Western places: Imagination, environment, and technology

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It's a place, it's a feeling, sometimes it's just a state of mind
It may not be what you were looking for, but it's here in what you find
And it's all these things, it's the West

– Dave Stamey
It's the West

I

We are in places. Some places beckon us, some are to be avoided, and some are banal; however, and regardless of our place proclivities, we are emplaced and this emplacement urges reflection. The opening lines of Edward S. Casey's (1993) seminal work on the philosophy of place, *Getting Back Into Place*, asks us to "imagine what it be like if there were no places in the world" (ix) – a seemingly innocuous consideration that prompted Casey to detail a history of place in philosophical thought and the experiential characteristics of place, including the ways in which place is structured by and serves to structure our experiences (Casey 1993, 1997). The places we occupy stand in conceptual contrast to the spaces we occupy, a distinction espoused by Casey and taken up in contemporary thought, especially in the geography disciplines that take as a subject the ways in which people operate in place/space (Relph 1976; Sack 1997; Yuan 1990). Although an oversimplification, the distinction between place and space can be seen as the former being constituted by meaning where the latter is not (Relph 1976, 3). Casey's initial prompt augmented through this distinction can be revised to ask us to imagine what it would be like if there was no meaning in the worlds we inhabit. This is a challenging, if not impossible, request.

This essay indirectly takes up this consideration through reflection on the role of place in the intermountain region of the American West (hereafter referred to as the west), presented as places in their own right. The essay begins with a brief introduction to the concept of place, highlighting characteristics developed in the literature that will help to interpret western places and the ways in which the communities that inhabit them construct and react to place-meanings. The following sections elaborate on three facets of place that help to understand our emplacement – the roles of imagination, natural environments, and technology. The sometimes divergent ways that different communities understand their places can be in part explained through these three facets, and to this end I use examples from three generalized western communities to illustrate my argument – the indigenous peoples whose places were violently disrupted by settler colonialism, the rural western communities that settled in these places, and the urban communities that are quickly developing in these places. The essay ends with a brief discussion about the ways that diverging place-meanings are taken up in the practice of environmental governance, specifically focusing on the environmental conflicts surrounding Bears Ears National Monument. It is my ultimate aim to defend the role of place in the western milieu, a role that does not receive adequate consideration by the agents and institutions that seek to govern community interaction with their places.

Although there has been a resurgence of the importance of place in contemporary analyses (e.g. Casey 1993, 1997; Relph 1976; Sack 1997; Yuan 1990), the concept of place has been deliberated on throughout history. Casey's (1997) *The Fate of Place* traces the discussion of place throughout western thought, suggesting that place held conceptual import in the elaboration of our inhabited worlds until the early modern period, at which point the concept of space took primacy as a metaphysics of our world. Space, however, was inadequate for understanding our embodied experiences and through the phenomenological work of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Bachelard, and Derrida – among others – place was reinstated as a central notion (Casey 1997).

The inadequacy of space in this respect stems from the abstractedness of space; abstract space, as conceptualized in the early modern period, was "continuous, isotropic, homogeneous, finite, or infinite" (Relph 1976, 26, quoting Jammer 1969, 7), whereas place has "a special noncausal power found in its containing character, its qualitative differention, its heterogeneity as a medium, and its anisotropy of direction" (Casey 1997, 134). On this view, our worlds are instantiations in space, a metaphysically prior construct serving to relate and constrain our experienced realities. The objects that we interact with – fundamental to our experiences – are spatially organized, independent from each other, and able to be understood apart from our experiences of them. Places, on this account, are "merely momentary subdivisions of a universal space quantitatively determined in its natural homogeneity" (Casey 1997, 134). Within space, our experiences are matters of mental processes, "subsum[ing]…every sensible appearance under a representation whose status is unremittingly mental" (ibid, 203). The Cartesian mind-body dualism required that our material realities – the spatially extended body and the homogenous space it occupied – were distinguished from our meaning-laden experiential realities, seen here as "unremittingly mental".

As theorists became critical of modernist dualisms, conceptions of space as metaphysically distinct from place were problematized. Lying at the heart of these criticisms was the recognition of the role of the theorists in their conceptualizations – empirically, theorists did not theorize outside or apart of their own places. Ernst Cassirer (1970), as quoted by Relph (1976), asserts that "we must admit that abstract space has no counterpart and no foundation in physical or psychological reality", itself "a free creation of the human imagination and as such is a direct reflection of the achievement of symbolic thought" (26). Space, as a creatively imagined abstraction, may be useful in certain projects where an object's extension is central to the epistemic goals of the project, yet this does not give it priority – metaphysical or otherwise – over place. Places, being "sensed in a chiaroscuro of setting, landscape, ritual, routine, other people, personal experiences, care and concern for home, and in the context of other places" (Relph 1976, 29), are not merely derivate of nor are they reducible to space. Place is constitutive of space – it is "basic to protostructuring [of the rational world]…it is place that introduces spatial order into the world" (Casey 1976, 5).

Place and space are distinct, the latter an abstract notion of the continuous and infinite extension of the objects (and relations between objects) in our world, whereas the former is contextual,

particular, and meaning-laden, both structuring our experiences and being structured by our experiences. Places should not be understood as simply material surroundings – they are, as Casey (1993) suggests, "more an *event* than a *thing*" (329, his italics). While these definitions lack rigorous defense, they do suggest that to understand our places is a different project then to understand our spaces – this essay takes up the project of understanding place in the context of the west. Essential to this is understanding our experiences between our embodiment and our surroundings as where we are is critical to who we are and, conversely, who we are is critical to where we are. I expand on this relationship in the following sections.

<div align="center">III</div>

Our places, as I've described, are not to be understood abstractly. Although they are not *things* inasmuch as they are *events*, they are in part comprised of things. It is useful to distinguish between three types of things that occur in places in order to better detail how different western communities inhabit their places: [1] The experiencing body, [2] the environment being experienced[1], and [3] the objects within the environment. This is by no means an exhaustive list, nor are its members meant to be exclusive. For instance, the experiencing body is an object in the experiencing bodies' environment and as such, is part of the environment being experienced. This suggests that we cannot so easily distinguish the constituents of a place, yet this crude list serves to highlight specific considerations of place. Furthermore, these categories are themselves sets of complex relationships with both converging and diverging analytical constructs that can provide varying interpretations of place. Thus, and for the purposes of this essay, I narrow my focus on bodies, environments, and objects to imagination, natural environments, and technology, respectively.

The Imagination

We are emplaced bodies whom interact with our places in a variety of ways. These interactions are meaningful in virtue of our interpretations of the interaction. By this, I mean that we bring to bear a tool-kit, of sorts, with which we interpret an interaction in order to create, recognize, and modify (among other related activities) the meaning of the interaction and its constituents. There are a variety of tools we use to interpret our interactions, such as our conceptual schemas, our languages, our perceptions, our values, and so on. Gaining recognition in the literature is the role that our imaginations play in the construction of meaning. In describing the role of the imagination in pragmatic thought, Thomas M. Alexander (1990) argues that for the pragmatists (focusing specifically on works of Peirce, James, and Dewey), imagination is "a dynamic, 'embodied' view, beginning with the idea of living organic beings acting and learning in a world...[where] the ontological modalities of actuality and potentiality are integrated into the very idea of an 'event' or 'situation' [recall *place*]" (325). In this view, the integration of the event-actuality/potentiality falls to the imagination whereby the meaning of the "actual was reinterpreted and reconstructed in light of the possible" (325). This suggests that the interactions the emplaced body has with their surroundings can be meaningful, in part, by accounting for the

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[1] Here, I use "environment" in the broadest sense, meaning the totality of a perceptual bodies' surroundings.

"image-schematic structures [read: imagination] at work in our pre-conscious bodily organization of experience" (346).

How this happens is elaborated in Mark Johnson's (1987) *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*, where he argues that meaning is imaginatively derived from our embodied and sociocultural experiences. According to Johnson, as we traverse our world we experience it and these experiences operate on our imagination to "give us image-schematic structures…[that] can structure many different physical movements and perceptual interactions, including ones never experienced before" (169). What we "experience and cognize as meaningful" is, on Johnson's account, dependent on these imaginatively derived image-schematic structures. Our experiences are structured by our imaginations, providing schemata with which to construct meaning. Interpreting meaning from our place-interactions, on both Johnson's and Alexander's account, requires our embodied imaginations. Critical here is the recognition that our experiences are organized by our imagination which in turn structures our future experiences.

The iteration of experience/imagination/meaning is thus limiting as meaning is limited to our experiences, reflected through our image-schematic structures. Casey (2000) puts it succinctly as "what we take to be *in* the imagined object or event is only what we already, explicitly or implicitly, know *about* it. Imaginative experience is inherently circular in this regard, with the consequence that in imagining we cannot claim to confront anything radically new" (7-8). Given that we individually have different place-experiences, the meanings we glean from and attach to our places will thusly be different.[2]

As people have a variety of common experiences in common places, their imaginative structures become more aligned and these are "what is shared when we understand one another and are able to communicate within a community" (Johnson 1987, 172). It is perhaps controversial, but I take these common imaginative schemas to be constitutive of what is being termed the *social imaginary*. The social imaginary, as described by Claudia Strauss (2006), was first introduced by Cornelius Castoriadis and later developed by Benedict Anderson and Charles Taylor. Castoriadis (1997) recognized the social imaginary as rooted in the "radical imaginary" of the individual (127, 142). The social imaginary, however, is not reducible to the individual – it reflectively structures the meanings taken up by the radical imagination (thus reinforcing the social imaginary) and social institutions (Castoriadis 1997, 128; Dews 2002, 518). Whereas Castoriadis saw *the* social imaginary as singular in a culture, Anderson (1983) and Taylor (2004) recognize a plurality of imaginaries. These imaginaries were "cultural models, which are similarly shared, implicit schemas of interpretation", diverging and converging across diverse communities (Strauss 2006, 329; see also Jasanoff 2015; Smith & Tidwell 2016). Social imaginaries, in either case, are products of similarly-oriented interpretive groups, deriving from the community while also structuring future meaning-making of the community.

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[2] Casey (1993), Tuan (1997), and Lakoff & Johnson (1980) explore how different types of experiences render varying degrees of meaning difference. For instance, our common embodiments with regard to gravity give us common understandings of concepts of up/down.

In this brief and underdeveloped discussion, I've attempted to motivate the view that our places are imbued with meaning by virtue of our embodied experiences, our imaginative capacities, and our social imaginaries. Meaning-making is limited by virtue of the constraints of our social imaginaries and by our experiences, themselves structured by our social imaginaries. Thus, on this view, the role of the imagination in place-making can be evidenced by the social imaginaries of varying communities, a task I will take up further in the essay.

The Natural Environment

Our embodied experiences are conditioned by the environment in which we find ourselves. A simple example is my shivering in cold weather and sweating in hot weather. More complex, however, is Casey's (1993) discussion regarding the "the look of the land" impacting the affective experience (itself structured by past experience) of the emplaced body. Casey distinguishes four features of a landscape that lead to an "experience of desolation" – barrenness, vastness, impenetrability, and isolation (196). Although Casey recognizes that previous experience of a place will modify the unease that someone will have in relation to any combination of these features, he argues that in general, a person experiencing a new place with these four landscape features will experience "an effect of displaced desolation located as much in the contortions of the land or water as in the convolutions of the psyche" (197). From this, we can surmise that different features of a place will be differentially interpreted by varying communities. An Indigenous community that has lived in the arid deserts of the west will not likely feel "desolation" in similar landscapes, whereas settler colonists that came from more populated, vegetative, and (to them) more comfortable environments could feel a "displaced desolation" when settling the west.

On this view, the physical character of a place can in part determine the interpretation of a place for a community. As argued above, however, the image-schematic developed by the imagination from previous experiences will influence place-meaning as well. For example, Ángel J. García Zambrano (2012) shows that pre-European contact Mesoamerican communities preferred founding cities in places where they could align their buildings with a mountain peak that was visible beyond a concave mountain recess to give the impression that the peak was emerging from the recess. This is due to both the landscape features (mountain recesses and peaks) as well as the pre-conceived meanings of these features, namely that they were the "'place of ancestors' or 'place of those who have ancestors'" (217). Previous place-meanings interact with landscape features to develop new places and place-meanings. What is often referred to as Indigenous Knowledge can, in this discussion, be seen as place-meanings that allow the communities holding this knowledge – especially those that seasonally travel throughout their landscapes – to move across landscapes without being be *displaced* or experiencing the *desolation* that can afflict communities unaccustomed to unfamiliar places. These place-meanings can be seen to underwrite the seasonal movements and cultural practices of Algonquian Indigenous peoples, described by Regna Darnell (1998):

> "Throughout the [North American] continent, aboriginal peoples have legends describing themselves as autochthonous rather than as immigrants. By virtue of long residence and interaction with a *particular place*, people come to 'belong' to that land. Land and

identity, therefore, [are] inextricably linked, even while people move about on the land"
(104, my italics)

The Algonquian peoples referred to here were not moving through *space* nor were they displaced immigrants – they were emplaced through their place-meanings (i.e. place-knowledges) even as they traversed through a multitude of places.

Related by the integration of place-meaning with natural environments, but differentiated by stable versus dynamic movements are the colonial agri-settlements that developed through the colonization of North America. Echoing the emplacement that place-meanings render, Laura B. Delind (2006) suggests that place is "at once a geographic *space* and a living force that hold people to a thickness of relationships and memory that signal a 'fit' and a sense of belonging" (128, my italics). However, and although place is being recognized similarly, it is notable that this conceptualization employs the notion of *space* – it is in space that the places of colonial agri-settlement arise. This adherence to the modernist priority of space is illuminating and displays pre-conceived notions of a dualistic separation of place and space, a point I will return to below. This is further evidenced by Delind in her example that "the greatest biodiversity correlates with those places that are most settled – where a people have been 'placed' over long periods of time. Conversely, the absence of biodiversity correlates with excessive mobility, which…is a measure of homeland insecurity" (128). Aside from the overt (and problematic) distinctions between settled and mobile emplacement, this passage indicates the "displace desolation" (i.e. homeland insecurity) that can result from traveling into natural environments where people do not have prior-experience of relevantly similar places.

This discussion suggests that the place-meanings of a community have meaning-attributes that track both features of the natural environment as well as the prior experiences of similar environments. Therefore, the ways in which diverse communities attach meaning to their places can substantially diverge from each other.

Technology

Just as the features of natural environments – in combination with our pre-conceived image-schemata – can help to structure our place-meanings, the objects within our places serve different interpretive roles. Here I focus on *technological objects*, yet I do not presume that this exhausts object-possibilities. I also do not offer a specific definition of what I take to be a technological object. For my purposes, it is sufficient to recognize that those features of our places that are built, constructed, or fabricated are recognized as technological. As the possibilities are near infinite, I limit my discussion to one aspect of technology-in-place – the image-schemata that varying technologies are structured by and serve to structure.

Although the specific details of the relationship are yet to be agreed upon, it is widely recognized that technology, in general, has a role (both implicit and explicit) in shaping "the ways we view ourselves and our communities, and consequently the direction that our individual, community, and corporate activities will take" (Hickman 2001, 3; see also Ellul 1964; Feenburg 1991; Haraway 2006; Ihde 1990; Marcuse 1968; Winner 2010). It is not my aim to defend or refute this, only to show how technology operates on our place-meanings in ways that offer insights into different communities' place-meanings.

The ways that image-schemata serve to structure our place-meanings is well-evidenced through Kent Nerburn's (2010) *Neither Wolf Nor Dog* (Chapter 6 – Junk Cars and Buffalo Carcasses) where he discusses the supposed junk he sees on the Lakota Pine Ridge Reservation with an Indigenous elder, Dan. Nerburn was "mystified" by the lack of "order or indication of effort to keep things clean" regarding the objects on the reservation, prompting him to ask Dan about the "junk cars and all the trash". Dan's eventual response is telling:

> "Watch our little children. They might get a bike and ride it, then just leave it somewhere, like that. You say they are irresponsible. They are just being like their ancestors who believed that you owned something only so long as you needed it. Then you passed it to someone else…All of this – all these cars and stuff – makes me proud…It means we haven't lost our traditional ways…In our way, everything had its use then it went back into the earth. We had wooden bowls and cups, or things made of clay. We rode horses or walked. We made things out of things of the earth. Then when we no longer need it, we let it go back in the earth…We are living the same way, but we are living with different things." (78-80)

Although this passage is, on the surface, explained by mere cultural differences, it is suggestive of deeper forces that help to understand how the same place can be differentially understood. Nerburn, raised with the material-consumerist experiences of the settler state, interpreted the place as disorderly and dirty, strewn with junk and decaying items. Not only did Nerburn interpret the place as such, but his interpretations were being structured by this experience – he thought it "reflected a lack of self-esteem and a sense of hopelessness about life", a preferable option to his "earlier explanation – that people who lived like this were simply lazy and shiftless" (75). The meaning of the objects, themselves, were meanings of the place – the place imbued with pre-conceptions of the people who inhabited it. Dan, on the other hand, was proud of the objects. His place-meaning reflected a different image-schematic, in the language of imagination offered above, that structured his interpretation as *hopeful* (see also Medak-Saltzman 2017). The meaning of the objects, to Dan, were reflective of his people and their traditions in ways that ran contrary to Nerburn's interpretations. The technological objects were not objects in space – they were objects in place, part and parcel of the meanings of the place. The objects, taken in context, are interpreted differently by both parties. This example shows how objects – in this case, technological – are part of place-meanings and how understanding their interpretations gives insight into the place-meanings of varying communities.

The ways that technology relates to place-meaning can be more subtle than the overt interpretative differences between communities. For example, the hearth in a house is a common example of emplacement – Casey (1993) explains that the hearth was built in the center of Greek homes, structured by the socioculturally experienced image-schematic of the Greek goddess of the hearth, Hestia. Hestia was said to be the first Greek deity to build a house and symbolized family life and household economy (133). For the Greeks, the place-meaning of the hearth-centered home was structured by the sociocultural experience of the deity and, reflexively, the hearth structured the place-meanings of home and family. Perhaps not coincidentally is Albert Borgmann's (1987) example of the structuring effects of technology: "a stove [is] used to furnish more than mere heat. It was a focus, a *hearth,* a *place* that gathered the work and leisure of a

family and gave the house a center" (41-42, my italics). Certainly the emplaced-hearth, in both examples, was intentionally used as technology, but as Borgmann recognizes it is not for mere warmth. The home-place, itself, structures interaction in the home in ways that are likely to be hidden without focused reflection. Similarly, the height of ceilings, the length of hallways, and the emplacement of doors and windows structures our place-meanings and interactions (Casey 1993).

Urban dwellings with gridded streets, manicured landscapes, and ordered lots are structured from and reinforce image-schemata of cleanliness, linearity and order. The errant bike or broken down car on Dan's reservation signaled either disorder and clutter (and subsequent lack of self-esteem and hopelessness) or pride in community, depending on the image-schemata that structured one's place-meaning. Paul F. Starrs (2003) analogously describes a western ranch as "a microcosm of ranching's realm…some parts intensively used, other parts left alone, still other parts safeguarded for the future…the order and function are often *known only to the rancher*" (69, my italics). The rancher's place-meaning derives from an image-schematic structured by the place itself while also structuring the future place-meaning.

The technological objects – here seen as both dwellings and artifacts – of our worlds are emplaced, providing meaning and interpretative experiences to the emplaced individual. The ways that our technological objects structure meaning can evidence the ways in which different communities dwell in place, as well as the image-schemata they bring to bear when interpreting place-meaning of other places, such as Nerburn's divergent interpretation of objects on the reservation. The final section integrates the imagination, natural environment, and technological object considerations discussed here to briefly elaborate on the ways that different communities place-meanings are taken up in western environmental governance.

IV

Bears Ears National Monument in Utah is currently at the center of larger debates about land-protection in the west. Bears Ears is significant as it is an explicit confluence of conflicted interests – the Indigenous peoples[3] whom the area holds significant cultural meaning for, the western ranchers and mining companies whom have economic and social stakes in the area, the recreationists and conservationists whom wish to see the area preserved, and the governance structures that will dictate the future of the area. A recent National Geographic article is telling regarding place-meanings of the area:

> "Deep in a box canyon in Utah, in the heart of the fractured land known as Bears Ears National Monument, there is a cave – swooping, mineral-streaked alcove in a sandstone cliff…You bump along a dirt road that twists long miles through arroyos and canyons, past jagged crags and sandstone domes. Then you are on foot. You clamber through a dry watercourse clogged with bitterbrush and poison ivy; you sidle along a rock ledge. Look up: A dissolving jet contrail is the only sign of the time in which we live. Look down:

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[3] The Hopi, Zuni, Pueblo, Navajo, Ute, Paiute, and Apache peoples all consider the region to be part of their ancestral home (Nordhaus 2018).

What seem like stones at your feet are in fact remnants of cooking vessels. Such relics are everywhere." (Nordhaus 2018, 1-2).

This description asks the reader to imagine that they are traveling to this cave ("You bump along…You clamber…Look up…Look down") citing both the natural environments ("sandstone cliff…jagged crags…dry watercourse") and technological objects ("dissolving jet contrail…cooking vessels…relics"). The three facets of place-meaning articulated above are found in this description, offering a salient example to explore how different communities construct the place-meaning of Bears Ears, underwriting the governance of the area that they deem acceptable. The conflict over Bears Ears has "fallen along predictable lines. Drillers and miners, loggers and ranchers, face off against hikers and bikers, climbers and conservationists…and at Bears Ears, the Native Americans who were there first" (Nordhaus 2018, 9). These three generalized communities (rural western, urban western, Indigenous) have place-meanings that, in some part, derive from the image-schemata that communities bring to abear, themselves developed from prior experiences.

The urban image-schematic finds purchase in western dualisms between civilization and nature, derived from western philosophies that cast people as separate from their environments (recall *space* versus *place*) instead of part of their environments (Lloyd 2000; Robinson & Tout 2012). Useful here is Casey's (1993) discussion of gardens as places – image-schemata derived from built places (here, seen as urban landscapes) that prompt an edging out of the built environment into the wild. Gardens are "contrived places and yet are largely if not entirely composed of natural things" allowing one to "edge out of domestic enclosure and [move] towards fields of uncultivated land…I have decommissioned myself with respect to familial and professional duties." (154). I posit that Bears Ears, on the urban imaginary (aggregate of urban image-schemata) is a garden-like place – a place of hiking and biking trails, rock-climbing routes, and aesthetic nature that should be protected and cultivated as we do our home-gardens and lawns through conservation and preservation management. The dualism of the urban imaginary demands a spatial border be enacted (the boundary of Bears Ears National Monument), recognizing that spatial nature is to be cultivated for urban civilization's "decommissioned…familial and professional duties". The character of the natural environments of Bears Ears – the barrenness, vastness, impenetrability, and isolation evidenced in the above passage – structures a displaced desolation that the urban imaginary (complete with the pre-modern universality of its tenets) assumes everyone must feel in that place. As a garden-place, it must be protected for all of us. As a displaced desolate-place we must all be protected from it. This place-meaning, although underdeveloped, renders tenable governance strategies that allow recreational use of the garden-place while inhibiting place-meanings that do not feel displaced-desolation, or those that allow divergent place-meanings.

The rural image-schematic is similarly derived from western dualisms, yet their emplacement within these places allowed image-schemata to develop without the displaced-desolation of the urban imaginary. Rural dwelling has a more porous boundary with nature. For instance, ranchers dwell along fence lines (linear spatial divisions reflective of space/place dualisms) and "along a dirt road that twists long miles through arroyos and canyons". Fences and roads are technological objects that both structure movement across the landscape and inscribe meaning to it. Fences

mean that the landscape is being utilized through livestock grazing, that the landscape is propertied, and that certain travel is restricted, for example, whereas roads signal an unrestricted freedom to move across the landscape. For this imaginary, Bears Ears must be left unrestricted for propertied use – these communities see it as a dwelling-place rather than a garden-place, albeit through the western dualisms that render extractive uses tenable. Thus, protections of this area that limit the freedom to travel and use the area are untenable and obviously in conflict with urban imaginaries.

The Indigenous image-schematic is the most reflective of place as it is well-developed through millennia of emplacement in Bears Ears. The place-meanings of the natural environment do not render it desolate, they see the place as providing strength. The Ute peoples of the area have "respect for the spirit of the bear and the respect to the spirit makes one strong" (Southern Ute Tribe website), reflected in the twin buttes being named Bears Ears. The technological objects are not artifacts or relics in the sense that they are remnants of lost peoples – they are symbols of their own persistence, much as Nerburn saw junk where Dan saw tradition. Furthermore, whereas the urban and rural imaginaries focus on the spatial-boundary of the national monument, the Ute people's image-schemata reflect place boundaries: "To the west lie the Bears Ears buttes…to the south the land drops toward Comb Ridge, and 80-mile wall of sandstone that…forms the Earth's backbone…'We're tied to the land as if the land tied us to it: There's no way we're to get away from it until we're no longer on the Earth" (May Jane Yazzie, quote by Nordhaus 2018, 18). The Indigenous imaginary does not ascribe place-meaning in terms of boundaries or dualisms – the place is not merely a backdrop to their lives, it is their lives. Thus, extraction cannot be allowed and spatial-boundaries are insufficient. The governance of the place is, in this sense, the governance of the Indigenous peoples who are of the place.

These elaborations are underdeveloped and would benefit from closer inspection. I do not aim to provide a full evaluation of place-meanings in western communities, only evidence that place-considerations can help to understand inter-community environmental conflicts. Environmental governance that seeks to collaborate across multiple communities would do well to elaborate on varying facets of place, fostering a place that allows different participants to describe place-meaning while also structuring the ascription of future place-meaning (Kemmis 1990). Furthermore, the governance decisions eventually made are reflective of certain place-meanings that will diverge from certain others. Place and its constitutive elements of imagination, natural environments, and technology helps to illuminate the ways in which our surroundings serve to structure our meaning-attributions in ways that may run contrary to place-meanings of concomitantly emplaced communities. Future work would do well to clarify and expand this discussion.

V

I have outlined a conceptual distinction between place and space, defended the role of the imagination as providing image-schemata (aggregated as the social imaginary), described how our natural environments structure our experience of place, and described how place-objects and place-dwellings indicated varying place-meanings. This essay is, in my opinion, underdeveloped

and would benefit from revision. However, it is my hope that it is sufficient to motivate an account of place in environmental governance in the American West.

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