-produced thought. While the danger certainly exists that place-produced thought reinforces politics of exclusion and dangerous forms of othering, the horizon for place-produced thought is open and encourages a continued analytic of the shared ontology of place and production in the development of future projects, and the exciting possibility of emerging local epistemologies.
INTO THE ESSENCE OF THINGS:
HENRY DAVID THOREAU

In tomorrow's world, men [sic] will not need artificial instruments such as jets and space ships. In the world of tomorrow, the new man will 'think' the place he wants to go, then his mind will take him there.

– Sun Ra, 1956

On July 4th, 1845, after walking a mile and a half from the small town of Concord, MA, Thoreau settled into a dilapidated cabin on the shore of Walden Pond—beginning his “Walden experiment.” This two-year engagement with place is an important instance of a thinker developing thought with/in place. Thoreau hints at how the place would come to inform his thinking when he documented his impressions of the first day at Walden: “I had made some progress toward settling in the world. This frame, so slightly clad, was a sort of crystallization around me, and reacted on the builder.”¹ This “reaction” became the source of Thoreau’s place-produced thought. Here and throughout his writings, one can sense that Thoreau concertedly treated the Walden experiment as a method to derive
indigenous knowledge through topographically situated thinking. In order to analyze the germination of Thoreau’s place-produced thought, I will examine certain details of the Walden experiment and demonstrate how Thoreau entered into an active negotiation and interaction with place.

Throughout *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, Thoreau repeatedly refers to the impact that Walden had upon the development of his thoughts. He points to the significance that he expects situatedness will have for his thinking when he proclaims, “I have thought that Walden Pond would be a good place for business.”

While this passage appears in the chapter titled “Economy,” the sort of business to which Thoreau alludes does not involve markets or monetary concerns. Rather, the “business” he envisions undertaking at Walden Pond is “private business with the fewest of obstacles,” that is to say, solitary thinking. Hoping to circumvent some of the inhibitions to thinking and living, such as government regulation and societal conventions, Thoreau turned to the wilderness in order to live and think outside of those systems – to live and think in a newfound freedom. As one progresses through the text, it becomes increasingly apparent that Thoreau meant to use Walden as a place to focus thinking and living.

**LOCATING WALDEN**

Although Thoreau often refers to his place of thought as Walden or Walden Pond, his *think place* actually extended beyond the shoals of the pond, and even beyond
Ralph Waldo Emerson’s fourteen-acre plot upon which he resided. While the bean field and cabin had particular importance within the place of the experiment, all of Walden Pond – indeed, the whole wooded area between the towns of Concord and Lincoln, and the towns themselves can be considered as his *think place*. Thoreau did perceive boundaries to it, even though the overall *think place* contained a multiplicity of places. Some of these were more urban (Concord, Lincoln, and the railroad), symbolizing the constraints of societal convention and legislation. Others were the sites of actual inhabitation by Thoreau – Walden Pond, the cabin, and bean field. Often the movement through the woods between these places served to ratify Thoreau’s perception and ideas about each of them. The transitions between places, as well as the places themselves, cumulatively comprise the landscape of Thoreau’s *think place*.4 Thoreau explains that when one establishes a *think place* with the “most admirable kind of invisible fence,” a locus for thought has been circumscribed – a precondition for the production of situated thought.5

Within *Walden*, Thoreau chronicles his methodology for choosing the place to conduct his thinking/living experiment. In the chapters “Economy” and “Where I Lived, and What I lived For,” Thoreau characterizes the place near Walden Pond as well suited to his sensibilities and practical requirements – it was in the woods, near a water source, and far enough (but not too far) from town. Beyond mere pragmatics, however, Thoreau also perceived that the place possessed qualities he believed essential for a thought-producing endeavor, most notably, the capacity for solitude and the opportunity to live in nature.
One of the most significant attributes of Walden for Thoreau was that it allowed solitude. Granted, throughout the experiment, Thoreau never went more than a week without some form of human contact. This fact, though, does not negate the important role solitude played. Moreover, it reveals that Thoreau himself was at least in part responsible for the constitution of the place he inhabited. Thoreau perceived the place as one where he could regulate interpersonal contact and engagement with society. Thoreau *believed* that the place was solitary, and therefore it *became* a place where he could be alone with his thoughts.

For Thoreau, removal from the village of Concord and from the greater society afforded him physical and ideological distance from constraints on free thought. As Thoreau perceived it, Walden was an open realm, free from societal distraction and outside of dominant cultural formations. Thoreau was not so opposed to society as to promote anarchy, but throughout his life he did remain an advocate of free thought and wary of state control. “No doubt another *may* also think for me,” Thoreau observed, “but it is not therefore desirable that he should do so to the exclusion of my thinking for myself (Thoreau’s italics).”

Although Thoreau appeared to turn his back on society from time to time, he did actually concede that there needed to be a balance between a civilized and wilderness life. The natural world was needed, not to replace civil life, but as a counterpoint to the distractions and delusions of government control and capitalist pursuits. “We need the tonic of wildness,” exclaims Thoreau, or “village life would stagnate.” Even though Thoreau frequently expressed his desire to remove himself from Concord,
he also realized its necessity. For most of the two-year experiment he walked back
to town every few days to replenish supplies or hear the latest news.

Thoreau’s exaggerated emphasis upon solitude is not entirely
contradictory or hypocritical. In fact some scholars, such as Rebecca Solnit, have
claimed that it has been the various interpretations of *Walden* that have framed it
as an exercise in absolute solitude. As Solnit points out, Thoreau himself never
denied his frequent jaunts to town nor the numerous visitors he entertained at his
cabin. For Thoreau, *Walden* *was* solitary. It was the possibility of this solitude (or
perceived solitude) that served as the critical aspect of Walden Pond as a place to
produce thought. In this attraction to solitary thought, Thoreau reveals an affinity
for the thinking in solitude advocated by Socrates. For Socrates, thinking is best
conducted in its (supposed) pure form through an inner dialogue that ideally
occurs in solitude. Similarly, Thoreau believed that the pace, trappings, and fetters
of society “distract our attention from serious things” – such as living and
thinking.

On a practical level, much of Thoreau’s time at Walden was spent taking
care of basic survival: acquiring food, water, and maintaining shelter. In terms of
the intellectual project, Thoreau managed to settle into an existence that he
believed was ripe with clarity and truth. For Thoreau, Walden offered the
opportunity to become entangled with nature – to get into the essence of things in
their natural habitat. Describing this, Thoreau used an analogy drawn from
archaeology. He imagined excavating down through the “mud and slush of
opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance… till we
come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call reality (Thoreau’s italics).” This approach characterized the entire Walden experiment. As a Transcendentalist, Thoreau used his time at Walden Pond to discover what he regarded as a real and truthful existence. By living simply and in direct contact with nature, Thoreau believed he was able to reduce living, thinking, and being to their “lowest terms,” where he could get to their “whole and genuine character.”

CULTURAL INSCRIPTIONS

Thoreau arrived at Walden Pond with many presuppositions, including the elements of American Transcendentalism and Romanticism to which I just alluded. In addition, he presumed that nature is simple and transcendental, as is demonstrated by his call to “let us first be as simple and as well as Nature ourselves… Fix not thy heart on that which is transitory,” or his exhortation that we “spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown to the track by every nutshell and mosquito’s wing that falls on the rails.” The text of Walden is interspersed with references to transcendental laws and truths derived from nature, laws which he had specifically hoped to discern through the raw contact with nature that he experienced while at Walden. Indeed, an entire chapter is entitled “Higher Laws.” There, Thoreau reminds the reader that “Nature is your congratulation, and you have cause momentarily to bless yourself.” In his Journal entry of July 6, 1845 Thoreau writes “I wish to meet the facts of life—the vital facts, which where [sic] the phenomena or actuality the Gods meant to show us, —face to face, And so I came down here.” Statements such as these illustrate
Thoreau’s overarching belief that through contact with nature the potential for Transcendentalist discovery became tangible.

Thoreau also routinely positions nature as a redemptive antidote to the ills of society – such as the frivolous pursuit of excess and gluttony. Thoreau viewed the sublimity of nature as extremely valuable because it facilitates transgression – a jolt to the mind that opens avenues of new intellectual exploration and modes of living. Like Kant, who described how the power of nature could transcend the capacity of human cognition in the experience of the sublime, Thoreau was a believer in the heuristic opportunities offered by an experience of the awesomeness of nature.

These varying concepts of nature reveal what James McIntosh calls Thoreau’s “shifting stance toward nature.” For Thoreau, nature was certainly equated with the real and the true, but Thoreau’s thoughts about the human relationship with nature fluctuates greatly throughout *Walden*. At some moments, Thoreau views humans as an imbedded part of nature, while at other moments, he views humans as cut off and segregated from nature. In Thoreau’s numerous descriptions, nature can entertain a multiplicity of roles: from nature-as-growth, nature-as-companion, nature-as-antidote to nature-as-truth.

Many of Thoreau’s sentiments about place, identity, and nature, reveal ideas that he brought to the Walden experiment. The presence of these pre-existing views in the development of thought with/in *Walden* also indicates the inescapability of cultural discourse. Through his conceptions of things, his
perceptions of place, and the capacities of nature, Thoreau brought an *a priori* cultural consciousness into the place of the experiment. Thoreau’s description of nature also demonstrates the presence of inscribed cultural meanings, as (ironically) when he asserts that nature is “the language which all things and events speak without metaphor.” These types of assertions by Thoreau are evidence of a pre-conceived cultural/discursive signifier which views nature as the source of higher laws and absolutes – and that the bare encounter with nature reveals meaningful truths.

The lens of American Romanticism that Thoreau used to survey the landscape was perhaps the most significant discursive structure that helped to give the place meaning. For Thoreau, these biases often meant that Walden and, more generally, nature, was positioned as other to society, and thus suggested that one’s return to nature would be redemptive and regenerative. Cultural inscriptions do not completely define Thoreau’s place-produced thought, though, for the place itself pushed back against many of these cultural prescriptions, often modifying or negating their influence.

Before moving on to the role of place agency in Thoreau’s place-produced thought, I want to make note of one of the distinct aspects of Thoreau’s process of developing thought with/in Walden. Interestingly, the final manuscript for *Walden* was not actually written *in situ*, but was worked up from Thoreau’s retrospection and the extensive *Journal* he maintained during the actual inhabitation. Thoreau didn’t publish his treatise documenting the Walden experiment until 1854, seven years after he departed from Walden. Even so, it can be argued that Thoreau used
the place of Walden as a locus for thought by *thinking of place* during the completion of the manuscript. As William Rossi notes, “the Journal provided a means of perpetuating, even as it transformed the Walden enterprise and the Walden experiment.”

I would argue, going even further, that Thoreau extended the epistemology of the Walden experiment not solely through reference to the *Journal*, but also by *thinking of place*. This is a crucial distinction because the continuation of place-produced thought would have certainly included the Journal, but by *thinking of place*, Thoreau’s thinking also encompassed latent memories, recollections, and habits of thought that he established while there. This claim means that the *Journal* was simply one portion of the process of developing thought with/in Walden. The continued engagement of place by *thinking of place* allowed for a kind of perpetual performativity and production. Rossi found fault with Thoreau for not strictly using his “Journal as journal.” However, if we consider what he recorded as place-produced thought and the Journal as an intermediary device allowing him to return to Walden by *thinking of place*, then we can understand that the Journal was an instrument enabling Thoreau to have a continued thought producing relationship with/in Walden even after his departure.

**PHYSICS AND METAPHYSICS**

While the Walden experiment was fruitful for Thoreau in terms of writing production, that does not, in itself, indicate that place was (albeit partially)
responsible for producing thought; he may simply have used Walden as a “thinking place” rather than a “think place.” However, we find that when Thoreau became engaged with place, the co-production of thought with/in Walden began to emerge, specifically as the place exerted itself against the preconceptions that Thoreau brought to Walden.

As I noted in the introduction, the agency of place in place-produced thought often pushes back against cultural presumptions and the desires of the thinker. In this manner, Walden emerged as a co-author of the place-produced thought that is ascribed to Thoreau. In his introduction to the Beacon Press edition of *Walden*, Bill McKibben gives us a glimpse of how place can push back when he asserts that “what nature provides is scale and context.” What McKibben seems to refer to is both how the materiality of place can cause a thinker to disregard some aspects of the place while emphasizing others, and how the familiar human scale of things can be replaced. For Thoreau, this meant that he became sensitive and attuned to both the minute and the grandiose qualities of place. By thinking with/in place Thoreau’s attention was directed to the majesty encapsulated in even the most minute creature and corner of Walden. For example, Thoreau writes: “every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me.” Thoreau also gained a new consciousness of the cosmic and large scale, as is evident when he claims that “Walden is a microcosm for the world.” Both of these levels of attentiveness—of living at a scale other than the human—are products of Thoreau’s direct engagement with the materiality of place. By sensing and living with/in these phenomenon, Thoreau
developed a new awareness of their significance in the constitution and meaning of place.

Thoreau’s direct experience of the “life force of nature” also functioned to reaffirm his disdain for the fuss of society in favor of something more raw and spartan – a wilderness existence without the superficial and superfluous accouterments of culture. By penetrating into the essence of things, Thoreau believed he was able to brush aside societal luxuries and understand what is “necessary of life” (Thoreau’s italics). Explaining what he means by “necessary of life,” Thoreau wrote “I mean whatever… has been from the first, or from long use has become, so important to human life that few, if any, whether from savageness, or poverty, or philosophy, ever attempt to do without it.” While Thoreau is referring to the basic necessities of life – food, water, and shelter – he is also alluding to the ideal conditions for free and unrestricted thought and existence.

From early in his residence, Thoreau looked toward the materiality of place as a means to encounter the “necessities of life” and the truth of existence. For example, he noted: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life.” In this sense, place operated as an instrument of revelation, enabling Thoreau’s thinking to develop greater clarity, magnitude, and articulation than it had when he had been in a more “urban” setting. Thoreau’s
connectivity to the “vitals of the globe,” developed as a central tenet of his place-produced thought.  

Thoreau was very cognizant that his encounters with the material phenomena of place and a shifting sense of scale impacted the way his thought was developing. “I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house.” Similar to Bachelard’s claim, Thoreau’s lived experience of place transformed its meaning and the thinking produced with/in it. In a short meditation on the pickerel of Walden Pond, Thoreau comments on how they contributed to his thinking with/in Walden. After witnessing their “dazzling and transcendent beauty,” Thoreau is prompted to write that “They, of course, are Walden all over and all through; are themselves small Waldens.” Just as he regarded Walden as a microcosm of the world, these small fish acted as a microcosm of Walden – displaying the same sort of beautiful simplicity and honesty of existence found throughout the Walden experiment.

As an avid naturalist, Thoreau was drawn to directly encounter the phenomena of Walden. Because of his naturalist concerns, but more importantly because of his entanglement and integration with place, Thoreau’s encounters became intrinsically connected to his philosophy. As Bill McKibben wrote of Thoreau: “His physics informed his metaphysics.” Thoreau believed that knowledge of a place – of its physical attributes and constituents – was matched by knowledge of being; in other words, for both place and thinker, epistemology was informed by materiality. In the process of describing his life at Walden,
Thoreau touches upon the interconnectivity of place, thought, and materiality when he notes that “my instinct tells me that my head is an organ for burrowing… and with it I would mine and burrow my way through these hills [the place of the Walden experiment]. I think that the richest vein is somewhere hereabouts.”

The lived experience and engagement with the flora and fauna of place provided Thoreau with new insights into what he believed to be a more real existence – a free mode of being unclouded by the “shams and delusions” of cultural inscriptions. Thoreau's experience led him to believe that this free mode occurs through becoming ensconced—through settling in, and gaining knowledge of place by “burrowing in” to discover its “richest vein.” As Thoreau proclaims at a particularly reflective moment within the text: “I was as near being resolved into the essence of things as ever I was in my life.”

THINKING WITH/IN WALDEN

One of my main contentions about the Walden experiment is that the newfound freedom, clarity, and interconnectivity that Thoreau discovered in an intimate exchange with place created specific thinking that can be demonstrated to be place-produced. An important tenet of Thoreau’s thinking with/in Walden was the recognition of how human/nonhuman and the inside/outside of place function together as an integrated whole. Oddly enough, it was Thoreau’s vocation as a land surveyor (whose function is typically to define and delineate boundaries) that helped to influence this aspect of his place-produced thought.
Surveying was a meaningful, but ideologically complicated, activity for Thoreau; it allowed him to be outdoors and to legally wander where he pleased, but it also had significant political and ethical implications. As Patrick Chura describes in his text, *Thoreau the Land Surveyor*, the activity of surveying was philosophically important to Thoreau because it emphasized cultural interrelationships. As Chura details, Thoreau was highly informed by the “Coast Survey ideologies” which had become well known through various surveying projects conducted by the federal U.S. Coast Survey initiative throughout the 1840s and 50s.32 “As both an important intellectual pursuit and a specifically American cultural activity,” Chura writes, “the Coast Survey became a focal point for the nation’s ideas about economics and the environment.”33

Using this ideology as his model, Thoreau cultivated a type of surveying that brought several facets of culture into contact with one another. His method of delineating and measuring place became one that united economics, politics, science, philosophy, naturalism, and aesthetics. Even though Thoreau approached surveying quite differently than surveying done strictly for “territory and trade,” he still maintained ambivalence toward it, recognizing that surveying was the first step in the development and exploitation of the landscape. The conflicting feelings that Thoreau had about surveying were present when he began the Walden experiment. I argue, however, that by thinking with/in Walden, Thoreau developed a new understanding of how surveying could be used as a complex method of getting into the essence of things. In addition, he came to believe that it could also function as a form of civil disobedience. A critical understanding of the
function of surveying as a form of political resistance came to Thoreau through the development of place-produced thought.

Chura states that “by any criterion except economic, Henry Thoreau’s surveying career began at Walden.” When Thoreau completed a survey of Walden Pond in 1846, it was done so for his own purposes in hopes that he would increase his acumen about Walden (Fig.1). “To passively experience a world like Walden is one thing,” contends Chura, “to *survey* it is another (Chura’s italics).”

![Figure 1. Henry David Thoreau. *Walden Pond, manuscript survey (ink on paper)*, 1846. No. 133a in CFPL Thoreau survey collection. Image courtesy of the Concord Free Public Library.](image)

While the survey of Walden Pond gave Thoreau a greater ability to get “into the essence of things” and dig below the surface encounter to get at the transcendental knowledge that he thought Walden held, perhaps more importantly, it also provided him insight as to how surveying could be a transgressive act of civil disobedience; a constructive means of un-siting and reclaiming the landscape. The conceptualization of surveying in this capacity was a direct product of Thoreau’s
place-produced thought and became an important means of justifying his later surveying activities.

Chura does well to account how the survey of Walden Pond is the first instance in which Thoreau uses surveying subversively to create an alternative representation of a place. Chura points out how Thoreau’s pond survey can be read as iconoclastic more by its purposeful absences than anything else. “The omission of the town border is a meaningful silence,” claims Chura, as the survey presents a place with “no property lines and no discernible personal or civic claims.”

36 The only things identified are either natural (hills, trees) or personally meaningful to Thoreau’s encounter with Walden (his cabin, railroad). Thoreau intentionally excludes the majority of the “useful” information contained in a conventional survey. As Chura reports, Thoreau’s survey “seems to go out of its way to offer nothing of conventionally economic or political value to anyone.”

37 In a sense, Thoreau re-constructed the place in manner that erased previous claims and impositions and instead tried to emphasize the natural phenomena and agency of place. As an outcome of place produced-thought, “the story told by the Walden map is thus a forcefully iconoclastic narrative” co-authored by thinker and place.

38 Thoreau’s understanding of surveying developed through thinking with/in place became imprinted upon his entire body of thought and his profession as a surveyor. In many ways, the appreciation of surveying developed with/in Walden was likely how Thoreau came to terms with and justified his later surveying career. For Thoreau, surveying was a means of being-in-common with the world.
while also making political and ethical statements. Because Thoreau utilized surveying as a means of knowing the landscape and finding truth, he viewed his methodology of surveying as crucially distinctive from that of conventional surveying for financial gain. In one of Thoreau’s last essays, “Life Without Principle,” he extensively discusses this critical difference stating: “As for my own business, even that kind of surveying which I could do with most satisfaction my employers do not want. They would prefer that I should do my work coarsely and not too well, ay, not well enough. When I observe that there are different ways of surveying, my employer commonly asks which will give him the most land, not which is most correct.”

Surveying emerged as a central component of Thoreau’s thinking with/in Walden, as it provided Thoreau not only with an identity as a surveyor that personified the “vital personae of philosopher and natural historian,” but also became a means to engage place in a direct and material fashion in order to produce situated localized knowledge.

AN INTEGRATED WHOLE

By surveying and thinking with/in Walden, Thoreau became much more attuned to the ways that seemingly divided locations, entities, and philosophies touch upon one another in profound and potent exchanges. There are several moments throughout Thoreau’s encounter with Walden in which the boundaries and distinctions between things become fuzzy or dissolved. For example, when observing the small pickerel caught by fisherman, Thoreau remarks how they are
Walden, or small “Waldenses” and serve as an embodiment of the place through which a critical conflation of location and animal entity occurs.

The deconstruction or re-territorialization of boundaries was an important aspect of Thoreau’s experience and of his place-produced thought, and it is perhaps best illustrated by the confusion he recounts after gazing into the glassy surface of the pond: “In such transparent and seemingly bottomless water, reflecting the clouds, I seemed to be floating through the air as in a balloon, and their [perch] swimming impressed me as a kind of flight or hovering, as if they were a compact flock of birds passing just beneath my level.” 41 This incident was far more than just directional confusion for Thoreau, as it made apparent how easily the perception of something can slip and transform into something else entirely. The loosening of seemingly rigid boundaries or distinctions was significant because it demonstrated the ways that discrete entities and ideas cross into one another.

Place-produced thought often drastically modifies the existing boundaries of a place, bringing a new awareness to the relationship of an existing place with other places, reassessing their alignment, overlay, and interdependence. The thinking developed with/in Walden revealed to Thoreau how individual entities are integrated within a greater system or collective. This revelation shares an ontological structure with the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. “As my living present opens upon a past,” writes Merleau-Ponty, “which I nevertheless am no longer living through, and on a future which I do not yet live, and perhaps never shall, it can also open on to temporalities outside my living experience and
acquire a social horizon, with the result that my world is expanded to the dimensions of that collective history which my private existence takes up and carries forward.”

In many ways Thoreau was a phenomenologist, and it was through place-produced thought that he began to recognize that being occurs in place and is highly determined by place. “We are never alone,” wrote Thoreau, in a statement that has periphrastic echoes of Heidegger’s phenomenological “being-in-the-world.” In his musings about solitude, Thoreau demonstrates his connections to the landscape as an integrated whole. “I have a great deal of company in my house; especially when nobody calls… Let me suggest a few comparisons, that some one may convey an idea of my situation. I am no more lonely than the loon in the pond that laughs so loud, or than Walden Pond itself… I am no more lonely than a single mullein or dandelion in a pasture, or a bean leaf, or sorrel, or horse-fly, or a humble-bee.” Initially, this revelation by Thoreau may seem inconsistent with the solitude that Thoreau sought and found at Walden. However, the *type* of solitude that Thoreau sought was not one that cut him off from any form of contact with others, but rather was solitude from imposed cultural restrictions and limitations. He wanted to exercise his individual freedoms while also deepening his integration with the landscape. Ironically, it was Thoreau’s attempt to be removed from society that led to the place-produced thinking, which helped to reify his indelible and crucial relation to the collectively networked organization of society.
Thoreau’s understanding of the relation of the individual to the collective environment of his habitation also reflects Nancy’s correspondence between the individual and the community. For example, Thoreau states in *Walden* that “to cooperate, in the highest as well as the lowest sense, means *to get our living together* (Thoreau’s italics).”⁴⁵ Here, Thoreau emphasizes the shared ontological status of cooperation. He does not simply mean we need to get along together. Instead, he insists upon recognizing the fundamental web of interactions that form the basis of existence. Compare this notion to Nancy’s assertion that “one cannot make the world with simple atoms… There has to be an inclination or an inclining from one toward the other, of one by the other, from one to the other. Community is at least the *clinamen* of the individual… that opens up its being-in-common (Nancy’s italics).”⁴⁶

As Thoreau increasingly became aware of these vital connections, he realized that conflicts, social issues, and cultural activities – even those seemingly far removed from his localized existence – necessarily demanded his attention and response. As part of this greater whole, Thoreau had no choice but to take action in response to the Mexican-American war, abolitionism, western expansion, and the hanging of local reformist John Brown. For Thoreau, his own existence was connected to these issues whether he wanted it to be or not, and therefore they demanded he act as an individual within the collective. Just as the small pickerel were “themselves small Waldens,” Thoreau’s own small existence was emblematic of the entire nation, or even all of humanity.
Thoreau’s place-produced thoughts on existence as an integrated whole, helped to solidify the distinction of humans who live in separation, as if they are segregated from the collective, from those who live as part of an integrated whole. This difference enabled Thoreau to comprehend a more complex relationship between humans and their environments than the commonplace divide of city/country. Thoreau grew to suspect that the ills of society were not an inherent part of society, but rather were the product of humans living as separate entities. For Thoreau, waste, excess, and superfluous pursuits all stemmed from individualized greed and desires. In this lengthy passage, for example, Thoreau compares the problems of the nation to the problems of the segregated individual – both living as though disconnected, blindly striving for the next innovation rather than living more simply and as a community:

Our life is like a German confederacy, made up of petty states, with its boundary forever fluctuating, so that even a German cannot tell you how it is bounded at any moment. The nation itself, with all its so called internal improvements, which, by the way, are all external and superficial, is just such an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim, as the million households in the land; and the only cure for it as for them is in rigid economy, a stern and more Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose. It lives too fast. Men think that it is essential that the Nation have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles and hour… But if we stay at home and mind our business, who will want railroads? We do not ride on the railroad; the railroad rides upon us. 47

For Thoreau, living as separate entities gets us off track from a productive existence. This concept of being-in-common with the world surfaced as a vital aspect of Thoreau’s place-produced thought, one that was considerably less
evident in his earlier work. Before the Walden experiment, Thoreau often wrote about the human connection with nature in different terms. For example, in one of his earliest essays, *Aulus Persius Flaccus*, eponymously titled after the Roman poet, Thoreau writes that “the divinest poem, or the life of a great man, is the severest satire; as impersonal as nature herself, and like the sighs of her winds in the woods, which convey ever a slight reproof to the hearer.” 48 Another mention of nature can be found in the essay, *A Walk to Wachusett*, in which Thoreau comments that “all nature lay passive, to be viewed and travelled.” 49 While these examples demonstrate Thoreau’s interest in the natural world, I contend that it was not until his intimate engagement with Walden, having experienced firsthand the agency of place, as well as the epistemological and ontological reciprocations with/in place, that Thoreau emerged with a new appreciation of how the individual connects with the world. For example, Thoreau writes in *Walden* that “a lake is the landscape’s most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth’s eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature.” 50 Through the Walden experiment, Thoreau deepened his perception of the ways that humans are interrelated with nature. It is with/in Walden that he identifies “himself with wild nature” 51 and comes to the realization that “I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself.” 52

**THINKING BEYOND WALDEN**

While Thoreau’s thinking with/in Walden produced a significant body of indigenous knowledge, Thoreau was also able to extend and apply many of the
ideas cultivated there throughout the rest of his life. Many of these thoughts informed Thoreau’s philosophy long after the physical encounter with Walden had ended. “Perhaps I can never find so good a setting for my thoughts,” writes Thoreau in his Journal, “as I shall thus have taken them out of.”53 This statement speaks to the impact that Walden had on the development of his thought, but I argue that it also suggests that Thoreau took the indigenous knowledge cultivated at Walden and carried it forward as a part of his being.

Rebecca Solnit has made a similar claim about the derivation of Thoreau’s politics. She does not allege that his political leanings were directly manifested through place-produced thought in the same manner that I do, but she does assert that his indigenous encounters helped to affirm his wider views on national political debates and issues. That she should think so is not a great surprise, for Solnit is resolute in asserting that landscapes are political and that encounters within landscapes help to shape and inform individual politics.

In Thoreau’s case, Solnit points to his experience of picking and eating huckleberries as one filled with political implications. In Solnit’s estimation, Thoreau’s gathering and enjoyment of a huckleberry feast was a political metaphor for freedom. Upon being released from a night spent in jail for not paying his taxes (Thoreau’s method of protesting the Mexican-American war), Thoreau’s first act was to walk two miles to a huckleberry patch where he could pick and enjoy the berries as he pleased. Solnit argues that this was deliberate: “If he went to jail to demonstrate his commitment to the freedom of others, he went to the berries to exercise his own recovered freedom, the liberty to do whatever he
wished—and the evidence in all his writing is that he very often wished to pick berries.”

Thoreau himself alludes to how collecting wild berries can be a means of disrupting capitalism and acting out one’s own personal freedom. Thoreau wrote in “Resistance to Civil Government” that upon his release from incarceration, he was soon “in the midst of a huckleberry field, on one of our highest hills, two miles off; and then the State was nowhere to be seen.” The equivalence of wild fruit with freedom, and the activities of collecting and consuming wild fruit became an important political fusion that influenced Thoreau throughout the rest of his life. In Wild Fruits, one of Thoreau’s last texts to be written, he notes of black huckleberries that “this crop grows wild all over the country—wholesome, bountiful, and free, a real ambrosia. And yet men, the foolish demons that they are, devote themselves to the culture of tobacco, inventing slavery and a thousand other curses for that purpose.” The critical connection between wild berries and free existence is even more explicit when Thoreau reminisces about “a sense of freedom and spirit of adventure I used to take my way across the fields with my pail [for gathering fruit].”

For Thoreau, as for other makers of place-produced thought, local political events were often translated into personal political viewpoints. In Thoreau’s case, thinking produced with/in place furthered his political strategies of resistance. Through the newfound freedom that he discovered by thinking with/in place, Thoreau solidified a firm belief in active resistance against regulatory systems that restricted individual personal freedoms – leading to ideas, writings, and
actions espousing civil disobedience. For example, Thoreau recorded these thoughts in his *Journal* less than a year into his stay at Walden: “In my short experience of human life I have found that the outward obstacles which stood in my way were not living men—but dead institutions.”

Perhaps the most important thing that the Walden experiment taught Thoreau was the *preciousness and value* of the individual being able to act and think for his or herself. Near the end of *Walden*, as Thoreau ruminates on the lessons learned through thinking with/in place, he urges others to seek out similar experiences in which “new universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within.” In doing so, Thoreau recognizes that this may need to be done in opposition to civil government. There is a direct link between the place-produced thought with/in Walden and the political ideology of resistance that Thoreau adamantly defended for the rest of his life. Indeed, this connection is made even more matter-of-fact because Thoreau wrote his original essay, “Resistance to Civil Government” *during* the Walden experiment after spending the night in jail for not having paid his taxes.

Viewing Thoreau’s night in jail as *part of* his Walden experience is key to recognizing the connection between his politics and place-produced thought. For Thoreau, the night in jail served to further emphasize the freedom of living in the woods, as well as the inhibitions that the state can impose upon those freedoms. Upon emerging from prison Thoreau scanned the landscape and wrote about his newfound consciousness – “I saw yet more distinctly the State in which I lived.”

Prior to his inhabitation of Walden, Thoreau writes pejoratively of the state on
several occasions. In “Herald to Freedom,” Thoreau describes the abolitionist Nathaniel P. Rodgers “not as scientific explorer under government, but as a Yankee sealer rather, who makes those unexplored continents his harbors in which to refit for more adventurous cruises. He was a fund of news and freshness in himself (my italics).”61 In another essay, “Wendell Phillips Before the Concord Lyceum,” he writes of the “timidity and selfishness of the state.”62 In these examples, Thoreau displays an inkling of the juxtaposition between individual freedoms and the control of the state that would be fully realized with/in Walden.

While his sentiments preceding the Walden encounter demonstrate Thoreau’s disdain for the state, I contend that it was not until the thinking developed with/in Walden that Thoreau conceived of a particular type of living and thinking as a form of resistance to the state. I argue that the experience of the night in jail cannot stand alone as the source of this thinking because it was the relation between imprisonment by the state and the freedom experienced at Walden (epitomized by eating wild berries) that prompted Thoreau to set upon a course of active political resistance. Living truthfully, freely, and near to the “vitals of the globe” with/in place became more meaningful after the night in jail because its political implications were magnified. Thoreau realized that his frugal and simple existence was not acceptable according to the state. “If I will not fight—if I will not pray—if I will not be taxed—if I will not bury the unsettled prairie—my neighbor will still tolerate me and sometimes even sustains me—but not the state.”63
After the night in jail, Thoreau increasingly began to understand how the entire Walden experiment could be considered a form of civil disobedience. In many ways, Thoreau’s existence at Walden was antithetical to the program of the state, and because of its independence from the state, it could be measured both as a literal and a symbolic challenge to state control. As Thoreau recorded in his *Journal* shortly after the night in prison: “When I have indulged a poets dream of a terrestrial paradise I have not foreseen that any Cossack or Chipeway (sic)—would disturb it—but some monster institution would swallow it— The only highway man I ever met was the state itself.”

The influence of place-produced thought on Thoreau’s politics is evident when we compare Thoreau’s closing remarks in *Walden* (stated above), and the beginning statements of the “Resistance” essay written while living at Walden: “It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume, is to do at any time what I think right.” For Thoreau, it was more important to do what one felt was right than follow the law, meaning that each individual could establish his or her own laws. Recall that Thoreau’s assertion is derived not only from the sense of freedom that he found with/in Walden but also the interconnectivity that he found there. For Thoreau, the government and its laws often promoted greed, personal gain and selfishness. Therefore, to do what is right in spite of the law could be a means to counteract self-interest and more consciously exist as part of a collective whole. Thoreau did not pay his taxes as a form of protest against the actions of the government because he realized that what happens “there” affects the “here.”
Living in nature at Walden gave Thoreau a sense of being able to act as one wished, rather than being forced into harmful and wasteful action. This sense of freedom and personal responsibility toward the integrated whole became a permanent mark not only on Thoreau’s political ideology, but on his being as well.

TOPOPHILIA

One of the other significant aspects of Thoreau’s thought developed with/in Walden was his ethos of place. “What I have observed of the pond,” writes Thoreau “is no less true in ethics.” Thoreau is not projecting human morality into nature here, but rather is constructing a metaphysical concept based upon observation of the physical world through the eyes of a surveyor. Thoreau’s physics to metaphysics surveyor-like analogy implies that just as one can obtain a measure of water depth in a cove by studying the “outlines of its surface and the character of its shores,” one can also “draw lines through the length and breadth of the aggregate of a man’s particular daily behaviors and waves of life into his coves and inlets, and where they intersect will be the height and depth of his character.”

This type of translation from physics to metaphysics was particularly significant for Thoreau because it meant that each unique place was an opportunity for learning – each distinctive place offered an equally exclusive piece of knowledge. I argue that this realization was developed by thinking
with/in Walden, and was the fire of his passion as a zealous topophiliac. Thoreau’s overall ethos of place – his ethical outlook developed from place-produced thought – can be described as a profound care for place, or what Lucy Lippard was later to refer to as a “place ethic.” Lippard defines this term as “a respect for a place that is rooted more deeply than an aesthetic version of the ‘tourist gaze’ provided by imported artists whose real concerns lie elsewhere or back in their studios.” In Thoreau’s case however, I would modify Lippard’s definition to also include a respect rooted in the profound realization of the agency of place.

Through his 26-month settlement with/in Walden, Thoreau appears to have developed a spiritual bond with place. Through the development of place-produced thought, Thoreau cultivated a greater interest in place and its “connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there.” This Transcendentalist connection to the vitality and idiosyncrasies of place became an integral part of Thoreau’s future activities and philosophy. Many of his projects that followed the Walden experiment were framed around an engagement with, and love of, a specific place. Thoreau’s books *The Maine Woods* and *Cape Cod* are clear examples of his continued exploration of the intricacies of place. In addition, his “excursion” series, including *A Yankee in Canada* and *A Walk to Wachusett*, also indicate his love of place. In many ways Thoreau wanted to achieve what Estella Conwill Majozo describes as “map[ping] the terrain of the outside world through confrontation with the inner territory of the soul.”
Thoreau’s topophilia was due partly to his understanding of individual places as distinct confluences of human and non-human traces functioning in dialogue with one another, but also because of their special ability to produce indigenous epistemologies. Because of Thoreau’s awareness of the power of place, which became more substantial during the Walden experiment, he also developed a strong conservation ethic. Thoreau demonstrates his conservationist tendencies when he writes: “I should be glad if all the meadows on the earth were left in a wild state.”72 As James McIntosh suggests, when “we read Walden something similar happens to us. Our own feeling for nature deepens as we register facts, savor descriptions, share Thoreau’s many perspectives, and appreciate one valuable moment after another” – which are all facets of his place-produced thought.73 Thoreau himself expresses a direct conservationist concern in his chapter “The Ponds.” “Since I left those shores the woodchoppers have even further laid them waste,” laments Thoreau, “and now for many a year there will be no more rambling through the aisles of the wood.”74

Through his place-produced thought, Thoreau developed a greater appreciation for “placeness.” This type of appreciation and care prompted Thoreau to worry about Walden and other natural places losing their unique character – whether through the capitalist pursuits of urban expansion and railway construction or by the conquest, mapping, and taxonomy of space. Through his development of a place ethic, Thoreau has become widely recognized as an important figure in the American Conservationist movement. Organizations such as the Walden Woods project and the Thoreau Institute have been formed to
continue Thoreau’s “ethic of environmental stewardship and social responsibility.”

I contend that this ethic of respect and care for place had its greatest development in the thinking produced with/in Walden, because it was through that experience that Thoreau gained a greater insight into the agency of place. There is a telling shift towards the particularities of place—of how a place pushes back—and its role in the co-production of knowledge. Through his encounter with Walden, Thoreau seems to recognize nature and place not just as a means to experience a “sense of greater space and freedom,” but as an independent agent. In his Journal, Thoreau writes, “What is this pond a-doing? I must know a little more.” The phrasing that Thoreau repeatedly uses to describe or discuss Walden addresses the place as a personification or animation of Walden as its own entity without becoming anthropomorphized. “Of all the characters I have known,” writes Thoreau, “perhaps Walden wears best, and best preserves its purity. Many men have been likened to it, but few deserve that honor.” It seems as Thoreau is speaking to a dear old friend rather than a place when he looks into its “face” and asks – “Walden, is it you?”

The engagement with/in Walden in order to produce thought was deeply moving for Thoreau and served to confirm the important role of place and nature not only in a healthy, simple, and truthful human existence, but also in the vital co-development of new thought. These feelings and ethos of place agency is something that Thoreau continued to carry with him, as they became intimately
inscribed into his production of thought, and even more so into his very mode of being.

ONTLOGICAL SHIFTS
By burrowing in and thinking with/in place, Thoreau altered not only his own being, but also that of Walden. Both place and thinker became etched into the other’s being, creating an ontological and epistemological bond. Thoreau’s place-produced thought left a tenable mark on the place of the Walden experiment so haunting that the ontology of Walden has undergone lasting modification. The online Massachusetts Tourism Information Guide declares that because Thoreau “immortalized the area in his book, one result has been that it is now a tourist attraction.” During Thoreau’s lifetime, the pond did not receive many visitors. In the summer, small groups of swimmers would seek respite from the summer heat. In the winter, the pond would be regularly harvested as a water source, as blocks of ice were hauled back to Concord. Today, in contrast, Walden Pond is a National Historic Landmark and a state reservation (Figs. 2 and 3).

By 1935, some 485,000 people visited the Pond each year with Sunday crowds often numbering 25,000. Today, one can still visit Walden Pond and take an interpretive guided walk with a stop off at a replica of Thoreau’s cabin – albeit one not located at the original site (Fig. 4). One can also visit the gift shop or bookstore, though none of this will be possible until you pay your five-dollar
Figure 2. Entrance sign for Walden Pond, March 2008
Image courtesy of Ron Cogswell

Figure 3. The park has a limit of 1000 visitors at a time, and once that limit is reached (approx. 330 cars in the gated parking lot), no more cars are allowed in.
Image courtesy of watrlily.blogspot.com.
entry fee at the gates. Most notably, the ability to visit Walden is restricted and controlled. The park has a “people capacity” of 1000 visitors and once this limit is reached, the entrance to the park is closed. These changes to the place of the Walden experiment are not detailed here as a reflection on the corruption of commercialization or commodification that the place has witnessed, but rather as a means to indicate the gravity of the alterations to the ontology of Walden.

The thought produced with/in Walden has transformed it for many into a site of creative and spiritual inspiration. People still travel to Walden in search of inspiration. The place of Walden has become a signifier for the thinking and experience Thoreau once had there. Thoreau’s passing intimacy has left an unretractable social mark that includes the cult of nature, in which nature is endowed with a connection to “reality,” the transcendental, and the spiritual. Walden’s ontology has also taken on socio-historical importance due to the thinking that Thoreau produced there. The place is now often referred to as the “birthplace of the conservation movement.” Today, the ontology of Walden is
also explicitly discursive, full of signage and didactics, directing visitor’s views, attention, and movement. Ironically, the sort of societal regulation that Thoreau was hoping to escape now mediates the Walden landscape.

Just as the thinker transforms place and leaves marks upon it by developing place-produced thought, the place also pushes back on the thinker, modifying his or her perceptions, thoughts, and being. The agency and subjectivity of both place and thinker are central in the development of place-produced thought because thinking occurs through a dialogical negotiation that reworks the nature of both their beings. This distinction is a significant criterion in the development of place-produced thought because it entails a relationship that is more *think place* than *thinking place*. Thoreau’s Walden experiment is an important instance of place-produced thought because it demonstrates this distinction in the co-production of thought between thinker and place. Thoreau’s encounter with Walden included the recognition of the agency of place as an active force, rather than relating to place as a utility. For Thoreau, Walden was far more than a setting or backdrop to act out his own desires; Walden was a sovereign entity that he became intimately immersed with/in.

Although Thoreau’s encounter with Walden constitutes a celebrated instance of place-produced thought, it is also a fairly straightforward and widely accepted example of a thinker cultivating a remarkable correspondence with place. In the following chapters, other instance of place-produced thought will be explored that are not as readily interpreted as an occasion in which thinking has inextricably and intimately been made with/in place. Many of these complicate
and challenge some of the notions of place-produced thought that we have
described and considered including the materiality of an encounter, definitions of
place, methods of engaging place, how place pushes back, the problematics of
exclusion and otherizing, and even the limitations and pernicious hazards of
creating place-produced thought.
BEING A LANDSCAPE: MARTIN HEIDEGGER

Not where man hides himself troglodyte-fashion in caves, eternally individual and never finding humanity outside himself; nor where he moves nomadically in great hordes, eternally plural and never finding humanity inside himself; only where he dwells quietly in his own hut, communing with himself and, as soon as he issues from it, with the whole race – only then will her [nature’s] lovely bud unfold.

– Friedrich Schiller

Growing up in the shadowy fingers and rolling foothills of the eastern side of the Rocky Mountains, in a family that prized outdoor activities, I quickly developed an affection for, and fascination with, less urbanized spaces. I have memories of sitting through lessons in middle school while I dreamt of being in a place in nature outside of the city. One of my favorite daydream spots was a particular parcel of pasture that my grandparents owned. It was a wide-open space on the edge of the Red Deer River valley infested with prairie scrub and dotted with evergreens. The only sounds one heard out there were like oatmeal – subtle and robust.
Much of my experience of this place centered around walking. From my grandparents’ farmhouse, we would head east past the dusty corrals and the sleeping farm machinery until the ocean of grass swallowed us up. The journey to that field felt like a transformation as the physical signs of civilization dissolved in my peripheral vision. The skin of urbanity was slowly sloughed off, layer by layer, until I had a feeling that I was surrounded by nature. It was a place that seemed both wild and lonely, where you could yell as loudly as you wanted and no one would care – save for a small killdeer darting from her nest. Walking was an integral part of the experience that provided a literal and metaphorical shift. With these types of experiences and background in tow, whenever I encounter nature writing that is excessively Romanticized, a piece of me fathoms the enticement. I understand the allure; I understand the engrossing nostalgia, but I also acknowledge that those places have meanings and mnemonic qualities that have been imposed upon them.

It is hard to deny the attraction of the natural world – the magnetism of a place that has undergone relatively limited transformation by a human hand, a seduction of the sort that E.O. Wilson has termed biophilia. Kant expressed a sort of biophilia in his belief that nature was the greatest source of beauty and of the sublime, far exceeding anything created by the poet or artist. Specifically, Kant claimed, “nature is thus sublime in those of its appearances… of which brings with them the idea of its infinity… [and furthermore] the inadequacy of even the greatest effort of our imagination.”¹ According to Kant, in the sublime moment, nature provides something exceeding the cognitive capabilities of the human
mind. Perhaps this is the source of its appeal, as countless writers, poets, visual artists, and musicians have maintained a special inclination toward the natural world. Paul Cézanne, for example, was one of the first modern painters to break from the Renaissance tradition of depicting illusionistic space and faithfully imitating nature. But in rejecting the “faithful imitation of nature,” he by no means rejected nature itself. Instead, he decreed “I must always come back to this: painters must devote themselves entirely to the study of nature and try to produce pictures which will be an education.” In his attempt to move aesthetics beyond the quest for accurate mimesis of the natural world, Cezanne still looked to the natural world for guidance. It was through the study of nature that he discovered a new method of looking and of representation that enabled him to break from traditions of mimetic rendering.

Martin Heidegger also felt the magnetism of a soft breeze, the charming appeal of a serenading songbird, and the awesome power of a developing windstorm on the horizon. For Heidegger, though, building a humble cabin in the Black Forest served as far more than just a nature lover’s refuge or a place for a weekend respite. Instead, it served as a counterpoint to his home and existence in Freiburg. Indeed, I contend that this counterpointing was crucial in Heidegger’s development of the concept of aletheia. As an unveiling, opening, and disclosure, aletheia is used by Heidegger to describe how being is revealed in time. He understood the process of aletheia as a continuous cycle of uncovering and concealing of being, as a movement between states of being – the same sort of flux Heidegger himself experienced in the passage from one of his dwellings to
the other through the activity of walking. This chapter will focus on Heidegger’s concept of *aletheia* – one small part of his contribution to philosophy, but one that was crucial to his exegesis of being. I contend that the transition from city home to mountain cabin, particularly through the activity of walking, provided Heidegger with an experiential understanding of *aletheia*, one that clarified its significance. The place of Heidegger’s thought has most often been posited as his mountain cabin and while this place serves as a critical component, the complete landscape of his thought actually encompassed the cabin, the city home, and the transition between them.

**DIE HÜTTE**

The process of the cabin’s construction was conceived by Heidegger’s wife Elfride, who drew an initial sketch based upon a cabin owned by the Women Student Union of the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg. The land where it would be sited was purchased from a local farmer and the dwelling was completed in 1922. During that summer, on August 9th, Heidegger and his family moved in. The cabin lies approximately one kilometer (approximately one thousand yards) from Todtnauberg, and is literally nestled in the hillside, with its northerly side half buried in the valley wall. The position of the cabin intentionally provides majestic views of the valley sprawled below; the tips of Alps are visible in the expanse to the south.
The cabin itself (Heidegger refers to it as *die Hütte*) was unassuming and practical. The entire footprint measures a mere four hundred sixty square feet and was divided into four equally sized rooms. In his text about the cabin, *Heidegger’s Hut*, Adam Sharr provides a lush architectural reading of the dwelling, including a description of its construction:

The hut is primarily a timber-framed structure. Details of its construction suggest that it was made and assembled using hand tools. Walls are framed using a series of vertical studs, braced with horizontal members and filled with rubble. Some pockets in this frame are fitted with window frames. Externally, walls are clad with timber shingles in equal courses, lapped in two directions. Internally, walls are lined with vertical planks, finished and treated, of approximately equal size and spacing.4

Through this description and extant images of the cabin (Figs.1 & 2), we can deduce that the cabin was plain, and free from superfluous luxury or ornamentation. The interior was austere, minimally stocked and fairly empty – even Heidegger’s study area was mostly free of books as he kept the bulk of his library in Freiburg (Fig.3).

From 1923 until 1928 Heidegger was chair of philosophy at Marburg University. Before this stint, however, and then again after Edmund Husserl’s retirement in 1928, Heidegger taught at the Albert-Ludwig University of Freiburg, which is only a short journey from the cabin. Thus, Heidegger was able to frequent the cabin often – reading, writing, and thinking there for over fifty years. This cabin was the site where he developed many of his lectures, essays, and texts.
Figure 1. Heidegger’s Hut, outside Todtnauberg, Germany.

Figure 2. Exterior of Heidegger’s Hut.
Even though his wife oversaw the placement, orientation, and design of the cabin, these specifications were strictly determined by Heidegger’s intentions for the cabin. What he sought was a place of his own, a place where he could locate and generate thoughts about being and existence. His hope was that through reciprocal cultivation with the landscape, his thinking would become ensconced in place, rooted in “its hourly changes, day and night, in the great comings and goings of the seasons.”

Heidegger’s desire to stand face to face with the bare essence of existence resonates with Thoreau’s description of his aims for the Walden experiment. “It would be some advantage to live a primitive and frontier life…” declared Thoreau, “if only to learn what are the gross necessaries of life.”

The lack of modern amenities (electricity was not installed until nine years after the original construction) gave Heidegger a feeling of closeness to the elements. For both Thoreau and Heidegger, the quest to be near the essence of nature and existence became tied to the aspiration of establishing a place to think.
on these concepts – a location to center and engender a new body of thought gleaned through the relation with/in place.

As a place for the focus of thought, not just for reading and writing, the cabin also served Heidegger as a place for being. This distinction was imperative for Heidegger because within the development of his philosophy, activities such as dwelling, building, being, and thinking are folded into one another. By situating and focusing thought, Heidegger expected to garner new insights about existence and the nature of being. The phrase “work-world,” especially in terms of describing his cabin, had important implications for Heidegger. By conjoining the two terms, he illustrated their status as mediating and co-creating one another. Heidegger is stressing that the place of work (what we are calling the place of thought) is inseparable from the work itself. Moreover, the phrase “work-world” contains hyphenation, an important mode of combining terms that recurs frequently in Heidegger’s lexicon. Placing a hyphen between two words seems such a simple gesture. Yet, the amalgamation of two entities such as work and world, notions that had traditionally been kept separate in metaphysics, proved to be a profound strategy that permeated the reaches of Heidegger’s philosophy. Perhaps most famously, his notion of “da-sein” renders coming to being as inseparable from the place in which it exists. Through situated thinking with/in place, Heidegger’s affirmed his belief that being is intimately connected to place, as expressed in his celebrated dictum on the nature of being: being-in-the-world.

This glimpse into Heidegger’s imbrication of place with being does not afford the entire picture of the process by which he developed and delineated his
think place. Some critical questions still to ask include: How did Heidegger choose the place to locate and focus his thinking? What led him to this particular spot as opposed to all others? The answer to these questions reveals that the motivation and attraction towards the parcel of land and the cabin above Todtnauberg were formed through a series of complex and interwoven factors.

The first of Heidegger’s considerations in locating a place for thought was practicality. After constructing the hut, other than the five years spent teaching in Marburg, Heidegger lived on his property in Freiburg until the time of his death in 1976. The close proximity of the cabin made it easily accessible and readily available. Weather permitting, Heidegger often hiked the thirty-one kilometers (approximately nineteen miles) from his home in Freiburg to the cabin. And yet, despite this literal proximity, the cabin was remote enough to be removed from town, surrounded by the natural world. The environment around the cabin was just as important as the cabin itself because, as a passionate hiker, Heidegger frequently explored the local topography through long walks. The forest’s undulations and remoteness were deeply connected to the identity and constitution of his work-world and place for thinking.

Heidegger’s own biography needs to be considered as an influence on the decision about where to locate his place of thought. Born in the town of Messkirch near the edge of the Black Forest, Heidegger’s affection for the countryside of his youth persisted throughout his life. The site for the cabin above Todtnauberg mirrors the landscape found in the Black Forest region near
Messkirch and perhaps gave Heidegger a sense of his childhood, not only through the flora and fauna, but also in the cultural habits and customs of its inhabitants.

Beyond any nostalgic childhood yearnings, the identity and concept of the Black Forest peasant held even further significance for Heidegger. As a persona, it was also closely connected to German Romanticism. Indeed, much of Heidegger’s relationship with his locus of thought needs to be read through a screen of early German Romantic philosophy. One aspect of this school that seems especially germane for Heidegger is the notion “that ‘external’ nature is not just a causally determined object and is part of ourselves as subjects in ways that we cannot explain.”

Another determining factor for Heidegger’s choice of the cabin as a think place was an awareness of the long historical lineage of thinkers who had also utilized huts for reflective thought in solitude. Heidegger was certainly aware of “the Tübingen tower of Hölderlin, Goethe’s picturesque Gartenhaus in Weimar, and Nietzsche’s convalescent home at Sils Maria in the Austrian Alps.” The reclusive and ascetic lives of the pre-Socratic philosophers were also models that Heidegger tried to emulate by dwelling/thinking at the cabin. By some accounts, the creation of the cabin was a strategy for Heidegger to locate and insert his philosophical legacy into the trajectory laid out by these other thinkers. Heidegger’s retreat to the cabin was not, however, an act of escapism or isolationism. Often a harsh critic of escapism, Heidegger seemed, to the contrary, interested in a form of Socratic solitude that sustained reflection and inquiry of the sort he believed possible only in concert with the natural landscape.
Some of the other influences on Heidegger circulating throughout his landscape of thought are illustrated in the images displayed in the cabin’s interior. The absence of any other decoration calls particular attention to these few images and their importance to Heidegger. They suggest that German Romanticism and the ideology of the Black Forest peasant were significantly entwined with Heidegger’s existence at the cabin. In the bedroom hung an image of a woman wearing traditional Black Forest garb (Fig.4). In the dining area or Vorraum (front area), hung a portrait of the German bucolic poet Johann Peter Hebel (Fig.5). In 1957, Heidegger wrote an essay entitled Hebel der Hausfreund (Hebel - Friend of the House). In the study, where Heidegger did most of his writing, hung a portrait of the Romantic/Idealist German philosopher Friedrich Schelling. Since so little

Figure 4. Digne Meller-Marcovicz, Heidegger in the bedroom of the cabin. On the wall is an image of a woman wearing traditional Black Forest garb. Image courtesy Digne Meller-Marcovicz.
adornment is displayed in the cabin, we can surmise that the placement and symbolism of the images was intentional and carefully considered. Therefore, we can read these images as meaningful constituting forces permeating the place of Heidegger’s situated thought.

The identity of the Black Forest was so thoroughly ingrained in his life that Heidegger requested to be buried with branches from the forest.11 “This philosophical work does not take its course like the aloof studies of some eccentric,” asserts Heidegger, “it belongs right in the midst of the peasants’ work.”12 The hut was not just a location, but an embodiment of the entire world of the Black Forest peasant – echoed in each piece of grass, each clapboard shingle, each rustle of the trees, each movement of a writing hand, and in each thought. These influences and forces, as part of the constitution of Heidegger’s think place, gave him a “particular configuration of meaning,” in which he could begin to develop thought.13
The cabin was certainly esteemed by Heidegger, and he enjoyed staying there as often as he could. Yet, the cabin itself was only a portion of his complete locus of thought. What Heidegger developed as a *think place* or “work-world” was a landscape – a system of places and the movement between them. That Heidegger’s own concept of place is more akin to a landscape than to a discrete locale is suggested by the fact that he often utilized the German word *gegend* to communicate a specific notion of place. With no direct English translation, the term sheds polymorphic synonyms, reading as everything from area or region, to locality and neighborhood.

For example, in “Conversation on a Country Path About Thinking” from 1966, Heidegger uses the term as such: “The region gathers… each to each and each to all into an abiding, while resting in itself.” The important distinction is that the Heideggerian concept of place (*gegend*) comprises a “gathering of elements [places] that are themselves mutually defined only through the way in which they are gathered together.” This articulation of place, resembling the multiplicity and variability of a landscape, should come as no surprise. Thinking back to the concept of place already established here, place was established as a “sequence of events and actions through space.” Therefore, place exists as a zone of active exchange between the elliptical paths of its constituting forces. This conception is quite consistent with Heidegger’s use of *gegend*.

Taking into account this conceptualization of place in locating and delineating Heidegger’s landscape of thought, let us reconsider the role of the
cabin. In contrast to the traditional reading of the cabin as the place of Heidegger’s thought, the cabin needs to be read as one of many places gathered together in the landscape of Heidegger’s thought. One of the other places that should also be examined is Heidegger’s home in Freiburg. Planned and completed in August of 1928, the Freiburg home was necessitated by Heidegger’s replacement of Husserl as chair at the University in Freiburg.

The style of the home is in line with Heidegger’s fondness for traditional Black Forest farmhouse architecture – a stone filled timber frame and walls covered will timber shingles. With three stories of space available, Heidegger chose to locate his study on the second floor, with a view of the backyard and the silhouettes of the slanted hills beyond. The study was the largest room in the house and contained a voluminous wooden desk. Heidegger’s writings and an ample library were housed in floor-to-ceiling shelves (Fig.6). As a spatial strategy

Figure 6. Digne Meller-Marcovicz, Heidegger in his study at his Freiburg home. Image courtesy Digne Meller-Marcovicz.
for being closer to the essence of existence, the organization of the Freiburg study seems a departure from the modesty of the cabin. In fact, the organization and furnishing of the whole Freiburg domestic space appears more discursive – conditioned by traditional cultural roles and by Heidegger’s position in society as a leading figure at the University. Although the home tried to exude a traditional Black Forest persona, “it is effectively a suburban house in Black Forest clothing.”\textsuperscript{18} The Freiburg house was equipped with all of the comforts available during the time of its construction – running water, working sanitation, and electricity. While this place served as the center of Heidegger’s family life and his academic appointment, he remained relatively silent in his writing concerning his thoughts and feelings about it. Some of the impetus for this might be because the house was much more of a shared family place, serving the various needs of many other people and as a point of contact with children, students, friends, and colleagues. The cabin, on the other hand, was very distinctly Heidegger’s place.

Throughout his life, Heidegger wrote about many of the locations that inspired him, but the home in Freiburg remained relatively, and almost purposefully, undisclosed.\textsuperscript{19} Heidegger preferred his existence at the cabin, claiming that, “my work up there is interrupted for long stretches by conferences, lecture trips, committee meetings and my teaching work down here in Freiburg.”\textsuperscript{20} However, even though it was not preferred, the Freiburg home filled an important role opposing the cabin. For Heidegger, it occupied one end of the transitional spectrum of being, and was therefore integral to understanding being.
In this sense, Heidegger utilized a strategy of negation analogous to that discussed in Thoreau’s Walden experiment. Within this strategy, the gathering of elements helps to define each place – through what they negate just as much by what they affirm. The actual landscape of Heidegger’s locus of thought should be considered as the cabin, the Freiburg home, and the movement between them. Just as Thoreau had hoped that his Walden experiment would be generative, Heidegger expected that a think place, which included a contrast between country and city, would proliferate new ideas about being and existence. As Sharr suggests, “a continuous and complex tension [existed] between the provincial and cosmopolitan throughout the philosopher’s mature life and work.” The transition between these two places was key for Heidegger’s understanding of being as (in) a continuous cycle of disclosure and concealment.

THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY

The distinction between country and city had a significant impact on Heidegger’s life and the development of his place-produced thought. In many ways, Heidegger essentialized each of their identities and associations to uphold a strict dichotomy. For Heidegger, the country was a compendium of attributes associated with the Black Forest peasant – simple, hard working, and connected to nature. The city on the other hand, was filled with distraction and noise, chicanery and lip service – a disengagement from being. Time and again, Heidegger makes these sentiments clear, as when he asserted that: “The world of the city runs the risk of falling into destructive error.” Similarly, in an address given in Heidegger’s hometown, at
the celebration of the birthday of composer Conradin Kreutzer in 1955, he warns that, “Many Germans have lost their homeland… They have been caught up in the turmoil of the big cities, and have resettled in the wastelands of industrial districts.”

A similar differentiation between the country and city is explored by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*, which examines changing historical perceptions toward country and city. Williams begins his text with a forthright statement: “‘Country’ and ‘city’ are very powerful words, and that is not surprising when we remember how much they seem to stand for in the experience of human communities.” As Williams makes clear, the power of the two terms is the result of the accretion of centuries’-worth of rhetoric and discourse. The central concern for Williams is that both country and city are historical – transformed over time toward a multiplicity of ends. By parsing through centuries of British literary examples, Williams demonstrates that the relationship between country and city depends upon rhetorical contrast. For example, the Charles Cotton poem, *The Retirement*, from 1676, yields this description of the country:

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Good God! How sweet things are here!
How beautiful the Fields appear!
How cleanly do we feed and lie!
Lord what good hours do we keep!
How quietly we sleep!
What peace! What unanimity!
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In clear contrast to this joyously empathic proclamation, other authors such as George Crabbe have painted dour portraits of city life. In Book I of *The Village*
from 1783, he writes “From Truth and Nature shall we widely stray, Where Virgil, not where Fancy, leads the way?”26 And in Book II, “Yet here Disguise, the city’s vice, is seen, And Slander steals along and taints the Green.”27 Much of this rhetoric utilizes an utopian/dystopian split that appeals to the morality of the reader – the country is clean, quiet, and good – while the evil denizen of the city slander and steal. A particularly important moment in the development of British literature occurred in the 17th and 18th century, as the evocation of the rural shifted from a tone of veneration to one of melancholic loss. The concern for the loss of rural life in British Romanticism is paralleled in the German Romanticism that influenced Heidegger.

THE CONCERN THAT QUESTIONS TECHNOLOGY

In many ways, a perception of the rural as melancholic is also apparent in Heidegger’s writings. For Heidegger, an authentic form of existence was slowly being eroded and taken over by urbanization, mechanization, and technology. These concerns about technology are important when analyzing Heidegger’s place of thought because they further the distinction between country and city. The lack of amenities at the cabin, and his resistance to incorporating modern conveniences, such as electricity, were rooted in the equation of technology with the city, and by extension, with the concealment of being.

For Heidegger, the abstention from modern technology was not based merely on personal phobias; rather, it had much more significance for existence
and the nature of being. As an example, we can return to Heidegger’s words from the “Memorial Address” for Kreutzer mentioned above:

> those who have stayed on in their homeland... Hourly and daily they are chained to radio and television. Week after week the movies carry them off to uncommon, but often merely common, realms of the imagination, and give the illusion of a world that is no world (Heidegger’s italics).\(^2\)

Several of Heidegger’s writings address the dangerous diversions of technology, but no other speaks as directly about the nature of technology as does “The Question Concerning Technology” from 1954. There, Heidegger posits a discrepancy between the “challenging-forth” of technology and the “bringing-forth” of poiesis. The bringing-forth of artwork is aligned with the revealing in aletheia as a means to open the clearing of being. In contrast, the form of revealing delivered by technology is described by Heidegger as such: “wherever we try to point to modern technology as the revealing that challenges, the words ‘setting upon,’ ‘ordering,’ ‘standing-reserve,’ obtrude and accumulate in a dry, monotonous, and therefore oppressive way.”\(^3\) The concern for Heidegger is that technological pursuits distract us from Husserl’s imperative of getting to “things themselves.” In Heidegger’s understanding, technology inhibits aletheia and the disclosure of being.

Heidegger’s great concern about technology arises with his acknowledgement of its powerful ability to cover over being, hiding the true nature of being from us. In “Memorial Address,” for example, Heidegger warns that there is a “process that gnaws at the very marrow of man today: man today is in flight from thinking (Heidegger’s italics).”\(^4\) Heidegger goes on to explain that
humanity has been losing the recognition and practice of meditative thinking to the summons and fervor of scientific calculative thinking. Meditative thinking, for Heidegger, is a means of being-in-the-world. It is to “dwell on what lies close and meditate on what is closest; upon that which concerns us, each one of us, here and now; here, on this patch of home ground; now, in the present hour of history.”

ALETHEIA

For Heidegger, meditative thinking is also aligned with aletheia. A term conventionally thought to have been used by the Greeks to mean “truth,” Heidegger reinterprets aletheia as the “unconcealment of being.” In his fresh interpretation, the truth of being is more suggestive of revealing or uncovering. For Heidegger, aletheia describes how being becomes unconcealed, and then soon covered over by the familiar and mundane, by the everydayness of the world, only to be revealed again in time as a new understanding of being. By traversing between cabin and house, Heidegger was able to build an understanding of the unveiling and concealment cycle of aletheia through the actual walk from Freiburg to the mountain cabin (and back again). In fact, walking from one to the other provided Heidegger with an experience of aletheia—an embodied metaphor. Like the experience I often had walking out into my grandparent’s field, this hike put Heidegger in a transitional state, one between concealment and disclosure, during which he shed the distractions/concealments that threatened to cover over the truth of being. This visceral understanding of aletheia, developed through
thinking with/in place, was a vital portion of Heidegger’s place-produced thought and one of the central concepts of his philosophy.

The connection of aletheia to walking is implicit in the language Heidegger used to describe it. For example, he often describes aletheia in terms of walking upon a wooded path. In the essay “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” he wrote that the “path to it [aletheia] is distinguished from the lane along which the opinion of mortals wanders.”32 In Being and Time, Heidegger reflects on a specific experience of the ancient Greek philosopher Parmenides – “The goddess of truth who leads Parmenides places him before two paths, that of discovering and that of concealment… the path of discovering is gained only in… distinguishing between them understandingly.”33 The metaphor of walking on a path as a means to understand thinking and the disclosure of being also appears in Heidegger’s collection of essays entitled Holzwege. The German word translates as “wood paths” and the essays in this book derive from Heidegger’s experiences walking in the woods around the cabin, and from walking in the landscape between the cabin and Freiburg (Fig. 7). These essays further confirm Heidegger’s connection of life experience with philosophical understanding.

For Heidegger, walking on a woodland path afforded a type of thinking absent of teleological design. It was a method of revelation that was fully engrossed in the world without predeterminations. Aletheia is also like a journey on a path toward a clearing in which presence and being is revealed. And like the references to a “path,” the metaphorical language of the “clearing” was likely also a product of Heidegger’s walking activities. The clearing of being (*die lichtung*
des seins), used by Heidegger in his discussions of aletheia, and rendered in colloquial German as (eine lichtung) has a connotation not so much of brushing away, but rather of a forest clearing of the kind one might encounter walking on a forest path. In “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” Heidegger writes that the “forest clearing [Lichtung] is experienced in contrast to dense forest… the free space thus originating is the clearing.” A few pages further along in the same essay, Heidegger explains that “in that clearing rests possible radiance [the other translation of Lichtung is light], that is, the possible presencing of presence itself.”

Heidegger’s own clearing of being was at the mountain cabin where “he perceived greater authority in the bluntness of existence he found intensified by mountain terrain.” In sharp contrast, the return to the city was equated with the concealment of being, swarming as it was with technological distractions and
meaningless, fleeting interactions. In *Parmenides*, Heidegger writes that “concealing is for us displacing – a kind of ‘putting away’ or putting aside.”

However, by remaining at either dwelling for too long, Heidegger felt displaced from the clearing of being. Despite his preference for the cabin, he never remained there for any great length of time. Therefore, he regularly found himself between the two dwellings; the temporal state of being in each place was disrupted by the transition back to its counter part allowing him to experience the recurring dance of concealment and disclosure. Significantly, the concept of aletheia implies just such an endless sojourn, one in which being never comes to rest as either permanently concealed or unconcealed.

The notion of movement as integral to Heidegger’s understanding of aletheia is connected to the importance both of this landscape and also of walking to him. As previously mentioned, Heidegger was an avid hiker. Whenever possible, he would walk from Freiburg to the cabin – no small feat considering the mountainous terrain. He also enjoyed taking long walks while staying at the cabin. For Heidegger however, walking was far more than a form of calisthenics; walking was a lived experience of aletheia. Heidegger’s mentor, Husserl, shared a similar belief in the conflation of walking with revelation. Husserl described walking as a special activity that brings about both an inward and outward attentiveness. Inwardly, walking “brings home to me that I am a total organism [and not just a collection of parts],” wrote Husserl. Yet, it also reveals “being-here is the absolute product of my body and my immediate place, the two together in indissoluble composition.” Heidegger viewed walking in similar terms, not
only as an experience of aletheia that is transitory and moves us closer to, or farther from, the clearing of being, but also as an experience of interconnectivity between place and being – of the basic state of da-sein, of being-in-the-world.

Husserl and Heidegger are hardly the only thinkers to connect walking with the discovery of place and being. A large body of discourse has drawn walking together with ontological understanding as a “state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversations together.” Geoff Nicholson, author of The Lost Art of Walking: The History, Science, and Literature of Pedestrianism, assertively claims – “Tell me how you walk and I will tell you who you are.” Other writers identify walking as a special type of human activity. Rebecca Solnit, for example, writes “it is the movement as well as the sights going by that seems to make things happen in the mind, and this is what makes walking ambiguous and endlessly fertile.” Thoreau was also a champion of walking, dedicating an entire essay to the emancipatory activity. For him, when done properly, walking allowed one to be “absolutely free from all worldly engagements.” Both Thoreau and Heidegger seem to agree on the efficacy of walking as a means to inhabit the world, as a method for synchronizing being with place. The pace and physicality of walking bring to attention otherwise unseen aspects of the landscape, including subtle shifts in environmental minutia. Walking requires greater observation than do other types of travel, as one literally negotiates the particulars of the terrain. For Heidegger, the changing terrain compounded the experience of transformation from one state of being to another. Beginning in an urban setting and then
moving to a rural one, the elevation changes markedly over the 19-mile hike. Beginning in Freiburg at around 900 feet, Heidegger would wind his way to the cabin at an elevation of over 3700 feet. The paths that he used were often unmarked and partially overgrown (Fig. 8). Along the walk, Heidegger would have been able to feel the landscape change, as the chill of the cool mountain air settled into his bones. On the 25th anniversary of the construction of the cabin, Heidegger wrote a poetic essay, called *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens* (The Thinker as Poet) in which he describes parts of the landscape seen on the journey between cabin and house. The landscape is fairly challenging and the demands of the climb (either up or down) could be taxing. Yet, in the poem, Heidegger describes the details of the landscape with a certain tenderness: “When in early summer lonely narcissi bloom hidden in the meadow and the rock-rose gleams under the maple” something amazing is revealed – “The splendor of the simple.” As an activity that brings one closer to a place, walking is transformative as it enables embodiment and reflection – leading to a different
state of being. Heidegger’s walking changed the walker, through engagement, movement, and thinking with/in place.

One renowned Heideggerian scholar contends that the apparent correlation between physics and metaphysics “does not mean the real origin of such work (philosophy) can be construed in terms purely of the particular details that make up each philosopher’s life-situation.”45 Such an assertion might make us hesitate, wonder whether too much importance is being placed upon walking and the physical landscape in Heidegger’s understanding of aletheia. However, in Heidegger’s case, it does seem tenable to translate his experience of place directly into philosophical thought. Heidegger’s method of practicing philosophy was one heeding Husserl’s call – “to the things themselves.”46 Heidegger was not a proponent of speculative metaphysics; instead he was a firm believer in direct experience. For example, in a lecture given early in his career, he stated that practicing philosophy was a “way of behaving.”47 Therefore, I argue that the walk from Freiburg to the cabin created the conditions for arriving at that the idea of aletheia and as a means of practicing a rigorous investigation of its process.

Upon Heidegger’s death in 1976, the New York Times published an obituary by Hannah Arendt, who wrote “Heidegger never thinks ‘about’ something; he thinks something.” For Heidegger, thinking something meant doing something, which means that he lived and breathed aletheia in order to gain knowledge of its origins and process. In this sense, the understanding of the philosophical concept of aletheia was structured by the metaphor of walking between two places of existence. In George Lakoff’s terms, the strategy of using
walking to reveal the fundamental process of aletheia can be considered as an “ontological metaphor.” In *The Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Mark Johnson describe how “our experiences with physical objects (especially our own bodies) provide the basis for an extraordinarily wide variety of ontological metaphors.”

It must be noted that while the emphasis on the experience of walking has been on the physical, lived, and immediate, it is recognized that these experiences transpire within a wider framework of contingent influences such as political, cultural, and personal forces. For Heidegger, the mental and physical transformations that occurred through walking became an ontological transformation – comprised of the concealing and disclosure that characterizes aletheia.

**IMPOSSIBILITY OF RETREAT**

Since his death, both the mountain cabin and the Freiburg home have remained in the possession of Heidegger’s extended family; however, their respective ontologies have been irrevocably transformed by the thought developed with/in them. As noted earlier, place-produced thought leaves unretractable traces on the being of place as well as that of thinker. Both experience an ontological alteration. Just as place acts upon the thinker, and the thinker acts upon place, the product of their co-dependence leaves the being of both parties indelibly transfigured.

For many, the landscape of Heidegger’s thought remains a source of distressing intrigue. Much of this is due to Heidegger’s well-documented
involvement with the Nazi party. Many scholars have criticized the ideology of Heideggerian thought for being rooted in the rhetoric of *blut und boten*, which itself was embraced by the Nazi party. In many ways, this association has become a permanent addendum to the being of the place.

Because a love of a particular place can engender that kind of regionalist ideology, some believe that place-produced thought should necessarily be viewed with a wary eye. It can prompt misguided thinking. And certainly, many scholars would agree with Jeff Malpas when he claims that “there are elements of Heidegger’s thought and action that those of us committed to a broadly liberal, democratic form of life must find repugnant.”

However, in the examination of aletheia, we have shown that as a philosophical concept, it is not so much entrenched in the particulars of a specific ethnogeography (*Deutschland*) as it is derived from the physical experience of movement between places and states of being – movement unfolding over time. It was Nietzsche who first revealed that universal truths were historical and grounded in time, emerging as new truths each time they are uncovered. As a passionate follower of Nietzsche, Heidegger also understood this as the essence of being, revealed in the cycle of aletheia. Through movement in time – by walking – the nature of being was exposed to Heidegger. Remaining stationary in either Freiburg or the cabin would have resulted in the concealment of being, as the ubiquity of the familiar would have drawn the clearing of being to a close.
Whether one condemns the use of the cabin in Heidegger’s thought or instead, chooses to celebrate it, there is little doubt of the pervasive influence of Heideggerian thought on later 20th century thinkers – Levinas, Sartre, Derrida, and Agamben are counted among them. The weight of this prominence has made the landscape of Heidegger’s thought something of a tourist attraction, not unlike Walden Pond. A walking tour of the landscape has been established and the Todtnauer-Feriendland website describes the path as a “panorama circular route” known as the Martin Heidegger Rundweg that takes one on a 4 mile hike from a parking lot along a trail through the valley that passes above Heidegger’s cabin before looping back around below the cabin (Figs. 9 and 10). The trail was designed by the Heidegger family in 2002 and has five markers scattered along the way providing biographical information and direct quotations. The first of these signs seems, at first glance, to read as a contrite vindication *wer gross denkt, muss gross irren* (he who will think greatly, must err greatly). However, *irren,*
which can also be translated as wander, rove or ramble. The phrase can therefore be re-read with an emphasis on movement: “he who will think greatly, must wander greatly.”

The establishment of Heidegger’s trail can be read as a product of the ontological shift that occurred when thought and place were fused together. The imminence of the traces from Heidegger’s thought is still negotiated by the family today. “He is still living here, as far as I am concerned,” claims Heidegger’s son Hermann. A sign near the cabin has been erected that reads – “The hut is still owned by the Heidegger family and used privately by them. Visitors are not permitted. Please respect the privacy of the family.” A similar note appears within Sharr’s book asking for the privacy of the Freiburg home as well. That such signs are necessary points to the continued interest people have in the locales where Heidegger worked. The way that Heidegger’s landscape of thought is encountered, perceived, and interpreted remains ineradicably mediated by the thought produced there.

Complicated though Heidegger’s relationship with the cabin, the Freiburg home, and the movement between them may have been, the main concern of this chapter has been to argue the imbrication of this place with thought in Heidegger’s philosophy. A body of knowledge was produced that was situated and focused in a fusion of thinking, place, and action. Much of Heidegger’s writing touches upon the relationship of physical engagement and metaphysical erudition. For him, philosophy was a lived experience, one that directly taught the philosopher about aletheia. The clearing of being emerged like an opening on one
of the paths that Heidegger regularly traveled through his landscape of thought, as he attempted to navigate between the two poles of his own existence.
SITE UNSEEN: GORDON MATTA-CLARK

This world just drops a bunch of rules on top of you…

– Donald Draper, Madmen

Each space, each spatial interval, is a vector of constraints and a bearer of norms and ‘values.’

– Henri Lefebvre

During his rather short lifetime, Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978) produced an astonishingly diverse group of artistic projects. Experimenting with photography, film, sculpture, performance, site-specificity, and installation, Matta-Clark’s activities were consistent with the emphasis on fragmentations and accumulations that characterized much of the artwork of the 1970s. While he voraciously explored an assortment of approaches and media, Matta-Clark is perhaps best known for his “cut” pieces—physical interventions into architectural spaces—typified by his project Splitting from 1974. In Splitting, Matta-Clark made an incision through the entire structure of a suburban New Jersey house—both
literally and metaphorically cutting the place open to reveal and deconstruct its spatial organization (Fig.1).

Some critics have interpreted Matta-Clark’s “cut” pieces negatively, seeing them as a form of transgression that borders on violence; in fact, Matta-Clark received several angry letters about *Splitting*. One such letter from an architect railed that Matta-Clark was “violating the sanctity and dignity of abandoned buildings by interrupting their transition to ruin.”¹ Another, from the critic Maud Lauvin, claimed that Matta-Clark’s “wounding of a house can be seen as a male violation of a domestic realm with female associations.”² These criticisms, like many of the others that Matta-Clark received, posit the architectural space as sanctified and secure. Therefore, any transformation is cast as degenerate. This is especially true of the domestic space used in *Splitting*, as the home can be read as a symbolic “spatio-temporal retreat [and respite] from a

Figure 1. Matta-Clark, *Splitting*, 1974. Image courtesy Barbican Art Gallery.
This association of violence to Matta-Clark’s artwork is reasonable. Many of his pieces required extreme physical exertion and labor involving heavy tools. The incisions that he made into buildings have a strong tactile and visceral quality, and the evidence of the cutting action, such as splintered wood or frayed edges of plaster, feature prominently in the photo documentation of many of his projects (Fig. 2). However, a close and rigorous reading of Matta-Clark’s “cuts” can reveal that they are not primarily (or even predominantly) acts of mindless violence.

As an artist whose development was rooted in the New York avant-garde of the late ‘60s, Matta-Clark, along with many other artists, felt the urge to critically question the established norms of their contemporary environments. I
argue that his work—including the cuts—should be considered as strategies of resistance to the spatial distribution of power and the discursive reorganization of urban space. Moreover, it was through the development of place-produced thought that Matta-Clark formulated this strategy of resistance, one that began to emerge through his situated thinking with/in the odd shaped properties of his *Fake Estates* project from 1973.

Matta-Clark’s aversion to the hegemonic tropes of Modernist architecture and urban planning began during his studies at Cornell in the late ‘60s. Those early intimations became more fully developed through Matta-Clark’s thinking with/in place—grounded in the intimate encounter with place that he had as a resident of NYC. There, Matta-Clark witnessed first-hand the means by which Modernist architectural projects privileged simple, clean, and functional design over anything else. Several iconic buildings displaying the aesthetic philosophy of Modernist architecture began to dot the skyline of NYC in the 1950s, including the *Seagram building* designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and the *United Nations Headquarters* designed by Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer. By thinking with/in place, Matta-Clark enacted a form of political resistance that was both a response to the “abstract tendencies of modern architecture… [and to] the degeneracy these models wrought in the urban environment.” As Matta-Clark witnessed the indifference or lack of concern for landscaping, aesthetics, and local usage of space, a failure epitomized by Robert Moses’ newly constructed freeway system, he was impelled to cultivate a politics of place that resisted such impositions.
For Matta-Clark, the obtrusive imposition of power upon the landscape was disturbing because it radically altered the ontological value of different places in one fell swoop. He deplored these state regulated spatializations of power and knowledge and sought a means to subvert them. Recognizing that, I argue that the *Fake Estates* project is not only Matta-Clark’s *think place*, producing critical insights about the philosophy of “the cut” and the reiteration of power, but also a political act, an attempt to subvert the dispersion of power that defined the form and being of the lots that became part of *Fake Estates*. Before examining that project and Matta-Clark’s later “cuts,” though, some historical and cultural context regarding NYC of the late ‘60s and early ‘70s is in order. That context is deeply connected to Matta-Clark’s entire artistic output.

GEOGRAPHIES OF RESISTANCE

Beginning in 1969, New York City experienced a particularly unfavorable eight-year period. Police corruption was rampant, and economic and political turbulence cast a veil of distress over the spirit of most New Yorkers. As early as 1968, one of mayor John Lindsay’s commissioners even commented: “The city has begun to die.”⁶ No single event can be pinpointed as the start of the downturn for NYC. As is the case with many crises on this level, a convergence of political, social, and economic problems yielded a general malaise. As Jefferson Cowie explains, the melancholy stemmed from the realization that “the immense institutional achievements of the previous generation… were both sources of power as well as systems of constraint on the future fortunes of the American
Polarizing war efforts in Vietnam, racial backlash, and an economic downturn compounded this anxiety.

In addition to budgetary woes, the city also saw increases in “white flight” and ghettoization. With the escalation of felonies in NYC throughout the ‘60s, many members of the upper middle class migrated to the perceived safety of suburbia. During the same period, public housing for low-income families in the urban center proliferated. Public housing “by the sixties… became ethnicized as ‘ghettos,’” claims Lucy Lippard, “confining social evils (and resistance) in specific places.”

Within this environment, the power relations related to place became especially evident. “Isolation epitomizes the ghetto, which has become a fortress,” contends Lucy Lippard, “a last bastion, to keep some people in and others out.”

Many New Yorkers in the ‘70s felt frustration with their seeming inability to affect change, with the crushing sense that there were stuck in place – geographically, socially, and economically. The frustration and dissatisfaction are implicit in Matta-Clark’s “cuts” into buildings. His “cuts” were conceptualized as a form of resistance against these cultural conditions, against the use of place as an instrument of power that delimits in these injurious ways. Matta-Clark believed that his interventions into architectural spaces could engender important perceptual shifts in the way that places were occupied and utilized.

As a graduate of Cornell’s architecture program, Matta-Clark was well versed in the current tropes and theories circulating in the world of architecture.
Rather than buying into the dominant Modernist ideology typified by Le Corbusier however, Matta-Clark left Cornell feeling disturbed by the canons of Modern architecture and the political control of urban landscapes. His desire to question the formalism of Modern architecture and to create a sense of an ambiguity regarding place were also reflective of shifting cultural sentiments. Cowie describes this disposition as an “outward contest of power relations that defined the first half of the seventies.”

A widely recognized example of such contestation is proto-punk, which blossomed at this same moment. Many proto-punk musicians effectively expressed the vitriol and exasperation of the collective existential crisis in the early ‘70s. One American proto-punk band, The Stooges, captured the converging hopelessness and dissatisfaction that many felt, distilling it into short caustic bursts of buzzing guitars and snarling lyrics. In songs such as Search and Destroy, lead singer Iggy Pop desperately moans:

I am a world’s forgotten boy
The one who searches and destroys
Honey gotta help me please
Somebody gotta save my soul.

While epitomizing the sense of frustration and angst in the early ‘70s, these lyrics also appear as a fitting description for Matta-Clark’s own artistic sensibility, expressing as they do the marginalization that Matta-Clark identified with, as well as the desire to question and destroy dominant forms of power.
The ballooning agitation with the architectural old guard came to a head for Matta-Clark in 1976, when he was invited to participate in an exhibition at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in NYC. Around 3 o’clock in the morning on the day that the show was to open, Matta-Clark entered the space of the exhibition while the installation was still in progress and gained permission from the curator to shoot out some of the already cracked windows with a BB gun. What ensued was both a performance and political statement. While blasting out all of the windows on the floor of the exhibition, Matta-Clark delivered an acerbic diatribe “against its esteemed members and the architectural ideologies they supported.” As Matta-Clark later claimed, “These were my teachers. I hate what they stand for.”

While the physicality of this act is undeniable, I propose that it was most significantly a type of conceptual violence, and an important point on the arc of thought that characterized Matta-Clark’s developing practice. And while the connection between the blasted windows and the later “cuts” is readily evident, that arc did not begin with blasting out the windows. Rather, evidence of it can be discerned as early as the Fake Estates project from 1973. From the thinking cultivated within the Fake Estates project, Matta-Clark was able to re-affirm the intimate linkage between place and identity, as well as appreciate how the “cut” (in its various articulations) could act as a form of reinscription and reclamation – as a means to play with the constitution of place and allow for it to be made “anew.”
FAKE ESTATES

The *Reality Properties: Fake Estates* project (commonly referred to as Fake Estates) from 1973 was an important juncture in the development of Matta-Clark’s artistic theories and practice. Further, this project is a significant instance of place-produced thought; Matta-Clark derived much of his mature theory and practice from his thinking with/in the small urban properties of the *Fake Estates* project. The development of Matta-Clark’s ideas about, and deployment of, “the cut” as both a philosophical concept and a spatial strategy of resistance are inextricably connected to the fusion of place and thought initially manifest in the *Fake Estates* project.

The project began with Matta-Clark’s acquisition of five small parcels of real estate from the city of New York. Gradually, he acquired a total of fourteen parcels in Queens and a fifteenth on Staten Island (Fig. 3). The crucial question to consider when analyzing the *Fake Estates* project is why Matta-Clark chose these precise bits of the urban landscape.

In a broad context, their location within NYC was of utmost importance. Beginning with re-zoning in the late ‘50s (the first major re-zoning since 1916), the rapid rearrangement of the city continued through the early ‘60s. In the escalating transformations of NYC by city planners, private redevelopments, and the movement of people and capital, the city underwent a radical reorganization. The primary player behind the restructuring was Robert Moses. And, perhaps not surprisingly, “Moses’s vision derived from the popular urban design theory of the
Figure 3. Aerial Map of Queens and Staten Island identifying the location of the 15 lots. Image courtesy Cabinet Magazine – http://cabinetmagazine.org/events/oddlots.php
day promoted by French architect Le Corbusier in his 1925 plan for “Voison for Paris,” which included the ruthless demolition of the current urban landscape in favor of a “revolutionary re-design of the city.”

Beginning in the period immediately following the war, Moses set about reconfiguring NYC to be more automobile friendly, in part by integrating an expansive set of freeways that connected Manhattan to Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Staten Island. The design of many of these expressways prioritized efficient, accessible car travel over landscaping, aesthetics, and local traditional usage of space.

In a sense, these freeways acted as cuts, restricting and redirecting pedestrian and automotive traffic. They also cut off neighborhoods from places that had contiguous exchanges before the road was created. The cutting up and division of space transformed the identity and value of places by disrupting or severing the types of relationships and exchanges that were possible with other places in the landscape. As Roberta Brandes Gratz writes, Moses’s plans effectively “erase[d] neighborhoods, undermine[d] social capital, and wipe[d] out longstanding economic investment.”

The creation of the freeway system also generated “gutterspaces,” parcels of land that were deemed valueless. In fact, research suggests that the gutterspaces purchased by Matta-Clark were likely created by Robert Moses’s freeway infrastructure reorganization of the post-war period. Guy Debord vilified the ability of urban expansion or reorganization to remove the uniqueness and value from places when he wrote that “Urbanism is capitalism’s seizure of the natural and human environment in which banalization dominates.”

These
banalized gutterspaces are often compact, and have unorthodox shapes and dimensions (Fig. 4). For instance, one of the Fake Estates properties measured 2.33’ by 355’ while another was 1.83’ by 1.11’. Matta-Clark acquired each these properties for very little money (around $35.00 a piece) after the previous owners had failed to pay taxes on them and they were seized by the city. Many of the properties, including a 2.77’ by 100’ lot were surrounded by other properties or fenced off, making them completely inaccessible (Fig. 5).

Matta-Clark was intensely aware of how the face of his home city was altered by the freeway systems and re-zoning of the Moses administration. In an undated note, Matta-Clark wrote that, “as a native New Yorker my sense of the city as home runs deep, being full of an honest regard for its state and the quality of life available there.”

The relationship between quality of life and the organization of space was a long-term concern for Matta-Clark. And while observing the spatial reorganization of the city, Matta-Clark became increasingly conscious that the reorganization of place was being undertaken as an instrument of power. In an interview from 1976, Matta-Clark declared: “what I am reacting to is the deformation of values (ethics) in the disguise of Modernity, Renewal, Urban Planning, call it what you will.”

During the early 1970s, Matta-Clark expanded his thinking regarding the relationship of place and identity. Rather than only focusing on the people who have been marginalized, Matta-Clark began to more directly examine how places can exacerbate the disenfranchisement of certain groups. The concern for the ways that a place may condition and contain its inhabitants also led Matta-
Figure 4. Schematic drawings of all 15 properties.
Image courtesy Cabinet Magazine – http://cabinetmagazine.org/events/oddslots.php

Note: 1 [one foot] = 30.48 cm
Clark to consider how places themselves can be marginalized within a larger spatial organizational system. For Matta-Clark, place and identity were so closely related that their relationship was ontological. He realized that when the world of an entity is altered, the being of that entity also undergoes a radical transformation. In the case of the Fake Estates properties, Matta-Clark recognized that the designation of the small parcels as “unusable” spaces had transformed their very being. More importantly, Matta-Clark also recognized that this determination of being was a product of the spatial reconfiguration of the city through state intervention, and did not represent their entire measure of being.

Another crucial attribute of the places that Matta-Clark acquired for the Fake Estates project was their inaccessibility and marginalization. For Matta-Clark, these places were victims of demarcation processes that served the dominant power structure, as exercised through the state and the exchange of
Matta-Clark was drawn to the condition of these properties because “their level of disinterested abandonment virtually removed the property from the realm of society.” Matta-Clark was specifically drawn to exposing the multiple systems of power responsible for this “virtual removal” – including Modernist ideology, Moses’ freeway plan, rezoning laws, and the rule of the grid. In his text from 1966, *The Order of Things*, Foucault discusses the relationship between power and geography, asserting that the *a priori* episteme “in a given period, delimits in the totality of experience a field of knowledge, [and] defines the mode of being of the objects that appear in that field.” This notion is applicable to the episteme of the Moses regime responsible for the delineation of the *Fake Estates* properties. Within this episteme, these spaces were seen as unusable and simply byproducts of making “conscious determinations about the future of the city through state intervention.”

The properties of the *Fake Estates* lacked conventional value because they could not be readily accessed or built upon. They deviated from the concept of property in the episteme of NYC during the early ‘70s. Thus, they ceased to have an understandable meaning or significance. In *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Marc Augé makes a distinction between a place and a non-place: “if a place can be defined as relational, historical, and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, historical, and concerned with identity will be a non-place.” Augé’s notion of non-places is reflective of Foucault’s concept of the heterotopia, a counter-site: “real sites that can be found within the culture [that] are simultaneously represented, contested,
and inverted.” By thinking with/in the non-places of *Fake Estates*, Matta-Clark transformed them into a new type of heterotopia. These spaces that had been removed from an active role and function in society – having been virtually erased by the spatial reorganization of the Moses urban planning strategies—were remade.

That the properties were marginalized non-places was of great significance to Matta-Clark. He had a longstanding interest in activities and entities operating on the “edge of a system.” For example, he had a strong passion for graffiti writing, which he regarded as the inscriptions of maligned youths attempting to inject their voice into the facade of the city. This fascination was manifested in the *Photoglyphs* and *Graffiti Truck* projects of 1973. *Photoglyphs* consisted of photomontaged graffiti from the outer boroughs while *Graffiti Truck* invited locals to tag Matta-Clark’s truck with spray paint, which he then cut into sections and sold as works of art. Both works were displayed under the title *Alternatives to Washington Square Art Show* after his joke application was rejected by the actual Washington Square Art Fair. Both projects demonstrate Matta-Clark’s concern for empowering the marginalized and for rejecting established conventions. Further suggestion of Matta-Clark’s affinity for the maligned is evident in his own words: “I have based my outlook and my work on those given things in the environment which have passed over into a neglected state… just as much out of a very personal identification with the cultural and social sense of being.” Not only did Matta-Clark identify himself
with the properties of the *Fake Estates* project, he also viewed these places as potential geographies of resistance.

The strategy of resistance that Matta-Clark developed by thinking with/in place was not strictly opposed to power, but rather sought to expose the distribution of power in place, including the limitations and conditions thrust upon a place. This strategy of resistance derived by thinking with/in place should not be overestimated, however, as Matta-Clark’s intention was not to emancipate or grant the places agency. Rather, his strategy should be thought of more as akin to play. By playing with place, Matta-Clark hoped to loosen the grips of the imposed state authority used to designate the character and value of place. This playfulness encouraged the possibility of yielding a “sense of ambiguity of a structure, the ambiguity of a place.” As Matta-Clark added, this is “the quality I am interested in generating.” At the heart of the *Fake Estates* project was a desire to reveal the power relations that had shaped the identity of the properties and show that places have a multiplicity of identities—not simply the one prescribed by the state. By doing so, Matta-Clark was able to demonstrate that the creation of these spaces was part of an ideological agenda that saw the urban landscape as a “sprawling chaos that needed replacement with functions spatially separated from each other, and therefore needed to be questioned and disrupted.”

**THE CUTTING OF FAKE ESTATES**

While Matta-Clark had begun exploring “the cut” several years before he created
the *Fake Estates* project, those earlier efforts lack the conceptual rigor and focus of his later ones. In many ways, the thinking with/in place that Matta-Clark undertook in *Fake Estates* enabled him to evolve his understanding of the possibilities of “the cut.” In 1971 while working in the basement of 112 Greene Street in Soho, Matta-Clark generated his first project that included a laceration into an architectural structure. *Cherry Tree* consisted of a hole cut into the floor of the basement that was dug out to the depth of six feet. Within the hole, a cherry tree was planted. After surviving only a few months, the vestiges of the tree were buried in the hole. The entire cavity was then sealed off with concrete and lead before being conceived as a new work with a new title – *Time Well*, also from 1971. The next year, Matta-Clark began a more ambitious exploration of the “cut” in his series of projects collected under the shared title *Bronx doors, Bronx Floors*, all of which were much more radical than any of Matta-Clark’s previous endeavors. The *Bronx doors, Bronx Floors* pieces consisted of chunks of walls, ceilings, and floors removed from old abandoned warehouses in the Bronx (Fig.6). While the project predates *Fake Estates* by over a year, and seems to react “precisely to the imposed… order” of the place, just as *Fake Estates* also does, it was the fragments of the displacements – along with photo documentation – that were displayed in the gallery as works of art. The focus of the cutting actions were on the extraction of pieces of wall, ceiling, and floor, that then acted as minimalistic sculptural forms aestheticized as art objects. Therefore, while the *Bronx doors, Bronx floors* projects utilized cutting techniques, the “cut” was not yet employed as a strategy of resistance because there was not a significant
conceptual response to the site of their execution and extraction. The place of “the cut” was not deliberately and carefully chosen for its particular perceptual and political attributes. Rather, locales were chosen for more practical reasons: they were easily accessible and could be modified without too much hassle or restriction.

The next step in Matta-Clark’s evolution of “cuts” came early in 1973, when he traveled to Milan, Italy. There, in an abandoned warehouse, Matta-

Figure 6. Matta-Clark, *Bronx Floors: Threshold*, 1972
Image courtesy The Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark and David Zwirner, New York.

Clark constructed *Infraform*, consisting of “a right-angled triangle [cut] through the perpendicular intersection of two block walls.” In many ways, *Infraform* seems to have been more a logistical experiment to further test the possibilities of
building incisions – almost a form of practice for later projects. Only a few photographs survive as documentation of this project. In both *Bronx doors*, *Bronx floors* and *Infraform*, Matta-Clark does not seem to have achieved the same deliberate thoughtfulness and situatedness of “the cut,” as will be evident in his post-*Fake Estates* activities. That major transition in the nature of his “cuts” began by developing thinking with/in the *Fake Estates* project, when Matta-Clark actively situated his thinking within a particular place (the 15 lots). By cultivating his thinking with/in place, he was able to engender a conceptualization of “the cut” that was metaphorical, conceptual, and political rather than just literal.

The notion of “the cut” as a philosophical concept and strategy of resistance realized through *Fake Estates* allowed Matta-Clark to move beyond employing more literal cuts simply as physical acts. The broader understanding of their significance also enabled him to refute the accusations that the strategy was rooted in violence and hostility. By identifying and purchasing the lots of *Fake Estates*, Matta-Clark created his first metaphorical cut – carving them from the urban fabric and wresting them from their designation as gutterspaces. Matta-Clark was able to bring awareness to the sites that were previously unseen—calling into question the identity and limitations foisted upon them. In a sense, these sites, which were banal and invisible, were brought into a dialogical play of spatial relations, imposition of power, agency of place, and identity.
THE CUT: DISRUPTING POWER

Matta-Clark’s development of the “cut” as a philosophical concept and spatial strategy of resistance and Michel Foucault’s writings of that era share a concern for the distribution of power through spatial organization. In an interview from 1976, Foucault explains how the division of spaces, through both physical demarcation and taxonomical language, can be spatial strategies for the dispersal of power. “There is an administration of knowledge,” asserts Foucault, “a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge and which, if one tries to transcribe them, lead one to consider forms of domination designated by such notions as field, region and territory.”34 Foucault here indicates that these spatial concepts and the language used to articulate them are devices through which the relations of power are transmitted. Foucault recognizes language as a mechanism of power. Once an entity, such as a specific place, has a certain taxonomical description, it is shaped and restricted by that linguistic term. Classifying a site as a “gutterspace” or non-place simultaneously prescribes the limits of knowledge about, and the potential of being for, such a place.

Foucault also addresses the possible subversion of the spatial dispersion of power within a lecture entitled, Des Espace Autres (Of Other Spaces), in which he discussed his notion of heterotopias as being “outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.”35 Foucault expands upon the idea of some places being “outside” of other places by introducing the concept of heterotopias of deviation. These heterotopias are established when the exchanges or power relations within a place deviate from those taking place in other cultural
spaces. In many ways, the properties of Fake Estates fit this description of a heterotopia because they were perceptually and even physically outside of the entrenched norms of properties in NYC.

Heterotopias (such as the Fake Estates properties) fascinated Foucault because they do not operate by the same rules as other cultural spaces. As Foucault explains, heterotopias of deviation—prisons and hospitals for example—are places where people are sent when their behavior strays from normalized and established rules. This concept can be adapted to thinking about places themselves. As in Fake Estates, the places exist “outside” of the regular practices and codes of the contextual urban spatial organization.

The sites that were to become the Fake Estates properties lacked capitalist value – they had relatively low exchange value or use value. Henri Lefebvre has written about the values forced upon spaces by the hegemonic social and economic class as a means to serve its own needs and maintain its dominant position. While Lefebvre does not share Foucault’s emphasis on the role of language in the production of a place, he does agree that “nowhere is the confrontation between knowledge and power, between understanding and violence, more direct than it is in connection with intact space and space broken up.”36 When space is broken up, a dialectic emerges between the knowledge of or within a space and the power exercised through demarcation. For Lefebvre, the economic and social relations acting upon and within a place determines the nature of the confrontation between knowledge and power. Robert Moses and his urban planners were acutely aware of this relationship and of how it could be
manipulated to control behavior. Moses’s view was that the state needed to intervene in economic and social relations occurring in place and that the city needed to be “reshaped, thinned out, [and] controlled” in order to do so.\textsuperscript{37}

This understanding of the prescriptive control of space and its function in the Moses regime brings us back to the development of the “cut” established with/in the \textit{Fake Estates} project. It also allows us to see how Matta-Clark activated the \textit{Fake Estates} as a different kind of heterotopias of deviation—one that was much more political—as a means to subvert the state control of space. In doing so, the “cut” became less as an act of violence and more a form of play. As a form of play, the strategy of resistance developed by Matta-Clark with/in \textit{Fake Estates} is akin to what Judith Butler calls a “reiteration of power.”\textsuperscript{38} This reiteration enables physical acts to become political actions, and through repetition exposes the conditions of power responsible for the formation of a subject/place. This reiterative process can become a strategy of resistance because “the reiteration of power not only temporalizes the conditions of subordination but shows these conditions to be, not static structures, but temporalized – active and productive.”\textsuperscript{39} As a reiteration of power, which is also a means to play with power, Matta-Clark’s “cuts” were able to reveal the contingent and fluctuating conditions of power being imposed upon a place—by taking the means of control and using it as a means to subvert that control. In \textit{Fake Estates}, Matta-Clark calls attention to, and plays with, the contingencies of the lot formations and their designation as non-places/gutterspaces by the Moses planning projects. By revealing these conditions, Matta-Clark was hopeful that the places could
temporarily exceed the limitations of power to which they remained tethered—that the places could push back against their forced designations.

By thinking with/in place Matta-Clark was able to arrive at a new realization of the non-physical implications of “the cut.” Through the situated nature of the *Fake Estates* project, Matta-Clark was able to respond to the particular conditions of the place and conceive of the “cut” as a method to question the decisions “regarding how we order and organize entities, subjects, bodies [and places].” Through the crucial situatedness of thought, the *Fake Estates* project enabled Matta-Clark to employ “the cut” in an entirely original manner that did not require a physical incision, but created the potential to disrupt the existing perceptions and supposed fixed identity of the properties.

CUTTING AND FOLDING – WHAT DOES PLACE WANT?

After Matta-Clark purchased the various lots that became the *Fake Estates* project, he intended to display them as artworks, albeit indirectly, via written and photographic documentation. Even though he was not able to assemble this documentation himself before his death, Matta-Clark did leave some vague instruction as to how they should be displayed as a complete work of art including: “a) documentation of the land with dimensions and whatnot, b) an overall photograph of the actual site, c) the collaged photo-strips, and d) the property itself.” Following these directions, Matta-Clark’s widow, Jane Crawford, posthumously assembled these collages for a Matta-Clark retrospective.
exhibition held in Spain in 1992. Though these collages are the only remaining material expression of the project, the lasting impression on the properties has been far greater than their inclusion in a collage.

Like Thoreau and Heidegger, Matta-Clark left unretractable marks that have served to transform the ontology of his think place. And again like the situations of Thoreau and Heidegger, the place pushed back, inscribing itself onto the thought and being of Matta-Clark. As Donald Goddard writes in his review for Cabinet magazine’s re-examination of Fake Estates in 2006: “There are so many ways in which these parcels of space barely register, or are deliberately played down, yet they are among the most evocative things Matta-Clark did as an artist and person, partly because there is no separation between the two [Matta-Clark and the Fake Estates properties]; one cannot be forgotten for the other.”

As was also the case in the other instances of place-produced thought, the place chosen for the development of thought does not passively receive the
imposition of the thinker’s activity. The place has its own agency that resists, filters, or supports the thinking produced with/in its locale. Consequently, the place necessarily has to negotiate the new thinking into its ontological status through what Gilles Deleuze refers to as “folding;” through “folding” an entity incorporates new forces or influences to “produce new modalities of being.” This notion is consistent with the contingent constitution of place as a network of relations ceaselessly morphing over time. It also resonates with our conception of place explored in the introduction—a bio-socio-historical zone of active exchange.

In considering how place pushes back against the thinker, a pertinent question to ask might be: What does place want? Perhaps the properties of Fake Estates did not want to be part of an artistic project. Perhaps they did not want to be involved as a site and tool of resistance to the spatial distribution of power in the urban landscape. Matta-Clark ruminates about whether this is the case, in an entry in his notebook from 1970:

RATHER THAN FINDING MORE WAYS OF USING AND EXPLOITING WHAT IS LEFT AND FORGOTTEN AND REMAINS EMPTY, IT WOULD BE FAR MORE USEFUL TO ALLOW THE DEAD ENDS THE THEIR PEACE AND QUIET… THE FAILING OF THE ARCHITECTURAL STATE SET MENTALITY IS ITS HOMOGENOUS ACCESSIBILITY FOR TO ALL AND AN OPPRESSIVE MANIA FOR INFLUENCING THE ENTIRE FABRIC DOWN TO THE IN ALL OF ITS DETAILS OVER ALL ITS SURFACES… THEREFORE ROOFTOPS, WATER FRONTS EMPTY LOTS, WHATEVER KNOWN USABLE SURFACES THAT ARE DOING ALL RIGHT ON THEIR OWN ARE TARGET FOR ‘IMPROVEMENT.’

43

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Here, Matta-Clark seems to recognize the sovereignty of place, the sense that it might be better to allow place to remain free from the inscriptions of the “architectural state set mentality.” In these types of statements, Matta-Clark implicitly acknowledges the subjectivity and agency of place.

While it is difficult to know precisely what the sites in *Fake Estates* wanted, the properties did, in fact, revert to their condition prior to Matta-Clark’s inclusion of them in the project, giving them—for a time—“their peace and quiet.” Upon his death in 1978, his estate—including the fifteen properties—was turned over to his wife Jane Crawford. Not knowing that taxes needed to be paid on them, she disregarded the tax bills and by 1980 the properties were reclaimed by the city. Each of the sites became, once again, a gutterspace.

This is how they remained until 2003 when the editors of *Cabinet* magazine became curious as to what happened to the *Fake Estates* properties. They discovered that four of the properties had since been sold, but the others were still owned by the city. They attempted to acquire the properties as part of a venture (including an initial essay, an exhibition, and publication) that revisited the Fake Estates project. But the city, suspicious of the magazine’s motives, refused to sell the properties. Eventually they agreed to temporarily license the properties to the magazine. *Cabinet* then commissioned sixteen contemporary artists to develop imaginary and actual projects that could be realized within one of the remaining properties. These were eventually displayed in 2005 as an exhibition and subsequent publication entitled *Odd Lots: Revisiting Gordon*
Matta-Clark’s Fake Estates at the White Columns Gallery (formerly the 112 Greene Street art space) in New York City.

The revitalized interest in the place of Matta-Clark’s thought speaks to the ontological shift that occurred through the production of situated thought. Apparently, the sites did not entirely return to their status as gutterspaces. Instead, some thirty years after the activation as a place for thinking, the interest in the history, identity, and being of the places was reignited. Even though the places may have resisted the influence of the thoughts situated within them, the network of their relations had irrevocably come to include and incorporate (fold) in the thought of Matta-Clark.

Still another closely related project, this one by architect Martin Hogue called [Fake] Fake Estates: Reconsidering Gordon Matta-Clark’s Fake Estates, was created in 2006. Hogue’s intent was to ask “some interesting questions: can the site constitute an end product within architecture? Is a constructed site somehow less than a building?” As Hogue states “the Fake Estates become both a site to be critically reinvested as well as the starting point for other, more speculative endeavors… This project seeks to visually articulate the agency of maps through a consideration of those moments when conventions for establishing the location and the precise boundaries of a site produce a conceptual ‘excess of surveying.’ Maps constitute not simply a way to locate parcels—in a way, one might argue that the Fake Estates and the [Fake] Fake Estates are by-products of mapping and surveying activities.” This is perhaps further evidence
of the ontological transformation of the properties, as they now are utilized by the
likes of Hogue as the source of “speculative endeavors.”

I want to make a brief note here about the critical role of mapping and
surveying in Matta-Clark’s project as a means of making an breaking boundaries
as an important link to Thoreau’s place-produced thought. Both thinkers shared a
keen interest in thinking with/in place in order to reconfigure and reterritorialize
the borders of place in defiance of the existing physical, ideological, and political
delineations.

Since the Cabinet magazine project and Hogue’s [Fake] Fake Estates, the
properties themselves have for the most part faded from artistic and critical
consciousness.\textsuperscript{47} When asked in 2012, Jeffrey Kastner, senior editor for Cabinet
said “I’m afraid I don’t actually know if the city owns them or not.”\textsuperscript{48} Perhaps this
is evidence of the place pushing back? While these places will always retain the
unretractable marks of Matta-Clark’s thought and encounter, they are not
absolutely defined by this exchange, just as their label as “gutterspaces” did not
wholly determine them. These properties have pushed back by remaining in flux
and moving along the paths of their own divergent histories. Some of the
properties have been purchased by adjacent property owners and are now
amalgamated with neighboring properties, others have remained untouched, while
others have faded into the banalization of the urban landscape… and maybe they
want it that way. Perhaps they have found the “peace and quiet” that Matta-Clark
thought they should be allowed.
Given the cultural climate of New York City in the early ‘70s, it is not surprising that an analysis of Matta-Clark’s conceptual development would demonstrate that he was compelled to resist the power relations that were present in that environment. Many of his contemporaries in art, music, and literature also found themselves concerned with the often frustrating and confusing cultural impositions of the era. However, Matta-Clark’s reaction and strategy against these conditions was wholly unique. Through the situatedness of his thinking he was able to produce localized knowledge that enabled the conceptual shift of “the cut” from the literal to the metaphorical.

My main contention here has been that this development was place-produced, largely through his work on the Fake Estates project, and reflected the interests of those sites, producing an understanding of “the cut” that was more thoughtful and deliberate than Matta-Clark had been able to achieve in earlier articulations. Most importantly, the Fake Estates project rescued Matta-Clark theories and practice from a reading that suggests an insensitive macho artist, recklessly and violently slashing into the spaces of our existence. Instead, we can understand how Matta-Clark utilized the “cut” in an attentive and prudent manner, “aimed at revealing and undermining power where it is most invisible and insidious.”49 The logic of the “cut” became a response to the city being cut up through state intervention. Matta-Clark’s response to the Robert Moses spatial ideology was to make place “anew” and to recognize that “the city was not a machine for living, as architect Le Corbusier had pronounced. Urban life [and
places] could not be reduced to engineering models for traffic, housing, entertainment” or gutterspace.⁵⁰
As an environment of extremes, the desert has often been viewed as a place that can confuse, disorientate, or alter one’s perception of reality (maybe even open the doors of perception—if you are more of a mystic). The impression of the desert as a place of altered states stems, perhaps, from the seeming endlessness of sky and land, or possibly from the almost frightening lack of verticality. In the desert, the horizon—an important reference point for spatial orientation—can seem as miniscule or imperceptible as a single pencil line traced across a blank white page. The discombobulation and confusion of the senses felt in the desert is often partly attributable to physiological effects. As the temperature does a mighty pendulum swing from the crippling heat of the day to the snapping midnight chill, the body can be exposed to hyper- and hypothermia within the very same day. In
fact, the desert is renowned for its effects on the body. Many tales of traversing the desert include descriptions of seeing mirages—ethereal images that arise out of the sand right before a traveler’s eyes as apparition, trick of light, or actual hallucination.

When the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard visited the deserts of the American southwest in the early 1980s, he also had an experience that altered his perceptions. Although Baudrillard does not note any specific physiological trauma, such as hallucinations, he does describe a profound cognitive metamorphosis that transpired in the desert. I argue that Baudrillard’s experience in the desert should be considered as a notable instance of place-produced thought, one in which the place pushed back against the pretensions of the thinker. By thinking with/in the place of the desert, Baudrillard was able engender a new strategy of thought and investigation, one based upon what I am calling here “rapid excursive successions.” Through the development of place-produced thought, Baudrillard was prompted to reconsider his theoretical commitment to the idea that cultural signs are the primary means by which things have meaning. The experience of the desert marked a turning point for Baudrillard—it became his think place as it reshaped not only his style of writing, and strategy of investigation, but also—and most consequentially—the development of his thought.
COMING TO AMERICA

The first of Baudrillard’s longer sojourns in the United States took place in 1975, when he taught for a few months in both San Diego and Los Angeles. In the early 1980s, Baudrillard again spent time traveling through America, especially through the desert regions of the southwest. “As soon as I had a free moment, I went off into the desert,” writes Baudrillard, “For me that was the real scene.”¹ These wanderings were not meant as escapist vacations allowing Baudrillard to unwind. Instead, they were motivated by the intention to gather evidence supporting his pre-existing theoretical concepts about America. As the sociologist Arthur J. Vidich claims, Baudrillard came to “America not to discover it, but to confirm his already fixed images of it.”² Most of Baudrillard’s “fixed images” were influenced by his theory of simulacra, the notion that in contemporary culture, signs were responsible for creating what Baudrillard called a “hyperreality.”

In his 1981 publication, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard argued that in the postmodern world, mass media technologies provide the individual with a hyperreality that is more exciting and engaging than everyday life, and is therefore preferable to everyday realities. Baudrillard stressed that hyperreality informs and orders the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors in the everyday life of the individual. In large part, Baudrillard’s desire to travel America was because he believed it was the epitome of the hyperreal, a place where simulated experiences and images had supplanted reality and where any sort of clear differentiation between the real and hyperreal had dissolved. In *Simulacra and Simulation* Baudrillard uses cinema as an example of the hyperreal: “the relation that is being
formed today between the cinema and the real is an inverse, negative relation: it results from the loss of specificity of one and of the other.” According to Baudrillard, cinema had become hyperreal because it was no longer presented as imaginary or unreal. For Baudrillard, American culture, specifically, had similarly abandoned a distinction between everyday realities and the cinematic. By coming to America, Baudrillard wanted to see this for himself, to immerse himself in the simulacra. “America is neither dream nor reality,” claims Baudrillard, “It is a hyperreality.”

Baudrillard had a definite agenda for his travels, namely the desire to bask in what he believed to be the full realization of the hyperreal. Yet, within his collection of observations about America and the desert, published in 1986 as *America*, Baudrillard reveals still other motivations for his American journey.

The first of these motives was to get away from Europe—not simply geographically but also psychically, emotionally, and philosophically. For Baudrillard, the culture of Europe weighed heavily on the thoughts and behaviors of its inhabitants. “The essential thing was to escape from Europe metaphysically,” Baudrillard stated in a later interview with Philippe Petit, to be “far from a nostalgic culture and history.” Baudrillard believed that America had a novelty unencumbered by tradition, custom, and historical cultural rules. In America, any concept could be manifested in (hyper) reality without having to acknowledge, or adhere to, moral, aesthetic, or critical traditions. Another reason Baudrillard wanted to travel to America was because of his fascination with the desert. For Baudrillard, the desert was heterotopic—in the Foucauldian sense that it was a place that deviated from the established norms of place—a place of
otherworldly fantasy so unusual that a metaphysical awakening seemed likely to occur there. Of course, much of Baudrillard’s perception of the desert as a place of awakening or transformation actually relied on representations of it in popular literature and cinema.

In fact, throughout the pages of *America*, Baudrillard makes several references to the cultural influences shaping his perception of the desert, including Reyner Banham’s book, *Scenes from America Deserta*, published in 1982. Within *Scenes*, Banham details the visual splendor and intellectual insights that he observed in his own travels through the American deserts. “Reyner Banham is right [about the desert],” states Baudrillard, “you have to accept everything all at once, an unchanging timelessness and the wildest instantaneity.” Thus, while Baudrillard regards the west as “wild”—a place with a visible untamed primitivism, he gets that idea (at least initially) not from direct experience of the desert but through a written source.

Another key influence on Baudrillard’s perception of the American desert was popular cinema, especially the iconic Westerns of John Ford. Films such as *Stagecoach* (1939), *My Darling Clementine* (1946), and *Rio Grande* (1950) were shot in the Monument Valley region along the Utah-Arizona border (Fig.1). The Western themed films of Ford (seven in total) revitalized the genre of the American Western film and supplied both Americans and Europeans with defining images and ideas about the landscape of the American southwest. Baudrillard mentions Ford in his writing and shares the director’s slightly neo-romantic view of the desert. In Ford’s films, the desert is often depicted as a
rugged and unforgiving stage for playing out human conflict. “Monument Valley is the geology of the earth, the mausoleum of the Indians,” writes Baudrillard, “and the camera of John Ford.”

Baudrillard not only indicates some of the well-defined ideas he held about America and the desert even before crossing the Atlantic, he also reveals some specific tasks he hoped to achieve during this American sojourn. “I went in search of astral America,” he declares, “the America of desert speed, of motels and mineral surfaces.” Baudrillard’s aspiration was that this search would yield a “marvelously affectless succession of signs, images, ritual acts on the road,” that is, that it would enable an experience of hyperreality. These were his expectations—to escape Europe and to reaffirm his theories of simulacra and hyperreality by relishing the artificial signs and simulations of America. At the same time (and perhaps ironically), Baudrillard was also curious about having an experience that would put him in contact with the real. Underlying Baudrillard’s
travels in America was the question of whether there was any place left in which
the real and hyperreal could be differentiated from one another—this was a
crucial part of Baudrillard’s theory about the hyperreal—not that it was the
antithesis of the real, but that it subsumed the real. It seems that Baudrillard
believed the most likely possibility for temporarily disrupting the hyperreal was to
have a material experience in the desert – to find the desert of the real. Even
though Baudrillard bought into many of the tropes and mythologies about the
American west—such as Fordian and other Western films, Kerouacian travel
adventures, hippie counter culture, hot rod custom car culture, mysticism, the
frontier myth—he experienced much more than those myths would suggest.

Baudrillard’s notion of having a material/embodied experience in the
desert that was connected to the real was by no means a novel one. The ritual of
using the desert as a catalyst for personal metamorphosis through direct
engagement has a long history, dating back several thousands of years in the
Judeo-Christian mystical tradition. Many Native American cultures have also
included the desert as a vital component for the vision quest, a transformative
ritual in which one gains acumen about themselves and the world through
engagement with the energies of the landscape. In assorted media, the desert is
presented in similar ways—as a magical place where personal growth and
transcendental change can happen.

A good illustration of this perception is in one of Ford’s westerns, The
Man Who Shot Liberty Valence, from 1962. The narrative of the film unfolds with
James Stewart’s character (Ransom Stoddard) arriving in the small desert town of
Shinbone, fresh from some law school out east, full of optimism, naïveté, and a somewhat idealized notion of human relations. Stewart’s character goes through a series of physical and emotional tribulations that test the limits of his beliefs and values, transforming him into a wiser, seasoned, and more accomplished person. At the end of the film, having survived the challenges of the desert town, Stewart’s character emerges anew, completing his transformation from a wide-eyed novice attorney to worldly-wise U.S. Senator. The film reiterates and codifies the trope of the desert as a place of transformation that, by the 1960s, was well ensconced in popular culture. “I think you can say that the real star of my Westerns has always been the land,” claimed Ford.10

The Fordian depiction of the desert may have helped to fortify Baudrillard’s expectation that a radical new type of experience could (perhaps even would) occur there. This expectation, along with notions of shamanistic and psychedelic transformation, was a large part of the attraction of the desert for Baudrillard. By traveling to Disneyland, Las Vegas, and Times Square, he was able to ratify his theories of simulation and the hyperreal. Since these places conformed to his theory of the hyperreal, Baudrillard sought to discover a place that might resist his theories. He wanted to know if there were any places left in America that were not completely absorbed by the hyperreal. Baudrillard wondered if there was anywhere in which one might experience the real.

While it is absolutely the case that Baudrillard’s motivation to experience the desert was based upon pre-existing, media-driven perceptions, I argue that in many ways, his desire to witness the real was nonetheless realized during his
wanderings in the desert. Baudrillard did have a type of mystical episode there, although it did not consist of discovering the essence of life or making a new age spiritual connection with a Gaian force; it was more of an interruption of cultural signs. What happened in the desert was that the place pushed back—it resisted the meanings given through the cultural signs of hyperreality. As the raw self-evidence of the real was laid bare, Baudrillard noticed how what one can call the “immanent signs of the real” created a disruption in the existing cultural signs and altered their meaning. For Baudrillard, this meant that the landscape of the desert contained bits of the real that could sometimes distinguish themselves from, and modify, the signs of the hyperreal.

An important ancillary effect of this resignification was that the place also fended off (some of) Baudrillard’s preconceptions about America, a consequence that is discernible in the transformation of his attitude and beliefs about America. Before arriving in America, Baudrillard’s judgment of American sociality was quite dismal. He believed America to be an exemplar of the simulation order, in which “real” interaction and meaning had been replaced in favor of the “hyperreal.” In *Simulations and Simulacra*, Baudrillard writes that in America, “people no longer look at each other, but there are institutes for that. They no longer touch each other, but there is contactotherapy. They no longer walk, but they go jogging, etc. Everywhere one recycles lost faculties, or lost bodies, or lost sociality, or the lost taste for food.”

In another paragraph from the same text, Baudrillard again pejoratively describes America: “a mental implosion and involution without precedent lies in wait for a system of this kind, whose visible
signs would be those of this strange obesity, or the incredible coexistence of the most bizarre theories and practices, which correspond to the improbable coalition of luxury, heaven and money.\textsuperscript{12} Baudrillard’s indictment against the media-fueled consumerism of America seems evident as he predicts an implosion of the escalating American fixation on excess and artifice.

In many ways, Baudrillard’s early view of America is aligned with the stereotypes of global mass media—that Americans are obese, overindulgent, and vapid. The apparent inclusion of these sorts of stereotypes in Baudrillard’s writing has caused many critics, including Vidich and Denis Dutton, to view America as irresponsibly reductive and overly disparaging. However, upon a close reading of America, one may discern a shift in Baudrillard’s perception of America. Baudrillard relates how the experience of place pushed back against his stereotypes, giving him a greater appreciation for American culture. Toward the end of the text, Baudrillard extols the emancipatory dimension of American thought: “We criticize Americans for not being able either to analyze or conceptualize. But this is a wrong-headed critique. It is we who imagine that everything culminates in transcendence… their perspective is the very opposite: it is not conceptualizing reality, but realizing concepts and materializing ideas.”\textsuperscript{13} For Baudrillard, the emancipatory quality lies in the break that America has made with old world European theory and history. As Baudrillard claims, Europe may have “invented a certain kind of feudalism, aristocracy, bourgeoisie, ideology and revolution” that are meaningful for Europeans, but they simply have no resonance in America, and therefore have been cast aside.\textsuperscript{14}
Following his experience of thinking with/in the American desert, Baudrillard grew into a proponent of America, acknowledging both his new vision of American culture and also the radical shift in his philosophical strategy and conceptual development that took place there. As the experience of the desert translated into the writing that became the Cool Memories series, Baudrillard even seemed to become a staunch defender of America. Near the end of the first Cool Memories text he proclaims, “I shall never forgive anyone who passes a condescending or contemptuous judgement on America.” Of course statements like this one should be considered in the light of Baudrillard’s roguish personality, as he himself at times seems to write of America with disdain. However, after traveling through its landscapes, Baudrillard’s view of America does seem to have morphed from one that sees a world “rotten with wealth, power,” into one that celebrates speed, freedom, and jubilant possibility. “Let us grant the country the admiration it deserves,” states Baudrillard. Beyond a new affection for American culture, the experience of the desert more importantly provided a radical alteration to Baudrillard’s intellectual strategy and theoretical development.

PHENOMENAL REDUCTION

Through situated thinking with/in the desert, Baudrillard was compelled to take account of the immediacy of the landscape—the craggy physicality and stark visuality of the desert. Of all the places that Baudrillard traveled as he crossed America, the deserts of the southwest seemed to have most fully captured his
attention. A large majority of the pages in America include a discussion of the desert, with the entire final section of the text collected under the heading “Desert for Ever.” Baudrillard’s sustained interest in the desert seemingly emerged from several interconnected and situated cognitive developments. I argue that each of these developments came to Baudrillard while thinking with/in the desert and are linked to the transference of physical experience to philosophical thought—physics becoming metaphysics. Like Thoreau’s experience in the Walden experiment, Baudrillard seems to have been engaged by, and infatuated with, the physicality of the landscape.

By confronting the physical landscape of the desert, Baudrillard was led to exclaim that “This is the only place where it is possible to relive, alongside the physical spectrum of colors, the spectrum of the inhuman metamorphoses that preceded us, our successive historical forms: the mineral, the organic, salt desert, sand dunes, rock, ore, light, heat, everything the earth has been, all the inhuman forms it has been through, gathered together in a single anthologizing vision.”¹⁸ The philosopher of hyperreality was presented with a place where the real managed—even if ever so slightly—to make itself distinguishable from the hyperreal, a place where cultural signs did not determine meaning without some resistance. In a sense, the place shook Baudrillard, dislodging the assuredness and totality of the logic of Simulacra and Simulation. It brought Baudrillard to the immediacy of experiencing and thinking of the real through the phenomenal encounter of the landscape. This was momentous in the development of Baudrillard’s thought, as the poststructuralist philosopher found himself struck by
the phenomenological force of the desert. For Baudrillard, the real of the desert seemed to subvert some of the cultural signs and images that continuously modified and mitigated its meaning. “The very idea,” writes Baudrillard, “of the millions and hundreds of millions of years that were needed peacefully to ravage the surface of the earth here is a perverse one, since it brings awareness of signs originating, long before man appeared (My italics).” In the desert, Baudrillard witnessed scenes with extraordinary visceral tangibility. The bodily experience opened his awareness to the possibility that things and places can have meanings beyond those supplied by cultural signs.

By thinking with/in place, Baudrillard was challenged to examine the tactile and material surface of things. What emerged from this challenge was that Baudrillard recognized and acknowledged distinctive types of signs: on the one hand, those derived from the semiotics of culture, and on the other, those that were immanent surface signs of the real landscape. What Baudrillard discovered was that the sensory wonders of the surface signs often served to disrupt the meanings transmitted by cultural signs. For Baudrillard, the desert seemed to have a unique ability; “a geology, a sidereality, an inhuman facticity, an aridity that drives out the artificial scruples of culture.” Baudrillard also recognized the influence this disruptive capacity could have on the perception and constitution of a place. I argue that the turn in Baudrillard’s experience can be referred as “phenomenological.” However, it should not be misconstrued as an abandonment of poststructuralist semiotics in favor of phenomenology. Baudrillard himself makes this clear in response to a question by Philippe Petit, in which he is invited
to clarify his position on the experience of the desert. He responded by saying that he was “on the side of – not a phenomenological, but almost a phenomenal reduction of things. You never, in fact, escape transcendence, any more than you can escape discourse, but at a given point the lighting changes, and even ideas pass by the landscape like unidentified objects.” In this statement we again find an example of Baudrillard’s playful impishness. He refuses to concede to a phenomenal experience in the desert, even though he says as much only a few lines later in the same text: “Everything [in the desert] is restored to its raw self-evidence.” Instead of offering a direct assertion, Baudrillard engages in semantic word play, calling his desert experience a “phenomenal reduction.”

Despite recognizing the magnitude and power of immanent signs in the desert, Baudrillard also retains the belief that cultural signs are still at least partially responsible for framing his experience. The persistence of cultural signs is evident in the literary and cinematic allusions that recur in Baudrillard’s references to the desert. Throughout the pages of America, Baudrillard often mentions the cinematic quality of the desert, as when he observed, “the desert you pass through is like the set of a Western.” For Baudrillard, the identity of the desert remained entangled with its representations in films, even to the extent that the images from the screen often take “precedence over reality.” “It is useless,” contends Baudrillard, “to seek to strip the desert of its cinematic aspects in order to restore its original essence; those features are thoroughly superimposed upon it and will not go away (Fig.3).” However, as Baudrillard also discovered, the real of the desert had the ability, every so often, to stand out from the signs of the
This image shows the integration of the cinematic in the desert by depicting a cowboy watching a movie on a large screen in the landscape of the desert. The mural itself also functions as a cinematic screen, painted in a trompe l'oeil manner on the side of a building facing a parking lot. There is a blurring of distinction between the “real” cars parked in front of the wall and the “virtual” landscape unfolding in front of them.

hyperreal in film and mass media. For Baudrillard, the subversive encounter with the real was a “way of sweeping away all the cultural superstructures.”

Yet Baudrillard also saw how the appearance and subversion of the real was fleeting, as it was quickly subsumed by the hyperreal. The “raw self-evidence” of the real could briefly meddle with the hyperreal, and then just as quickly be gone in the flood of unrelenting cinematic effects. That brief moment was enough, however, to enable the real of immanent signs to create a possible fissure in, or parallax to, the stream of signs in the hyperreal.
NEW SEMIOTIC ORDER

Perhaps as important as the geography of the desert was the experience of physically moving through the desert. Motion was crucial for Baudrillard because it helped to illustrate that the relationship between place, immanent signs of the real, and the cultural signs of the hyperreal is not static; rather, it is—at least sometimes—in flux and negotiation. Prior to his desert excursions, Baudrillard’s theories had drawn heavily on semiotics as articulated by Saussure via Barthes. Baudrillard’s analysis of the sign, however, broke way from Barthes’ because he posited that both the structure of the sign and its operation had progressed through history beyond what Barthes had described. While Barthes had explored how the relationship of the signifier to the signified was transformed within a particular context to create a mythology, Baudrillard believed that at the end of the 20th century, in a world governed by mass media, that signs had evolved to the point where, as part of the hyperreal, they were cut off from their referents. Baudrillard deemed these signs “floating signifiers” because they did not have a “referent or ground in any ‘reality’ except their own.”

For Baudrillard, the experience of the desert triggered a reconsideration of his theories about “floating signifiers” and the hyperreal. The revelation of the real, through situated thought, presented Baudrillard with signifiers that were not completely free floating. Instead, the immanent signs of the real in the desert were connected to the physical phenomena of the desert landscape. This challenged Baudrillard’s existing theory in which there was no longer any differentiation between the real and the hyperreal. It was not that all cultural signs had been
erased in the desert, but rather, for Baudrillard, their meaning could sometimes be subverted by the physical rawness of the primal landscape. Baudrillard refers to this as “desertification,” in the sense that the meaning of a sign in the hyperreal could be altered or drained to a “zero sum of meaning.” As he describes, the awesome corporeality of the desert topography has a way of interrupting cultural signs:

The natural deserts… create a vision expurgated of all the rest: cities, relationships, events, media. They induce in me an exalting vision of the desertification of signs and men. They form the mental frontier where the projects of civilization run into the ground. They are outside the sphere and circumference of desire. We should always appeal to the deserts against the excess of signification, of intention and pretention in culture.  

In the desert, Baudrillard experienced a “phenomenal reduction,” in which some cultural signs, and “even your sense of belonging to the human race are all numbed by the fact of having before you the pure, unadulterated sign of 180 million years.”

I suggest that Baudrillard’s experience of phenomenal reduction in the desert led him to recognize a new semiotic order. This new semiotic order allowed him to accommodate what seemed to be anomalies to his existing theories: the immanent signs of the real in the desert. Baudrillard’s own language makes clear what those are, when he refers to having before you the “pure, unadulterated sign of 180 million years” or “signs originating, long before man appeared.” Through phrases such as these, the reader is again confronted with the notoriously slippery and puckish side of Baudrillard. On the
one hand, Baudrillard acknowledges that the signs of the hyperreal do not wholly define some aspects of the desert, but on the other hand he still uses the language of semiology to describe them. While it seems like these “signs originating, long before man appeared” have subverted the Baudrillard’s theory of sign structure, he does not relinquish the logic of the sign, and instead incorporates a reading of the physical rawness of the primal landscape into his theoretical system by creating a new semiotic order.

Throughout the pages of *America*, Baudrillard uses the word “sign” in several different ways, marking a change from one based on the hyperreal to one that is employed loosely (and playfully) enough to encompass a variety of signs, including immanent signs of the real. For example when Baudrillard writes “I looked for it [America] in the speed of the screenplay… in the marvelously affectless succession of signs”33 or “the desert you pass through is like the set of a western, the city a screen of signs and formulas,”34 he is using the term “sign” to indicate a cultural sign. For Baudrillard, a cultural sign of hyperreality is akin to his description given in *Simulacra and Simulation*—“It has no relation to reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.”35 In contradistinction, Baudrillard also uses “sign” in other passages of the text to denote another type of sign. For instance, Baudrillard writes about “signs with no hierarchical ordering… [and] the power of pure open space, the kind you find in the deserts. The power of the desert form: it is the erasure of traces in the desert, of the signified of signs in the cities, of any psychology in bodies. An animal and metaphysical fascination – the direct fascination of space, the immanent fascination of dryness and sterility.”36
Another quote, already mentioned above, also indicates a type of sign distinct from cultural signs: “The natural deserts tell me what I need to know about the deserts of the sign… we should always appeal to the deserts against the excess of signification, of intention and pretention in culture.”37 In the first examples the term “sign” seems to refer to signs of the hyperreal and in the latter, to immanent or surface signs of the real. By employing the term “sign” for disparate usages, Baudrillard seems to want to have it both ways—signs with signifiers that are free floating and others in which the signifiers are grounded by a real topographical referent—further evidence of his elusive and mischievous disposition. As Mike Gane writes, “Baudrillard does occasionally appeal to a radical empiricism of experience against ridiculously out of date concepts. Experience is never purely empirical in Baudrillard.”38 Gane is referring to the same sort of description for Baudrillard’s desert experience as mentioned above—Baudrillard wants to have it both ways. He is not willing to abandon his commitment to semiotics and simulacrum, yet, he also realizes that there is a “phenomenal reduction” in the desert—“the mineral substance of light, the corpuscular fluid of the colours, the total extraversion of one’s body in the heat”—that exceeds the reaches of the hyperreal.39

Baudrillard’s openness to modifying his own theory of signs should come as no surprise. As already mentioned, the notion that the structure of signs could be altered over time was an inherent part of Baudrillard’s overall argument for the progression of the sign. As part of this progression, Baudrillard conceived of the 3rd order of simulation, which moved beyond Barthes semiology to the hyperreal.
The notion of a shifting, historical, or culturally specific structure of the sign was central to Baudrillard’s theory of sign structure. This brings us back to the new semiotic order necessitated by the experience of the real in the desert. Through glimpses of the real in the desert, Baudrillard seemingly (temporarily) adjusted his theory to account for the presence of real phenomena in the physical landscape.

As early on as the third page of *America*, Baudrillard presents the apparent adjustment in his implementation of the term “sign” as part of a new semiotic order, both informing and confounding his reader, like a trickster poet: “The very idea of the millions and hundreds of million years that were needed to peacefully ravage the surface of the earth here is a perverse one, since it brings with it an awareness of signs originating, long before man appeared… And yet they are signs. For the desert only *appears* uncultivated (Baudrillard’s italics).” Later in the text, Baudrillard describes the relationship between the cultural and immanent in even more direct terms. “It would be wrong headed to counterpose Death Valley, the sublime natural phenomenon, to Las Vegas, the abject cultural phenomenon. For the one is the hidden face of the other and they mirror each other across the desert.” In both of these quotations, Baudrillard seems to be wrestling with the relationship of the real and the hyperreal – of the immanent and the cultural. In his experience, the desert actually allowed for a distinction between the real and hyperreal, rather than dissolving their differences, as the hyperreal so deftly accomplishes. Therefore, Baudrillard needed a means of accounting for the experience of the real in the desert. His solution to the seemingly contradictory handling of “sign” is the development of a new semiotic
order in which multiple types of signs co-mingle. As Richard G. Smith writes, Baudrillard’s strategy “is to deconstruct the apparently impervious surface, or continuum, of the code, or the Semiotic.” In Baudrillard’s hands, the place of the desert is shown to be a confluence of immanent signs of the real and cultural signs of the hyperreal within a zone of active exchange.

While I argue that the physical rawness of the desert prompted Baudrillard to reconsider his theory of the structure of the sign in the hyperreal, I also contend that this adjustment was limited and contextual. It does not seem that the recognition of the real in the desert motivated an overhaul of his theory in terms of the operation or reach of the hyperreal. Instead, Baudrillard seemed to regard the desert as the last bastion of the real, the only remaining place where the real was discernable. Moreover, he seemed to suggest that as the reach of the hyperreal continued to extend, even these places would soon vanish. “Everything has now turned into culture and it has even become very difficult to go beyond one’s own culture since one finds it everywhere,” claimed Baudrillard in an interview from 1995. “There will even be a moment when one will not be able find any deserts. Deserts are a metaphor for disappearing objects, evanescence beyond culture. Now they have become increasingly culturalized they are virtually impossible to find.”

RAPID EXCURSIVE SUCCESSIONS

While the experience of the real in the desert constituted an important part of
Baudrillard’s place-produced thought, it does not represent the situated thinking that would have the greatest impact on the development of his subsequent theories. The portion of Baudrillard’s desert experience that would have the greatest legacy on his thinking is what I think of as “rapid excursive successions.” Baudrillard provides a sense of the experience of these “rapid excursive successions” in the desert when he writes that: “The absence of discrimination between positive and negative effects, the telescoping of races, technologies, and models, the waltz of simulacra and images here is such that, as with dream elements, you must accept the way they follow one another, even if it seems unintelligible.” What Baudrillard observed was how a certain movement and speed through the expansive landscape of the desert allowed one to fly from one image to the next, or from one thought to the next, without a logical correlation between successive images or thoughts. Baudrillard called this emancipatory thought process a “spatial, mobile conception – freed from historical centrality.”

The discursive practice that highlights such a type of thinking for Baudrillard is being termed here “rapid excursive successions.”

The locomotive relationship that Baudrillard had with the desert, a relationship that was central to his experience, can be characterized by one word: speed. As we have examined in other instances of place-produced thought, the method and rate of locomotion through place informs the experiences and thought produced with/in place. For Thoreau and Heidegger, the slow and contemplative nature of walking played a significant role in their projects. Baudrillard’s
movement through place by car was much faster than a walking saunter, and therefore, provided him with a different type of encounter with place.

In his descriptions of the desert, Baudrillard regularly celebrates the mobility and freedom of driving through the desert. “Driving is a spectacular form of amnesia,” writes Baudrillard, “Everything to be discovered. Everything to be obliterated.”

The ecstasy of this celebration is reminiscent of Filippo Marinetti’s connection between speed, mobility, and freedom in the Futurist Manifesto. “Up to now literature has exalted a pensive immobility, ecstasy and sleep,” denounces Marinetti, “we intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer’s stride, the mortal leap.” Just as the Futurists did, Baudrillard celebrates the liberation he associates with the speed of the automobile both by physically allowing him to have great mobility, but also by conceptually facilitating detachment from a traditional theoretical base. In his descriptions of American cars, such as the one he used to traverse the desert, Baudrillard makes a particular note of the ability they “have of leaping into action, of taking off so smoothly, by virtue of their automatic transmission and power steering. Pulling away effortlessly… riding along as if you were on a cushion of air, leaving behind the old obsession with what is coming up ahead, or what is overtaking you.”

The duration and pace of Baudrillard’s desert excursions—a small number of fast-paced campaigns—afforded him insight into the conceptual possibilities of rapid succession. Baudrillard’s experience was defined by the freedom of the open throttle of the automobile on the spacious roads of the desert. This particular type of movement was essential to Baudrillard’s experience of rapid succession.
because it enabled him to witness the desert landscape as an unchanging expanse, which hardly changes mile after mile, which is then shattered by passing through a settlement, roadside attraction, or unique landscape formation. The flashing of successive images, as one passes through a town, is even more punctuated by the perpetual views of the desert vastness preceding and following these encounters. This flurry of visual information does not encourage lingering on any one impression for very long.\textsuperscript{48} The type and method of Baudrillard’s movement in the desert is significant because it served to alter his perception of time and space. Between his method of travel and the desert environment itself, Baudrillard quickly discovered that his typical perception of time and space was almost useless. The dizzying expansion and compression of time and space in the desert—for example, when something on the horizon looks fairly close, but after hours of driving, still appears to be the same distance away—forced Baudrillard to observe things differently, latching onto the visual fragments as they flew past.

The ability of the desert to play with perceptions is well documented. As the desert writer William L. Fox notes, the desert has a tremendous power of “absconding our expectations of how to measure time and space.”\textsuperscript{49} Baudrillard also comments on this type of perceptual shift: “when you emerge from the desert, your eyes go on trying to create emptiness all around; in every inhabited area, every landscape they see desert beneath, like a watermark. It takes a long time to get back to a normal vision of things.”\textsuperscript{50} The way that Baudrillard moved through the desert, with the speed of the open road, assisted in this perceptual shift and marked a key component of his experience.\textsuperscript{51}
Following his desert excursions, Baudrillard began to utilize the rhetorical
equivalent of the disconnectedness he experienced while speeding through the
desert—a succession of fleeting fragments and aphorisms—in his writing.

Baudrillard asks himself near the end of *America*: “Why are the deserts so
fascinating?” He then promptly answers himself, saying, “It is because you are
delivered from all depth there – a brilliant, mobile, superficial neutrality,” which
is “a challenge to meaning and profundity, a challenge to nature and culture, an
outer hyperspace, with no origin [in cultural meaning?], no reference-points.”

For Baudrillard, this meant that the rapid movement through the desert created a
sense of active exchange between signs and images in which the solidity of
meaning, origin, or singular reference was denied. This experience was significant
because it prompted a shift in the development of Baudrillard’s thought,
germinating from the desert experience of rapid excursive successions. As an
embodied metaphor, Baudrillard realized that assemblages of pithy snippets
gathered from immediate and fleeting observations offered alternate perspectives
to those derived by traditional theory and close analysis.

While I am arguing here that the speed and movement through the desert,
and the rapid transition from one impression to the next, contributed to
refashioning Baudrillard’s thought, I would add that he was undoubtedly primed
to find that approach valuable by a well-established tradition of philosophical
aphoristic journal writing. Some of the aphoristic literary collections that
Baudrillard may have been familiar with included books by Goethe, Kierkegaard
and Wittgenstein. He was also definitely aware of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and
Evil, a text divided into numbered sections, many of which consist of a single aphorism. In Baudrillard’s writing, Nietzsche is a constant companion.

“Nietzsche, as far as I am concerned, is the one who has continued to be the most important,” writes Baudrillard, “but not as a point of reference, as someone I would cite, but as a spirit (esprit), as a stimulus (impulsion), or inspiration.”

Baudrillard knew of the aphoristic tradition used by Nietzsche long before he arrived in the desert. In principle, therefore, he could have adopted this approach prior to his desert engagement. But he did not. For Baudrillard, it was the phenomenal reduction and the movement through the landscape (adapted as a sort of vanguard empiricism) that impacted him so greatly. “I knew about all of this [the desert]… when I was still in Paris of course,” claimed Baudrillard, “But to understand it, you have to take to the road.” Baudrillard refers here to the pre-existing perceptions acquired from the hyperreal of mass media versus the immanent signs of the real in the landscape of the desert. The latter remained unrecognized until Baudrillard was immersed and thinking with/in the place.

On the road, careening through the desert, Baudrillard witnessed the “succession of signs, faces, images” through the windshield of his car, as if they were flashing on a screen. From these fleeting impressions, Baudrillard gleaned observations and insights, prompting him to fall in love with the fragment. And, as Geoff Dyer claims, he came to adore “slipstream exaggerations, heat-ripple visions and switchback revelations.” Baudrillard relished the subversion and outbreak of new possibilities in using a fragmentary and excursive observational strategy. What Baudrillard was able to accomplish with this style is a sort of
postmodern mash up of often-disparate thoughts to create new meanings. In his post-America writing, Baudrillard opened up his range of analysis to include myriad topics, and bears the stamp of what Gane calls “remarkable experimentation and play.”

Many of his detractors, however, have assumed Baudrillard’s fragmentary style and strategy to be a misstep. As Vidich claims, in writing America, Baudrillard was “substituting impression for analysis, feeling and intuition for careful study.” Vidich chastises Baudrillard for this strategy, asserting that America “creates a literary aesthetic by sacrificing intellectual and artistic precision” and that it is “largely empty of insight.” Another philosopher, Denis Dutton, declares in his review of America that Baudrillard “leap[s] from one bombastic assertion to the next, no matter how brazen.” In making these critiques, Vidich and Dutton seem to miss the point. It is no accident that Baudrillard avoids a traditional, rigorous academic analysis. Instead, he puts into practice the strategy learned in the desert, hoping that an alternative perspective and understanding of America could be produced that stood in contradistinction to those offered by traditional analytical methods.

Baudrillard uses the strategy of rapid succession as a means to avoid the paralysis of analysis. “If you approach this society [USA] with the nuances of moral, aesthetic, or critical judgment” claims Baudrillard, “you will miss its originality.” Although Baudrillard here seems to suggest this style of observation is especially well suited to analyze contemporary American culture, throughout the remainder of his life he continued to use a strategy of rapid
excursive successions to create new perspectives and meanings between
established fields of study and cultural theories that address everything from
terrorism to mass media. Immediately following his desert experience, the
profundity of a strategy of rapid excursive successions seems to have deeply
resonated with Baudrillard, as he adopted it with even more zeal for his very next
book, *Cool Memories*, which was published in 1987, one year after *America*.

Baudrillard was so pleased with the outcome of the first *Cool Memories*
publication that he eventually extended it into a series of five texts (*Cool
Memories I-V*). The impact of Baudrillard’s place-produced thought seems
evident, as each of these texts reflects Baudrillard’s desert experience and the
thinking developed there by presenting a “whirl of things and events as an
irresistible, fundamental datum.” Each of the *Cool Memories* books consists of
short bursts of thoughts, snappy witticisms, and tiny morsels of biting cultural
criticism assembled together. This structure can be related back to Baudrillard’s
desert experience, flying along in his car while a visual pastiche of signs, images,
and impressions flashed across his windshield. While this rhetorical equivalent of
rapid excursive successions is an important element of the *Cool Memories* series,
the experience in the desert—of fragmentary and fleeting impressions—had still
another, and even more significant, impact on the development of Baudrillard’s
thought, leading to a profound turn in the progression of his philosophy.
RADICAL UNCERTAINTY

Many scholars agree that a significant shift occurred in Baudrillard’s thought during the late 1970s or early 1980s, around the same time as his travels in the desert. Mark Poster identifies an important shift in Baudrillard’s thought with the publication of *Fatal Strategies* in 1983. It is in this text that Baudrillard fully adopts the analysis of the hyperreal over the “representational subject.” Gane also designates a similar time period in which Baudrillard’s theories undergo a transformation, although he asserts that “*Seduction* [from 1979] is the work that marked the turning.” In Baudrillard’s writing from the period when he began spending time in America, according to Gane, one finds the first evidence of both his shift away from Marxism and from traditional argumentation and toward more fragmentary and aphoristic writing. In *Fatal Strategies*, Baudrillard begins to challenge the logic of the subject in which the “Kantian categories of time, space, causality” are believed to be rationally applied to the experience of reality.

Within this text, Baudrillard also begins to criticize the footing of critical social theory, pointing to how, in the post-modern world saturated with the hyperreality of mass media, “rationalist epistemologies are inadequate for the analysis of the media and other new social activities.”

I argue that the impetus for this shift is rooted in the rapid excursive successions of the desert experience. In an interview with *CTheory* from 1995, Baudrillard gives an indication of this connection. Asked about his travels and whether he considers himself as “The Accidental Tourist,” Baudrillard responded:
I guess a form of speculation, a capacity for crossing, traversing, yes... If going around an object or looking at it from multiple viewpoints, defines the tourist, yes that is true. But there is also the fact that tourists avoid, let off, abandon a number of belongings and I did strive to do that... I tried not to refer to all of the history of ideas, philosophy even, to all of that richness I admired the most. Somewhere they are still close to me, but I did try not to make references to them, I chose to forsake them.  

Baudrillard’s response reveals the adoption of a strategy of rapid excursive successions that came to inform his thought through investigative strategies that “avoid, let off, abandon” traditional theoretical grounding in favor of thoughts formed through scraps of passing observation.

From the early-1980s onward, Baudrillard further expanded the fragmentary strategy of rapid excursive successions formulated in the desert, as his theorizing and philosophy attempted to subvert the boundaries of various fields of study and remain “without a school or an attachment to a social movement or intellectual discipline.” During the period following his desert travels, Baudrillard began to increasingly display his preference for the fractal and enigmatic. This is evident in the proliferation of topics that Baudrillard began to address in his writing—leaving nothing off limits—as is suggested in the blurb on the back of Cool Memories. “Baudrillard’s last book was about America,” it reads “His new one is about cats, Foucault, Alfa Romeos, leukemia, Catholicism, the Berlin Wall, mattresses, Laurent Fabius, Jean-Paul II, roses...” Cool Memories II (1987-1990), published in 1996, continues with a similar wide array of topics. Touted by the back cover as a “wide ranging discussion of events and ideas,” moving “between poetry and waterfalls, strikes and stealth bombers, Freud and La Cicciolina, shadows and simulacra... Reagan’s smile and Kennedy’s death.” Even
the organization of the *Cool Memories* series demonstrates evidence of the move away from a traditional linear sequencing for a text, as the grouping of sections under the year they were written is abandoned in *Cool Memories II*, and is replaced by a continuous stream of aphorisms.

Gane has referred to this turn toward the fragmentary in Baudrillard’s thought during the early ‘80s as a move towards “radical uncertainty.” In his post-desert writings, Baudrillard progressively incorporates uncertainty and fragmentation to investigate the contradictions and inconsistencies of culture. For Baudrillard, the utilization of a fractured and uncertain methodology seemed well suited for analyzing a world which itself had become fractured and uncertain. “If the world is paradoxical, [then Baudrillard believed that] theory must be even more paradoxical.” In the rapid excursive successions experienced in the desert, Baudrillard found the perfect strategy for theorizing about the world. In this way, we can consider Baudrillard’s place-produced thought as an instance of *thinking through place*, even after the physical interaction with the place had ended. This lingering presence of Baudrillard’s *think place* in his philosophy was profoundly influential—even to the point of altering Baudrillard’s existence. By transforming Baudrillard on an ontological level, the desert seemed to have radically transformed his development as a thinker and human being. “Long before I left,” laments Baudrillard “I could not get Santa Barbara out of my head.”
REAL AMERICA DOES NOT EXIST

While Baudrillard was deeply impacted by his travels in America, he also had some lasting influence on America. As the writers Aurelian Crăiucu and Jeffrey C. Isaac assert, Baudrillard has been the “most prominent postmodern thinker who has written on America.”

I claim that Baudrillard’s writing on America can be considered as an investigation about how Americans experience place, one emerging out of his own place-based experience of the American landscape. Written nearly thirty years ago, Baudrillard’s critique foresaw the increasing role of the hyperreal and the proliferation of technology that now defines how Americans experience place.

In his book, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, Baudrillard suggests that the Gulf War never happened in the sense that it was only experienced in the USA as hyperreal signs and images. For Baudrillard, the experience of the Gulf War was so mediated by mass media that it was something cinematic and artificial—successfully subsuming the real war into the floating signifiers of the hyperreal. The hyperreality presented by the 24-hour news cycle was not the war itself, but a discursively constructed version of the war. In his writings about America, Baudrillard implies that a similarly discursive construction through the hyperreal occurs in how Americans experience place. The real places of America do not exist because they are so thoroughly experienced through the mediation of cultural signs and technologies (hyperreality).

In his experience of certain places in America (Disneyland), Baudrillard realized just how pervasive the hyperreal is, which enabled him to predict how its
unrelenting growth would soon lead to the domination of the fourth order of simulacrum in the experience of place—the virtual. This is the ontological leap that Baudrillard makes in his gathering of information about America. Baudrillard was able to forecast, and in many ways assist, in the radical shift of how place is experienced in America, ultimately modifying the very ontology of America.

Although Baudrillard was surprised and perhaps somewhat elated by the distinction of the real from the hyperreal in his desert excursions, he also acknowledged that distinction as increasingly less likely to occur. Baudrillard’s prediction of the onset of the virtual in America, as part of the historical progression of simulacra, helped to define a shift in the way that Americans would experience place in the wake of the digital information age that would exchange the real for the virtual. The use of the virtual as a mediator between the viewer/traveler and the landscape has become commonplace in the 21st century digital era. Navigation and digital mapping software or applications (Google maps being one of the most popular) have become regular features on everything from automobiles to hand held digital devices, accessible at almost any time or location. These types of technologies provide a virtual representation, which users can then utilize to navigate a real place. This virtual layer has become so ubiquitous and widespread—even in the form of geotagging images on social media sites—that it is often perceived as part of the place, and absolutely mediates our experience of place.

Devices that provide augmented realities, the Google Glass for example, have the same effect of blurring any remaining distinction between the real and
the virtual. Google Glass is a computer in the form of a pair of glasses worn by the viewer. By using voice commands, images and information are displayed on the lenses of the glasses so that from the perspective of the user, images are overlaid onto what they see before them, effectively merging the virtual with the landscape (Fig.4 and Fig.5). This merger changes the way that place is experienced, which also means that the place is changed. It is through the exchange with place that we gather information and organize our thoughts about individual places—which is a major force in the constitution of its being (and ours, presumably). Baudrillard makes this connection when he reflects on driving in America: “This [he refers to the fluid experience and freedom of driving in America] creates a new experience of space, and at the same time, a new experience of the whole social system.”

Just as Baudrillard had his perceptions of time and space altered by travelling through the desert, he also foresaw how a similar type of alteration or shift in the perception of place would coincide with the spread of the virtual. Baudrillard’s thoughts about how place would be experienced in the fourth order of simulacra—the virtual—stemmed from his own experience of the hyperreal in America. Baudrillard understood that the evolution of the hyperreal into the virtual would likely be embraced first in America and would radically change the manner in which Americans experience the place of America, and indeed this occurs on a daily basis with the implementation of digital navigation and mapping technologies.
Figure 4. A view from the perspective of a Google glass user showing the navigation graphics overlaid onto the landscape. Image courtesy www.google.com/glass/start/what-it-does/

Figure 5. Another view from the perspective of a Google glass user showing the navigation graphics overlaid onto the landscape. Image courtesy http://www.howitworksdaily.com/technology/how-smartglasses-work/
All of this proliferation of geolocational technology has rendered an even greater variation in the experience of place. “Place” is now more than ever heterogeneous “places,” depending on which technologies are used or activated in the navigation and understanding of place. The ubiquity of these mediations has increased the impossibility of having the same experience of place more than once. The pervasiveness of technology in the experience of place for many Americans has reached the point in which media and technology pundits such as J.D. Lasica have made claims that “geolocation capabilities will simply be baked into our everyday on-the-go lives.” The use of geolocational technologies reshapes sensory data in powerful ways – they can often initiate rapidly changing exchanges with place as the technology may even change or update as the experience is occurring. This means that multiple experiences of “places” can occur within a seemingly singular experience of “place.” These types of technologies have facilitated the proliferation of exchanges within a situated socio-historical zone to become more diversified, complex, and networked.

The alteration to the way that Americans experience place through the mediation of geolocational technologies will ultimately lead to a transformation of the place itself—this is Baudrillard’s ontological leap. As previously mentioned, Thoreau shared a similar assertion about the transformative power of technology more than one hundred years before Baudrillard when he claimed that “the railroad rides upon us.” For Baudrillard, I argue that the first indication of this transformation comes out of his place-produced thought with/in the American landscape. Baudrillard believed the alterations to the experience and
understanding of place should not be taken lightly. With the further disappearance of the real, the virtual will increasingly modify the understanding, organization, and classification of place, essentially forming an ontological transfiguration.
One would cut through all the heavy layers of ideology that have been borne down since the beginnings of the family and private property: that can be done only in the imagination… to change the imaginary in order to be able to act on the real.

- Catherine Clement

The human imagination can significantly transform the everyday. In this sense, it can be thought of as a place of revolutionary innovation, an incubator for what might seem impossible in a given epoch. For example, Leonardo da Vinci imagined flying machines in the pages of his notebook long before the first airship or the flight of the Wright Brothers. As the writer Virgil Nemoianu claims, the human imagination is a potent resource because it can “introduce us to a series of things that have not happened in our own worlds.”

In aggregates, such as the “collective imagination,” the human imagination is also a site for originating new forms of knowledge, identity, and subjectivity. Indeed, a collective imagination is a place in which the hopes, fears
and desires of a collective are negotiated, a place where disparate ideologies and cultures encounter each other in a dialogical exchange. This chapter argues that it is such a place—specifically the third space of the Indian collective imagination—that the philosopher Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak used as the setting for situated contemplation, for the development of thought produced with/in place. As an interstitial site of negotiation and invention between the body politic of the colonized and the imposition of colonial rule, the third space of the Indian collective imagination had a particular and significant impact on Spivak’s methodology of analysis, object of critique, and development of thought.

THIRD SPACE
I have borrowed the term “third space” from Homi K. Bhabha. If first and second spaces are meant to indicate those of the colonized and the colonizers, then the third space is identified as something else besides; a space that mixes elements of the two other spaces in order to map an alternative geography that can remain contested and unsettled. According to Bhabha, a “third space” is a place of hybridity and exchange. Within these exchanges there is an “emergence of interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – [in which] the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated (Bhabha’s italics).”² It is the character of the Indian collective imagination as a “third space” – a place of contestation and negotiation – that Spivak especially interacts with, in developing her place-produced thought. In many ways, the development of Spivak’s thinking has been
deeply grounded within what she refers to as the “inventive equivalence” of the third space of the Indian collective imagination. As Spivak explains, inventive equivalence does not involve a removal of difference, but rather entails, “thinking without nation, [using] space-names as shifters, in a mythic geography” that can disturb “measures in terms of a standard at whose heart is Western European nationalism.” She has utilized this place-produced thought to develop an insurgent critique of the discursive tropes of Western metaphysics and Eurocentricity. Viewed with this awareness of its integral relationship to “mythic geography” and intimate relation to place, I argue that Spivak’s philosophy contains a critical spatial and topographical quality that is often unrecognized. As such, this chapter will demonstrate the crucial roles of materiality, situadedness, and the co-production of thought with/in place, in the development of Spivak’s thought.

Spivak’s philosophical development is especially noteworthy within this overall project because it includes the production of a situated epistemology with/in place, but without an explicit terra firma. The geographical borders of India do not absolutely define the third space of its collective imagination (Spivak’s think place), as the third space is not completely defined along nationalistic, ethnic, or religious lines. As a zone of active exchange, the third space of a collective imagination can be diasporic, extending beyond the borders of established nation-states (which are themselves temporal human constructs). Thus, Spivak’s place-produced thought is not directly imbricated with physical topography in the same manner as the other examples described in this text.
Nonetheless, by thinking of the third space of the Indian national imagination as a *type of place*, we can regard it within the parameters of a place as first established in our initial discussion of place and space, that is to say, as a *socio-historical zone of active exchange* between various forces and ideologies—and therefore, a dynamic space of negotiation. The third space of the Indian collective imagination functions as a focalizing locus for Spivak’s thought in the same manner that physical geographies operate in other instances of place-produced thought.

**DISCURSIVE MATERIALITY**

The absence of materiality in Spivak’s place of thought might, at first, seem problematic, particularly because materiality was critical to the other instances of place-produced thought that we have explored. However, we need to recall that the materiality in other instances of place-produced thought was significant because of how it *demonstrated the agency of place*. The encounters with materiality for these other thinkers are examples of the place pushing back, asserting itself against the presumptions of the thinker and the impositions of culture. This distinction emphasizes that the agency of a place is part of, but also more than just its materiality. Instead, the agency of place should be considered as a product of its stratified histories, encounters, and the forces acting upon and within its margins. The sum of its agglomerated particulars is what provides place with a continuously shifting agency, not merely a singular aspect of its material constitution.
The third space of the Indian collective imagination—while lacking the actual materiality that other sites of place-produced thought may possess—still has a similar force of indigenous agency, making it capable of pushing back against the presumptions of the thinker. Even so, there is still more to be considered in terms of materiality for Spivak’s locus of thought. By further examining materiality in place-produced thought, not only can we better explicate the character of materiality, but we can also reveal a vital materiality operating at the core of Spivak’s thinking.

First, we would do well to recognize the influence of language, discourse, and ideology on the materiality of every occurrence of place-produced thought. In the Walden experiment, for example, even though Thoreau perceived that by living in a cabin on the edge of Walden Pond he would be brought closer to the “essence of things,” he brought his own discursive presumptions to the experience of materiality within the place. For example, Thoreau expresses that “a taste for the beautiful is most cultivated outdoors, where there is no house and no house keeper.”5 The possibilities for the materiality of a place are in some ways determined by the thoughts, language, and capacities of the person experiencing the encounter. Baudrillard’s engagement with the material desert was undoubtedly filtered through interlocutors such as Jack Kerouac, John Ford, Reyner Banham, and pop culture representations. All of these discursive layers came with Baudrillard to the desert, injecting his experience with pre-existing notions of materiality. Each encounter with materiality is marked by the concept and perceptions of materiality that the specific person brings with them. Therefore,
while other instances of place-produced thought may seem to have a more direct engagement with raw materiality, we need to remember the discursivity of materiality particular to each thinker within the context of their encounter with place. For example, when Matta-Clark first learned of the “gutterspace” properties and was able to visit one of them, he was struck by the nature of their existence and the conditions responsible for their creation. For most other observers, these small parcels of land were meaningless and useless, and a material encounter with them would likely have done little to changed that conception. Materiality in the same location is experienced very differently for each individual, depending upon the background, intentions, and motivations framing his or her experience.

Secondly, even though Spivak’s thinking may not be explicitly anchored to a terra firma, there is still a material basis to the development of her thought. This includes her childhood experiences living in Kolkata, her own body, her movement(s) between the USA and India, and perhaps most importantly her continued encounters with Subaltern women. Even though Spivak has lived in the USA for most of her life, she has maintained close relations with various Subaltern groups. For instance, Spivak speaks about her experiences with a group of Sabar women—how they demonstrate within their songs an inventive equivalence and negotiation akin to that which animates the third space of the Indian collective imagination. Spivaks notes that the inventiveness of their lyrics, which often mix fact with fantasy, are a microcosm of third space processes and productions. As Spivak explains in an anecdotal format:
Imagine the frisson of delight that passed through me the first time that I heard these women weave a verse that began: *Manbhumer Man raja*—‘King Man of Manbhum’—using the precolonial name of this place that nobody uses. The next line was even more delightful: *Kolkatar rajar pathorer dalan bé*—‘the King of Kolkata has a stone mansion.’ Kolkata was in the place of what I am calling ‘inventive equivalence.’ They were going to Kolkata, a little group for a fair, so they were honouring the King of Kolkata by preparing these songs. Kolkata is my hometown and I was thinking, as I sang with these women in that remote room… who would the King of Kolkata be? Kolkata is a colonial city and, unlike older Indian cities had never had a Nawab… it never had a Hindu Raja either. But the women were singing ‘The King of Kolkata has a stone mansion,’ where Kolkata occupied the place of a shifter, and who was I to contradict?⁶

Through song, these women were able to construct a narrative about Kolkata that wove together histories and invented attributes into their present collective experience of traveling to Kolkata. For Spivak, these types of encounters have provided a materiality or grounding to the play between positions or claims that characterizes the function of the third space of the Indian collective imagination. These encounters have also revealed to her how the third space can “appropriate material of all sorts into its machine, robbing the content of its epistemic charge.”⁷ That ability to become “neither the One… nor the Other… but something else besides,”⁸ is markedly present in Spivak’s thinking and notable when she proclaims: ‘I realized that, as for all peoples who are not the felicitous subject of the European Enlightenment, their perennially blocked path to ‘modernity’ has been hybrid, not ‘European.’”⁹ In terms of this type of play or hybridity, the third space of the Indian collective imagination (and therefore Spivak’s thinking) echoes Jacques Derrida’s thoughts about the nature of a text. For Derrida, a text is “at the same time open, proffered and indecipherable, even
without our knowing that it is indecipherable (Derrida’s italics).” When Derrida speaks about a text, he urges us to understand the inseparability of the text from context, meaning that the text is never fixed. The text operates as more of a “third space” in which diversified voices intermingle and clash in continual play. Derrida insists that this play means that the text is “constituted by its never-fully-to-be-recognized-ness.” There is an important connection between Derrida’s assertions, Spivak’s thinking, and the function of the third space of the Indian collective imagination, because it emphasizes the performative tendencies utilized to produce knowledge and meaning.

CRICKET AND COLONIALISM

Some historical context for the anatomy or framework of the Indian collective imagination and its development in the 20th century is in order here. The Republic of India, as it is known today, had been a trading partner with numerous European companies since the beginning of the 18th century. In 1848, British regulation of the region was strengthened when an English lord was appointed to the top position in the East India Company, which was the most powerful organization in India. The East India Company controlled trade and flexed its muscle through the use of private armies. Once the company was dissolved in 1874, England took over direct control of India, which was subsumed under colonial rule. India remained under stringent British control until 1947, when it became an independent nation. The shift for India from being a colony to being a post-colonial nation, and the exchanges between colonizer and colonized during that
process, were significant in the development of Spivak’s thinking. Of particular import for her was the third space of the Indian collective imagination and its relation to British attempts to produce, maintain, and promulgate its authority in India. One of most explicit and readily understood instances of this confluence can be found in cricket.

First introduced during the 1840s as a segregated sport, one in which English and Indian players never mixed, cricket “evolved into an unofficial instrument of state cultural policy,” serving as a vehicle to further disseminate ideas about imperialist standards of character and social behavior. The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai writes that the structure, etiquette, and rules of cricket were intended to “transmit Victorian ideals of character and fitness to the colony.” As the reach and popularity of cricket flourished in India, cricket teams from England began to tour India playing matches against “Indian” teams – originally comprised of Englishmen living in India. However, as the number of highly skilled Indian cricket players increased, there was a sense of public urgency (closely tied to the rise of Indian nationalism) for Indians themselves to represent India on its national cricket teams. This demand mean that there “had to be other parallel entities in the colonies against which the English nation-state could play: thus, ‘India’ had to be invented, at least for the purposes of colonial cricket.”

Through its growing popularity and its representation of a collective identity, Indian cricket became firmly established in the realm of the national imagination. Once a part of the national imagination, cricket became subject to
the agency of the social collective, molded at the interstices of heterogeneous cultures and ideas. Through representations in the collective imagination via cultural outlets such as mass vernacular literature, public broadcasting, popular cinema, and increased indigenous patronage, Indian cricket was presented as a “critical instrument of [Indian] subjectivity and agency in the process of decolonization.”15

Indian cricket grew into a means of actively playing out, in a physical and visual manner, the ideological and political conflicts swirling within the third space of the Indian collective imagination. As a form of ideological play, cricket can be considered as a “microcosm of the fissures and tensions of a deeply divided society: fissures that it both reflects and plays upon, mitigates as well as intensifies.”16 As a visualization of the operation of the third space of the Indian collective imagination, cricket also served as a source of Indian identity and subjectivity formation. Appadurai writes that when “Indians from various linguistic regions in India see and hear the cricket narratives of television and radio, they do so not as neophytes struggling to grasp an English form but as culturally literate viewers for whom cricket has been deeply vernacularized.”17 Thus, cricket transformed, and a colonial sport became a new form of “inventive equivalence.” A key aspect of this inventive equivalence was the tangible subversion of caste hierarchies and the challenge to Western constructs of the Subaltern subject.

As early as 1906, the victory of a mixed caste Indian cricket team over a group of European cricketers was celebrated by the *Indian Social Reformer*
newspaper as having “done far more to liberalize the minds of thousands of young Hindus than all other attempts in other spheres.” As Ramachandra Guha also writes, these types of victories “were seen variously as a triumph over caste prejudice and an assertion of a suppressed national spirit.” That a game might have such far-reaching consequences is not unreasonable. Roger Callois has asserted that “the competition and simulation [acted out in games] may and indeed do[es] create cultural forms to which an educational or esthetic value is ascribed.” It is the notion of cricket as a site in which third space conflicts and contestations are enacted that creates a crucial connection to Spivak’s thinking. A comparable subversive process and assertion of Subaltern subjectivity is inscribed in Spivak’s thinking about the critique of Western metaphysics and Eurocentricity.

Beginning as a symbol of, and instrument for, colonial power, cricket was transformed in the Indian context into something quite different. This production of an “inventive equivalence” amounted to a cultural re-visioning. Indian cricket became clearly distinct in its character, process, and presentation from the colonial English model of cricket, while still maintaining a historical connection to its British roots. Appadurai cites that “the impact of media, commercialization, and national passion have almost completely eroded the old Victorian civilities associated with cricket. Cricket is now aggressive, spectacular.” Or as Ghua more generally states, “the game has come to mean something quite different here from what it did, and often still does, in its original home.” The journalist Soumya Bhattachary also describes how the game of cricket was re-visioned in
India, particularly after the ICC Cricket World Cup in 1983, as it became the symbol of a “New India, a Young India, a Fearless India” and the “delirious staple of Indian public life and discourse.”\textsuperscript{23} The fervent embrace of cricket as a collective passion in India is demonstrated by their role as a major player in world cricket since the 1970s, winning the World Cup twice within that span. Cricket has been re-territorialized; in its contemporary manifestation, English cricket has been transformed in India into “something else besides” – not just a leftover from a colonial oppressor. As Shadra Ugra maintains, “India sees cricket – and indeed an image of itself on a global scale – through its cricket team.”\textsuperscript{24}

In the transformation from “cricket played in India” to “Indian cricket,” a crucial indigenous modification occurred which enabled Indian cricket to become a forum for the negotiation of collective consciousness and agency. This shift transpired when the challenges within the game of cricket were presented as the personal struggles of some of its most famous cricketers. These narratives of personal struggle came to stand as metaphors of the collective struggle for subjectivity and identity. Once this shift occurred, Indian cricket was no longer merely a game. In describing the famous cricketer Gundappa Vishwanath (Fig.1), Anandam P. Kavoori details how he would will “the public, his partner (so to speak), to reach more fully into themselves, to participate with increasing abandon.”\textsuperscript{25} The viewing public for cricket came to feel as though the struggles and victories of the individual cricketers were also their own struggles and victories. By becoming a metaphor of collective identity, cricket ceased to be an extension of colonialism, and became instead a “social practice that forms the
background of everyday life.” As Guha claims, cricket was instilled in the collective heart of Indians because it acted out the concerns of the collective on the playing field.

Figure 1. The famous cricketer Gundappa Vishwanath at bat. Image courtesy of Getty Images.

LIMINAL PHILOSOPHY

This act of translating cricket from a colonial instrument of power into a representation of passionate collective subjectivity is a critical illustration of the operation of the third space of the Indian collective imagination. However, it’s worth noting that Spivak never explicitly writes about cricket. In the context of this analysis, it doesn’t matter that Spivak never directly references the development of cricket in India, because I am using it as an example of how the power of the third space of the collective imagination can negotiate and alter existing forms of subjectivity and knowledge. Spivak’s thinking is connected to Indian cricket in the shared reliance on the third space of the Indian collective.
imagination. It is the transformative and negotiative ability of the third space of
the Indian collective imagination that is most indelible for Spivak, rather than any
of its individual productions such as cricket. Spivak has been much more drawn to
the third space of the Indian collective imagination in the oral-formulaic traditions
of endemic storytelling and folk songs. “I am not asking us to imitate the oral-
formulaic,” claims Spivak, “I am suggesting that the principle of inventive
equivalence [drawn from the oral-formulaic] should be at the core of the
comparativist impulse.”

Spivak’s connection to the oral-formulaic and the Indian collective
imagination has a long history. Born in what was then called Calcutta in 1942,
Spivak studied and lived there until the early 1960s when she came to America to
continue her education at Cornell. Despite moving her main home to America
more than 50 years ago, Spivak has continued her engagement with India by
returning there to teach and work with various groups. It is Spivak’s sustained
efforts to think with/in the Indian collective imagination that has enabled her to
maintain a symbiosis, both working with, and learning from, the power of the
third space. These encounters have helped Spivak to invigorate her connection to
the collective imagination, as well as provide a materiality for it in the form of
tangible bodies and subjects.

The Indian Independence of 1947 marked a tremendously influential
moment in the development of Spivak’s thought. Indeed, at a lecture given at the
Centre for Advanced Study in Sofia, Bulgaria, and later published as a book
entitled, *Nationalism and the Imagination*, Spivak spoke of the impact of Indian independence:

Elation in the conversation of the elders, interminable political discussions. Remember, we were 300 years under the Islamic empire and then 200 years under the British. So it was big… The important event was Partition, the division of the country… Overnight Kolkata became a burdened city; even its speech patterns changed. If these were the recollections of Independence, the nationalist message in the streets created schizophrenia.  

The feeling of schizophrenia that Spivak describes came about mainly through Indian Partition. As nation-states were geographically reorganized, many people seemed to lose the “comfort felt in one’s corner of the sidewalk, a patch of ground… which the nation thing conjures.” As Spivak continues, “when this comfort is taken away, there is a feeling of helplessness, loss of orientation, dependency, but no nation thing.” Without a specific parcel of land in which to anchor and ground the sense of nationalism, the third space of the Indian collective imagination became a key site for the negotiation of Indian identity and subjectivity. The schizophrenia that Spivak refers to is the uncertainty and open-endedness of Bhabha’s “intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness” as it is negotiated within the third space of the collective imagination. Therefore, for Spivak it has been the re-visioning function of the third space of the collective imagination that has been most profound, rather than the act of Independence or Partition itself. Due in part to her experience of Indian Independence and Partition, Spivak enthusiastically embraces a form of nationalism that “is the product of a collective imagination constructed through rememoration.” As
Spivak and other Indians experienced during Partition, when the piece of ground that one derives much of his or her identity from is radically modified by political or cultural actions, a loss of comfort with such a place may occur. In such an instance, the collective imagination takes on even more prominence as a source of rootedness, belonging, and identity.

Near the end of the lecture, Spivak reiterates one of the main lessons that she learned from the “rememoration” or re-visioning of the state by the collective imagination, in the formation of an identity for itself as part of the Independence process: any collective imagination “trained in the play of language(s) may undo the truth-claims of national identity thus unmooring the cultural nationalism that disguises the workings of the state—disguises the loss of civil liberties.”

Spivak’s own development of thought is rooted within the play of language and negotiation of difference in the third space of the Indian collective imagination mentioned above. Spivak hints at this type of site-specificity for her thinking/speaking when she notes, “I tend to always speak in context. I always carry the trace of what I do, where I am.”

In many ways, Spivak’s place-produced thought is a form of critical regionalism, sharing tensions between the local and the global that are evident in all forms of place-produced thought. Just as Spivak’s critical regionalism attempts to be “free of the baggage of nationalist identitarianism” and moves beyond national boundaries, the overall notion of place-produced thought that we have been exploring endeavors to do something comparable. As Spivak’s project demonstrates, place-produced thought is often able to chip away at the legacy of
established norms such as the Platonic binarisms in Western philosophy because it often attempts to “undermine possessiveness, the exclusiveness, [and] the isolationist expansionism of mere nationalism.”³⁶ Spivak’s place-produced thought is reflective not only of post-coloniality, but also of post-nationality. The emphasis of critical regionalisms over any essentialized concept of nation was largely derived from Spivak’s experience with the localized manifestation of the collective imagination in indigenous stories and song.

For Spivak, the product of situated contemplation in the third space of the Indian collective imagination has been a type of liminal philosophy, a method of thinking that opens “something else besides,” as an alternative to binarisms. As described above, the translation of cricket through the third space created a dialogical hybrid that was not purely a representation of colonizer or colonized. This type of “in-betweenness” is still present within contemporary Indian cricket. As Ugra writes, “Indian cricket today stands for both First World market domination and Third World aspiration; inclusion and insularity; arrogance and open-mindedness (Ugra’s italics).”³⁷ This same type of in-betweenness has also marked much of Spivak’s philosophy. The nurturing of a liminal philosophy has been crucial for Spivak because it provides the possibility for mounting a critique from both inside and outside of a discourse. This has enabled Spivak to work within the customs of Western philosophy, but at the same time, to turn away from its prescriptions, generating what Bhabha calls a “re-articulation, or translation, of elements that are neither the One… nor the Other… but something else besides, which contests the terms and territories of both” (Bhabha’s italics).³⁸
Being “neither the One... nor the Other... but something else besides” is a position that Spivak has attempted to maintain throughout her life as she openly acknowledges her Indian roots as well as her place of privilege teaching and living at one of the elite Western academic institutions. Yet, just as the third space of the Indian collective imagination is constantly being negotiated and contested, Spivak continues to think (and exist) within the indeterminate “by learning to unlearn her privileges as a prestigious academic residing in the USA… [and by] learning ‘to speak to (rather than listening to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern.’” 39

Spivak’s liminal philosophy also provokes questions about what, and who, has traditionally been outside of certain discourses, forcing one to consider the ideological and discursive motivations for those exclusions. Much of the thinking and methodology that Spivak has derived from the third space of the Indian national imagination has been constructed as a critique of Eurocentricity, hegemony, gender, and the elitist presumptions of Western thought. Spivak has mounted these critiques not only through the expansion of post-colonial studies, but also through a deconstructionist negotiation of the major philosophical works in Western metaphysics.

Just as we have seen in the other instances of place-produced thought described here, Spivak herself was transformed through the creation of place-produced thought. She adapted the functions of the third space of the Indian national imagination, such as inventive equivalence, liminality, the interstices of difference, and the undermining of power, into a distinct mode of discourse.
analysis, cultural study, and mode of being. Indeed, Spivak maintains a liminality between the worlds of privileged Western Ivy league academia and the materiality of her identification as an Indian rooted in the third space of the Indian collective imagination.

A POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE

One of the methods that Spivak has utilized to extend her thinking with/in place into critical analysis has been to recognize the third space of the Indian national imagination as a form of discourse. By thinking of the third space of the Indian national imagination as a discourse, one can see how it (re)produces subjects and epistemologies. In fact, in Benedict Anderson’s influential text, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, he describes how the development of nationalism or national consciousness is “conceived in language, not in blood.” In Anderson’s view, collective identities are constructed like a discourse because they entail a “re-presentation and negotiation of consciousness.” This concept of an identity formed through language is related to the theories of Jacques Lacan. In many ways, Anderson’s claims about collective identity formation are derived from Lacan’s views about the emergence of individual identities. For Lacan, language is a Symbolic order that precedes and makes possible human subjectivity. Reality is interpreted through the mediation of language and instigates the formation of the subject. The writer Philippe Julien describes the influence of the Lacanian Symbolic order as such: “Even before birth, the child is inscribed in a symbolic universe that determines its place.”
The determination of identity through language and discourse is echoed on a larger scale in Anderson’s consideration of imagined communities.

Of course, the association of the third space of the Indian collective imagination with a form of discourse is consistent with Spivak’s affinity for the deconstructionist texts of Derrida. Spivak first gained critical prominence in 1976 by writing a pensive and celebrated preface to the English translation of Derrida’s 1967 text *Of Grammatology*. Since then, Spivak has incorporated Derrida’s teachings, especially deconstruction, into her own thinking. Spivak has been particularly drawn to one of the tasks of deconstruction—to expose the unfinalized play between oppositional positions within a discourse.

Herein lies a critical connection between the third space of the Indian collective imagination and discourse. Just as Derridean deconstruction posits discourse as “a play of presence and absence, a place of the effaced trace,” the third space of the Indian collective imagination can also be considered as a place that is indeterminate and interstitial. For Derrida, writing (or discourse) can be anything or “all that gives rise to an inscription in general.”\(^4\) By considering the operations of the third space as a form of discourse, Spivak has been able to take the same sort of transformative and negotiative functions found in the third space and apply them in numerous critiques, including the canons of Western philosophy.

One example of this thinking is Spivak’s *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Within this critique, Spivak mounts a third space/deconstructionist
negotiation of three of the major figures in the tradition of Western philosophy: Kant, Hegel, and Marx. As Spivak claims, her goal for the critique is to “examine the structures of the production of postcolonial reason.” What Spivak reveals throughout this critique is the Eurocentric and normative epistemic presuppositions embedded within the philosophy of these three thinkers. Spivak then demonstrates how the Other or “native informant” is a necessary construct for the logic and production of thought by these three heavyweights. As she details, each of them constructs and essentializes the trope of the native informant as a means of otherization, one that forecloses and dismisses the possibility of agency and subjecthood for the native informant. By deconstructing this foreclosure, Spivak’s aim is to provide a “counter narrative that will make visible the foreclosure to the position of the narrator.”

One of Spivak’s main tasks in her critique of Kant, Hegel, and Marx is to speak to the Subaltern within and through the writings of these three men, but also to not allow their ideas about the Subaltern to become codified and naturalized by the passage of time and their popular acceptance in the study of philosophy. Instead, Spivak learns and unlearns their theories, pulling them apart to reveal the problematic complicities within each philosopher’s logic.

KANT

Beginning with Kant in A Critique of Postcolonial Reason, Spivak examines how Kant’s third Critique, The Critique of Judgment, is predicated upon a
geopolitically differentiated subject. Spivak insists that Kant’s subject (the one who holds the power of the critique of judgment) is “generally dependent upon the rejection \([\text{Verwerfung}]\) of the Aboriginal.”\(^47\) Spivak’s claim is based upon her reading of a particular passage from the third \textit{Critique} that is reproduced here with her notes included:

Grass is needful for the ox, which again is needful for man as a means of existence; but then we do not see why it is necessary that men should exist (a question which is not so easy to answer if we cast our thoughts by chance \([\text{wenn man etwa... in Gedanken hat}]\) on the New Hollanders or the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego). Such a thing is then \([\text{alsdem ist ein solches Ding}]\) not even a natural purpose; for it (or its entire species \([\text{Gattung—the connotation of “race” as in “human race” cannot be disregarded here}]\)) is not to be regarded as a natural product.\(^48\)

Spivak acknowledges that this particular reference to “New Hollanders (Australians) or the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego” has historically been brushed aside in the discussion of Kant as an “unimportant rhetorical detail.”\(^49\) Spivak asserts that this phrasing should not be left unexamined, as it reveals a critical geopolitical differentiation of Kant’s subject. “Its crucial presence in \textit{The Critique of Judgment} cannot be denied,” stresses Spivak.\(^50\) Through her analysis, Spivak illustrates the necessity of the native informant within Kant’s rhetoric, produced as the parerga to the ergon of the Western world. As a certain outside to the ergon, the native informant intrinsically operates in relation to a lack within that ergon. “If the third \textit{Critique} is read as the indirect orchestration of a universalist teleology,” states Spivak, “the parergon that it yields is the raw man \([\text{native informant}]\).”\(^51\) As such the raw man (New Hollander or Fuegan) plays an integral role in the transformation of the raw into the philosophical by the Western subject
of reason. The raw man exists, as an empty space that can be inscribed by the Western subject, which Spivak believes is Kant’s global project for the Western subject.\textsuperscript{52} This project of the European subject, to bring the raw (East) to the philosophical (West), is the thinly veiled specter of “imperialism as social mission.”\textsuperscript{53} Throughout her reading, Spivak demonstrates Kant’s complicity in that form of imperialism by differentiating the native informant as raw, unnatural, and non-subject. Spivak’s intent is not to merely “diagnose Kant’s hidden ‘beliefs,’” but rather to utilize the re-visioning inherent in the thinking developed with/in the third space of the Indian collective imagination (and the teachings of deconstruction) to render a “something else besides” – an alternative reading of Kant.

HEGEL

Just as Spivak does with her analysis of Kant’s third \textit{Critique}, she attempts to expose the implicit foreclosure of the native informant in Hegel’s reading of the \textit{Srimadbhagavadgita}. Within this critique, Spivak demonstrates how the two very different inscriptions by dominant forces—one originating from inside India, and the other from outside (Hegel) —share “structural complicity.”\textsuperscript{54} By demonstrating this similarity, Spivak intends to avoid “some of the too-easy West-and-the-rest polarizations sometimes rampant in colonial and postcolonial discourse studies.”\textsuperscript{55} Therefore, rather than placing Hegel’s text in stark opposition to a Indian nationalist reading of the \textit{Gita}, an endeavor which would really only serve to legitimatize colonial difference, Spivak attempts to navigate
the oppositional difference between the two readings. Spivak’s goal is to illustrate how both readings are strategic examples of dominance that foreclose the subjectivity of the native informant.

In Spivak’s critique, both of the texts achieve this foreclosure through a “manipulation of the question of history in a political interest.” Through a close reading of a specific passage from Hegel’s *Lectures on Fine Arts*, Spivak illuminates how his reading of the *Gita* interprets the Spirit in India as stagnant and unprogressive. Here is an excerpt from the passage that Spivak references:

> I am the taste in flowing water, the splendour in the sun and the moon, the mystical world in holy scriptures, in man his manliness, the pure fragrance in the earth, the splendour in flames, in all beings the life, contemplation in the penitent, in living things the force of life, in the wise their wisdom.

Spivak’s interpretation of Hegel’s reading of Krishna’s list is that the Spirit never changes and remains the same in all forms. According to Spivak, Hegel “needs to say that the Spirit-in-India makes monotonous lists in a violently shuttling way.” “Hegel’s conclusions from these rather difficult passages” claims Spivak, is that the Spirit-in-India is “extremely monotonous, and on the whole, empty and wearisome.” This unchanging spirit does not fit into the Hegelian morphology of the Spirit that evolves over time. In Hegelian philosophy, if the Spirit is never transformed, then it would never reach its telos of a fully self-conscious realization. Spivak indicates how the native informant is foreclosed as part of the great realization of the Spirit by quoting Hegel directly: “The Indian knows no reconciliation and identity with Brahma [the so-called Hindu conception of the
Absolute] in the sense of the human spirit’s reaching knowledge of this unity (Hegel’s italics).”

Hegel’s claim is even more plainly stated here: “Indians cannot move history.”

Along with a critique of Hegel’s reading of the Gita, Spivak demonstrates how an Indian nationalistic reading also serves to inscribe the “Law” onto the native informant. Spivak points to how some Indian nationalistic groups have used the Gita as a tool for identifying and preserving “national continuity.” For these groups, the Gita is supra historical, representing a “permanent truth.” As Spivak illustrates, many of these groups use their interpretation of the Gita to delimit the identity and agency of the native informant. In the form of a regulatory device, the Gita is utilized as a form of body politic, placing normative inscriptions upon the Indian subject. Spivak argues, therefore, that just as Hegel does with his reading, the nationalist interpretation of the Gita attempts to insert a specific figuration upon the native informant—one serving the particular needs and authority of each type of reading. “Nationalism,” Spivak contends, “is in many ways a displaced or reversed legitimation of colonialism.” Both Hegel’s and the Indian nationalist reading of the Gita are guilty of prescribing the limits and definition of the Subaltern subject to suit the fulfillment of their own needs.

MARX

In the final portion of Spivak’s overall critique of these three key figures in the Western philosophical tradition, she takes aim at the philosophy of Marx. As with
Kant and Hegel, Spivak details evidence of how Marx creates a complicit foreclosure of the native informant. For her analysis, Spivak focuses on the “implications of a notorious phrase that Marx probably used only once: ‘the Asiatic Mode of Production [AMP].’” Marx’s motivation for differentiating an Asiatic mode of production from a European one was to explain why Asia had not experienced the same progression from feudalism to capitalism that has characterized European history. As Spivak points out, Marx’s postulation of an AMP is wrought with Eurocentricity, as it is based upon a historical narrative of progress grounded in a European version of history, and the assumptions of capitalism as the progression of modern society. By doing so, Spivak exposes the foreclosure of the native informant in which the “extraordinary achievements of the pre-capitalist imperial civilizations are generally ignored.” This figuration of history by Marx is a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy that “makes visible the fault lines within the account of history as (European) modes of production.”

Just as it did in the works of both Kant and Hegel, the foreclosure of the native informant here satisfies a certain philosophical interest. Within her exposition of Marx, Spivak demonstrates how the “AMP has revealed itself to be neither historico-geographically ‘Asiatic’ nor logically a ‘mode of production.’” Spivak’s main critique of Marx, as was the case with Kant and Hegel, is that Marx has constructed a specific Asiatic subject, history, and mode of production that serves to further his own logic and argument. As Spivak argues, Marx produces and defines the Subaltern subject to suit his own needs; so that he can place those subjects outside or to the side of his version of historical economic
evolution. By removing the Subaltern/Asiatic subject – the native informant –
from his theory of capitalism’s progression, he essentially removed any
discrepancies to that history, which forms such a significant part of Marxist
philosophy. In doing do, Marx spoke for the native informant, foreclosing and
dismissing the Subalterm subject and their history.

In her re-reading of all three of these figures, Spivak maintains an
approach that is careful not to attempt a resurrection of the lost voice of the native
informant. Rather, Spivak points towards the impossibility of such a task,
especially in the figuration of the native informant by these three. Instead, Spivak
anticipates the opening of a third space, in which “active interception and
reconstellation” can occur, much like what occurred with cricket in the third space
of the Indian collective imagination.69 Spivak also reminds us that none of her
critiques are intended to be damning or accusatory. Instead, she hopes to “produce
something that will generate a new and useful reading.”70

In my summations of Spivak’s critiques of Kant, Hegel, and Marx, I
realize that I have merely scratched the surface of these complex and rich
critiques leveled against three of the great thinkers in Western philosophy. While
the outcome of these critiques is fascinating and valuable, I have not to attempted
to recount the nuanced particulars of each of Spivak’s critiques, but rather have
focused on the strategies used to mount them. My aim here is to connect this type
of thinking and tactical critique back to the thought produced with/in the third
space of the Indian collective imagination. By utilizing this place-produced
thought, Spivak has been able to deploy inventive equivalence and negotiation of
difference as a critical method of re-visioning – of producing a “something else besides” – not only for the Subaltern subject of the native informant but also for the legacy of thought cast by Kant, Hegel, and Marx on the history of Western metaphysics.

SPEAKING TO THE SUBALTERN

A recurring concern in these examinations of place-produced thought has been the ontological shift that occurs for both thinker and place in the process of developing place-produced thought. In the case of Spivak and the third space of the Indian collective imagination, an argument can be made for a similar type of transformation. While we have already addressed the bearing of the third space upon Spivak’s development of thought and mode of being, we have yet to consider the ontological shift in the third space itself that has been precipitated by her place-produced thought. One means of gauging this transformation might be to study one of Spivak’s most celebrated lines of inquiry: Can the Subaltern Speak? Spivak has revealed the complexity of the answer—much more than a straightforward “yes” or “no”—through her work in post-colonial and Subaltern studies.

Through writings such as Other Asias, In Other Worlds: Essays In Cultural Politics, Outside in the Teaching Machine, and A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present, Spivak has shown how the Subaltern subject and native informant have been foreclosed upon
and shut out of the processes or logic within traditional Western hegemonic discourses. Calling for a re-visioning of the Subaltern subject(s) by “wrenching them out of their assigned functions,” Spivak has helped to remap the territory of its consciousness. She has also influenced the third space of the Indian collective imagination to continue and expand its negotiation of collective identity, the nation-state, and Subaltern subjectivity. Through the continuous negotiation within the third space, some conceptualizations of Indian nationalism have begun to move away from the solidarity of the nation-state toward a mutating collective of critical regionalisms. Within this non-essentializing view of nationality, there is a deconstruction of the cohesive nation-state (Indian or any other). As Spivak argues, national consciousness has realized that “we can’t make a clear-cut distinction between self-determination and nationalism, regionalism and nationalism. There must be a persistent critique that operates during and beyond the rational arrangements.”

One of the best indicators of the impact that Spivak’s place-produced thought has had on India may have come in early 2013 when she was awarded the Padma Bushan. The award is given annually by the government of India to honor notable service to the Republic of India. The award is the third highest award given to a civilian by Republic of India. However, beyond questions of Indian nationalism and collective consciousness, perhaps Spivak’s place-produced thought has been most valuable in initiating greater interest in the formation and ontology of the Subaltern subject. Without resorting to strict authenticity politics, Spivak has raised a challenge—channeled through the influences of Derridean
deconstruction and the powers of the third space of the Indian collective imagination—to produce radical analyses and newly imagined possibilities for the Subaltern subject.

Perhaps this challenge is best illustrated by the growth of Subaltern Studies as an important field of study. As David E. Ludden claims, “In the 1990s, Subaltern Studies became a hot topic in academic circles on several continents; a weapon, magnet, target, lightning rod, hitching post, icon, gold mine, and fortress for scholars ranging across disciplines from history to political science, anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, and cultural studies.”73 One of the outcomes of these studies has been the re-visioning of the Subaltern. Yet, rather than trying to speak for the Subaltern, most of this new discourse attempted to speak to them, and to assist in vitalizing the “integrity of indigenous histories that appear naturally in non-linear, oral, symbolic, vernacular, and dramatic forms.”74

There is evidence that this increased re-visioning and shift in ontological status continues. In 2012, the international edition of the New York Times published an article on the increased number of publications produced in India. Kanishka Gupta, the founder and managing director of Writer’s Side, claimed in 2012 that there is a “new breed of writers who wanted to write books that connected to the average Indian reader… Publishing houses committed to publishing such books sprang up all over the country and big multinationals had to shed their elitism and enter this space.”75 While Gupta is specifically referring to the “watershed moment” of the publication of Chetan Bhagat’s novel Five Point Someone, the resonance that Spivak’s (and others) thought has had on these
type of developments within India can’t be underestimated. The negotiation of
the Indian subject continues as an ongoing discourse in the third space of the
Indian collective imagination, due in large part to Spivak’s place-produced
thought. Several recent publications, such as New Subjects and New Governance
in India by Ranabí̄ra Samāddra and Suhit Sen, Appropriately Indian:
Gender and Culture in a New Transnational Class by Smitha Radhakrishnan, and
The New India: Citizenship, Subjectivity, and Economic Liberalization by
Kanishka Chowdhury, demonstrate the continued negotiation and investigation of
the formation of the Subaltern subject. Each of these recent critiques is marked
with the epistemic and ontological trace of Spivak’s place-produced thought.

RADICAL RECALCITRANCE

With all the talk of the agency of place at the beginning of this chapter, there is
one aspect of Spivak’s place-produced thought that we have so far failed to
consider: how place has pushed back against the thinker. Perhaps, we have made
too much of the transformations that Spivak’s place-produced thought has had on
her think place – the Indian collective imagination. Indeed, it seems that some
scholars have questioned this very relationship in their criticisms of Spivak’s
writing. In the swirling storm of controversy set off by Terry Eagleton’s caustic
review of Spivak’s A Critique of Postcolonial Reason for the London Review of
Books, some scholars sided with Eagleton and wondered “Can Gayatri Spivak’s
‘pretentiously opaque’ writing make a difference in the real world?”76 The debate
about efficacy and real world application of Spivak’s writing is nothing new for
philosophy, but was specifically heightened by some of Eagleton’s comments in his review such as: “Post-colonial theorists are often to be found agonising about the gap between their own intellectual discourse and the natives of whom they speak; but the gap might look rather less awesome if they did not speak a discourse which most intellectuals, too, find unintelligible. You do not need to hail from a shanty town to find a Spivakian metaphorical muddle like ‘many of us are trying to carve out positive negotiations with the epistemic graphing of imperialism’ pretentiously opaque.” In this particular excerpt, Eagleton also tacitly questions whether Spivak has been able to bridge the gap between her writing and the Subaltern subject. Part of his assault seems to ridicule a disconnect between one of the topics of Spivak’s writing, the Subaltern subject, and the Subaltern themselves.

Yet, it is interesting to wonder whether Eagleton’s assertion really runs contrary to the notion that Spivak’s place-produced thought has prompted an ontological transformation to the place of its production – the Indian collective imagination? Our answer depends on how we interpret Eagleton’s critique. There have certainly been a number of other critics (many of them part of the Indian collective imagination), which have disputed or interrogated the influence of Spivak’s thought. Most of these critiques are based upon two distinct types of dispute: either with her method of analysis or the inauthenticity/appropriation of Indianality of her voice. For example, some critics have examined Spivak’s heavy use of poststructuralism and deconstructionism and “reject her reading practices as aiming at an accommodation of the realities of imperialism to purely textual
Some of these critics (among them—Arif Dirlik, Aijaz Ahmed, Ella Shohat) believe that “her privileging a theory [deconstruction]… foregrounds a hegemonic discourse while muting native voices.” Another such critic, Benita Parry, argues that Spivak’s methodology constructs a story of colonialism that “freezes the native into a limbo of speechlessness and inarticulation,” and that she “glosses over the documents and histories that tell the stories of the colonized people’s struggle.”

An example of criticism that focuses Spivak inauthenticity/appropriation of Indianality comes from individuals such as Dipesh Chakrabarty and Harish Trivedi. In a 1997 interview with Tina Chen and S.X. Goudie of UC Berkeley, Bharati Mukherjee has the following exchange with her interviewers:

- Mukherjee: …These critics, on the other hand, though they locate themselves in North America and participate in the North American competitive, materialist economy, invent or appropriate the positions of populous, Asia-based communities, and worse, they reduce the diversity of those communities’ positions into one that fits most neatly into their favored theory. The Indian graduate students and junior faculty members I have talked to on western Indian campuses in the last two years have expressed growing resentment of such usurpation. The theorist they most often named was Spivak, perhaps because she is the best-known of the Indo-American group.

Some recent publications by serious Indian literary critics based in India, for instance by Professors Aijaz Ahmad and Harish Trivedi of the University of Delhi, indicate an emerging resentment of the appropriation of Indianality and postcoloniality by scholars of Indian origin (or of non-European origin) who have opted for U.S. citizenship and/or permanent residence in North America… Professor Trivedi, who lectured here at Berkeley a few months ago on the Eurocentric implications of the term "postcolonial," was more direct in his attack on the right of Spivak, a U.S. citizen and long-term U.S. resident, to speak for the
"periphery."

- Chen and Goudie: Spivak has cautioned against reading her as someone who claims to "give voice" to those she represents; she has said in The Postcolonial Critic --and I'm paraphrasing--that to read her as speaking for "the periphery" is to read her, wrongly, as a "Third World informant."

- Mukherjee: But then she goes on to, at the same time, trounce others for providing versions, portraits that don't coincide with hers so that she, I'm not going to say that she's lying, but there's this problematic position . . .

Some of these cries of inauthenticity are perhaps due to Spivak’s physical distance from the heart of the Indian collective imagination in India. “I feel fine that I'm not at home either in India or in the US,” claims Spivak. Criticism grounded upon Spivak’s geographical distance from India hardly seems fair. Firstly, we have already discussed how the lack of physical contact or a visceral material encounter does not mean that Spivak’s thought is not intimately linked with the third space of the Indian collective imagination. Secondly, because, as we have realized with other instances of place-produced thought, the thinker can have a lingering effect on the being of a place without remaining in physical contact with said place. Consider for instance, the lasting repercussions many thinkers continue to have on their think place even after they have deceased. Thirdly, due to the previously mentioned lack of topographical specificity for the Indian collective imagination, it is conceivable for Spivak to think with/in it from virtually anywhere.
Therefore, are we to understand these criticisms lobbed at Spivak as merely examples of intellectual academic sparring? Or could there be something more to it? I argue that we can, perhaps, read these critiques as an illustration of the place pushing back. Even though Spivak does well to “speak to,” rather than “speak for” the Subaltern subject and the Indian collective imagination, perhaps it does not always want to listen. Many of the criticisms against Spivak are unwarranted and misinformed, but some of them may be part of the agency of place asserting itself. Even though they may be disparaging toward Spivak, we need to consider these voices as part of the place of the third space of the Indian collective imagination, and therefore comprise the recalcitrance of place. These voices are part of the negotiation and interstice of conflicting views that comprise Spivak’s think place and may partially represent the place itself, resisting and challenging the thinking developed with/in its margins. Places often push back in uncomfortable ways, and as a place that is a collective of disparate ideologies and agendas, there is bound to be some resistance by place to the impact that Spivak has on the Indian collective imagination.

Most scholars agree that Spivak has been a significant contributor to post-colonial and Subaltern studies – even Eagleton states that “The political good which Spivak has done far outweighs the fact that she leads a well-heeled life in the States.” There also seems to be general consensus that Spivak’s work has gone a long way in helping to re-vision the ontological makeup of the Subaltern subject, whether it is in Western philosophical discourse or the Indian collective imagination.
In an increasingly globalized and technological world, the intersection of unique placeness and the production of thought will likely continue to transform in surprising and creative ways. As we move into the future, the potential efficacy and risk of such entwinement needs to be considered. The five instances of place-produced thought examined in the previous chapters do not comprise a complete or exhaustive list of the sorts of thinking with/in place being done. Rather, these projects were chosen for the heterogeneity of their place-produced thought. Through their differences, we are able to discern the variety of thought that can be manifested by thinking with/in place, as well as realize the distinct modes of engagement that a thinker may have with place. These instances were also chosen because they are engaged with very different types of places. This multiplicity helps illustrate the complex and changing nature of what can be considered a
think place in the various occurrences of place-produced thought. The method in which a locus of thought is delineated can also widely fluctuate; some of them are more ideological than geological (as it was for Spivak), and some of them are more ambiguously defined than a measured and demarcated plot on a map (as for Thoreau or Heidegger). In addition, the projects of these thinkers demonstrate the agency of place in distinctive means—place pushed back against all of these thinkers, but did so in varied ways.

Just as the thinkers, places, and projects from the previous chapters are heterogeneous, so too have been the approaches I have employed to examine them. By analyzing these instances of place-produced thought while thinking through more than one methodological approach, my hope has been to remain open to the dynamic complexity of place and to the nuanced ways that a thinker may interact with a place beyond only its significations, or outside of cultural inscriptions, or more thoroughly than a material encounter with its topography might provide.

That said, much of this discussion has emphasized the critical function of materiality in place-produced thought. As we have witnessed in the development of place-produced thought, each thinker was confronted with a certain materiality of place. This engagement with phenomena did not constitute a purely phenomenological encounter, but did often prompt a tangibility of place that created a rupture or shift in the thinkers pre-existing beliefs, desires, and assumptions. Despite their diversity, these instances collectively reveal how
thinking with/in/of/through/about place can produce localized epistemologies, and are just as much of a product of the place as they are of the thinker.

MOVING BEYOND THE LOCUS OF THOUGHT

In the instances of place-produced thought examined here, the thoughts produced with/in places have generated far-reaching implications, which extend beyond any regional or spatial confinement. Place-produced thought is simply contextually specific in its application, limited by what the French call *terroir* (the highly unique mixture of a specific climate, geology, and topography), it can be modified, grafted, and applied to a variety of other frameworks. Moreover, because place-produced thought has tremendous ontological weight, I have argued that it can transform the being of both place and thinker. The trace of the place-produced thought inscribed upon each entity forms an unretractable impression that transcends the idiosyncratic encounters with/in place. In this sense, I have maintained that place-produced thought, by its very nature, *can’t* be contained by the margins of its locus. Further, as we have explored here, the development of an ethos or politics of place is a corollary of thinking with/in place. These ethical and political positions do not remain locked or fixed within place; they infiltrate the rest of the world. In fact, the foray of place-produced thought into other contexts may prove to be one of its most valuable qualities. Applied in a new framework, place-produced thought can often be the root of great innovation, resistance, or change.
Perhaps as a reaction to the increasing reaches of globalization, in the last thirty years there has been a renewed interest in localized knowledge as a means to ameliorate the impact and banalization of globalization. Since the late 1980s, entire fields of social and cultural theory have undergone what has been dubbed a “spatial turn,” initiated by some key texts such as *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* by Edward W. Soja from 1989, *The Practice of Everyday Life* by Michel de Certeau from 1980 (1984 in English), and Michel Foucault’s *Des Espaces Autres* (written in 1967 but not published until 1984). As one portion of this reinvigorated interest in the relationship between space, knowledge, power, the global and the local, place-produced thought can be understood as sharing many of the same concerns and sensibilities that are evident in other investigations into the reciprocations between thinking and place.

LEARNING FROM LOCALES

I would like end with some questions to keep thinking about in terms of the future of place-produced thought, and some thoughts about the places of these thinking projects. One of the first questions to consider is what happens to these places once they have been recognized as a site of powerful thought generation (like Walden Pond), especially when these places gain certain fame – attracting multitudes of people with various motives? Many of these people are curious to see if the place will prompt or elicit some type of similar powerful or spiritual experience resulting in a creative epiphany. What effect does it have on place
when there is an accumulation of people looking for something to happen? Does this mean something is more likely to happen? Can another thinker engage a place that has already successfully generated place-produced thought?

One of the problems that any one of us will run into when visiting a place that has already been used to develop place-produced thought is the difference of relations that will emerge in our own encounter. Because place is always relational and in flux, it continues to change even as we are in the midst of an encounter. Therefore, the relations of one person’s encounter may be drastically different than another person’s with the very same place. My point is that we can never experience the same Walden Pond that Thoreau did, and we can never have the same experience of Heidegger’s landscape near Todtnauberg as he did – I discovered this first hand. Part of the reason for this is the different relations we will have with the place, but also because we all experience the materiality of a place and its phenomena differently. No physical encounter can be exactly duplicated. Even subtle changes to a place can resonate greatly in our overall interaction with, and impression of, that place. We can try to recreate the connection with a place that some other person might have had, but it does not mean that a connection will happen, or that it will produce the same results.

This does not mean, however, that a place that was part of a past instance of place-produced thought is lost to the rest of us for creative purposes. It simply means that we will likely not have the same encounter with that place. Exchanges with places can be productive in so many different ways that a singular place might yield panoply of diverse thinking projects. Even if we never create our own
place-produced thought, learning about the special relationships that others have had with particular places in the development of thought can still be quite powerful and enlightening. Studying place-produced thought also helps to remind us of the agency of place and of its power. These projects reveal that places, like things, “change in defiance of their material stability.”³ Places are not blank slates waiting for us to give them meaning, and in fact, places sometimes resist or refute the meaning and ideas ascribed to them. I believe that projects of thinking with/in place help us to reduce our anthropocentrism and recognize places as “participants in the reshaping of the world,” – to borrow Bill Brown’s description of things.⁴

Discovering the intimate relation that some thinkers have had with place emphasizes the deep interconnectivity that all of us can have with place, reminding us that our very being is related to place, as in Heidegger’s da-sein. Place-produced thought can help to revitalize our consciousness of the meaning and value of the places we inhabit. It may allow us to see sites that often go unseen, and reveal new ways of thinking about and experiencing the landscapes that we occupy.

Throughout this discussion, I have tried to demonstrate some of the core aspects of place-produced thought so that we can begin to understand it as a distinct method of engaging place. I have tried to illustrate how, in certain instances of thinking with/in place, the place itself clearly asserts its agency and influence in the actual production of thought. And I have tried to elucidate how this connection is much different than other historical or intrinsic means of
maintaining a relationship with ones surroundings. Finally, I have tried to
accentuate the innovative and irruptive possibilities of place-produced thought—
important sources for identities, thoughts, boundaries, and modes of being—while
also recognizing its potential to be used to justify racism, exclusion, and bigotry.
As we increasingly recognize the agency of place and non-human entities, the
function of place in contemporary culture will truly become, as Aristotle once
claimed, “a remarkable one.”
Introduction


7 My intention here is not to fully enter the rich and extensive body of discourse surrounding the philosophy of place, but simply to provide insight into the choice of “place” instead of “space” in the nomenclature of place-produced thought.


10 Ibid. 58.

11 Ibid. 47.


13 A great exemplar of the unseen power relations behind the ordering of space is the career of Frederick Law Olmstead – credited with co-designing Central Park in New York and also with contributing to the preservation of the Yosemite Valley. Olmstead’s report for the Yosemite Commission in the 1850’s was influential in its eventual designation as a public park. Olmstead’s motivation, as Claudia K. Silverman writes in her article “Civilizing the Wilderness: Frederick Law Olmstead in the Yosemite Valley 1863-1865,” was to bring the “wilderness into the political arena in order to define its purpose and designate its owner.” For Olmstead, this would ensure the potential for responsible human stewardship of nature, but it also illustrates the pervasiveness of power structures within our perception of place. Olmstead’s involvement with Yosemite allows us to understand the place of the park as a designed space – infused with the ideology of a particular episteme – the same one used for the design of Central Park.


18 For Agamben, an apparatus is anything that captures, restricts, or determines the thoughts and actions of living beings.


21 Other new developments in philosophy have attempted to move beyond the separation of self and world, or what Kant deemed the division of the noumenal and phenomenal. The term “The Speculative Turn,” in reference to the Linguistic Turn, has been given to a resurgence and rearticulation of a new materialism and realism. The publication of Quentin Meillassoux’s *After Finitude* is often noted as the spark of this movement.


23 Ibid. 184-185.


27 The term “différance” is being employed here in the sense provided by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, where the term is a conjunction of the words “differed” and “different,” but also implies a structure that is never completely translatable as it slips away into ambiguous alterities and deferments.


While plenty has been written on the history of the formation of the subject, there are several key texts within this tradition including: Rousseau’s *Of The Social Contract, Or Principles of Political Right*, Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*, Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, Levi-Strauss’ *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, and Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.”

At the same time however, this revaluation of the subject is not a return to the humanist subject of the Enlightenment. As James Heartfield writes in his article “Postmodernism and the ‘Death of the Subject,’” these types of assertions about the subject do not, “nurture the illusion that… man and woman may live as a demiurge, single-handedly and completely taking charge of their destiny.”

An example of this criticism came about when Bierstadt’s painting, *The Domes of Yosemite*, from 1867 was unveiled. As author James Kaiser writes, “some considered it Bierstadt’s finest work, but others accused Bierstadt of vulgar exaggeration. The scenery was simply too perfect (Kaiser’s italics).” Others such as Randall C. Griffin in *Homer, Eakins, and Anshutz*, Gerald L. Carr in *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School*, and many others, have chronicled the various criticisms of the Hudson River school beginning as early as the mid 1860s.


64 Ibid. 121.

65 Goldsworthy’s oft-repeated forms, including the arch, ovoid, and serpentine line, have been constructed in various manifestations on every continent of the globe.


67 Ibid. 137.


73 At the time of this writing, Heidegger’s “The Black Notebooks” had been published in German and not yet translated into English. By all accounts, these notebooks reveal, in Heidegger’s own words, his truly abhorrent anti-Semitism.


76 I believe that Thoreau is a prime example of a thinker who developed many different instances of place-produced thought over his lifetime including other projects in the Maine woods and on Mount Wachusett.

77 Martin Heidegger, Being and Time: A Translation of Sein and Zeit, Reprint. (State Univ. of New York Press, 1996).


Chapter One


2 Ibid. 18.

3 Ibid. 17.

4 The importance of movement between places is further discussed in Chapter Two as a critical condition in the development of Heidegger’s thought.


6 Ibid. 42.

7 Ibid. 297.


10 Ibid. 92.
11 Ibid. 85.
12 Ibid. 73.
13 Ibid. 91.
14 Ibid. 203.
17 Many of these different relationships or connections that Thoreau had with nature are discussed in the “Walden: Activity in Balance” chapter of James McIntosh’s, *Thoreau as Romantic Naturalist: His Shifting Stance toward Nature*, 1St Edition (Cornell University Press, 1974).
23 Ibid. 72.
24 Ibid. 10.
25 Ibid. 85.
26 Ibid. 286.
27 Ibid. 124.
28 Ibid. 267.
30 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Beacon Press, 2004). 93. The “richest vein” that Thoreau mentions is alluded to a few pages earlier on page 91 as a real and truthful existence when he claims that, “I perceive that we inhabitants of New England live this mean life that we do because our vision does not penetrate the surface of things.”
33 Ibid. 49.
34 Ibid. 22.
35 Ibid. 25.
36 Ibid. 38.
37 Ibid. 39-40.
38 Ibid. 40.
44 Ibid. 129-130.
49 Ibid. 32.


61 Henry David Thoreau, Civil Disobedience and Other Essays (the Collected Essays of Henry David Thoreau) (Digireads.com Publishing, 2010). 120.

62 Henry David Thoreau, My Thoughts Are Murder to the State: Thoreau’s Essays on Political Philosophy (David M Gross, 2007). 152.


64 Ibid. 276.

65 Ibid. 227.


67 Ibid. 271.

68 Ibid. 272-273.


70 Ibid. 7.


Chapter 2

1 Immanuel Kant, Paul Guyer, and Eric Matthews, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Cambridge University Press, 2001). 138. For Kant, the appearance of the sublime in nature caused problems for the function of the intuition (representations of sense data given by the Imagination to Understanding) because it was not able to offer a completely defined representation to the Understanding.


3 Timothy Clark, “Can a Place Think? on Adam Sharr’s Heidegger’s Hut,” *Cultural Politics* 4, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 103.


7 Even the smallest of gestures, such as inserting a mere hyphen, can be revolutionary. Giorgio Agamben reminds us in *Infancy and History* that “every gesture becomes a fate.”


One of these accounts is by Heinrich Wiegand Petzet in his text, *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger 1929-1976*, when he describes how Heidegger held “great admiration” for the sages on Chinese folding screens, sitting and writing in front of their simple huts.


Some of Heidegger’s texts that include the use of the term *gegend* are: *On the Way to Language, Discourse on Thinking*, and *Being and Time*.


Ibid. 99.

A few of the texts that mention places which were beloved by Heidegger include: “Memorial Address,” “Building Dwelling Thinking,” and “Why Do I Stay In the Provinces?”


Ibid. 24.


Ibid. 13.


Ibid. 47.


39 Ibid. 225.


46 The influence of Husserl is evidenced in the fact that Heidegger dedicated *Being and Time* to him.


49 Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology: Being, Place, World* (The MIT Press, 2008). 21. In a personal correspondence with Malpas on 5/22/14, he wrote: “You quote me on the ‘repugnant’ character of Heidegger’s politics - remember that comment prefaces a longer discussion that also argues that much of the treatment of the issue in the literature is misplaced. And I also argue that there is a deeper sense in which Heidegger’s own thinking commits him to a certain sort of democratic thinking that is seldom acknowledged. Of course, the recent publication of the Black Notebooks has brought this discussion to the fore again - although in a rather limited and sensationalist fashion that does little to illuminate what is really at stake.”

50 His affinity for Nietzsche prompted Heidegger to write a four volume set on the earlier philosopher’s body of thought.


Chapter Three


4 Several iconic buildings displaying the aesthetic philosophy of Modernist architecture were constructed in NYC in the 1950s, including the Seagram building designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and the United Nations Headquarters designed by Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer.


9 Ibid. 208. The same can be said of the gated communities developed in the suburbs by the affluent.


15 Editor-in-Chief, Sina Najafi, has stated that the research completed by the editors of Cabinet magazine for the *Odd Lots: Revisiting Gordon Matta-Clark’s Fake Estates* exhibition and publication revealed that the most likely cause for the creation of the majority of the *Fake Estates* lots was the Robert Moses freeway system projects, although, at least one of the lots existed prior to the Moses administration.


19 This is not to imply that the imposition of power occurs only through autocracy, as Foucault reminds us, power is also dispersed (or not) through the actions of each person.


25 In an interview with Liza Bear, Matta-Clark commented “the description of them that always excited me the most was ‘inaccessible.’” Pamela M. Lee, *Object to Be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark* (The MIT Press, 2001). 103.


27 Thomas Crow comments that it is “important to note the prescience in 1972 of Matta-Clark’s interest in graffiti as the territorial markings of the young and dispossessed,” in *Gordon Matta-Clark*, Corinne Diserens, Ed. (Phaidon Press, 2006). 53.


30 Ibid. 34.


39 Ibid. 16.


46 Ibid.

47 There have been some other recent artistic projects that have been inspired by *Fake Estates*, such as Arielle Assouline-Lichten’s *The Micro and The Multitude; The Spaces Between Places*, but none that have directly engaged with the physical properties themselves.

48 Personal correspondence with Jeffrey Kastner. 12/12/12


Chapter Four


7 Ibid. 24.

8 Ibid. 5.

9 Ibid. 5.


12 Ibid. 14.


14 Ibid. 87.


17 Ibid. 58.

18 Ibid. 72.

19 Ibid. 3.

20 Ibid. 6.


25 Ibid. 57.

26 Ibid. 73.

27 Ibid. 81.


30 Ibid. 72.

31 Ibid. 72.

32 Ibid. 3.

33 Ibid. 5.

34 Ibid. 58.


37 Ibid. 67.


40 Ibid. 3.

41 Ibid. 71.


45 Ibid. 88.

46 Ibid. 10.

47 Ibid. 56-57.

48 One may wonder if Baudrillard had perhaps experienced the same type of rapid movement on the Parisian trains or the TGV, and indeed he may have. Yet, I would argue that train travel would not have allowed for the same level of engagement with the landscape, nor would the phenomena of the landscape have impressed itself so greatly onto Baudrillard in the same manner that the landscape of the American desert did while he drove through it. It would also not have offered the same degree of personal freedom of mobility that was also crucial to Baudrillard’s desert experience.


51 The type and frequency of Baudrillard’s movements through the desert also serve as a counterpoint to the way that Heidegger moved through place. As previously noted, Heidegger’s
place-produced thought was cultivated by slow, contemplative movements repeated many times—assisting in the development of his own place-produced thought.


55 Ibid. 5.


59 Ibid. 140.


62 Ibid. 71.


64 Mike Gane, Jean Baudrillard: In Radical Uncertainty (Pluto Press, 2000). 15.


66 Ibid. 8.


69 Ibid. 21.

70 Jean Baudrillard, America, New Edition (Verso, 2010). 76.


73 J.D. Lasica, “Beyond Foursquare: Geolocation Services Proliferate, Mature,” PBS, accessed 4/25/14, http://www.pbs.org/idealab/2013/02/beyond-foursquare-geolocation-services-proliferate-mature058/. The development of geolocational apps has progressed so far that they have even begun to be divided into distinct subcategories since the emergence of early apps such as Foursquare and Gowalla. Listed here are some of the categories and the apps within each to demonstrate the growth and interest in these technologies: GEO-SOCIAL apps - Instagram, Bonfyre, Highlight, Place+, Sonar, Glympse. GEO & SOCIAL TRAVEL APPS – TripAdvisor, Gogobot, Like a Local Guide, Afar, TouristEye, Airbnb. PLACE ANNOTATIONS AND DISCOVERIES – Now, Sidewalk, Banjo, Everplaces, EyeEm, Kullect, Field Trip, Tagwhat, goGlympse, Trover. SHARED EXPERIENCES & SOCIAL STREAMS – Zkatter, Flock, LooxieMoments, Koozoo, Flixwagon Geo, Qik. HEALTH & FITNESS APPS – RunKeeper, Runtastic, Map My Run, Map My Ride, Cycle Tracker Pro, Cycle Watch, AccuTerra, Endomondo, PUMATRAC, iSmoothRun, Strava Run, Nike+ Running. TIME-BASED APPS & MEMORY AIDS – Path, TimeHop, Historypin, Historyvius, Rewind.Me, Breadcrumbs, Do You Remember, Placeme. GEO-FENCING & KEEPING TRACK OF YOUR KIDS – Footprints, Family Tracker, SecuraFone, NearParent, Lookout, Trick or Tracker. LOCAL SOCIAL & MOBILE COMMERCE – ScoutMob, Shopkick, Mokriya, Zaarly, Savvi, Groupon, Zavers. The most popular of these geolocational app categories are likely RECOMMENDATION APPS – Yelp, Foursquare, Zagat, Raved, Snoox, I loves it!, LiveStar, Google Local, Ditto. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of other geolocational apps not include in this list.

Chapter Five


2 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2004). 2.


4 Ibid. 30.


7 Ibid. 29.

8 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2004). 41.


13 Ibid. 93.
14 Ibid. 98.

15 Ibid. 105.


19 Ibid. 115.

20 Roger Caillois and Meyer Barash, Man, Play, and Games. (University of Illinois Press, 2001). 76.


27 Indeed, several writers including Ben Carrington and Stephen Wagg have noted the absence of sport analysis in the post-colonial discourses of Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha. The argument for this lack is the predominant linguistic framework employed by these writers, leaving a deficiency in the analysis of the role of sport in post-colonial discourse.


29 Ibid. 9.

30 Ibid. 15.

31 Ibid. 16.

32 Ibid. 40.

33 Ibid. 50.
34 Ibid. 82.
35 Ibid. 48.
36 Ibid. 32.
38 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2004). 41.
41 Ibid. 44.
45 Spivak uses the ethnographic term of “native informant” to indicate a non-subject in the tradition of Western philosophy in contrast to the subject of the Western world, implying the foreclosure of becoming a subject for the native informant. In the arrogance of Western philosophy, the native informant only gains identity through inscription by the West.
48 Ibid. 26.
49 Ibid. 26.
50 Ibid. 27.
51 Ibid. 34.
52 This type of supposed relation also seems easily associated with Hegel’s master/slave dialectic, especially in the sense that the presence and function of each one helps to define and form the other.
54 Ibid. 39.
Chapter 6

1 The interest and celebration of the indigenous as a counter-point to the spread of globalization and multi-national corporations is an enormous movement that started to gain traction in the 1980s. Today, this movement encompasses a vast array of players including organizations and thinkers such as Slow Food, Slow Space, Alter-globalization, and individuals such as Arturo Escobar, Edward W. Soja, David Harvey, Doreen Massey, Dolores Hayden, Lucy Lippard, Robin Wall Kimmerer, and many others.

2 Several anthologies have recently been published which speak to the incorporation of spatial theories into other disciplines of social and cultural theory including The Spatial Humanities: GIS and the Future of Humanities Scholarship edited by David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan, Trevor M. Harris, Geographies of Communication: The Spatial Turn in Media Studies edited by Jesper Falkheimer and Andrée Jansson, and The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives edited by Barney Warf and Santa Arias.


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