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Omissions: Part I

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Lies are a form of fiction that serve the purpose of deception. But not all fictions are lies. As a rearrangement of fact, fiction can be illuminating. And what of omissions?

I will omit the fact that I am writing about my own experience. I will omit the fact that some of these events occurred in the physical realm, and others occurred while dreaming. For most of my life, I was inhabited by a virus that demanded I sleep 10–12 hours each night. These proportionately long stretches of time and opulent sensory detail will not be omitted from my account of reality. I will omit the fact that my ethnic and migratory origins are not well documented, as well as the fact that I have not made efforts to look up whether historical records exist. I have only oral accounts recounted by members of my family. Given that these people are white or tried to pass as white or tried to pass into the ranks of propertied whites, it can safely be assumed that some of these stories are not only omissions, but also lies.

I will omit the fact that I have always communicated with trees.

From an intercontinental distance, I now watch them burn. I do not watch the videos or news reports. Instead, I log on to the glitchy government incident map that lags as it loads the sawtooth, matte pink perimeters that represent the live edges of wildfire. They lie, translucent and superimposed, above the shaded topographical rendering of the surface geography of a state. The names of highways and towns are still legible beneath its pink obliteration. Cool mint green represents the forests. Subterranean mineral stratigraphies are omitted from this dimension. I refresh the page every so often to catch the flat shape approaching the regions where my loved ones live. I superimpose its odorless and dissociated form onto my mental map of this land that, though at a great remove, shaped my being. My loved ones include the trees. I have only the capacity to digest this zoomed out, two-dimensional iconography of live catastrophe that omits all affect, texture, and consequence.

California first existed as a fictional island in a sixteenth-century romantic novel by the Spanish author Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo.¹ Calafia (from the Arabic *khalifa* for leader), was a beautiful Black queen on an island of warrior women who nourished their gryphon pets by feeding them the living bodies of men. California was the idea subsequently adopted by Spanish colonizers to delineate this edge of a chaotic assembly of islands and uplift of the ophiolitic sea floor that continues to press into the continent:

Thirty million years ago, the Pacific, North American, and Farallon tectonic plates collided and created the region's mountains and craggy coastline, as well as the region's climatic, topographic, and geological diversity. Mountains captured rain and served as barriers to migration. The interstitial spaces of the coast created refuges for peoples and animals ... In a Pomo creation story told by William Benson, Marumda formed the world out of wax, shaping specific habitats to support distinct life.²

The name "California" persisted even when the territory was cut in half and annexed by the United States from Mexico in 1848 following war and the exchange of \$15 million.³ The linguistic and sensorial worlding of state fiction through settler colonial law enclosed within itself the present-day territory of California. An act of Congress in 1853 established the Mendocino Indian Reservation, incorporating and interpellating Indigenous homelands into the federal state's legibility of property ownership, where I grew up in its temperate rainforests.⁴

He read the road signs with interest now, wondering what lay beneath the names. The Algonquins had named the territory he lived in Great Water, michi gami. How many dead lives and fading memories were buried in and beneath the names of the places in this country. Under the recorded names were other names ... bid from view the real names of people, places, and things. Names that had meaning.⁵

Noyo-Bida, Sho-Ka-Wab, Sedam, Buldam, Shanel, Ya-Mo-Bida, Kashaya, Kaogoma. These are some of the pre-colonial names for its geographies that persist, while many of the names the autonomous societies had for themselves in their seven distinct languages were erased through genocide by foreign viral

and microbial disease, enslavement, displacement, intermarriage, sloppy ethnography, massacre, educational indoctrination, and a century of federal lawsuits.

Their markets included currencies of beads made of clamshells smoothed by touch, and the more valuable magnesite, a cryptocrystalline volcanic mineral transmuted in veins of serpentinite and metamorphic terrains. When baked, magnesite turns from white to deep hues of citrus and salmon. The beads were called "pomo," which transliterates as "rock with a hole." An early settler ethnographer used this name of their currency to refer to all of the more than seventy autonomous bands of the seven different linguistic groups, and Pomo has persisted.⁶ The name of the ethnographer was forgotten. Or it might be an omission of my negligent research. Like an omission, a rock with a hole holds space—a hologram for the substance it contained.

This is a long preamble to even start the process of assembling words to refer to the people, places, and things to be accounted for within a world reconstructed through sense-memory.

Everything in the world began with a yes. One molecule said yes to another molecule and life was born. But before prehistory there was the prehistory of history and there was the never and there was the yes ... How does one start at the beginning, if things happen before they actually happen? If before the pre-history there already existed apocalyptic monsters?⁷

Language is a nebula of omissions. When nouns of common use in the present are evacuations of fact, I feel in the dark to draw the outline of holes.

The world I want to describe is the sensorium of state fictions. Property is a fiction of the state that ignores the interdependencies of human and non-human ecosystems across its bubbled boundaries. I want to make sense of how the imaginaries of property are superimposed upon and interrupted by a multiverse of other worlds. Because the state is an unreliable narrator, and because we can assume that the characters narrated into a fiction believe in the story that animates them, I will omit the fact that all members of the prior three generations of my family labored in the service of statecraft.

For more than two decades since I left the rented house where we lived in the forest, I arrange and rearrange its spatial formation in my dreams, to move through it again, to add to its unfinished narratives. It was a hostile shelter. When it was not the house itself leaking buckets of water from the roof, growing fluffy dark stains of mold under the carpet, leaving infected splinters from its raw timber walls in my hands, harboring scorpions that climbed the walls at night—it was the people inside, throwing objects and limbs at each other and kicking the dog when it barked. My refuge and kin were outside in the forest, or at the edges of cliffs above the ocean.

Outside in. Outside in. Outside. Inside. Inside out. In this outside, I was the outside.

Sublimation in physical chemistry is a phase transition in which a solid substance sublimes directly to the gas state, bypassing the liquid. I will omit the fact that I am human. Humans are mostly liquid, in the bypassed state. To sublime, to shapeshift, to take on the form of the non-human-other that so affects our subjectivity—I want to call it sublimation as well. But Sigmund Freud hijacked that beautiful alchemical metaphor to mean a mature coping mechanism by which a person displaces a socially unacceptable or destructive instinct into a socially acceptable one.⁸ And besides, humans have limits.

So much time spent outside in and inside out that my subjectivation was enmeshed with the vegetal and the animal and the mineral at all its scales. Our touch was negotiated across the material signs of property and the omissions of the dispossessed. By the time I arrived, the land had already been arranged and rearranged by the physical transformations of settler colonial statecraft. I followed scores of narrow paths into the woods, reliably compacted into shape by the hooves of deer. A faded fluorescent pink ribbon mounted on a dowel signaled the switch from our rental parcel to the empty one next door.

At the edge of this parcel a split fir tree had grown a double trunk curved like a hammock. Its limbs were the seat for osmotic duration. To avoid burning plants, I filtered the elemental nitrogen in my urine through thatches of dried

vegetal matter, delighting in the displaced sound: a variegated, high pitch flow absorbed without echo by the dense soil that contrasted the deeper, hollow reflections of piss hitting water in a porcelain vessel. As I returned to the house, I pressed my face against the trees I encountered, sensing their inconsistent moods beneath the ridges of bark. The contact left their filaments and microbiome on my skin, along with the mixed odor of sap, fiber, and communities of spored species living and decaying in the folds. They also left ticks at times, and elements of manganese, iron, calcium and copper drawn up from the soil and into their twigs and leaves. They transmuted their minerals through my skin, making me a fleshy vessel for geological animacies. I will omit our communications. What matters is that we established a channel of relation between us.

The deer trails crossed other sites bearing signs of activity that I was warned to avoid: a vagrant campsite with residues of intermittent rekindling; tall water tank clusters signaled the excessive thirst of a methamphetamine lab or hydroponic marijuana cultivation; lines of electric fence where no livestock were kept. These symbols prefaced an armed presence. Here the right to property ordains owners to punish trespass with gunfire. I could follow in the footsteps of deer, but if captured, I could not transubstantiate into the arboreal from the stubborn, identifiable shape of a child.

And a sheathe of bark enclosed her soft breast. Her hair turned into fluttering leaves, her arms into branches; her feet, once so swift, became mired in roots, and her face was lost in the canopy.⁹

I, like Daphne, enjoyed being pliant and soft. I liked running too, even if only to escape.

The road was no one's property: it belonged to everyone by means of the state, but the mounds of fur and flesh compressed into the asphalt indicated that cars held the hierarchy. Our mailbox perched at the edge of the road was punctured with bullet holes and occasionally delivered surprise pornography magazines to my father. They were anonymous signals that his home address was known by those who were displeased with a decision he had made in court about what they were permitted to build on their property. Eventually the mailbox was abandoned in favor of a Post Office box in town, where the clerk identified and discarded the hate mail in advance, without us ever knowing it had arrived.

My father worked as an environmental planner, influencing and making decisions about the interactions across private and public property within ecosystems, state infrastructures, and cultural heritage. Like all the socialist patriarchs in my filial line of white settlers, I own no titles to land. They simultaneously rejected and failed the racialized property ownership intentions of settler coloniality, even while their labor maintained the function and property of the state.

The author and literary critic Édouard Glissant analyzes epic poems of Western myth as foundational journeys that prefigure the establishment of settler colonies:

The retelling (certifying) of a "creation of the world" in a filiation guarantees that this same filiation—or legitimacy—rigorously ensues simply by describing in reverse the trajectory of the community, from its present to this act of creation ... The mythical community precedes any thought of the individual, whose foremost dimension is as a link in the chain of filiation.¹⁰

If the white working class of settler coloniality has a founding myth of filiation, it is the mumbled journey from exclusion to the promise of power and possession. It is the dream where their marginalized yet majority class power worlds a socialized "commons" through the just laws and institutions of a democratic state. But what are laws, and who decides what is held in common? Laws are mental maps of an idealized set of relations superimposed upon the material world. Laws are fictions of the state animated through laboring bodies and biophysical forces. And the founding myths of the State of California omit its own origins in racial genocide, ecocide, and slavery.

Today's climate fires and ecological catastrophes are fed by the accumulated dead fuel of the state's founding omissions. Any account for the acceleration of California's wildfires that does not reach back in time to the violence and terraforming of settler colonization is not only an omission, but also a lie.¹¹

In U.S. history, everything is about the land, who oversaw and cultivated it, who fished its waters, maintained its white life, who invaded and stole it. It's about how the land became a commodity: real estate, broken into pieces, to be bought and sold on the market. It is about how African bodies became properties and a source of labor, and how poor

white settlers embraced white supremacy as a substitute for land and slaves.¹²

In line with poor white settlers who relied upon the state for legitimization, environmental movements focused on conservation have historically mobilized the force of private property and capital to protect land and sites. Conservation assumes that natural ecosystems and human activities can be contained within separate, ontological bubbles. The founding myths of wilderness conservation and natural parks rely upon notions of racial exclusion that omit from their narrative arc of ecological histories the interdependent lifeways of generations of the Indigenous peoples of California.

Statecraft uses the same techniques of fiction to build its worlds and scenarios as those employed by artists. Political and cultural imaginaries are mutually influenced across all forms of media, from literature to film to games.¹³ Fiction is crafted on and off the page. *Worldbuilding* is a prefigurative practice, while *worlding* is the material implementation of the prefigurative into the lived, the felt, and the perceptual. The settler state's practice of laws, myths, and property are sensory, world-building projects. Its languages of property and possession have altered existing ecologies and naturalized themselves over generations to the human sensorium, through which we construct meaning and language.¹⁴ Which is to say that if our bodily sensorium maintains and animates the worldbuilding practice of statecraft, it is

time to rewrite the fictions that prefigure our embodied relations.

"The word is my fourth dimension."¹⁵

Umwelt, Umgebung, Merkzeichen, Wirkraum. These are some of the words with which the biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864–1944) articulates his theory of how organisms construct worlds of meaning and interpretation.¹⁶ Through non-linguistic signs figured across their bodies and environments, worlding takes place. The "um" in *Umwelt* puts the organism at the center of its own subjective reality, encircled by its world. Translated into English as "environment," *Umwelt* is an enclosed world. Uexküll's key theory of *Umwelt* is that a world is composed of a biosemiotic web of material signs legible and specific to each species, and even to each organism. Limits to perceptual capacity exist at the biophysical level; it is why we dream of metamorphosis to embody the powers of another organism. The sensory perception and life priorities of an organism formulate its spatio-temporal language of *Merkzeichen* (perception signs) and the *Wirkraum* (effect space) in which the *Merkzeichen* appear to the organism. Uexküll chose the uncharismatic yet familiar tick to narrate how its life priority to suck mammalian blood constructs for them a scented, sightless world of signs from touch, warmth, and butyric acid. The embodied, mediated nature of this system of biosemiotics thus describes a relation to the environment in which organisms oscillate

between physicality and a virtuality of the representational mind.¹⁷

Though Uexküll's model is recognized for its application to the biological world, he also talked about the phenomenology of vases, roads, and hats. He offers us the liberty to apply a theory of biosemiotics to human-fashioned constructs. We can therefore begin to look at the settler state in its transubstantiations as a language, as a medium, as an organism, as an ecology. Immersion in its perception signs of property affect the embodied, biosemiotic webs of all species within the ecologies of the state's *Umwelt*, nested within its surroundings (the *Umgebung*).

"The landscape of your word is the world's landscape. But its frontier is open."¹⁸

The Word for World is Forest is the title of a 1972 novella by Ursula K. Le Guin. It depicts a struggle between a colonizing force and the harmonious, native inhabitants of an enchanted forest.

The novella's plotline was mirrored in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* in 1983—shot in old growth redwood groves in Humboldt County that were clear-cut shortly thereafter ... then rehashed by the car bombing of Earth First! activist Judi Bari in 1990 ... rerun in the animated film *Fern Gully* in 1992 ... repeated in 1999 by a payment of several thousand acres of land plus \$480 million from the California State taxpayers to the real estate financier Charles Hurwitz in exchange for 7,500 acres of

the largest remaining grove of unlogged, old growth redwood trees—called Headwaters—which then became federal and state property. At the time, the campaign of predominantly white conservation activists saw the transfer of the forest's custody from private to state ownership as a worlding of the democratic commons. However, they did not think to advocate the return of these ancestral lands to the custody of the Wiyot tribe, who were then occupied with the critical work of establishing a new reservation to house their members ...¹⁹

The plotline repeated in *Avatar* in 2009; I watched this film in 3D in Istanbul upon invitation by a cameraman for *Al Jazeera* in Afghanistan, who was on vacation after being kidnapped by Al Qaeda in a U.S.-occupied territory, and wanted to zone out.

All these narrative arcs include one colonizer who is destined to become a traitor to his own origins when his moral crisis turns him to fight on the side of ecological justice. White settler conservation activists have played this character: Julia Butterfly was a traitor; Gypsy, killed when a logger felled a tree upon him, was a traitor.²⁰ I refer to these traitors by their chosen names, but theirs was a choice to erase their names and invent new ones in order to cut ties with their genealogies. If only severance with roots were so simple.²¹



Photograph of Gavin Kroeber, 2018. A white male figure dressed in black shorts and T-shirt is running away from the camera and up a dusty gray flow of solidified rhyolitic lava from six million years ago, towards a small mountain peak flanked by golden, dry grass and topped with a forest turned into charcoal from the extreme heat of the 2017 Tubbs fire in Sonoma, CA. Photo by Caitlin Berrigan.

The traitor in Le Guin's novels is often a translator or an anthropologist, tasked with mediating languages across worlds, and condemned to being mistrusted by all. She was familiar with this role because the "K" in her name was inherited as the daughter of prominent anthropologist Alfred Kroeber.²² His namings and framings of those who came to be known as "California Indians" did the dual work of both preserving some records of Indigenous cultures as they faced relentless violence and displacement, while also producing for the state the very knowledge systems and taxonomies by which its policies of exclusion and dispossession were carried out.²³

Le Guin's book *Always Coming Home* (1985) enmeshes her father's vexed methodologies with her own science fictional extrapolation of their

future after ecological disaster.²⁴ The novelist swaps the concept web of the state's political imaginary for her own literary one. If her speculative future mirrors the present moment, it cannot really be called prophetic, because when she wrote about the future, the past already contained the momentum of ecological collapse. The present we inhabit follows the logical narrative arc written by the extractive infrastructures of the settler state. The book includes simplified maps of Northern California's geography, onto which she superimposed placenames of her imaginary Kesh people, bearing resemblances to the Yuki, Miwok, Pomo, Wappo, and Patwin peoples.²⁵ Her nephew Gavin walked with me to the vistas where you can hold the book up against the horizon to see the same volcanic topography repeated as a line drawing on the page.

Between the colonial farmhouse Le Guin's brother named "Kishamish" that fed her imagination, and the redwood house on "Always Foggy Coast"²⁶ in which I grew up, lies a two-hour forty-minute drive from Highway 1 to the 128 to the 101. In the year 2026, the characters in author Octavia Butler's novel *Parable of the Sower* (1993) walk a southern section of this asphalt highway on foot, surrounded by flames.

*There's that fire drug with its dozen or so names: "Blaze, fuego, flash, sunfire ... The most popular name is pyro—short for pyromania. It makes watching the leaping, changing patterns of fire a better, more intense, longer-lasting high than sex.*²⁷

But I saw no flames from the 101 in August of 2018, when the Mendocino Camp Fire broke

out near Kishamish and burned through November, the largest California wildfire to date at that time.²⁸ I saw only the buoyant flammagenitus clouds that form in shapes of white thunder as heat from the wildfire sucks oxygen out of the air and atmospheric moisture condenses above before being contaminated by ash. The sunsets refract into the colors of citrus and salmon.

The Mendocino Camp Fire ringed the heavily contaminated edge of the Pomo waters called Elem (Clear Lake), whose islands and shores hold the region's historic sources of minerals unearthed by the Indigenous peoples there since at least 10,000 years, including obsidian glass and the magnesite that was used as currency (pomo). Starting in the nineteenth century, the area was mined by settlers for mercury, which they used to purify gold and silver from ores. Gold Rush settlers enslaved Pomo people in their operations. When in 1850 a few Pomo people escaped from sexual and labor bondage and killed two settlers who had murdered a Pomo boy, the U.S. Army organized a massacre on *Bo-no-po-ti* island in the lake, executing one of the largest and most under-acknowledged incidents of mass murder in U.S. history.²⁹ Lucy Moore was a six-year-old girl who survived with her mother by metamorphosis—becoming amphibious, hiding underwater and breathing through a hollow tule reed.³⁰ The Gold Rush began a long, leaky stratigraphy of superfund toxicity that contaminates the lake's ecology and the bodies of the Elem Pomo people who continue to live

there, layered over and into the stones that had been formed by volcanic, subterranean fires.³¹

*I wonder if the ground has anything to say? I wonder if the ground is listening to what is said? I wonder if the ground would come alive and what is on it? (We-ab Te-na-tee-many, or "Cayuse Little Chief," 1855.)*³²

I admit that I couldn't really get into the simplistic plot of *The Word for World is Forest*, but what matters is that the title alone is a perfect sentence. In six words, it expresses that a forest is a complex ecological system and not an object or assemblage. It refers to the process by which meaning-making through signs—semiosis—is constructed through an organism's phenomenal and relational existence with its environment.

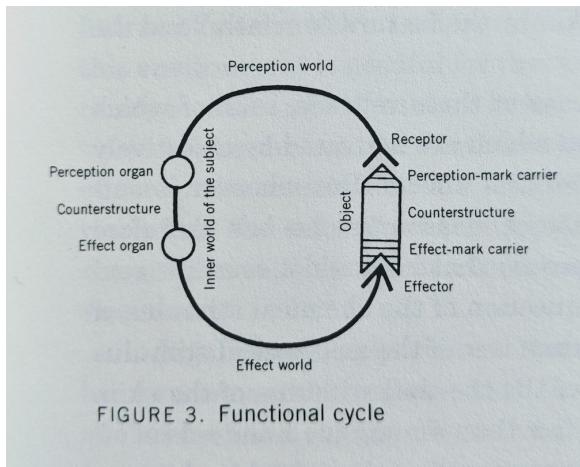


FIGURE 3. Functional cycle

"FIGURE 3. Functional cycle." Diagram is a black and white, two-dimensional, closed oval shape interrupted by a few simplified geometries. Text reads at the bottom: "Effect world"; left cluster: "Inner world of the subject – Effect organ – Counterstructure – Perception organ"; top: "Perception world"; right cluster: "Object – Receptor – Perception-mark carrier – Counterstructure – Effect-mark carrier – Effector." From Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans: With a Theory of Meaning*, trans. Joseph O'Neil, 1st University of Minnesota Press ed, Posthumanities 12 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

Our biological sensory apparatuses determine the limits of the farthest planes of our individual Umwelt, a world which Uexküll suggests we visualize as soap bubbles:

*We will see each of our fellow human beings as being enclosed in bubbles that effortlessly overlap one another because they are made up of subjective perception signs. There is no space independent of subjects. If we still want to cling to the fiction of an all-encompassing-world-space, that is only because we can get along with each other more easily with the help of this conventional fable.*³³

Omit the organismic specificity of Immanuel Kant's "human" and we get an Uexküllian metaphysics: "*The human being itself is the original creator of all its representations and concepts and ought to be the sole author of all its actions.*"³⁴ The persistence of virtual perception signs in the mind leaves them plastic to time and imagination. Though we do not have eyes on the backs of our heads, we fill in the holes with holograms. I am not proposing that we rely upon either a Kantian or an Uexküllian metaphysics to model the world; but I am proposing that they offer a useful model of the sensorial worlding of statecraft.

Science, fiction, and technological prostheses serve as tools to transcend the limits of our sensorium, and the edges of what is offered by our own bubbled Umwelt. We use them to try to imagine the subjective realities of other beings, and to interpret the inhuman languages through which they are expressed. "*Significance ... is not the exclusive province of humans.*"³⁵ I am not just referring to animals, but also to how minerals make meaning. Some rocks, for

example, carry the residual memory of the orientation and intensity of the earth's magnetic field relative to the rock at the time of its formation. With delicate instrumentation, this record of terrestrial alignment in time can be translated into sound.³⁶ The magnesite from Elem's continuously animated volcanic fields holds subjective memories of the earth's polar-wander paths as old as 2.1 million years. These magnesite memories can be transmuted through its microscopic saturation in the soil, drawn into the tissues of the trees and from there into the ecology of forest relations. As a partially mineral being, my understanding of time has a different valence and vector.

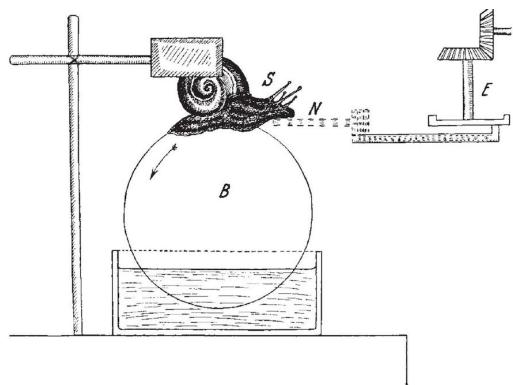


FIGURE 16. The snail's moment. *B* = ball,
E = eccentric, *N* = stick, *S* = snail

"FIGURE 16." Diagram is black and white, in the style of simplified mechanical illustration, depicting an apparatus for a stick hitting the head of a snail held suspended by an anchored rectangle, atop a dimensionless, empty circle floating in a shaded rectangle. Text reads: "The snail's moment. *B* = ball, *E* = eccentric, *N* = stick, *S* = snail." From Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans: With a Theory of Meaning*, trans. Joseph O'Neil, 1st University of Minnesota Press ed, Posthumanities 12 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

Uexküll thought that an organism's perception of time could be quantified by measuring the smallest indivisible "moment signs." A diagram of an experiment to measure

a snail's perception of time shows a *Helix pomatia* placed on a rubber ball floating in water, while its shell is held in place by a clamp. "The snail is thereby free to crawl and also stays in the same place."³⁷ A stick is placed beneath the snail to hit it at different frequencies, to determine at which speed of "motion signs" the snail will perceive the stick as being still or when it is moving, thus concluding the perception time of the snail's Umwelt.

Herr Jakob Johann Baron von Uexküll,
When you say "clamp a snail"

(YAK-KUB VON OOKSGULL,
I would never recognize your name off the page)
when you say "clamp a snail" and put
it on a rubber ball in water

when you say hit the snail repeatedly
with a
stick

when do you recognize that in an effort to articulate
another's world
you have fundamentally altered your own?³⁸

Uexküll calls the existing, *a priori* surroundings of an organism the Umgebung. It is composed of things that may contribute to meaning-making only if an organism's sensory perception can access them. These things are what Kant calls *phenomena*. But the Umgebung also contains that which remains inaccessible to an organism's sensorium, which Kant calls *noumena*. While the Umgebung holds both noumena and phenomena, the subjective Umwelt of an organism contains only

phenomena. The noumena of the *Umgebung* are thus inaccessible to meaning-making.

However, Uexküll failed to account for the deliberate, violent transformation of existing phenomena in the environment into noumena: the omissions from the biosemiotic worlding of an *Umwelt*. vector.



Clear-cut in Eureka, California, ca. 1900. Black-and-white silver gelatin photograph shows a vast landscape with hundreds of enormous tree stumps in a flat plain that extends to the horizon. Sky is uniform and gray. Some stumps show flat, angled cuts that indicate industrial logging. Sharply uneven, charcoal edges on other stumps, the stark lack of brush, and a skinny, deeply black tree in the foreground are indications that the whole area was set on fire after being clear-cut. In the mid-ground stands a one-story, pitched roof shelter with three doors next to a road, which are the only objects that can be used for comparative scale. The footprint of the whole building is equal only to two tree stumps placed end to end. Photographer unknown.

Returning to the woods of my sense-memories: to the forests now in flames. For nearly two hundred years since the logging industry clear-cut ninety-eight percent of all the old growth redwood forest on earth, this land and all those who inhabited it have been subject to infinite divisions and subdivisions. The redwood lumber was used to build colonial cities in Northern California and to construct hydraulic pressure systems invented for the Gold Rush that carved and dissolved whole

mountains for tiny particles of gold sedimented within them.³⁹

Even now, the appetite for gold grows ever more molecular. Money may not grow on trees, but the interior tissues of a tree's leaves become gilded with gold when it is taken up through the soil by deep arboreal roots and deposited into their veins. State-funded scientists in Australia have isolated quantities of gold accumulated inside the leaves of trees. They render the microscopic mineral traces visible in 3D with a tool called the Synchrotron, a ringed particle accelerator the size of a football field that manipulates electromagnetic fields. It looks like an aperture, an anus, a panopticon, or an iris.⁴⁰ The probe demonstrates the stability of certain minerals as they animate and contaminate living tissues. Recently, a private mining company applied these methods to successfully prospect for subterranean ores of gold—verticalized and atomized within forest bodies.⁴¹ If ores of gold can be found by proxy of the leaves on trees, what would the search look like for magnesite and its electromagnetic memories?

I put this moment ... here. I put this moment ... here.
I put this moment—over here! Over here!⁴²

Sliced bodies of two-thousand-year-old trees
haunt the forest with abandoned, decapitated

trunks. The noumena of their height can be drawn in the mind, extruded from the shape of their base. Wildfires have been through these hills and left evidence in carbonized stumps. Some are still alive. Having lost their bodies, the trees send out genetically identical sprouts from their roots to grow new selves.

A balanced ring of young shoots encircles the immense, burned out root of one redwood in front of my old house. They are hundreds of feet tall, and still just a fraction of the age of the mother clone. Spikes of dense charcoal rise in the center like a black flame—the only etched remains of the original tree. Like sentinels guarding a void, the young trees drop their red needles into a soft depression in the center. To enter it is to cross a threshold, to sink into its decomposing needles as deep as snow. (Fuel for the next fire.) Nocturnal animals used to activate the motion sensor of the lamp in the driveway, suddenly illuminating the tree branches in my bedroom window at night like bleached green ghosts. Once as a child, I entered this vortex to play, and two burgundy and black scorpions climbed into my hands. I understood then that this hollow was not for play but was instead a holding space to contain the lingering forces of violence that, in just one century, razed thousands of years of continuous human culture and the forests cultivated into wild gardens by the California Indians.

The Word for World is Forest: an imperfect novel decrying colonization and condemning the translator to death—is it possible to translate this perfect title sentence into the

language of the inhuman? I do not yet know the name that the forest calls itself.

I regularly encountered the hauntings in the woods—neither noumena nor phenomena. At the time, I lacked the fortification and skill to yield to their speech long enough to make out whether the destructive tone I sensed came from the vicious substance of their stories—or whether their tone carried a justifiably vengeful threat. When I asked the adults around me to whom they belonged, the lie repeated to me was that the forests could not be haunted because no one lived in them until after they had already been logged. Now I know I should have listened more closely to the ghosts—but their tone was terrifying.⁴³

*"You do not know, my rash one, you just don't know / Who you are running from, and that's why you run."*⁴⁴ Like any kin, the forest both loved and betrayed me.

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Caitlin Berrigan works across performance, video, sculpture, and text to engage with the embodied ecologies of power, politics, technology, and life worlds. Recent works explore poetics and queer science fiction as a world-making practice through voice, instruments, and moving images. Berrigan's work has shown at the Whitney Museum, Berlinale, Goldsmiths, Poetry Project, Henry Art Gallery, Harvard Carpenter Center, Anthology Film Archives, and UnionDocs, among others.

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2. Daniel B. Akins and William J. Bauer, *We Are the Land: A History of Native California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021), 9. Thanks to Dr. Kathleen Whiteley for this reference.

3. Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: Perfected Treaties, 1778–1945," February 2, 1848, Article XII, General Records of the United States Government, National Archives Building, Washington, DC,

<https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/guadalupe-hidalgo-original>.

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5. Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977; New York: Vintage International, 2004), 329. Citation refers to the Vintage Intl. edition.

6. Kat Anderson, *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California's Natural Resources* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 34. Thanks to the independent booksellers at the Mendocino Gallery Bookshop for stocking this title, where I encountered it in their store.

7. Clarice Lispector, *The Hour of the Star*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (New York: New Directions, 1992), 11.

8. Art is often offered as a standard Freudian definition of cultural sublimation of trauma and neuroses.

Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality: The 1905 Edition*, trans. Ulrike Kistner (London and New York: Verso, 2016).

9. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010), 70.

10. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 47.

11. Heather Davis and Zoe Todd, "On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 16, no. 4 (2017): 761–80.

12. *Exterminate All the Brutes*, season 1, episode 1, "The Disturbing Confidence of Ignorance," directed by Raoul Peck, aired April 7, 2021 on HBO.

13. On the worlding of the "Third World" through the British literary canon, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (October 1, 1985): 243–61; on science fiction in statecraft, see Peter Galison, "The Future of Scenarios : State Science Fiction," in *The Subject of Rosi Braidotti : Politics and Concepts* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 38–46; Janet Vertesi, "'All These Worlds Are Yours except ...': Science Fiction and Folk Fictions at NASA," *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*, no. 5 (2019): 135–59, <https://doi.org/10.17351/estss2019.315>; Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim, *Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

14. I use "we" to gather the otherwise heterogenous subjects of the U.S. settler state.

15. Clarice Lispector, *Água Viva*, trans. Stefan Tobler (New York: New Directions, 2012), 4.

16. Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans: With a Theory of Meaning*, trans. Joseph O'Neil, 1st University of Minnesota Press ed, Posthumanities 12 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

17. See also contemporary theories of biosemiotics and more-than-human meaning-making in Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Elizabeth Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Timo Maran, "Semiotization of Matter: A Hybrid Zone between Biosemiotics and Material Ecocriticism," in *Material Ecocriticism*, ed. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 141–57; Jason Edward Lewis et al., "Making Kin with the Machines," *Journal of Design and Science*, July 16, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.21428/bfafd97b>.

18. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 33.

19. Conversation between the author and Ted Hernandez, Wiyot Cultural Director and tribal historic preservation officer, July 28, 2021.

20. Shana Moulton, *Whispering Pines 10*, video and website, 2020, <https://www.whisperingpines10.com>; Margot Hornblower, "Julia Hill, Butterfly: Five Months At 180 Ft.," *TIME*, November 5, 1998, <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,988314,00.html>; Alex Barnum, "Toppled Tree Kills Logging Protester in Humboldt / First Fatality in Decade of Activism," *SFGATE*, September 18, 1998, <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Toppled-Tree-Kills-Logging-Protester-in-Humboldt-2990323.php>.

21. The incommensurable project of white innocence can lead to abject identification with parasitic organisms named after queer poets and fantasies of self-decapitation as in Mary Walling Blackburn, "From the Gnome's Genome to Trash DNA: Technologies of Ancestor Phantasy for a Final Generation," *e-flux Journal*, no. 106 (February 2020), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/106/314856/from-the-gnome-s-genome-to-trash-dna-technologies-of-ancestor-phantasy-for-a-final-generation/>. On settler moves to innocence, see generally Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (September 8, 2012).

22. On Alfred Kroeber's legacy and work, see Gretchen Kell, "Kroeber Hall, Honoring Anthropologist Who Symbolizes Exclusion, Is Unnamed," *Berkeley News* (blog), January 26, 2021, <https://news.berkeley.edu/2021/01/26/kroeber-hall-unnamed/>; Alfred L. Kroeber, "Handbook of the Indians of California," *Bulletin 78* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology, 1925).

23. On crafting a thoughtful methodology for the problems and fluidity of aggregate naming practices, Atkins and Bauer write, "The language used to refer to people, any people, is both arbitrary and powerful. It is created, and it creates. Words sit at the center of the

contested terrain of cultural sovereignty ... As much as possible, we have used the names people used for themselves instead of ascriptive terms ... In our varied experiences, most California Indians use that term, or Native Californians, to refer to themselves. There are exceptions, and we imagine those tendencies may shift over time. We remain alert to those changing patterns." Akins and Bauer, *We Are the Land*, 9–11.

24. Ursula K Le Guin, *Always Coming Home*, SF Masterworks (London: Orion Publishing Group, 2016). Thanks to Gavin Kroeber for introducing me to this site and work, on and off the page.

25. NTS Radio and Andrea Zarza Canova, "Always Coming Home: A Sonic Journey From Kesh," NTS Radio, January 22, 2020, <https://www.nts.live/incoming/always-coming-home>.

26. As correlated using the illustrated maps of Kesh in Le Guin, *Always Coming Home*.

27. Octavia E Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Aspect, 1995), 246–47.

28. Surpassed shortly thereafter by the August Complex Fire in 2020, and then by the Dixie Fire in 2021. CalFire, "Top 20 Largest California Wildfires," State of California, January 13, 2022, https://www.fire.ca.gov/media/4jandlh/top20_acres.pdf.

29. Jeremiah Garsha, "Reclamation Road: A Microhistory of Massacre Memory in Clear Lake, California," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 9, no. 2 (October 2015): 61–75, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.9.2.1292>.

30. Sasha Khokha and Suzie Racho, "Marking a California Massacre—With a Native Ceremony of Forgiveness," *KQED*, May 15, 2020, <https://www.kqed.org/news/11818362/markings-a-california-massacre-with-a-native-ceremony-of-forgiveness>; Akins and Bauer, *We Are the Land*, 136.

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32. Lawrence Kip, *The Indian Council at Walla Walla, May and June, 1855* (Eugene: University of Oregon, 1897), quoted in Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the*

Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1.

33. Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, 70.

34. Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties / Der Streit Der Fakultäten*, trans. Mary Gregor, Janus Series 3 (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), 129.

35. Eduardo Kohn, "How Dogs Dream: Amazonian Natures and the Politics of Transspecies Engagement," *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 1 (February 2007): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2007.34.1.3>. Thanks to Jol Thomson for this reference.

36. See the artwork *Tsinamekuta* (2016–20) by Marcela Armas, featured as part of the exhibition *Common Frequencies* at BioBAT Art Space, Brooklyn, New York, May–October 2021. See generally paleomagnetism in Stephen Marshak, *Essentials of Geology*, Fifth Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 48.

37. Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, 72.

38. Elena Ailes, *Nightshade* (Chicago: Kastle Editions, 2017). Thanks to Elena Ailes for permission to reprint this poem, and to Jessica Sarah Rinland for introducing me to it. See generally, "the observer effect" and the "double-slit experiment" and Karen Barad's notion of "agential realism" in Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

39. Anderson, *Tending the Wild*, 99.

40. Thanks Sam Hertz for this image reference.

41. J. Thomas Nash and Frederick Norville Ward, "Biogeochemical Prospecting for Uranium with Conifers: Results from the Midnite Mine Area, Washington," USGS Numbered Series, *Biogeochemical Prospecting for Uranium with Conifers: Results from the Midnite Mine Area, Washington*, vol. 77–354, Open-File Report (U.S. Geological Survey, 1977), <https://doi.org/10.3133/ofr77354>; Harley D. King, Gary C. Curtin, and Hansford T. Shacklette, "Metal Uptake by Young Conifer Trees," *United States Geological Survey Bulletin*, USGS Numbered Series (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1984), 18, <https://doi.org>

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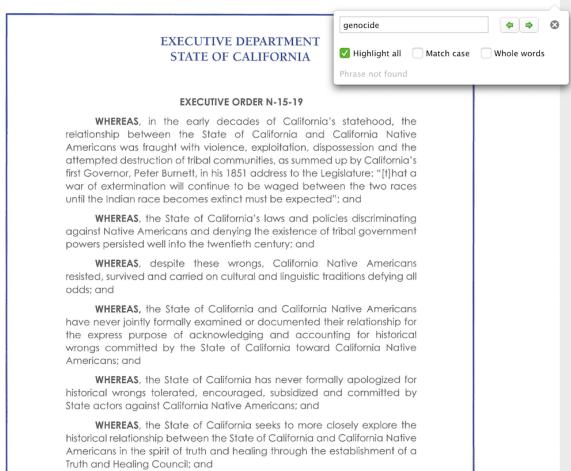
43. Eve Tuck and C. Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, eds. Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis, Research Methods / Cultural Studies (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2013), 639–58; Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Colin Dayan, *The Law Is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011). Thanks to Dr. Heather Davis for the reference to Tuck and Ree. Thanks to Dr. Haneen Naamneh for the reference to Dayan.

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GEORGIA

Omissions: Part 2

Caitlin Berrigan



Screenshot of a PDF copy of the Executive Department, State of California, Executive Order N-15-19, issued by the office of Governor Gavin Newsom, June 18, 2019. The screenshot includes legible text from the first six "WHEREAS" statements. At the top right, a search box set to highlight found instances of the word "genocide" displays the result: "Phrase not found."

A fact omitted from my early education is that in the 1920s, after a century of massacres and displacements, multiple bands of Pomo peoples gathered in solidarity at Buldam. The unmarked site is nestled between forested ridges, on the banks five miles inland from where a big, brackish river empties into the ocean at the Victorian village of Mendocino, the town where I grew up. As private loggers completed the clear-cutting of the old-growth forests, the Pomo peoples were forcibly removed from Buldam by the U.S. Army. I had been told that most of them had always lived in the warm oak

meadows where some live now on the Round Valley Reservation.⁴⁵ Sports tournaments surface this geographical segregation and ethnic cleansing, when public school buses shuttle white kids and brown kids to and from opposite directions—between the economically impoverished sunshine of the district near the reservation, and the gothic fog banks of the coast where mostly white settler children live.

The generation of my parents, the artists and hippies, came in a rush during the 1960s and 1970s with counter-cultural intentions to mend their social oppressions and to heal and conserve the land ravaged by industrial logging.⁴⁶ They were desensitized to the noumena of omissions, and strove to rewild the land according to environmental conservation theories that excluded Native Californians from the wilderness their ancestors had created and maintained. The land was further fractioned into smaller parcels of cheap properties sold off by logging company holdings.⁴⁷ My mother cultivated my expertise in real estate offerings of the region. She assigned me the task of spotting "for sale" signs from the car and searching through advertisements in the newspaper. I circled those that managed to fall within her parameters of modest budget and size—and that did not bear evident traces of having been used recently for making meth and requiring costly renovations. Each week for eight years I diligently executed this sub-cycle of aspirational property ownership for her, as a repetitive, embodied discipline.

The parents of many schoolmates bought these resource-devalued parcels, called them ranches, and spent their days handcrafting lofty estates and watering their gardens. I could not make sense of how they had so many resources without jobs, whereas my parents hustled long hours in waged labor and money was tight. One evening my nine-year-old friend called her stepmom from our friend's house to ask her to come pick her up; instead, the FBI answered the phone while in the middle of raiding her house for drugs. They call it the Emerald Triangle, the largest marijuana agricultural zone of North America.⁴⁸

As the hippie wave of settlers revalued the fractionated land with new forms of cultural capital—wilderness conservation and drug markets—they also appropriated what they understood about the traditional sweat lodge ceremonies and expanded the planes of the human Umwelt with psychedelics. They followed the influential culture of nonprofit organizations such as the Esalen Institute, a self-described "intentional community" tasked with stretching "human potentialities," located in Big Sur on a cliff with a pool of hot springs overlooking the ocean.⁴⁹ We were taught the songs and stories of the first Indigenous peoples, whose myths molded our imaginations.

Their massacres were noumena. It was only in 2019 that Governor Gavin Newsom issued a formal apology to Native Americans of California. "It's called genocide," he said at the ceremonial event. Although the text of the executive order does not call it by this name.⁵⁰

White supremacy omits the fact that law and property are creation myths, and not the concrete phenomena of a shared sensorial world. As the professor and theorist of law Cheryl Harris writes in her classic text:

The origins of whiteness as property lie in the parallel systems of domination of Black and Native American peoples out of which were created racially contingent forms of property and property rights ... Whiteness shares the critical characteristics of property even as the meaning of property has changed over time. In particular, whiteness and property share a common premise—a conceptual nucleus—of a right to exclude ... Possession—the act necessary to lay the basis for rights in property—was defined to include only the cultural practices of whites. This definition laid the foundation for the idea that whiteness—that which whites alone possess—is valuable and is property.⁵¹

Worldings of whiteness and wilderness are intertwined.

Reservation communities had been established in 1853 and 1909 to settle Indigenous people dispossessed of their lands. But with the California Rancheria Termination Acts of 1958 and 1964, many of these were no longer recognized in a claim of benevolent state care encouraging "assimilation"—by which is meant erasure. A total of forty-six rancherias were terminated, making it possible for the lands to be possessed as U.S. public domain or as private property. Over the following half century, more than thirty of these small communities (some no more than forty people) filed federal lawsuits and reinstated titles to their land in 1977, 1979, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1986, 1991, 1992, and 2009.

"The U.S. legal system has been incapable of recognizing Indigenous peoples' very different relationship to land largely because of its recognition of land as property," writes Harris.⁵² These property titles and concepts of belonging are virtual perception signs (Merkzeichen) that materially instantiate the effect-space of the law (Wirkraum). Property and belonging require recognition by the state, and are therefore always already inscribed within the worlded Umwelt of Californian coloniality.

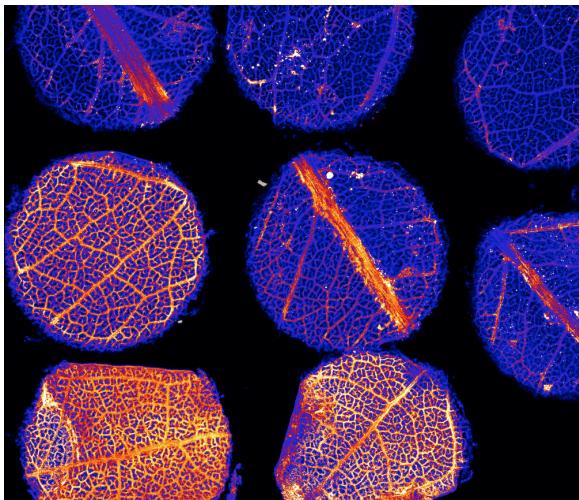
"I did not want to be in a nine-year lawsuit," said the tribal warrior and treasurer Yellow Bird Woman Eloise Cobell (Niitsítapi Blackfoot Confederacy), in the middle of what turned out to be a sixteen-year lawsuit on behalf of 500,000 Native Americans.⁵³ The lawsuit was settled in 2010, when she successfully secured \$3.4 billion—a smaller portion of the billions of dollars of revenue from resource leases and fees owed to Native Americans by the federal government that had never been paid out.⁵⁴ Cobell died a year later. Part of the settlement has enabled tribes including the Round Valley Reservation to buy back fractionated land.

Outside of lawsuits, the Indigenous peoples of California continue to model and advocate for a practice of worlding ways to belong to each other and to an ecology of relations outside of land possession, undermining and subverting statecraft through the laws of property.⁵⁵ Property taxes collected by the state omit remuneration to the people whose ancestral lands were dispossessed. Tribes such as the Ohlone—on whose unceded land Silicon Valley

was established—have initiated systems whereby property owners can submit voluntary land taxes directly to the tribes.⁵⁶ All this while the tech industry impoverishes the state by evading taxes through offshore accounts, and undermines democratic oversight by pushing forward libertarian "innovation zone" cities governed by private corporations.⁵⁷

Silicon is a crystalline chemical element abundant in the earth's crust, which must be highly purified and atomically aligned with the beam of a nuclear reactor before it can become useful to semiconductor electronics. The earthliness of its hardware belies the metaphors of immaterial labor and wealth that hold aloft the fictional site of Silicon Valley. Since its founding, Apple Incorporated has persistently grounded its filial creation myth within an apple orchard in Palo Alto. Its products feature the inscription "Designed by Apple in California" and are associated with geographic features of the state, thereby naturalizing the ballooning land values and sharp economic wealth gaps instantiated by the luxury tech sector. Since the release of OS X Yosemite in 2014, Apple has named its operating system software after designated California wilderness areas. In 2020, Apple released OS 11 Big Sur, without an accompanying land acknowledgment. The same year, the federally unrecognized Esselen tribe of Monterey County regained a 1,199-acre parcel of Little Sur wilderness—a small fraction of their ancestral homelands—when a private conservancy facilitated the purchase and transfer of the parcel with state government funds.⁵⁸ The

Esalen Institute for human potential was not included in the return of the tribe's lands. Is it within the potential of silicon to atomically realign humans according to its own crystalline desires?



Gum leaf samples showing traces of manganese. A non-lens-based photograph depicts a cluster of eight flattened, disc-shaped leaves against a dimensionless black background. The veins and fibers of the leaves are artificially colored cerulean blue. Some of the veins of the leaves are also filled with varied saturations of yellow, orange, and red gradients. © CSIRO Australia, 2019.

Only a few decades after the old-growth redwood forests were clear-cut, most of their lumber was burned in 1906 when the San Andreas fault shook apart gas and electric lines across the Bay Area, setting fire to the Victorian buildings erected on redwood struts and beams. It is a common omission of historical record that this was, in fact, the revenge of geological animacies upon the colony. But this infernal decimation of San Francisco cultivated a fear-driven practice of fire suppression that became official policy to this day. Fire, like wilderness and Native Californians, was excluded from the Umwelt of Californian coloniality. Outlawed

were the fire-dependent lifeways of millennia of Indigenous fire stewardship that promote critical habitat, reduce the number of wildfires, and maintain the "metaphysical and biophysical relationships of people and their environment."⁵⁹ Dead forest fuels instead were left to accumulate over one hundred years, and pests controlled by routine cultural burns infected the undergrowth. The woodland floor thus untouched by humans gathered into a thick, springy thatch of molted vegetal matter, teeming underneath with fungus and weevils.⁶⁰ Growing up, I misinterpreted its elastic mass as a perception sign of "wilderness"—the forest left to itself in feral nobility.

My grandfather Leo called certain varieties of trees "dirty" because they left extra messes of branches and leaves for him to clean up. He had been a park ranger, and on his long walks through urban neighborhoods the year before he died at 94, he still could not resist the ingrained habit of tidying plant tangles shed along the sidewalk. An almost compulsive allegiance to hygiene is a family trait born from class. Recounting their elementary school, his sister defined the line between them and the other children by their bathed bodies. She said, "we were at least—you know—clean." My grandfather's plant pruning thus struck me as a rejection of the arboreal baroque, or as an imposition of a fastidious aesthetic where the perilous maintenance of a dustless boundary holds the gap between poverty and destitution.

But Leo's relation to trees was partially right. A garden is a world-making practice, and all of

California had been tended to as a wildcrafted garden before settlers arrived.⁶¹ Starting in 1901, twenty years before Leo was born, a bill was passed that authorized state funds to purchase and consolidate properties deeded in perpetuity as parks: circumscribing worlds apart from the settler colony that treat nature as sites for tourism and recreation in the public domain. Like ecofascism today, early conservationists such as John Muir cast a benevolent white gaze of supremacy upon the sublime vistas of the national parks, claiming to be traitors to the encroachment of resource extraction while driving the violent displacement of California Indians from the complex ecological worlds that made the land valuable in the first place. The exact enunciations of their white supremacy are not worth repeating, because their words still animate the institutions of the state.⁶²

Leo was raised in the San Fernando Valley by a man who fled a family obligation to enter the Irish Catholic priesthood by hopping trains with hobos. The single father of five shared the survival skills of vagrancy with his children: how to become familiar with an unknown landscape and how to fish the rivers for food. This interaction with the natural world led Leo to his profession as a caretaker in state parks. Up until the end of his life, my grandfather never owned a home or land. His positions as a state park ranger enabled him to live with his family in small recreation areas in the redwoods and on beaches near Los Angeles, most bequeathed to the public from the estates of wealthy actors and oil tycoons. All precarious workers must contend with the grim coercion of

the property system as it becomes increasingly stratified: possess or perish. Leo's career decision was both a survival strategy and an idealism of the unskilled, uneducated working class: to embed themselves in state institutions.

By retirement, his civil servant salary was no match for the market of California real estate. He purchased a manufactured double-wide in a 55+ homeowner's association subdivision in the high desert of Nevada. In the hottest months of summer where it is the hottest place on earth, Leo and his wife dotted around in an RV across national parks. They could have been extras in scenes from the film *Nomadland* (2020), where the economically disenfranchised white precariat does not proclaim class warfare upon the predacious gig economy. Instead, in an effort of cognitive dissonance, they salvage their dignity by claiming to be released from Fordian labor and temporality and into the manicured, transcendent nature of Western landscapes—those that were dispossessed from Native Americans.

To evade the confrontation of class exploitation, the colonizer's offering to the working class of white settlers has been a sense of belonging within white supremacy or belonging within a democratic commons—both of which are already founded in genocide.⁶³ How can the white settler working class disavow this Faustian bargain? How is it possible to become a traitor to the colonizer within, without becoming either a martyr or a white savior? The lie of this filial fiction is made perceptible through the holes in the craft of its

worldbuilding, through the fires it can no longer contain, through the glitch that, as Lauren Berlant writes, "*is an interruption within a transition, a troubled transmission. A glitch is also the revelation of an infrastructural failure.*"⁶⁴

Not all fictions are lies, but indeed there is a lie at the heart of this one that serves the purpose of deception: to conceal the true executors of power, their unattainability, and their ideological inconsistencies.

I am not ideologically consistent, nor am I materially consistent. I omitted the fact that I am human but conceded that I am a partially mineral being. I have omitted my communications with trees, but have allowed the lisp of mineral agencies to leave residues within my narrations. I want to go deeper into the exercise of worldbuilding, to imagine our (in)human potential to dishabituate the settler colonial sensorium and narrative arcs to which we have become adapted. Can we world our way into a storyline of collective desire?

I made decisions about inessential details that can be omitted. In some cases, a fully dimensional object is unnecessary, and we can make do with set pieces and scaffolding. I have sketched a biosemiotic model of how state fictions of property and the law become materialized through organismic sensoria. I have accounted for the presence and perceptibility in our existing surroundings of both noumena and phenomena. Though our

dreams are ambitious and elastic, we will not be building a world from a blank slate; we will be worlding this storyline into a pre-existing ecology of relations and beings, including all its frictions and contradictions. Therefore, I have begun to assemble some of the essential figures and features of this world—as well as the omissions.

With the parameters of the world crafted for us thus far, we can begin to narrate a test scenario: subterranean agencies of the earth have long been precipitating within the living tissues of organisms, including those of our author/narrator. In resistance to extraction for their use in communication technologies, minerals have formed an alliance with forest ecologies to build technological networks of collective intelligence. Part of the intention of the alliance is to resist material domination by the neocolonial tech and space industry, by now both deeply embedded within and evasive of the state. Stone is slow, so it took some time to materialize anything that could be considered infrastructure within the bodies of trees. The first scene is an initial encounter that takes place in the recent past—a quarter century after the narrator's formative subjectivation amidst the early regrowth of the clear-cut redwood forests:

I make a visit to my childhood home. For this arrangement in my mind, I sublet from the owners the spacious, upstairs master bedroom I had shared with my sister. Remnants of product displays lean around the room from a psilocybin cappuccino microdosing boutique that recently moved out. Despite the scarcity of water and resource collapse, the

owners are hoping to attract a business earning higher revenue. The former commune next door has been further fractioned into expensive vacation rentals and an invitation-only sanctuary for queer artists to connect with nature.

The vacation rental host lets slip to me that one of the factors contributing to the accelerating real estate value here is that the CIA is holding seances in the forest. Because there is still very little cellular and informational technology infrastructure, the redwoods act as a natural shield and conceal the mass gatherings of spies. Although the local residents never know when the spies come and go, they bring in streams of money simply by coming and requiring food, filling up gas tanks, using electricity, and building an infrastructure to remain hidden. It is hard to distinguish a spy from the Silicon Valley tourists on ketamine retreats.

Here I think the narrator should drive to the rented house—and the tires spin catching a grip on the steep dirt curve. We introduce some ambiguity: Is that a raven or a man-eating gryphon perched in the tree, or is it Julia Butterfly? We could use a costume of feathered cornrows that resemble the character Neytiri from *Avatar*. But the Grimey wings could signal an emo techno origin, further suggesting the creature is a former warehouse squatter turned gig-working platform technology customer support agent, taking a much-needed soma holiday from emotional labor to communicate via fungal reveries with the tree kin. We want the figure to be cringe-relatable.

I park in front of the house, but I do not go inside. I slink into the void made by the circle of cloned redwoods, where the fire fuel of neglected needles continues to assemble in mounting volume. The enormous black stump of the old-growth tree meets me. I gaze into the face, etched across its weathered charcoal surface. I am received and seen. "As always these ghosts are in league with matter."⁶⁵ I do not know what to offer, or how to soothe it.

As I oscillate anxiously under its steady scrutiny, I notice a new formation that was not there when I was growing up. A milky, cryptocrystalline chrysalis is precipitating beneath the root: magnesite. I am distracted by the sudden malfunctioning of my Bluetooth® headset and a cool liquid seeping from my cellphone. I try to capture the stream in case it is a condensation of my data, liquefied by the CIA's hertzian vortex to be absorbed and collected through the soil.

As I approach the chrysalis, I can see its opaline filaments extending into the ring of adjacent redwood trees. The energies are increasingly palpable, and I feel the magnesite resonating with the elemental molecules sedimented into me by the forest as a child. I attune and the signal sharpens.

I am thinking the character hears a layered score of electromagnetic signals mixed with speech. Amidst jumbled abstractions, it should become clear that there is a climate-change-driven land grab by the contemporary version of white supremacist wilderness conservationists in the form of apocalyptic preppers, microplastic-enrobed survivalists, boogaloo bois, the Singularity evangelists, Patagonia®, and private

nature conservancy trusts. They are attending workshops and enrolling in new university degree programs to learn Traditional Ecological Knowledges (TEK) of wildfire management, which are now both permitted and promoted by state fire agencies, rather than being outlawed as before. The rub should come when it is revealed that this revaluation of TEK is simply treated as a commodifiable technique and not, in all cases, accompanied by an epistemological radicalization to abolish property as means to delineate ecological territories, or the systematic transfer of power and land from the state and private ownership back to the Indigenous peoples of California.

This is a lot of information to be absorbed by the character, so perhaps it can just be a foreshadowing that is treated in greater depth later? Also, there is a potential hole in the worldbuilding: we are some distance from the volcanoes and faults of Elem, so we will need to figure out the subterranean path that the magnesite took to get here. I am not a huge fan of magic, so this needs some work.

*I am at first confused about whether the magnesite is a listening device installed by the CIA, or if it evolved on its own within an ecology of *Umwelten*. I surrender again, and the hologram of the superstructure decrypts the facet where it becomes clear that the geological animacy of magnesite has contaminated and subsumed not only the CIA's séance infrastructure, but also the Innovation Zone blockchain. The word for world is word for word the worlds of words—I sense the holes are portals whose inverted interiors of negative space delineate*

overlapping worlds. These noumenal opacities encrypt and decrypt, alight along a vast, reticulating lattice of mineral movement.

So many holes in this plot. We will have to populate it with an equal quantity of traitors.

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Caitlin Berrigan works across performance, video, sculpture, and text to engage with the embodied ecologies of power, politics, technology, and life worlds. Recent works explore poetics and queer science fiction as a world-making practice through voice, instruments, and moving images. Berrigan's work has shown at the Whitney Museum, Berlinale, Goldsmiths, Poetry Project, Henry Art Gallery, Harvard Carpenter Center, Anthology Film Archives, and UnionDocs, among others.

45. The Round Valley Reservation comprises a confederation of tribes descending from the Yuki, Pit River, Little Lake Pomo, Nomlacki, Concow, and the Wailacki. On its forcible settlement, see generally Anderson, *Tending the Wild*, 89; Akins and Bauer, *We Are the Land*, 146–49.

46. On "replacement narratives" and the psychology of "white savior complex" by which settler environmentalists lay claim to dispossessed California Indian land and culture, see generally Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*, 139; on the historical geopolitics of the white settler group The Native Sons of the Golden West evoking claims of indigeneity to California, see Garsha, "Reclamation Road," 66.

47. Fractionation includes many transformations of land into property. For example, from the U.S. Department of the Interior: "As a result of the General Allotment Act of 1887, reservation land was divided up and allotted to individual tribal members. After the death of the original allottee owner, title ownership was divided up among the heirs. As the land passed through each generation, the number of owners grew exponentially, resulting in the highly fractionated ownership of much Indian land today ... Fractionated ownership and the checkerboard nature of land ownership patterns (i.e., trust lands, fee lands, and lands owned by tribes and individuals throughout a reservation) cause major challenges for tribes that impact their ability to exercise tribal sovereignty and self-determination." "Fractionation," February 25, 2019, <https://www.doi.gov/buybackprogram/fractionation>.

48. Kaitlin Reed, "Cannabis, Settler Colonialism, and Tribal Sovereignty in California," in *Routledge Handbook of Interdisciplinary Cannabis Research*, ed. Dominic Corva and Joshua S. Meisel (New York: Routledge, 2021). Thanks to Dr. Kathleen Whiteley for pointing me to Dr. Kaitlin Reed's work.

49. Esalen Institute, "A Leading Center for Exploring Human Potential," Esalen Institute, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://www.esalen.org>; Brian Pace, "Lucy In The Sky With Nazis: Psychedelics and the Right Wing," *Psymposia* (blog), February 3, 2020, <http://www.psymposia.com/magazine/lucy-in-the-sky-with-nazis-psychedelics-and-the-right-wing/>.

50. Gavin Newsom, "Executive Order N-15-19," Executive Department, State of California, June 18, 2019, <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/6.18.19-Executive-Order.pdf>; Jill Cowan, "'It's Called Genocide': Newsom Apologizes to the State's Native Americans," *New York Times*, June 19, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/us/newsom-native-american-apology.html>. On executive apologies to Native Americans, see generally Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas: Poems* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2017). The executive order established a truth and healing council, which will issue a report including recommendations for reparations in 2025. "California Truth and Healing Council," Government, The Governor's Office of the Tribal Advisor, accessed June 17, 2021, <https://tribalaffairs.ca.gov/cthc/>.

51. Cheryl I Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1714, 1721, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1341787>. Thanks to Dr. Anette Baldauf for this reference.

52. In Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*, 142.

53. Daniel M. Cobb, ed., *Say We Are Nations: Documents of Politics and Protest in Indigenous America since 1887*, H. Eugene and Lillian Youngs Lehman Series (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 272.

54. Julia Whitty, "Elouise Cobell's Accounting Coup," *Mother Jones*, September 2005, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2005/09/accounting-coup-o/>.

55. See generally, Beth Rose Middleton, *Upstream Trust Lands and Power on the Feather River* (Baltimore : Project Muse, 2018); Beth Rose Middleton, *Trust in the Land New Directions in Tribal Conservation* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2011); Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*; Joely Proudfit, Dina Gilio-Whitaker, and Nicole Lim, "Righting Wrongs Committed against Native People," *Los Angeles Times*, November 24, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2021-11-24/op-ed-accountability-native-people>.

56. "Shuumi Land Tax FAQs," The Sogorea Te Land Trust, accessed June 17, 2021, <https://sogoreate-landtrust.org/shuumi-land-tax-faqs/>.

57. "Nevada Bill Would Allow Tech Companies to Create Governments," *Associated Press*, April 2, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/legislature-legislation-local-governments-nevada-economy-2fa79128a7bf41073c1e9102e8aoe5fo>; "Innovation Zones Next Steps for Nevada," Office of Governor Steve Sisolak, April 26, 2021, https://gov.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/govnewnvgov/Content/News/Press/2021_docs/IZnextSteps.pdf; Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, "The Californian Ideology," *Science as Culture* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 1996): 44–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09505439609526455>; Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (London and New York: Verso, 2014); Ahmed Kanna, *Dubai: The City as Corporation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Vanessa Ogle, "Archipelago Capitalism: Tax Havens, Offshore Money, and the State, 1950s–1970s," *The American Historical Review* 122, no. 5 (December 1, 2017): 1431–58, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/122.5.1431>; Vanessa Ogle, "'Funk Money': The End of Empires, The Expansion of Tax Havens, and Decolonization as an Economic and Financial Event," *Past & Present* 249 (November 2020): 213–49, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtaa001>.

58. "Esselen Tribal Lands Conservation Project," Esselen Tribe of Monterey County, accessed June 17, 2021, <https://www.esselentribe.org/our-land>; Kristi Sturgill and Hayley Smith, "After 250 Years, Esselen Tribe Regains a Piece of Its Ancestral Homeland," *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com>

/california/story/2020-07-31/after-250-years-esselen-tribe-regains-a-piece-of-its-ancestral-homeland. As this essay went to print, another significant return of ancestral lands was achieved along the Northern California coast by the InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council working with a nonprofit, private conservancy based in California: Dani Anguiano, "Native American Tribes Reclaim California Redwood Land for Preservation," *The Guardian*, January 25, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/25/native-american-tribes-california-redwood-preservation>.

59. Frank K. Lake and Amy Cardinal Christianson, "Indigenous Fire Stewardship," in *Encyclopedia of Wildfires and Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Fires*, ed. Samuel L. Manzello (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020), 2, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52090-2_225. Thanks to Sasha White for this reference.

60. Anderson, *Tending the Wild*, 145.

61. See generally, Anderson, *Tending the Wild*.

62. Anderson, 108; Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*; Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*.

63. "The central feature of the convergence of 'white' and 'worker' lay in the fact that racial status and privilege could ameliorate and assist in 'evad[ing] rather than confront[ing] [class] exploitation.'" Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 1744. Indeed, so much so that "the working class" is colloquially understood as the white working class, whereas any other ethnic or racial group performing the same labor is qualified by another name.

64. Lauren Berlant, "The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 3 (June 2016): 393, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816645989>. Thanks to Sam Hertz for this reference.

65. Dayan, *The Law Is a White Dog*, 30.

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