RESTORING THE HUMAN IN THE SEARCH FOR NATURE:

HOMELESSNESS, ECOLOGY, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR CHANGE

By

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Why can't we give love?
'Cause love's such an old fashioned word
And love dares you to care for the people on the edge of the night
And love dares you to change our way of caring about ourselves
This is our last dance. This is ourselves under pressure.

- Freddie Mercury & David Bowie

For the people on the edge of the night…

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LEARNING TO SEE

> We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive
> where we started and know the place for the first time.
> -- T.S. Elliot

My fieldwork ended right where it began. Just over a year and a half ago, in December 2012, I

stood at almost this exact spot. During my initial visit to the area, a local archaeologist brought

me here to introduce me to the Ventura River. It was my first glimpse of it. I stood in the middle

of the Main Street Bridge and looked down, searching for the small channels of water that wove

in and out of the vegetation that filled the floodplain. We walked back and forth; taking turns

calling out the names of the plants—as biologists tend to do—and I tried to imagine what it

would be like to actually conduct research here.

Now, I didn't have to imagine. Now, at the end of the fieldwork, I returned to this place

by the river that I had come to know so well over the past year. I was leaving Ventura in just a

few days and spending a final evening with Henry and Joy, my friends from the riverbottom.[1]

They arranged the entire evening, and called me four times during the day to finalize the plans.

After dinner at a restaurant, we drove up the hillside behind City Hall to the giant wooden cross

that Joy said I needed to see before I left. There in the quiet darkness, we traced the curves where

the lights of California dissolved into the black abyss of the Pacific Ocean. As she motioned

toward the neon swirl of the Ferris wheel from the county fair, spinning off in the distance, Joy

said, "Isn't this nice?" Henry told us about how he hitchhiked up the coast in his 20s, before the

freeway was built; it was different then. We stood in the breeze on the edge of the hillside,

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[1] Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the confidentiality of research participants.

pointing out landmarks and telling stories until a police cruiser arrived, and advised us to leave with its blinding white spotlight and disembodied voice projecting through the loudspeaker, "The park is closed." In my experience, people from the riverbottom tend not to hang around when the cops come, and this time was no different. As Henry gruffed a quick, "Time to go," we hopped into my car and wound our way back down to sea level. Not quite ready for the night to end, we decided to go to the beach, to watch the evening's fireworks from the county fair.

I thought parking might be an issue. Many of the businesses we passed had signs charging for their lots, and everything seemed full. We decided to try the public lot near the riverbottom, by the Main Street Bridge, and were pleasantly surprised to find it nearly empty. In retrospect, it is not very surprising; most people do not go to this area after dark. The three of us walked along the bike path to the stone bench at Surfer's Point, a perfect vantage point for the show. We made a game of exclaiming, "Wow!" every time there was a loud bang, and by the time the flashes stopped, rivers of tears were streaming down our cheeks. Now, it really was time to go; time for Joy and Henry to head back to their camp; time for me to go home. We made our way back to the car as the light of the half-moon filtered over the darkened riverbottom. When we arrived at the lot, Henry and Joy headed toward my car. I paused and turned toward the river, placing my foot on top of the levee. I breathed deeply, inhaling the place, trying to memorize the moment. I'm not sure how much time passed, but Henry eventually returned, quietly standing next to my right shoulder. After a moment, he asked, "Thinking of all the people you know running around down there in and out of the bamboo?"

Yes. That's exactly what I was doing.

I was thinking of Virginia's camp just beyond the railroad tracks by the little white cross that marks the site of the shooting during last year's fair, where we lay on her mattress under the

willow tree and fed pieces of pita bread to the sparrows. And the spot on the levee under the freeway overpass where Alec and I sat the day his camp was removed; how we talked for hours about life and death and family and grief. And the place behind the white cinderblock wall where people in the riverbottom leave extra food for each other, for anyone who needs it. I was thinking of the land conservancy workers and the volunteers, the state park rangers and highway patrol officers, the people and the stories that have become part of this place.

But at Henry's prompt, I thought about that moment just over a year and a half ago when I was standing in almost this exact spot, my first time at the river. I remembered that I tried to imagine what I had read about this place, about the camps, and the work, and the people, not realizing they were here all along. I simply could not see them. Eventually, I said to Henry, "I was just thinking about how, when I first came here, all I kept seeing were the plants. But now, after this whole year, all I can see are the people."

INTRODUCTION

RESTORING THE RIVER

Rivers are meeting places. They are places where water and land merge, forming floodplain

wetlands that circumvent and complicate notions of a sharp divide between the terrestrial and the

aquatic. They are places of difference and connection, of gradients and change, where much

happens below and across the visible surface. For me, the study of water has been a process of

making gradients manifest, and in understanding the ways in which outliers, or the things that lie

outside of what is considered typical or normal in a probabilistic sense, are often part of what we

understand as "normal" in a systemic sense. Water operates in multiple ways, and rivers display

a remarkable diversity in form and function, often tied to larger dynamics and processes such as

climate, moisture, soil, geography, and temperature.

Rivers are also political places, both in terms of jurisdiction and in terms of justice. It is

astonishing how we make boundaries so readily over something as fluid as water. Waterways

often operate as both borderlands and political borders, crossing and constructing boundaries

between cities, states, and nations as they flow across landscapes and landforms. As these

riparian ecotones become sharpened into discrete lines, the social construction of the boundary

becomes less apparent. The boundary and the river together seem more stable, more objective,

more natural. Yet, as sites encoded with power and value, waterways that are made into

jurisdictional boundaries can become sites of social sorting with implications for people and

environments. When it comes to waterways, position matters, and the upstream is a privileged

position that is often associated with the power to use, control, and pollute water, negatively

impacting both human and nonhuman communities. Although the popular environmental slogan

states, "We All Live Downstream," the social, political, and economic power to challenge

upstream powers is not equally distributed across all positions of gender, race, class, culture, and

species (Bullard 1990, Gaard 2001, Shiva 2002). Determining who has the access and legitimacy

to live along water is a concern for both social and environmental justice.

This project investigates the intersection between the environment and people by

bringing together two entities that live within a riparian landscape: (1) *Arundo donax*, a tall

bamboo-like plant that is classified as an invasive species by the California Invasive Plant

Council; and (2) homeless people living in encampments within the floodplain of the Ventura

River.[2] Each of these elements is typically situated within different domains of scientific

knowledge and practice: natural science/environmental restoration and social science/social

services, respectively. Why bring these two together?

Arundo provides a useful metaphor to explain this. If you look at a stand of *Arundo*, you

will most likely see a cluster of large, round, hollow, jointed woody stems. After a brief

examination of the surface, you might assume that each stalk represents an individual plant:

influenced by common external, environmental factors, but internally separate. However,

beneath the visible surface of the soil, *Arundo* grows rhizomatically, which means that many of

the *Arundo* stems are connected by a network of underground stems. These underground stems,

called rhizomes, allow the plant to reproduce laterally and asexually instead of through

sequential sexual generations. The stems that appear separate on the surface are connected to and

are influenced by each other underground.

In this project, I investigate the often-unexamined underground connections between the

"stems" of environmental work and social service work. Bridging these two domains illustrates

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[2] An invasive species is an organism that is considered non-native and is not under human control through domestication or cultivation (Beck et al. 2008, Invasive Species Advisory Committee 2006).

how they work in concert to mutually shape and reinforce each other. Thus, rather than being a dialectic in tension, people and the environment (or what is often divided as culture and nature) are both mutually stratified by intersecting domains of power. Race, gender, and class hierarchies are constructed through assumptions about nature (Fausto-Sterling 2001, Merchant 1980, Mitman 2005, Moallem & Boal 1999, Nash 2006, Raffles 2007, Subramaniam 2001, Tuana 1988) as understandings about the environment are inflected through racialized, gendered, and classed standpoints (Haraway 1989; Kolodny 1975, 1984; Kosek 2006; Scharff 2003; Tsing 1994; White 1995a, 1995b). Thus, solutions that prioritize one domain over another may inadvertently create further oppressions for both people and the environment. Bringing these two elements together reveals collective enactments of marginalization through the intersection of multiple dominant epistemological paradigms, such as environmental restoration science and practice, and social welfare and social health.[3]

Project Background

> "We want to connect the ocean with the mountains with a recreation trail that goes up the river … We want to connect the city with the river so that people feel much more ownership and we don't have this just be a place for people to escape."
>
> > – Steve Bennett, Ventura County Supervisor[4]

> "Where are we going to go? We're going to go up to the streets where they really don't want us. This is where we live. That is going to cost so much money. Why don't they turn it into something for us?"
>
> > – Julie Peterson, Ventura River floodplain encampment resident[5]

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[3] Collective enactments of marginalization, in other words, means the ways in which marginalization occurs or becomes acted out through the interactions among multiple entities. In this research, I am interested in understanding the ways in which environmental restoration acts in concert with social welfare and social health in ways that may contribute to marginalization and exacerbate root causes of violence, particularly for people who are unhoused.

[4] Stallworth (2012).

In order to understand the connection between environmental work and social service work, my research focuses on a major ecological restoration project on the Ventura River in Southern California, where local environmental organizations are working with social service agencies to improve ecological functioning and public access to the river. The restoration simultaneously involves the removal of *Arundo donax* and the removal of long-term homeless encampments that often correspond with dense *Arundo* growth. Although the encampments have been commonplace within the floodplain since the Great Depression (Escario et al. 2008) and *Arundo* was intentionally introduced to Southern California from the Mediterranean for erosion control in the 1820s (Bell 1993), both entities have become publically viewed as problematic and illegitimate invaders of the river's floodplain; thus, their removal is seen as essential to restoring the river to its "natural" state.[6]

The Ventura River is a landscape undergoing rapid and significant changes that are happening on both a physical and a value level. In other words, there are changes happening within the physical landscape as well as in the way the landscape itself is being valued. One of the primary drivers of these changes is a shift in the availability of public funding for conservation work. In 2004, the California State Legislature appropriated $100 million for the development of river parkways through The California River Parkways Act. This is indicative of a national shift towards re-valuing previously disturbed or neglected waterways in urban areas. River parkways have always served a dual purpose of restoring habitat and ecological functions and creating opportunities for public access and recreation in areas adjacent to rivers and streams. However, these marginal waterways have also frequently been sites of long-term

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[5] Ibid.
[6] For example, the president of the Ventura Audubon Society stated in the chapter's monthly newsletter that the "restoration of the lower river depends on the success of efforts to relocate homeless camps" (Schoppe 2012, p. 1).

homeless encampments, and efforts to restore public connection and ecological functioning have increased tensions surrounding the presence of camps. For example, in California, citizen environmental organizations and regulatory agencies have threatened and pursued legal actions against local municipalities for water quality impairments due to the presence of riverbottom encampments (Newman & Rogers 2014, Santa Barbara Channelkeeper 2015).

The conflict over the Ventura River reflects broader tensions between restoring ecological purity and environmental justice concerns. Central to the work of ecological restoration is the idea that landscapes will be put back, or restored, to a healthy "natural" state that existed prior to human disturbance. However, efforts to restore ecological purity have historically been tied to issues of race and class. For example, the establishment National Parks and other nature reserves have displaced Native Americans from their lands (Mitman 2004) and histories of racial violence and exclusion have dramatically shaped black experiences in and with nature (Finney 2014). Moreover, environmentalists tend to prioritize recreation as the ideal way to know nature, which excludes and devalues the intimate understandings that working class people such as foresters and fishermen develop through their daily engagement with landscapes (White 1995). Therefore, the production of healthy landscapes tends to displace or exclude *particular* human beings along with their experiences and knowledge, which suggests that the ways landscapes are understood and managed is as much a concern for environmental justice as is the unequal distribution of toxic waste and pollutants.

Theoretical Framework

The idea for this project originated, in part, from questions that arose for me during my previous work as a field researcher in the Ecology and Evolution Department at Rutgers University. My

primary responsibility was to coordinate research evaluating a number of wetland rapid assessment methods by applying the methods at a series of freshwater floodplain wetlands in two New Jersey watersheds. Wetland assessments, which use various qualitative and quantitative indicators to assess the quality of a wetland's functioning and the value it provides to society, are occasionally used to determine conservation priorities, but they are more commonly employed by government agencies and private consulting companies to identify impacted sites for potential land development variances, or for compensatory mitigation.[7]

The many hours I spent in the field throughout this three-year project provided me with many things: countless cases of poison ivy on the exposed strip of skin between the place where my knee-high rubber boots ended and my tan nylon shorts began (the cost of my distaste for long pants in the hot, humid New Jersey summers); the counter-intuitive understanding that seasonal winter floods made chest waders necessary equipment for checking groundwater wells in January; and the opportunity to witness, among other things, a sleeping raccoon nestled in a tree hollow, an oval patch of tall grass still matted from a bedded deer, the almost eerie white forms of egret colonies perched on the gnarled branches of a dead tree, and the dramatic explosion of a ripe jewelweed seedpod. Occasionally, we would find evidence suggesting that people were also living in some of the sites: an isolated tent, newspapers, clothes hanging on a line stretched between the trees.

These wetlands were, for the most part, isolated pockets of woods surrounded by roads and middle- to upper-class suburban housing developments. From the outside, they were

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[7] Wetland mitigation is regulated under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, and requires responsible parties to compensate for wetlands that are lost through actions such as dredging or filling by creating, enhancing, or restoring wetlands with the overall goal that there will be "no net loss" of wetlands from human impacts. In practice, however, this goal is not typically realized. For a critique of mitigation policies and practices in the United States, see Ambrose (2000) and Lave, Robertson, and Doyle (2008). For an analysis of the political economy of stream restoration in the United States and the influence of neoliberalism on the field of stream restoration, see Lave (2012).

nondescript places lacking formal names, parking lots, or established trails; they were places you would probably drive by without a second glance. (Actually, you probably *do* drive by places like this all the time.) Roads within the built environment can create metaphorical walls that divide the physical landscape into different social worlds (Patton 2005). And, like the places themselves, the events in the everyday lives of human and nonhuman entities within these obscured places likely go unnoticed by many people nearby.

What has stayed with me over the years is a heightened awareness that the functions and values of these marginal spaces could not be completely contained within our indicators. The value that these wetlands held for the people who were living within them did not fit into the assessment methods. The indicators we were measuring and evaluating were based on implicit definitions of what constituted legitimate wetland functions and values (and what did not), and assumptions about who were (and were not) considered legitimate beneficiaries of those ecosystem services. As Bonnie Spanier and Jessica Horowitz (2011) write,

> Starting assumptions underpin how research questions are asked, how studies are constructed, which explanatory frameworks are acceptable and which are not, which data are highlighted and which data are excluded for being atypical, and how data are interpreted. Indeed, these critiques make visible the ways that biases in worldviews enter the scientific method (p. 45).

People living within the wetland systems were not considered legitimate users of the space in a normative sense, which became encoded into the wetland assessment methods themselves. And because there was no way to include them within our data, they were completely written out of any kind of formal representation. It is this disregard that feels like a type of *epistemic violence* (Spivak 1988), whereby people, places, identities, and types of knowledges that do not fit within the normative assumptions, frameworks, and metrics of scientific practice are excluded.

Homelessness, as a social problem and a social welfare concern, was invisible to the restoration ecologist, just as most homelessness researchers do not see ecosystem services, wetland restoration, or invasive species management as a central concern to their work.

Thus, it is important to study both domains together in order to analyze the dependencies, relationships, and conceptual links between them. To do so is vital for making sense of our collective understanding of our responsibility to each other, to the environment, and to the future.

Knowledge, Power, and the Construction of the Natural

There is power inherent in "naturalizing" identities, behaviors, and processes. What is constructed as "natural" is often what is seen as unquestioned truth or reality. Oftentimes, what we think of as natural are things we do not think to question because they do not appear to be questionable—they are either what we "know" or the way the world is; they appear solid, fixed, normal. Thus, the "natural" can seem secure, certain.

What is considered natural (both in terms of human and nonhuman nature) is constructed through assumptions about how knowledge is produced and the methods we use to construct that knowledge. Through learning these knowledge-construction practices—either by being disciplined or trained in them—the practices (and the knowledge they produce) can also come to be seen as natural or given (Latour 1987, Lave & Wenger 1991). Thus, people trained in different academic disciplines might "see" or "know" differently because they have different assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), what counts as knowledge (epistemology), and how that knowledge can be obtained or how reality can be understood (methodology).

It is difficult to question our own ideas of what we consider natural; they are harder for us to see. It is similar to how one's perception shifts when one's eyes adjust to a darkened room.

You grow accustomed to seeing a certain way, and either forget, fail to realize, or never knew that there are other ways of seeing, other things to see. Thus, one way to recognize the limits of what we know is to juxtapose it with difference, similar to the way we might better notice the darkness of a room when a light is abruptly turned on. Therefore, people with different experiences, different training, or different ways of seeing have the potential to bring to light things that we assume or take for granted.

However, not everyone's knowledge or type of knowledge production is given the same weight. Knowledge is stratified by power. Basic assumptions made by the dominant majority or the most powerful people (i.e., the dominant paradigm, or way of seeing the world) might be considered the "most natural" (universal, unbiased), and these perspectives often have less work to do to prove their legitimacy or validity (because they are the least questioned), while other ways of knowing are delegitimized and seen as partial or biased. In "Situated Knowledges," Donna Haraway (1998) calls this the *god trick,* and argues that all perspectives are, in fact, partial and situated; all perspectives offer a view from somewhere, and it is important to mark hegemonic positions as such. Thus, though power is ingrained within the perspective of the majority, that power is not bestowed by divine right or through infallible vision, but through oppression and appropriation.

Feminist epistemologies of science based on standpoint approaches focus on diversifying scientific knowledge by incorporating multiple perspectives (starting with those most marginalized or outside of the dominant paradigm) in order to create a more complex understanding of reality. Sandra Harding (1998) argues that starting scientific research from marginalized perspectives brings a stronger objectivity. Donna Haraway (1998) argues for the inclusion of partial perspectives into science for the "unexpected openings" they bring. Although

perspectives from outside the dominant paradigm can bring new knowledge to light through the inclusion of different assumptions, values, and experiences, these approaches may be limited in their ability to question or challenge the dominant paradigm because the hegemonic power is left intact. However, if the core value or goal is inclusion, then outsider or borderlands perspectives are more likely to conform to the dominant paradigm in order to gain legitimacy, to be seen and heard. For example, Steven Epstein (1996) describes how AIDS activists effectively gained the power to bridge the constructed divide between the public and science by becoming "lay experts" who could speak the "language" of science and communicate within the scientific arena, thereby "forcing credentialed experts to deal with their arguments" (p. 335). However, by becoming more "scientific" in order to gain legitimacy and challenge expert claims, the activists who became lay experts lost "street credibility" and the trust of those within the movement who did not develop expertise; as a result, the activists inadvertently reproduced the relations of power they were seeking to change by unintentionally repositioning some people on the margins.

By having to conform to the language of science, the "outsiders" need to do more work. They are the ones whose identities become destabilized, more fluid (although there are repercussions because they tend to lose some legitimacy of being an outsider once they achieve lay expert status). This leads me to question the identity of the experts. How are they influenced or changed? What do they give up? I think that we need to symmetrically consider the construction of particular scientific identities. The blurring of categories between lay and expert seem to slant toward increasing the value and, by extension, power of "lay" knowledge. However, do we also need to see experts as lay people? Is the category of *scientific expert* still conceived of as an integral, essential unit? What forms of researchers' knowledge fail to fit within the dominant epistemological or methodological framework of their field, and what

happens to that knowledge? How might the content of their science be different if this knowledge was included?

Instead of concentrating on inclusion, Helen Longino's (1994) feminist epistemology focuses on the feminist perspective "as an object of reflection, not as a subject position" (p. 473). In this regard, a feminist epistemology is based on "doing science as a feminist," which implies an application of feminist values to any research question or scientific discipline and reflects on how a particular perspective (and the values and assumptions implicit within that perspective) impacts what we see (and fail to see), what we know, and how we know it. Justice is implied as a core value within Longino's criteria for a feminist epistemology, which is evident through her six criteria: 1) empirical adequacy, 2) novelty, 3) ontological heterogeneity, 4) complexity of relationship, 5) applicability to current human needs, and 6) diffusion of power. Although she is concerned with observing reality, it is not a sufficient condition; justice is equally important and necessary. However, it can be difficult to make the transition from epistemology to methodology and to apply Longino's criteria in practice.

Lastly, I am also drawing on Patricia Hills Collins' (2009) black feminist epistemology, which, in contrast to the previous epistemologies of science, focuses specifically on knowledge that is produced through social science.[8] As a sociologist, Collins builds her epistemological framework from the everyday experiences of black women, which lends an empirical grounding to her work that directly embodies the ethos of her argument. Collins argues that values and ethics should be the starting point for research. Knowledge is more than information, and in

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[8] I am primarily drawing on the 2nd edition of *Black Feminist Thought* (2009), in which Collins heavily revised her previous framework to include an analysis of power through a Foucauldian lens, which focuses more on the circulation of power through the matrix of domination and the relationship between power and knowledge. The first version appears to be more heavily based on standpoint theory, and focuses primarily on identity construction and the individual as the primary site of intersecting oppression.

order to create lasting social change, knowledge production should be built on an ethics of caring that recognizes three components: (1) the uniqueness of individuals, (2) the appropriateness of emotions in dialog, and (3) the development of the capacity for empathy. Thus, the starting point for political action through research begins at the point of research design, which implies that the research process itself, not just the product of research, constitutes political action. Politics that are enacted through methodologies influence the construction of identities. Ontology meets methodology meets epistemology.

This understanding of the politics of research resonates strongly with a politics of the everyday. The political realm is more than an external sphere of formal institutions of power: the legislatures, the laws, and the sovereign. Power circulates through the interactions of daily life in the everyday mundane actions we take for granted. In discourse, this is the unquestioned realm of the common sense, what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) calls the *doxa*, which structures what is possible. Power lies in the ability to define the rules of engagement, in circumscribing the domain of discourse. As Tim Cresswell (1997) writes, "The creation and maintenance of metaphorical understanding is an inherently political process and one that is more likely to be produced by people in power … Power, at least in part, involves the ability to impose metaphors on others" (p. 333). Thus, what appears in the public sphere of discourse is constructed through everyday relations of power that define appropriate content and legitimate speakers—what may be said and who may be heard. This means that it is important to understand how dominant discourses operate, how they are constructed, what they engender, and what they foreclose. It is also important to look for the silences, the absences—who and what cannot be heard. And, as Collins writes, "Silence is not to be interpreted as submission" (Collins 2009, p. 108). Within the silence, there is often everyday resistance.

Resistance is a reciprocal force to oppression. My first formal introduction to resistance was through an introductory physics course, where we learned that force equals mass times acceleration ($F = ma$). We drew countless boxes with arrows pointing directly at the box to represent a force moving the box in the direction of the arrow (at a rate of acceleration in proportion to the magnitude of the force and inversely proportional to the mass of the box). In this model, the box travels in the direction of the arrow indefinitely (unless an opposing force, such as another hand, comes along to stop it or push it back in the other direction). However, in life, when one pushes a box across a table, the acceleration is not constant, nor does the box move indefinitely. Resistance, in the form of friction, pushes back. It counteracts the overt force of the push and, over time, diminishes its power and, by extension, its acceleration. In other words, friction causes the box to slow down. In time, I learned that I also needed to draw a smaller arrow on the opposite side of the box to represent the resistance. However, these arrows were easy to forget because resistance is a covert force. We see the hand pushing the box, but the friction between the box and the table is invisible; it materializes in the interaction between the table and the box. Similarly, resistance is important to consider because, without it, researchers risk reproducing the silences, or paternalistically speaking for those they are trying to help, thereby unintentionally reproducing unequal power relations and invisible violence (Spivak 1988). It is an ethical concern as much as it is one of knowledge. What this implies for research is that it is important to interpret meaning in a way that is culturally relative, understanding what language and behavior mean to the individual and how meaning is produced through social interactions.

Resistance is the subversive cousin to overt opposition, and together they work to erode the forces of oppression. However, oppression is not a single force. Systems of oppression

interact with each other in ways that are not simply additive. In other words, the social location

(and thus experiences and knowledges) of someone at the node of multiple intersecting systems

of oppression is unique, and quite different from the sum of each of the parts. Collins' (2009)

concept of *intersectionality* is often used to consider how different identity positions within an

individual intersect to create oppression. However, for this project, I am drawing more heavily

on her concept of the *matrix of domination*, which posits that there are four interrelated domains

of power that contribute to the overall organization of power: the structural, the disciplinary, the

hegemonic, and the interpersonal. The structural domain organizes power through large-scale

social institutions, such as the legal system, banking, schools, and the media. The disciplinary

domain is concerned with organizational practices that manage human behavior through

bureaucratic regulations and techniques of surveillance. The hegemonic domain legitimates

power through ideology, culture, and consciousness to create the realm of common sense that

links the structural and disciplinary domains with the interpersonal domain, or the domain of

everyday life. Power is not located in any one of these domains, but circulates among them. By

bringing these domains of power together to understand how they work in conjunction with or in

opposition to each other, we can see the ways they contribute to collective enactments of

marginalization and oppression.

   Reconstructing Ecology

Inspired by those formative field experiences in New Jersey, part of my overall research project

is to work towards reconstructing ecological science by incorporating insights from feminist

epistemologies of science. In other words, what would a feminist ecological science look like? Is

it possible to create an alternative conception of environmental understanding that does not reproduce a human/nature or social/physical dichotomy as a foundational aspect of the work?

All of the feminist epistemologies of science have influenced my thinking and this project in some way. Therefore, my intention is not to choose one as the "best" one; each has strengths in different situations. For example, Sandra Harding's concept of *strong objectivity* might be strategically useful in arguing to audiences who strongly adhere to the objectivity of objectivity, such as natural scientists or positivistic social scientists. It might be able to act as a boundary concept and provide a legitimacy that will facilitate being heard. In terms of my own values and the work of this research project, Helen Longino's feminist epistemology resonates strongly with me because of her focus on justice (rather than knowledge) as a core value of research and interrogating power through the work that it does rather than through a basis of inclusion and identity categories. Feminism is about more than simply adding women (and others) into the equation; it is a questioning and reconfiguring of power.

Patricia Hill Collins' work embodies many of the values of Helen Longino's, but it provides a more explicit connection to methodology. Although Collins developed her intersectional epistemology specifically for social science, I am interested in its utility for understanding the intersections between the nonhuman and the human, and specifically how domination is enacted through the landscape. I think that it may be particularly useful combined with work on multispecies ethnography (Haraway 2007, Kirksey & Helmreich 2010), which incorporates nonhuman entities as ethnographic subjects. While work in multispecies ethnography (for example, Hayward 2010, Helmreich 2009, and Tsing 2012*)* often addresses the politics of and within science, what is missing from much of this work is an ethical argument and an interrogation of the implications for the nonhuman. In many regards, knowledge about the

physical and the biological still remain within the domain of natural science. Incorporating intersectionality within the research design may bring greater opportunity to reciprocally interrogate the implications of research findings for the environment as well as for people.

Ecology is about relationships. That is what originally drew me to the field. Ecology incorporates biology, chemistry, physics, geography, and geology. However, it is not a static subject. It is first a way of thinking, an orientation that focuses on understanding how these various dimensions of life interact in ways that shape and influence each other. Ecology is concerned with the role of power (often human power) to disproportionately influence those relationships, and more recently there is interest in understanding how ecological knowledge can be utilized to further human rights, and how ecologists can incorporate human rights into their work (Duke, Middendorf, & Wyndham 2011). At the 2011 Ecological Society of America (ESA) conference in Austin, I attended a session on ecology and human rights, which was organized by Clifford Duke, ESA's Director of Science Programs, and George Middendorf from Howard University. This was the first time (to my knowledge) that human rights had been formally addressed at an ESA meeting. A related session, also organized by Middendorf (along with Nadine Lymn from ESA), focused on engaging with communities. These presentations signify a large shift within the field of ecology, wherein scholars more directly engage with the politics of knowledge and how the products of ecological knowledge can contribute to furthering human rights.

This acknowledgement of human rights within ecology provides an opportunity for my work to add a critical analysis of the ways in which knowledge production *within* ecology contributes to—and possibly impedes—human rights. In order for this to happen, people must be more fully considered during the research process as part of ecology, not simply beneficiaries of

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ecological knowledge or external actants who are disturbing "natural" ecological systems (which is the dominant framing in much of the current research on socio-natural systems). The category of "human" is not an essential, unitary, or deterministic category, and we cannot hope to ultimately further human rights by starting from a place that dehumanizes. To make changes that further human justice along with environmental justice (i.e., justice towards the nonhuman), we must begin from a place of difference that does not write out people and places marginalized by powers of oppression. We must start from a place of justice. We must construct nature differently. And so, to do research differently constitutes political action.

Research Design

This project represents an effort to construct a feminist ecological science that attends to the complex inter-relationships between people, environments, knowledge, and power. I am a qualitative methodologist experimenting with different methods to render that complexity visible, and in designing this research, I strove to design a project that would embody the values I think are necessary within the solutions. This entailed spending a significant amount of time embedded within the field site. I spent 12 months in Ventura, California, conducting ethnographic fieldwork from August 2013 to August 2014.

The design of this project incorporates multiple positions, and I pay close attention to the ways people negotiate between identities and make meaning at the places they intersect. I conducted 81 semi-structured interviews with environmental workers who were attempting to clean up the riverbottom, with social service workers who were trying to house the homeless, and with people who were homeless and living in the riverbottom. I did this in order to understand the different perspectives of these groups and how they construct the problem. I also

conducted participant observation at restoration activities, encampment removals, coalition

meetings, housing inspections, and within homeless encampments, which provided access to data

felt by direct experience and difficult to access in other ways. This research combines

anthropologist Laura Nader's (1972) call to "study up," or to study the cultures of power with a

value of also including marginalized perspectives within research. It is not typical to combine

both of these within the same research project. One of the unexpected outcomes of this design

was the discovery that, even though I originally thought of this as a project of merely combining

multiple group perspectives, in the end it became an ethnography of a community and the ways

in which people across multiple levels are struggling to create change within systems that

inherently and increasingly dehumanize.

I also employed photography as a visual methodology to document changing

nature/culture interactions and as a politics of representation to counteract dominant ways of

representing the homeless and the work in riverbottom. Photographs were made during

observation activities at public events and in public spaces. They functioned as visual fieldnotes

to engage with animals, plants, and non-living entities that could not be interviewed, and to

capture the diverse perspectives of participants. Photographs were initially taken intuitively, as

suggested by Gillian Rose (2012), and were increasingly refined as my fieldwork progressed. I

focused specifically on documenting interactions between people and the landscape by recording

"communicative events" (Briggs 1986) rather than producing static representations. For example,

I documented how people within homeless encampments perceived aspects of the riverbottom by

carrying my camera with me and photographing objects and views as they were pointed out and

described to me. I attempted to frame photographs in a way that communicated both the

analytical and the emotional perspectives of research participants.

Employing Grounded Theory

In order to understand the construction of human and nonhuman nature through the restoration work, I employed a grounded theory methodology, which is based on the assumption that meaning is socially constructed rather than a natural or static quality of people, objects, or events. Grounded theory is an inductive approach to qualitative data that facilitates the development of theoretical insights from data grounded in fieldwork (Patton 2002). Developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory is an analytic framework that challenges strict positivist ideas about objectivity, the scientific method, and the separation between researcher and subject. Positivist scientific methods are generally based on the assumption that proper application of the scientific method by an unbiased researcher can reveal "true" understandings about an external reality, and generate large, overarching theories about nature. In contrast, grounded theory is rooted in the tenets of the Chicago School's symbolic interactionism that understands meaning as something that is produced through the interactions among people, objects, and other non-human entities (Berg 2009). More specifically, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, "how inhabitants of a setting define their situation determines the nature and meaning of their actions as well as the setting itself" (Berg 2009, p. 9); in other words, meaning is constructed socially, and there may be multiple meanings or realities that exist simultaneously. This understanding of knowledge construction aligns with the purpose of this research project to understand the multiple constructions of human and non-human nature and their implications that are occurring through the restoration of the Ventura River.

Furthermore, symbolic interactionism and grounded theory support the assumptions of ethnographic research methods (such as participant observation) that are employed in this project, which aim to elucidate how participants understand, experience, and construct their

realities through direct experience. Ethnographic methods place the researcher within the situation or site of action, quite possibly in the midst of uncomfortable and difficult sights, smells, and experiences which, according to Philippe Bourgois (1999), challenges positivistic understandings of what it means to be an expert, and questions the legitimacy conferred through research methodologies that do not require (and often inhibit) direct experience. As Bourgois states (1999):

> Through the epidemiological approach public health researchers have managed to develop a scientific method that allows them to become experts on drugs without ever having to interact with drug users in their problematic, dangerous, and uncomfortable indigenous environments (p. 2165).

Through ethnographic research, the researcher gains expertise through both the research process and the interactions between the researcher and research participants, and research participants are also acknowledged as experts in their own experiences. In fact, the researcher is part of the situation, and interacts with and engages with the participants. It is assumed that the researcher will alter the field of study through her or his observation, but this is not to be considered a contamination of a static and separate field. When analyzed reflexively, these "observer effects" also have the potential to elucidate broader social and cultural understandings (Monahan & Fisher 2010). Thus, theoretically and practically significant knowledge can be constructed through interactions between the researcher and his or her field of study.

Grounded theory supports the epistemological assumptions and methodological approaches that undergird this research. There have been multiple refinements of grounded theory since Glaser and Strauss's initial articulation of the methodology in 1967, and for this project, I am primarily drawing upon Kathy Charmaz's (2006) social constructivist approach as well as Adele Clarke's (2005a, 2009) situational analysis (which further integrates a social

worlds/arenas framework to grounded theory). Both of these approaches can be utilized as analytical tools and can be used along with additional types of analysis. Initial open coding of interviews was conducted using Charmaz's (2006) process of line-by-line coding to identify initial categories and codes, followed by selective (or focused) coding of the most salient themes to facilitate the emergence of broader patterns and insights across participants and groups. I also wrote theoretical and methodological memos that reflected upon conceptual relationships and analytical insights throughout data collection and analysis.

Situational analysis is designed to supplement basic coding through the creation of three different kinds of analytical maps (situational maps, social worlds/arenas maps, and positional maps) and explicitly integrates the key elements of a situation into analysis, including non-human elements such as animals, plants, technologies, discourses, and art, as well as spatial and temporal contexts (Clarke 2005a, 2009). Situational maps are used to identify relationships among the main human, nonhuman, discursive, and other elements. Social worlds/arenas maps analyze the situation from the perspective of each of the social worlds or collective actors, and positional maps can be used to analyze multiple positions that actors hold as well as multiple ways of framing issues within the situation (Clarke 2005b). Situational analysis is a flexible analytical method, and the method can be customized to fit the specifics of individual research projects; for example, situations can also be analyzed as assemblages (e.g., Clarke & Friese 2007, Deleuze & Guattari 1987, Marcus & Saka 2006). During the process of designing this research project, I drew heavily on situational analysis through the creation of messy and ordered situational maps following an initial discourse analysis of media reports, and a pilot site visit that included informational interviews and observations.

Closing the Reflexive Loop

I began my fieldwork with research questions aimed toward understanding how the different groups of people working (and living) in the riverbottom were constructing nature through the river restoration. That was the book I planned to write when I returned from my fieldwork, but whenever I tried, I kept hitting a wall. I ultimately realized that the most captivating parts of my research came from the very human stories and experiences I had accumulated in Ventura. The people were the important part of my fieldwork. Writing anything less felt like a violence, which initiated my resistance. The ways that people construct nature have implications for more than nature alone. The construction of nature itself engenders social relations. At its core, this dissertation strives to understand the human implications of the social construction of nature. In particular, I focus on the multiple ways that dehumanization is currently happening through knowledge production. I call this *closing the reflexive loop* between humans and nature. This is an analytical perspective largely influenced by research on the politics of technology (i.e., Winner 1985), and could be considered a technology studies perspective on nature. In the wake of much scholarly focus on the "post-human" and a "more-than-human" nature, it is important not to end our analysis at the non-human, but to keep asking: *Have we yet learned to be human? What does it mean to be human?*

In the chapters that follow, I analyze the multiple ways in which dehumanization is occurring through the restoration work on the Ventura River. Chapter 1, "Misfit Ecologies," provides a grounding for this work through a literature review on the histories of environmental knowledge, the construction of identities through science and technology, and social anthropologies of violence. The next four chapters each analyze a particular aspect of how dehumanization is occurring through knowledge production around nature: trash, invasive

species, the political economy of cities, and national shifts in homelessness policies. The second half of each chapter provides data and analysis that aim to re-humanize people through the inclusion of alternative perspectives and values. Chapter 6 describes a participatory digital media project that I initiated through a series of workshops in Ventura. Lastly, I conclude with an analysis of what it would mean to restore the human.

CHAPTER 1

MISFIT ECOLOGIES

Ecology is a scientific discipline. It is also a value, or a way of viewing the world through

relationships. As a discipline, however, it is not a completely bounded entity. As is any scientific

enterprise, the knowledge produced through ecological science is influenced by social context

and cultural norms. At the same time, the knowledge produced exhibits a kind of social life,

influencing the world outside the academic realm. This chapter reviews multiple literatures that

provide alternative perspectives on the field of ecology, including those from environmental

history, science and technology studies, and anthropology. The section on environmental history

demonstrates various ways in which our knowledge about nature is socially and culturally

constructed—in other words, how people influence knowledge about nature. The science and

technology studies and anthropology sections demonstrate the role that scientific knowledge

production plays in naturalizing human identities and constructing the human. These sections

provide a foundation for interpreting the empirical chapters that follow.

Ruptures in the Field of Environmental Knowledge

What is the environment? Over my many years as an environmental educator, I must have asked

this question of countless groups of students—children and adults. My job was to teach about the

environment, and at the time, it made sense to me that I would begin with a definition of the

term. I wanted students to understand that the environment is everything around us: living and

nonliving, inside and outside, natural and manmade. But here and now, I ask the question again

with the intention to learn rather than to teach. What *is* the environment? Instead of looking to

affix a definition to the word, I am concerned with how the environment comes to be defined and known, and how that knowledge changes over time. Just as environmental processes are not static, the concept of the environment is a changing nomenclature, constituted and understood differently across time, often in relation to changing social and cultural processes, including scholarly and academic ones.

This type of historicizing analysis facilitates a denaturalization and contextualization of the present; it is what Foucault might call a "history of the present" (Foucault 1995, p. 31). It is a history of that which escapes questioning, ways of thought and being that are unnamed and thus unseen. A history of the present renders visible the epistemological field that classifies and orders. This field is the table upon which language becomes material, ordering space and disciplining bodies; it is a field, not of progress, but of possibility. Categories appear to be natural orderings, neutral containers of classifications, but they are constructed upon the table of the epistemological field, which remains invisible until there are ruptures, changes in the mode of being or order (Foucault 1970). For this reason, Foucault asserts that ideas across disciplines in a given time frame are more closely related than the progression of ideas over time within a single discipline.[9] This is the reasoning behind Foucault's cross-sectional analysis in *The Order of Things*, which shows how the construction of the fields of linguistics, biology, and economics at the end of the 18th century disciplined life itself as an object of knowledge and power.[10]

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[9] Categories and classifications are not solely constructed through knowledge production; they are also constructed through technology. Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star's (1999) infrastructures are analogous to Foucault's epistemic field. These infrastructures (and the classifications they engender) usually remain hidden in daily life and only become visible when they breakdown or fail. Unlike Foucault's ruptures, which are large-scale shifts in social and cultural thinking, Bowker and Star's infrastructural breakdowns often occur in the mundane and the everyday.

[10] Foucault (1970) describes two forms of power: (1) anatamo-politcs of the human body, which discipline the body as a machine, and (2) biopolitics of the population, which discipline the species body. In the biopolitics of the population, basic biological processes (such as reproduction, birth, death, and health) are transformed into statistical assessments and interventions that are aimed at the entire population (the social body) or at categories of bodies.

In this section, I turn to the field of environmental history in an effort to construct a history of the present "environment." The works selected for this section focus in some way on a dimension of knowledge about the environment. This analysis brings forth the ways in which the field of environmental history has changed over time in relation to broader social and cultural shifts. Thus, my intention is to bring to light the epistemological field of environmental knowledge by tracing shifts over time.

Institutionalizing Nature and Disciplining Environmental History

Prior to the 1960s, historical work that addressed the environment was largely encompassed within western American history. However, the field of environmental history primarily emerged out of political and intellectual history rather than from western history (White 1985). Although it was not the earliest work to be placed within this new genre of scholarly work, Donald Worster's *Nature's Economy* (1977) has become one of the field's most influential foundational pieces. What appears to make Worster's work unique is its focus on ecological scientific thought and its attention to the interactions between scientific, political, and economic institutions. In *Nature's Economy*, Worster (1977) traces the history of ecological thought through "an intellectual biography," rather than a traditional "history of science" (p. xiii). Worster's choice to frame his work as a biography of ideas is important. It signifies that ideas themselves have lives; they are not static truths waiting to be discovered. Worster exemplifies this through the structure of his text and through the individuals he highlights, who range from Gilbert White and Carolus Linnaeus in the 18th century to the popularization of ecological science in the mid-20th century. His historicization of ecology demonstrates the dually historical and cultural nature of the field. For example, when Darwin's evolutionary theories shifted notions of nature to include changes

over time, nature was no longer seen as a static entity to be observed, described, and understood. This heightened awareness of temporality facilitated ecology, the study of relationships among organisms, to become known and defined as a legitimate concept.

In contrast to Worster's extensive history of three centuries of ecological ideas, Gregg Mitman's (1992) *The State of Nature* follows the practices of one particular school of ecology over the first half of the 20th century. Mitman's focus on American ecological science during the period of 1900-1950 represents a period in the discipline wherein subfields were less defined, and ecology operated between the natural and social sciences. The discipline was most concerned with understanding interactions between living organisms and their physical environment. As such, social relations were integrated into the science of ecology at its foundation. Similarly, ecological principles and understandings were explored as a means by which human behavior and society could be understood. Mitman concentrates his analysis on a particular institution, the University of Chicago, and a particular ecologist, Warder Clyde Allee. Influenced by his Quaker upbringing, Allee's understanding of animal behavior was based on principles of cooperation rather than Darwinian notions of competition. Allee's work, along with that of other Chicago School ecologists, became a second root of ecology, one that formed independently from Darwinian evolution. Allee's pacifist beliefs also shaped his understandings of nature and the knowledge he created. Situated in the interwar period in the United States, Allee's work had a strong anti-war political agenda. In fact, according to Mitman, "Allee believed he had found empirical evidence opposing the doctrine of war and… a theory of sociality centered not on the family but on the association of individuals for cooperative purposes found in the most primitive forms of life" (p. 4). The significance for Mitman is in the realization that humans cannot understand nature in an objective way that is unmediated by culture.

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Historical critiques of sociobiology focus on the conservative, often problematic work based on Darwinian competition and hierarchies of evolution. However, Allee's work represents a more liberal, pacifist, socio-biological understanding. Thus, Mitman uses Allee (and the work of the Chicago School ecologists) as a way of complicating the history of ecological thought beyond one of winners and losers. In contrast to earlier writers who focused on tracing institutional lineage, he interrogates the production of ecological ideas as his main subject. The symmetrical analysis provided by Mitman illustrates his main point: "There are no predefined categories, no absolutes to which we can turn, a position once occupied by the idea of the natural, the origin of essence… Perhaps in our search for identity, meaning, and solace, we should look not to nature but to our own actions" (p. 212).

Breaking Out: Environmental History Meets Race, Gender, and Class

Environmental history's transition into the 1990s reflected an increasing interrogation of the human/nature dichotomy. As Virginia Scharff (2003) states, nature would become viewed both as "things-in-themselves" and "things-transformed," thus combining both materialist and constructionist views of nature. William Cronon's (1991) groundbreaking book *Nature's Metropolis* is one of the first historical works to attempt to understand nature in this way. Cronon focuses his history on 19th century Chicago, and positions the transformation of natural resources into consumer goods as the primary connection between people and nature.[11] In this way, products like grain, lumber, and meat do not exist as solely human products or natural resources. Cronon describes two categories of nature: *first nature* and *second nature*. First nature is the nature that exists prior to human influence, while second nature is that which has been

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[11] It is a departure from previous environmental histories for Cronon to begin with an urban place.

constructed by human ideas or transformed by human practices.[12] One of the benefits of this

framing of nature is that the transformation of (first) nature into products can no longer be hidden

through the construction of separate categories that place natural resources as "nature" and

consumer products as "human" (or culture). The power of people to transform nature brings in an

ethical component and a responsibility that is largely missing in previous historical constructions

of nature. As Cronon (1991) states, "If we wish to understand the ecological consequences of our

own lives—if we wish to take political and moral responsibility for those consequences—we

must reconstruct the linkages between the commodities of our economy and the resources of our

ecosystem" (p. xvii). Furthermore, Cronon's focus on the city of Chicago (the "Gateway to the

West") situates his work closer to Western history than the intellectual histories that defined the

first works in the subfield of environmental history. However, *Nature's Metropolis* diverges

from both genres in its refusal to depict nature as either a purified, wild landscape untainted by

humans, or as a product of intellectual ideas created by (prominent) human academics. Cronon

himself describes his work as an urban history rather than an environmental history, which

emphasizes the urban landscape. The title *Nature's Metropolis* further blurs the boundary

between natural spaces and cities constructed as human spaces, and the metropolis of Chicago is

itself an example of second nature. Chicago was physically and symbolically situated on the

border between the wild western landscape and the older cities of the Northeast. Perhaps this is

one reason Cronon chose to write his history on Chicago rather than New York or Boston. As

such, *Nature's Metropolis* reflects a shift in environmental history to focus on actual

environments (rather than ideas about environments) and the inclusion of urban spaces as natural

places. As a result, the role of people within the environment also shifts. For example, in

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[12] I think that Cronon's *first nature* is analogous to the nature that Mitman (1992) argues cannot be known by human
scientific practices, and the natural history that Worster (1977) defines in relation to human history.

Cronon's narrative, people are usually nameless individuals rather than well-known academic elites. Environmental understanding is also brought outside the self-contained sphere of human ideas and into the realm of everyday practices and their associated ethical implications.

With the growing attention paid to the interactions between people and the environment in environmental history came the inclusion of distinctions of class, gender, and race; consequently, human diversification mirrored the diversification of natural landscapes. Richard White's work is an exemplar of the ways in which class reflected through labor became integrated into environmental history. In "Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living," White interrogates the oppositional relationship frequently depicted between the environment and work. Environmentalism (and, more currently, sustainability) is a movement that is heavily inflected by economic stratification, whereby protecting the environment is often advocated for by those individuals who have the time to devote to such causes, and who usually do not work manually or in contact with "natural" resources (Agyeman 2005). This is in contrast to environmental justice movements, which are often situated in poorer, working-class communities. Rather than a luxury, environmental justice movements are often initiated out of necessity in response to acute environmental impacts. Instead of separating work from nature, White (1995a) considers work an integral part of knowing nature. In particular, environmentalists' conceptions regarding work influence their definition of the environment. According to White, environmentalists who think of work as an agent of environmental destruction while exalting recreation as the ideal way to know nature do not recognize the ways work can also provide opportunities for the acquisition of an intimate understanding of the environment. On the other hand, environmentalists can also idealize certain types of work, such as farming, as a return to the land that will inherently foster care for the earth. White's essay

problematizes these two dichotomous constructions of work within mainstream

environmentalism. He charges environmentalists' denigration of work with human construction

as outside of nature, thus reinforcing and reproducing a false trade-off between humans and

nature. By blurring the boundaries between work and nature, White illustrates how dichotomies

and hierarchies interact to create stratifications that span categories of race, gender, and class.

Virginia Scharff's (2003) *Seeing Nature Through Gender* also considers humans to be

part of nature, and goes so far as to call them "human animals." Scharff is also aligned with

White in thinking through the interaction of particular human categories (i.e., gender) and natural

ones. Her work extends White's concept of hybridity by positioning gender as an organic

machine (compared to White's identification of the Columbia River as an organic machine). She

considers the role of the sex/gender dichotomy in our understanding of nature, arguing that

knowledge about nature is always mediated through gender (and gender is reciprocally mediated

by nature). Through this work, Scharff (1995) aims to counter the essentialism that often

characterizes ecofeminist conceptions of the earth as mother and women as caretakers. For her,

gender is not simply a category of analysis. Consequently, she does not advocate for the

exclusive focus on women's stories, activities, or perceptions of the environment, and instead

recognizes that there is no essential way that men and/or women categorically understand or

experience nature. She moves past this line of thinking in her edited volume through the

inclusion of papers that consider particular instances when different people and groups have

understood the environment in gendered ways. The papers are organized by four main themes

that she identifies within environmental history: representation, bodies, consumption, and

politics. By positioning environmental history as a history of "man and nature" instead of a

history of "people and environment," Scharff highlights the power relations reflected within

language regarding environmental relations. Nature has frequently been gendered and positioned as feminine. Thus, androcentric environmental histories that are predominantly written by men and focused on men's understandings of and interactions with nature reproduce a fundamentally gendered binary. In response, Scharff argues that the category of "man" must be interrogated along with that of "nature" when considering the production of environmental knowledge. As Scharff states: "Gender is relational and permeable, not a solid object to be carried from place to place. It is more like grammar, employed in all conversations, not always perfectly executed, and indeed often misunderstood, but providing at least the potential for order in a world full of wild possibility, unacknowledged context, and inexplicable consequence" (p. xv). Thus, through Scharff's work, we can see the clear influence of gender studies—and particularly social constructionist accounts—on environmental studies.

While Virigina Scharff's incorporation of gender further complicated definitions and boundaries of nature, Julie Cruikshank's (2005) aptly titled text, *Do Glaciers Listen*, conceptualizes the environment as an always-social place, and environmental knowledge as produced by and in relation to physical places. Cruikshank traces close to 300 years of history in the Mount Saint Elias mountain range in Alaska and northwestern Canada. She focuses on the period between 1550-1900, known as the Little Ice Age, when earth's temperatures cooled to a point that glaciers began advancing in this area. Cruikshank conceptualizes environmental knowledge as diverse, multifaceted, changing, and relational by focusing on the oral narratives of two indigenous groups, the Tlingit and Athapaskan, who inhabited the region, and the written narratives of early travelers and geophysical scientists who often stayed within the area for various reasons of interest. In this text, the glaciers themselves are considered agents in the construction of knowledge, similar to Timothy Mitchell's (2002) agential mosquito in *Rule of*

Experts. Cruikshank's choice of the St. Elias Mountain Range significantly illustrates the relationship between changing geophysical circumstances and human social relations. Glacial changes to the landscape that occurred during the Little Ice Age period were associated with changes in human settlement patterns, bringing the Tlingit and Athapaskan peoples in increasingly frequent contact with the powerful, colonial European expansionists of the 18th century. The Europeans and scientists predominantly seek to abstract and separate glaciers from humans and social relations. From their viewpoint, glaciers were distinct parts of a natural world. In contrast, the Tlingit and Athapaskan described glaciers as inherently social and responsive to human actions (i.e., glaciers can and do "listen").

Cruikshank provides a cross-cultural approach to decentering and destabilizing natural knowledge, and her work has implications for understanding the impact of colonial enterprises (and the scientific practices and rationales that often accompanied them) for indigenous peoples as well as environmental places. At the same time, however, Cruikshank strives to complicate post-colonial studies which, as she states, "inclines increasingly to theoretical concerns that seem ever more distant from detailed knowledge of local practices and power relations on the ground" (p. 5). Just as the environment in *Do Glaciers Listen* is not a unitary externality, knowledge (particularly local knowledge), is shown to be produced in relation to the physical environment, indigenous people, European travelers, and geophysical scientists. Local knowledge is no longer seen as a unified entity that exists in a static container waiting to be "discovered." Thus, in a sense, Cruikshank provides a post-colonial history of knowledge, which is always already both social and natural.

The examples in this section illustrate the ways in which environmental history through the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s has increasingly diversified the actors producing

environmental knowledge. Attention to categories such as gender, class, and race or ethnicity brings the construction of environmental knowledge outside the realm of academic institutions, and prominent intellectuals are no longer seen as those most legitimately able to "speak" for nature. However, these changes in environmental history extend beyond simply adding more perspectives on the environment. Throughout this period of environmental history, there is an increased blurring and deconstructing of binary oppositions: human and nature, work and nature, urban and natural, environmentalism and work, and local and universal. In this way, the environment becomes increasingly defined as an active agent in the creation of knowledge, people are positioned as part of nature rather than outside it, and knowledge is produced relationally among various positions and actors.

(De)constructing Boundaries: Bodies, Health, and Environment

The third major shift in the history of environmental knowledge occurs in the second half of the first decade of the 21st century, as boundaries and borders continue to be questioned and interrogated. During this period, the personal becomes environmental as the focus shifts from viewing humans as a part of nature to seeing how the environment is part of the human. This shift is achieved through an increasing focus on health, where the internal environments of bodies are considered alongside the health of the external environment. What is new about this shift in knowledge is the way in which environmental health is beginning to be understood in relation to human health. The works in this section explore how ideas about the external environment are constructed in relation to ideas about human bodies; in some ways, they question the social construction of the body and blur the boundary between bodies and the environment.

Gregg Mitman's (2004) article "In Search of Health: Landscape and Disease in American Environmental History" traces the connections between the environment and disease through time across multiple biological disciplines and spatial scales through the frame of Aldo Leopold's concept of land health. Mitman argues that discourse in American environmental history has distanced health from conservation and environmental values and social movements from the practice of science, and explores the potential of reintegrating health into American environmentalism for the reconfiguration of boundaries constructed between humans and nature. By redefining health as the product of the relationship between individual and environmental factors, rather than determined solely by the absence of harmful external microorganisms, Mitman describes the ways in which the neo-Hippocratic revival of the early 20th century challenged the fixed conception of disease established by germ theory in the 19th century. This increased focus on holism and equilibrium was influential across multiple sub-disciplines of biological science, including Walter Cannon's concept of homeostasis as well as Leopold's land pathology. Attending to the political and social context of scientific and environmental discourse, Mitman illuminates patterns of injustice, and illustrates the influence of political economy (and colonialism) in the creation of scientific ecological knowledge. He cautions against deterministic interpretations of the environment that naturalize social inequalities. Similar to Cruikshank's findings in the St. Elias Mountain Range, Mitman identifies notions of "purity" in nature associated with the creation of the National Parks and other nature reserves, which facilitated the displacement and marginalization of people and an ordering of non-human nature in the quest for health. Mitman asks:

> But whose well-being, whose health, was preserved? Race and class have always figured
> prominently in the history of environment and health in America. This was no less true in

the designation of wilderness areas than in the placement of toxic waste dumps in the United States (p. 201).

This analysis suggests that a reconfiguring may also be necessary for the dominant narratives of environmental justice, which typically focus on toxic exposures in urban landscapes.

In this paper, Mitmann employs the theoretical approach of Actor Network Theory (ANT) to illuminate the "transnational network of institutions, scientists, and political economies" (p. 189). Rather than providing a linear, chronological view of one strand of American environmental history, or reifying Leopold as a mythic hero of the environment, Mitman focuses on the diverse scientific, social, and political pathways, where knowledge about health and environment is produced. He shows the ways that incorporating health into environmental history can provide a more complex and multi-dimensional understanding of historical relations among different groups of people, between humans and nature, and between humans and non-humans. What he does not address in this initial project is the ways in which these broader understandings relate to present land use, and environmental and social practices.

In *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Landscape*, Linda Nash (2006) brings environmental history to focus on the body. Nash traces a cultural and intellectual history of health from the mid-19th century belief in miasmas and the curative power of wilderness through the environmental illnesses of 1980s, which complicate the predominant narrative of environmental history, a narrative often characterized by increasing exploitation and conquest leading to alienation and regret. By focusing on health and disease, she finds that definitions and understanding of the body, which were formed in relation to prevailing medical knowledge (as well as the changes in that knowledge through the institutionalization of new fields such as public health), changed from what she calls an "ecological" notion of the body to a "modern" conception. Nash states:

The older body was characterized by a constant exchange between inside and outside, by fluxes and flows, and by its close dependence on the surrounding environment… In contrast, for the modern body, 'health' came to connote primarily the absence of disease; it implies both purity and the ability to fend off harmful organisms and substances… health became a quality possessed (or not) by an individual body rather than a dynamic relationship between a body and its environment (p. 12).

This shifting conception of health, and thus of bodies and bodily functions, had implications for the ways that bodily organs were thought to function. In particular, the skin became viewed as a protective barrier between the human body and its environment, a reinforcing structure that bounded and purified the modern body. However, as chemical pollutants increasingly became agents of illness, the porosity of the skin and thus the integrity of the individual human body again became questionable. Thus, rather than providing a linear narrative of either triumphant medical and scientific progress, or a declensionist story of increasing environmental degradation and regret, Nash illustrates the ways that notions of health and disease shift in relation to institutional understandings and environmental practices.

In "Purity and Danger," Nash (2008) takes up the question of the ways that historical understandings of environment and disease influence the regulatory practices that predominate in the current environmental landscape. Nash situates the relationship between chemicals and environmental standards within the context of the relationship between bodies and the environment. In this context, regulations are not seen as abstract and objective criteria, but embedded with assumptions regarding bodies and spaces. Just as Mitmann (2004) identified an ideological notion of purity in the design and creation of natural areas, Nash finds similar implications in the design of water regulations. The emergence of bacteriology and germ theory changed prevailing conceptions of health from a dynamic relationship between a person and his or her environment to a closed system whereby healthy bodies were those that kept out disease-

causing agents. The awareness of water-borne pathogens in drinking water resulted in the creation of water purity standards. These drinking water standards were created through a negotiation of social and physical constraints. For example, water companies could not economically eliminate all microbes from the water. However, as Nash states, "the assumption of environmental purity had been institutionalized: waters that met the standards were deemed 'pure,' while those that did not were labeled 'contaminated'" (p. 652). This highlights the power of standards to classify and order. As water was categorized into binary groupings of "pure" and "contaminated," differences became naturalized, and the social construction of standards became obscure. Nash also contrasts the development of water quality regulations with the development of air quality standards. Concern over air quality standards began within factory environments, which lacked the assumption of an ontological purity commonly associated with natural environments, and was translated into regulations focused on managing levels of exposure that would remain within the body's ability to self-regulate. According to Nash, these two early approaches to environmental pollution became institutionalized within the disciplines of public health/sanitary engineering and toxicology, respectively. The legacy of this history can be seen in current environmental health regulations, which still focus on either the delineation of "safe" exposure levels (for example, the case of farm worker exposures to pesticides) or on the isolation and elimination of a single pathogenic agent (for example, the case of E. coli contamination of spinach). When regulations fail, Nash questions the efficacy of responses that call for "better science or less uncertainty" by making visible the social legacies that continue to influence disciplinary assumptions of bodies and environments in ways that constrain possibilities for alternative solutions (p. 656).

In this most recent phase of writing, environmental history returns to its intellectual and

institutional historical roots. However, the intellectuals and institutions are not solely contained within academic walls or within the disciplines of ecological science. Just as Nash illustrates how the internal environment of the human body can be influenced by the environment that lies beyond the skin, academic institutions and their disciplinary distinctions are influenced by knowledge produced outside the "ivory tower." Thus, knowledge created through disciplinary standards could be viewed as a construct similar to the purity of drinking water created through environmental standards. In these works, the boundaries themselves are called into question rather than the definitional concepts. Ideas as well as material objects travel across borders, both being influenced by and influencing others. The question here is not "what is," but what can be seen. Viewing environmental knowledge in this way may provide a better understanding of current environmental problems (and perhaps identify unseen alternatives). As Linda Nash states: "How we understand the cause of E. coli poisoning will determine how we respond to it" (2008, p. 657).

Constructing and Contesting Nature and Identity Through Science

Despite the many boundary-reinforcing scientific practices that aim to separate science from society, readings on gender and science highlight the porosity of that boundary in multiple ways. The social construction of science and technology has been a main concern for STS scholars. As shown in the previous section, norms and values influence the production of scientific (and technologic) knowledge. As researchers observe and interpret differences in social characteristics (such as class, gender, sexuality, race, or nationality) through the frames of their own values and norms, they then ascribe to those social differences essential characteristics of nature or technology. When these social characteristics are later "observed" in nature, they link their

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existing social and cultural values to natural processes, constructing them as "nature," and thereby reinforcing them as "truth" (Hess 1995). In this way, cultural and social values become naturalized (and implicitly given power) through scientific research. In this section, I will analyze specific ways that science constructs ontologies and identities, discussing themes relevant to current feminist science and technology studies.

Dealing with Difference

Scientific research on gender/sex differences has played a role in creating and normalizing understandings of gender. Nancy Tuana (1988) illustrates the long historical precedence of the ways in which the gender/science system has influenced scientific investigations by showing how assumptions of women's inferiority have infused scientific theories of reproduction and embryology, beginning at least as early as Aristotle. Aristotle's work was situated in a time when the prevailing worldview already assumed that women were biologically inferior to men, which influenced Aristotle's interpretations of reproductive biology and led to one of the first systematic justifications of the inferiority of women. According to Tuana (1988), Aristotle's theories of difference were based on the premise that more developed animals contained more heat. Therefore, Aristotle inferred that women (being inferior) must develop less heat than men, which became an assumption underlying his research. In turn, his research circularly produced evidence that naturalized this difference as a defect located within the biology of women, thus reifying them as inferior and incomplete in relation to men. What is most interesting (and perhaps disturbing) is the persistence of this finding. Aristotle's successors continued to reinscribe the belief of male primacy through their work, even when the physical evidence

suggested otherwise. This led to some very "creative anatomy" on the part of scientists and the (unintentional) reproduction of Aristotle's ideas for at least 2,000 years.

This persistence of ideas regarding the inferiority of women seems to underlie much of the scientific research on sexual difference. In "The Liberation of the Female Rodent," Marianne Van den Wijngaard (1995) illustrates how the lesser value attributed to female sexual behavior influenced both the treatment of rodents in laboratory experiments and the knowledge produced therein. The (predominantly male) scientists of the 1960s, who sought to understand sexual behavior through laboratory research with rats, attributed a complexity to male behavior that consisted of multiple steps and observable actions. In contrast, the female rats were not considered to exhibit complex sexual behavior. Their behavior was seen to consist primarily in an arched back, which signified the female rat's receptivity towards the male. The perspectives of the male researchers, and thus the behaviors they viewed as important, were prioritized in the construction of knowledge regarding sexual behavior. As a result, the sexual behavior of female rats was effectively relegated outside the observational framework of the researchers, and rendered invisible through the process of knowledge production. It was not until the number of women scientists increased in the 1970s that the complexity of sexual behavior exhibited by female rats was recognized and acknowledged as valuable.

This omission of the female rat experience goes beyond behavior to interpretations of biological sex differences and the differential treatment of female rats. According to van den Wijngaard (1995), female rats were valued primarily as vehicles for understanding male rat sexual behavior. This translated into the performance of more invasive surgical and experimental procedures on female rats than on their male counterparts. Thus, the search for the natural development of the male was achieved through the manipulation of the body of the female rat.

Experimental treatments on female rats ranged from androgen injections to actual physical damage of the hypothalamus. This mode of experimentation was unique, considering that male rats were generally used for experimentation that was not focused on sexual difference. This suggests that there may be physical implications for bodies considered less significant through the eyes of researchers. In the case of the laboratory rats, female behaviors were less recognized than male behaviors (or were interpreted through a masculine perspective). In addition, female bodies were predominately made to bear the physical impacts of experimentation. Thus, the female rat became an instrumental body upon and through which masculine sexual behavior could purportedly be observed and understood.

For researchers seeking to understand sexual difference through the frame of similarity rather than difference, the female is assumed to look and behave the same as the male. As shown in the previous examples of anatomy and sexuality, this can lead to misinterpreting observed data, or to ignoring that which is considered "different" or outside the framework of the scientists. For example, Joan Fujimura (2006) further explores the role of perspective in the interpretation of data and scientific knowledge production. She engages with a *sociomaterial approach* to explore the production of sex/gender through molecular genetic research. Fujimura's work pushes beyond illustration and critique towards a constructive vision of research that does not separate science from society. She asks, "How does one recognize and deal with the actions of biophysicalities (or nonhuman actants) if they are always mediated by culture?" (p. 50). If both the material and the social are co-constructed, and if, as seen in the work of Nancy Tuana (1988) and Marianne van den Wijngaard (1995), interpretations of "nature" are related to the researcher's temporal and spatial locations, then scientific practices that are based on a separation of science or nature from the sociocultural are inherently flawed.

To move beyond critique, then, Fujimura reexamines experimental research on the sex-determining genes (the "*SRY*" and "*DAX-1*" genes) by attending to the context of multiple perspectives on sex. She symmetrically analyzes the research methods and interpretations of geneticists, along with the efforts of sex-gender theorists and transgender activists. This approach builds upon feminist epistemologies of science that incorporate standpoint approaches (e.g., Donna Haraway's (1998) situated knowledge, and Sandra Harding's (1998) strong objectivity) through the inclusion of multiple perspectives in the production of scientific knowledge. In Fujimura's approach, data on genetic sex difference are read from multiple social locations (natural science, social science, and political activism) with the intention to interrogate the material (biological) along with the social and historical. Interestingly, what she finds through this approach is that sex is diverse even at the genetic level. However, the geneticists, who reproduce knowledge through their own predetermined categories of biological sex, tend to ignore data that contradict these assumptions. Through a reexamination of this ignored data, which Fujimura calls the "awkward excess," she identifies a different research conclusion than the scientists. Thus, even that which is physical is also seen social. Biological sex is shown to be a "leaky" concept, which calls into question the sex/gender dichotomy. Fujimura's work brings to light the ways in which feminist research can create new dichotomies (such as sex/gender) in the process of trying to denaturalize biological concepts, or in order to show the social construction of scientific knowledge that may have the unintended effect of creating and reinforcing a divide between the social and natural realms. Furthermore, there tends to be a power differential within the binary, whereby that which is considered physical or biological is imbued with the power of nature and assumed to be a constant underlying reality.

Constructing Nations and Identities

In "Gender, Race, and Nation," Anne Fausto-Sterling (2001) makes an explicit effort to shift the focus of analysis from the "racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers" (p. 360). This emphasis is made clear in the note preceding the introduction, which highlights Fausto-Sterling's choice to omit illustrations or visual images of Sarah Bartmann from her text because these images only serve to reify Bartmann as an object of study, rather than focus on the scientists who used her. This explanation serves as a justification of Fausto-Sterling's omission of the images. However, by placing her decisions with regard to language and images at the forefront of her paper, Fausto-Sterling also makes transparent the construction of her work. This aligns well with her argument that this work is more than a historical story. Though today's conclusions might be different, we are no more outside of social, cultural, and political influences: "Were [Sarah Bartmann] somehow magically alive today, contemporary biologists or anthropologists might frame and read her differently, but it would be a framing and reading, nevertheless" (p. 360).

Indeed, Sarah Bartmann's treatment in the 19th century was situated within a context of intense European capitalist expansion. For example, there are parallels between Cuvier's exploration of Bartmann's hidden genitalia, the French colonial exploration of the hidden or interior Africa, and the association of hidden, interior people and a primitive quality or nature. As Fausto-Sterling states, "Cuvier's goal in this paper was to render visible the hidden African nations and the hidden genitalia. By exposing them, he hoped to disempower, to use observation to bring these unknown elements under scientific control" (p. 357). Thus, these scientific "discoveries" were integral to the construction of a national identity, not just an individual racial or gendered identity.

In "Racializing Bodies Through Science in Meiji Japan," Yuki Terazawa (1995) highlights a similar way that scientific and medical research on women was utilized to construct an image of Japanese society as superior to those of racial minorities. Through Yamazaki's study, Japanese women of higher classes were shown to begin menstruating earlier than women of lower social backgrounds, which was considered a reflection of a more advanced and civilized environment. Yamazaki also attributed backwardness to women of racial minorities, while he ignored those same qualities when they were present in Japanese women. In this way, women's bodies were used to construct a uniform ethnic identity for Japanese culture through the marginalization of minority races. Although this occurred within the context of growing Japanese imperial expansion, colonization was not limited to the level of government practices. Because women's bodies served as Yamazaki's research material, they were also colonized and transformed into subjects. As Terazawa states,

> Yamazaki wanted the women to be compliant informants but transforming them into model interviewees required an exhaustive colonizing process. Women had to be taught to communicate in the proper way, whether it was in their native language or in the language of the researchers, and it was necessary to equip them with new ideas and attitudes in order to break down their deep-seated reluctance to discuss reproductive issues with strangers and men in general. (p. 91)

There are parallels here between the colonizing practices of governments and Yamazaki's practices to elicit data from women of ethnic minorities through the process of cultural assimilation, where the interviewees must learn to communicate using the language of the researchers, or at least to communicate in the "proper" way. Furthermore, in pursuit of their goal to extract data from the women, the researchers also "equip them with new ideas and attitudes," thereby committing what seems to be an ideological violence with a profound lack of respect to the cultural or personal beliefs of the women. Aside from the obvious ethical critique of this

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practice, it also likely influenced their data, since the women interviewed were constrained to speak through the framework of the researchers.

Initially, I assumed that readings about identity construction through science would analyze the various ways in which women's identities have been constructed through the practices of science. However, I discovered that the identities being constructed were not always those of the women who were the objects of study. Their voices are, in a sense, still silent, their words and images recorded and interpreted through the frames of the scientists. The bodies of women were read as texts, but the words of the women themselves are largely absent from the historical record. Thus, the identities being shaped through these works are the identities of the scientists and a construction (and reinforcement) of a boundary between what/who is considered Other and what/who is considered normal. Thus, it is through the definition of bodies that are considered deviant that "normal" identities become defined, reinforced, and disciplined.

Materiality & Feminism

Grappling with concerns about materiality is an ongoing debate within feminist research. Joan Fujimura's (2006) re-examination of the genetic production of sex is one of the more practical, empirically based works concerned with materiality. Indeed, much of the work on the subject appears to be more theoretical and/or philosophical. One exception to this is Elizabeth Wilson's (2008) "Organic Empathy: Feminism, Psychopharmaceuticals, and the Embodiment of Depression." In this paper, Wilson works to bridge the gap between prevailing biochemical notions of depression and feminist research, which she asserts do not adequately address biological materiality or biological research. In this way, Wilson's work is similar in orientation to Fujimura's research on the genetic production of biological sex. She works to show how the

spheres of biology and politics are always and already intertwined. This interconnection is not something to move beyond or to pass over, but something to understand in a deeper, more complex way. As she states, "My interest lies less in the deconstruction of biology than in learning how biology itself deconstructs. This shift in focus massively expands the bedrock of feminist analysis, and it changes what can count as political material or political action" (p. 378). In a sense, do feminist researchers have their own "awkward excess" too? It appears that, rather than questioning the "awkward excess" of genetic research, Wilson is highlighting an area that often lies uninterrogated outside the framework of much feminist research, and she is interested in the question of what new understandings can be reached through a more empathetic attention to biological data. In the case of pharmaceuticals and depression, Wilson finds that the biological data have in and of itself a political strength that complicates existing notions of how pharmaceuticals act within the body. Understanding the potential benefits of pharmaceutical therapies used in conjunction with psychological therapies (i.e., attending to both social and biological relationships) also implies that working to reclaim pharmacotherapy from corporatization is an important part of feminist work.

While Wilson works to reclaim the biological body (and psychopharmaceutical industries) for feminist work, Elizabeth Grosz (2008) seeks to appropriate the work of biologist Charles Darwin, which is typically considered outside of the accepted bounds of feminist theory (except perhaps as a source of critique). As her title, "Darwin and Feminism: Preliminary Investigations for a Possible Alliance," implies, Grosz explores the possible conjunctions between Charles Darwin's work on natural selection and the feminist project of understanding difference.[13] As Grosz states, "He is perhaps the most original thinker of the link between

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[13] I use the word "conjunctions" intentionally in this sentence. In Grosz's (1993) description of her intention to analyze the potential utility of Deleuze and Guattari's work for feminist research, she states that "…not only are

difference and becoming, between matter and its elaboration as life, between past and future" (p. 28). Grosz identifies and delineates seven implications within Darwin's work for feminist research. I will refrain from outlining all of them here, but I will discuss some of Grosz's points that I found most salient. Darwin's understanding of evolutionary change implies a transformation of the self that is forward moving and directive. This idea of change, while not necessarily developmental or teleological, has implications for feminist research in general. Grosz asserts that feminism needs to challenge and transform its own underlying assumptions, methods, and values in order to create transformative change. This brings to light the performative aspect that I often find in her work. Through the act of uncovering utility in Darwin's work, Grosz finds salient concerns for feminism while simultaneously demonstrating her point that feminist researchers must be careful to attend to that which is considered outside of the bounds of feminism.

Karen Barad (2008) also utilizes the work of a scientist within her theoretical framework on "Posthumanist Performativity." Barad's discussion of the work of physical scientist Niels Bohr provides a non-normative conception of matter and relationality. Bohr's work on atomic theory began with an underlying assumption that philosophy and physics could not be separated and, as a result, his work questions the boundedness of both the material and conceptual, of things and ideas. As Barad states, "Bohr rejects the atomistic metaphysics that takes 'things' as ontologically basic entities. For Bohr, things do not have inherently determinate boundaries or properties, and words do not have inherently determinate meanings" (p. 131). Barad incorporates

there possible conjunctions and interactions, but also possible points of disjunction, of disruption, of mutually questioning, that may prove as fruitful as any set of alignments or coalition of interests" (p. 172). I think that conjunction is a productive term. One definition is an alignment of two celestial objects so that they appear to be in the same or nearly same place in the sky. It is also a word used to connect clauses or sentences. What is salient here is that this implies an overlap or joining without necessitating an alliance (or sameness). Thus, Grosz provides points of overlap between feminist work and Deleuze and Guattari (as well as Darwin) without requiring the negation of feminist critiques of their work (i.e., *both/and*).

this radical relationality into her concept of *intra-action*. Thus, things (or objects, ideas, or boundaries) are constituted precisely in their actions in relation to others. This is a dynamic concept whereby agency is seen as an object that cannot be possessed, "not [as] an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world" (p. 135). It appears that a fundamental assumption for Barad is the sociality of (living and nonliving) nonhuman entities. This is a sociality that does not rely on human meaning-making or human action. It is possibly a way of thinking about social constructions without reproducing a nature/culture binary or constructing nature/materiality/biology as either a deterministic force or a blank slate. In this conceptualization, humans are not removed from nature or from materiality; however, objects already have social lives, and this radical interrelation is how matter comes to matter. This framing has implications for research and how knowledge is produced through the relationship between the researcher and the subject/object. Barad states:

> 'We' are not outside observers of the world. Nor are we simply located at particular places *in* the world; rather, we are part *of* the world in its ongoing intra-activity… our epistemology must take account of the fact that we are a part of the nature that we seek to understand. (p. 146)

However, according to Barad, even this articulation is incomplete. Nature is not and cannot be seen as a container that holds the human. We are not so much within nature as we are part of the "world-body space"—both agents of reconfiguration and dynamically constructed through that reconfiguring. Barad's work could have salient implications for environmental work, particularly in its potential to create alternatives beyond current socio-environmental research that often unproblematically assumes a natural scientific (quantitative) approach as the only way to access knowledge about nonhuman systems and processes. Is it possible to create an alternative

conception of environmental understanding that does not reproduce a human/nature (or social/physical) dichotomy as a foundational aspect of the work?

Questioning Methodology

While Barad (2008) challenges existing conceptions of ontology and epistemology in research (and even whether there is or should be a distinction between ontology and epistemology), she leaves questions of methodology largely untouched, which may require further work in feminist science studies, perhaps also with a more empirical focus. Although their work does not specifically address materiality, Bonnie Spanier and Jessica Horowitz (2011) do address the role of methodology and its influence on the production of knowledge. I found this paper to be particularly useful as a practical, empirical piece. Spanier and Horowitz illustrate the importance of methodological assumptions—the starting points for research. These assumptions can influence data interpretations and, similar to the findings of Fujimura, may lead researchers to ignore inconsistencies in their findings. While Fujimura leaves the practices of genetic research intact (i.e., the questioning and reanalysis that come primarily from perspectives outside normative biological research), Spanier and Horowitz (2011) provide a list of ten conceptual errors inherent in claims for biological determinism: reification, the choice of defining "difference," questionable categories, assuming "universal" behaviors, "nature at base" as an invalid concept, correlation versus causation, vague "potential" as genetic basis for determinism, irrelevance of multiple genes explanation, assuming "biology" means fixed, and heterosexual conceptual errors (i.e., the concept of "sexuality" based on heterosexism). What is particularly salient, even from these short distillations of methodology, is that emerging concerns similar to those in previous feminist Science and Technology Studies work (as seen in some of the papers

discussed here) highlight the importance of methodology to feminist critiques of science (and perhaps to the feminist reconstructions of science itself).

The Power to be (Un)seen: Invisible Violence

> "Vision is *always* a question of the power to see – and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices. With whose blood were my eyes crafted?"
>
> —Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges"

Science is a messy practice; this messiness is both a strength and an important facet of scientific knowledge that acknowledges—and even embraces—the complexity ingrained within the world (Fortun & Bernstein 1998).[14] Communication between scientists and the public typically involves boundary-setting between scientific expertise and lay knowledge. Part of the construction of those boundaries involves a depiction of scientific research that is ordered, clean, and determined by the scientific method. This disconnects the public image of the construction of science from the private "messiness" that is inherent in all knowledge creation. As Donna Haraway (1988) states, "The only people who end up actually *believing* and, goddess forbid, acting on the ideological doctrines of disembodied scientific objectivity—enshrined in elementary textbooks and technoscience booster literature—are nonscientists, including a few

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[14] Fortun and Bernstein (1998) illustrate how scientists "muddle through" experimentation in ways that are less ordered and directed than the typical representation of scientific research. Indeed, science is not as clear-cut as it appears. For example, Millikan's experiments on oil droplets to identify the charge of an electron are not simple and reproducible. Millikan's detailed knowledge of his equipment, and his commitment to a theory of a single electron charge as well as the black-boxing of the concept of an electron charge facilitated his calculations and determination of a unitary electron charge of 1.62×10^{-19} coulombs. Similarly, Copernicus did not simply "discover" that the earth revolves around the sun in an overnight revolution of scientific thought initiated by an instantaneous discovery of a new fact. Copernicus's theories were integrated more gradually, initially utilized to improve calculations and chosen somewhat as a matter of preference rather than absolute truth. Enrolled actors helped to facilitate the uptake of the new information by softening the divide between Ptolemy and Copernicus. Thus, scientific facts are made through a messy, indeterminate socio-technical assemblage rather than through independent, instantaneous discovery of absolute truths. Direct observation and experience are important to that process. Reality is pursued, not discovered.

very trusting philosophers" (p. 577). Thus, objectivity and the scientific method can (and often do) function as boundary-setting practices that create and reproduce power differentials between scientists and Others through the construction of legitimacy and authority (Shapin 1984). In short, the search for objectivity is a search for power.

Violence is an equally slippery concept. Physical violence is often overtly connected to inequality and fear. Fears of physical violence abound about low-income, inner-city minority neighborhoods. These stories, often bordering upon urban legends, play a significant role in legitimating sanctions, surveillance, and other forms of marginalization and control. However, the circumstances that create the material conditions and subjectivities that promote and foster violence are often less visible and acknowledged. This hiding enables the physically violent actions of those who are marginalized to be naturalized as essential components of their character and identity, while the violence committed by the powerful often goes undetected.[15] This makes challenging invisible violence more difficult because it is deeply associated with privilege and power. Invisible violence does more than organize power; it is the weapon of the powerful. As Philippe Bourgois (2009) states:

> The practical stakes of rendering the tentacles of violence more visible are high because one group's violence is often another's virtue and, in tandem with hierarchies of symbolic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 2000), interpretations of violence and virtue generally follow the unequal distribution of resources. (p. 18)

In "Recognizing Invisible Violence," Bourgois (2009) articulates a theoretical framework for thinking about invisible violence that consists of three overlapping categories: structural violence, symbolic violence, and normalized violence. *Structural violence* is the violence caused by political and economic forces. For example, Paul Farmer's (2005) *Pathologies of Power*

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[15] This is what Bourdieu would call "misrecognition" (Bourdieu 2000).

examines the role of political and economic systems—particularly those connected to land ownership—in creating illness. Structural violence connects the privatization of land and the commodification of resources with deteriorating environmental and human health. In *The Lives of Dust and Water*, Maria Cruz Torres (2004) demonstrates how the rise of neoliberal economic and political policies in Mexico (along with international globalization policies) have increased economic inequality and environmental degradation within El Cerro and Celaya, with profound material implications for the residents of these rural communities. The privatization of land resources altered the communal land-holding practices within El Cerro, which transformed land into an economic commodity and led residents to sell off property in order to pay for rising expenses such as medical care. In both communities, agriculture and fish became valuable commodities within a global capitalist economic system. Resource management was transformed from small-scale subsistence practices to large-scale commercial enterprises, and shifted the control over the means of production from the hands of the residents to those of the economic elites. In this way, agricultural crops, fish, and later shrimp became increasingly "produced" for the global economy and exported outside local communities to southern California and other more distant locales. These extractive practices dramatically increased the degradation of the local environment, and the residents of the local communities found themselves caught within a stratified cycle of inequality and exploitation.

Symbolic violence is a system of internalized violence (Bourdieu 2000). Through symbolic violence, ideologies of domination can become internalized and turned inward. It is a form of "blaming the victim," in which victims blame themselves. According to Bourgois (2009), symbolic violence explains the conservation of the status quo, or why people accept domination. The third type of invisible violence discussed by Bourgois (2009) is *normalized*

violence. Normalized violence occurs in the everyday. It is composed of many small, micro-violences that appear to be a "normal" part of daily life. Bourgois adapted this concept from Nancy Scheper-Hughes's term "*everyday violence*" (Hughes & Lovell 1987), as well as from Michael Taussig's concepts of "*culture of terror*" (1984) and the "*nervous system*" (1992). What appears to be common across these three categories of invisible violence is the focus on understanding the cause of violence, not simply describing or identifying it. These are categories that would perhaps more appropriately be called categories of the construction of violence, or how violence is made.

But how does this identification of invisible violence occur through research? Many ethnographies on homelessness attend to the ways in which experiences of homelessness are constrained or influenced by invisible violence. For example, in *Righteous Dopefiend* (2009), Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg detail the 12 years they spent (from 1994 to 2006) following the daily (and nightly) experiences of a social network of heroin addicts living underneath a network of highway overpasses in a formerly industrial area of San Francisco. At the center of *Righteous Dopefiend* is a portrayal of the humanity of people who are often dehumanized in our culture as well as through social welfare and medical systems. Throughout the text, the authors pair deeply embedded observations and photographs of the lives and experiences of heroin addicts with analytical insights that focus on structural forces that constrain and construct those experiences. Because of this, the particularity and individuality of the residents of the Edgewater Boulevard encampment are portrayed with humanity and empathy in the text. The analysis in each chapter focuses on structural forces and power relations rather than on the individuals themselves, and these relations of power appear to be understood, as much as possible, through the lens of the addicts. This focus inhibits objectification because the

analytical gaze is not focused upon them as individuals. The purpose of this work is not to

describe their *lumpen subjectivity* (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009), which would likely reproduce

a series of individualizing and problematic "culture of poverty" explanations. Instead, the text is

to understand lumpen subjectivity by engaging in the lives, perspectives, and experiences of

heroin addicts in order to see through to the ways this subjectivity is created by dominant

systems and institutions of power (such as race/racism, heteronormativity, sexual violence,

stigma, medicine, public health, housing, rehab, incarceration, parking regulations and vehicle

registration laws, deindustrialization, and urban redevelopment), which visibilizes the ways in

which individuals are made vulnerable and their choices constrained through repetitive and

compounding structural violence. In addition, Bourgois and Schonberg pair their analytical

insights and theoretical contributions with practical recommendations for change in their

conclusion to the text.

> While Bourgois and Schonberg focus almost exclusively on homeless individuals,

Vincent Lyon-Callo's (2008) *Inequality, Poverty, and Neoliberal Governance* is unique in its

specific focus on the homeless shelter industry as the "object" of study:

> Ethnographic work focusing only on "the poor" or "the homeless" miss interconnections
> between social actors. Similarly, these ethnographic studies also neglect the discursive
> processes producing 'the homeless' or 'the ghetto'… In light of these concerns, I made
> the tactical decision to focus my study not on 'the homeless' or simply to provide another
> ethnographic description of behaviors of homeless people. Instead, I study homelessness
> by looking at interconnections between homeless and housed people through a focus on
> the homeless sheltering industry (p. 19-20).

Lyon-Callo is interested in the construction of homelessness by the policies and practices of the

(increasingly medicalized and neoliberalized) shelter industry, which embraces Laura Nader's

(1972) concept of "studying up" more so than the other ethnographies of homelessness I have

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read. As Nader states: "Studying 'up' as well as 'down' would lead us to ask many 'common sense' questions in reverse" (1972, p. 289).[16] This reversal in the "common sense" of research questions inherent in "studying up" also reflects Lyon-Callo's approach to studying the discursive processes of the neoliberalization within the shelter industry. In other words, neoliberalism should be thought of through both the material conditions that it produces and through the discursive processes by which these conditions become accepted as "common sense" or normal. Focusing on the discursive calls into question the naturalness of homelessness as a problem and the common sense of predominant approaches to ameliorating it.

According to Lyon-Callo, the inequalities that materially produce homelessness have become so normalized that the existence of homelessness itself is tacitly consented to on a social level. He argues that predominant representations in the media, popular culture, social service institutions, and personal anecdotes have constructed homeless individuals as deviant (for example, as substance abusers or mentally ill). The hegemonic authority associated with deviance has shaped the ways homelessness is understood in the social imaginary of citizens in the U.S., along with "common sense" institutional and individual responses to homelessness. Lyon-Callo employs Foucault's concept of governmentality (Foucault 2004) as an analytical tool to consider the ways in which knowledge production and institutional practices produce human subjects within the homeless shelter industry. Specifically, the predominant practices of ameliorating homelessness within the shelter industry focus on the development of coping strategies and reforming the behavior of homeless individuals (i.e., normalizing the deviance of those who are homeless), which fosters the production of docile and deviant bodies. In this way, governance becomes distributed so that individuals are simultaneously governed as well as governing, thereby reproducing dominant relations of power rather than subverting them. Thus,

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[16] For another example of "studying up," see Sharon Traweek's (1988) ethnography of high-energy physicists.

rather than addressing root causes, instances of homelessness (which are more often seen as "natural" processes of social inequality) and the practices of the homeless shelter industry that are "intended to resolve homelessness contribute to its maintenance" (p. 19).

Although neoliberalized and medicalized ideologies constrain "common sense" responses to homelessness, these boundaries are neither all-encompassing nor deterministic; they are resisted. However, Lyon-Callo finds that challenges do not typically occur through direct opposition, but through more covert forms of resistance. This suggests that multiple axes of power (i.e., resistance as well as violence) operate through the scale of the mundane and everyday, and resistance from particular (subjugated) status positions might be less obvious or visible, which reinforces the point that observing and interviewing across multiple spatial and institutional locations might be important to understanding power relations and resistances.[17]

Lyon-Callo has an explicit interest in political action and creating change within the homeless shelter industry. Thus, he is interested in not simply how the biopower of the shelter industry constructs docile and deviant subjects, but how it inhibits opportunities for opposition and dissent, thereby constraining political action.[18] His "politically-engaged ethnography" differs from Bourgois and Schonberg's "engaged ethnography" through his direct engagement with shelter workers, community members, and homeless individuals in dialogue aimed at challenging the "common sense" of dominant shelter practices, the biomedical model, and associated understandings about homeless individuals.

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[17] For additional examples of invisible, everyday resistance, see Collins's (2008) example of a black housekeeper who was given hand-me-down clothes by her white boss (she graciously accepted the clothes in her employer's presence, but later threw them out on her way home); and Monahan & Fisher's (2011) example of hospital nurses who resisted surveillance by breaking, washing, or hiding the RFID tracking devices (doctors were able to outright refuse to wear the tracking devices, whereas nurses usually could not).

[18] "Narrowly read, this is a book about homelessness in a small city in Massachusetts. More broadly, however, I am exploring the interrelationships between structural violence, social imaginings, discursive practices, and the possibilities of resistance under neoliberal governance" (Lyon-Callo 2004, p. 13).

The texts of Bourgois and Schonberg (2009) and Lyon-Callo (2008) are examples of two different approaches to ethnographically studying invisible power, and each approach has its strengths and limitations. In *Righteous Dopefiend*, the intense humanization of heroin addiction (and addicts) is coupled with an awareness of the ways in which entities such as public health, hospitals, law enforcement and regulations structure opportunity and experience. However, there is a relative absence of the experiences of the health and social service professionals, who exist primarily as peripheral outlines in the text. In many ways, these mediating positions and organizations are also constructed and constrained by the same economic and political forces, albeit on a likely smaller scale.

Conclusion

Moving forward in feminist STS entails reconstructing science and finding alternative routes of knowledge production that merge feminist insights of ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Karen Barad argues for a merging of ontology and epistemology. However, leaving out methodology from this (de)conceptualization does not adequately address the means by which knowledge is created. This dissertation brings together feminist challenges to the nature of reality, the definition of knowledge, and the means by which knowledge is produced in an effort to create different ways of being, understanding, and doing. I incorporate insights from the field of environmental history that interrogate the boundaries between landscapes and people in order to contribute to an understanding of how the relationship between the environment and health is deeply intertwined with knowledge production and practice rather than an individual-level external variable. This research also contributes to an understanding of how processes of

Othering enacted through ecological restoration work are linked to frames of race, class, gender, and nation situated within broader socio-political dynamics.

ETHNOGRAPHIC VIGNETTE:

WELCOME TO THE WELLINGTON PROPERTY

The Ventura River begins as a mountain stream, winding its way through steep, undeveloped

ranges in the Los Padres National Forest. When the topography flattens, the river emerges into

the Ojai Valley and the floodplain begins to broaden (eventually becoming about ½ mile wide).

The main stem flows for approximately 15 miles through the agricultural Ojai Valley to the city

of Ventura, then expands into the estuary just south of the Main Street Bridge, taking up an area

of about 30 acres long and 2 miles wide until it reaches the Pacific Ocean.

Just past the Main Street Bridge is the place where the restoration work (and camp

removals) began on a 9-acre, rectangular property bounded by the bridge, a freeway overpass, an

earthen levee, a bike path, and the river. The property was acquired in 2012 by a small, local land

conservancy as part of the coalition working to create a river parkway. Nearby property owners

include California State Parks, Ventura County Watershed Protection District, the City of

Ventura, a private RV park, and a private ranch. In September 2012, the land conservancy began

the first coordinated removals of long-term homeless encampments and *Arundo*.

Walking through the property in September 2013, there are large open areas where

Arundo has been cut down by volunteers and "treated" with herbicides by California

Conservation Corps workers. Conservancy workers often tell stories about the people who once

lived in these now bombed-out looking circular patches of land, repeating the same stories over

and over again as if the previous residents are still haunting the landscape. The dead woody

stalks of the bamboo-like *Arundo* cover the ground, making it difficult to walk over the trails

created by decades of informal housing structures that have existed on the site. The constant

woosh of cars speeding along the freeway overpass creates a nearly continual background

soundtrack and a cool, salty breeze can be felt from the nearby Pacific Ocean. Employees of the

conservancy patrol the property weekly to keep people from reestablishing camps. On the day I

accompany the manager on patrol, he calls the police to notify them of a line of tents on city

property directly underneath the Main Street Bridge. Though the tents come up to the property

line, they do not cross it onto the conservancy's land.

CHAPTER 2

TAKING OUT THE TRASH: THE WORK OF HYGIENE AND POLLUTION

Fieldnotes, 19 April 2014

A group of about 25-30 volunteers has gathered in the Ventura riverbottom on a balmy

Saturday morning for the local land conservancy's annual Earth Day cleanup. Mark, the

conservancy's land manager, climbs on top of a pile of freshly mulched *Arundo* and

loudly calls out to the crowd surrounding him,

> "Why is there trash in the riverbottom?"

A young boy sporting work gloves and a scarlet-red Boy Scout troop t-shirt responds,

> "Hobos?"

> "Hobos would imply those people are looking for work. *These* people are not

trying to make it work, so they're not hobos. Mostly these people are running from the

law and hiding out," Mark replies. Then, he issues a warning to the adults to watch out

for needles in the trash that they'll be picking up that day.

Much of the physical work in the Ventura River focused on the removal of trash. During the

twice a month cleanup events, the local land conservancy usually assigned volunteers to one of

two "chores": "taking out the trash" or "cutting the grass" (picking up garbage or removing

Arundo). "Taking out the trash" involved wearing heavy work gloves, collecting garbage directly

with our hands or with a spring-loaded trash picker upper, filling as many large clear plastic bags

as possible, and hauling them out of the riverbottom into a giant roll-off dumpster. When a

dumpster was not immediately available, we piled the bags near the roadway for one of the land

conservancy workers to bring to an off-site dumpster with his truck.

Trash removal in the riverbottom was not a glamorous job. Human-made materials firmly

embedded in the ground often alternated with layers of river soil in sedimentary formations that

accumulated over months and years. We spent hours excavating objects that ranged from

decomposing clothes and rugs to cooking materials, personal items, and jars containing various

bodily and non-bodily fluids. My joints and muscles ached from the repetitive bending and

lifting, as we filled bags that were both heavy and uncomfortable to carry. I found the plastic

sacks easiest to haul when I heaved them over one shoulder, Santa Claus-style.[19] But when I did

this, the materials of various densities and shapes redistributed themselves into awkward

configurations, causing sharp edges to poke into my back. Mark cautioned me to be careful

carrying the bags this way because I could be stabbed by the needles that might be inside, a

warning that revealed the concerns for personal safety that frequently arose during this work.[20]

The discomfort associated with this labor extended beyond physical fatigue; there was

also emotional work. Cleaning up the riverbottom involved contact with the intimate belongings

and traces of the everyday lives of the people who once lived there. Sometimes we worked in

campsites newly cleared of their residents, while at other times we pecked at minutia that

remained in areas already cleaned. During my first day as a volunteer in the riverbottom, we

focused on picking up some of the last remnants of trash on the land conservancy's property. My

fieldnotes from that day capture some of my initial impressions:

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[19] Participating in the cleanups and helping to carry bags out of the riverbottom helped me to earn the trust and respect of the land conservancy employees. Mark and Tony invited me to a large cleanup event in Santa Clara during my first few weeks in California because they thought it would be a good opportunity for me to make some good research contacts. As I walked out of the riverbottom with a large, filled garbage bag over my shoulder at the end of the event, Mark and another group leader offered to put the bag on something with wheels. When I replied that I was okay, the group leader responded, "that's a team leader right there." After a few minutes, Mark said, "Yeah, you've you got to get the full experience." Both Mark and Tony thanked me for helping because they did not expect that I would. Throughout my fieldwork, when one of them introduced me to a new person, they would also mention my help with removing trash and *Arundo*. This example demonstrates some of the relational aspects of conducting ethnographic fieldwork. By investing time and energy in the restoration efforts, I came to be seen by the environmental workers as someone who would reciprocate efforts (when possible) and who was invested in understanding their perspectives and experiences.

[20] It is worth noting that I only remember encountering one needle in the riverbottom during the many hours of restoration work in which I participated over the course of the year, though there was usually a fair amount of drug paraphernalia. The lack of needles suggests that people in the riverbottom were more careful and conscientious with their sharps than the frequent warnings of the conservancy workers would suggest.

As I was struggling to pick up some persistent piece of cloth stuck in a charred circle of ground, a man nearby called over to me, "I found a crack pipe in there." I felt uncomfortable and barely sounded a response. After a while, I stopped working. I walked around by myself with my camera, making photos of the river and the campsites. It felt wrong to be there, picking through the remains of people's lives with such little respect. They are ghosts in this place, and the stories of the encampments will be the ghost stories of the future. What does the retelling do?

This entry illustrates my own discomfort with the work of cleaning the riverbottom, which only increased throughout the year as the land conservancy began clearing areas where encampments still existed, and as I came to know some of the people within them. I felt such strong connections between the material objects we were removing and the people who lived there that I had trouble seeing the accumulated materials as trash. This example also highlights my concern for the future, when the riverbottom has been cleared, and stories are all that remain of the struggle over this place and the people who once lived here.

Stories also do work. In *Nature By Design*, Eric Higgs (2003) states, "restoration is about restorying place" (p. 285). He argues that restoration work builds connections between people and the environment through physical practices and the retelling of narratives in an ongoing conversation that links past, present, and future. Attending to the role narratives play in transforming place positions ecological restoration as a cultural process, in addition to a physical and emotional one. Furthermore, the physical, emotional, and cultural dimensions of restoration often work in conjunction with each other. Changing narratives can alter both the ways in which waterways are envisioned as well as the expectations for the future, which can in turn bring about changes in restoration practices and, ultimately, in the waterways themselves (Lave 2014, Lee & Roth 2001). However, landscapes are not the only things that are made (and remade)

through restoration work. In the Ventura River, the "restorying" of the river also involved the "restorying" of people. In this chapter, I examine the role that trash, pollution, and hygiene play in "restorying" the riverbottom and the people who live there.

Constructing a New Natural

Despite its prominence in the current restoration work, trash was not always one of the most visible environmental problems affecting the Ventura River. Before work began on the development of a river parkway, restoration efforts in the watershed focused on the removal of the Matilija Dam, endangered steelhead trout recovery, the identification of water quality impairments from chemicals and agricultural runoff, and the relocation of development that frequently flooded during large storms.[21] Public environmental reports rarely mentioned homeless camps or trash, and the ones that did recommended dealing with "floodplain inhabitants" by establishing more permanent campsites, regular trash removal, access to sanitation facilities, and an early-warning system for flood events.[22] This suggests that, even if encampments were seen as undesirable, they were still largely accepted as an unavoidable and normal part of the river by local environmental organizations and city agencies.

This all began to change in 2005, when the California River Parkways Act made new funding available and, therefore, catalyzed local efforts to create the Ventura River Parkway. River parkways in the United States are generally constructed with two main purposes: to restore ecological functioning and to create public access in land adjacent to urban waterways. In an effort to align the Ventura River with these broader values, local environmental groups worked

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[21] For Matilija Dam removal and endangered steelhead trout recovery, see Allen et al. (2003), American Rivers (2000), and Capelli (1999). For the identification of water quality impairments, see Leydecker and Grabowsky (2006). For relocating development in the floodplain, see Capelli (1993), and Friends of the Ventura River (1992).
[22] For example, Wetlands Research Associates (1992, 1993, 1994).

together to reimagine the river as a place of community health and recreation, where local families would leisurely wander in nature, where Patagonia employees could go for a quick trail run during lunch, and where tourists would ride rented bicycles before heading to the nearby downtown business district for dinner.

The presence of homeless people living in the riverbottom conflicted with this emerging vision of the river, and, as a result, environmental organizations now began to organize around permanently removing the camps. First, they attempted to physically clear the riverbottom through trash cleanups and police sweeps, but the trash and the people kept returning. The lack of tangible progress was frustrating, as Sean, the program director for a local grassroots environmental organization described:

> We were gonna do another cleanup and I was like, "Dude, forget it. This cleanup is stupid. The whole thing's stupid." This was after years of the city organizing its cleanup and we did our big one with Patagonia but the same camps were filled with trash the next time. We were just cleaning up after people. They would wait until we were done and go back down. What were we accomplishing? I decided not to do any more cleanups because they weren't really making any difference. It just felt like the best thing we could do was to make people see what was happening down there. That's when we started doing the trash monitoring and mapping campsites and taking photos. Have you seen the photo reports? We circled the fecal material and stuff. We wanted to shock people.

When physical removal proved to be insufficient, the environmental work shifted tactics and engaged in a process of cultural displacement by changing how the broader community viewed people in the riverbottom. In an effort to "make people see what was happening down there," a citizen water quality monitoring program added surveillance of the encampments to their monthly monitoring protocol. Volunteers who had once only been collecting data on pH, dissolved oxygen, and nutrient levels in the water were now also recording the locations of

campsites, cataloging trash, and taking photographs. The group produced a GIS map of the location of encampments, a YouTube video of the "trash epidemic" in the riverbottom, and a 70-page report of photographs of camps where, as Sean stated, they circled the fecal material to increase its visibility. Collectively, the data produced by the water quality monitoring began to construct the encampments as environmental pollutants that were detrimental to the health of the river (and the nearby ocean). Moreover, the group employed the map, video, and photo report as vehicles to enroll others in the camp removals. As Sean stated:

> It's a really powerful tool just using media. That was really the strategy that drove the homeless and the trash issue. That was all it was. Let's just blow this up. Nobody knew about it 'cause you can't see it. Within a couple months everybody was talking about it. That's cool. We forced people to look at it and talk about it. I think that's valuable.

Here, Sean described the water quality monitoring group's deliberate strategy to polarize the narrative into a crisis, which was driven by their desire for power. By using multiple forms of media, the group shifted the nexus of power from the homeless to the community and "forced" the audience to "look at it and talk about it" when they could not (yet) physically force the homeless people out of the riverbottom. In this way, the viewers unwittingly supplemented the environmental group's need for power and, in doing so, became participants in its projection.

Once the media produced through the trash surveys got people talking about the problem of encampments, the monitoring group began to mobilize this increased awareness into action by leveraging existing environmental regulations. In 2006, the California EPA listed the Ventura River as impaired for trash under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act (CWA), and set a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) at 0 (which means that there is no allowable limit for trash in the waterway). However, the trash TDML was generally not enforced. The water quality monitoring group sent photographs and wrote letters to government agencies and the Los Angeles Water

Board threatening to sue for non-compliance with the trash TMDL, which would levy a fine of $25,000 per day against the city, county, and other responsible land owners. The threat of enforcement of the trash TMDL now cast the camps as pollution that simultaneously threatened the environmental health of the river and the economic health of the city. This provided the leverage environmental groups needed to mobilize coordinated action for permanent camp removals.

By 2010, the narrative about the camps in the riverbottom had changed. The encampments were seen as an environmental problem instead of a social one, which meant that, instead of recommending early-warning systems, increased sanitation, and trash removal, the environmental groups now advocated for removing camps, which the threat of fines made more tenable. A 2010 report on restoration opportunities for the Ventura River (produced through funding from the California River Parkways Act) not only mentioned homeless encampments, but also argued that they were "a significant threat to water quality during storms" and limited "public appreciation of this significant environmental and recreational resource" (Pitterle 2010, p. 8).[23] This shift made the camps—and the people living within them—legible and thus governable as environmental pollution.

Pollution, trash, and other forms of waste are not naturally waste. Waste is a culturally constructed socio-political category, which operates as a governable object that enables control over specific populations through medical and scientific discourses of contagion (Douglas 2002, Moore 2012). The fear of contagion legitimates exclusion. After all, it must be hunted and quarantined to keep disease from spreading to the general population (Chamayou 2012). This

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[23] This statement frames the environmental threats of the camps within the values of river parkways to restore ecological functioning and increase opportunities for public use and recreation, which demonstrates the potential organizing role of the ideology of river parkways on local communities.

exclusion can be enacted through interpersonal interactions, such as when a California State Park Ranger vehemently warned me not to touch any of the people in the riverbottom:

> Don't go deep into the *Arundo* alone. You should be okay if you bring someone else. Don't bring your dog in. These people are dirty. These people have things I don't want. Hepatitis A, B, C, D… E. MRSA will kill you. Don't shake hands. I tell them I have a cold and don't want to get them sick to explain why I'm not touching them. Also, don't breathe in what they are breathing out. Don't touch them.

The park ranger's warning is framed through a language of care, which legitimates her statement and gives it power. However, her concern for my safety constructs the two of us as fellow members of the same general public in need of protection from the Others in the riverbottom.[24] Moreover, her fear that I might contract one of the various diseases of homelessness transferred her insecurity to me as I became (momentarily) afraid for my own safety. If I then acted out of that fear and, in an effort to secure the sanctity of my own health, refused to touch people in the riverbottom (or avoided the encampments altogether), I would have reproduced the quarantine and amplified their exclusion.

Narratives of contagion produce emotional anxiety, which engenders a physical impulse to assert control over the offending agent. Making the camps legible as environmental pollution prompted physical actions and removal. By 2012, environmental cleanups in the riverbottom included removing the actual campsites in addition to the trash, as Tony from the land conservancy described:

> For three years in a row about 400 kids would come down and do maid service in the river. We would take out everybody's trash. We wouldn't make them leave. Well, we'd make them leave their camps for the day but we'd let them come back. Some would pile up their trash right outside the little entrances. We said, this year, this is the last time.

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[24] Interestingly, the rationale that the park ranger provides to people from the riverbottom is also articulated through care, as it is for "their" benefit that she avoids touching them.

We're gonna come there. We're gonna take out the trash and we're also gonna knock

down the camps and any structures we find.

That is exactly what they did. A local non-profit that trains and employs at-risk youth for

conservation work supplied the crews to "knock down the camps." According to Mark, the

adolescents and young adults went in and completely smashed all of the campsites so that people

could no longer return to their camps. The land conservancy also began biweekly patrols to keep

camps from being rebuilt, and monthly volunteer events to clean up the property and to make

members of the public more comfortable with going down into the riverbottom.[25]

During volunteer events, the conservancy workers usually led a tour of the riverbottom

before we began working. On these tours, any outrageous piece of trash or belongings that had

been found would often be pointed out. Especially rousing would be any time we came across

the "shit buckets" that people in the riverbottom used as makeshift latrines. For example, as we

were walking through the *Arundo* one morning, a conservancy worker pointed to a plastic 35-lb.

cat litter bucket and said, "Make sure you check out the bucket, it's really cool." The group

laughed and, as we walked past, one of the volunteers said, "Do NOT look directly into the

bucket!"

The land conservancy used the buckets and any evidence of human waste as a way to

enroll support for the project. In order for volunteers to show up and clean up the river, they

needed to buy into the project, which required a certain amount of distance from the human

implications of the work. By pointing out human excrement and the infrastructure used to

contain it, the land conservancy workers constructed the homeless as less than human (or animal-

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[25] During one of our walks, Mark explained how the birders were the "first colonizers" of the riverbottom: "It's gonna take some time for the public to think that it's okay to be here, but our first plan of attack is to get the birdwatchers down here. We've been incorporating Audubon in all of our events, so they've been getting here more and more and slowly, feeling more comfortable about it."

like) and of irresponsible moral character. This worked to enroll labor and garner resources for the restoration work, such as volunteers, government officials, and funders, while simultaneously hiding the material and economic conditions that facilitated the presence of both the waste and the people in the landscape (i.e., a lack of sanitation and trash removal, a lack of affordable and very affordable housing, or trauma). However, an alternative reading of the "shit buckets" reveals the agency of people in the riverbottom and contradicts the stories being told by the conservationists. The presence of the buckets in the riverbottom signifies that people in the camps did not want to defecate around where they lived. Instead, they wanted to maintain pride in and of their living spaces, and attempted to do that by creating makeshift sanitation infrastructures to contain their waste. The "shit buckets" were about far more than pollution and irresponsibility; they were a way that people maintained their sociality, and thereby resisted the individualizing effects of the conditions of the bare lives to which they were subjected.

The knowledge produced by the water quality monitoring and subsequent restoration work shifted common sense understandings about the camps and the people in the riverbottom, thereby constructing a new natural. The environmental groups staked their claim on the riverbottom through a process of *epistemic exclusion* that ultimately transformed the camps from a social problem into an environmental threat. Epistemic exclusion is a process of segregation or differentiation that occurs through knowledge production, and changes how we see or understand others in ways that enable their physical isolation or removal. By making the encampments legible as trash, the environmental groups made the people within the camps into territory and excluded them from humanness. They did this through three steps: cultural displacement, naturalization of exclusion, and physical removal. At first, the environmental groups employed cultural practices, such as photography, mapping, and video, to displace the people at the

riverbottom through narratives. Next, they naturalized the exclusion by leveraging existing water quality standards to make camps known as environmental pollution. This step is key because it provided the legitimacy for removal by excluding the camps from humanness. Once the people in the riverbottom were seen as "not human," they were delineated as those who could be captured and physically removed.

Ghosts in the Landscape: When Trash Speaks Back

However, the dehumanization experienced by people in the riverbottom was not unilateral or deterministic. There were moments when trash spoke back. Just a few weeks after I arrived in Ventura, Mark and Tony from the land conservancy invited me to join them at a volunteer event at the Santa Clara River. The city had just completed a large coordinated removal of encampments, and a local university was bringing all of their first-year students to clean up the area as part of their scheduled orientation to college.

On the day of the event, hundreds of young adults descended upon the riverbottom. They walked in teams armed with plastic bags, gloves, facemasks, and trash grabbers. Mark and Tony were each leading a team of students, and I decided to follow Tony and his team to their assigned camp first. We immediately went to work filling up plastic bags and hauling them over to a huge, mint green roll-off dumpster. The students often called out when they found something particularly odd or gross. Tony sometimes chimed in with a story about how bizarre and crazy the people in the camps often behaved. At one point, I saw one of the students standing alone near the dumpster. The ground in front of her was littered with photographs and newspaper clippings (Figure 1). She bent down, scooped up a handful, and then went completely still. Without speaking, Tony and I walked over to her. The three of us simply stood there, staring at

the papers in her outstretched arms. Quietly, with tears in her eyes, she looked up and whispered, "It's just so sad." For a moment, we were all silent, unable (or unwilling) to speak. The distance between object and inhabitant dissolved in that instant. The student gently returned the photographs to the ground and the three of us turned and walked away, leaving them there despite our proximity to the dumpster and the mission to clean the campsite. Once the objects became connected to a person, we were unwilling to throw them aside.

Figure 1. Photographs and newspaper clippings in the riverbottom

The Human Cost

> The California version of the EPA is threatening to fine Ventura some $25,000 a day if it doesn't clean up the watersheds and the riverbottoms. That's the motivation behind those clearings. People will give you a lot of other reasons, but that's the motivation. I believe in that value. I believe in the environmental protection. But what's the human cost?
>
> *-- Local minister and advocate for the homeless*

Throughout my fieldwork, people would often bring up the threat of EPA fines and the amount of money the riverbottom camps might cost the city if they were not removed. However, very few people discussed (or seemed to wonder) what removing the camps might cost the people living within them. This is another example of exclusion, and one that can be repeated in other areas, such as academic work. For example, there is very little research that considers the value that riverbottoms provide from the perspective of people who live there. In the health geography literature on therapeutic landscapes, homeless people are considered negative elements in greenspaces because people who are housed tend to perceive them as dangerous, which can provoke feelings of fear and insecurity in visitors and reduce perceptions of personal safety (Finlay et al. 2015, McCormack et al. 2010). In contrast, the health geography literature on the therapeutic benefits of indoor spaces of care for homeless people is abundant. This research focuses primarily of the value of managed spaces (i.e., homeless shelters, drop-in centers, or rehab programs), but does not consider how unmanaged spaces (like riverbottom camps) can also be places of care.[26]

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[26] Examples of indoor, managed spaces represented in the spaces of care literature include public libraries (Brewster 2014, Hodgetts et al. 2008), drop-in centers (Cloke et al. 2010, Conradson 2003b, Hodgetts et al. 2007, Johnsen et al. 2005, Llewellin & Murdoch 1996), community service providers (Cloke et al. 2007, Conradson 2003a, Conradson 2003b, Crack et al. 2007, Parr & Philo 2003), shelters (Evans 2011, May et al. 2006), hostels (Stuttaford et al. 2009), and substance abuse treatment programs (DeVerteuil & Wilton 2009, Evans et al. 2015, Wilton & DeVerteuil 2006, Love et al. 2012).

The logics of exclusion and social sorting that are present in broader American culture

can be reproduced in the ways landscapes are understood in relation to people who are homeless.

Urban ecologist Sarah Dooling (2009) is one scholar who is challenging this exclusion through

her research on ecological gentrification, which illustrates how perceptions of home for people

living in riverbottom camps differ from those of city planners and park workers. She draws on

Giorgio Agamben's work to demonstrate how city planners and park officials create the

riverbottom as a state of exception that excludes the homeless from full citizenship and subjects

them to the conditions of bare life. However, the exclusion from social life is never absolute. The

problem with relying on Agamben's (1998) concept of bare life is that it does not adequately

address resistance, which can lead to overdetermination that itself becomes exclusionary. As Lisa

Gunther (2012) writes:

> *Life is never bare*…because the relation to the Other cannot be destroyed. Even when
> reduced to a "naked relation to naked existence," even when exposed to an unimaginable
> extremity of need and affliction, even when forced to steal from others in order to secure
> one's own survival, the subject retains a relation to alterity which provides a starting
> point, however minimal, for resistance (p. 75).

When the riverbottom is considered a place of bare life, then anything else must be better; any

option must be an improvement (or at least of equal merit): a motel room, a shared house with

other homeless people, relocation to another town, a shelter, or the park downtown. Rendering

people in the riverbottom as bare life enables a paternalistic rationale that they are being

removed for their own good by devaluing their voices, preferences, and lived experiences. [27]

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[27] When people who are homeless resist these interventions of "care" (that may, in fact, cause harm), they are considered deviant, lacking in moral status, and in need of discipline and accountability. In Ventura, a person who resists removal from the riverbottom (by returning, reconstructing camps, and refusing housing assistance) is categorized as "service resistant," and is described as "not your warm and fuzzy homeless person." From the outside, there appears to be no rational reason why a person would return to the riverbottom instead of living in a motel room, except for a personal desire to engage in criminal behavior. This presumption of deviance legitimates

Therefore, it is important to understand the value of even the places that appear valueless, so that interventions meant to help do not inadvertently cause additional violence, and actions that cause harm (whether intentional or otherwise) can be recognized and held accountable.[28] In this section, I draw on the lived experiences of people living in the riverbottom to show how the site acts as a protective space that allows people who are homeless to resist the conditions of bare life through four overlapping categories of care: belongings, access to nature, privacy, and relational benefits.

Belongings

Having a place to keep one's belongings can make a dramatic difference in a person's everyday life. In camps, people often sleep on mattresses instead of directly on the hard ground, and have some reserves of food, clothing, and survival gear (such as an extra tent or sleeping bag). More established camps might have a formal "garage" constructed out of *Arundo* or a tent. Riverbottom camps afford people a respite from carrying everything they own directly on their person, enabling them—at least at times— to attend to daily tasks unencumbered by bags, shopping carts, baby strollers (modified into material transportation devices), and loaded bicycle trailers. In addition to the obvious physical benefits of reduced fatigue and bodily strain, there is a positive psychological value to having access to personal storage. Many of the people with whom I spoke discussed their efforts to avoid being perceived as homeless, which included

increasingly harsh attitudes and actions toward people and encampments in the name of improving their health, the health of the river, and the health of the broader community. See Mitchell (2011) for a discussion of broader patterns of social sorting in the United States that divide the homeless into the deviant, underserving poor, and the docile, deserving poor.

[28] This concept of violence draws on Philippe Bourgois' (2009) theoretical framework of invisible violence, which consists of three overlapping categories: structural violence, symbolic violence, and normalized violence. *Structural violence* is the violence caused by political and economic forces. *Symbolic violence* (Bourdieu 2000) is a system of internalized violence, where ideologies of domination can become turned inward to create a form of "blaming the victim," in which victims blame themselves. *Normalized violence* is violence that occurs in everyday life, and is composed of many small micro-aggressions that appear to be a "normal" part of daily life. Invisible violence tends to be more covert, and thus more difficult to identify and measure compared to physical violence.

wearing the "right clothes" and "staying clean" (with regard to personal hygiene). Carting around one's belongings is a stereotypical indicator of homelessness in the United States, and simply being seen carrying laundry in public can be a stigmatizing experience for a person without formal housing, as the following excerpt from my fieldnotes illustrates:

Fieldnotes, 25 November 2013

James explained some of the trouble he's been having trying to get everything set up to start taking classes at the community college. He needed to complete the college's online orientation, so he went downtown to use the computers at the library, but when he got there, he realized he also needed earbuds, which he didn't have. Then, he tried again a few days later once he got some earbuds, but the library computers only let him log on for an hour and he ran out of time. Now, he's going to try to use the computer lab up at the college, which is an hour walk from his camp. But if he goes today, he'll have to bring all of his laundry with him to campus, which he doesn't want to do. James points to a large, green army duffle that is full of folded clothes, and says he hates walking with his laundry on his back because then people can tell he's homeless. When he walks to the church on laundry days, he makes an effort to stay on side streets and paths where it's less likely he'll be seen.

For people in the riverbottom, the ability to leave items in a set location is one way to resist the stigma of being homeless in public by passing as a person who is housed. During my fieldwork, some people did utilize other alternatives for storage besides riverbottom camps, such as personal vehicles, rented storage units, and a friend's garage. However, these options required access to regular financial resources or local supportive (and stable) social relationships to make them feasible. Getting behind on the rent for a storage unit or being unable to maintain a street-legal vehicle means risking the rapid loss of one's belongings. Until camp removals became more frequent and routine in the riverbottom, encampments provided a relatively secure and

accessible "home base" for people for whom other alternatives were either inaccessible or unsustainable.

Camp removals can now happen often and with little or no warning, especially when they are removed directly through the restoration work. One implication of this shift is that people can lose important belongings, which require a significant amount of resources and effort to replace, even if they seem insignificant to an outsider. However, some items are irreplaceable. One day in November, I saw a man named Theo at a drop-in program at a local church. Theo is a Vietnam veteran and one of the well-respected "OG's" ("old guys") in the riverbottom. While talking with him, I learned that state park rangers and land conservancy workers removed his camp and threw all of his belongings into a dumpster. My fieldnotes from that day capture some of Theo's loss:

Fieldnotes, 04 November 2013

Ruby is sitting in the smoking circle with Theo and another man. I go over to them and sit down in an empty chair. I ask Theo how he's doing. He says quietly, "Not too good." He tells me the park rangers threw away all of his stuff. He went back and was at least able to recover his sleeping bag because the dumpster was still there. I am surprised because there wasn't much time between the noticing and the dumpster. I was with the land conservancy workers when they began noticing the camps (including Theo's) on State Park property just the week before. Theo tells me he lost the last photograph he had left of his wife, and begins to cry.[29] He says he wishes he could stop thinking about her. He's crying so hard. I put my hand on his shoulder. He holds my hand, then hugs me hard. We sit around the circle briefly in silence. Theo asks if I smoke as he offers me the cigarette from behind his ear. I don't smoke. He puts it back, saying this is the smoking only section. At Theo's prompt, I realize that people are waiting to smoke and I am breaking etiquette by taking up one of the seats. I ask if I can join him for lunch. He looks at me and just says, "Please." His voice is weepy. I tell him I will and leave for another interview.

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[29] Theo revealed during an interview that his wife was killed in a car accident nearly 20 years ago. He was driving the car when they were struck head-on by a drunk driver. He spoke of his wife a great deal during our interview.

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About an hour later, as I am walking back across the courtyard after the interview, I hear Theo call out, "Hey! You! Don't go anywhere." I stop. He shuffles over and hands me a bouquet of flowers. I am not sure if they are actually for me. I ask him a few times, "For me? Really?" Theo pleads, "Stop it" (simultaneously seeming embarrassed and pleased) and explains, "I don't know what it is, but I think when people talk to you, they feel better." I am very touched by his gesture. He says he knows the park rangers have a job to do and that they're only doing their job, but he doesn't understand why they won't listen to him. He tries to keep his camp clean so they'll let him stay but they still won't. "I'm not a bum!" he loudly exclaims as he turns and runs into the men's restroom, crying.

Theo's story highlights the profound emotional lives of people who are homeless, and the deep personal value their belongings can hold. Belongings in encampments can be sentimental as well as functional, which often goes unrecognized when the perceived needs of homeless people are reduced to bare necessities. Theo's words and actions convey a sensitivity to the physical and emotional needs of others that I recognized in many of the homeless people I met, once I became known as a safe and trusted person. Even in the face of the pain he experiences, Theo acknowledges that the park rangers have a responsibility (and thus, their actions are not necessarily reflective of personal or individual choices). In response, he initiates an effort to work with them to keep the riverbottom clean by attending to his camp (not a small undertaking when one is without basic sanitation and trash removal). Theo's anger is not a result of environmental efforts to clean up the river, but an outcome of the way in which the work does not currently allow him to escape being identified and removed as trash.

Belongings are not always portable; they can also become attached to place and embedded within the landscape itself. One of the most poignant experiences of my first time in the Santa Clara riverbottom was when I came across the burial site for Riley and Ginger, two dogs from the camps (Figure 2). The graves were carefully constructed and elaborately decorated

with personal artifacts, wooden crosses, plants, stone markers, and homemade headstones. Once I learned to recognize them, I began to notice others: one next to a camp on a small embankment next to the 101 freeway, another during a volunteer day picking up trash in the Ventura River for the land conservancy. Joy and Henry pointed out the small group of stones in their camp that mark the resting place for Joy's fish, Blue. Later, Henry constructed an elaborate grave for their dog after he was hit by a car, and Joy described the funeral held for him by the riverbottom community. These intangible belongings illustrate how encampments are also places of ritual and memory. The social and emotional lives of people in the riverbottom can become connected to particular places within the landscape. As a result, leaving may be difficult and painful, especially when people are made to leave against their will.

Figure 2. Dog burial site in the riverbottom

Access to Nature

An appreciation for nature is not something people generally consider when thinking about the experiences of people who are homeless. However, I was struck by how often people in the riverbottom wanted to talk about the nature that surrounded their camps. During interviews and conversations, stories quickly emerged about such things as birds, rats, and possums coming by for daily meals, a person searching for snakes in the underbrush, coyotes howling in the dark, and a mountain lion passing through one of the more isolated camps. These unsolicited stories often described everyday experiences, degraded landscapes, and interactions with plants and animals that many people would label as pests. However, rather than seeing them as unhealthy parts of an ecological system in need of restoration, people in the riverbottom tended to see value in these stigmatized dimensions. By seeking out and connecting with aspects of nature that reflected their own marginalized subject positions, people in the riverbottom were able to resist the violence and dehumanization that they so often experienced through their interactions with people.

Living outdoors can provide survivors of considerable trauma with an increased sense of space, safety, and self-determination compared to other accessible alternatives. People who have been incarcerated, people who have experienced significant abuse, and military veterans described feeling confined, frightened, and triggered when indoors and in small spaces. Blaze, a 46-year-old white man who is a Gulf War veteran and is frequently in and out of prison for parole violations stemming from a drug charge, compared living indoors to being in jail:

> I'd rather be out in the street than living in a house, confined in the rooms that just remind me of being in jail. Try living in a box. You put us in a box, things will probably be a lot worse for us than down in the street in the open. A lot of us feel that way, ex-convicts like myself. People don't understand that.

Blaze suffered a traumatic brain injury from a skull fracture during an altercation with local police. As a result, he suffers from recurring epileptic seizures. Blaze described problems with getting the correct dosage of his seizure medication in jail:

> I get locked up and what's the county do? They give me half or less of my dose. They don't give me what I'm supposed to take. They don't do that for a lot of people in there. They don't give you the right medication. That's why you have all these problems in jail.

Indeed, Blaze's anxiety about being confined indoors was about more than a lack of physical space or mobility. He could not leave a place where he felt his life was in jeopardy. He could not trust the care he was receiving, and yet he did not have the freedom to leave. Blaze's fears were not unfounded. A homeless woman who was a regular guest at the drop-in program where he volunteered died in the county prison just a few weeks earlier when her seizures were not adequately treated.

Virginia, a white woman in her early 50s with a fondness for Patricia Cornwell crime novels, was also uncomfortable being inside:

> I don't like to be indoors. I don't like it. I don't like it at all. When I first started living in the riverbottom, I thought, man I can't wait to get indoors again. Then I spent time down there and it was *so* peaceful. [*Singsongs*] I had my own property! [*Laughs.*] I did. I built my own tent. I built it myself. That was so cool.

Virginia described living in the riverbottom as peaceful compared to being indoors, and, similar to Blaze, she associated that peacefulness with a sense of autonomy. Virginia calls herself a shape shifter. During our interview, she demonstrated her ability to switch between the entities living inside her: wide-eyed and childlike with a high-pitched voice one minute, then gruff and paternal the next. She switched in the middle of telling a story, then asked me, "Did you see how

I changed?" I did. Virginia expressed feeling sensitive to interpersonal contact because people can trigger her and make her "change" entities without her consent:

> It's like: don't come near me. People try to touch me and tap me and make me change… because I'm a shape shifter. Always have been, always will be. I can get really big or I can… I have different entities that are just mine. Big Red for instance. Grrrrrrrrr. Big Red, you know? And somebody tapped into Big Red one day and I didn't even know Big Red lived in me. That's when I saw him. And ever since people saw that, they've been trying to tap in to me, see what else they can get to show up. Like it's fun or something. I mean, this isn't fun. You don't call Big Red to the scene unless Big Red's needed. Big Red is only for life and death for real.

It's unclear from Virginia's statement exactly who the "they" are (and a follow up question did not clarify), but she does convey a sense of feeling experimented on by others who try to make her switch against her will for their interest or entertainment. This could refer to experiences with mental health professionals or people with whom she has come in contact in everyday life, who (perhaps unintentionally) trigger her. She described being subjected to a similar lack of self-determination, which she called bullying, during her recent time in a residential drug and alcohol rehab program:

> I couldn't be myself there. I couldn't laugh loud, I couldn't be honest. I had to let people bully me and I had to let people get close to me. Like, I don't like too much contact. There was one point, they took me out of me. They put something in me, an entity in me, that took my soul, my consciousness out of me. When that happened, it was on.

For Virginia, this is not a game; the ability to become Big Red (and others) is a survival skill for times when situations threaten her sense of control over herself and her space. In contrast, when I asked Virginia how the riverbottom compared to other places she can stay, she again described the peacefulness she feels there:

The riverbottom is so peaceful. It is unbelievable. I need to have tranquility. Peace and quiet and tranquility. Party if you want to but no fightin' and stuff like that.

When I asked her how the riverbottom feels more peaceful, Virginia described sensory elements connected to nature and invited me to experience it directly:

It's sweet because you feel nature. You feel the energy from nature, from the ground, the ocean, the air itself. You know, the air down there is different from the air above. And another thing, there's no electricity down there. It's *different*, trust me. Do you want to come down to my spot with me?

The following excerpt from my fieldnotes describes my experience in Virginia's camp:

Fieldnotes, 02 December 2013

As we approach Virginia's camp, she warns me that it's messier than normal, as one commonly does when receiving unexpected company at home. The camp is in a clearing surrounded by *Arundo* and a large willow tree (Figure 3). There are garbage bags in the center of the clearing filled with what appear to be clothing. Trash is scattered about. Virginia's "tent" is homemade, comprised of multiple tarps and a vinyl banner salvaged from some event that are tied together into a triangle-shaped roof under a branch from the willow. A large, faded American flag creates a wall at the head of the queen-sized mattress that is lying on the ground. About fifteen books lined up like a little library sit in the corner between the mattress and the edge of the tarp. Virginia asks me where I want to sit. I tell her I'll sit wherever she wants me to. She brushes some leaves and dried macaroni off of the bed, straightens the pillow, and instructs me to lie down. I am nervous—this feels pretty vulnerable. But, I do it. She says, "you lay that way and I'll lay this way." Her head ends up by my feet and her feet next to my head. We lie in silence, looking at the branches, listening. Virginia asks, "Isn't it beautiful?" I think she wants me to feel what it's like to sleep in the riverbottom. With a tinge of tenderness in her voice, she quietly asks if I can hear the cars and then narrates the calm, steady, purr of the 101 freeway almost overhead and the sound of the wind passing through the *Arundo*. It's like a white noise machine, drowning out all the chatter. It really does feel like a different world down here. Virginia asks if I want to come back and hear it at night. "That's the

best time," she says, because the dark is quiet; there are no lights down there. I hesitate…
maybe another night? She laughs and calls me a scaredy cat. I don't challenge that.
Virginia pulls out a bag of pita bread from her cart and asks me to help her tear it up for
the birds. She says she has more for them. She's fond of the birds. "They're so sweet," she
says in a soft voice as she places the small bits of pita in two piles at the edge of her
camp. Before I leave, she shows me where she goes to look at the stars. "Isn't this
beautiful?" she asks again. I agree and thank her as we say goodbye. As I walk away,
Virginia calls out, "Please don't tell them where I'm at."

Figure 3. The location of Virginia's camp (after it was cleaned by the restoration work).

The peacefulness Virginia describes emerges from her experience of the riverbottom as a
place of protection from the violence she faces in more exposed public places and within
managed, institutional settings. The sense of freedom she feels from nature is calm and hence,

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calming. The dark is quiet; the birds are "sweet." The "noise" of sound and light and people are attenuated. The cars on the freeway and the wind in the *Arundo* are consistent and non-threatening; they can be counted on. The birds accept care, but are not demanding; they do not judge her. Through her relationship with nature in the riverbottom, Virginia resists being naturalized as a psychological curiosity and experiences the freedom to be a person, to be human.

City officials, organizational workers, and the local media predominantly construct people in the riverbottom—as well as others living outdoors who refuse case management—as outlaws who choose to reject housing assistance intended to "better their lives" because they refuse to be held accountable for their actions. However, when people like Blaze and Virginia experience physical and psychological violence from institutions (such as prisons and mental healthcare), it can foster very real and rational distrust and insecurity. The freedom that Blaze and Virginia seek is not freedom from personal responsibility, but freedom from being subjected to continued violence, often experienced through a lack of consent (where they are not free to choose or outright oppose). Military veterans have not only been subjected to physical and psychological violence through military institutions, but have been in the position of enacting that violence on other people. For veterans, the value of freedom to live outdoors and in the riverbottom can be experienced as a means of fighting the dehumanization they have experienced through war, as a right they have earned through their sacrifice. When I asked Theo, the Vietnam veteran, what he considered the best part of living in the riverbottom, he replied:

> Not paying rent. [*Both laugh.*] Um… the freedom to come and go as you please. No landlord. God knows I hate landlords. They figure they've got to live up to the name, landlord… ahh!

Although Theo initially joked that the main benefit of living in the riverbottom was "not paying rent," his response indicated that he was more concerned with being confined by a contract (i.e., a lease) and being beholden to a person with power over him (i.e., a landlord) than with the financial cost. I followed up in order to clarify:

So, the best part of living in the riverbottom is your freedom?

Theo responded:

Yes! I fought for my freedom. I fought for your freedom. I fought for everybody's freedom and they treat it like it's nothing, man. I've been to Vietnam. I had to do things I didn't want to do. God knows I … [*crying*] … I did a lot of things I didn't want to do. We all did things that we… Man ain't supposed to kill the way I look at it and dammit, they shouldn't make us do somethin' like that. And, it seems like it's all worthless. Everything I did over there is for nothing. The people I seen, the friends I had over there, they died for nothing. I was 17 years old, scared… Man, I was so scared. I didn't think I'd ever make it back home. I had a mental discharge because I had a nervous breakdown. It was only after I'd been there a year. I still feel like I'm affected by it. Mental health around here keep on wanting to talk to me. I don't want to talk to them. I don't want to be reminded of things there. They tell me, "You really need help." No, I don't! All I need to be done is to be left *alone*.

Theo's response connects living in the riverbottom with the freedom he feels he has fought for (and earned) through his military service, which required him to experience and enact violence. He was made to do things he "didn't want to do" and still feels the effects. I asked Theo what makes him feel safe. He was completely silent at first. Then he asked me to repeat the question twice before he responded:

That's a good one. …heh… living down there I can only take it as momentarily at ease…[*pause*]… When I can hear the birds sing. When I can see animals around me, wild animals, that makes me feel safe. It makes me feel at peace.… Let the birds sing!

Like Virginia, Theo connects an internal feeling of safety (or being "momentarily at ease") with the external, natural world in the riverbottom. He focuses specifically on singing birds and wild animals, which are neither domesticated nor beholden to people. The wild animals and birds are symbolically free, which Theo communicates through the phrase, "let the birds sing," which is an adaptation of the phrase, "let freedom ring." The freedom that Theo finds in nature helps him to feel, at least momentarily, that he is also free and safe from being commanded to commit unsafe acts against his will. When he feels safe, Theo describes feeling a sense of peace; or, put another way, he feels a reduction in the violence he has experienced in the human world. From this perspective, it makes sense that Theo would resist leaving the riverbottom. During our interview, he explained that, although he is entitled to receive veterans housing, he refuses to go because he will have limited input in where he will live or with whom he will be forced to live. Instead, Theo cycles in and out of the riverbottom. When the police or park rangers kick him out, he crawls up in the crevasse at the top of a freeway overpass and lives there until he can return and make a new camp.

Although the riverbottom is a place that people find peaceful and positive for their wellbeing relative to other accessible alternatives, life in the riverbottom is neither idyllic nor easy. In the following example, Henry invites me to see his "waterfall," which demonstrates how access to nature can help people get away from the stress of daily life in the riverbottom community, and the value of overlooked places in mitigating everyday insecurity and violence:

Fieldnotes, 20 December 2013

Henry and Joy have been showing me around the Santa Clara riverbottom all day. It's now late afternoon, and we're debating whether we should try to talk to more people or come back another day. Joy suggests another option:

"Hey, Henry*,* can you show her that waterfall? Are we close enough to that? It's really pretty."

Henry agrees and I'm confused because I'm pretty sure there's no waterfall near here. I check to make sure I'm hearing correctly,

"There's a waterfall?"

Joy and Henry simultaneously respond in the affirmative, laughing.

I'm not sure what's in store, but Henry and I have left the riverbottom, crossed a busy road, and are now headed toward the ocean. At the edge of the pavement, Henry slips between some vegetation and a chain link fence and disappears down a narrow path. A sign on the fence warns, "No trespassing." I can't see anything except for the plants, the path, and the fence, and at this point I've only known Henry for two days. I pause. Maybe this isn't such a good idea. But, ultimately, my curiosity about the mysterious waterfall wins out and I, too, fade into the shadows. We walk. The eucalyptus trees are fragrant; the fence is ever-present on our right. Then, my ears catch the faint but unmistakable sound of falling water. Waterfall? It keeps getting louder until, at the end of the path, a torrent of water suddenly emerges in front of us. This is Henry's waterfall: the discharge from the city's wastewater treatment plant. We climb down a mountain of large boulders and sit at the edge of the pond created by the effluent (Figure 4).

Henry: This is where I come to get away from Joy and get away from my camp. There's nowhere I can get along, you know? [*points toward the water*] See it?

Jenn: The duck?

Henry: Yeah. It's a mallard. When the river's low, you come down here and all this bamboo dies. This whole area, you get about nine hundred big carp trapped here. Then they wait for the water to come back and swim out again. There's a fish! There! It jumped! Could've been a bass.

Jenn: How long were you a fisherman?

Henry: My entire life, my entire non-working and working life. Even when I was a kid, I was fishing.

Jenn: [*pointing*] Ooh!

Henry: That's an egret. He comes down to get a meal. They got fish all out in there. Now if this was Louisiana, you'd have alligators out there but this water's too cold. [*Points to the duck.*] See that blue on its feather? See it? Quack-quack-quack-quack. Quack-quack-quack-quack-quack. Quack-quack-quack-quack-quack-quack-quack. [*Makes kissing noises at the duck.*] Come on. Come on [*kissing noise*]. Come on little duck [*kissing noise*]. He's curious. If I had some bread crumbs to throw to him, I could get him to come over here.

[*pause*]

This is where my peace is, right here. This is where I get away from [the city officials]. Get away from all the trouble. Get away from the riverbottom people. This is where I come. This is where I come. I mean look at it. This is free. Totally free. But you know, you're not supposed to be able to come and enjoy this place here. The laws won't let you. Why? Isn't this nice?

Jenn: It's beautiful.

Henry: The sound. Tranquility.

Blaze, Virginia, Theo, and Henry describe feeling a sense of safety and peace through their connections with nature and living outdoors, which demonstrates the restorative aspect of nature for people in the riverbottom. This therapeutic value is constructed through embodied political and relational work rather than through a romanticized notion of sublime beauty or "naturalness." Non-human elements that would typically be classified as unnatural or out-of-place through mainstream ecological restoration have positive value here. The cars on the freeway and the stalks of *Arundo* are restorative aspects of the riverbottom to Virginia, who, instead of seeing them as sound or biological pollution, values their consistent, rhythmic, nonthreatening presence. The discharge from a water treatment plant is a waterfall that reduces stress and connects Henry to his former life as a commercial fisherman. "Nature" in the

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riverbottom community acts as a means of resistance through self-determination and care, where people can resist the conditions of bare life and the very real violence they experience through interventions intended "for their own good."

Figure 4. The view from Henry's waterfall.

Privacy

Consider for a moment the possibility that all the walls in your home are transparent, that anyone and everyone can observe any aspect of your life, from the mundane to the extraordinary. This is what it is like to be homeless. When people live in public spaces, the private aspects of their lives are on display. Things like sleeping, changing clothes, arguing with a family member, crying,

recovering from a stomach virus, sex, and urinating are all very normal human behaviors that are also aspects of a person's social and physical health. And yet, people who engage in these private actions in public spaces can be shamed and pathologized regardless of whether they have access to alternatives. This is the fundamental flaw in vagrancy laws, which have become nearly ubiquitous in cities across the United States. Vagrancy laws criminalize private acts in public spaces by blaming people who are homeless for making inappropriate choices regarding their behavior. This reduces responsibility to the neoliberal value of individual choice, which compounds the stigma homeless people already experience, and hides the lack of their viable options. Even when people are sympathetic to homelessness, they can potentially individualize blame. In these cases, it is often through a medicalized rationale that the homeless person's behavior is attributed to a mental illness that he or she cannot control. The following exchange I had with Mary, the director of a free lunch program, illustrates how people can often be unaware that they reproduce these labels:

> *Mary:* We got a call from City Hall that there was a complaint from the apartment complex over here. They saw this gal peeing and pottying on lawns across the street. The lady told the city that it's our fault. I talked to her, and I said, "It's really not us when you think about it. She's a mental case. We've been after the city to help these people with mental conditions. That's really where it's at." She said, "You're right. I hadn't thought of it like that. I just figured they were going to your place and it's your fault." I said, "I don't condone that kind of action. If I'd have seen her, I'd have called the police."

> *Jenn:* I don't know how hard it is but… are there other actual places where people can use the bathroom?

> *Mary:* No, there's no place on the avenue. Only here, when we're open.

> *Jenn:* There's that piece of it. People have to go. There's a very human aspect to that.

Mary: Yeah. They don't care. They look at them and think they're dirt or they're trash or they're not worth it. See, I just look at them as human beings. Other people look at them as useless trash. Don't wanna see them.

Many of the people I spoke with from the riverbottom described it as a place where they have dignity because they have privacy. The first layer of privacy comes from the plants, which function as informal walls that impede visibility and delineate camp boundaries. This vegetative cover attenuates the vulnerability that people who are homeless can feel in the broader community. Theo described how being in the riverbottom afforded him with a sense of personal safety and freedom:

I'm too visual. I like to be… unvisual? When I'm down in the riverbottom, I'm behind all the bamboo so people don't see me. I hate hiding like a common criminal, but that's what they try to make you feel like. Maybe I am trying to hide from society. I guess I am.

Beyond this first layer of privacy, residents often created separate living quarters within individual camps. More established camps had separate room-like areas that created additional layers of privacy, which is demonstrated by the following experience in Joy and Henry's camp:

Fieldnotes, 08 July 2014

I meet Henry and Joy at their camp to take them to Sears so they can look for a new tent. Henry was in the hospital and the dogs tore up the door to their tent while they were gone. When I walk into the camp, Joy reaches into a bucket of ice and hands me a can of Coke. Henry emerges from the tent wearing only a pair of boxers. Joy tells me he hasn't wanted to leave the camp since he's been back from the hospital. Without looking at me, Henry apologizes for not being dressed and begins brushing his teeth in the "bathroom" area of their camp. I avert my eyes, trying to respect his private space even though there are no walls. Joy and I sit on the mat in front of their tent, talking and drinking our sodas. Henry occasionally interjects random comments as the foam from his toothpaste starts to completely surround his mouth. Joy prods him to hurry up as he begins to shave the gray, shaggy beard that has sprouted since the last time I saw him. Henry glances in the mirror

taped to the tree in front of him and responds that he needs to clean up because he doesn't want "Jennifer to think I'm dirty like all them other people down here." When he is finished shaving, Henry continues to talk to us as he crawls back into the tent. A heavy, green blanket covers the gaping hole in the front made by the dogs. He appears fully dressed a few minutes later wearing a pair of khaki shorts, a cotton button down shirt, and a pageboy cap. Joy tells him he looks cute.

Encampments provide designated places where hygiene activities can occur. By having a setup for brushing his teeth and shaving, Henry is able to clean up when he arises without having to travel through public areas in search of a restroom that he will be permitted to use. Camps also allow people to store clean, potable water for drinking and cooking, as well as for personal hygiene. Every morning, Joy rides her bicycle to a local business that allows her to fill up her water bottles (reused 2-liter soda bottles) so that she and Henry have clean water for the day. This keeps them from going without water or attempting to use water from other sources, such as the river that contains bacteria and other pathogens and pollutants. Henry and Joy also had a shower setup before it was thrown away during the last riverbottom sweep by the city (Figure 5). By hanging a solar-heated camping shower from a tree branch and placing a wooden pallet on the ground underneath to keep the mud off, they could take showers with water warmed by the California sun without having to travel to the coin-operated public showers at the state park campground, or rely on the limited hours (and case management requirement) of local homeless service organizations.

Figure 5. Henry pointing out the location of his camp shower

By having private places within encampments where they can conduct hygienic behaviors, people in the riverbottom may engage in them more frequently, which could have physical health benefits. However, there is also a psychosocial benefit to being able to get clean. There is a moral value attached to cleanliness that constructs "clean" as civilized, proper, and even human. When people who are homeless become physically dirty it reinforces the societal view that they are symbolically "dirty" people, and thus immoral, uncivilized, improper, and inhuman. Henry's comment that he does not want me to think that he is "dirty like all them other people" in the riverbottom reflects his awareness of this moral construction, and he reproduces the stigma in order to reduce his own identification with being dirty. Like Henry, many of the homeless people I spoke with made an effort to differentiate themselves as "clean" individuals as a way to demonstrate their value as people and project their personhood or humanity. For

example, Theo boasted during an interview, "I'm the cleanest hobo I know." Makeshift latrines were another way that people tried to separate themselves literally and symbolically from dirtiness and waste. Henry, Joy, Virginia, and Theo all described to me, unprompted, how they urinate and defecate into containers and plastic bags instead of directly on the ground. The privacy afforded by the riverbottom enhanced the health of people in encampments by allowing them to temporarily wash off the stigma of dirtiness and depravity that is normally associated with homelessness, thus mitigating their sense of social exclusion.

Relational Benefits

A flyer on the door of the Ventura City Hall reads "Volunteer Training for the 2014 Homeless Persons Count." Next to this statement is a photograph of a person bundled in jeans and a heavy winter coat sitting on a sidewalk. Her knees are folded up toward her chest with her arms crossed above them. One of her hands draws the hood over her face so that all distinguishing characteristics of her person are hidden by the armor of her body and the coat, leaving me to infer gender from the purse-like bag that rests on the ground nearby.

This is a familiar image of homelessness in the United States, where people who are homeless are often represented as solitary, isolated, and forlorn individuals who exist outside of society or social relations (Gerrard & Farrugia 2015, Hodgetts et al. 2005, Schneider & Remillard 2010, Widdowfield 2001). However, in contrast to these pervasively individualizing images, everyday life for someone who is homeless is a profoundly social experience. Relationships with each other, organizations, government agencies, businesses, and trusted people are essential to survival. The riverbottom is a place where social relations are forged and where people work together to protect each other (in the context of limited formal police

protection), to procure resources like food and water, and to provide social and emotional support. The community formed in the riverbottom enhances the resilience of its members by reducing isolation and providing backup for people who have limited family support and are typically excluded from the broader communities within which they live.

In contrast to outside depictions of the riverbottom as a lawless, out-of-control place, there are important social codes and values that promote order and help to create a safe space. For example, it is important to announce one's presence loudly when approaching someone's camp. This is the equivalent of knocking on the front door of a house, as Henry explains:

> I always holler before I go in. Whenever you come to my gate, you holler before you ask if you can come in. Just as respect for everybody down here.

Something as simple as announcing your presence plays an important role in cultivating respect and building trust. People in the riverbottom live lives where their personal and physical boundaries are frequently violated. Even if no harm is meant, walking directly into a camp unannounced is perceived as a potentially threatening act because you have already disregarded a boundary. Announcing one's presence communicates an acknowledgement and respect of boundaries, and the person in the camp retains the ability to allow or deny your entrance.

There is also a strong ethic of sharing among people who are homeless. If you have something, you share it because you will probably need something in the near future, and then people will share with you. Ruby, a Latina in her early 20s, described her experience of sharing in the riverbottom:

> People, they're more loving than you think. I just try to stay in their good graces. We're all in this together. Many different people will say that. When it comes to our needs, such as smokin' cigarettes or a bottle or whatever, we gotta be there for one another. Unless you are stingy, then you're not part of it.

Ruby's examples are of sharing cigarettes and alcohol, but I have witnessed numerous other instances of sharing and working together to pool resources and support. For example, I was in the riverbottom with Henry and Joy when we ran into their friend, Rich, and his dog. Even though they had not seen each other in months, Rich immediately asked if they were hungry, or if their dog needed food. Rich had just picked up some leftover pizza and dog food, and was bringing them back to his camp on the flatbed trailer behind his bike. His first reaction upon seeing Henry and Joy was to offer to share what he had. Upon talking further, it became clear the salience of this value in his life. Rich has been homeless since 2003, and lived in the Ventura riverbottom until the big land conservancy move-out the year before. When he lost his camp, Rich moved to the Santa Clara riverbottom on the other side of the city. Rich described the vulnerability he experienced by being disconnected from the supportive relationships he had established in the Ventura River:

> For a long time I had a hard time out here because I didn't know anything over here. I really didn't know anybody, so it was really hard for me. For six months, it was really hard for me. If it weren't for the church back then, I would've starved to death. I know I would've. It's a good thing cuz I would've died. I know I would've. Many times I've been down since then, but now almost anytime I asked anybody, "Hey, you got something to eat? I'm hungry," they would feed me. It's more like a community down here with us once we get to know each other. They don't have worry about me goin' into their home and don't have to watch me every second cuz they're afraid I might steal somethin'. Once they learn that I ain't gonna do that shit, then it's a lot different, but everybody's standoff-ish [at first].

Relationships are so important to survival that Rich is certain he would have starved without outside support from a church program (a program which has since been shut down by the city). Now that he has developed new relationships in the riverbottom, Rich is able to find the support he needs. Building trust and gaining acceptance among homeless people takes time, which

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makes sense, given the high degree of vulnerability they have with one another. Changes that may seem minor to an outsider (for example, to a land conservancy worker removing camps from the riverbottom) may have significant impacts for people who are affected. Rich gained acceptance in the Santa Clara riverbottom. However, many did not. I was frequently told stories about the violence that broke out on the Santa Clara River after people migrated from the Ventura River. Luke, a white man in his mid-50s who grew up in Ventura, described the move from the Ventura River to the Santa Clara:

> Let's see. I stayed out down at the east end of the city, but everybody was getting beat up bad and stuff stolen. I mean, 2 x 4s to the head while they're sleeping. I'm like, "I can't do this."

Luke moved back to the Ventura River, but farther north, beyond where people usually live. In order to find a safe place to stay, he is now very isolated. There is only one other camp near him, and he is very careful not to do anything that will bring attention to his camp, such as build a fire for cooking. For some time, Luke would leave his camp at 5 AM and ride his bike to the church where he volunteered with Blaze in the kitchen. Once the city shut down the church program, however, Luke became almost completely isolated in his camp, and I rarely saw him.

Many long-term riverbottom residents described how the restoration work and camp removals have upset the safety and stability within established communities, as this excerpt from my interview with Blaze illustrates:

Jenn: What was it like living in the River Bottom?

Blaze: I haven't lived there in four years. When I lived in there, it was a tight-knit community. We didn't steal from each other. We didn't take advantage of each other. Now days, they do that.

Jenn: Why did that change?

Blaze: All the OG's, old guys, old men and what not, guys we trust. The OG's at the riverbottom, they're all dying off and there's no one to leave an example to the others about how to live.

Jenn: Do you know anything about the work going on in the riverbottoms?

Blaze: The clean up? It makes it look better but that's about it. It don't make it act better. You know what I mean? The people inside, it don't change their actions. Actually, yeah it does, it makes it worse.

Jenn: How so?

Blaze: Because they're taking everything they have down there.

Theo described a similar dynamic when I asked him to describe his vision for the people living in the riverbottom:

> That we can come together and live in harmony. Help each other. I miss that. At one time it was really that way. That they open it up and let people live free. That they can let people have a taste of real freedom again. All they have to do is clean up after themselves.

Even though the camp removals have such a negative impact on the social relationships within the riverbottom community, the restoration workers remain largely unaware of the effect of their work. They see their actions as ones that support people moving out of the riverbottom and into permanent housing. However, because affordable housing options in Southern California are limited, people are often housed in motel rooms, single occupancy rooms, and low-rent private rentals that may be shared with strangers. These housing options can be highly isolating and individualizing for people who are accustomed to living within and relying upon the relational community within the riverbottom landscape.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I describe how dehumanization occurs through conservation work. Environmental activists leverage environmental regulations and public water quality monitoring in a way that constructs people in the riverbottom as trash. However, it is not simply the narratives of the conservationists that are the problem. The insidious logics that allow anyone to see "other" people as "outside" society enable and legitimize this exclusion. It is also the ways in which some scholars theorize otherness as an individual experience or condition abstracted from the conditions that create it. Even efforts to ameliorate or critique this exclusion can unintentionally reproduce the conditions they seek to change. What would it mean to theorize an othering and exclusion of social groups in context? This takes a radical commitment to get past the binaries of "same" and "different" or "good" and "bad." Doing so requires vulnerability and a willingness to release a certain amount of control. It also requires on-the-ground reflexivity, and sometimes it means challenging the norms of what "should" happen. When I began my fieldwork, I had fairly clear ideas about how I should interact with people I met, and I tried very hard not to cause harm. One of the great values of embedded fieldwork is that one quickly learns that the world is so much more complicated that our preconceived notions and concrete rules. For example, it would have been problematic, to say the least, if I had tried to become friends with every person I met in the riverbottom. That seems relatively clear. However, to reject offers of friendship, of hospitality, of gratitude even, is also exclusionary. Thus, the safest, most humane way forward seemed to be to acknowledge that reciprocity is possible across significant power differentials, and when achieved, relationships can be humanizing. It also requires a significant ethical commitment. The position with a greater formal power holds the primary responsibility for minimizing harm. This does not mean a collapse of all boundaries, but rather

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requires healthy ones. Healthy boundaries are generally flexible, and are negotiated in practice as trust and relationships develop.

CHAPTER 3

CUTTING THE GRASS: THE POLITICS OF SECURITY AND INVASION

I met Mark and Adrian from the land conservancy to observe how they use chemicals to remove *Arundo* in the riverbottom. We were going to be working in the State Park area that they started clearing adjacent to the land conservancy's property. When I arrived, Adrian was standing in the parking lot with two women in their early 20s and a blue-uniformed highway patrol officer. The women wore olive green pants, khaki button-down shirts with California State Park logos, ball caps, and hiking boots. Upon talking with them, I learned they were State Park interns who felt lucky to have jobs where they could put their environmental science degrees to use.

"What do you do?" I asked.

One of the women responded,

"Different things every day, usually outdoors. Depending on where we are, we do different kinds of weed management."

Today they were going to be spraying the leaves and stems of *Arundo* with a form of the herbicide glyphosate, designed to be safe for aquatic environments. To prepare, the interns donned full-body Tyvek clean suits, rubber boots, plastic safety goggles, and gloves before pouring measured amounts of the chemical, water, and blue dye into plastic backpack containers, which they then strapped onto their backs.[30] For my part, I carried a large pair of sharp, metal loppers to manually cut down the stalks of *Arundo* that had grown too large for the foliar spray.

As we walked into the riverbottom, I turned to the highway patrol officer, who happened to be next to me, pointed to the pair of heavy black binoculars that were dangling from his neck, and asked:

"What are you here for?"

"Bird surveys," he responded.

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[30] Physical cutting is not sufficient on its own because the plants simply grow back. Herbicide is needed to kill the rootstock in order for removal to be effective.

"Anything you're looking for in particular?"

"Bell's vireo [an endangered bird]. We found some last year."

Then, he pointed to the pair of loppers in my hand and inquired,

"What are those for?"

But before I could answer, he interjected,

"To cut off the homeless' fingers?"

I looked up at him, unable to muster a response. He laughed almost instantly and said he was just kidding and that he wished the land conservancy would clear the camps from under the freeway overpass.

Occasionally, there are instances during ethnographic fieldwork that seem to communicate whole realms of complex interrelationships and layers of meaning within a single, succinct interaction. This was one of those moments. Consider that, while two female environmental scientists were strapping a chemical poison to their bodies in order to eradicate a problematic plant, a male California Highway Patrol officer was wearing a pair of binoculars around his neck to protect an endangered bird. Add to that the officer's impulsive—and disturbing—association between chopping off human fingers and cutting down stalks of *Arundo*, and one can easily see that scales of moral worth work in ways that structure the uneven distribution of security and protection. Indeed, not all forms of life are valued equally. In dominant Western culture, plucking a blade of grass does not typically engender a significant degree of ethical reasoning. Stepping on an ant or swatting a fly might elicit a twinge of guilt, though probably not a great deal of debate. However, dogs and cats are a different matter entirely, let alone humans.

One of the ways that organisms are ordered is through the Great Chain of Being, a hierarchical scale that places God at the top and inanimate objects at the bottom. All forms of life lie somewhere on the scale: plants rank between the nonliving and the animals; "simpler" animals like the ant or the fly are below more "advanced" animals such as dogs and cats; and

humans occupy the space at the top, just under the deities. The Great Chain of Being was first formalized as a concept in the works of Aristotle, Plato, and other early Greek philosophers (Lovejoy 1936), although hints of the idea appear earlier in the Bible. For example, in the book of *Genesis*, God created humanity in his image and granted dominion over nature (Smith 2011). While Plato suggested that not all of creation occupies the same metaphysical level, it was Aristotle who first postulated that animals should be ordered into a single *scala naturae* (or "ladder of nature") (Lovejoy 1936). In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle (1997) constructed a hierarchy among animals that related sensory ability to intelligence. He associated higher intelligence with a greater ability to be taught, and ranked the senses according to how each affected one's potential to learn. For example, he considered all animals to be intelligent because all animals can sense (as opposed to plants, for example), but animals unable to hear (such as bees) were deemed less intelligent, and thus ranked lower than hearing animals because he believed that animals needed to hear in order to be taught. Aristotle prioritized sight over all other senses because "most of all the senses, [sight] makes us know and brings to light many differences between things" (p. 1552). The Great Chain of Being has been instantiated within modern biological science through the phylogenetic scale, which is so pervasively taught in present-day biology classrooms that the ordering of organisms from protists to primates has come to be viewed as common sense, or natural.

The implications of this diffusion of the Great Chain of Being into everyday life extend beyond biology and textbooks. There are moral rankings implicit within the ordering of life. Greater value is attributed to organisms that are positioned higher on the scale, with humans, who elicit the greatest moral consideration, at the top. Moving down the scale, other forms of life are afforded more protection the more "human-like" they appear to be, rendering beings with the

greatest amount of difference from the human ideal less worthy of protection or even

consideration. Moreover, the phylogenetic scale intersects with other scales of moral worth, such

as the sociozoologic scale, which ranks organisms according to their social role, or how well

they fit into society (Clark 2015). Invasive species, for example, which are non-native organisms

that are thought to cause economic or environmental harm, rank low on the sociozoologic scale.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that these categories of classification are themselves

mutable. They are not so much natural orderings as categories that are constructed in relation to

changing physical and social relations, and transfers can occur laterally across very different

categories of classification (Haraway 1997, Helmreich 2009). And yet, the categories themselves

enact a particular material politics, as they simultaneously construct and are constructed by the

world. For example, classifying organisms as invasive performs ethical work by offering what

Jonathan Clark (2015) calls, an "ethical shortcut" that circumvents discussions of *whether* an

organism should die, because "the label has already settled this question for us, rendering all

invasive animals 'killable' without further debate" (p. 37). Different scales are not isolated from

each other; they interact to construct intersectional moral statuses, which means that organisms

that rank low on both the phylogenetic and the sociozoologic scale face a greater risk of being

excluded from moral consideration and killed with impunity (Clark 2015). For example, the

eradication of invasive plants, like *Arundo*, does not engender much, if any, ethical debate. But

if, as Aristotle asserts, plants cannot sense, does the lack of ethical debate matter? This is the

central question addressed in this chapter.

Introducing *Arundo*

Giant cane. Giant reed. Spanish reed. Elephant grass. Wild cane. Carrizo cane. Caña brava.

These are just some of the common names of the plant that biologists call by the formal binomen

Arundo donax. To people in the riverbottom, *Arundo* is known as "bamboo," a plant to which it

bears an incredible likeness. *Arundo* grows in tall, dense clusters that are difficult to navigate

both physically and visually, especially as the plant matures. When they are young, the stems of

Arundo are green and flexible, but with age, they harden into thick and woody reeds that do not

easily bend or break without tools or the application of significant force. One of the most

challenging days I spent in the Ventura River was the day we shuttled a large pile of *Arundo*

from the edge of the river where it had been cut and stacked by volunteers to the bike path

outside of the riverbottom, out of the water's reach. There were five of us working together and,

when we first began, the mound of cut plants rose higher than the top of my head and was just

about as deep. I observed the pile and naively thought that I would simply tuck a bunch of

Arundo under my arm and carry it out over and over until the pile was gone. But as the work

progressed, my arms ached from trying to wrangle the deceptively unruly stems that were more

than twice my height into bundles that I could carry, my ankles swelled from repeatedly slipping

on the smooth, round stalks that escaped my grasp and fell to the ground, and my body bore the

scratches and bruises of being poked and scraped by stray plant parts and sharply cut edges.

Needless to say, I was fairly cranky by the time we were done (which was only mildly assuaged

by the meal that followed at a local taqueria with Mark from the land conservancy and another

volunteer). My crankiness was not merely related to hunger, fatigue, or pain. I was irritated, at

least in part, because *Arundo* acted in ways that simultaneously defied my expectations and

resisted my efforts to remove it. It was the plant's lack of cooperation that felt frustrating, and

perhaps—if I am being honest—somewhat insulting. My frustration came from its lack of cooperation with my objective, from its resistance to my efforts to remove it. That plant simply refused to behave the way it was *supposed* to behave.[31]

It was through this experience that I began to understand and even empathize with the anger and, at times, the hatred of many of the people who were working to clean the riverbottom of *Arundo*. To say that conservationists in Ventura generally disliked the plant would be putting it mildly, which was evident in the responses I received when I asked how they felt about it:

"A lot of people in our world call it the weed from hell. It's so difficult to remove."

"It's insanely intrusive…. *Arundo* is a nightmare. It's why I drink tequila."

"It's nasty business. It's such a challenge to get rid of because it's such a resilient beast."

"I hate it with a passion."

"I think it's a scourge. The less *Arundo*, the better, that's how I feel."

"I one-thousand percent support its eradication. I want it all gone as soon as possible."

"It's just sucking the river dry. They're awful, horrible weeds."

"In this state, it gobbles up so much money."

Through the use of highly negative and extreme words, conservationists communicated just how strongly they felt about Arundo and its removal. For example, the plant was not merely intrusive, but "insanely" so; it was not simply hated, but hated "with a passion"; and its eradication was

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[31] In contrast, I did not feel this way on other days when we were cutting down the plants with loppers. Then, the work felt somewhat gratifying. I remember how the metal blades of the loppers made a satisfying crunch as they sliced through the thickened cellulose stems, followed by the entire plant's falling over. *Crunch. Fall. Crunch. Fall. Crunch. Fall. Crunch. Fall*—until entire swaths of the riverbottom were cleared. On these days, the plant was compliant (or at least it seemed to be at the time), and in turn, I did not hate it. If anything, I felt ambivalently caught between the positive feelings of satisfaction and progress associated with the restoration work, and a sense of loss and guilt from the awareness of what the plant and its removal meant to people who lived in the riverbottom. Indeed, my feelings toward the plant and my understanding of its place in the area are complicated.

supported 1000%, an order of magnitude exponentially higher than the full 100%. This begs the question, why such negative feelings toward this particular plant?

One factor contributing to *Arundo*'s vilification is its classification as an invasive species. Although there is no single definition, two key components are largely accepted as criteria that must be fulfilled in order to consider an organism invasive: (1) it is non-native, and (2) it causes economic or environmental harm and is not under human control through domestication or cultivation (Beck et al. 2008, Invasive Species Advisory Committee 2006). Invasive species are considered so partially because they are organisms that are living, growing, and reproducing in geographic areas outside of what ecologists consider their natural or native habitats. As organisms that are out-of-place, non-natives have the potential to upset ecological relationships because they are beyond the range of predators that would ordinarily check their growth. This lack of predation can facilitate the rampant spread of non-natives into new environments, introducing new challenges for native species through increased competition for resources, increased predation, interference in reproductive cycles, and changes in broader ecosystem conditions, such as food webs, soil chemistry, or fire regimes. However, it is important to note that not all non-native organisms are considered invasive. For example, many non-native ornamental plants and agricultural weeds cannot reproduce or spread widely without human intervention, and they tend to stay within or near gardens or other human-dominated areas. These plants are considered to be under human control through cultivation or land use practices that keep them from spreading into and taking over non-human landscapes. Likewise, organisms that escape cultivation or domestication (or that are introduced directly from other natural areas) and become naturalized in non-human landscapes without causing overt economic or environmental harm are also not generally considered invasive. For example, ring-necked pheasant, which was

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introduced to the United States from Asia in the mid-19th century, has become such an economically significant game bird that many state natural resource agencies actively manage pheasant populations to increase their numbers, and in 1943, South Dakota designated the pheasant as its official state bird.

Invasive species, then, are not only organisms that are in the wrong place, but they are organisms that are believed to cause harm through what is often framed as aggressive and uncontrollable growth into new landscapes. This means that there is a location component (out-of-place) and a behavioral component (out-of-control) that influence whether an organism is deemed invasive. According to the California Invasive Plant Council, *Arundo* meets both of these criteria. In the 1820s, *Arundo* was intentionally introduced to Southern California from the Mediterranean for erosion control because the plant tends to form dense colonies by reproducing asexually through rhizomes, or underground stems (Bell 1993). It was thought that these networks of underground stems would help stabilize stream banks by holding soil in place during the infrequent but heavy storms that are common to the region. However, these same characteristics also make the plant difficult to remove because the rhizome mats are nearly impossible to dig out (requiring the use of herbicides to kill), and new plants can be generated from a mere fragment of the rhizome. This high fecundity (a common gendered and racialized discourse surrounding invasive species—see Subramaniam 2001) enables fast and flexible reproduction, which is blamed for *Arundo*'s uncontrollable growth and subsequent invasion of "natural" landscapes. Mark, the conservation manager, described *Arundo*'s propensity for colonization to volunteers during the land conservancy's Earth Day restoration work event:

> It's a scourge in our waterway. It's a grass species that came over from the Middle East about 100 years ago. It basically takes over waterways. Just about every creek and river in Southern California is under threat of being completely choked out by this species.

Mark's explanation that the grass "came over" hides the historical context that *Arundo* was invited and intentionally brought into the United States to work. Most problematic animal and plant invasions have an origin story that involves the intentional or unintentional actions of humans. Intentional introductions occur when, like *Arundo*, a person or group of people bring in an organism that they believe will provide environmental, economic, or cultural benefits without an awareness of (or regard for) the potentially negative impacts of the introduction. In contrast, unintentional introductions happen by accident, through actions such as the release of ship ballast water or the transportation of packing materials and cargo shipments, which have become an increasing concern with the rise of global trade and travel. However, despite the central role that people play in creating and exacerbating ecological invasions, human responsibility is often articulated as a distant historical fact (thus minimizing its relationship to current problems) or ignored completely when invasive species are characterized as inherently dangerous and aggressive organisms. For example, Mark's description that *Arundo* "came over" from the Middle East to take over and choke out waterways in California places the responsibility for any problematic consequences of its presence on the plant by reinforcing the perception that *Arundo* is invasive by nature. Moreover, *Arundo*'s behavior extends beyond taking over waterways and crowding out native species, as Mark explained:

> When I used to work up in Ojai, I removed *Arundo* just to remove *Arundo* because it's horrible for the environment. Doesn't provide any habitat. Sucks up too much water. It's a fire hazard. There are a couple other bad things. Oh, and then it gums up the waterways when there is a flood. It gets stuck against drainage channels and becomes a flooding hazard just by itself. So, I mean there are so many reasons to get rid of it no matter what's going on with the social situation.

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Mark articulates what many people in Ventura described as the main harms associated with *Arundo*: it provides a poor quality habitat for animals (for example, birds are not known to nest in stands of *Arundo* or use it as a food source); it takes up and stores high amounts of water, which reduces water for native species (and people); and it is seen as both a fire and a flood hazard.[32] From this perspective, *Arundo* is not merely an environmental problem; it is dangerous. The plant's presence in the riverbottom could literally bring disaster in the form of drought, flood, or fire. This is a common way that invasive species are framed in scientific and media discourses, which describe invasives as biological disasters that threaten the security of healthy environments and native organisms (Hulme 2011, Robbins & Moore 2012, Subramaniam 2001). The framing of *Arundo* as both a disaster and a threat is reproduced in the language that the land conservancy uses to introduce the plant, which is illustrated by the following quote from Mark's tour of one of the land conservancy's properties during their annual volunteer appreciation picnic:

> This is a nonnative, invasive, cancerous plant. You need to think of *Arundo* as a cancer. It grows and takes over healthy areas just like how cancer takes over healthy cells.

Mark employs a health metaphor as a way to communicate *Arundo*'s dangerous qualities to members of the public.[33] The cancer metaphor symbolically constructs *Arundo* as a pathological invader whose unrestrained growth harms healthy components of the external landscape 'body' by comparing the plant to the rampant reproduction and spread of malignant cells within the human body. By extension, native organisms (including people) within the local community who behave appropriately are implicitly constructed as the "healthy cells" threatened by *Arundo*.

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[32] For these reasons, *Arundo* removal is generally viewed as an important part of restoration work in Southern California, and a necessary step in restoring the Ventura River to a natural state.

[33] Other metaphors that are used to communicate *Arundo*'s unwieldy behavior include a "gas guzzling SUV" (to compare *Arundo*'s water uptake to the more efficient usage of native plants) and "Bermuda grass on steroids" (to describe how *Arundo* can spread and become a monoculture, and how difficult it is to remove once it has become established).

Mark chooses this metaphor within the context of a volunteer picnic held on one of the land conservancy's properties farther up the river, where encampments are not as common. *Arundo* removal is the main problem on this property, and as Mark explains to the group, the land conservancy has a responsibility to be a good steward of the land (i.e., they are responsible for creating a healthy landscape), which is why they cannot let the *Arundo* win. He uses the comparison to cancer to provide a justification for the land conservancy's use of herbicides to remove *Arundo*:

> With cancer, you use the least effective dose of chemicals to keep the cancer from taking over healthy cells. Or, it's like when you give a sick kid antibiotics. You do what you have to do and get done with it.

Cancer cells are so inherently dangerous that, according to modern medicine, they require the use of poisonous chemicals to destroy them. The harm produced by the treatment is justified by the lethal consequences of allowing the cancer cells to multiply. By comparison, the herbicides are constructed as the chemotherapy necessary to eradicate the "cancerous" *Arundo* and reestablish homeostasis (i.e., healthy functioning) within the system. The second metaphor comparing herbicides to antibiotics performs similar work. At their core, antibiotics are designed to kill. Their intended targets are microorganisms that cause disease by invading and multiplying inside other bodies. However, because antibiotics are non-specific, they can also kill healthy organisms such as gut bacteria, and cause unintended side effects. These "civilian" causalities and their negative impacts are justified because it is more important to act against the bacteria than risk illness, especially when one is a parent responsible for the health of a sick child. As Mark states, "You do what you have to do and get done with it." Moreover, there is a military subtext operating beneath the surface of the health metaphor that reinforces the militaristic construction of invasive species. Language surrounding cancer is rife with military metaphors. Cancer is the

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enemy and public health efforts to eradicate it in the United States are framed as the "war on cancer." People bravely fight and battle the disease, the advance or retreat of which is tracked and mapped within the body. Even the various stages of cancer treatment have been described as military tactics (e.g., Lyman 2014). In war, there is death, there is destruction, there are even unintended causalities, but these are legitimated by the fear that the consequences of not fighting the battle are worse than the cure. Fear legitimates war as the only viable option, and makes unacceptable outcomes seem like reasonable sacrifices. On the day of the volunteer picnic, Mark began the tour by leading the group of a dozen or so volunteers to a small clearing. He gathered the group around him and pointed to where the trail ahead disappeared into what appeared to be a tunnel of *Arundo* and said, "I am going to take you through a war zone. That is a solid wall of doom." Not one person questioned the conservancy's use of herbicides against *Arundo*.

The interpretation that *Arundo*'s behavior is out of control is what makes it appear particularly threatening. This connects to how we construct publicness and civility. *Arundo* does not behave appropriately in public. It causes harm by spreading easily, by exhausting resources, and by being difficult to remove. These are threatening behaviors because control is so central to our idea of safety that resisting control becomes associated with being unsafe. Thus, being out of place and out of control conveys a presupposition of harm that constructs *Arundo*—and invasive species more broadly—not just as a problem, but as a danger and a threat, which practically compels its removal and implicitly justifies the costs.

The War on *Arundo*

Controlling and removing *Arundo* is an expensive activity. A cost-to-benefit analysis conducted by the California Invasive Plant Council estimates that $71 million was spent over a 15-year

period (from 1996 to 2011) to remove *Arundo* from California's coastal watersheds at an average cost of $25,000 per acre (Giessow et al. 2011).[34] To learn more, I contacted Carrie, a natural resources specialist who was one of the first people to raise awareness and organize work around *Arundo* removal in Southern California. In the mid-1990s, she banded together a team of federal, state, local, and private organizations to eliminate *Arundo* from an Orange County watershed, and the plant has been her nemesis ever since. Over the years, Carrie has held a variety of job titles at various environmental agencies and educational institutions, but her moniker, "The Queen of *Arundo*," has remained. She currently manages environmental resources for the military, and I went to meet with her on the base where she works:

Fieldnotes, 14 February 2014

The Queen of *Arundo* drives a white Chevy pickup and works for the United States military. She has long curly gray hair and wears three silver rings on each of her hands. She picks me up in the parking lot outside the main gate and drives us onto the base, stopping briefly to hand our government-issued IDs to the uniformed man at the checkpoint. We wish him "good day" as we leave the booth, traveling past beige buildings and metal fences scattered across a surprisingly rich landscape of low-lying plants, shorebirds, and open water. We park at the Point, facing a large lagoon, and sit side-by-side in the truck talking for almost two hours. Seals about to birth pups frolic in the water in front us while soldiers create a distant fog of discharged weapons to our far right. With a metronome of ocean waves behind us, I learn that this base is the home of the largest intact tidal wetland in all of southern California. It is surreal to say the least. I am not exactly sure what I expected when I got in the car this morning to meet the Queen of *Arundo* at a military base in southern California, but this was not it.

After the interview, I ask her what it's like to do this kind of work for the military. She tells me it's not that different from her jobs at other organizations, but she has more restrictions and hoops to jump through here. She also has more funding, but the funding

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[34] The Ventura River watershed claimed $7.5 million in *Arundo* removal costs since control measures began in earnest in the mid-1990s, just over 10% of the $71 million total budget for the state (Giessow et al. 2011).

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ebbs and flows; when it does become available, she often has little notice and needs to spend a large amount of money relatively quickly. Also, everything she does has to be justified according to the mission of the military, which is to protect the United States of America. So if she wants to remove *Arundo*, it has to have some connection to that mission; otherwise, she can't do it. They have to be careful how taxpayer dollars are spent. She says that's a good thing. This base has won awards for the work that they've done. They do more than the minimum and more than many bases have. They have even proactively restored some of the wetland systems on their property, just in case the military should need the mitigation credits in the future.

The rich setting of our interview aside, most of my conversation with Carrie focused on her work 20 years earlier. Armed with degrees in Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation, Carrie spent twelve years as an environmental consultant conducting plant and animal surveys for development permitting until the work became too difficult to continue:

> It was kinda like writing the obituary for a site because they were going to come out and bulldoze it and make a shopping center. I was like, "You know, I don't think I can do this anymore."

In search of more fulfilling employment, Carrie completed a master's degree in biogeography because "it continued to help bring the whole ecology thing together," and took a position with a national land conservancy, which led her to the restoration side of applied environmental work. This was in the early 1990s, when wetland mitigation was gaining traction as an environmental regulatory practice in response to the new national "no net loss" wetland protection policy. The idea behind "no net loss" was to keep the overall wetland acreage in the United States constant by balancing the wetlands lost through development with wetland creation through restoration and mitigation. At the time, it brought renewed hope in the environmental field's private sector. Carrie began to work on the restoration of one of the largest rivers in California, where *Arundo* had taken over much of the floodplain. She advocated for removing invasive plants as a

mitigation strategy to improve existing wetlands. This ran counter to predominant practices at the time, which focused on creating entirely new wetlands instead of repairing ones that had been damaged. As Carrie described:

> Getting rid of invasive species was just unheard of back then. They were like, "Yeah, well, that's nice but you still have to build a wetland." I was like, "No, we can build a wetland just by removing the invasives. The wetland will come back on its own." No one had heard of that. This wasn't built into any mitigation. Nobody was doing that.

She began working with local regulatory agencies, federal agencies like the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Army Corps of Engineers to see if they could bring back wetlands by removing *Arundo*. Carrie explained that part of her rationale was that it would be a more efficient way of using resources, because smaller amounts of money could be used in more (and larger) areas:

> You could take $100,000 and get rid of *Arundo* on a mile of reach of river, but if you have $100,000 and you want to build a wetland, you can only build an acre.

Although it would take longer to "create" a wetland this way, Carrie's hope was that they could also produce more wetland acreage per dollar with more flexibility, since projects could be completed (and financed) in smaller portions over time. To test this hypothesis, she started a voluntary watershed group focused on removing *Arundo*. Regulatory agencies, public works, landowners, college students, and the occasional university researcher all began attending. Many of the participants were representatives of groups that did not normally speak to each other, especially the regulatory agents who, in her words, "usually put everyone off." Carrie described how the group members built real camaraderie as they began conducting small removal projects in the watershed:

> One of the guys from Fish and Wildlife said something and then the Water District guy made a joke about him like "you're such a dork" or something. Then he stopped all of a sudden and went, "Wow. You know, I never would have said something like that to your

face." And the other guy said, "I never would have let you say something like that to my face." It was like we broke down so many barriers. I thought, "Wow, this is such a bonding experience. *Arundo*'s bringing us all together. It's so beautiful." But it did. It really did.

It is somewhat ironic that a vilified plant united people who came together with the common goal of orchestrating its demise. Perhaps it was helpful to have a common enemy. Yet, despite the seemingly overwhelming consensus about the need to remove *Arundo*, there was still a relative lack of knowledge about how to do it effectively. Carrie explained how a woman who serendipitously contacted her about a mysterious plant eventually helped them find some answers. The woman, it turned out, was a plant physiologist who had just completed her Ph.D. and moved to California from the east coast to take a position at Cal State University, Long Beach. She was trying to identify a plant that she kept seeing, which she though looked suspiciously like a giant form of *Phragmites,* an invasive plant common in the eastern United States, but one that would have been out of its range on the west coast. Carrie explained:

> Somebody directed her to me because at that point I was becoming the Queen of *Arundo*. [*Laughter.*] She called and said, "What is this crazy *Phragmites*?" I was like, "Let's go look. I don't know what you're talking about." We met and went out. She just pointed and I was like, "Okay, that's *Arundo donax*. It's nothing." She said, "Well, I'm a plant physiologist and I'm gonna study it," and I was like, "Okay, I have a list of questions that I need answered about *Arundo* so we can better attack it. Can you do that?" She did. She was awesome.

One of the topics they researched was something Carrie called the "mythology" that *Arundo* was "a plant from Hell that would grow everywhere and anywhere, and that if you chopped it up into little pieces, every little piece would form a new plant." She also wanted to figure out the most effective way to apply herbicide:

There's all these different ways. You can spray it on the leaves, or you can cut the plant, let it re-grow, then spray it on the leaves, or you can just put it on the cut stumps. Tell me about *Arundo*. How does it grow? What does it need? What are its cycles, so that I can understand it better?

Learning more about *Arundo*'s physiology eventually helped Carrie and the physiologist develop a more effective management plan. First, they discovered that the legends about the plant's dangerously high reproduction rates were not accurate:

> [The physiologist] got the skinny. She told me that, "No, not every piece will grow." The interesting thing she found was that when *Arundo* grows, there's a basal set of stalks that comes out. In the springtime, the outer stalks (the outer branches or ring of stems) start to collect rooting hormones in the leaf nodes, but only along the outer branches, and the hormones go away by summer and fall. It's only in the spring because the spring is when it floods in Western Asia and Eastern India where *Arundo* is from, and when it floods, the outer branches lay down. That's when they have the most opportunity to root. If you're going spend a lot of energy creating rooting hormone, do it when it makes sense. That's in the spring when there are floods; otherwise it's not a big deal.

This meant that, as long as they did not cut in the spring, there was no need for concern about the stems growing into new plants. Because of this, they could mulch the cuttings or simply leave them on the ground to decompose, which would allow the nutrients in the plant to return to the soil instead of being completely taken away from site. A second discovery was that fall is the best time of year to spray with herbicide, which Carrie explained:

> You get [the chemical] on the plant, and the plant needs to absorb it, but you don't want it to just absorb into the leaves and kill off the top because you've got all those roots. You want to find the time of year when the plant will pull [the chemical] down into the root and kill it, and that was in the fall. Because in the fall, she said, the plants go into a dormant stage and pull all the chlorophyll and nutrients out of the leaves and back into

the roots to save for the next time they want to do a push. That's when the plants are most likely going to pull the chemical on the leaf [down to the roots].

So Carrie and her *Arundo* team started to experiment in the field with different cutting and herbicide treatment regimens, making new discoveries along the way. For example, they learned that *Arundo* desiccates very quickly after it has been cut, which seals up the stem and keeps things (like herbicides) from being absorbed. However, if the plant is growing in the shade, the cut will stay moist so there is a longer window where the plant can be sprayed effectively. Eventually, the team developed a master list of what worked and what didn't work, and that's when things started really taking off, as Carrie explained:

> The Fish and Wildlife Service started to get into this idea of using *Arundo* as mitigation and there was this whole, "Well, how many acres do we do? What are we…? How do we do it?" Then suddenly consulting firms jumped on that, and now I'm getting phone calls all day long, "What's the best way to get rid of that radundo?" I'm like, "Okay, first, it's *Arundo* and I'm not gonna tell you until I think you even know what it is because I don't even know what you're gonna go out there and spray." [*Laughter.*] The agencies came to us and said, "We need to know so that when people come to us we can be able to say what works and doesn't work. Give us the way." I go, "Well, there isn't *the* way. There are several ways." "No, we don't want several ways. We want *the* way." Okay, I sat down and honestly tried to type up the way, and I did. I typed up the way for a whole number of different conditions. Still didn't make them happy.

At that point, the treatment protocols Carrie developed were all based on a value of efficiency. Carrie and her team were working to identify the most effective way of killing *Arundo* with the least amount of chemical, the lowest effort, and the lowest cost, and they had become fairly successful at it. Then one day, Carrie received an unexpected request:

> So I get a call from Parks and Rec saying, "What are you doing? You're gonna kill my program. I have to manage all this park along this river and I have to get rid of all this

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Arundo. I am hiring big crews to go out and do this. They have to stay employed all year long. When you go and say all they've got to do is cut once and spray a little bit and they're done, what do I do with those people? I can't hire them for just part of the year. If I hire somebody, they've got to work all year. What am I going to have them do?" And I'm like, "Okay. Condition number 23—. " That's how we started to work it out. I started to realize that there were all of these conditions and all these different agencies that do things differently. I couldn't just cut them out and say, "Well, too bad. This is the best way to do it." That would've killed their program, so we created a chart of all these different conditions.

Carrie's entanglement with *Arundo* began with the goal of better understanding the plant's physiology in light of over-determined narratives and mythologies about its potential to cause harm. Through her work and the work of her team, we can see how *Arundo* is more complex and more biologically and behaviorally diverse. It is by striving to understand that complexity that Carrie developed an effective protocol for *Arundo* control in all of its multiplicities, including a multiplicity of human values that range from efficiency to keeping people consistently employed. The traces of this work, which was undertaken two decades earlier, still exists on the Ventura River. Mark and Tony from the land conservancy are using Carrie's protocols, which were handed down to them by an intermediate organization. Of course, these protocols are not exactly the same; they have changed over the years and are still changing, yet the roots remain. Mark and Tony seem to draw particularly from the method designed for Parks and Recreation to keep people working year- round; however, they are trying to keep their the volunteers—their free labor—engaged throughout the year. In fact, the same protocols can be designed to meet multiple values.

At the end of our interview, I asked Carrie how she feels about *Arundo*, the plant that has been her adversary for 20 years. She replied:

Well, I have a lot of respect for it after all these years of working with it. I just see it as a plant out of place that doesn't play nicely. I see it as a very easy plant to get rid of biologically, but a difficult plant to get rid of politically.

As Carrie's story demonstrates, there are complex politics associated with the work of removing *Arundo* from areas where it is unwanted. There are the knowledge politics of identifying control measures, the regulatory politics of applying herbicides in wetlands, and the interpersonal politics of coordinating between and among various human actors. However, once *Arundo* control is underway, there are also political ramifications that occur as an outcome of removing the plant. This next section addresses some of the human implications associated with *Arundo* removal work and its status as an invasive plant species.

Civilian Casualties

The question remains, does the lack of ethical debate surrounding the eradication of invasive plants matter? I argue that it does. First, there is the ethic that proposes that all life is important and should be respected as such. Within this framework, the idea that invasive plants are outside the bounds of ethical consideration to the degree that they can be killed with impunity is problematic, if for no other reason than it is worth critically considering the systemic, organized taking of life. This does not oblige us to ignore environmental harms, or even to refrain from working to remove or control invasive species, but rather to take a step back and question underlying assumptions (about life, about nature, and about responsibility) in order to identify negative implications that escape awareness, and to consider alternative possibilities. My intention in this section is not to redeem *Arundo* by ignoring its problematic aspects, but to complicate predominant understandings of the plant and our current attempts to control it. It is, if nothing else, important to recognize and take into account the complex ramifications of actions

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implemented with good intentions to establish a more complete and, I would argue, a more just means of going forward.

In the Ventura River, invasive species discourses were superimposed onto people in ways that enabled dehumanization and displacement. As a reminder, there exists both a location component (out-of-place) and a behavioral component (out-of-control) that helps to determine whether an organism is considered invasive. Similar to *Arundo*, the homeless in Ventura were often described as being from somewhere else, as stated by this land conservancy employee:

> It was a big thing for me to learn that not everybody was from here. I met a lot of people who said, "Where am I supposed to go?" And I said, "Well, where are you from?" "I came all the way here from the Carolinas or from the Midwest where being homeless involves frost-bite and snow and here it only rains one month out of the year." You've seen our weather just in the couple days that you've been here. What I found out was that there was this underground network that we were really on the map, if there was one, for being a good place on the West Coast to be left alone. Once we realized that, we realized we had to get off that map.

 The theme that Ventura's homeless population was not from Ventura arose during interviews I conducted with city officials and social service workers, in addition to the environmental workers. The attractive climate, the county jail, and the county medical hospital were frequently cited as reasons for the influx of homeless individuals to the city, and the "repatriation" of people back to their "home" state or their "home" city were discussed as important components of solving homelessness in Ventura.

People living in the riverbottom were also constructed as out of control, as Tony from the land conservancy explained:

> In my town where I grew up in upstate New York, there were one or two homeless people and they were the son or daughter or brother or sister of somebody in that town. They had a place to stay but just were struggling with mental illness and living outdoors.

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[In the riverbottom] there were a lot of people here who were doing it by choice because they liked the lifestyle. They supported themselves on crime and, you know, meth has a lot to do with it. Very rarely did we come across a sober, working person who was living in the riverbottom by choice. You have your episodically homeless people who are like a rent check away from it—living in their car, living on couches—but you have just more of the kind of defiantly homeless down there that were not ready to stop doing meth or crackin' 40s at eight in the morning.

Another common theme that emerged across multiple interviews and observations was that people living within the riverbottom were constructed as uncontrollable primarily for two reasons: lack of a stable family and drug use (typically "meth"). Stories about meth use, meth labs, and the outrageous, illogical choices of meth users were commonly told (usually to volunteers) and were generally very abstract, as were the stories about criminal behavior, which were often told in connection to fueling meth habits and generally about stealing a large quantity of bikes (which was not a particularly accurate description of the homeless people I met). In these ways, both the *Arundo* and the people living within the Ventura riverbottom are constructed as being invasive species—out of place and out of control. In the following sections, I analyze some of the material implications of this overlapping construction of invasiveness.

"Let nature become what it should have been all along"

Constructing people as invasive species within the landscape engenders and legitimates particular types of actions. As Tim Cresswell (1997) writes, "Weeds are the botanical equivalent of dirt. Just as dirt is matter out of place, weeds are plants out of place" (p. 335). Weeds do not belong; they are not from here. When invasive species are constructed as both out of place and out of control, they can engender feelings of displacement and threat. Restoring things to their

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proper place, or disciplining proper behavior, has the potential to assuage these feelings, which a volunteer for the land conservancy removing *Arundo* described:

> I think [*Arundo*] is terrible. There was an article in the Star this Sunday about it again and it's really a problem. Invasive species are bad. And they hurt local species, natural things that are supposed to be here.

> *How did it feel to remove it?*

> Therapeutic. Yeah, when I pull weeds, I don't know what it does but it lifts me somehow out of the depression. Yeah. Gardening, weeding, landscaping—all that stuff I like.

> *What's therapeutic about it?*

> About pulling weeds and beautification? I never really thought about it, I just went with it. I just identify what makes me feel good.

This volunteer describes the process of removing *Arundo*—and pulling weeds more generally—as healing both for himself and for the environment. There is a subtext here of creating order through removing that which offends or does not belong. Mark, the conservation manager, framed the restoration work in a similar way during one of his patrols of the site:

> You can see with the whole upper terrace here, the *Arundo*'s being treated. This just got sprayed. We just kind of basically let native plants reseed themselves and let nature become what it should have been all along. Some school kids have come and planted mugwort, some willow trees, some sycamore trees, and cottonwood trees. So we'll kinda do some planting, but that's more for the educational benefit than for just the environment. The environment has plenty of native plants to take over these areas without our help. That's usually the way to do it.

In this example, the conservation manager articulates that the main responsibility of the restoration work is to remove the negative influence of *Arundo*. The invasive plants are positioned as the main barrier to the growth of native plants, which, as he articulates, already

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contain everything they need to "take over" the site and make it "what it should have been all along." This reveals a teleological assumption of a natural ordering to the community composition, and according to this logic, the active removal of entities that are understood as both out of place and out of control is meant to restore the natural order of things in a manner analogous to a bacteriological conception of restoring health by removing a pathogenic entity. Active intervention, then, is focused on removing the offender, rather than through the creation of health.

The exception to this is the active planting done by schoolchildren, but these actions are seen as primarily beneficial for the children as opposed to the physical site. During a planning session that I observed between environmental educators and the conservation manager, it was decided that students would begin planting first in the areas where encampments previously existed. In one sense, this reflects a logical, logistical choice. These areas tend to be more open, and thus easier to plant. However, I cannot help but wonder what moralizing and civilizing lessons these actions (perhaps unintentionally) communicate. The recolonizing of spaces in the landscape that were, in some sense, a physical manifestation of deviance (and defiance) through the planting of native plants that, by "nature" of their identity, will not grow out of control.[35] Restoration work is a reclaiming of history as much as it is a reclaiming of territory (Robbins 2014).

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[35] There were also plans for students to paint over the graffiti-filled freeway stanchions with a mural of a natural-looking wetland. For me, this became even more salient when I later learned during the meeting that the students doing the planting would hail primarily from the predominantly Hispanic, low-income Westside neighborhood sandwiched between the Ventura River corridor and the Downtown Business District. It is disturbing that something that seems so innocuous as planting acorns with schoolchildren could potentially contribute to *ecological gentrification* (Dooling 2009) through a type of *epistemic violence* (Spivak 1988) and the creation of docile subjects.

"You're not removing the camps, you're removing the Arundo"

The process of constructing invasive species, at least as experienced here, can be considered a process of Othering that invites action. Weeds invite pulling and, over time, the valence towards removing the Other can come to be seen as natural. How was this enacted within a landscape where human and nonhuman "weeds" overlap?

In Ventura, the first line of attack for the land conservancy was *Arundo* removal, which allowed them to begin clearing the property while they were still in the process of taking it over from the previous landowners. As an employee of the land conservancy stated:

> We went down there as much as we could before we acquired the property and the county at the time was doing a large Arundo removal project. We thought, "Great, you know, *Arundo* removal is one step." We don't have to say you have to leave because there's also liability for storage of possessions when someone's lived on public property and squatted there for a while. The city of Fresno went in a few years ago with backhoes and bulldozers and just kicked everybody out of this community. Bulldozed their stuff and threw it out. A lot of people lost personal items, identification, things like that. ACLU got a hold of it and 5.3 million dollars later, we now have a policy for how, on *public* land, county and city land, we have to notice and offer to store possessions for up to 90 days for people who have been on that property.
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> So [the *Arundo* removal] dove-tailed nicely with what we wanted to do because removing the *Arundo*, you're not removing the camps, you're removing the Arundo. Removing the Arundo removes a lot of cover and puts them right out in the open and makes it really uncomfortable to want to stay there.

The *Arundo* removal functioned as a way for the restoration work to begin in a less controversial way. The land conservancy was able to begin clearing the site before they officially owned the property. However, *Arundo* was more than a weedy plant to the people who were living in the riverbottom, many of whom used the thick, sturdy stalks as both a cover and a building material, which Mark described during a patrol:

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You see the clearing was a U.S. army vet, a veteran from Vietnam. Huge camp. He actually had a sign up that said something about being a veteran and have pity or have mercy on me. … But, right here, this whole stretch where you see all these chippings, 30 foot high Arundo. So this was just a wall, an impenetrable wall, that he was hiding in and you could only really see if you looked down from the bridge. One of the camps over here had a… like a regular door… door frame… door knob… you would open the door through the Arundo and she would have a barbecue, a full kitchen sink, dressers, carpets.

Removing the *Arundo* functioned both symbolically and materially as a removal of the privilege of privacy and of domesticity from people living in the riverbottom, which was legitimated, at least partially, through the seemingly objective value placed upon the problematic nature of *Arundo* that necessitated its removal—at least from the perspective of those in dominant positions of power.[36] There were also fewer constraints on removing *Arundo* than on removing people and their property. *Arundo* removal was a path of least resistance that, once initiated, normalized the removal efforts through a sort of function creep over a period of approximately three months, which became one means by which the discursive construction of the people living in the floodplain as invasive (i.e., both out of place and out of control) became material, legitimating their dehumanization and displacement. This is displacement that is occurring through ecological restoration practices, or *restoration displacement*.[37]

Passive Restoration

The restoration displacement that occurred through the land conservancy's work in the Ventura River is not an isolated instance. It represents one example of a larger shift in conservation work,

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[36] The new landowners made a public spectacle of the newly exposed camps by holding a social event at the property and taking groups of members of the community, social service agencies, environmental organizations, government officials, and business owners on tours of the camps while people were still living in them.
[37] I am indebted to Gail Hollander for providing me with the articulation of the term *restoration displacement* in her comments as a discussant on a conference paper version of this chapter at the 2014 American Association of Geographers (AAG) meeting.

where environmental practitioners are increasingly responsible for managing the social or human

aspects of their sites in addition to the non-human dimensions. For example, in Southern

California, environmental consulting firms can be hired for a service that has become known as

"passive restoration." Passive restoration essentially means removing the invasive species around

homeless encampments with the goal of getting the people to leave. A private ranch in Ventura

hired an environmental firm to perform this service on their property in the Ventura River.

Michelle, one of the consultants on the job, introduced me to the concept of "passive

restoration":

> Some of the projects that we work on don't really have an active restoration component.
> If we're removing homeless habitat, that's passive restoration. This is about reducing or
> eliminating homeless habitat because homeless people are trespassing. As a property
> owner, you don't want to expose yourself to liability from illegal access, illegal activities,
> any of that kind of stuff, so you have to reduce your exposure. The easiest way to do that
> is to get rid of the *Arundo* because that's a simple way to eliminate the attraction. For
> passive restoration, we have to remind ourselves we're not removing every stitch of
> *Arundo* but only those plants where somebody could sneak in and stick a tent.

During my interview with Michelle, I was surprised to learn that removing homeless people

through managing their "habitat" has become a distinct category of environmental consulting

work. Passive restoration is a service that Michelle's company is regularly hired to provide for

local private landowners. The work for this particular landowner in the Ventura River, however,

added a second component that included bi-weekly patrols to monitor for returning homeless

encampments, and to engage with people living on the property. Michelle explained how this

came about:

> Initially, they looked at private security companies but they were like, "Is there poison
> oak down there?" And I said, "Yes" and the reply was, "Hmmmmmmm…not so much.
> Thanks." Once they come down and see the site, they're like, "I'm going to have to go

there? I'm going to get my security uniform dirty if I walk into there...not so much."
[*Laughing.*] So then it turned into, "Well you guys are down there monitoring for
resprouts anyway…you guys talk to those people and keep them out."

When the private security company refused to take on the riverbottom patrols, the job was added
to the consultant's *Arundo* monitoring. Twice a week, Michelle, who has a bachelor's degree in
geography but considers herself an untrained naturalist, and Lisa, a biologist who is employed by
the same consulting company, patrol the ranch for camps. Lisa described how Michelle's newly
developed tracking skills help them to find homeless people in the riverbottom:

> Michelle has actually become quite a good tracker. She can see trails…she's got quite an
> eye for trails. That's what it's all about because you can't walk through the entire area
> because it's so big. So it's looking for new trails.

Michelle continued:

> Let's say I have a little backpack and a tent and I want to find some place to sleep for the
> night, "I know, I'm gonna put my tent up there." Once I start making trips in and out over
> a couple of days, the quality of the leaf litter changes because I'm trampling it and
> breaking it down. It becomes finer and finer and the oxidized layer that was on top isn't
> anymore because there's churning from foot traffic. So I might not find somebody right
> away, but I will invariably say, "Oh yeah, there's a wear spot." And/or you pay attention
> to footprints in the dirt. I can tell if you wear Vans, tennis shoes, or Converse shoes.
> *[Laughs.]* And you start looking for bicycle tracks and a lot of in and out.

I said to Michelle that, "It's like a different kind of field guide" and asked if these type of patrols
were becoming "a thing." Michelle responded:

> Well, it could have become a thing. The Nature Conservancy contacted me once they
> realized they had a homeless population on their property in the Santa Clara River
> watershed. They own 16 miles of property. They said, "I understand you guys offer
> security services?" [*Laughs.*]…And I was like, "Oh yeah, I've always wanted the Nature
> Conservancy for a client because if I'm never going to get a job at the Nature

Conservancy, at least I can have them as a client, right?" *[Sigh.]*... But I said no. I don't want to patrol more riverbottom property. Our company is diverse enough that we have other projects that we work on and just to invest time in being nah-nah-nah, the riverbottom patrol person is hard. So, if you take on an *Arundo* removal or habitat restoration project and you find there is a homeless component to the project, I think it's easy enough to tap in to the local social services network and get them to help you along with law enforcement.

Michelle and Lisa were not the only environmental workers performing homeless camp removals, regular site patrols, and general security services as part of restoration work. There were, of course, the employees at the local land conservancy (Mark, Tony, and others), who were clearing and patrolling their property in the Ventura River. Additionally, the national land conservancy who Michelle turned down eventually hired someone to manage their properties in the Santa Clara River (in addition to contracting with a private security company to conduct armed patrols). This is a new development. Twenty years ago, natural resource managers paid less attention to people in their sites. For example, when I asked Carrie, the Queen of *Arundo*, if she had to deal with homeless people or removing encampments on the rivers that she worked on in the 1990s, she responded:

That was not our—we didn't want to be involved in that. If we had any incident, we'd usually call the local law enforcement, but I wasn't dealing with it directly.

She went on to describe one of the rivers on which she worked, which turned out to be a main migration route:

We would be going up that river mapping *Arundo* and there'd be a whole trail of mostly youngish Latino men with nothing. I mean nothing. Don't know exactly where they were getting let off, but they would walk through the gorge of the river.

I asked Carrie how she responded when she saw them, and she replied:

Just smiled and hi. They just smiled and said, "Hi." Or they said, "Hola." At that time with the Conservancy, we weren't law enforcement. We didn't enforce anything.

In some ways, that separation between "humans" and "nature" in environmental work may have been protective for people in marginalized positions who also made use of river corridors. However, with the current shift in categories of work across humans and nature, environmental restoration work is changing on a broader scale, now treating homeless people as non-humans. Describing *Arundo* as "homeless habitat" is dehumanizing language, as is the term "passive restoration." In contrast to "active restoration," where the primary nuisance species is directly removed, it is harder to remove homeless people directly without law enforcement—and, as people, they cannot be removed with loppers, herbicide, or mechanical masticators. Instead, *Arundo* removal serves as a proxy to removing homeless people, who, in this scenario, have also become a nuisance species (the homeless).

Language use matters. During one of my first visits to a watershed meeting in Ventura, I was explaining my research project to one of the watershed managers. The person suggested, not so gently, that I might want to change my study to focus on another pressing issue because the homeless had already been "eradicated" from the river. The word "eradicated" is part of the everyday lexicon of invasive species management (i.e., a goal might be to eradicate *Arundo* from the Ventura River), and the watershed manager appeared unaware of the slippage she unconsciously performed (which instantly convinced me that I should continue with my intended research topic). So, does the lack of ethical debate surrounding the killing of invasive species matter? I argue that it does, if for no other reason than it should not be so easy to think about— let alone enact—the "eradication" of an entire group of human beings.

Conclusion

Invasive species are rarely understood as complicated organisms. We long for the elegance of simplicity. There is a common moral ontology that, while perceived as reality, is in fact normative. There is no simple description of reality; ethical shortcuts are constructed entities, and ethics can be compressed in unhelpful ways. There is also a compressed ethical time frame. How do we do messy ethical work in a web? It takes more time, and we often want to outsource.

I have devoted a fair amount of this chapter to *Arundo's* construction as an invasive species, though the trained ecologist in me sometimes struggles to reconcile the tension between the actual material harm that *Arundo* (and other invasive species) cause with the problematic ethical implications of constructing invasives. Similarly, the encampments in the riverbottom do cause physical environmental harm. My intention is not to romanticize either the *Arundo* or the homeless, nor to ignore material problems, but to complicate them. The social construction of *Arundo* is not arbitrary. However, I would argue that it is overdetermined. I first came to this insight through my research as an ecologist, while I was working as a field researcher in a lab group that was studying *Phragmites* (the same subject of study for the physiologist who approached Carrie). Like *Arundo*, *Phragmites* was seen as an evil plant, and there was no shortage of research on its terrible environmental impact.[38] Our lab group was conducting research on the effects of *Phragmites* on fish populations, and the data suggested that the plant was not as detrimental to juvenile fish as people generally thought. From the research that followed, a more complex portrait began to emerge, one that was unpopular in the invasive species circle. Indeed, it is difficult to produce research that goes against the grain of what is

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[38] There are actually entire academic conferences devoted to the teasing out the similarities between *Phragmites* and *Arundo*.

accepted. This experience, along with my perspective on invasive species and on research in general, is the material effect of a different kind that typically goes unrecognized.

People and plants always escape the categories we construct for them. How would our knowledge about nature and people change if we paid better attention to that excess, to the pieces that don't "fit" our preconceived notions and expectations? Would we see each other differently? Would we act differently towards each other? I think we would. I also think it is a necessary step in creating a more just future. I am not as interested in settling debates about the relationship between materiality and constructivism. My project is one that is more focused on trying to understand the pieces that are written out, whether they are physical or symbolic (which are not mutually exclusive categories). I am interested in seeing the value in the undomesticated as an important part of shedding light on the problems that might otherwise escape awareness, and for the possibility of envisioning alternative futures.

CHAPTER 4

CREATING CLEAN AND SAFE PUBLIC PLACES

Fieldnotes, 28 June 2014

I was driving downtown and noticed Andrew, the director for the Downtown Business Improvement District (DBID), standing on Main Street wielding a small trowel in his hand. As I drove past, he knelt down and pulled a plant out of the ground between the edge of the street and the curb. Curious, I turned around and went back. When I returned, he was on a side street, meticulously clearing the greenery out of one of the cracks in the sidewalk. It occurred to me that he was weeding the street the way one might tend to a yard or a garden.

A few days later, I was downtown with a friend and we passed by the grand reopening party for a jewelry store that relocated to a new storefront on Main Street. The event was also a fundraiser for the DBID's Family Reconnection Program, which pays for one-way transportation out of Ventura to send people who are homeless to live with a family member or in a residential facility. Andrew stepped out of the store as we walked by and we stopped to talk. During our conversation, I mentioned that I saw him weeding the street,

> "You were paying such careful attention. It looked like you enjoy taking care of
> the street, like it makes you feel proud to make sure everything's in order."

At this, Andrew's eyes lit up, he stood a bit taller, and with a broad smile, he declared,

> "I do!"

The Ventura riverbottom was not the only place where weeding occurred. From the downtown business district to a residential neighborhood, the homeless were often seen as problems that needed to be removed from public places. This is not surprising. Cities across the United States display a remarkable lack of hospitality toward the homeless. Exclusionary tactics like defensive architecture and anti-homeless legislation, which make it difficult for people who are homeless

to carry out daily activities in public places, are not only common, they are increasing (Bauman 2014, Fisher et al. 2015, National Coalition for the Homeless 2014).[39] In California alone, there are 500 anti-homeless ordinances in the 58 cities that collectively contain three-quarters of the state's homeless population; and if current trends continue, 55 new laws will be added over the next five years (Fisher et al. 2015). The present-day proliferation of anti-homeless measures began approximately 30 years ago in response to the dramatic rise in homelessness that occurred in the United States in the 1980s.[40] As city officials struggled to deal with the rapid influx of people living in public spaces, they sought out ways to encourage the homeless to "move along" to other areas by regulating the use and meaning of that space. Don Mitchell (1997) calls this the *annihilation of space by law*, which he argues is an effort to annihilate people who are homeless by erasing the spaces in which they can live, as if it were possible to alleviate the problems of social marginalization, downward economic mobility, or a lack of affordable housing simply by outlawing the people who experience them. However, anti-homeless strategies are not actually implemented with the intention to alleviate human suffering, but rather to hide it.

To understand why this makes sense from the perspective of cities, we must situate contemporary anti-homeless measures within their political and economic contexts. In the 1980s and 1990s, the twin forces of neoliberalism and globalization ushered in a dramatic shift in the meaning and value of public space. In the wake of migrating industry and heightened competition to attract and retain capital, cities have gone into the business of selling themselves

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[39] Defensive architecture, which is also called *hostile architecture* or *disciplinary architecture*, uses physical modifications in the built environment to deter undesired social behavior. Examples include armrests in the middle of benches that keep people from lying down, sprinklers and metal spikes installed in city sidewalks to keep people from remaining in place or storing belongings, and outdoor speakers that project the sound of jackhammers or other unpleasant noises to deter sleeping at night. Anti-homeless laws are state and local ordinances that ban behaviors such as camping, sleeping, sitting, lying down, loitering, loafing, storing personal belongings, begging, living in vehicles, and sharing food in public places.

[40] The majority of anti-homeless laws in California have been enacted since 1990, and ordinances that ban camping and food sharing in public are the newest and most rapidly growing categories of legislation (Fisher et al. 2015).

(Harvey 1989, Zukin 2009). They have become destinations fueled by the production and consumption of culture in an effort to entice capital in the form of business, tourism, and consumer spending (Norcliffe et al. 1996, Zukin 1995).[41] In this new cultural economy, image can be more important than materiality. As Sharon Zukin (2009) writes:

> Because it's difficult to come up with new ideas, competition condemns cities to create ever more places that aim to be distinctive, but look just the same. Like the aspirational consumption of contemporary consumers who buy high-status goods in the hope of expressing the high status they would like to have, cities engage in aspirational production, producing more modern art museums, arts festivals, hipster districts, and cafés—all because they want to be *different* (p. 9).

The neoliberal city has put the urban landscape to work by selling the fantasy that "the good life" is possible, even when reality falls short. And fall short it often does. Critical geographers have documented how large-scale redevelopment projects tend to materialize uneven power relations in the built environment in ways that privilege elite members of the community at the expense of those on its margins (Brenner & Theodore 2002, Graham & Marvin 2001, Smith 1996, Swyngedouw et al. 2002). Yet, it is the harsh realities of injustice that must remain hidden in order to keep people believing that they can consume their way to a better life.

This is why it has become so important for cities to "annihilate" the homeless from public space. People who are homeless signify the failures of an unjust economic system. They are the people left behind by migrating industry, excluded by gentrification, and marginalized by social exclusion. Their very presence threatens the city's projection of a community that is successful, livable, and full of promise, and thus compromises its competitiveness for capital in the symbolic marketplace. Furthermore, the presence of the homeless makes visible the downside of

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[41] For example, the extensive downtown and waterfront redevelopment projects that have become nearly ubiquitous in US cities typically include the construction of sports stadiums, conference centers, upscale dining and shopping districts, and other cultural amenities (Gotham 2007, Swyngedouw et al. 2002).

globalization and neoliberal economic policies, thus complicating the glittering assurances of unbounded financial freedom to all who work hard to earn it.

The attempt to purify public space by removing the homeless is an effort to purify the narrative about the community within which the homeless exist. However, efforts to purify public spaces also produce particular kinds of communities. As Don Mitchell (1997) writes, "…what we understand public space to be, and how we regulate it, is so essential to the kind of society we make" (p. 312). This chapter explores the relationship between urban redevelopment and environmental restoration in order to understand how the political economy of landscape transformation shapes how we see the community, nature, and each other. I do this by analyzing the connections between the restoration work and the city, and by situating the community within its political economic context. Then I provide narratives for four different grounded perspectives of "the community," analyzing each for how they define community and the assumptions that undergird that definition (i.e., why that definition makes sense). This chapter demonstrates how political economy constrains possibility, even for those who resist.

Situating the Community

The city of Ventura is bounded by nature, nestled between the foothills of the Los Padres Mountains to the north, the Pacific Ocean to the south, the Ventura River on the west, and the Santa Clara River in the east. This particular geography influences community characteristics that exist within the city. For example, beachside rentals, surf culture, and fishing boats draw on the proximity to the ocean, while hikers, ranchers, mountain lions, and single-family homes converge on the hillsides, spawning community-wide deliberations about the tradeoffs between development and conservation. The city of Ventura is also bounded by social and cultural forces

that influence the community in very material ways. In particular, the 2008 global financial crisis appears to have had a significant impact on the community, and provided the impetus for much of the current struggle over the Ventura River and the shift in value of other public greenspaces and natural areas within the city.

When the financial crisis hit in full force at the end of 2008, California cities had been dealing with years of declining state and federal aid combined with increasing local responsibilities for public service provision. In the wake of the recession, multiple cities, including San Bernardino, Vallejo, and Stockton, could not meet their financial obligations and filed for bankruptcy. The city of Ventura suffered large losses to its investment portfolio, including two $5 million corporate notes (one with Washington Mutual Bank and one with Lehman Brothers, who both filed for bankruptcy) (Panzica 2008). In January 2009, the city council held a special meeting to strategize how to handle an unanticipated $4 million shortfall in the city's 2008-2009 operating budget along with an estimated 10% loss in revenue that would decrease the following year's budget by more than $11 million (Plisky 2009). According to Ventura's 2010 budget narrative, the city was leery of following in the footsteps of other local governments that "resorted to budgetary gimmickry, borrowing, or using one-time funds for ongoing expenses," and instead committed to "living within [its] means" through a major organizational redesign (City of Ventura 2010, p. 1-1). The city's reorganization eliminated nearly 40 permanent staff positions, reduced compensation for all remaining staff by at least 5%, cut city services such as homelessness outreach and landscape maintenance, and expanded the city's Volunteers in Policing (VIP), Volunteer Ventura, and Adopt-a-Park programs in an effort to provide more public services through the work of community volunteers (City of Ventura 2009). Longer-term strategies implemented by the city to increase income prioritized attracting

and retaining businesses, promoting revenue generation through activities such as tourism, and focusing real estate development on "economic development rather than affordable housing" (City of Ventura 2009, p. 153). In other words, in the face of a major budgetary crisis, the city of Ventura employed strategies that aligned with broader political economic trends and neoliberal values by decreasing public services, increasing the responsibility placed on individual citizens for the public good, and prioritizing economic productivity across all aspects of the city.

These changes had a significant impact on the landscape of the city as it was remade to promote these heightened economic priorities. One of the first changes was the establishment of business improvement districts (BIDs), which are public-private partnerships that function as quasi-governmental entities. Businesses and property owners located within the BID's boundaries pay an additional tax to fund projects and services, such as litter removal and landscaping. These funds (plus additional money that local governments agree to provide) are managed by a nonprofit organization that is headed by a paid executive and governed by a board of directors comprised of government officials, business members, and property owners.[42] Ventura created two BIDs in the aftermath of the financial crisis. In 2011, hotels in Ventura, Oxnard, and Camarillo banded together to form Ventura County West, a Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) managed by the newly formed Ventura County Lodging Association. Hotels, inns, and RV resorts within the TBID agree to pay an additional tax assessment of 1.5% of their gross rental revenues (a fee that is usually passed on to guests) with the goal of marketing the area as a distinctive tourist destination to increase its competitiveness with nearby Los Angeles and Santa Barbara (Bronzini 2011, Hoops 2011). The city of Ventura also established a Downtown Business Improvement District (DBID) run by the Downtown

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[42] BID revenues are often supplemented by public and private service contracts and other means of providing income. For example, Ventura's Downtown BID gained $144,000 in contracted revenue from the city for providing its own baseline services, such as trash removal (Downtown Ventura Partners 2015).

Ventura Partners with the goal of promoting economic development in the city's prime downtown area through promotions and image development, economic restructuring, and streetscape maintenance to create "a safe, inviting environment for shoppers, workers, and visitors (Downtown Ventura Partners 2015, p. 5). As part of these efforts, Ventura installed parking meters on the main commercial streets (amid much public opposition) and used the funds to pay for a police officer dedicated to the downtown area (Martinez 2012). They also hired downtown "Ambassadors" through Block By Block, a private company that contracts with BIDS across the country to provide environmental maintenance, safety, hospitality, and outreach services. The Ambassadors are part of a program to "take back the parks" from the homeless by being a presence in the parks, engaging with people, tracking undesirable behaviors, and controlling access to public bathrooms (Martinez 2015).[43] Downtown Ventura Partners hire and train the Ambassadors with funds provided by the City of Ventura through its citywide "Safe and Clean" public places initiative, whose creation coincided with that of the BID.[44]

"Clean and Safe" programs, which cities across the U.S. have established in conjunction with BIDs and urban revitalization projects, are based on the assumption that removing all indications of dirt and danger from public spaces will create a more consumer-friendly environment, attract more shoppers, and stimulate economic development (Glyman & Rankin 2016, Mitchell & Staeheli 2006). This logic legitimizes a sanitization of public space through the

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[43] See Sleiman & Lippert (2010) for an analysis of how downtown ambassadors act as police proxies through "clean and safe" rationalities that target the homeless and other marginalized people whose presence produces discomfort with consumers.

[44] The Ventura City Council adopted the Safe and Clean Initiative in 2011 after directing city staff to establish a plan for dealing with vagrancy that would also support the city's 10 Year Strategy to End Homelessness (Lambert 2011). The goals of the plan are to make every public place in the city safe and clean by "activating" public places to deter "anti-social" behavior, creating and enforcing vagrancy laws (i.e., anti-homeless laws), and instituting a campaign called "Hand-Up, Not Hand-Out," that directs people to donate to one of the three Homeless to Home (H2H) organizations instead of giving money to panhandlers, and reorients social service organizations to require homeless people to participate in case management in order to receive access to services such as food, showers, or laundry facilities.

removal of people and objects that are seen as dirty and dangerous because they threaten

consumerism. Because BIDs endow private entities with a disproportionate power to regulate

public spaces through the funds they control (and the symbolic capital they hold), consumerism

has become overvalued in the urban landscape to the detriment of alternative values such as

"fairness, constitutional rights, and compassion" (Glyman & Rankin 2016, p. 7).[45]

I witnessed an example of this trade-off in downtown Ventura. A woman had been living

in a small pocket park on Main Street, reportedly for years. The park was essentially an

undeveloped commercial lot with grass, a few trees, some benches, and a small path that people

mostly used as a cut-through to get to the public parking lot on the next street. Stores flanked

each side of the property, and a large sign advertised that the lot was for sale, signaling that its

lifespan as a park was perhaps drawing to a close (Figure 6). A woman in a wheelchair kept her

belongings along the wall on one edge of the park and, during the day, she would sit on Main

Street, asking for spare change and speaking with people who passed by. I was told that she was

a regular figure downtown. Rather, she *was* until the city discovered that she had a small income

and financial resources. The discovery happened during the annual point-in-time (PIT) count that

HUD requires of all of their funded communities each January. Adam, the city's community

services manager, divided Ventura into zones and assigned a pair of volunteers to survey each

zone. Andrew, the executive director for the BID, and Christine, the Homeless to Home housing

specialist, surveyed people in the downtown area, including the woman in the park. At the next

monthly Social Service Task Force Meeting, Adam announced that the city would no longer

tolerate people sleeping and storing belongings in the parks. He specifically mentioned the

woman in the wheelchair, who they had determined had some financial resources, which meant

that she belonged in housing. Within weeks, the woman was gone from her corner of the park,

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[45] See also Beckett & Herbert (2010), and Rankin (2016).

and in her place, there were a number of extremely large, heavy planters filled with attractive, blooming flowers (Figure 7). This instance of 'weeding out' is more than metaphorical. How did the woman feel about her newly enforced housing status? Three months later, she was still returning to the park, the place that had been her home for years:

Fieldnotes, 09 May 2014

The woman who used to sleep in the park on Main Street is wearing a pink sweatshirt and sitting in her wheel chair on the right side of the park across from the potted plants and trellis that occupy the space where she used to live. She is resolutely holding up her middle finger toward a blacked out cop car on the street in front of her. I recognize the officer from the social service task force meetings. He is standing outside the car writing on a pad of pink paper and making calls on his cell phone. As I walk by, I hear the woman saying over and over, "That officer is spying on me" as she continues to give him the finger.

Figure 6. Park for sale in downtown Ventura.

Figure 7. New planters in the downtown park provided by the BID.

Unfortunately, the weeding out of undesirable people is not a novel practice for cities. According to Grégoire Chamayou (2015):

> The founding act of police hunting, the inaugural scene of the roundup power that was to become that of modern policing, is the immense hunt for the poor, idle people, and vagabonds that was launched in Europe in the seventeenth century—first with the Poor Laws of Elizabethan England, and then in 1656 in France, with the creation of the General Hospital, where "the poor were to be interned and fed." In doing so, royal power chose to solve the problem of poverty by the massive incarceration of the poor. Of course, to intern them, they had first to be captured. (p. 78)

Even earlier, in the sixteenth century, there were guards posted at the city gates in Nevers, France, to keep the poor from entering, and special officers called "beggar-hunters" were tasked with the job of chasing-down and arresting people who asked for alms in the streets (Chamayou 2015). Although exclusion of the poor from the urban landscape is not new, the rationales and

practices themselves change over time. One of the major changes currently underway is the spread of these practices from the "built environment" to the "natural" landscape of cities. Until recently, the edges of many rivers and streams in the urban environment served as protective, interstitial places. Floodplain protection laws inhibited economic development, and the public generally did not venture into these areas, especially places without marked trails or defined parks. In Ventura, it was the Ventura and the Santa Clara riverbottoms as well as other waterways in California, such the Los Angeles River, the Santa Ana River, the San Diego River, the Yuba River, the Truckee River, and Fife Creek, to name a few. There are now restoration projects aimed at clearing out homeless encampments on all of these waterways, and there are many more examples across the United States. The "hunt" for homeless people in the city has now invaded nature.

The restoration work in the Ventura River is connected to the city's post-financial crisis political economy. One of the city's first income-generating strategies after the crisis of 2008 was to focus real estate development on "economic development" (City of Ventura 2009, p. 153). In 2010, the city proposed a controversial plan to annex 800 acres of unincorporated land plus 800 acres of agricultural land in the Cañada Larga River Valley in order to build 100 executive style "ranchette" homes with the hope of attracting wealthy business executives. A number of local environmental organizations rallied together and formed a coalition that successfully fought the Cañada Larga development. As an outgrowth of that work, they decided to revive the Friends of the Ventura River group that had been relatively defunct for a number of years, a group that Anne, one of the leaders, described:

> We had this really solid, active group together, and decided that this would be the perfect group to reenergize Friends of the Ventura River. That same group stayed together. We added the city and the county and other government agencies over time to strengthen the

coalition. Basically, it came back alive out of the fight against development of the Cañada Larga Valley, which is a watershed to the Ventura River watershed. We're trying to do our best to improve the health of the river. The organizations involved are all pretty committed to trying to prevent a lot of building in the floodplain and trying to improve the health of the river. That goes back to…you probably have a few other questions about the homeless…*[fading voice]*

The environmental coalition defeated the city's plan, and then began to focus more concertedly on restoring the Ventura River. They garnered more access to funding by deciding to formally create a river parkway, which helped to manifest some of their goals. However, river parkways are also connected to economic redevelopment, which helps to legitimize the environmental work in the eyes of city and county government officials as well as the general public. Mark from the land conservancy explained this economic connection between the work in the riverbottom and the city:

> *Mark:* We're transforming it back into a river parkway. I mean seriously, the Pittsburgh River and these parkways all over the country used to be polluted nightmares of…what is it… blight? Blight, right?
>
> *Jenn:* Yes.
>
> *Mark:* And these river parkways all across the country are now economic vitalizations to their downtowns and pretty recreational corridors now. They used to be just total shitholes, so… that's the overall vision. We've got a 15-mile recreation corridor, half of which has been shat on for decades. You've got paradise in the upper Ojai watershed with all the trails and the preserves there. We're transforming it down here. It's just a little bit more challenging.

By working towards the creation of a Ventura River Parkway, the environmental groups were able to work within the logics and values of the city and its desire for economic development. Although physical development was not possible (or at least very difficult) in the riverbottom

because of floodplain protection laws (and resistance from conservationists), the city leveraged the recreational potential of the river as yet another tourist attraction. The river was integrated into the city's "Safe and Clean Initiative," which mirrored the themes of hygiene and safety in the restoration activities of removing trash (i.e., cleaning the area) and invasive species (i.e., making it safe). Tony, also from the land conservancy, explained the public support they received from the downtown business district at one of their first events in the riverbottom:

> We had the Downtown Ventura organization, the downtown business booster group saying that making this a tourist destination would give so much business to the bike depot over here. You could be in the middle of nowhere, and then in five minutes you could be in a downtown restaurant having a nice lunch. This would be such a boon for our downtown revitalization project. They bought into the project. I went and presented at their board meetings and got them to pretty unanimously vote to participate as a friend of the river.

During my fieldwork, the Friends of the Ventura River applied for and received National Recreation Trail status for the Ventura River. At the coalition meetings, people discussed the value this designation would provide in heightening the visibility of the river to potential tourists across the county.

Many of the people I spoke with in Ventura described the restoration work in the riverbottom as a project that was bringing the river back into the community. However, as the movement to bring nature back into the city gains ever more popularity, it is important to recognize that ecological restoration work is not a value-free enterprise. Restoration is influenced by the political and economic values of the broader community within which it is situated, which can shape not only the use and meaning of the "natural" landscape, but the quality of the community as well.

Defining the Community

From a city's perspective, homelessness is a "community problem." In Ventura, the city's Community Services Manager, Adam, was the point person for almost everything related to homelessness. He was the link between the community members, the community organizations, and those involved in community development. One afternoon, approximately two-thirds of the way through my fieldwork, Adam and I were in a car together, traveling back from Los Angeles. George, one of the social service directors, had arranged a bus trip to L.A. to tour apartments constructed out of metal shipping crates. The ride on the bus had been fairly bumpy, so Adam and I chose to ride back to Ventura in George's car to avoid exacerbating the motion sickness we were both experiencing. It was not very often that I had the opportunity to talk with Adam without many other people around, and our relationship had been tenuous at times throughout the year due to the sensitivity of his position. As George drove, Adam began to ask questions about my research and my findings, which people often did when they got me alone, especially in informal settings. In particular, he wanted to know how I reconciled all of the conflicting perspectives and experiences I encountered in my fieldwork. In my response, I explained that I tried first to understand each perspective on its own terms. For example, my first responsibility is to understand how he feels and experiences his work, and if I am successful at that, he should be able to read something I write about his perspective and feel understood. Then, I will also have an interpretation and an analysis, which he may or may not agree with. He asked me what I thought about how the city was dealing with the homeless, which was the sensitive issue because the city (and Adam in particular) were experiencing a fair amount of criticism for their "hand up, not hand out" program, and for closing down a drop-in program for the homeless at a local church. I told him that, my disagreement with the actions of the city aside, I think cities are being

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put in very difficult positions. I have noticed that more and more responsibility is being placed

on communities to provide services within a context of decreasing funds and support. It reminds

me of some of the issues with deinstitutionalization in the 1970s and 1980s, at which time there

was a movement to provide community mental health care without a reciprocal increase in

funding, so communities did not have the resources they needed to provide adequate care. Right

now, it is difficult for cities to opt-out of the tourism trap because they need the private funding

to provide public services—a very challenging position.

"You get it," Adam sharply responded, and then asked me a question that I had heard him

ask nearly every group with whom he worked:

"What *is* a community's responsibility to provide housing for the homeless?"

To which I responded:

"It depends how you define 'the community'."

The following sections provide four different perspectives of "community": (1) managing the

community (via Adam, the community services manager for the city of Ventura); (2) promoting

the community (via Andrew, the executive director of the downtown BID); (3) organizing the

community (via Emilio, the community organizer for the Westside neighborhood); and (4)

feeding the community (via Sarah, the cook at a community drop-in center).

Managing the Community

Adam was the one person mentioned by nearly everyone I spoke with during my fieldwork.

From the riverbottoms to the social services agencies, the environmental organizations, and the

community councils, at some point during the interview or conversation, the person I was

speaking with would pause, look at me, and say something like, "Have you talked to Adam yet?"

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It was almost comical. Adam's position in the city's community development department bridged the areas of economic development and community service. During our first interview, I asked Adam for an overview of his work. He stood up from behind his desk, walked around to a large whiteboard mounted on the wall behind me, pointed to a drawing of three overlapping circles inscribed with the words "economic," "social," and "environment" and explained:

> I work at the intersection of economic, social, and environmental issues. I do not work directly with the population. I work on policies associated with how the city deals with issues associated with homelessness and vagrancy and housing, and how those things are funded, and what the municipal government's role is in interfacing with the agencies that actually work with the populations. I wear a lot of different hats in a lot of different rooms.

The first "hat" I witnessed Adam wearing was that of the coordinator of riverbottom camp removals on city property in the Santa Clara riverbed. I was walking with Tony from the land conservancy, and we heard the hum of a motor approaching on the trail in front of us. Within moments, Adam emerged, driving a green ATV. As he passed by, Adam paused just long enough to give Tony a slap on the back, like a coach communicating his approval. Tony beamed in response to Adam's brief acknowledgement. Tony's response to Adam's attention was representative of many responses I observed among individuals who interacted with him. People would often compete for his attention or seek his approval. Indeed, Adam is a highly charismatic leader, and he knows it. He uses his compelling personality and cultural savvy as a kind of interpersonal glue to bring disparate groups together, which he explained in the following exchange from our interview:

Jenn: What is the most fulfilling part of your work?

Adam: The most fulfilling part is to look back at the relationships between and among the various agencies fifteen years ago—the county government, the nonprofit social

service providers, the business community, the faith-based community, the municipal government, the police department, the public safety agencies, the environmental groups—and see how fractured they were. And in 2013, as you saw, all of those groups were in one place, with the same objective. Fifteen years ago, if we were going through [the camp removals] that you witnessed a couple weeks ago, we would have had picketers, we would have had newspaper articles and stories about the big, bad, mean, awful, municipal government. But instead, what we have is general agreement that these environments are not the right places for people to live and work and we need to do something different. So the most fulfilling part is seeing how those relationships have changed. It's been a big part of my work over the last fifteen years.

Jenn: How did that change come about?

Adam: I firmly believe that that change came about based on what used to be shared goals and objectives but poor communication among and between agencies, and poor resource distribution. I believe that the changes were to understand our shared goals and an application of finite resources to get outcomes that we are all under pressure to get. We realized that we were only going to get those outcomes if we used finite resources in a smarter way and a more narrow way…

Jenn: How did the increase in communication happen?

Adam: It's impossible not to like me, and part of it is the power of personality. I've worked here for 26 years. I know everybody. There's not a room I walk into where somebody hasn't had an interface with me that's positive. I believe a lot of it is… It's trust. It's demonstrated follow-through. It's agreeing to disagree. It's having a history of experience working with me and my office and knowing that we may not agree on everything but there's no deception. There's no sort of goal that's being hidden. Essentially, it's just putting everything on the table and saying, "Look, if we agree with this premise and we agree with this result, can we trust each other in the middle as we go through the process? We may not always go through the process exactly the same, but let's remind each other that we agree

with the premise and we have our eye on the same prize so how we get there is not always going to be the same." It's that simple. It really is. One of the premises we started with, Jennifer, is that every public place should be safe and clean for every member of our community. Almost impossible to disagree. Put yourself in every person's position—the police department, the fire department, social service agencies, the county government, the faith-based organizations, and the business community. Who would disagree with that sentence? So then, what we did is, we wrote—I wrote—an ordinance. I wrote a plan. I wrote a policy called the Safe and Clean Public Places Initiative. And it has five tenets: more cops, more maintenance, activate the area, bring more services to people in that area— and then anti-panhandling campaigns: make sure that people who are well-meaning don't give people money because it manages and maintains their living on the streets and discourages them from going into social service agencies or using those resources that actually end their homelessness. That's it. It's that simple.

...

But that doesn't mean that I don't get…. Anytime and every time someone calls or emails Ventura City Hall to say that there's an issue related to vagrancy and/or homelessness, it ends up on my phone. And frankly, for people that are interested enough to want to know what the hell's going on, this is the exact same conversation I have with them. I've had this conversation, you can tell, a million times. That said, I have city council members to keep happy, and my bosses to keep happy, and the social service agencies to keep their trust, and the public safety agencies to keep their trust, and the faith-based organizations (who I'm accusing of being misguided charitable givers, by the way), and the business community (who people are crappin' on their doorsteps) and I'm the one who goes in front of every one of those and explains this program and explains what we're trying to achieve by it and what their part in it is and explains it's not going to be perfect. We're moving but we're leaving things in the wake that we know aren't perfect. And, that's my job. So it's part public relations, it's part being fast on my feet, it's part being able to go out and facilitate a community meeting in a

neighborhood where people are freaking out, which is what I'm going to be doing with this group. So I talk to the person in the group who seems the most moderate and I say to that person, "Put together a meeting in your community and I'll come out and I'll talk to them." So there will be 15 people in the room. One guy's going to hate me no matter what I say, and one lady's going to love me no matter what I say because I remind her of her grandchild. And for everybody in between it's going to be up to me to explain that it's not illegal to be homeless. It's illegal to engage in behaviors that impact the quality of life for you as a homeowner and a contributing member of society, but it's not illegal to be homeless. … Now, what can we help with? You got somebody shitting in your gazebo that your homeowner's association is paying for? Now you got our attention. You got somebody leaving their beer bottles, or they're drinking out there in public or having sex in public? We'll talk about how we address that as a municipal government, and how *you* address it as a homeowner's association.

…

The *community* needs to decide what the answers are. If the community decides that it's our responsibility for housing and jobs, then let's do it. If the community decides it's not, I'm just an employee. Someone tell me what to do. Do I have personal opinions? Yeah I do. Some council members would say too strong opinions and that I'm pushing an agenda that they haven't approved. I don't know if that's true or not… There's a lot of people who would laugh out loud to hear that I'm an advocate for the homeless. On the other hand, some people characterize me as being anti-homeless and I would laugh just as loud. I say this is all a balance and there are no great answers. One of the phrases that I use a lot and you'll hear me say is—perfect is the enemy of the good. We are going to adopt policies that people are going to argue are bad for some reason all day long and they're right. But I live in a world where I would say, but look at all the good parts of this policy.

Adam often spoke in long monologues when he was "on," and it was clear from our conversation that he had developed very particular articulations of the problems and solutions. In contrast, as I

got better acquainted with him through my fieldwork, I found him to be fairly quiet, almost reflective during moments when he was not performing his persona as a public official. This may be due in part to the fact that his policies do not reflect his personal views, but have been developed and implemented to make his job manageable. He has been a city employee for over 26 years, during which time he has seen some significant changes in the expectations of his position. It is also clear that Adam interfaces with many diverse standpoints as part of his position, and he described how conflict among them could inhibit progress by causing a stalemate. On one hand, it could be personally frustrating to hold a position where it is difficult to get things done. However, the now-increased emphasis on demonstrating results and measureable outcomes has placed additional pressure on Adam to create change. If he fails to do so, he may lose his job. Adam avoids this by seeking out "objective" goals and values that, on the surface, "everyone" would agree to (i.e., having safe and clean public spaces), which fosters a consensus that hides many of the political dimensions of his initiatives. Adam openly admits that there are problems with his policies, but he sees them as a preferable (and perhaps the only) alternative to an overwhelming negativity that would keep any changes from being made. He is positioned as an intermediary between the public, the city council (i.e., elected officials), and his supervisors (i.e., paid city employees); as a result, he does not have the privilege of taking sides or having a "clean" view of community. Adam's "community" is a diverse, messy, and disparate set of individual and organizational actors with competing needs and interests that he needs to corral and steer towards a direction even as they try to pull him (and each other) apart. He is beholden to the political dimensions of his position, which tend to reinforce existing power disparities while also trying to create change in the ways he feels are possible.

Promoting the Community

Andrew and I met for our interview in a Western-style saloon downtown that he suggested because it was one of his favorite places. We convened at lunchtime, between his morning meetings and setting up for a public movie screening that was going to be held that evening in one of the local parks. Andrew is the executive director of the downtown business district and, as the opening vignette to this chapter illustrates, he takes great pride in the area he oversees. At times, he reminds me of a parental figure of the downtown area, attending the events of his businesses, setting up services for the public, and making sure everything is in order. During our conversation, I asked Andrew to describe his position:

> *Andrew:* I have an interesting role because I was a former journalist. I came here as a reporter for *The Star* nine years ago and covered Ventura. In my coverage, I was always fascinated with the intersection between government and homeless issues. I was covering it for many years, and I'd been down to the riverbottom many, many times. You've probably heard of the big river flood of, I think, it was 2005. There was a push before then even to try and remove some of the illegal encampments down there on the basis of the trash and the—and actually, the real foundation was the police calls, the public emergency response calls. The fire department, the police would go down there and there'd be booby traps and the topography, and it was 2:00 in the morning and it's dark. Then there was the major flood, which really brought it to another level. People got trapped out there. It was pretty terrifying for some. It was like, "This is going to happen again. As a community, we've got to get our hands around it."
>
> I got to cover most of that. Then just two years ago, I transitioned from the newspaper to where now I'm what's called the Director of the Downtown Ventura Partners, which is the business improvement district. These BIDS are pretty common around the country. I'm guessing Nashville probably has one.

Basically, they're usually in downtowns or tourism areas where all the property owners vote to assess themselves on top of their property taxes. I'm the director of that and oversee all of the collective funds. We do a myriad of different things, from—we launched a free public trolley to putting on special events to working with the business to a big part of my job, the part I thoroughly enjoy, is interacting with our homeless population and our vagrant population, because we have both. They're distinct. We've got some truly needy people and we try and help them. Then we've got some jerks. We've got some thugs who are up to no good, who we don't have any tolerance for.

…

Part of my job is, how can we all cohabitate? It's an easy job from the standpoint that everyone's welcome, right? We don't penalize or punish anyone because you're homeless. That's not my thing. It's about the behaviors. I think we've pushed hard to try and educate our stakeholders, our merchants, that we really try and focus on the behavior. If you're minding your own business and you're having a good day and you're polite and you're in the park, that's great. You know what I mean? The parks are public spaces and no one should ever be judged on using the park based on who they are and what their socioeconomic status is.

Jenn: How has interfacing with the business community been?

Andrew: Well, I would actually say it's gone remarkably well for a couple reasons. From Day One, we never said, "We're gonna get rid of those people." It was never us versus them. It was always trying to focus on behaviors. I think that's helped, because most business owners—no one necessarily wants that negative element right outside their store, but they get it. They get that there's some people that are down and out.

One of the services we provide is to respond to any situation where someone feels uncomfortable or threatened, and we do. We try and make it clear that it's not illegal to float a sign. It's not illegal to sit on a sidewalk. I think because enough of our merchants have been here for some time, they understand this

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isn't Disneyland. It's public. They're very public sidewalks. It's not private property. We can't decide who gets to be on our streets and who doesn't.

Jenn: What are people afraid of? What is the fear?

Andrew: The unknown, probably. The stigmas that come with somebody who's seen as being homeless. They potentially could break into my property or something of mine would get stolen or my kids could be threatened in some way. I think the root comes from the fear of not knowing what could happen. I think then there's the fear of the property values and that if enough bad situations happen in my neighborhood, all of a sudden my neighborhood now has a negative perception.

Jenn: Are you from Ventura?

Andrew: I grew up in southwestern Colorado. I've been out here nine years and fell in love with Ventura, to be honest. I'm fascinated by these problems: the human element, the environmental element, and how communities try and balance the two. Actually, that was part of my motivation [for] why I left the paper. I didn't feel like I was that effective or influential from there. Whereas, I feel like now, I can be far more influential and have a voice at the table of what we're doing. I really enjoy that.

Before Andrew became the director of the business district, he was a journalist for the county paper. He provides an example for how that position exposed him to some of the issues in the community and the riverbottom, which fostered his interest in trying to address complicated human and environmental problems in the city. The same interest prompted Andrew to transition from journalism to the BID in the hope that he could make tangible changes. He wanted "a voice at the table" rather than simply reporting other people's voices. From this perspective, it makes sense that Andrew would find working for the BID rewarding, and that he would relish the persona of the downtown caretaker. In this role, it is possible for him to see the material difference that his efforts make in the physical landscape of the city and in the community at

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large. Andrew describes his position as a link between the homeless (and, in his words, vagrant) and the business community, and what I find very interesting is how his sympathies toward the homeless predate his position at the BID and influenced his interest in taking on the new role. My impressions of Andrew outside of the interview reinforced this view. I remember thinking that there appeared to be some effort to hire a person for the BID position who would not be completely pro-business, and who would try to mediate between the business community and the homeless in a way that would benefit everyone. Andrew describes in detail the efforts he has made to build tolerance for the homeless among the district's business owners. Yet, at the end of the day, his responsibility is primarily to the business community. He must produce the city's desired outcomes in order to keep his position and ensure the BID's renewal at the end of its 5-year term, and the homeless have very little input on Andrew's goals or the practices he implements. Unfortunately, throughout my year in Ventura, I noticed that he appeared to become increasingly less tolerant of the homeless, and stopped speaking with me the more I interacted with the homeless community. During or interview, Andrew explained one of the ways the business community was trying to meet their responsibility to address homelessness in the community:

> We actually launched a program—we're very proud of this—called our Family Reconnection Program. We dedicate $2,500 to $3,000 of our budget towards, as the title says, family reconnection. If someone ends up homeless on our streets, for whatever reason, but they don't really—even if they have family here, but if they feel that they can reconnect with family that wants them or a support group in another community, we will provide the one-way transportation to that community. We have very specific goals, because we're not bussing people out of here. For every individual, we have to have verbal or written confirmation that there's someone who's going to receive them when they get there. We have a whole file folder. We work with police to make sure they don't

have any outstanding warrants. We're not just bussing someone out of town who's wanted for something. It's all voluntary.

He went on to point out the program's success due to the number of people they have helped and the gratitude that recipients and family members have expressed to them. He also pointed out some of the potential criticism:

> The reality is, I mean, it's just—we have such demand here, some might argue, "Well, you're just forcing them out of your community." That's not the case. If that is a consequence, then I'm okay with that, because we can only help so many. We only have so many resources. If it costs $700.00 to have an apartment here and the person has $400.00, then maybe they don't—maybe they have a responsibility to go somewhere they can afford. I don't know if everyone gets to decide where they want to live. I can only afford where I can live. Would I want to have a bigger house? Well, yeah, but just because I want it doesn't mean I get it.

Even though Andrew described the Family Reconnection Program as voluntary, and explained multiple times how it was not simply "bussing someone out of town," he ultimately revealed that, if the critics are right, and they are indeed "forcing them out," then he is "okay with that." He rationalizes that the homeless should go somewhere they can afford, as if their position is simply one of geography and poor, petulant choices. Ultimately, Andrew sees people who are homeless as people who are impacting the community, not as people who are part of it. His response illustrates how, even in instances when there are very good intentions, economic priorities often take precedence over more human ones.

Organizing the Community

The Westside neighborhood lies between the Ventura River and the downtown business district. The population of the neighborhood is predominantly Hispanic with a household income that is

generally lower than Ventura's. The Westside has the most affordable housing in the city, although people who live in the neighborhood generally cannot afford to purchase their homes (Community Planning Laboratory 2006). Many of the city's homeless services and drop-in programs were once concentrated along "The Avenue," the main thoroughfare in the neighborhood, although there are currently efforts underway to move them to new locations in order to disperse services (and their impacts) across the city. The story of the Westside is a familiar one in cities across the United States. In an effort to promote economic development, Ventura has focused attention on cleaning up the neighborhood and increasing real estate prices, while people living in the neighborhood have organized to keep their homes and ensure that neighborhood changes are ones that benefit them. Emilio, a community organizer for the Westside, spoke with me about their efforts in the neighborhood over the past few years. He started the interview by telling me the story behind why and how he became a community organizer:

> *Emilio:* I actually used to be a house painter. I had an incident. Painting houses, I used to make a lot of money. Some people used to pay me cash, so I'd be walking around with wads of cash. My parents are diabetic. I went to pick up their medicines, and my mom had just had back surgery, so she had some really strong painkillers. My dad had syringes. You factor that into—my brother just bought a new car, so he's like, "Here go try it to get the medicine." Well, the next thing you know, here's this young Latino male with a wad of cash, syringes, pain killers, and a car that doesn't belong to him. It took a while for things to get cleared up.

> *Jenn:* How old were you?

> *Emilio:* It wasn't that long ago. It was 2008. I had this crazy experience where I went from being this guy who's really good at painting houses, making money, right

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into, "Here's this guy that is being accused of all these things." There was nothing I could do to fight it because all my money was confiscated, even to try to bail myself out.

Jenn: You were arrested?

Emilio: Yeah. Then, finally, when I was released, I went to my house, which was down the street from the courthouse, and I didn't leave my house for two years. I went from being incarcerated here to being incarcerated there.

Jenn: Oh, wow. How long were you incarcerated?

Emilio: It was about a month and a half. It was primarily because some other stuff happened while I was in there, like a riot happened, and things happen. Long story short, for two years, I just was inside my house looking out the window seeing the days go by. Finally, the organization I now work for was doing some sort of voter outreach and education campaign. Somebody came to my door, and they were like, "Oh, we're with… and blah, blah, blah." I was like, "Oh, that's cool." They gave me information. I really didn't care.

Then one day that I was like, "Okay, that's it. I can't do this any longer. I need to at least take a drive down to the beach or something." I ran into a friend. My friend was organizing for that organization. She's like, "Hey, do you need a job?" I was like, "Okay." She got me a job.

I had never done any of this stuff. I had no idea. I had no idea there was Cesar Chavez or there was all these other movements. It never registered in my mind that people like me could do anything like that. The very first assignment that I was brought to was a redevelopment plan for the Westside.

From the start, Emilio's role as a community organizer had a deep personal meaning. It was the route by which he reintegrated himself into the community (and the world) after the trauma and violence he experienced in jail and his subsequent isolation at home. For Emilio, community work was also personal work. He became an organizer in the midst of the city's redevelopment

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of the Westside. For his first major project, he organized a formal response to the city's

redevelopment plan by translating planning documents into Spanish and holding meetings with

various community stakeholders. As he said, "We had no idea what we were doing, but we just

put together a response." I looked over the document they sent the city, and asked him about the

opposition to the new storefront standards that the city planned to require for businesses on the

avenue. He explained:

> We run a very different economy in the West Side. We have mom and pop stores that
> have been in business 30, 40, 50 years. They run primarily on cash transactions.
> Monetary. When you go to Main Street, you see these nice facades, these great business
> concepts that have been thought out. Over there, it's all credit. It's there one month, gone
> in two. Right here, we build as we go. That dynamic is, in a way, what makes this
> community stand out. Not just this one, but most that are in this demographic setting.

> The other issue is that, because we build as we go, not everything looks nice. When you
> have people planning in already built-up neighborhoods, their vision is not necessarily
> what's been happening for decades. They come with this mentality of, "We're just gonna
> get rid of the blight by taking whatever storefronts are available and creating what you
> call 'mixed use'." Which is the storefronts in the bottom, apartments at the top, high
> density. It's beautiful, but that raises rents. Already, as it is, it's very hard for somebody
> who's out on the street to even rent a room. Imagine you're living at the riverbottom; it's
> super hard. That's the context of what I came to do here.

> From there, we were able to put a new dimension to the project. Which was bringing in
> Spanish speakers to find out what was going on, but also raising awareness about the
> effects of gentrification in the neighborhood. Renters, immigrants, single parents, the
> homeless; for the most part, no one ever really tells them anything. In order to build that
> rapport with the community to where they can trust you and they're like, "You know
> what? He's not trying to sell me something"; it takes a lot of time.

At first, they began fighting the city's redevelopment plan by challenging the design standards and bringing to light the implications for existing businesses. They also fought against the privatization of the neighborhood library. Next, they began fighting for things the neighborhood residents actually needed. They surveyed the neighborhood and realized there was a disproportionate amount of childhood deaths related to obesity and violence:

> Eventually, what really happened that brought people together was we went and we canvased the neighborhood. We knocked on doors, and we came across some parents. One had lost her child to childhood obesity, and the other one to gang violence. We kept on walking. We came across more violent deaths here, more childhood obesity there.

> I remember it was an eye-opener. We did a little grid, like they do in crime shows, putting the pins. It was just super, super evident. We realized we have a problem, "Wait a minute. We don't have any green space." We started educating people. We brought in this national expert to do a six-county study on open space. We started talking about a park—because the park and the river are super, super close, because it's fighting for the last open space.

The community rallied around the idea of a park, and identified a potential site in an open lot, which, as Emilio explained, was one of the prime spots slated for development:

> The city identified catalyst sites that they thought would generate new investment. Kellogg Park was one of those catalyst sites. That's why we fought them so hard. We were like, "Hell, no. That's the last big spot." That's why all of it comes back down to if it weren't for this group of people, this whole place would already be a different place, and you'd be talking to somebody else who would probably be telling you, "You know what, this used to be a very bad neighborhood."

By leveraging the health concerns related to a lack of open space on the Westside, the neighborhood won the land and their park, and slowed the process of gentrification. However, the fight was not over:

One of the things that occurred when we were able to win the purchase of the land was that as soon as the purchase was completed, the city just ran everybody out. Pretty much the city just said, "This is a city park and now we're gonna take care of the rest." The people that had worked so hard to make it happen felt like it was just taken away from them.

Part of what I do is to find new leaders that will eventually carry out this work. Because either I'm gonna die of a heart attack one day from getting pissed off, or I'm just gonna be taken somewhere else. I want the residents to feel like, "We've been here since the beginning; we know how to organize." There's a saying in organizing that says, "Your only safe community is an organized one." That's what I'm trying to get at.

Emilio pointed out how community organizing is an ongoing process of resistance, vigilance, and building new leaders. Simply winning the park was insufficient; the neighborhood then had to fight the city from co-opting the project. (The neighborhood did fight the city, and eventually designed their park through a participatory planning process facilitated by the Trust for Public Land. Kellogg Park opened to the public in 2016.)

The Westside neighborhood was also involved in some of the work in the Ventura River. Mark and Tony often referred to Emilio's role in organizing support for the river parkway, especially in the early stages of the project. I asked Emilio for his perspective on the restoration work in the riverbottom, which he immediately connected to the city's Safe and Clean Initiative:

The social impact of the lack of resources and lack of vision of cities is what pisses me off. Why? Because in the city of Ventura, the new city manager and the current city council have an agenda of doing what is called "safe and clean." For immigrants, for vagrants, for low-income people, "safe" means more police, more harassment. "Clean" means they're gonna get us off the streets.

That's where I love the idea of the river, but I feel that in order for the parkway to be a very successful endeavor, we have to look at making sure that the people at the river get

either employment or some sort of direct benefit from the project. That's where we come in, because part of our mission is to promote environmental and economic justice.

As long as I'm here and I'm keeping abreast of what's going on with the river and in collaboration, then I can be that voice. Have you ever been to the meetings over at Patagonia for Defense of the River Coalition? You notice very few people are actually low-income residents, right? You know what? I commend the coalition. They're doing good work, but there is still this moral perspective that is not there.

The Ventura River Parkway is not a project organized by Emilio (or the Westside community) and, as a result, there is some tension for him in deciding to participate in the coalition (and to invoke the neighborhood's support when it is needed). Ultimately, he sees his support of the riverbottom restoration as a way to serve as a voice for what he calls a "moral perspective" that gives precedence to the marginalized. People who are marginalized, and specifically the residents of the Westside neighborhood, are the community that Emilio prioritizes. According to his value system, the built and natural landscape of the city should first and foremost provide economic and/or health benefits for that community. For example, he would consider the restoration work to be more just if it provided economic benefits to people in the riverbottom. For Emilio, the issue is not whether people should profit from environments, but rather, who is systematically profiting from "nature," and who is bearing the costs.

Feeding the Community

Fieldnotes, 22 May 2014

Henry calls me to tell me that he and Joy left the Motel 6 and are back down in the riverbottom. They've made a lean-to with a tarp. "My medication isn't agreeing with me," he says. He feels sick, nauseous, and his eyes are blurry. I ask what I can do to help. He says, "Oh, I can't ask you for nothin'." But then tells me they haven't eaten in three days and they're so dirty because they can't take showers. I ask what kind of food is good

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for them and if they need dog food. He says anything is good—he can make a small fire and cook some hotdogs or hamburger or soup or even sandwiches or peanut butter and jelly. Anything, he says. I tell him I am finishing up some work and I'll come in a few hours.

I call Sarah for help. I'm wondering if she might know if the church has anything I can bring Joy and Henry. When I speak with her, she says she doesn't want to ask the church but that she has some things she can give me because her daughter just moved home and they are "swimming in stuff." She offers up some blankets and pillows. I stop at Sarah's house on the way to the river. She gives me a large comforter, a black garbage bag filled with soft items, and two brown paper grocery bags filled up. I can see a large pan, two loaves of bread, and some plastic yogurt containers. We put everything in my car. I am struck by how readily she parts with these things. There is no debate, at least none that I pick up on. Sarah tells me that Eric (another homeless person) is now taking showers at their house, and that he's really respectful. Before I leave, she asks if I'm hungry and offers me some eggs that she cooked, making sure to tell me there's no meat in them, "Cheese and veggies but no meat." I accept and she scoops eggs from a pan on the stove into a plastic container and hands me a metal spoon from the drawer. I give her a quick hug, and head out because I don't want to be in the riverbottom too long after dark.

I met Sarah at my first social service task force meeting, introducing myself to her after the meeting because she worked at a church that was in danger of having its drop-in program for the homeless shut down. I had heard about the controversy and wanted to learn more. Sarah was the cook at the church and, to my surprise, she immediately invited me to spend time with her in the kitchen so that people could get to know me and trust me. A few days later, I arrived at the church very early in the morning, and she put me to work squeezing a milk crate of oranges into juice for the guests. Sarah lived around the corner from the church, and began working there by chance after she wandered in one day looking for a volunteer opportunity for her nephew:

When I came to Ventura from Camarillo, I didn't know how to handle homeless people. When I would go in the shopping centers, I would go to a separate exit where I didn't have to pass by them because I didn't know if I should give money or not give money. I didn't know. We didn't really have homeless people in Camarillo. My nephew had just come to live with me, and he was playing video games a lot. I read about the church and I wanted him to just volunteer one day a week.

We walked over and just saw a whole courtyard full of people and dogs and guitars and food. Afterwards, I just kept thinking about that place, and then I thought, I really want to go and help a little bit. Maybe I could just peel vegetables or something in the kitchen once a week. That's how I started there: by accident.

That was three years ago. I hadn't been working for a really long time, and it was giving me some self-worth. You think it's just for the homeless people, but it was making me stronger. I was getting a lot of strength back in me, because I had been home for probably about seven years not doing volunteer work. Mostly, I did volunteer work because my son had Asperger's, so I stayed home with him.

It just wasn't that good to stay home that long. That gave me validation over there and made me feel really good. I loved it because I love cooking for large groups of people. I always thought I wanted to have a restaurant, and so here I had a free restaurant and a place to cook and all of the food and people who really, really appreciated it and needed it. It was everything that I like all bundled into one. [*Laughter.*]

I asked Sarah what she found most fulfilling about her work:

Mentally putting together all of the recipes. That's a good physical activity at my age. I'm 55 now, so it's really, really good to keep my mind going. That's a good side benefit for me. I guess I would like to say getting people out of homelessness, but I don't even know if that's really true. We just had a man who died—that we just found out who died a week ago. For the last two years, he would come to our place every day. We were his family, really. We had become that because he had had six heart attacks, and he was only 48 years old, and he couldn't get on social security. They just wouldn't qualify him.

He stayed just two blocks away and lived in the dirt at the Circle K, and the church was as far as he could walk. He had food stamps. He would sell his food stamps for his heart medication, so he didn't have food. We would give him food. The interaction that he enjoyed so much is the true essence of what happens over there. These people depend on us—the consistency—that they can come [to] every day. They can have food. They can have a shower.

It's just like family. They don't have family. My sister who passed away, she was mentally ill, and I think there were probably a lot of people that were her support system because we couldn't stay her support system. She had burned us out so much as a family. Now I can give back to people too, so that's really fulfilling to me. Maybe people [like me] helped my sister.

Sarah was colloquially known as "the mom of the homeless" or "the homeless mom" among the people on the streets in Ventura. She was trusted, and advocated for people, often acting as a family member would. She baked birthday cakes, asked people about their lives, received calls from prison, and always made sure that everyone was fed. She did not harbor an "us and them" mentality, and I believe this encouraged people to trust her. She often discussed how she felt more comfortable with the homeless than she felt in all the social service meetings she attended. She had a crew of volunteers in the kitchen, people who were homeless who would leave their camps and walk or bike miles to the church before dawn every day to cook and clean with her. They had responsibility. Blaze, who was often in and out of jail, often demonstrated fierce respect for Sarah. For instance, on Thanksgiving Day, he failed to show up at the church when he was supposed to. As we were cleaning up, there was a knock at the door; it was Blaze's cousin, who had come to tell Sarah that Blaze had been arrested for a parole violation. Blaze did not want her to think that he simply chose not to come. His sense of loyalty illustrates how Sarah has built relationships with the homeless, who have become an important part of her community.

Unfortunately, during my fieldwork, the church program where Sarah worked was shut down. In response, she organized a park outreach program that she launched on her birthday. She called me and said she had baked cake and made sandwiches and wanted to celebrate her day by feeding people in the downtown parks. What started as an impromptu birthday celebration turned into an organized weekly program. A regular group of volunteers (some housed, some un-housed) joined, and provided people with food, toiletries, and occasionally a listening ear. People began asking her for things they needed. Women requested sanitary pads and tampons, so we started carrying them. Dog and cat food were also highly requested items, as were Q-tips. The opportunity for homeless people to safely request what they actually needed instead of accepting others' assumptions of their needs is one benefit of the consistent, trusting relationships that can be built through low-barrier programs. For me, it was also a personal lesson in the value of humility (on the part of those in positions of authority) and reciprocity.

A few months after I left Ventura, I received a message from Sarah that her park outreach program had been shut down by the city. The downtown business community did not look upon her work favorably. Sarah was told that her program and its volunteers were in violation of environmental health codes, and were required to have a vendor's license to distribute food in the park. Nevertheless, she continues to distribute toiletries and other non-food items, and check in with her "homies in the park."

Conclusion

When I began my fieldwork in Ventura, I envisioned that I would be working across varied and diverse positions, from social worker to environmental group member to riverbottom activist. However, over the course of the year, all of these categories became blurry. How should I

categorize the person I interviewed who had worked for years for a local land conservancy but lost his job after struggling with personal issues and became homeless, then got back into housing, received training in social work, and was working for a drop-in program for the homeless when we met? What about Adam, the community service manager who everyone knew? Because Ventura was a relatively small city, there was great potential for collaboration and coordination among groups. By the time I left, I knew people from the riverbottom to the city council, and I felt as if I had come to know an entire community. However, how do we define "the community"? It is important not to over-sanitize such definitions, as it is equally important not to over-sanitize a community's physical landscape.

Academic research that values community engagement is a growing field, and an important one. However, as this field grows, it is important to critically consider exactly what "community" means. Organizations, governments, and universities are all situated within a political economic climate that can influence research questions, solutions, and possibilities. By designing my research as a "community" project that worked across multiple positions, I became torn between many of them: the homeless advocate who wanted me to speak out against city hall, the person in the riverbottom who only spoke with me on the condition that I would *not* speak out locally, and the city employees who were also my research participants. Partnering with specific organizations or citizen groups is important and essential work; however, there is also value in complicating ideas of community and working to understand how multiple positions interact with each other.

Undertaking this kind of project enabled me to understand how broader political and economic dynamics might be constraining possibilities at the community level. Community activists for the homeless tend to fight against the criminalization of homeless people in cities at

the local level through logics of choice (i.e., city officials are choosing to enact policies that criminalize the homeless). However, without deeming local officials blameless, it is also important to understand beyond individual choices the motives that are structuring the landscape of the city.

CHAPTER 5

ERADICATING HOMELESSNESS

Fieldnotes, 17 October 2013

My interview with Paul, the director of one of the largest social service organizations in Ventura, lasted over three hours. As we sat in his office, he described the Gateway Project, a proposed multiagency center designed to integrate emergency and transitional shelter with services like mental health care, addiction treatment, childcare, and job training. There was even space planned for a garden and a kennel for the dogs. He showed me a map of ten potential locations for the construction (the favorite was right next to the riverbottom). However, the Gateway Project was not going to come to fruition. Planning halted in 2012 when HUD changed its funding priorities and, according to Paul, "the money axe came down" and put a stop to the project. I asked him about a similar project that I read about in the vision plan for the Ventura River Parkway. "That was me!" Paul exclaimed. He told me he began attending the watershed meetings to add a social service perspective to the camp removals. "These are people," he said. "They don't just wash away, even though we might wish they would." He went on to describe a "light bulb moment" he had at one of the meetings:

> Just like the environmental groups are trying to reintegrate fish back into the river, we want to reintegrate people back into the community. The delta is an acclimating place. People need that too. Where is the delta zone for people? The marshy area that makes going in and out safe.

When work began on the Ventura River Parkway, people had been living in the riverbottom for decades. It had become a community within a community, where people relegated to the margins of the city's social landscape lived beyond the gaze (and interference) of others. By many accounts, the riverbottom was largely left alone by law enforcement, government officials, and other members of the public. In the words of Mark from the land conservancy, "The community

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just swept everything under the rug and didn't come down here. The agency people didn't come down here. The cops didn't like coming down here. It's been 80 years." To a degree, the 'out-of-sight, out-of-mindedness' of the city's approach to the riverbottom camps insulated the broader community from having to see or deal with many of the discomforting realities of homelessness. As efforts to create the Ventura River Parkway gained momentum, fears arose that the "river people" would now move downtown and negatively impact the city's burgeoning tourism industry and downtown revitalization.[46] Those fears were probably not unfounded. When a private ranch responded to the threat of the EPA's Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) fines by hiring an environmental consulting firm to move the camps off of their land, the density of people living on the land conservancy's property and nearby public lands dramatically increased, and it was unclear where everyone would go once those properties were also cleared.

Tensions mounted between the city and the environmental groups, who felt that the city was dragging its feet, and conflict ensued when the land conservancy began clearing its property months before it was supposed to begin work on it. Mark described an argument he got into with Adam, the city's community service manager, one day in the riverbottom:

> [Adam] was basically saying, "You guys are going rogue on us. We've got this plan to get rid of them next March." And I looked at him and I said, "I don't have until next March. I need liability insurance right now!" He's been doing this for twenty years and he knows a lot more about it, but I looked him right in eyes and said, "You can take this for what it's worth but I'm telling you, if you don't change your approach right now, you're going to get completely ripped open in the press." Because I knew it was coming. He was pissed—this little tree-hugger guy like me telling a higher-up in the city how to handle them with the service stuff. And I just said, "Look, you can laugh at what I'm

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[46] Income from tourism and the downtown business district became vital to the community following the city's budgetary losses from the 2008 national financial crisis (Panzica 2008), especially because local communities were already dealing with decades of declining state and federal funding while shouldering an increased responsibility for providing public services (Coleman 2005).

going to say right now, but seriously you've got to know what's happening in the community. They think you guys are fucking crazy for not doing anything about it. You're not enforcing the law. You've let this happen for 80 years."

The initiative put forth by the land conservancy and other private entities intensified the pressure for public landowners to take action. The city and county ultimately responded by moving up their timeline to take a lead role in coordinating the camp removals, as Adam explained:

> All of a sudden there were these private entities that decided to do something. What were we supposed to say? No, we're not doing it? You guys go ahead and we're just gonna leave our… so we got dragged along whether we wanted to do it or not. No doubt there was a dynamic of us saying, "Holy shit, we've either got to lead, follow, or get out of the way." The reality was because we had the public safety officers and the sheriff's department, everyone was looking to us to keep it safe. So, we ended up being the leaders even though we were getting nudged hard from behind.

Once the city and county were on board with the camp removals, the problem of where people would go remained. The city did not want them downtown. Housed community members did not want them in their neighborhoods. People in city government and law enforcement told me that they knew they could not try to "arrest [their] way out of the homeless issue" as they had during previous river sweeps.[47] Eventually, the solution came from the social services organizations,

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[47] Arresting the campers had become unpalatable, partially in response to California's Public Safety Prison Realignment, which transferred the responsibility for housing low-level offenders from state penitentiaries to county prisons. In 2011, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that massive overcrowding in California's state prisons violated the Eighth Amendment rights of inmates by providing inadequate provisions for medical and mental health care, and ordered the state to reduce its prison population by approximately 46,000 people (Newman & Scott 2012). In response, Governor Brown signed Assembly Bill (AB) 109, which diverted parole violators and people convicted of non-violent, non-serious, and non-sex offences to county jails instead of state prisons (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation 2013). (Responsibility for community supervision after release from state prisons also shifted from state parole officers to county probation agencies.) As the county seat, Ventura was required to develop an implementation plan to address an impending 31% increase in its inmate population (Varela 2011). They did this through two main tactics. First, they planned to increase the capacity of the jail by creating dormitory-style bunks in the common areas of existing housing sections. Second, they focused on reducing the number of people entering the jail through community-based alternatives to incarceration, such as an electronic monitoring program and a series of specialized "collaborative justice" courts (ex.: the Drug Court, Domestic Violence Court, DUI Court, Mental Health Court, and Community Intervention [Homelessness] Court). These specialized courts order alternative sentences that can involve activities such as completing a series of courses and mental health or addiction

which, at the time, were adjusting to Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s transition to a

Housing First approach. Housing First prioritizes stable housing as the first need to be met, even

for the most chronically homeless (National Alliance to End Homelessness 2006). In order to

remain competitive for federal funding, social service organizations needed to demonstrate that

they were increasingly making strides towards "eradicating" homelessness by moving people

from the street (or the riverbottom, as it were) directly into independent, permanent housing. The

restoration work in the river provided an opportunity for agencies to engage with a population of

homeless people that had previously been difficult to reach (and generally left alone). In the

weeks leading up to the camp removals, social service workers began going into the riverbottom

to talk with people and to work on finding housing placements for those willing to enroll as

clients, an endeavor one of the case managers described:

> We were going for a whole month before they started cleaning up to offer people services
> and explain it to them. First, the police went in and informed people. Then, the social
> services agencies came and said, "This is the timeframe when things are gonna happen. If
> you're open to services, come over." We left our contact information. We did that several
> times before the actual cleanup date when people had to move. Everybody was informed
> and everybody knew this was happening and it didn't come as a surprise. People had the
> ability to plan or see if they wanted to seek services or even leave town.

The goals of the social services overlapped with those of the environmental groups and the city,

and provided a way to remove the camps in a manner that seemed kinder and more humane than

simply kicking people out or relying on arrests and law enforcement. Enlisting the social service

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treatment in lieu of jail time. The county contracted with a private mental healthcare provider, Telecare Corporation,
to deliver Housing First's "Assertive Community Treatment" to people serving community-based sentences, and to
monitor their progress (Telecare Corporation 2016, Varela 2011). Local social service organizations also provide
case management. The move toward community-based alternatives to incarceration is a growing practice in
California (Judicial Council of California 2016, Wolf 2005) and across the United States (Alquist & Dodd 2009, Fox
2010, Lang 2011). The development of such collaborative justice courts in Ventura intersected with other initiatives
within the city. For example, the Community Intervention Court, which focuses on homelessness, came about in
December 2012, just a few months after the camp removals and restoration work began in the Ventura riverbottom.

organizations certainly helped with public relations for environmental work. It also minimized

the pushback that the camp removals received from social service workers and other advocates

for the homeless. On the surface, this convergence between the Ventura River Parkway and

Housing First seemed like a win-win situation for all of the parties involved, but was it better for

people in the riverbottom? This chapter delves into the details of the implementation of Housing

First in order to bring to light some of the hidden implications of "eradicating homelessness" in

the Ventura River.

Housing First: A New Social Paradigm

These days, there is an almost viral spread of media stories that portray big victories in the war

against homelessness: Connecticut and Virginia have ended veteran homelessness (Goldberg

2015, Altimari 2016), Utah is solving chronic homelessness by giving people homes (Bertrand

2015, Carrier 2015, McCoy 2015), and places like Austin and Nashville are turning tiny houses

into affordable micro-villages (Federico-O'Murchu 2014, Semuels 2015, Westneat 2016).

Although these stories highlight the innovative strategies and strong commitments of individual

states and local communities, they collectively reflect a broader national shift in the way that

homelessness is understood and addressed as a social problem in the United States.

Homelessness as we currently know it emerged as a visible concern in American cities

during the late 1970s and early 1980s. This rise in homelessness is commonly attributed to the

deinstitutionalization of people with mental illness brought about by the nationwide closing of

state psychiatric hospitals that began in the 1950s and continued into the 1990s. In Ventura,

people frequently cited the closing of the Camarillo State Mental Hospital as one of the main

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sources of local homelessness through narratives similar to this one from John, a case manager in

a local homeless outreach program:

> It probably started when Reagan closed all the state mental hospitals. Ronald Reagan was
> governor here. He started to close all the mental hospitals and then Pete Wilson continued
> it. Cal State Channel Islands used to be one of the biggest mental hospitals in the area—
> Camarillo State Hospital. I think probably at least 50 percent of [the homeless] have
> neuroses and things that would qualify them for constant care. That's a problem, and then
> you're gonna deal with them with the police? How does that make sense? You're gonna
> deal with a mental patient with the police. Someone that's self-medicating, trying to
> maintain some sense of normality.

I suspect that many places point to a now-closed psychiatric facility as the origin of their

community's homelessness woes. When stories are repeated often enough, they tend to take on a

mythic quality, normalizing them into common sense explanations for seemingly inexplicable

phenomena. Because deinstitutionalization was seen as the primary cause of homelessness,

dominant narratives of mass homelessness have largely revolved around mental illness and drug

addiction. As a result, homelessness has generally been understood through what Teresa Gowan

(2000) calls the *disease model* of homelessness. According to this model, people became

homeless when mental illness or substance abuse caused them to behave in a way that did not fit

within society and impeded their ability to be housed. Solutions to homelessness focused on

normalizing behavior through mental health and substance abuse treatment. As treatment

progressed, individuals moved through a "Continuum of Care" that gradually stepped them

through different levels of housing: from a homeless shelter to transitional housing, and, once

fully rehabilitated, into independent living arrangements. As a result, federal funding through

HUD focused primarily on providing emergency shelters and transitional housing, and social

service work typically involved delivering services such as food pantries and showers along with counseling or substance abuse treatment.

However, the field of homelessness studies has recently begun to shift from an individualized medical model to a socio-structural model. This shift began in response to housing research within the fields of economics and community psychology that demonstrated a link between the rise of public homelessness and neoliberal urban gentrification in the 1980s, which simultaneously increased housing costs and decreased the availability of affordable housing (Shinn 1992, Shinn & Gillespie 1994, O'Flaherty 1996). As housing became more expensive and competitive to secure, people with mental illness and others in marginalized positions were discriminated against and disproportionately ended up on the street (O'Flaherty 1996, Shinn 2010).[48] This research countered the understanding that deinstitutionalization and individual deficits were the root cause of homelessness, and instead associated homelessness with patterns of social exclusion combined with reduced social welfare policies and rising housing costs.

In 1992, Sam Tsemberis established Pathways to Housing in New York City and pioneered a new model for homelessness called Housing First, which was designed to address the structural issues of housing and social exclusion before focusing on individual psychosocial concerns. Housing First begins with the underlying assumption that housing is a fundamental human right rather than a privilege earned through successful treatment (Tsemberis et al. 2003). In this vein, the Housing First model seeks to change how mental health and homeless services are delivered by "providing immediate access to permanent housing *without preconditions*, providing support and treatment based on *choice* and services that support recovery, social inclusion, and community integration, [and] conducting *research and training* to develop best

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[48] It is important to recognize that homelessness is a contemporary and expanding crisis related to increasing downward economic mobility and insecurity; therefore, the problems associated with homelessness are not restricted to issues with framing, or to technocratic solutions.

practices for recovery-oriented care" (Pathways to Housing 2016). Over the past two decades,

Housing First has gained significant traction as a national model, largely in response to research

justifying the program's effectiveness via two primary outcomes: (1) improved housing retention

rates (Tsemberis & Eisenberg 2000, Tsemberis et al. 2003, Padgett et al. 2011, Tsemberis et al.

2012, Davidson et al. 2014, Georing et al. 2014) combined with (2) reduced government costs

(Culhane et al. 2002, Gulcur et al. 2003, Gilmer et al. 2010).[49] To many, Housing First appeared

to be a win-win intervention: more effective, more economical, and more humane. Its pro-

consumer ethos, which was focused on choice, self-determination, and autonomy, appealed to

advocates for the homeless, while the program's claims of cost-effectiveness resonated with

policymakers (Padgett et al. 2008). By 2002, Housing First effectively moved out of the

academic arena to play a large role in reshaping national housing policies. The executive director

of the Bush Administration's Interagency Council on Homelessness, Philip Mangano

(colloquially known as the "Homelessness Czar"), spearheaded a new federal response to

homelessness away from the "old model" of providing services to "manage and maintain"

homelessness toward "abolishing homelessness" through Housing First (McGray 2004). With

Mangano's encouragement, cities across the nation developed "Ten Year Plans to End

Homelessness," while HUD began to shift funding priorities away from emergency and

transitional housing.[50]

The transition to Housing First redefined homelessness as an object of knowledge,

transferring it from a medical problem to a material one. Instead of thinking about homelessness

as a complicated array of concerns, Housing First has transformed homelessness into a simple,

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[49] Public media attention, like Malcolm Gladwell's (2006) "Million Dollar Murray" article in *The New Yorker*, has also played a large role in popularizing the espoused benefits of Housing First (Padgett et al. 2008).
[50] Ventura County implemented their "Ten Year Plan" in 2008 (Ventura County Homeless and Housing Commission 2007).

straightforward problem, which can be easily solved (and measured) by the presence of four walls and a door. During my fieldwork, social service workers and housing advocates often repeated phrases like "the solution to homelessness is housing" almost like a mantra, as illustrated by the following quote from Paul, the social service director, at a public event in Ventura:

> How do we go from maintaining homelessness to solving homelessness? We know how to do this. We have the ability and awareness of what it takes. It takes housing. How do we solve homelessness? Housing. It's not magic, it's housing. Case-managed housing, case-supported housing.

Three months later, Christine, a Housing Specialist tasked with finding housing placements for the chronically homeless in Ventura, articulated nearly the same explanation during an interview:

> I don't think it's complicated. I actually think it's really simple. I think it's really simple. … I catch myself saying, "Well, it's really complicated." It's not complicated. It's just not. It's housing. It's housing. We just need housing and case management, case management and housing.

These quotes communicate a certainty in both the knowledge of the problem and in its solution that eliminates complexity (i.e., "We *know* how to do this."). There are no gray areas. According to this logic, the solution to homelessness is neither ideological nor "magic." It is concrete and practical, something that can be easily measured and managed, quantified and controlled. The solution to homelessness is housing, but not necessarily a home. The similarity in quotes also demonstrates how this discursive formulation circulates and solidifies as a social truth to become a hegemonic discourse (i.e., "commonsense") that hides the complexity of its construction and uptake.

Housing First is the scientization of homelessness. Abby Kinchy (2012) defines scientization as "the transformation of a social conflict into a debate, ostensibly separated from

its social context, among scientific experts" (p. 2). Scientization places a high degree of political authority in the hands of experts, and tends to constrain debates about matters of social significance to a narrow set of questions that can be decided through scientific information or "managed" by those with expertise (Morello-Frosh et al. 2005, Kinchy 2010). The rollout of Housing First shifted power from social workers and others in direct contact with the homeless to national homelessness experts, who evaluate program effectiveness (and competitiveness for federal funding) through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Organizations and communities spend thousands of dollars on attending expensive local and national practitioner conferences to learn the newest "best practices" in ending homelessness. Time and money are increasingly invested in managerial tasks and technocratic processes instead of providing direct services to the homeless. As Phil Mangano states, "Conjecture and anecdote no longer hold sway. It's research and data. Processes that hide a lack of getting things done need to cede to being performance-based; good intentions cede to accountability." Through Housing First, homelessness has become an information problem that can be fixed through more data, more communication, and more efficiency, while the homeless have gone from being classified as diseases to being quantified as data.

The process of scientization tends to frame political and moral questions in scientific terms, or to marginalize questions that do not easily conform to scientific analysis (Morello-Frosh et al. 2005). Although Housing First is meant to bypass the problems associated with temporary housing by providing a more humanizing and autonomous housing situation immediately, evaluations of Housing First programs tend to focus on the outcomes of people who directly engage with the programs themselves. However, the impacts of Housing First programs must also be situated within the broader landscape of their implementation. In the

sections that follow, I analyze two core components of HUD's Housing First model: (1) multi-agency coordination and (2) data-driven decision-making, and identify ethical concerns related to autonomy and risk that conflict with the stated benefits of Housing First to promote self-determination and security for economically vulnerable people.

Implementing Housing First

There are multiple ways to think about Housing First.[51] On one hand, it is a research-based intervention, which demonstrates how people who are homeless and battling diagnosed mental illness and substance abuse are capable of living in and maintaining independent housing. Individual agencies and organizations can independently choose to implement the intervention by learning and applying the model.[52] Housing First is also a national policy disseminated through the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, first to federal agencies, who then distribute them to local communities and organizations that are situated within particular political economic and social contexts.[53] However, evaluations of Housing First tend to abstract results from the broader socio-political milieu of its implementation, which means that less-than-desirable outcomes in housing placement and retention tend to be attributed to problems with individual organizations and communities who are either doing it wrong (i.e., lack of model fidelity), or not trying hard enough (i.e., lack of initiative). As a result, efforts to improve

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[51] HUD's implementation of Housing First is related to broader changes in public housing that include programs such as HOPE VI, Section 8, and Transforming Rental Assistance (TRA). These programs are part of a larger trend in constructing housing problems and needs that focus on mixed-income or inclusionary development, public-private partnerships, and voucher-based systems that supplement market-based rent.

[52] Those interested in learning about the components of Housing First directly from Sam Tsemberis and Pathways to Housing have multiple options. They can purchase a basic manual on the organization's website for $49.95, or the "full collection" for $499; sign up for one of the monthly fee-based trainings or on-site technical assistance through Pathway's Housing First Institute; or attend the biennial Housing First Partners Conference (with an onsite registration fee of $800, which does not include transportation or lodging for the 2016 event in Los Angeles).

[53] Willse (2015) provides a comprehensive overview and critical analysis of Housing First as a national social service policy.

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outcomes in the war against homelessness tend to reproduce the logics and practices of the individual deficit model that the housing research of the early 1990s sought to dislodge, except that, this time, the "diseased" are the social service workers and municipalities, and the "cure" tends to fall into one of two general categories: more education or more motivation. During my fieldwork, I attended a public event in Santa Barbara that was billed as a "Homelessness Action Summit" with national experts. The speakers included Becky Kanis, director of the 100,000 Homes Campaign known for cleaning up New York City's Time Square; Philip Mangano, who is now the president and founder of the American Roundtable to Abolish Homelessness; and a few select representatives of nearby communities who were introduced as individuals who were successfully implementing Housing First. At the end of a full day of instructional workshops, the speakers gave a series of inspirational talks to motivate the community to reach new heights in ending homelessness, which my fieldnotes describe:

Fieldnotes, 25 February 2014

As the darkened UCSB auditorium filled with people for the Homelessness Action Summit, images of homeless people, social service workers, and shiny new apartments continually rotated on the large screen that spanned most of the length of the stage. In the second row, a man with longish grey hair and a flannel shirt held a cardboard sign in the air above his head with the words "Pres. Obama Executive Action 4 Unhoused Citizens"[54] printed in black magic marker. The mood in the room was anticipatory. Many of the people in the audience were local social service workers who were there to learn the "latest on what works" from national and regional experts on homelessness. Some of the attendees had been engaged in workshops throughout the day with these same experts. As the lights dimmed, the moderator, a partner in a local social venture (capital)

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[54] The man holding up this sign and a woman with whom he was sitting appeared to be homeless. He held up the sign before the event began, and I inferred that he was advocating for President Obama to provide some action to increase affordable housing access and availability. During the question-and-answer session at the end of the event, he loudly called out to the speakers on the stage: "How you think that ending homelessness is real? Ending homelessness is not real." He seemed irritated and appeared to be challenging the overly positive assertions of the speakers. He continued to speak while the people on the stage tried to silence him by interrupting him with affirmations that ending homelessness is real and is in fact what they are doing.

organization, entered the stage wearing a white button down shirt, gray dress pants, and a matching suit vest, and asked the audience:

> How many of you have been to a talk on homelessness before? Let's see a show of hands. An awful lot of you. I bet you're wondering what's different about this summit, and how it's gonna help us better address homelessness? First of all, tonight is gonna be very much about solutions and results. We're not gonna dwell on the problems and the issues. I think a lot of you are very well-versed in them. It's gonna be focused on solutions and results.

A theatrical TED talk-like atmosphere ensued as the giant screen projected a multiple-choice question across the darkened stage. A single spotlight illuminated the moderator as he explained how the remote clickers handed out to each audience member worked. He instructed us to answer the question by punching in A, B, C, or D, and joked that the lone person who selected "E" was "definitely not paying attention" as the results appeared on the stage in real-time.

Results were the main theme of the evening. One by one, each speaker worked to motivate the attendees to improve their efforts to end homelessness. The event began to take on a pep-rally quality as the audience cheered and clapped with increasing fervor. There was hope in the air despite the news that Santa Barbara County was not yet housing enough people to end homelessness. Becky Kanis informed the Santa Barbara community that by "facing into [their] data" on housing they needed to be moving 14 more people a month into housing in order to become members of the elusive "Two and a Half Percent Club," an elite group of communities known for having the fastest rates of housing their homeless. The entire purpose of the Action Summit appeared to be to motivate Santa Barbara to step up its game. After receiving the disappointing news of its need for improvement, the audience listened to representatives from nearby high performing communities impart their strategies for success. One key aspect attributed to a community's success was a decision by individuals to "climb over" any obstacle that stood in their way, as one representative stated:

> There was never a moment where I said, "Okay, this is a barrier I can't do anything about." That would be my advice. Put them on a list and plug away at

every single one of them until you don't have any. Don't ever accept them as just being there and something you have to deal with.

Later, she went on to introduce the concept of pronoia:

It's the opposite of paranoia, which is when you feel that the universe is against you. Pronoia is the idea that the universe is for you. When we talk about Housing First, I would love for us all to believe that pronoia is our reality, that as we gather together as a community and work together, everything is actually behind us trying to give us every resource we can have to solve homelessness. Can everybody just say pronoia?

The audience dutifully responded in unison, "Pronoia!"

Finally, Phil Mangano came on stage. He explained that the economic consequences of homelessness are the new way of talking about compassion: "We discovered homeless people randomly ricochet against these very expensive systems and we began studies. There are now over 70 cost studies that are going on." And, how the old ways of addressing homelessness with "church basements, shelters, meal programs, [and] drive-by feeding programs… have been replaced by innovative ideas that the data and research say get the job done." He concluded his talk with the following call to action:

In his biography, Muhammad Yunus said, "My goal is that my grandchildren will go to a museum someday to see what poverty once was." In Santa Barbara, this conspiracy that we have, this breathing together in this room and beyond this room with your political leadership, with your civic leadership, with your business leadership, your goal is that your children will have to go to a museum to see what homelessness once was in this city. All of you here that have your names on the attendance lists—you know what? Someday, those lists will be under glass. They'll talk about the meeting that was convened in February of 2014 in which Santa Barbara recommitted itself to the moral and spiritual and economic goal of ending homelessness in this community. You know what? Your children will be so proud to read your name on that list.

The next evening, one of the local social service organizations in Ventura held a public event to educate the community on their efforts to end homelessness. The Ventura

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speakers repeated much of the same language of the experts from the Santa Barbara event. They spoke of how "we know what we need to do to end homelessness" and described local initiatives based upon best practices. After the event, a group of agency directors and long-term social service workers were standing in a circle, discussing the Santa Barbara Action Summit from the night before. They talked about their annoyance with the speakers, whom they felt didn't understand the reality of what it was like on the ground actually doing this work. Exasperated, Paul, one of the directors, blurted out, "Those people… they're the sunshine blowers!"

Although my fieldwork in Ventura overlapped with the community's implementation of Housing First, this was one of the first times that anyone in social services or community development openly criticized or expressed frustration with the transition. It took nearly seven months for them to feel safe enough to begin confiding in me about their personal experiences and perspectives on the work, which, not surprisingly, were more complicated than my initial interviews and observations revealed. The social service workers were actually the hardest group from which I gained trust, partially because it took time for them to realize that I was not there to evaluate them or how well they espoused the tenets of Housing First. Instead, I was there to understand them, and I took that commitment seriously, even when it complicated my preconceived ideas and assumptions. Evaluating the implementation of Housing First from a grounded perspective also meant taking seriously the perspectives and experiences of people for whom it did not work, which included social service workers, city employees, people who chose not to participate, and people who had previous negative experiences or who lost housing—these are the people and perspectives that tend to be excluded from evaluations of Housing First as a homelessness intervention model.

Multi-Agency Coordination

At the community level, Housing First places a priority on coordination and collaboration among social service providers, crisis response workers, government officials, and funders in order to streamline access to permanent housing, to improve matching between an individual's needs and available housing options, and to increase the availability of diverse alternatives for affordable and supportive housing (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) 2014). In Ventura, a high priority was placed on coordination across multiple dimensions. A joint partnership called Homeless to Home (H2H), which had been created between the city and three social service organizations (Salvation Army, Project Understanding, and Turning Point Foundation), focused on coordinating housing placements and case management across the city. The H2H team also included a housing specialist who could interface with landlords and property managers to identify units where people could be housed, and an employment specialist to work on the job piece. In theory, H2H should work like this: a person who is homeless meets a case manager and begins to trust them; the case manager identifies the needs or wants of the person (including housing), and assists her or him with accessing them; the housing specialist locates a unit that meets the person's needs, and that particular case of homelessness has now been solved. Communication among the case managers helps to streamline the process and keeps services from being duplicated so that people are placed into housing in a timely and efficient manner. This process is repeated until all homeless people within the city are housed and homelessness has effectively been "eradicated."

However, achieving this outcome rests on the assumption that housing is available and that it meets the person's needs. Ventura is located in the 13th most expensive metropolitan area in the United States, where the fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment is $1,555 and

requires a minimum hourly wage of $29.90 to afford (National Low Income Housing Coalition 2015). As a coastal community, Ventura also has a high vacation rental market and limited open housing stock. When I spoke with Christine, a housing specialist, she described some of the issues she has experienced while performing her job duties in such a competitive housing market:

> Have you seen any of our SROs? It would blow your mind. A room is $700 or more. It is the size of this. [*Motions to a tiny area of the coffee shop where we are meeting.*] There might be a fresh coat of paint, but it's in a building that's ready to fall down. Maybe there's a sink, maybe. There's a bathroom down the hallway. There's a smoke detector and a light. And that room is $700.00 a month. It's robbery. And there's no movement. We need to get individuals who are there to move up into other places so it opens up these spaces. We just don't have it. I've gone to trainings, like 100,000 Homes Campaign and things like that, but in a coastal community with rents like ours, we're just not the same as a community in Tulsa or something. They'll be like, "Well, yeah, you can get a two-bedroom for $400.00 a month." [*Laughter.*] It's not the same.

In the weeks following our interview, I accompanied Christine on some of her housing inspections, and her description of the SRO rooms was fairly accurate.[55] However, because these $700/month rooms are among the most "affordable" housing units in Ventura, space in them is limited, and people in case management are often "housed" in rooms such as those at Motel 6 (where the monthly rate can reach upwards of $1200) as an initial rapid solution while they wait for a better place to become available. Throughout our interview (and practically every time I spoke with her), Christine juggled two different cell phones that repeatedly rang and beeped with text message alerts. She was continually setting up appointments with landlords, arranging

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[55] During my fieldwork, there was a bedbug infestation in one of the SROs, and everyone was evacuated and temporarily placed elsewhere. The city's community services manager worked with the building's owner to remedy the problem and to address additional safety code violations. We received regular updates on the situation at the social services task force meetings.

security deposits with organizations, gathering information from case managers, and tackling an array of crises that seemed to arise almost daily. Despite all of her efforts, there was still a backlog of people who needed housing, and nowhere for them to go:

> I came into this position with this huge expectation—not my own, everyone else's—that, "Oh, now we have a housing specialist. Okay." Well, it didn't go from Monday having no housing to Tuesday, when I got hired, to—I can't snap my fingers and create housing. I'm not a developer. It's really challenging.

Indeed, there are limits to coordination when the resource is not adequately available and supply is the limiting factor. The Oxnard-Thousand Oaks-Ventura metropolitan area is a tight rental market, where apartment vacancy rates have remained below 5% since the first quarter of 2012 (Nakano 2016). Vacancy rates under 5% are considered "low," and rates under 3% are "exceptionally low" compared to the national average. The January 2016 apartment vacancy rate for Ventura County was 2.7% ("exceptionally low"), and the two cities in the county with lower-than-average rental prices (Fillmore and Santa Paula) reported a 0% vacancy rate (Harris 2016).

One of the critiques of Housing First is that it does not fund or promote the creation of new affordable housing (Western Regional Advocacy Project 2010). At the federal level, Housing First has been funded through HUD's homeless assistance dollars instead of through HUD's housing funds. This means that funds used to provide transitional housing and direct services to people experiencing homeless have been diverted into the private housing market through vouchers that subsidize market rate rents paid to for-profit landlords.[56] As communities

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[56] HUD has cut funding for transitional housing in favor of rapid re-housing, which, according to some housing experts, may not work very well, especially in high-cost communities. Rapid re-housing is funded under the HEARTH Act and provides financial assistance to cover move-in costs, security deposits, rent and/or utility assistance for a period of six months or less. Funds are distributed according to priorities set by the local continuum of care, although HUD strongly influences local priorities through the establishment of scoring criteria and the distribution of more funds to communities with higher scores. In some cases, rapid re-housing funds may be combined with mainstream housing assistance through Housing Choice Vouchers (i.e., "Section 8"). Housing Choice is funded separately from rapid re-housing through levels authorized by Congress, and is generally seen as a

work to align their programs with HUD's priorities, they are left to either seek out alternative sources of funding for their homeless services or to close them. At the same time, HUD continues not to use its housing dollars to create new public housing, even when existing units are lost through redevelopment or privatized through HUD's Transforming Rental Assistance program.[57]

By increasing the pressure to get people off the streets and into housing without supporting the development of affordable housing, Housing First places disproportionate responsibility on individual communities to find places for people to go. National experts who espouse the value of local control in providing communities with the choice to customize planning and innovate creative solutions reproduce this responsibilization:

> The idea that, somewhere in Washington, inside the beltway, there's an expert at some desk and deductively they're gonna send a plan to you and you're gonna end homelessness. It's crazy. It's inductive planning. It's local planning that really makes a difference, taking advantage of the local opportunities and the local political and civic will that get the job done. … We learned from Clay Christensen, a Harvard Business School professor, in his book, *The Innovator's Dilemma,* that it has to be innovation infused. You steal the best ideas from other places and nuance them to your own community.

Yet, when Christine tried to learn about concrete innovative practices that were working in communities like Ventura, she came away frustrated:

> Every time we went to things, we went in saying, "This is all great, yes, but here are the problems we're facing. Here's how it's not working." We asked time and time again, "Please give us an example of a jurisdiction where they have similar problems and they've come up with some solutions." We never got an answer because I don't think

substitute for public housing and project-based Section 8. Therefore, housing assistance and homeless assistance programs are administered by the same agency (HUD), but with different Congressionally-mandated funding streams.

[57] Policy-makers target housing assistance funds towards voucher programs (over public housing), in part, because they want to avoid the concentration of poverty that occurs within public housing projects.

they have it. But still, they're like, "It's the best. Just come to the boot camp. Just do the training." Well, yeah, we've done all that and it's not working in our community, so give us some more tools because we're not figuring it out on our own. I think that's some of my frustration. You just hear, "Well, best practices are best practices."

The implementation of Housing First reproduces a free-market logic through an underlying assumption that, by removing the constraints of a top-down, cumbersome, expensive government program, the free-exchange of ideas will flow and innovation will happen. By this logic, ending homelessness is possible as long as communities have enough willpower and ingenuity to make it so. When communities run into real constraints, training and technical assistance encourage them to try harder to implement "best practices" (which are somehow nebulous enough to evade tangible technical assistance, but precise enough to have definitively measureable outcomes). So what did Ventura do when they needed to demonstrate that people were being housed but they had limited places for them to go? They tried even harder to eliminate any and all gaps in the system by coordinating across every domain possible and exerting control over everything and everyone they could. For example, the coordination among the social service organizations did not end with the H2H case managers and employees. The organizations themselves altered their programs to prioritize placing people in independent housing, which meant moving away from the "old" ways that, as the rhetoric goes, only work to manage and maintain homelessness. On the ground, this meant that they reduced the number of beds and the time people could stay in transitional shelter (which includes a city-sanctioned homeless encampment) in order to keep people moving through the system, which Paul described:

> What HUD has done is speed up the transitional. We're actually reducing the number of beds so that I can increase the speed of the case management and move people through more quickly. But I have nowhere to move them to. What HUD wants at the end of the

day is what are my outcomes? With less beds, I have more outcomes because I'm able to get people through faster.

One way to get better outcomes without having enough housing was to decrease the number of beds available to people in transitional shelter so that people were not waiting around. The implications for this were that people were more quickly moved into SROs and other potentially substandard housing situations coded as "permanent housing" because they could not stay where they were. It also meant that the lack of available permanent housing led to a reduction in the availability of temporary and emergency shelter and, as a result, people sometimes remained unhoused while waiting for a permanent housing placement. During one of the Social Services Task Force meetings I attended, a new nurse at the county psychiatric hospital reported that there were no longer emergency beds for women in the county, and that people were being discharged without safe places to stay. She explained that she called every number on the list of resources for homeless people distributed by the county's behavioral services department, and every facility had either gone out of business or changed its focus to permanent housing, and its beds were now only available to people waiting for housing in their case-managed program. The hospital was discharging people directly to the street because it could not find any available emergency shelter for women in the county. The nurse came to the meeting because she thought the group in attendance would have the most updated information and could refer her to available facilities. One of the senior social workers with the county informed her that the changes were because of HUD's shift to prioritize Housing First, and that there was now a growing unmet need for emergency housing within the county.

I witnessed this growing need one day when I received a phone call from Arthur, one of the people with whom I had become acquainted at the homeless drop-in program at a local church. Arthur and his partner, Joan, were spending a few days in a motel. They lived on her

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social security (~$900/month) and his food stamps, and tried to rent a motel room for a week or two every month to take a break from the church walkway where they usually slept. That morning, Arthur woke up and discovered that Joan had taken an entire bottle of Klonopin and a bottle of Lyrica during the night, and was now unresponsive. Arthur called me after the paramedics took Joan to the hospital. He was attempting to pack up their room and check out of the motel, and he told me that he felt as if he was going to "lose it." I drove to the motel, found the room, and listened to him talk as he packed. We loaded all of their belongings into my car and drove to the hospital. Joan was still unresponsive in the ICU. I went to the cafeteria to get Arthur a turkey sandwich and coffee, and when I returned, Sarah and Eric from the church were in the waiting room with Arthur. We stayed there all day, and around 5:00 p.m., I drove Arthur to his storage unit to unload their things, then brought him back to the hospital, where he stayed for the night. Joan woke up the next day, and was transferred to the county psychiatric hospital next door. Around 3 p.m., I received a text from Arthur saying that they were releasing Joan even though she asked to be admitted. Eric picked them up in his van and brought them to their usual spot by the church. That night, even though the county winter warming shelter was open, Joan slept on the pavement on a rubber exercise mat because she needed a copy of her TB test results to get into the shelter, and she did not have them. The next day, I saw Arthur and Joan at the church:

Fieldnotes, 12 December 2013

Joan comes up to me and gives me a hug, which surprises me. Arthur asks for a ride to the storage unit and to public health to get Joan's TB records so they can get into the warming shelter. He wheels their baby carriage loaded with laundry and food out to my car and begins to put things into my trunk. Joan seems to be in pain—she's moaning and shifting back and forth from foot to foot. I ask if she wants to sit in the car and she agrees. I open the front passenger door for her. As she slowly climbs in, she tells me that her

muscles are all cramping up because she took a bunch of Lyrica and that's why she hurts. Honestly, I'm surprised that she's out of the hospital so soon, since she was in intensive care and unconscious just the day before.

We spend over an hour at public health retrieving Joan's TB results from the last time she was in jail, and waiting for her to take another test since this one is only good for a few more days. As we drive to the storage unit, I try to talk with Joan, but Arthur keeps talking over her and it's annoying. Arthur points out a house he used to live in; Joan does too. Then she tells me about the flesh-eating bacteria she got when she fell in the riverbottom and scratched her arm on a bottle cap. She shows me the scar on her arm – she doesn't remember what it was called but it was something worse than staph; she almost died. I quietly tell her that she is a strong person. She quietly says thank you. We talk about dogs. She had cats once but lost them. There is such sadness in her voice. We talk about loss and death—her parents, my mom. At the storage unit, Arthur unloads the car and sets up the bedroll for Joan to lie down. She's going to rest in there until the warming shelter opens later that evening. He plans on playing music while she sleeps.

Sometimes we have no idea what other people endure. I cannot imagine the experience of being unconscious in an ICU one day, then literally sleeping on a street the next. I remember being emotionally exhausted after experiencing this small part of Arthur and Joan's ordeal. And, though I feel a bit guilty saying as much, it speaks to the intensity of the full situation and the amount of trauma people who are homeless handle in their everyday lives. There was nowhere for Joan to go, no safe place to recuperate. People deserve care, whether they are homeless or not. That being said, yes, while it is true that we should work toward permanent solutions, we should not do so to the exclusion of caring for people where they are right now.

Data-Driven Decision-Making

Housing First encourages community organizations and social services to rely on a "data-driven approach to prioritizing highest need cases for housing assistance" (USICH 2014, p. 3). Housing

First advocates assert that drawing upon data for decision-making will allow finite resources to go where they will be the most effectively (and efficiently) utilized.[58] Various means of determining need include drawing upon data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) database, community vulnerability indices, or statistics on the utilization of crisis services. HMIS is a database where homeless service providers input data on clients and the delivery of housing and homeless services. Participation in HMIS is a mandated requirement to receive federal funding for homeless services through HUD (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) 2014b).[59] Communities receive HUD funds through a Continuum of Care (CoC), which is a community-level association of homeless service providers who operate under a board of directors and a set of approved by-laws. When HUD releases its annual CoC Program Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA), each CoC responds to the funding competition with a single grant application that includes a prioritized list of projects (ranked within two tiers). This means that funding is distributed at a community level instead of to individual providers, and service providers must be part of the CoC in order to have their organization's projects listed (and ranked) on the federal grant application.

The CoC grant program is a recent development in HUD funding and part of widespread changes in federal homelessness programs in response to the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act signed by President Obama in 2009. The

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[58] For example, as Becky Kanis explained during the public event in Santa Barbara: "You look at your performance and you allocate resources to people who are doing well, and if people aren't performing well, you either work to help them improve or you give the resources to people who are gonna do the right stuff."

[59] Craig Willse (2015) explains how the rise of neuroscientific models in the 1970s located mental illness in the brain (instead of in the history of the patient), which led to an erosion of psychodynamic authority and exposed social work to the demands of producing numerical "hard science" in order to evaluate the effectiveness of treatments and diagnoses. He describes HMIS as "one more instance of evidence-based medicine catching up to the 'soft medicine' of social services" (p. 119). However, it is also part of a broader shift across multiple domains that directly links evidence-based performance measures with value-based purchasing or pay-for-performance (P4P). Examples of P4P programs in the United States include merit pay for public school teachers and the Affordable Care Act's Hospital Value-Base Purchasing Program.

HEARTH Act is the reauthorization, and first major revision, of the 1987 McKinney-Vento

Homeless Assistance Act. The HEARTH Act codified many of the principles of Housing First

into new federal rules for HUD funding. Some of the changes that HUD has made include the

consolidation of many of its competitive grant programs into the new CoC grant program, and

the revision of HMIS requirements to emphasize performance evaluation (HUD 2014a). HUD

began to administer funding competitions under these new rules at the end of 2012, which

dramatically altered how organizations and communities apply for funding and manage

programs.

My arrival in Ventura coincided with the community's transition to HUD's new funding

(and programmatic) expectations. In September 2013, the Ventura County Continuum of Care

merged with the Oxnard Continuum of Care to form one larger regional CoC. Along with

coordinating funding applications, the CoC also organized the implementation of the new HMIS

requirements. There are currently four full-time staff members employed by Ventura County to

administer HMIS; they provide HMIS training, database management, and technical support.[60]

During a public event in Ventura, Louis, one of the HMIS administrators, explained how the

database works:

> Essentially HMIS is a data set of activities, data elements, demographic information, that
> type of information, that is collected and reported to the federal government in an
> aggregated form. There's no identifying information. It's just an overview of what the
> situation is in your community, your geographical region. For Ventura County, there is a

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[60] CoCs must use an HMIS application that meets HUD's specifications for data collection and reporting, but HUD does not require them to purchase a specific application. CoCs can choose one of the commercially available applications (or the build their own). However, this software choice is generally standardized across the entire CoC. In Ventura, organizations would often purchase one license for the database, which staff would share. During one of the CoC meetings, the county database administrator announced that HUD was changing their requirements and each staff member would need to have their own license for the database, a significant increase in cost to the organizations (licenses must be purchased and then renewed, so costs are continuous). At the meeting, the CoC discussed the possibility of increasing the percentage of funding allocated to HMIS from their overall grant application budget.

Ventura County Continuum of Care. They are the organization that is responsible for administering the HMIS. Within that, there is an HMIS data agency, which does the technical and the setup and all that. That's who I work for – the Ventura County Human Services Agency. Essentially all funded programs and federal partners such as HUD, SSDI, a bunch of acronyms up there right now that have programs for homelessness as well as behavioral health programs such as PAC through an organization called SAMHSA, all feed into HMIS. The goal here is really to get providers, such as emergency shelters, drop-in centers, transitional living centers, permanent supportive housing facilities—to get them all to put the information into our HMIS so that we would be able to aggregate that data and have an accurate picture of what's going on in our communities.

According to Louis, HMIS combines data across multiple agencies that interface with people who are homeless, and putting those different slices of data (or "data elements") together forms the image or "picture" of what is happening in the community, almost like a jigsaw puzzle. The picture becomes clearer—or more accurate—as more pieces of the puzzle (i.e., service providers) contribute to the database. By compelling participation in HMIS, HUD ensures that a certain amount of data will be deposited into the database. However, not all service providers rely on HUD funding, and those that do not are exempt from this mandate. Yet, the potential to solve homelessness through data has become such an attractive ideal that even organizations that are not required to contribute to HMIS are often encouraged by their peers to become part of the team and participate in the data collection. There is an entrepreneurial aspect to the database that engenders a subtle form of coercive participation, akin to peer pressure, in an effort to collect more data and enable more accurate decisions. On the surface, this may seem fairly innocuous; however, there may be some unintended implications. For example, after one of the monthly CoC meetings, I struck up a conversation with a police officer who specialized in homelessness outreach for the county sheriff's office. HMIS had been a big topic at that particular meeting, and

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the officer described his frustration with being unable to contribute to HMIS. He said to me, "I see police work as social service work," and he felt that he should have access to the database. I have no doubt that the office had good intentions. However, as the boundary between police work and social service work becomes less distinct, what keeps social service work from becoming police work? This is an open question, but one that points to the need for further analysis of the social dimensions of HMIS at the community level.

Indeed, the search for more data does not end at service providers, and there are implications for the homeless as well. Participation in HMIS is supposedly voluntary for homeless individuals, who are asked to sign an informed consent form during case management intake. On the consent form used by the Ventura County CoC, homeless clients can agree to have their personal information added to the database with or without data sharing between partner agencies.[61] During an interview with Maria, a forensic social worker and the chair of the CoC Data Performance and Evaluation Committee, I learned that social service data is not considered the same as health data. According to Maria, social service information is governed under California's Welfare and Institutions Code 5328, which permits data sharing among social service agencies:

> We have the ability to collaborate with multiple agencies. We're kind of above and beyond HIPAA, if that makes sense? We want to do it to coordinate, to make sure we're not duplicating the process. If somebody's working with somebody, good. We're not going to have another case manager do the same thing.

From Maria's statement, the value of the database is to ensure that people do not receive duplicate services. In other words, sharing data is about catching people who are exploiting the system. This was a common rationale articulated during many social service meetings. Instead of

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[61] See http://www.venturacoc.org/images/Documents/HMIS/2014-02-11_Client_Informed_Consent_and_ROI.pdf

drawing on data to reflexively analyze their own practices, the organizations tend to use data to scrutinize "down," which reproduced the gaze that many social service practitioners felt from HUD's scrutiny of their own data.

It is also important to note that HUD-funded agencies are graded on the quality of their HMIS data as part of their grant application. One of Maria's roles as the chair of the Data Performance and Evaluation Committee is to work with providers to ensure a high grade:

> I've been keeping up with all of the reporting measures. I'm kind of like, I don't want to say "numbers Nazi" [*laughs*], but I just know the importance of keeping our grade up. This is the first time we've been at a "B." When I first started, we were an "F." It's really hard—I can show you, these are all of our different programs, our rapid re-housing program, we're at an "A." Every month—every three weeks, I run the quarterly reports. I try to be very kind and break them down for my case managers. Just my tedious little thing I do for them so that they spend more time cleaning, scrubbing the data. Then, after I give them a week, I'll run another report. It's pretty tedious.

Maria performs this "tedious" data management for her organization and the others in the CoC in addition to her other job responsibilities. Because all of the providers must now apply together in one grant process, a poor grade for one service provider will negatively affect the CoC's overall score and competitiveness for funding. Thus, Maria feels pressure to keep abreast of all the case managers in order to keep the data quality high. One of the implications of this pressure is that the need to remain competitive in the eyes of HUD tends to overshadow other uses of the data:

> One thing in training the case managers is sharing with them that—yes, this information is for them to get a better picture of their client, but there are so many layers. There's program compliance, there's CoC compliance, and there's HUD compliance. It's important you have their date of birth because we're getting graded on it and when it comes to giving out grants, obviously, they want to give the grants out to those who are compliant and have their data in.

Maria also described ways that the stress of ensuring good data performances trickles down to the people with whom the providers are engaging:

> There might be some clients who maybe have schizophrenia or are paranoid and don't want to give their social security and, you know, that's fine, but we'll still try to ask for it. Now, if they don't want to give any information, it's like, "Okay, is this program for you?" We do need to report some numbers.

Maria showed me a copy of the consent form, and to clarify, I asked her:

> If someone doesn't agree to data collection, or if they revoke, they can't be in the program?

She responded:

> Uh huh, yeah. It ties our hands in that because we have to report.

Even though the informed consent form states that refusing to participate in HMIS will not limit access to shelter or services, Maria's statement reveals that actual practices may be more problematic, at least partially in response to the pressure that agencies currently feel to produce high-performing data.

Conclusion

Coordination among social services was not just limited to the three primary H2H organizations. Their coordination altered the availability of housing services by reducing access to temporary and emergency shelter, and transformed the ways in which other services were provided. Many of the organizations once had daily drop-in services, such as showers, laundry, and meals. They were also places where people could spend time and be safe. However, once these organizations transitioned to Housing First, all service became part of the program. This meant that, in order to access them, a person must be in case management and working to end their homelessness by

getting into permanent housing. The "free" services were now seen as enabling people to maintain their homelessness.

Organizations experienced a great deal of social pressure to adhere to these new policies. During the time I spent in Ventura, all emergency shelters, transitional housing, and drop-in centers that did not transition to case management lost their funding and closed. Social Service directors even went to the local YMCA and convinced them to refer homeless people for intake and case management instead of giving out day passes for the facilities or showers. There was only one program that resisted: a small, conservative evangelical church. During my fieldwork, it was the only place where people could go for a meal, a shower, or to do their laundry without being required to be in case management until it was forced to close by the city, who used land use ordinances to shut it down. The church is currently in federal court fighting the closure. A similar case has been filed by a church in Illinois, and this appears to be part of an emerging pattern of using land use planning and permit requirements to close or move homeless programs.

Coordination is also happening in domains outside traditional social services. The work in the riverbottom is one example. A second example is the increased coordination with the business community. Notably, Ventura's downtown business district took on the responsibility to help house the people who frequent the downtown area. They established a fund called the "Family Reunification Program" to purchase one-way tickets out of town for people to either live with family members who agree to take them in, or to go into residential facilities. The city is adamant that they are not shipping people out, but reuniting families. However, one of the issues with the implementation of Housing First is that it incentivizes "disappearing" the homeless rather than creating affordable housing. Andrew, the executive director of the business district,

was granted a "volunteer" status with the Salvation Army, which permitted him to attend the weekly H2H case managers' meeting and contribute to decisions.

CHAPTER 6

CONSTRUCTING THE CONDITIONS FOR COMPASSION

25 November 2013

Jenn: What is your vision for the Ventura River?

Blaze: I want to help do it. That's my vision. Help make it right.

Jenn: What would that look like?

Blaze: Maybe get rid of all the bamboo and just let Mother Nature do what Mother Nature does. She's the one making it, not us. That river is going to go whatever way she wants to roll. Cleaning it, that's a good idea. Clean it up but don't go down there and chase people out and expect things to be better. All that's going to do is make it worse. If they haven't learned that in the last five or ten years, they're not paying attention or seeing anything that is going on.

Jenn: Is it possible for people to live there and for it to still be cleaned up?

Blaze: Yeah, it can be done.

Jenn: What do they need?

Blaze: Conversations.

Jenn: Between who?

Blaze: Between the outside world and the inside world.

As I was planning my fieldwork in California, my thoughts were laced with visions of change. I had hoped, as many involved in justice research do, that my presence would have some positive impact. While I certainly did not think I had all (or any) of the answers, my thoughts about my impending work conjured images of setting up dialogues, facilitating community forums, and creating video projects. In doing so, I dreamed that other outcomes for the riverbottom might

also be possible. Yet, when I arrived in Ventura and began talking with people, there was simply

so much power and momentum behind the restoration work that I set these thoughts aside in

order to focus on building relationships and better understanding this place.

As my fieldwork progressed, I realized that I was developing close relationships with

people from different—and often conflicting—social positions who did not trust each other. This

meant that people were showing parts of themselves to me that they would not ordinarily share

with one another, and as a result, I had come to see each of them in ways that were more

complex and nuanced than the ways in which they saw each other. For example, the homeless in

Ventura were not the only ones experiencing violence. In many cases, the people removing

camps were environmental practitioners with bachelor's or master's degrees in wildlife

conservation, biology, or geography, and they had never expected to be eradicating the homeless

from the riverbottom as a routine part of their jobs. Others who worked for the local land

conservancy, an understaffed nonprofit organization with a grassroots budget, bore a particularly

high degree of personal responsibility for the success of the restoration work (and thus the camp

removals) while supporting families (in expensive Southern California) on non-profit salaries.

Their alternatives were limited, and yet this work took a significant physical and emotional toll

on them. Many shared that they had experienced ulcers and other somatic health effects, family

impacts such as coming home angry and lashing out at spouses, and increased substance use

from the stress of clearing the riverbottom.[62] This led me to wonder: what would it mean to

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[62] The physical and mental health impacts experienced by people removing the homeless from the riverbottom are remarkably similar to the health concerns experienced by the homeless themselves, which suggests similar (although not equal) experiences of invisible violence and dehumanization. The important difference is that the people removing camps are able to use their position and relative power to displace some of their dehumanization onto others of more marginalized social statuses (i.e., the homeless or a female spouse). At the same time, however, the homeless displace their dehumanization onto each other (largely enacted through inter-group domination), which also tends to follow established hierarchies of power and privilege. Alternatively, they take on a greater proportion of the violence onto themselves (which can result in a higher degree of physical and mental health problems). Indeed, not all homeless health issues pre-exist their homelessness, or are caused by material vulnerabilities

restore the Ventura River in a more humanizing way? How might we get there? The answers are as complex as the issues themselves. Just as people in the riverbottom are more than addicts trashing a waterway, I had also come to see how the people removing the camps were more than bullies without compassion. In order to remain true to my findings, I soon discovered that any efforts for creating change would need to honor this complexity.

Activists and advocates in the community often argued that people should have more compassion for the homeless, and it is tempting to see injustice as a crisis of compassion. It seems almost natural to argue that, if public officials, police officers, land managers, or other members of the public only had more compassion for people in the riverbottom, then they would act in ways that caused less harm. It is true that many people *do* need to be more compassionate, especially through the work of cleaning up the river. However, as historian of ecological design Pauline Madge (2009) says, "Sustainability becomes really interesting when it shifts from being an ethical and moral injunction (e.g., *don't do that, do this*) and becomes a way of imaginatively remaking ourselves through our relations with the world" (p. 50). What is striking to me about this statement is the value placed on creativity as an agent of change. Rather than issuing a prescription or "moral injunction" for individuals to "have" more compassion, thereby reducing it to a quality that an individual either possesses or lacks, I began to think about what it would mean to construct the conditions that make compassion possible. We need more creative ways of envisioning each other that are constructed through methods that understand and embrace

associated with being homeless (i.e., exposure to weather or a lack of defensible space). The dehumanization experienced by people removing camps limits their ability to experience compassion for the homeless. We could say that they *should* experience the full weight of their actions, that they should be held accountable. However, this alone is a reductive solution, and will likely result in greater violence. We also need to reduce their experience of violence in order to create safe environments for them to feel fully and see others. Their dehumanizing actions do come from a place of privilege, but they also operate as a protection against their own dehumanization. In order for them to change their actions, we must ultimately change the conditions that necessitate them.

complexity. In this chapter, I describe a workshop method that I developed to begin probing the ways to construct the conditions for compassion through participatory methods.

Workshop as Method

Although I had some tentative ideas about methods to facilitate change in Ventura, they all initially began with the assumption that there would be one group (usually the marginalized) communicating to another group (usually those in power), and through this interaction, the people in power would come to see the marginalized in a new way.[63] It occurred to me, however, that by setting up one group as the "teachers" and another group as the "students," these methods reproduced some of the norms and expectations of the "banking" model of education. According to Paulo Freire (1985), the banking model is the traditional educational approach that views students as empty vessels ready to be filled with knowledge deposited by teachers. Freire contends that this method of education mechanizes learning, which prioritizes conformity and complacency at the expense of curiosity and critical thinking. In contrast, he asserts that the transformative (and humanizing) power of education lies in co-creating understanding through decentralized, collaborative relationships between teachers and students:

> In essence, one of the radical differences between education as a dominating and dehumanizing task and education as a humanistic and liberating task is that the former is a pure act of transference of knowledge, whereas the latter is an act of knowledge (p. 114).

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[63] This is a familiar, albeit oversimplified, way of framing engagement between (academic and non-academic) experts and members of the public. These efforts tend to focus on increasing the value and power of local and subjugated knowledges with the hope of democratizing public participation and reaching more just ends. In practice, those in power often hinder the actualization of these lofty goals through cultural boundary work (Gieryn 1999) that reinforces their position as experts and undermines the uptake of new knowledge (Allen 2004; Kinchy 2012; Lave 2015; Ottinger 2009, 2013; Shostak 2013). Science and technology studies scholars who study these political dimensions of environmental expertise tend to focus on illuminating the dynamics behind *how* experts resist and subvert change, yet they rarely question *why* they do so. It seems obvious why people resist change, particularly from powerful and privileged positions. However, we must also see and understand them as people whose actions (and ability to see others) may be constrained by the roles and contexts within which they operate.

Drawing on Freire's insights, I wanted to avoid simply reversing the power dynamic between the people in the riverbottom and people in positions of authority. Instead, I wanted to create a new one. Compassion, like knowledge, is not simply imparted from one person to another; it is created through interactions. Thus, rather than trying to transfer understanding from one group to another, I asked: could we collectively create an act of compassion, and by doing so humanize both the oppressors and the oppressed? Could we create change without aggression?

As an initial mechanism to begin a conversation with "the outside and the inside world," I designed a workshop method that brought together people from different social locations to create a digital media project. By definition, a workshop is a place where something is constructed through activity and/or discussion, so as a format, it embodies the ethos of collective remaking that I wanted to establish. I held three sessions of the workshop: the first was at a local social service agency and included a mixed group of people who were homeless, social service workers, health workers, and community volunteers; the second was at a public park and involved environmental workers and activists; and the third was held at a public park downtown where people who are homeless commonly congregate. Although I initially intended to intermingle groups within all of the sessions, I ultimately decided to err on the conservative side to ensure that participation was as safe as possible for participants, especially people from the riverbottom and others who were homeless. Most of the people who participated in the first two sessions had developed close and trusting relationships with me throughout my fieldwork. For the final workshop at the downtown city park, I worked with people who were homeless in the park whom I either had not previously interviewed or did not know very well. Sarah, a local homeless advocate, and Henry and Joy, two residents of the riverbottom, helped me to facilitate the final workshop after participating in the initial session at the social service agency. Although

there was some variation in how the three sessions transpired, they each involved two primary activities: (1) the overlooked object exercise and (2) photographs of eyes.

Overlooked Object Exercise

In the overlooked object exercise, each person was asked to look around and identify an object that they thought was overlooked or unappreciated. When they found their object, each person wrote something from the perspective of that object. In other words, if the object could speak, what would it say? I provided very little guidance aside from the verbal instructions, writing implements, and paper in order to allow as much creativity and flexibility in interpretation as possible. At the final workshop in the downtown park, I conducted the exercise orally and recorded individual responses because I did not know each person's writing ability beforehand, and did not want to exclude anyone. I also thought that people who did not know me very well at the park would be more likely to interact with me individually (and for a shorter period of time than a full workshop session). Sarah, Joy, and Henry talked with people informally at a picnic table over pizza, which allowed for collective discussion and fellowship, and promoted a greater sense of self-determination and flexibility for people in the park—they could come and go as they pleased. Participation in the overlooked object exercise or the photography was not required in order to eat pizza or talk at the picnic table, and people who asked to take slices of pizza to others in the park were able to do so.

The overlooked object exercise is a cultural intervention based on performative ethnography.[64] The concept of performativity is commonly thought of in ways similar to Judith Butler's (2006) utilization, wherein she describes the formation of gender identity through a

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[64] The overlooked object exercise is one of the activities taught at a workshop on performative ethnography led by D. Soyini Madison, in which I participated at the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry.

"stylized repetition of acts" (p. 192) which create a pull to conform. In Butler's formulation, performativity tends to operate in a conservative way to establish and maintain the status quo. However, performative ethnography draws on a more subversive concept of performativity that is linked to Roland Barthes' (1980) concept of *the punctum*, which is a disruption in the flow of expectation that resists the reinscription of hegemonic values and opens up the possibility for alternative performances and meanings (Bhabha 2004, Dolan 1993, Madison 2011). Performative ethnography attempts to interpret and express, but also to incite and act. I chose the overlooked object exercise for the workshop because there is an embedded reflexivity within the activity (i.e., it is simultaneously about you and not about you) that I hoped would act as a vehicle to provide the safety for people to be vulnerable enough to share parts of themselves and the experiences they would ordinarily withhold from each other.

Photographs of Eyes

The second activity in the workshop involved taking close-up photographs of people's eyes. The idea for the photographs emerged from an interaction I had with Theo at the end of our first interview. We were sitting across from each other on metal folding chairs in the darkened storage room that the church used as a food pantry, surrounded by floor-to-ceiling shelves crammed with non-perishables and a wall lined with refrigerators that, if opened, would reveal stacks of unsold pizza, ready-to-eat pre-packaged dinners, bagged iceberg lettuce, cartons of eggs, and raw meat all stamped with dates that exposed their diminished utility to the businesses who donated them (indeed, this is the second life of expired food). Theo, like many people in the riverbottom, was initially nervous about speaking with me, and it took him some time to open up. Although he was initially chatty, he mostly told convoluted stories that were difficult to follow. The stories

seemed to be part of an effort to simultaneously appease me by talking without really getting personal, and appraise me by testing my reactions to discern whether I could be trusted. Despite Theo's ready agreement throughout the entire informed consent process, it was fairly obvious that I did not yet fully have his consent. However, instead of trying to coach Theo into answering my questions, I sat and listened to him, reflected back his stories, and responded to his declarations of being clean and law-abiding with my own assurances that I was unconcerned about that and that I thought he was valuable as a person either way. For nearly 20 minutes, the clear plastic folder with my interview guide sat untouched on my lap until, mid-story, Theo abruptly stopped, looked directly at me, and said, "So anyway… you have questions?" That is the moment that Theo finally gave me his true consent, when he decided to reveal himself to me. The remainder of the hour included a very personal conversation as we discussed Theo's military experiences, his family, and life in the riverbottom. The following exchange occurred at the end of the interview:

Jenn: Who else should I talk to?

Theo: God. [*Both laugh.*] I don't know… Donald? Donald is a good guy. He's still kind of confused. So am I, in a way.

Jenn: So am I. We all are.

Theo: That's why we're talking, right? We enlighten each other.

Jenn: Um-hm.

Theo: Cool. You have beautiful eyes.

Jenn: Thank you. So do you.

Theo: Thank you. It was real nice talking to you.

Jenn: You too. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Theo: …… Just a smile.

This moment of reciprocity demonstrates the relationships that can be built through the interview process. Theo's comment about my eyes was one that I heard on multiple occasions. People who were homeless often remarked about my eyes during or after an interview, which made me realize that it is probably rare for them sit, talk, and make eye contact with someone for more than an hour without the other person's judging or trying to change them. How often are people who are homeless really seen as people? How often do we sit across from people and really see them? How often do we allow ourselves to be seen?

These questions prompted me to take close-up photographs of people's eyes to represent what it means to see another person and what it means to be seen. Our eyes are something that are nearly, if not entirely, universally human, and yet they are also uniquely individual. They look and function in a myriad of ways that are both biological and social. They communicate expressions and feelings, joy and sorrow, and they embody the tension between a common humanity and individual expression. Photographing eyes also allowed me to incorporate photography into the workshop while still protecting the confidentiality of participants.

The Narratives

In order to embrace the creative aspect of the workshop, I had to accept a certain amount of vulnerability. After all, it was possible for people to think of the writing activity as a silly exercise and refuse to participate, or to view the writing as cursory and impersonal, leaving us with little to discuss. I also never tried to take such close photographs of anyone's eyes before, and I was unsure about the final results. I did not really know what was going to happen. The workshop was an experiment, and as such I tried to adopt an amateur's outlook and remain unattached to achieving any particular outcome. However, this was easier said than done. I was

extremely anxious before the first session, so much so that, after picking up him and Joy at their camp, I snapped at Henry on the way to the workshop. He was attempting to debate with me about a topic in the local news, and I somewhat abruptly retorted that I simply did not want to talk right then. I was about to apologize when Henry empathetically asked if I was nervous about the workshop. I remember the kindness in his usually gruff voice. Yes, I certainly was nervous. However, I did not need to be.

Seeing People Through Objects

A local social service organization generously donated the use of their space for the first workshop session. We convened in the large storage area that the agency had stockpiled with domestic items and assorted supplies to help furnish apartments for the newly housed. A door at the end of the room led to the back of the commercial office park, where I made use of the angled rays of evening light to photograph one person's eyes at a time. While I was outside, the rest of the group was inside writing their object narratives, and the following conversation took place:[65]

Betty:	[*quietly*] I'm number three. I have to try harder than number two.
Eric:	Than number five, which is me.
Jill:	No, *you* have to try *really* hard. [*Chuckling.*]
Eric:	This is the weirdest thing I've ever done.
Marie:	What? Then you haven't lived! [*Laughter.*]
Liz:	I like that! Oh, I'm imagining… [*Laughter.*]

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[65] The audio recorder was on while I was outside taking the photographs. The recorder was prominent in the center of the table where the workshop participants were writing. Each of the participants gave their consent to be recorded, and the participants knew that the recorder was there since, at the start of the workshop, I held the recorder up in front of the group, turned it on, and placed it on the table.

Eric:	I went to a screening of a half-an-hour sitcom that wasn't out yet, and then they asked us all kinds of questions and let us eat lunch in the NBC commissary. There was Johnny Carson and everybody over there and Ed. That was weird, but this is—
Betty:	This is weirder than that?
Eric:	Yeah.

Although there was some obvious discomfort felt by the participants during the process of writing their object narratives, most ultimately worked through their vulnerability to produce work that spoke in ways that truly reflected their individual subject positions. I was amazed. Betty, an ER nurse at the county hospital, wrote the following narrative from the point of view of a dustpan:

> Nobody appreciates me.
> I'm black and shiny and an interesting shape. I do a lot of useful service.
> Nobody sees what I do or wants to do it.
> I work well with others.
> I am put on the floor, stuck in a closet, or tossed in the garage.
> Nobody appreciates me.

Out of all the objects in the room (and there were many), Betty chose the dustpan, an object that restores order to a room by collecting and removing unwanted material, similar to the way a nurse takes care of the vast collection of mundane tasks that are essential to restoring a person's health. The similarity goes beyond function. The dustpan also works in conjunction with the broom, whose active sweeping often overshadows the dustpan's more passive, receptive work. The irony is that, while the broom might generate piles of dirt, a room does not become clean until the dustpan removes the waste. Although the dustpan is essential to the cleaning, its work often goes unnoticed and undervalued, not unlike the gendered relationship that exists between

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the masculinized work of curing (i.e., the doctor) and the feminized work of caring (i.e., the nurse) that occurs within Western medicine. Moreover, the dustpan performs the unsavory work of holding and carrying the unwanted matter instead of simply sweeping it away. Similarly, to be a nurse is to come into prolonged contact with the corporal messiness of the body in contrast to the brief interaction of the physician. By choosing the dustpan instead of the broom, Betty focused on an object that reflected her undervalued and unappreciated work as trauma nurse. Betty performs the labor that other people do not want to perform. She fixes problems. She clears the way and makes things flow smoothly for others. Yet, the voice of the dustpan reveals the frustration, sadness, and perhaps even loneliness that Betty feels despite all of her self-sacrifice, hard work, and collegiality.

George, the director of housing for a local social service organization, expressed feeling similarly, stating that the effort he expends to support others often goes unacknowledged. While speaking as a chair, he described holding people up, sometimes for a lengthy period of time:

> People pull me out, slide me in, plop down on me. Sometimes, they even put their whole weight on me all day long and never give me credit for how I serve a very important function.

Although he feels his assistance is unappreciated, the larger issue for George appears to be that he feels he is at the mercy of the people he is supporting. They push and pull him according to their needs or they "plop" their full weight on him without considering his feelings. The remainder of George's narrative focuses on the dimension of having restricted consent over what people do to him or expect from him:

> Never do I feel appreciated for the support I give to familiar or unfamiliar people. I have to put up with people whether they are good or bad. Whether they are in a good mood or bad. Whether they are angry or sad. But I give them support no matter what. Whether they have bathed or not. Whether they pass gas on me or even step on me. I am closer to

people and spend longer hours with people than they spend with each other. I give you

support whether I want to or not.

The chair does not have the option to refuse to provide support once a person decides to sit

down. It is required to treat equally strangers, people in foul moods, or those who smell. The

chair is not free to leave, even when it is uncomfortable or being mistreated. Indeed, it is not

difficult to see how George's narrative represents how the director of a social service

organization working with the homeless might feel. The purpose of his agency is to provide

assistance to people who need support with far fewer resources (in materials and staff) than the

job likely requires. However, George's feeling of being constrained or stifled likely comes from

"above" as well as from "below." His work supports a publicly funded housing system that

involves greater and greater amounts of scrutiny (and paperwork), which he feels restricts the

independence and creativity needed to construct alternative types of affordable housing. The

exasperation that George reveals through the voice of chair reflects his desire to escape a system

that pushes and pulls him so that he can regain his independence, although his ability to do so

might ultimately be limited by the reproduction of the very values he is trying to evade. [66]

    Denis, the protection coordinator for the local land conservancy, also constructed a

narrative that touched on the theme of consent. He chose to speak as the "tree marked by

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[66] This was a common dynamic that I noticed in Ventura. Directors and managers within the city government and non-profit social service organizations, as well as citizen housing activists, focused on courting corporate and individual donors to sponsor programs and events. It occurred to me that this was, in some way, an effort to redistribute money from the "one percent-ers" to provide for social goods in the midst of economic scarcity with little hope of achieving more just wealth distribution by changing public policies. In other words, individuals and organizations appear to be taking it upon themselves to provide funding for social welfare programs because they cannot wait for it to happen via other means (or do not believe that substantial change is possible). Like George, they also believe that cultivating private sources of funding will provide greater flexibility and independence from HUD and other sources of public funds. However, this freedom is often constrained by the need to prioritize the corporate interests who provide the funding. Money is not objective—there are values that circulate along with it. There are important benefits to filtering capital through a public system that is intended to serve the public good. The problem is that the neoliberalization of our public institutions and agencies overvalue private, corporate interests. Local public agencies and non-profit organizations increasingly bear a greater responsibility for securing the funds for social welfare from private interests, which detracts from the time spent actually meeting public needs and disproportionately prioritizes the values of private businesses and corporate donors.

graffiti," and in so doing, communicated the responsibility he feels to protect nature from the harm enacted by people:

> I like that you want to shout your message from the rooftops, but there must be a better way to communicate. Cutting through my bark is like cutting through your skin. It opens me up to infection and limits my ability to reach my full, beautiful potential. I have no way to protect myself from the marks you make. My other tree friends think this problem is overlooked and continues to go on, especially in the areas where people like to spend a lot of time.

The tree in Denis' narrative is being hurt by people cutting into its bark, yet it is unable to protect itself and cannot fight back like the plants and other nature in the riverbottom. Denis' position is to care for others who cannot care for themselves, but he also communicates his pastoral relationship towards nature through his writing. Nearly every time I read Denis' narrative, I think of the Dr. Seuss character, the Lorax. Denis "speaks for the trees!" However, he further nuances his text by acknowledging that the violence towards the tree is not intentional; rather, it is an unintended outcome of people who are struggling to be heard (i.e., the people in the riverbottom). There is a complicated tension between the needs of people and those of nature, and Denis demonstrates some sympathy for people in the riverbottom, and begins to hope for a better alternative. However, as the protection coordinator, he is clear that his responsibility lies firmly with ensuring the safety and health of the trees (and other non-humans) in the riverbottom.

Writing the narratives worked in a way that produced common ground between the workshop participants. We all feel unappreciated or overlooked in one way or another. However, the qualitative aspect of how we are overlooked is also very personal. In other words, the exercise produced common ground by embracing differences between individuals and social positions by communicating diverse experiences rather than simply trying to erase those

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differences, or agreeing upon some external sameness. Indeed, there can be commonality across difference while also not ignoring power differentials.

The exercise also engendered attention to each other, collective listening, and abiding. People were curious. They wanted to see what other people chose to write about and they wanted to hear what they each wrote. There was virtually no defensiveness in the workshops because people were not positioned to talk at each other or even to each other—they spoke as autonomous individuals. Instead of discussing how others made them feel, they simply talked about how they felt. While that may seem like a minor detail, it made a great difference. Additionally, the narrative exercise embraced a stronger value of consent, which is important in a group where people do not trust each other. By talking through an object, people were able to participate while deciding for themselves how much (or how little) they wanted to reveal. The exercise may have felt strange but, ultimately, no one was put on the spot to talk about themselves or their experiences. It was a gentler way of sharing that helped to promote safety and facilitate some trust building.

Seeing Objects as People

The overlooked object exercise in the downtown park went differently than it did during the previous two workshop sessions. Although people in the park spoke with me (and permitted me to take their photographs), almost none of them spoke as an object. I would first ask the person to look around and find something that they thought was overlooked or unappreciated. Though a few people chose an object, their narrative would quickly transition to their sharing an aspect of themselves and their experience as someone who was homeless. Others simply said that they were the object, and the rest refused to name an object and instead talked as themselves. The

people who were most objectified resisted my request to speak as an object. Instead, they categorically spoke as themselves—as subjects, and as people.

After the workshop, I was left wondering what to do with the narratives that did not fit. I had planned to create a digital mosaic of images from my fieldwork and the photographs of the eyes, and when one clicked on the eye photos, the individual's object narrative would appear. It felt wrong to leave the pieces from the last session out of the completed project. I thought that perhaps I could incorporate the eye photos from the last session without the narratives. For days after the workshop, I mulled over what to do. Then, as I was driving my car down the Ojai Valley into Ventura, it came to me. I had been thinking that the workshop did not work, but in reality, it worked perfectly. I was thinking over the conversation I had with Marvin, a man with whom I was acquainted through some of the homeless outreach activities in the park. Marvin is bundled in a heavy coat every day, with the hood pulled over his head. At the workshop, however, Marvin pulled up his hood so that I could photograph him, and it was the first time that I actually saw his eyes. Marvin was one of the people who simply would not choose an object. However, he went a step further. When I asked him to identify an object that was overlooked, the following exchange ensued:

| Marvin: | When you're homeless, you don't really look around. If I was inside, I probably would, but when you're homeless you don't really. |

| Jenn: | What keeps you from looking around when you're homeless? |

| Marvin: | I've done that when I've been inside before. But I think, when you're homeless, you're just looking for a place to sleep. Yeah, I think that's inside thinking instead of outside thinking. |

Marvin responds in a way that challenges my thought process. He points out that the question that I am asking does not make sense for him—it is "inside thinking instead of outside thinking."

This speaks to the power of this kind of research. Marvin felt able to challenge my entire framing, to push back on the expert researcher. It also speaks to the great power that we have as researchers, no matter how careful we are, to unintentionally impose our own views of the world onto others, even when we think we are helping. I almost threw out the most powerful data because I thought it did not fit. However, that is exactly the point. I decided instead to incorporate all of the narratives and photographs, and to allow the disruption to remain visible. I had to resist the urge to "clean" my data, because doing so is another form of violence.

The Photographs

> Every image he sees, every photograph he takes, becomes in a sense a self-portrait. The portrait is made more meaningful by intimacy—an intimacy shared not only by the photographer with his subject but by his audience.
>
> <div align="right">-- Dorothea Lange</div>

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These photographs were overwhelmingly intimate to create. I used a camera with a wide-angle lens and no zoom, which meant that I had to get very close to people (and their eyes) in order to photograph them. Nevertheless, each person allowed me to do so, even Kathleen, who did not want to speak. The photographs reflect a certain level of trust among the people who have allowed me into their space, and a great responsibility on my end to remain loyal to that trust. In a number of the photos, you can see my image reflected in the person's eyes. This is, perhaps, a representation of the relationality that is inherent in all knowledge production. We need more creative ways of envisioning each other. There is power in seeing yourself through the eyes of another person, of seeing yourself in someone else.

While preparing for the workshop, I was so deeply concerned about the outcome of the photographs that I did not pre-determine what I would do with them once they were created. Some people asked to see their photographs, but as we flipped through their images on my camera, there was little commentary. One man looked at his photograph and uncomfortably said that I got his "friend" in the picture, meaning the growth next to his eye. I assured him that it was fine. In general, it was almost awkward once the photographing process was completed, but I am not sure if it was my own awkwardness or theirs (or both). I wish that I had planned a way for people to see each other's photographs. Perhaps they could have written comments on each other's images, or reflected more on their own photograph or on the experience as a whole. I did, however, compile a document with the photographs and narratives from the first workshop and shared it with the participants of that session. The responses I received were positive, and most said that it was an interesting experience. Joy and Henry from the riverbottom were the most enthusiastic. They both asked if I was going to conduct the workshop again, and wanted to participate if I did.

Re-Imagining the Riverbottom

One of the outcomes the emerged from the workshop was a discussion initiated by Denis from the land conservancy about ways to restore the riverbottom that did not presume a need to displace camps. This was something that I had not anticipated at the project's outset, but that indeed happened during the second session I held for individuals in the environmental field. I did not invite people from the riverbottom to this session because I could not ensure that it would be a safe space for them. I held the workshop in a public park, and attendance was low: only two people attended. With such a small group, it seemed unnecessary to follow a formal program of

icebreaker exercises and facilitated discussions. The two participants, Denis and Anne, one of the Ventura River Parkway coalition coordinators, already knew each other. Denis and I had also met for our final interview just before she arrived, so we needed no warm-up to begin our discussion. The three of us sat at a picnic table and ate pizza, and the conversation flowed easily.

Denis and Anne began asking questions about my experiences with people in the riverbottom and the homeless in general. Because my fieldwork was ending, I felt freer to be more open with them about my thoughts and ideas (especially Denis). I shared some of my interpretations, which ran counter to the predominant environmental narratives (particularly around trash), and there was an epiphany, wherein Anne and Denis began to relate to people in the riverbottom:

Jenn: A guy I know on the Santa Clara River has pancreatic cancer and a brain tumor. His doctor is in Oxnard, which is an eight-mile bike ride from his camp. They give him pain medication, but they make him go there and get drug tested every week to make sure he's not selling it. So he has to do a pee test to make sure that—

Anne: That he's taking it.

Jenn: Right. That he's taking it. He has to go and get drug tested every week and ride his bike the eight miles to Oxnard. He calls me last week and he's like, "I just had to take all this Oxycontin to make sure it's in my system, and now I have to ride my bike." He was just in the hospital because he passed out. He's like, "I don't feel well. Is there any way you can give me a ride?" I went over and picked him up. I could give him a ride there but not back, so he threw his bike in my car. There's so many things people go through to survive that I understand when every once in a while, people stop—why people stop washing their clothes, or why they don't bag up their trash and then go throw it out when it's a hike to the garbage can.

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Denis: There's only so much you can do.

Jenn: I think that sometimes, the trash is also a defense. People start building walls. If I'm really smelly, you're not going to come bother me. When you don't have walls for years and years on the outside, I think people build them on the inside, and they build them in all sorts of ways. I think people use trash as a—

Denis: Stay away from me.

Anne: —buffer against the world.

Jenn: Yeah, it's like a moat.

Denis: I do that to my car so that nobody breaks into it. I just keep it totally nasty on the inside. [So a potential thief might think:] *I'm not gonna go in there. There's no fancy phone in that car.*

Anne: My car is so old, I don't know that it would be bothered, but you never know.

Jenn: The other thing I've come across is there are people who are hoarders and some of that is about security. I might need this someday and when I need it, I don't know if I'm gonna find it. When you have something, you just hoard. It becomes this material security because you don't have it in other ways.

Denis: Can I tell you a little story?

Jenn: Yeah.

Denis: We didn't know that there was somebody sleeping in this camp and Tony was just poking around and picked up this guitar. A completely useless, broken guitar in tatters. Then, the guy wakes up and goes, "Hey, that's mine. Don't touch it. It's really important to me." Tony was like, "No hope

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for this ever." But, it must have been some sort of comfort to the guy on some level. It was just total trash to us.

As Anne and Denis began to connect to people in the riverbottom through stories, they empathetically found parallels of similar logic in their own lives. A messy camp did not seem so strange when compared to Denis' messy car. Taking out the trash might be an annoying task at home, but even more so when one has to pack it out of a riverbottom on a daily basis. These alternative interpretations helped to normalize the behavior of people in the riverbottom in ways that made sense to Denis and Anne. People in the camps were no longer abnormal, deviant, defiant, or out-of-control. Instead, they were seen as people reacting in a very human way to inhumane circumstances. As our conversation progressed, these kinds of exchanges continued:

Anne: Anything could happen in your life. An illness or some financial collapse where you find yourself in that situation. It could happen really to—

Denis: Just about anybody.

Anne: —almost anybody.

Denis: Anybody who doesn't have a reserve.

Jenn: I can tell that you I would probably rather live in a camp in the riverbottom than cart my stuff around downtown or in the Motel 6 or in and out of housing that I can't afford.

Denis: The only thing I ever want to do on vacation is to not have housing. You know what I mean? Go camping and hiking. Can we do more camps like at the Harbor? Can we do more things for people who are more comfortable out of doors? There are small little places that they can take care of. There are rules. If you're gonna have community, you need to have some established rules.

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Anne:	Why don't we designate an area in the river bottom where it's county oversight? It's a campground in the river bottom.
Denis:	It's got facilities so that it's—
Anne:	There's trash removal.
Denis:	Bathroom.
Anne:	There's porta-potties.
Denis:	That's not so bad.
Anne:	If you have these alternative camps, you could say, "Okay, you guys establish what the rules are gonna be in this camp, but you're gonna set some rules. You guys establish them."
Denis:	Keep it clean. Here's your bathrooms. Here's your trash.
Jenn:	I think if you had really basic things that are super important, aside from that, you're gonna leave the camp—I wouldn't say leave it alone like we're gonna forget you exist because I think—it would be nice if they had a cop that looked out for them too.
Anne:	If they felt safe enough to call the police to say, "Hey, there's a problem. Could you come check it out?"
Jenn:	Right. I think they're going to need that relationship built. It's not gonna be—
Anne:	I could totally see that campground happening on city or county property in the riverbottom. It would be away from the trails that we want to establish for the public. It seems like one of the ten solutions that should be acted on.

Denis: Yeah. The only thing that we'd be facing with that is that when we have our flood years, which we will have, it would all have to be evacuated and torn down because it would go out to sea.

The conversation went in a direction that I did not anticipate (and at that point in my fieldwork, did not believe was possible). Denis and Anne began to brainstorm alternatives that would allow people to remain in the riverbottom. As Denis's last comment suggests, there are no simple solutions. He is still protecting the trees and the rest of the riverbottom and is unwilling to forego his responsibility to the environment, which I think is both important and powerful. Nevertheless, this particular discussion extends beyond ones about trade-offs between people and the environment. The assumption that people need to be removed in order to clean up the riverbottom has been decoupled, even if we do not yet have a solution. However, these are the kinds of problems (and solutions) that we need to further explore in order to find more just ways of restoring the health of human and nonhuman natures.

Conclusion

My goal for the workshop was to engender compassion within and across people from different positions where trust had been broken, and I think it was successful to some degree. The main value of using creativity as an agent of change is that it facilitated an openness and sharing among participants. They revealed different sides of themselves to each other. Because participants were each creating their own narrative to share with the group, they seemed to focus on sharing their experiences rather than criticising each other, and this was important in a group where there was a history of very little trust. People seemed more willing to share when they were not as afraid of being attacked or dismissed, and more willing to hear others when they had

been heard. A key aspect of humanization is to allow oneself to be seen by others—the good and the bad, dark and light—and to see those aspects in other people. Working together on a creative project helped to inhibit individuals from dividing into sides and categories, which was important. However, it is also important to recognize that the workshop is not a magical intervention that can simply be tested and replicated. My position as a trusted outsider positively influenced the outcome. People who trusted me came, and at the same time, I was an outsider who understood the situation but was not a part of it.

At the same time, the workshop by itself was not sufficient for lasting change. The opportunity to develop alternatives to cleaning the riverbottom without removing camps seems to have closed after the workshop ended and I left Ventura. There was no one there in a position to keep the friction going in a productive way. In some ways, the workshop worked better than I anticipated, which meant that I also feel guilty about having to leave just as possibilities were revealing themselves. Creativity is an important aspect of creating change, but it must also be followed by action. The product is great, but the process is ongoing, and the work continues.

CONCLUSION

RESTORING THE HUMAN

Fieldnotes, 20 January 2014

I am standing in the circular remains of a campsite. There are charred unidentifiable objects still warm from the fire that was burning just that morning. I pick up a hunk of wood, still smoking, and throw it down into the river to keep it from starting yet another fire in this exceptionally dry second year of no rain. I think of last night's news stories about the fires in the riverbottom caused by the illegal "vagrant" camps and the harsh comments they spawned on the KVTA Facebook page, and wonder if people would see it differently if they were here in the remains. The fires are not necessarily caused by carelessness or disregard or out-of-control behavior. There are reasons. It begins to make sense once you consider the people who lived here; people who were given twenty-four hours' notice by the state park rangers to pack up and leave. Twenty-four hours before the army of volunteers arrived to rid the place of your presence. To scrub it clean. People find ways to speak when they are not being heard. Too often this means having to choose between hurting themselves or the world around them. Too often it means burning it all down.

For an entire year, my main task was to listen to people. When I think about the simple, ordinariness of that responsibility, I am reminded of how extraordinary it actually is. It is a luxury, really, to be able to spend time with people, to have the time to really see them. I am still in contact with some of the people I met in Ventura. Henry and Joy call regularly. During one conversation, Henry was lamenting the fact that I was no longer in California, and suggested that, if the city would hire me, I could address the problems and make life better for the homeless. As flattering as that was, I had to recognize that the relationship I was able to build with him and the other people I met was, in many ways, only possible because I was *not*

employed by the city, and probably also because I had the time to devote to building and maintaining those relationships over the course of a year. My everyday life does not allow the same kind of time to build those relationships; there are simply too many other competing responsibilities for the sake of survival. I am still the same person. I still care just as much. If I recognize that about myself, then I also have to recognize the very human aspect of what it means for most people to get by on a daily basis in a social climate that values speed, efficiency, measurable results, and demonstrated evidence of progress over seeing and being with each other in our everyday lives. This dissertation is, in some ways, meant to be a resistance to the seemingly ever-increasing expectations of progress, and the things that we do to keep from falling behind. There is value in spending time, in being real, and in committing to the complexity of everyday life. I have tried to carry that value throughout this project, from the research design to the fieldwork and, finally, to the writing. If the assumptions and values that underlie research influence the knowledge that is produced, then I have tried to produce knowledge that embodies the values I believe are necessary in the solutions.

I went to Ventura to study the restoration of nature in the riverbottom, and this research has contributed an understanding of the human implications occurring through current urban environmental restoration practices. First, I focused on the two primary restoration activities in the Ventura River: "taking out the trash" (e.g., collecting debris from the campsites) and "cutting the grass" (e.g., removing *Arundo*). The collection and removal of "trash" and debris was one way that the land conservancy and their volunteers worked to clean up the riverbottom after homeless people had been removed from their camps. However, trash also played a formative role in legitimizing the camp removals by changing the narrative around homeless people in the riverbottom. Environmental activists and conservation workers leveraged environmental

regulations and public water quality monitoring data to make camps, and the people within them, legible as trash, which shifted the camps from a social problem to an environmental threat. Once people in the camps were seen as trash, they became constructed as environmental pollution, which excluded them from "humanness" in ways that enabled their physical removal from the riverbottom. Therefore, *epistemic exclusion*, or segregation through knowledge production, changes how others are understood so that they are seen as different in ways that facilitate material practices of exclusion.

The problem of epistemic exclusion extends beyond the narratives of the conservationists to the resilient logics that allow anyone to see "other" people as outside of society. Logics of exclusion often operate at the level of subtext or assumption, which can lead to their inscription within well-intended efforts to create change. For example, the underlying assumption that homeless encampments in the Ventura River were places of social exclusion enabled the perception that camp removals benefitted the homeless as well as the physical environment. However, because many people in encampments experienced the riverbottom as a humanizing, therapeutic landscape, camp removals actually caused them real physical and psychological harm. Recognizing this complexity is essential to the development of more environmentally and socially just restorative practices.

Environmental justice is about more than identifying undesirable land development or exposure to toxins; it is also about how we see or understand the non-human and the material world. This understanding is influenced by social values, such as the moral construction of invasive plants and animals. Invasives are considered problematic because they are out of place and out of control organisms that cause economic and/or environmental harm. As a result, their removal is seen as a necessary part of restoring order in natural systems to such a degree that

they are often excluded from moral consideration and can be killed without debate. In the Ventura River, the invasive plant, *Arundo*, was vilified to such a degree that its removal garnered a significant amount of time and resources from conservation workers and volunteers. Moreover, the discursive construction of invasive species became superimposed onto the people who were living in the riverbottom in ways that enabled their dehumanization and displacement. Slippage occurred between the categories of plants and humans so that removing *Arundo* engendered the physical removal of people. People and plants escape the categories that we construct for them, and looking for the underground connections between categories that appear separate can complicate ethical analysis in productive, and important, ways. Despite the drive and, at times, necessity, to simplify ethical constructs within normative rules, it is also important not to exclude messiness and complexity from ethical work.

Although my fieldwork began in the riverbottom, it quickly became clear that I needed to expand my view in order to more fully understand the river. The Ventura River is embedded within a community and within a particular political-economic context. Broadening the analytical frame to the landscape of the city connected the weeding in the riverbottom with the broad-scale "weeding" out of homeless people from public space through anti-homeless ordinances and safe and clean initiatives. I situated the proliferation of these initiatives within the current political economic climate to demonstrate the rationales and material constraints behind *why* this weeding out made sense from the perspective of cities. This context is important to recognize because otherwise advocates for the homeless can individualize blame for the criminalization of homeless people without challenging the underlying reasons behind why that criminalization occurs.

The restoration work in the Ventura River also intersected with broad scale changes in national homelessness policies and funding connected to HUD's shift toward Housing First. Housing First emerged through academic research on housing and homelessness that shifted paradigms from a medical model focused on the deficits of individuals to a socio-structural model that posits a material lack of housing as the root cause of homelessness. Housing First prioritizes housing as the first need to be met and is based on the assumption that all people, even the most chronically homeless, are worthy of a secure and stable "home." Although it is meant to provide a more autonomous and humanizing experience for people who are homeless, the ideal of Housing First is implemented through a series of HUD policies within a highly scientized framework. Scientization tends to concentrate political authority in the hands of scientific experts, who frame political and moral questions through scientific terms abstracted from social context. By situating Housing First within the broader landscape of its implementation, I have identified ethical concerns related to autonomy and risk that conflict with the stated intentions of Housing First to promote self-determination and security for people who are homeless.

By analyzing the underground connections between the "stems" of landscape health and human health, this research has demonstrated the dehumanization and violence that people who are homeless face across and through multiple intersecting institutions: from an environmental watchdog group to national environmental regulations, ecological science and the moral construction of invasive organisms, the neoliberal political economy of cities, and national housing and homelessness policies. Yet, people in the riverbottom were not the only ones who experienced dehumanization. In many cases, people removing the camps were people with degrees in fields such as wildlife biology, geography, and natural resources management, and they never expected to be removing homeless people as part of their job. Moreover, city

employees criticized for camp removals, vagrancy laws, and criminalizing the homeless were simultaneously beholden to economic elites, elected officials, and broader public outcries against the presence of homeless people. There is no truly just way of restoring the river without also restoring the human across these multiple positions. What does restoring the human entail? On one level, it is about creating the conditions that enable people to be seen as complex human beings. Restoring the human means being able to risk vulnerability and allow oneself to be seen. It also means being able to see the light and darkness in others.

In more concrete terms, there are policy recommendations that would be beneficial, such as increasing funding for homeless supportive programs, increasing affordable and very affordable housing stock, and decreasing the strings and audit culture that are currently associated with public funding. However, policy recommendations alone are not sufficient for lasting change. We also need to attend to changing our culture and values in order to construct the conditions for compassion. The workshops and other methodological experimentations in this research have shown the value of finding more creative ways of envisioning each other that are developed by someone who is not a representative of an agency, which also speaks to the role that researchers can play as trusted outsiders when working with communities.

At its core, this project has been about the role that epistemic exclusion plays in creating and maintaining dehumanization and marginalization despite efforts to create more just futures through restorative practices, landscape transformation, new public policies, and alternative research paradigms. Epistemic exclusion often operates as an undercurrent encoded in cultural values (e.g., pure "nature") and structural forces (e.g., the neoliberal political economy, HUD policies), evading detection as a subtextual force that cannot be easily measured, defined, or deduced. To identify and change epistemic exclusion requires one to risk vulnerability and invest

time, opportunities for which are reduced when too much value is placed on measurable outcomes and rapid results. Therefore, such exclusions remain resilient even in the face of concerned and compassionate people who reinscribe dehumanization through moral injunctions that individualize accountability. By resisting this pull toward individualization, we can release the potential for care and compassion to short-circuit, even temporarily, such exclusions and create possibilities— however limited—for imagining a different world.

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WORKSHOP NARRATIVES AND PHOTOGRAPHS

1.

Hello!

Without me you would not be able to have any hot water! I feel bad when people don't realize how much they need me for hot showers and cleaning every day and making their life a <u>lot</u> more comfortable.

I am the little water heater on top of the bathroom and I have a right to be here.

Riverbottom resident
Homeless since 2005, when her home was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina

2.

I wonder how *you* feel and for once *I'm* going to tell *you* how it really is. You keep me home most of the time with no one and I think, what the hell? Or, you put me on a leash when you take me out. What am I, some sort of slave with a ring around my neck? When you finally come home, wow! I jump for joy. I shower you with kisses. Love you no matter what. Know when you are sad or hurt. Golly pete, show me the same. Turn that damn TV off. Give me some of that love back a little longer.

I am your dog and I have a right to be here.

Riverbottom resident
Lifelong commercial fisherman

3.

Nobody appreciates me.

I'm black and shiny and an interesting shape. I do a lot of useful service.

Nobody sees what I do or wants to do it.

I work well with others.

I am put on the floor, stuck in a closet, or tossed in the garage.

Nobody appreciates me.

I am the dust pan and I have a right to be here.

ER Nurse, County Hospital
Riverbottom cleanup volunteer

4.

I am put away out of sight. I used to cover a couch. I was new and valued. People loved me. Now I am out of fashion and my couch frame is gone. People don't want to throw me out because that would seem wasteful. But as I am, I'm not useful anymore. Perhaps I could be recovered and come back again.

I am the old striped couch cushion and I have a right to be here.

Former cook for church homeless outreach program (shut down by the city)
Founder and coordinator of the Park Outreach Team (also shut down by the city)

5.

I am a work of art hanging here with my blue and black cables and flashing lights.

Without me you couldn't communicate with the outside world, could you?

You couldn't put the annoying people on hold.

You couldn't check your voicemail or ask your partner what's for dinner.

I am here to serve you, yet you don't see me anymore.

Just, for god's sake, don't get me wet!

I am the phone system hanging on the wall and I have a right to be here.

Volunteer, Park Outreach Team & "shower guy" at church homeless outreach program
Lives in his vehicle

6.

You are not even aware of my existence.

I believe I must be part of one of your favorite articles of clothing for I have been through many interesting experiences with you. At times I hang desolately in a dark closet. At other times, I am whirling round and round in hot, soapy water. Sometimes, I am hanging in the hot sun waiting for the "center of attention"—the shirt—to dry. People notice and appreciate the shirt but ignore the lowly button.

Let me tell you something. There was a time when I lived in the ocean. I was a living, beautiful creature. Now, I am sometimes called Mother of Pearl. This is not the end. My story will be continued…

I am just a button on your shirt and I have a right to be here.

Volunteer who manages the Safe Sleep Program at a local church
Lived most of his adult life as an international fugitive running from drug charges

7.

I'm up high. Hardly anyone notices me. Every now and then, someone does though and says, "Look, there is a hole up there." I get all excited thinking, "Oh boy, this time I am going to get fixed!" Then, the other person says something polite but is uninterested. And once again, nothing happens. So here I am, hole in the wall, waiting for the day when someone will get excited or inspired enough to fix me. I wish I could fix myself but I do not have plaster or even hands to put the plaster on with. I do hope a person comes soon that will fix me. It is lonely up here all alone.

I'm a hole in the wall and I have a right to be here.

Public Health One-Stop coordinator

8.

They have me stuffed up here and out of the way so nobody has to see me. Everyone takes the hot water I make for granted. The only way I can get any attention is if I make a nuisance of myself by leaking or flooding or maybe by making some whistling or gurgling noises. Someday, I'm going to point my hose at their conference table, where they think they're so important. I'm going to give them a couple of big squirts of water. Yeah, it'll mess up their pretty hairdos, but good! That'll be fun.

I am the water heater and I have a right to be here.

Local church's Environmental Action Committee chair

9.

I feel very unappreciated for being what I am. People pull me out, slide me in, plop down on me. Sometimes, they even put their whole weight on me all day long and never give me credit for how I serve a very important function. Never do I feel appreciated for the support I give to familiar or unfamiliar people. I have to put up with people whether they are good or bad. Whether they are in a good mood or bad. Whether they are angry or sad. But I give them support no matter what. Whether they have bathed or not. Whether they pass gas on me or even step on me. I am closer to people and spend longer hours with people than they spend with each other. I give you support whether I want to or not.

I am a chair and I have a right to be here.

Director of Housing, local social service organization

10.

Here I sit on the shelf, unplugged and unused! If there were some big event about to happen like a gathering where everybody needed to write about their feelings or their knowledge, they'd need me big time. Well…. maybe. If they decided to use pens or mechanical pencils or brand new pencils sharpened at the factory, I'd still be here with nobody needing me. But if they were going to use new pencils that had never been sharpened or pencils that were well used and had become dull, then I'd be their MVP. They'd see me here on the shelf (or just maybe they'd remember having seen me there), and they'd come get me. They'd plug me in, and I'd put a perfect point on every single pencil. I'd take each one, center it, and grind it to a perfect point. Boy, that would feel great!!! But there they all are, writing away and paying no attention to me … again. Here I sit unplugged and ignored, but that's okay. Who needs them anyway?! Screw it!

I am the electric pencil sharpener and I have a right to be here.

Chair, local social service task force

11.

I hope that before you judge me, you will give me some compassion. Help me get out of this environment to the place where I best belong. You see, I was in the hands of a kid who set me down and forgot about me. Then, a wind came along and swept me away until I landed here. In addition to helping me land in a better destination and keeping this watershed safe, can you give some brain power and action to prevent me from blowing away in the first place to help me land where I belong from the start? Thank you!

I am the overlooked piece of trash and I have a right to be here.

Secretary, Neighborhood Community Council
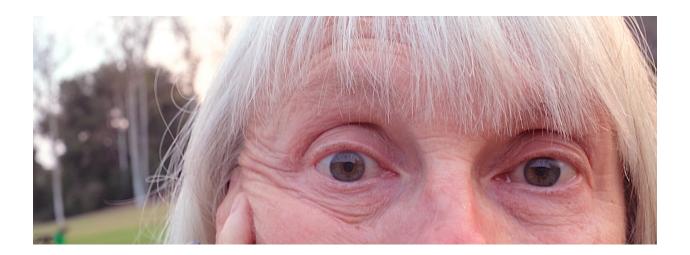*Advocate for riverbottom cleanups*

12.

I like that you want to shout your message from the rooftops, but there must be a better way to communicate. Cutting through my bark is like cutting through your skin. It opens me up to infection and limits my ability to reach my full, beautiful potential. I have no way to protect myself from the marks you make. My other tree friends think this problem is overlooked and continues to go on, especially in the areas where people like to spend a lot of time.

I am the tree marked by graffiti and I have a right to be here.

Protection Coordinator, local land conservancy restoring the Ventura River

13.

No one notices me until they want to yank me out and throw me away. I hold your paperwork together, provide temporary hems in your skirts and pants, close a hole in your pocket, hold together torn packaging and perform so many other useful functions. These valuable services go completely unnoticed until you wield the remover and ply away clumsily in an effort to yank my arms free from the item I am holding together for you. Once you straighten my arms, you pull left and right until I release my hold. Unceremoniously, you either toss me into the wastebasket or allow me to drop onto the floor to be later inhaled by a vacuum cleaner, ground into the carpet by your office chair or the bottom of your shoe. I am truly unnoticed, unless of course I manage to lodge myself into your bare foot after being abandoned on the carpet. Sweet revenge!

I am a staple and I have a right to be here.

Ventura River Parkway coalition coordinator
Board member, local grassroots land conservation organization

14.

Ventura City Park Resident
Died in 2016 when she fell and hit her head after a fight

15.

Remove me. Remove me from this tree. I shouldn't be up here in the first place. Plant me in the ground if you can. Homeless people are people too. Homeless people are people who have been displaced because of a bunch of things compounding you where you can't pay rent, you get vacated, you can't tread water, and you sink. But you don't sink entirely. Here I am.

Ventura City Park Resident

16.

When you're homeless, you don't really look around. If I was inside, I probably would, but when you're homeless, you don't really.

What keeps you from looking around when you're homeless?

I've done that when I've been inside before. But I think when you're homeless you're just looking for a place to sleep. Yeah, I think that's inside thinking instead of outside thinking.

Ventura City Park Resident

17.

Can you look around and find something that is overlooked or unappreciated?

Me! I did my four years in the military and, you know what? I should be recognized. I'm a vet. It was a lifetime ago.

What do you wish people understood about you?

I'm not a bad person. I'm not a bad person.

Ventura City Park Resident

18.

There doesn't seem to be a lot of empathy with people in the city. From the beach to the hills, there's a lot of difference and we are not treated as... Everything is getting lessened and lessened and closed and shut down. There's nowhere to shower.

If you could say anything to the city, what would you say?

Find out what empathy means. You don't know what empathy means. It's always about the crime rate over there.

What does it mean to have empathy?

To put yourself in someone else's shoes. See me.

So you're a member of the city, but they don't see you?

They don't, but it's worse than that. I don't want to say. It's just like…we're not human.

Ventura City Park Resident

19.

I was going to say that bundle of sticks that dropped out. I think they're about the relationship between the homeless and the community. I think that's what it is. The homeless are trying to take care of themselves and the rules have changed. I know they do it because that's their funding. It's based on the results of the hand-up. That's one of the changes I saw over there at Turning Point. They're going to that system. It's going to hurt the homeless that are not a part of it, that won't conform to it. The ones at the riverbottom, some of 'em right here. I don't want to do it. I was in a motel over there and they said you can't have visitors after ten o'clock. Man, this person is allowed to be here. That's my friend! He don't need to ask to visit me. I have rights too! It's a lot of frustration trying not to be homeless sometimes. And there's not enough people really representing the homeless, who will stand up for them. I know all the ones that come around from behavioral health, Salvation Army, a couple of the guys from Harbor Church. You get to see 'em and get to know 'em. It just feels like sometimes the homeless have to defend themselves even from the counselors.

Ventura City Park Resident

20.

That takes me a while to figure out. It's…It's not on the tip of my tongue. I have to stretch my imagination. The experience of being transformed? Because everyone, how they plug-in, that's how they're transformed to do miracles.

Ventura Riverbottom Resident

21.

Man… an object that's overlooked?… Her!
[*points to Sarah, the homeless advocate, who is standing nearby.*]

Her? Sarah?

Yeah. I'm thirsty. I've gotta go get a beer.

Ventura City Park Resident

22.

Can I be the object? I'd be a mirror.

If the mirror could speak, what would the mirror say?

They'd have to reflect on themselves. I just think that anyone who relates to the fact that they're uncomfortable when they see a homeless person and they drop their eyes, first look at what's really going on with them. Examine their own self of why they dropped their eyes. Is it embarrassment? Is it shame? That's their search.

Ventura City Park Resident