

# Thinking Otherwise Across Global Wests: Issues of Mobility and Feminist Critical Regionalism

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**I**N THE MID-1990S I BEGAN TO WORK on the subculture of women's surfing as a way to conceive transnational Wests (i.e., traveling Global Wests) and to think about the circulation and politics of westernness in tandem with what was then an era of "girl power." That work is turning out to have a second life in a project in the Public Humanities, after the publication in 2010 of *Surfer Girls in the New World Order*.<sup>1</sup> I could easily have presented materials in the activist research I'm doing in local/global surfemisms for a symposium focused on popular culture and Global Wests in, of all places, Australia.<sup>2</sup>

But as I was off surfing, so to speak, the field of US West literary and culture study was itself evolving, reconceiving its critical terrain through border, critical regional, and transnational analyses and, like Americanist studies generally, moving away from nation-bound models of interpretation.<sup>3</sup> In the 1980s to the end of the 1990s, women's literature and feminist questions animated the critical field powerfully, both in historical study and in literary/culture study.<sup>4</sup> Since

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This essay originated in a paper I gave at the "Pop West" symposium held at the University of Western Australia, Perth, in July 2014. I want to thank the organizers, Aaron Nyerges and Golnar Nabizadeh, for intellectual engagement as well as hospitality. I want also to thank the participants for their invaluable discussions and comments, before and after the symposium, especially Ethan Blue, Paul Giles, Jill Milroy, Sarah Gleeson-White, and Chen Hong.

<sup>1</sup> Krista Comer, *Surfer Girls in the New World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> The Public Humanities work is conducted through the Institute for Women Surfers (see <http://instituteforwomensurfers.org/>, accessed May 25, 2015). For scholarship that addresses issues of public history and for comparative racial and settler-colonial studies, see Krista Comer, "'We're Blacksurfing': Public History and Liberation Politics in *White Wash*," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 35, no. 2 (Winter 2016): 68–78. Also see "Surfeminism, Critical Regionalism, Public Scholarship." in eds. Dexter Zavzala Hough-Snee and Alex Eastman. *Critical Surf Studies: A Reader*. Duke University Press, forthcoming 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Scholars working on transamerican, transpacific, transnational, Native, and US West and border studies include Rachel Adams, Chadwick Allen, Susan Bernardin, Neil Campbell, Yen Le Espiritu, Paul Giles, Audrey Goodman, Kristen Silva Gruesz, Joanna Hearne, Alex Hunt, Susan Kollin, José Limón, Lisa Lowe, Tom Lynch, Zeese Papanikolas, Claudia Sadowski-Smith, José David Saldivar, Sara Spurgeon, Stephen Tatum, Paul Wickelson, Priscilla Ybarra, and Alex Young.

<sup>4</sup> Feminist historiography in the New Western History is too expansive to footnote here. Key early works include Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, eds., *The Women's West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press,

that time, however, feminist inquiry has stalled and/or fallen on deaf ears.<sup>5</sup> Of course, we live in a postfeminist and postrace moment across the Western world, wherein women's liberation has been, presumably, achieved, and feminist demands are muted.<sup>6</sup> Neither is there a body of literary work, since the 1990s, which announces itself as "feminist" or "feminist Western" in quite the way that literatures of the Civil Rights period did—though issues of structural sexism figure as profoundly ongoing. Contributing to this impasse is the fact that, since the 1990s, the edge of feminist theory has moved toward thinking gender/sexuality, at times judging as old-fashioned or theoretically naive questions of "women" or "women's literature."<sup>7</sup>

During these same decades, transnational theorizing has become a hallmark of feminist thought, as it has of course for American studies and an emergent global studies.<sup>8</sup> The need to theorize the changed situation of all life in relation to developments in global capital, technology, and media has been urgent. With the transnational/global turn, new problems have arisen, including a weakened investment by scholars in the domestic (national) life of women and gender, in race

1987); and Susan Lee Johnson, "'A Memory Sweet to Soldiers': The Significance of Gender in the History of the 'American West,'" *Western Historical Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1993): 495–517. A personal favorite is Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). In literary and cultural study, see Annette Kolodny, *The Land before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630–1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Melody Graulich, "O Beautiful for Spacious Guys: On the Legitimate Inclination of the Sexes," in *The Frontier Experience and the American Dream*, ed. David Mogen, Mark Busby, and Paul Bryant (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), 186–201; Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Krista Comer, *Landscapes of the New West: Gender and Geography in Contemporary Women's Writing* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> For concerns about related trends in the field of US Western history, see Margaret D. Jacobs, "What's Gender Got to Do with It?," *Western Historical Quarterly* 42 (Autumn 2011): 297–304. New scholarship on women's writing continues to appear at a slowed pace, for instance, Cathryn Halverson's *Playing House in the West* (Tuscaloosa: Alabama University Press, 2013). But it's rare to see strong feminist framings of questions related to field, such as Victoria Lamont's "Cattle Branding and the Traffic in Women in Early Twentieth-Century Westerns," *Legacy* 22, no. 1 (2005): 30–46. A welcome exception is Lamont's *Westerns: A Women's History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Feminists have written extensively on postfeminism. I do so in relation to youth culture and local and global third-wave activism in *Surfer Girls*. For a study important to thinking about popular culture and its work to "repatriarchalize" and restabilize the Western world gender orders altered by second-wave feminism, see Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture, and Social Change* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Debate is ongoing about women, gender, and sexuality as overlapping but distinct sites of subject formation. My focus here obviously indicates continued faith in the category of "women" as analytically profound, politically productive, and entangled across social locations. Claire Hemmings cautions feminist theorists that routine narratives of field formation—which chart theoretical progress from "simple" analyses of women to "corrective," more supposedly sophisticated analyses of gender—are problematically close to postfeminist claims that feminism after the 1990s has "arrived" and no longer needs overt politics to sustain it. See Claire Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Feminist transnational thought has been less interested in deconstruction of the nation per se than in attentiveness to national specificities and critique of global feminism and universal understandings of women's social location. Transnational theorizing emphasizes gender formation as constitutive of domains of public and private, imperial and domestic, and shows reproduction and sexuality as crucial to power relations between nations. For an introduction to feminist transnational thought see Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds., *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005); for an overview of trends in feminist thought see Ashwini Tambe, "Transnational Feminist Studies: A Brief Sketch," *New Global Studies*, vol. 4 (2010), iss. 1, Art. 7, 1–5. For discussion of feminist methodology questions see: Nancy A. Naples, "Changing the Terms: Community Activism, Globalization, and the Dilemmas of Transnational Praxis," in Nancy A. Naples and Manisha Desai, eds., *Women's Activism and Globalization: Linking Local Struggles and Transnational Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2002) 3–15.

formation, and in state-sensitive politics.<sup>9</sup> The field of transnational American studies is now in “correction” mode, at least in relation to US race relations.<sup>10</sup> But in relation to women, gender, and feminist studies, and to the gendering/queering of race studies, an analogous correction in American studies is not much on the horizon. Indeed, from the start, globalist theory and Americanist transnationalism did not establish themselves in conversation with feminist political economy or aesthetics.<sup>11</sup> They remain even now strangely obtuse and separate.<sup>12</sup> The depoliticizing or chilling effects on feminist scholarship of such large-scale disinterest, particularly given larger postrace and postfeminist ideological climates hostile already, are important to identify and to challenge. Who will come to the table as political allies in feminist struggles of the present? Are issues of women, gender, and sexuality not everyone’s issues? It’s hardly a wonder that a worsened feminist political climate, including in universities, overhangs all we now do.

Some of the best newer theoretical work in the field of US West studies—which comments extensively on the changed world order and on poetics and issues of storytelling—has not been conceived with a sense of the difference it makes to come at questions of the present and Global Wests from the standpoint of feminism, gender, and/or women’s lives. This is not to say that the work is antifeminist (it is not), only that it is focused elsewhere. The result, however, is a developing gender-indifferent or masculine unconscious in our theory and in the literary and film texts from which it has been derived. That is, there are similar trending developments in US West studies to those I noted above. It has seemed strategic therefore in my current thinking to privilege working with texts by women writers interested in place and gender or with films that feature women protagonists or feminist directors and to frame my own analytics more squarely through feminist studies.<sup>13</sup> This kind of effort is crucial so that an archive of materials that knows something about or explicitly cares about women’s lives and feminist questions will figure as

<sup>9</sup> As early as 2005, Sandra Soto addressed the range of concerns through the question “Where in the transnational world are US women of color?” She urged far more finessed definitions of “the transnational” and disputed charges of race formation theory as parochial. More recently she works in queer study offerings to theories of the transnational. See Sandra Soto, “Where in the Transnational World Are U.S. Women of Color?,” in *Women’s Studies for the Future: Foundations, Interrogations, Politics*, ed. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Agatha Beins (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 111–24. Also see Sandra Soto, “Transnational Knowledge Projects and Failing Racial Etiquette,” in *National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies, 35th Annual Conference Proceedings*, paper 8 (April 1, 2008), <http://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/naccs/2008/Proceedings/>.

<sup>10</sup> Don Pease concedes the “monopoly of assimilative power” that has accrued to transnational paradigms, collapsing into them works from postcolonial, multicultural American studies and border critique. He grants the negative impact that this has had on critical race projects in state-located contexts. See Donald E. Pease, “Re-mapping the Transnational Turn,” in *Re-framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies*, ed. Winfried Fluck, Donald E. Pease, and John Carlos Rowe (Dartmouth, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2011), 1–48.

<sup>11</sup> Carla Freeman considers this hard-to-fathom obtuseness via the question “Is the masculine the global whereas the feminine is the local?” See her insightful diagnostic essay “Globalization,” in *Critical Terms for the Study of Gender*, ed. Catherine R. Stimpson and Gilbert Herdt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 115–38.

<sup>12</sup> In Fluck, Pease, and Rowe’s *Re-framing the Transnational Turn*, for instance, the relation of the field imaginary of American transnational studies to feminist transnationalism is barely addressed. Nancy Fraser’s visionary essay in this volume, “Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History,” 373–90, offers a disturbing thesis about the unintended energies contributed by second-wave feminism to the restructuring of postindustrial capitalism, but a conversation with American studies is not a departure point.

<sup>13</sup> I prioritize women writers or directors and also embrace directors or playwrights who contribute feminist perspectives (hence the work of Nicolas Ray and Tracy Letts, among others). Hollywood’s notoriety at skewing its economies in male-dominant directions at all levels of production, directing, screenwriting, and acting makes it all the more important to gather a feminist film archive so as not to concede the field of Western film study altogether.

evidence in any of the larger claims asserted about the changed order of life or poetics of cultural production in the present.

With questions in mind then about evidence drawn from representations of women's lives, the recentering of a masculine critical West, and an appreciation for the demands and limits of transnational study (my surf work, though global, is deepest in California and Mexico), I went to the 2014 Perth symposium on global pop Wests. I was eager to engage with the emerging concept of "Global Wests," to theorize its relation to critical regionalism and to what I see as the distinctiveness of feminist critical regionalism from theorizations of the transnational. What does a feminist critical regionalism offer the emerging problematic of Global Wests? How does the centrality of settler colonialism for diagnoses of a Global West intervene upon as well as further critical regionalism as a developing body of thought? I hoped to pursue those questions by considering issues of mobility and storytelling in recent texts that self-consciously spotlight the social and narrative locations of women dwelling in and across Global Wests.

The archive I am gathering brings into conversation recent novels, poems, Hollywood classic and current feature films and indie films, and video shorts in global indigenous cinema.<sup>14</sup> For the Perth symposium I focused on Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* and María Amparo Escandón's *González and Daughter Trucking Company: A Road Novel with Literary License*. I have written about those texts elsewhere recently, so here I will explore three films that served before as supplemental argument.<sup>15</sup> The goal before, as now, is to open a discussion about issues of mobility and its politics. The first film is a kind of neglected classic Western, *Johnny Guitar* (1954), directed by Nicholas Ray and starring Joan Crawford, Sterling Hayden, and Mercedes McCambridge. *Johnny Guitar* sets up the problem of feminist and settler storytelling. I jump from it to the recent Tony-winning stage play *August: Osage County* (2013) by Tracy Letts, made into a film directed by John Wells and featuring a star-studded ensemble cast, including Meryl Streep, Julia Roberts, and Misty Upham. Issues of storytelling again pertain. Between these films, settler mobility is established and then collapsed. The closing moments of *August: Osage County* privilege the presence of Johnna, the fictional Cheyenne character, and raise the question "Now what?" To explore this question and decolonial mobilities, I draw from the work of Navajo filmmaker Ramona Emerson and analyze her video short *Opal*, a girl-powered indigenous Western. I am grateful to my colleagues in Native studies, to Susan Bernardin for her generous sharing of the Emerson short, and to Joanna Hearne. Their work in indigenous cinema and its relation to Westerns continues to be an important source of film theory.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> My larger book project, "The Feminist States of Critical Regionalism," combines Public Humanities surf research with work in feminist theory and literary and film study. The organizing focus is "feminist storytelling in the present." The novels, story cycles, and plays informing overarching arguments include Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*, María Amparo Escandón's *González and Daughter Trucking Company*, Edna Ferber's *Giant*, Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek*, Irene Silva's *flesh to bone*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Turquoise Ledge*, and Tracy Letts's *August: Osage County*. Films (short and feature) include *Bagdad Café* (dir. Percy Adlon), *Johnny Guitar* (dir. Nicholas Ray), *High Noon* (dir. Fred Zinneman), *Opal* (dir. Ramona Emerson), *4wheelwarpony* (dir. Dustinn Craig), *Frozen River* (dir. Courtney Hunt), *Gas, Food, and Lodging* (dir. Alison Anders), *Wild* (dir. Jean-Marc Vallée), and *The Homesman* (dir. Tommy Lee Jones).

<sup>15</sup> See Krista Comer, "Place and Worlding: Feminist States of Critical Regionalism," in *Transcontinental Reflections on the American West: Words, Images, Sounds beyond Borders*, ed. Ángel Chaparro Sainz and Amaia Ibarra Bigalondo (Valencia, Spain: Portal Editions, 2015), 153–69.

<sup>16</sup> See Susan Bernardin, "Guest Editor's Introduction," *Western American Literature* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 1–8; Susan Bernardin, "It's a Good Day to Bike: Indigenous Futures in Ramona Emerson's *Opal*," *Western American Literature* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 89–112; and Joanna Hearne, "'This Is Our Playground': Skateboarding,

Before I get to the films, though, I bring critical pressure to “mobility” and its standard-fare relation to settler-colonial modes of movement. That discussion moves into an elaboration of critical regionalism as theory and method for thinking through and after settler colonialism.



What Global Wests offers, as a concept, is an account of settler colonialism. It simply forces the issue. Such an account has begun to make its way into US West study through indigenous studies, but there is much work to do yet, and the Australian studies mainstream is far ahead of US scholarship in this regard. In conversation with Stanford University’s Comparative Wests Project, which foregrounds global legacies and the implications of settler invasion and national exception in tension with the lifeways of indigenous civilizations, the Perth symposium, held at the University of Western Australia, focused attention on the crucial importance of Global Wests in popular culture.<sup>17</sup> The idea was to think about the powers of pop culture to imagine collectively any notion of the social geographies called West across the United States, Australia, and China.

What better context in which to take up issues of gender or feminist representation than popular culture? Pop culture immediately raises questions of mobility and assumptions about mobility since the medium relies foundationally on ease of travel and movement. But of course not all Wests travel far and wide over the circuits of popular culture. Not all Wests are “coming to a theater near you,” as movie promotional ads used to say. Not all Wests *want* to move on the trail of that spatial logic. Indeed, some pop Wests—including the films that serve as my cases in point—seem to be more of a revelation. The fact that they exist at all is surprising. To find them is an effort, is *work*. Sometimes you can go to the local movie house and see them, but more often, they are art house films, and they seem eccentric, singular, outliers, without a larger tradition informing them or conceiving one text in terms of others. They do travel, to be sure, but their distribution is globally uneven (one experiences this fact less in the United States, where everything is immediately available). They move with undesired anonymity on indie global-village circuits and by virtual word of mouth. They require a great deal of interpretive foregrounding and situating to be legible—that is, though they are of “the West,” they constitute “the Wests,” in contradictory and sometimes mutually exclusive ways.

As if to make this point on my feminist behalf about the mobility of some and not other texts and Wests, there was additionally the coincidence of last year’s meeting in Sydney of the Cormac McCarthy Society. Clearly, McCarthy is canonical at this moment in cultural history—he’s a giant for Global Wests cinema and literature study, and his philosophical tendencies inform some of the most important theoretical work in postregional affect, style, and ethics.<sup>18</sup> Which is

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DIY Aesthetics, and Apache Sovereignty in Dustinn Craig’s *4wheelwarpony*,” *Western American Literature* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 47–69. See also Joanna Hearne with Dustinn Craig, “‘Just by Doing It, We Made It Appear’: Dustinn Craig on *We Shall Remain: Geronimo, 4wheelwarpony*, and the *Apache Scouts Project*,” *Western American Literature* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 71–88. My own work in *Surfer Girls* is organized around the idea of “intergenerational transfers of feminist knowledge.” I have appreciated very much the emphases on intergenerational work in indigenous study and in the work of Joanna Hearne particularly.

<sup>17</sup> For a description of the project, see <http://comparativewests.stanford.edu/> (accessed May 30, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Here I am thinking of the important work of Stephen Tatum. His *Cormac McCarthy’s “All the Pretty Horses”:* *A Reader’s Guide*, Continuum Contemporaries (London: Bloomsbury, 2002) is written for nonspecialists. Written for a scholarly audience are “Topographies of Transition in Western American Literature,” *Western American Literature* 5, no. 32 (February 1998): 310–52; and “‘Mercantilist Ethics’: *No Country for Old Men* and the Narcocorrido,” in *Cormac McCarthy: “All the Pretty Horses,” “No Country for Old Men,” “The Road,”* ed.

to say: McCarthy travels. And also or rather: some Wests travel globally along a set of well-known thematics, and scholars in Global Wests will know those thematics. We have to know *a lot* about them actually to have anything to say that many people would want to hear. Most of us attending the Perth symposium had something to say about McCarthy—perhaps in relation to settler cinemas, cultures of the US borderlands, theories of the present, the relation of the present to nation and postnation as well as historical memory, the nature of being, masculinity, aging masculinity, New World violence, the end times, Hollywood feature films, the Coen brothers, poetics and aesthetics, the US South meeting the US West, the Global South meeting the Global West. And so on. Off the top of my head, and off the top of many people’s heads, there is a great deal about McCarthy to say. And that is not only due to his being a virtuoso performer of Westerns but also because the West he writes through is so very seductively familiar. It’s “the West,” not “Wests.”

McCarthy offers an important example of a vision that establishes various fault lines in the field of Global West study at present—his work, as does John Grady Cole in *All the Pretty Horses*, comes to the end of something. It stops. That is, even as it travels widely in pop culture, it marks for us a stay on mobility or, anyway, a stay on a logic of mobility that historically, in Western empire and Western American and Australian frontier theses, presents optimistic horizons, new chances, hope, openings, progress, national exception, freedom. All these are of course dimensions of settler mobility across Global West spaces. John Grady Cole is left to wander, displaced, without country, and then eventually he dies in a knife fight. Through him, McCarthy relinquishes the regeneration-through-violence thesis that governs masculine settler occupation. With that bargain come others. Neither McCarthy nor Cole finally embrace the mobility that masculine settler-colonial expansion takes as a given. We seem to come to the end of affective investment in the settler enterprise as a source of individual or collective dreamworlds. But there is no vision beyond that moment; there is no “next.” There is only pervading pathos.

The feminist and indigenous cinematic and literary Westerns gathered in the archive I advance offer other kinds of critical regional responses to settler dilemmas. In recent work I have been interested in connecting understandings of what Latin Americanists call “the coloniality of power” (systems of hierarchical knowledge, social/capitalist order, and culture, installed in New World contexts) with work in postregional theory that asks: What has happened? What comes after, what comes next?<sup>19</sup> The effort to theorize critical regionalism as a comparative analytic for study of shared spatial legacies between settler states across Global Wests will make collaborative alliances among Global South theorists only to the degree that decolonized knowledge is established as a priority. “Delinking” from Eurocentric critiques of modernity, as theorists of the coloniality of power urge, enables what Mignolo calls “thinking otherwise.”<sup>20</sup> Mignolo’s work draws fundamentally from decolonial and border feminisms (Gloria Anzaldúa is a major influence) that long have formulated epistemologies concerned with the meeting place of theory and practice, that is, with questions of “What comes after?” Native American feminism, for instance, pursues

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Sara L. Spurgeon (London: Continuum Press, 2011), 77–93. While not focused on McCarthy, see also Tatum’s foundational theorization of the postregional: “Spectrality and the Postregional Interface,” in *Postwestern Cultures: Literature, Theory, Space*, ed. Susan Kollin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 3–29.

<sup>19</sup> Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–80; and Walter Mignolo, “The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 57–96.

<sup>20</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, “Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of Decoloniality,” *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (March/May 2007): 449–514.

Otherwise Thinking by investigating problems of sexism and violence to argue for women's well-being as key to decolonial politics and, implicitly, to "survival."<sup>21</sup> The concept of survival (Gerald Vizenor's coinage) is deployed as a more general term of art in indigenous thought to hold out the promise not only of presence and survival but also of an open-ended endurance, vitality, and cultural sovereignty, a refusal of victimhood and narratives of Indian tragedy.<sup>22</sup>

Issues of mobility, constrained mobility, or the absence of a desire for or drive toward mobility are key to discussions of thinking otherwise and to the decolonization of space and place. But more critical awareness needs to be brought to "mobility" as a concept. Do its associated analytic terms or the outcomes it describes suggest unconscious mappings of settler prerogatives to move in, and move upon, in order to take over, consolidate, and repurpose? When can mobility arguments perceive or respect limits, stops? Without such attention to its politics, mobility cannot serve as an analytic; it slips around, seemingly neutral, making oblique the constancy of struggles over geography. Offering a related caution, the geographers Neil Smith and Cindi Katz worried some years ago about insufficient scrutiny of the politics of spatial metaphors important to scholarship of the spatial turn in critical theory (i.e. "locality," "positionality," "territory," "displacement," and so forth).<sup>23</sup> In thinking spatial concepts like Global Wests, their cautions pertain more than ever. What is needed, then, are thicker descriptions of movement and its desires, new teasings of the relations between place and mobility. There is no meaningful place without movement; bodies move, as do objects and texts and ideas; none is frozen in place. Micromovements suggested by bodies moving in place might be distinct or linked to larger-scale mobility and to spatial prerogative (or its lack). How do we attend responsibly, ethically, politically, and aesthetically to matters of place and mobility? What is at stake in theorizing Global Wests as migrating locations, territories without borders, or static hemispheric structures? What can we learn from these diverging perspectives that will move us toward decolonized knowledge?

Feminist critical regionalism, attentive to concepts of place and the politics of mobility, offers direction. Critical regionalism is a way of thinking about the new configurations of place, time, and meaning occasioned by global economic restructurings and new technologies. Critical regionalism imagines political life in the present, taking up issues of place, bodies in place, and knowledges derived not only via textuality and discourse but from place as a critical location, an orientation, a material entangling of the human, the more-than-human, and the crossings of matter and meaning.<sup>24</sup> Despite the spatial turn and years of work in critical geography, place continues as an underutilized concept in critical theory. Reasons for critical wariness are easily

<sup>21</sup> For an earlier discussion of issues that have gained attention in recent years, see Andrea Smith, "Native American Feminism, Sovereignty, and Social Change," *Feminist Studies* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 116–32. For the energy surrounding feminist theorizing in indigenous study at present, see Cheryl Suzack, Shari Huhndorf, Jeanne Perreault, and Jean Barman, eds., *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Gerald Vizenor, *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Neil Smith and Cindi Katz (1993) as quoted in Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods* (Routledge: Taylor and Francis, 2015) (Kindle Location 600).

<sup>24</sup> The relation-in-process of feminist critical regionalism to the new materialism is apparent here in theoretical shorthand. The mutual entangling of the material and the discursive (and the materiality of the discursive) is established in Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). For discussion of gendered corporeality in what she calls more-than-human nature, see Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2010).

imagined: the association of place with forms of identity and metaphysics that are rooted (vs. routed), sedentary, essentialized, nostalgic, parochial. Place supposedly is “conservative,” whereas forms of cosmopolitanism and border travel take us to the edge of new thinking and sidestep exclusivities. But new interests in place are emerging.<sup>25</sup> In materialist feminism, postcolonial and queer theory, as well as indigenous and decolonial theory, place serves as a site of political imagination and organizing, a structural location for the everyday, a site for the reproduction of social life, a living realm of history and the sacred. Place of course is often mobile—but not always mobile. Some places, in fact, like tribal lands in the US West, Aboriginal homelands and country in Australia (as Jill Milroy noted at the Perth symposium), and women’s bodies in most places of the world, are at pains to establish themselves *as* bounded or boundaried, not socially porous, not open to just anyone who wishes to move through them.<sup>26</sup>

Discussions about the status of place, and of boundaries to mobility, are crucial thus to emerging bodies of critical regional thought and their ability to speak meaningfully to feminist and decolonial concerns. Particularly in the larger climate of Western world postfeminism and postracial social orders and the embattlements and complexities (i.e., social media) of world-scale social justice movements, critical political investment in these directions is urgent. The status of “the critical” in Global West analysis, as I have argued elsewhere, is not self-evident, it cannot be taken for granted.<sup>27</sup> What makes critical regionalism “feminist” or “decolonial” is the political decision to make these perspectives priorities for thinking otherwise. The decision goes to the question I raised earlier about feminist allies—allies notice there *are* politics to mobility, they consider who moves when, why, how, and where. “Migrating locations,” “territories without borders,” “transnational Wests”—the spatial logic of these Global West models often assumes that border crossing, by definition, is positive, transformative. Movement itself is naturalized. In an era of global capital flows in which a “borderless” world enables transnational capitalism and neoliberal definitions of freedom, our models must distinguish themselves more clearly from the spatial behaviors of finance capital as well as the legacies of settler spatial spreadings. Delinking critical regionalism as a body of thinking from unexamined assumptions about the politics of flow is a move with every consequence.

The question with such a large framing device as Global Wests is thus how to get in and out of it, how to “land” somewhere analytically instead of ride the surfaces of transnational circuits of media and culture flows? I come at this everywhere-and-nowhere problem via critical regionalism, and the feminist critical place aspects of my work with the concept distinguishes what I’m arguing from Neil Campbell’s important contributions to the field of critical regional theory.<sup>28</sup> Critical regionalism crosses borders and moves transnationally, to be sure, and Campbell’s work demonstrates that western American culture was produced through its outsides, making the weight of national/colonial spatial grids collapse upon their own folds and multiplicities. Routing

<sup>25</sup> For a superb current synthesis of theoretical work in concepts of place, critical methods, and place ethics, emphasizing decolonial perspectives, see Tuck and McKenzie, *Place in Research*.

<sup>26</sup> For “listening to country,” see Grant Revell and Jill Milroy, “Aboriginal Story Systems: Re-mapping the West, Knowing Country, Sharing Space,” in “Comparative Wests,” ed. Brian Codding, special issue, *Occasion* 5 (2013).

<sup>27</sup> See Krista Comer, “The Problem of the Critical in Global Wests,” in *A History of Western American Literature*, ed. Susan Kollin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 205–21.

<sup>28</sup> Neil Campbell, *The Rhizomatic West: Representing the West in a Transnational, Global, Media Age* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 41–74. For an extended discussion of *Rhizomatic West*, see Krista Comer, “Exceptionalisms, Other Wests, Critical Regionalism,” *American Literary History* 23, no. 1 (2011): 159–73.



westness over transnational media through the conceptual apparatus of the Deleuzian rhizome, Campbell shows how emergent border discourses of critical regions frustrate retreats from zones of global outsides.

But if transnationalism has taught us how Global Wests overrun boundaries, we grapple still as critics with the fact of immobilities, uneven development, frictions. Who moves when, under what conditions; which notions of place travel; which theories and texts and bodies travel?<sup>29</sup> Not all pop Wests move, want to move, or invite others to move through them. Critical regionalism is poised to speak to these problems not so much as a Deleuzian theory of transnational travel but as a problematic of critical global study attuned to big-picture analyses and structures (of settler states or patriarchal kinship systems) that contend also with the deep local. A critical regionalism in this guise assumes that Global Wests are observable through strategic locales.

Recent resituatings of critical regionalism point critics away from its origins in Kenneth Frampton's architectural theory and toward it as a geopolitical concept. In *Other Asias* (2007) and *Who Sings the Nation-State?* (2011), Gayatri Spivak focuses on the economic restructuring of Asia to formulate critical regionalism as a problematic able to counter the "easy postnationalism" of globalization, rewrite "postcoloniality into globality," and foster, through citizen engagement, broad democratic renewal.<sup>30</sup> Critical regionalism names political imaginations that go "under and over" nationalisms while retaining "the abstract structure of something like a state," which serves the role of "an ally" for redistribution of resources.<sup>31</sup> Like Spivak, the border theorist, anthropologist, and critic José Limón embraces critical regionalism as a critique of what he sees, in global literary studies, as an overestimation of postnationalism and underestimation of contemporary state power.<sup>32</sup> Limón's commitments to deep local place as well as to the global as it operates in border poetics move him to caution critics not to sacrifice the specificity of US–Mexico border locations in quests to read the global through them. Christina Van Houten understands critical regionalism as a feminist cultural movement that critiques postmodern aestheticism and attends to "the persistence of geographical history in contemporary thought." Tracing genealogies of spatial thinking in feminist theory, Van Houten links materialist feminism, antiracist activism, and ecological Marxism to offer feminist critical regionalism as "an alternative map to neoliberal capitalism, one in which the local concerns of feminist politics are read in relation to global power relations."<sup>33</sup>

Critical attention to mobility and place as vectors of power and sites of theory and politics situates scholarship and those producing it in global/local tensions. Mobility studies reveal the texture and contours of place, the negotiation of place in relation to hierarchical and geographical social orderings. It forces analysis of the locatedness of distribution, production, and

<sup>29</sup> Nearly twenty years ago Caren Kaplan cautioned about the uneven geographical and gender politics of traveling theory. See her *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Gayatri Spivak, *Other Asias* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 1, 131.

<sup>31</sup> Judith Butler with Gayatri Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (London: Seagull Books, 2007), 94.

<sup>32</sup> José Limón, "Border Literary Histories, Globalization, and Critical Regionalism," *American Literary History* 20, no. 1/2 (Summer 2008): 160–82.

<sup>33</sup> Christina Van Houten, "bell hooks, Critical Regionalism, and the Politics of Ecological Returns," in "Materialist Feminisms against Neoliberalism," ed. Mary Ellen Campbell and A. L. McCready, special issue, *Politics and Culture*, 2014, <http://politicsandculture.org/?s=critical+regionalism&searchsubmit> (accessed May 15, 2015).

consumption networks related to pop culture and analysis of issues of the social reproduction of pop-cultural workers, which always depend on historical relations to land and place.<sup>34</sup> That critical regionalism and its awareness of place as a broker of power should find common cause with settler-colonial theory and feminist materialist analyses of place and social reproduction is no accident. Patrick Wolfe famously argues that settler spatial operations are not initial historical “events” or one-time cultural contacts but structures that adapt over time.<sup>35</sup> Global struggles over settler geographies are not therefore historically “done” or somehow finished but continue into the present. Perhaps nowhere do we see this ongoing struggle more clearly than in the social life of subaltern women and cultural production that represents them and/or is produced by them. Perhaps nowhere more than here do we see the need more clearly for an analytic that can make sense of the politics of mobility in popular-culture study.



In popular culture of the West, the concept and representation of mobility is as constant as Big Sky, horses, and masculine men. One can't have the West as a recognizable genre without it. Whether mobility is suggested through legendary phrases like “Go West, young man,” labor practices like “cattle drives,” communication networks like “the pony express,” wholesale migrations like “the trek West,” or industrial technologies like the “transcontinental railroad,” the idea of the West conveys possibility through mobility. Of course, all these are statements about the benefits of mobility for settler populations. “Migration” is not in this rendering “invasion,” as settler-colonial theory would characterize it. Nor does it suggest forced mobilities (Trail of Tears, Navajo Long Walk) or forced enclosures (reservations, internment, Mexican repatriation trains).

Stasis in settler movement, in pop culture, suggests limits, conflict, danger: “cutting them off at the pass,” the “Mexican standoff,” to be “surrounded by Indians,” the enactment of “Asian Exclusion,” and, of course, the “close of the frontier.” Standing still is, in pop Wests, an ontological crisis, unless “a claim” or “a camp” is staked and territory or resources can be acquired. “Homesteading” as a form of occupancy is the major site of active-stasis in which national belonging, ideals of capitalist progress, heteronormed systems of kinship, all of them intertwining, move toward settler futurities. In contexts of ideologies of movement, we see, returning again to McCarthy's John Grady Cole, why it marks the end times for him and for settler imaginations that the cowboy wanders empty of purpose at the close of *All the Pretty Horses* and, like the Indians he passes, is abjected and subject to vanishing.

If some of the above reading of mobility may, for critics, be familiar, there is a need nonetheless to conceptualize critical locations, a critical perspective, about Global Wests, and the politics of Global West travels. To think toward the direction of decolonial analyses, the concept of mobility must be taken more seriously because it is entangled with every power relation and, in terms of pop culture, it represents the Others of Western cinema. That is (though again, it seems obvious), there is a need to analyze mobility and the production of social space and its orderings because it interfaces with issues and productions of women, gender, sexuality, indigeneity, race, class, and so on.

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<sup>34</sup> Mary Ellen Campbell and A. L. McCready, introduction to “Materialist Feminisms against Neoliberalism.”

<sup>35</sup> Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (New York: Cassel, 1999).

To do that work, I turn to three film examples: *Johnny Guitar* (1954), *August: Osage Country* (2013), and *Opal* (2014). In all of them, mobility serves as a site of feminist critique as well as a location of the problem, as I noted earlier, of “What has happened?” and “What comes after?” Each of the films invokes, to varying degrees, standard tropes of settler mobilities. At the same time, significantly, they subvert or call into question those logics of movement and, together, gesture toward what is so hard to imagine in settler imaginations: the end of the settler story, postsettler thought, decolonial inhabitations.<sup>36</sup> The analytic strategy here is to read for mobility as it establishes scale or a continuum of movement and its social implications.

The first film, *Johnny Guitar*, directed by Nicholas Ray and starring Joan Crawford, is not much written about by critics and was not liked at all in the United States upon its release, though it was embraced in Europe and praised by François Truffaut and is sometimes remembered through Peggy Lee’s melancholic theme song.<sup>37</sup> A classic opening introduces the film to viewers: a stranger, Johnny Guitar, rides into town from a vague outside. We learn he is in search of Vienna (Joan Crawford), the owner of a gambling/saloon establishment, who will employ him. Vienna is in need of protection from ranchers/thugs who want to run her off; Johnny is good with a gun. Vienna has made a deal with railroad magnates to situate their new stretch of track so that it stops, as a new depot, in front of her business. The arrival of the railroad as a form of transcontinental mobility and power and the industrial trade, tourism, and consumerism that it brings cause tensions with the local cattle barons and their cattle economy. So far, viewers know this generic scenario well—the stranger from outside, the battle between railroad and cattle interests—but what makes the film distinctive is the figure of Vienna, who as a female power figure (as Crawford was in Hollywood) embodies the crossroads of these forms of movement and active stasis. Much of the early film devotes itself to the anxiety of men taking orders from a woman and the havoc this situation wreaks with the gender order of the frontier territory. It is this crisis of who is in charge, and the need to oppose a female authority figure, that underlie the townspeople’s problems with Vienna.

Wearing black riding pants and boots, a power-red shirt, gun holstered at her side, and visualized for the first time towering over those below her from the second-floor balcony of the saloon, Vienna is the boss. She is all business; she has a vision for the town, with herself as its head. The architectural diorama she has commissioned of the town of the future declares her, all the more, a visionary, its rightful founder. Demonstrating the mind-set that Lorenzo Veracini attributes to settler ideologies, Vienna “carries [her] sovereignty with [her]”; she journeys to a country of her own making.<sup>38</sup> If this kind of story line could perhaps be read, in light of settler-colonial thought, as even a cliché of settler imaginings, what makes it story-worthy here is Vienna, the female settler-in-charge, who unapologetically claims the place of boss. Vienna is not the dignified Helen Ramirez (Katy Jurado) of *High Noon*, who wishes not to own the town but to do business in it peaceably, and who is forced out (and, with her, the Mexican colonial legacy). Neither is Vienna like Jill McBain (Claudia Cardinale), who, at the finish of *Once Upon a Time in the West*, is situated as a mother figure or muse/lover, a woman who can nurture a new town by “showing a little” to

<sup>36</sup> For the role of narrative in postsettler political thought, see Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 95–116.

<sup>37</sup> Judith Jack Halberstam is an important exception, and his work on the queer gaze and butches in cinema informs my work. See Judith Jack Halberstam, “Looking Butch,” in *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 175–229.

<sup>38</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 3.

get workers to do her bidding, an act that won't ostensibly cost her. No, Vienna is a "woman with a past," but as we come to learn, she has paid her dues before we meet her in the film, and she is not going to pay them again. This time around, things are going to be different.

In a marvelous scene at the beginning of the film that establishes the stakes of the settler enterprise for Vienna, she tells her employee to spin the roulette wheel, because, whether customers are present or not, she "likes to hear it spin." The moment calls to mind the line given to Judy (Natalie Wood) in Nicholas Ray's *Rebel without a Cause*. Jim Stark (James Dean) asks Judy what we think is an innocuous descriptive question, "Do you live here?" Jim is making conversation, trying to establish connection. Judy surprises us with the agony of "Who lives?" in response. In *Johnny Guitar*, however, there is less a gesture to existential crises, the wheel going round, than to gambling as a culture, as a boom/bust fact of capitalist settler-colonial dynamics. Vienna may like the sound of the wheel spinning, movement for its own sake, but we sense she knows the score of any gaming enterprise: the house always wins. As a woman with a past, this time she will own the house, control the town. This is not movement for its own sake but so as not to have to "show a little something" in order to move things along.

The desire to move like a settler man is precisely the problem of Vienna for the social world of the Arizona territory figured in this Western—what to do with the woman who wants to control the house, own the game, move and shake, and have sex, all with masculine prerogative? She figures one answer to the question "What comes next?" The kind of gender trouble such performances of femininity and sexuality bring to town are what the film is about. And the gender trouble gets more complicated. Tensions over female power mount in the struggle between Vienna and the ranch woman Emma Small (Mercedes McCambridge), who is bent, with a sadistic hatred, on Vienna's destruction. Queer theorist Jack Halberstam has written persuasively about Vienna as a figure of female masculinity. But I don't see, as does Halberstam, that the film kills off Emma as a killing of the split butch outlaw self of Vienna.<sup>39</sup> Still, the question of what motivates Emma is not one the film ponders much. Emma is a respectable woman who wishes to reinstate the gender order that Vienna would upset. But is Emma jealous of Vienna's authority? Competitive? Has she lost so much in love to a suitor (Dancing Kidd) who admires Vienna? These are questions unpressed, stories untold. The story that *is* told locates Emma Small as a defender of the cattle country status quo whose opposition to Vienna, while in part related to her gambling/saloon/railroad schemes for the future, seems also vaguely related to Vienna's "past."

What is the nature of Vienna's past? To return to the earlier question: What has happened? What has she had "to show" to get along? How is whatever she has done or learned related to her as a visionary, a social entrepreneur, a new brand of settler? She wishes very much to tell us and, especially, to tell Johnny Guitar. The real nature of the relations between Johnny and Vienna comes to light forty-two minutes into the film, and like the above formula-breaking generic scenes of the female boss, this scene too takes us out of the generic common sense. Suddenly we are in operatic registers of intense color, poetic speech, exaggerated physicality, sensual high drama. Peggy Lee's song sounds themes of longing, waiting. We have a rare explicit moment in Western cinema where the female protagonist tells us and tells Johnny, "I'm going to tell you" what has happened, and "You are going to listen." This exchange—of her saying she will tell him

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<sup>39</sup> Halberstam ("Looking Butch," 193–94) is interested in locating *Johnny Guitar* in a broad survey of butch cinema. I am doing a much closer, extended reading. I see Vienna as invested clearly in male love objects even as she queers heterosexual conventions by her performance of female masculinity.

a story and commanding him to listen—is what they fight about, however—what is at issue. All the while, awaiting her words, Johnny shakes his head, no, no, no. He cannot bear to hear it. Viewers learn implicitly that something, some many things, have transpired between the last time Johnny and Vienna met and this time of the film’s “now.” Whatever Vienna has done to get herself from the last place to this place—that’s what she needs to tell Johnny. She loves him, he loves her, they have loved each other all along, but none of that will make her tale audible. Johnny suggests instead a fiction by which they go back to the prior time, to what was, before, and then live out this moment now, as though no time in between has elapsed. Vienna, wanting to believe in make-believe even as she knows better, seems to judge this to be the best bargain she’ll get, and she takes it and, with it, the prize of Johnny. The scene consummates offscreen; we see them the morning after, clearly rejoined and now together, Vienna wearing a dress. By the time the film closes, though, our parting visual has Vienna wearing the black pants and boots again, even as she and Johnny kiss and leave us with that kiss and all it suggests of a butch settler woman and the masculine man who loves her.

One of the feminist morals of this film is that it is easier to run a casino/saloon, take over a town and control it, make a deal with railroad kings, and kill your rivals in self-defense than it is to tell the story of a female protagonist “with a past” and have it be heard. That difficulty is why *Johnny Guitar* figures symbolically for the archive I am gathering as a strong example of the problem of feminist storytelling, of women characters insisting they have a story to tell, and registering they are trying to tell it, leaving a record of that effort. What we are left with in *Johnny Guitar* is a tale about not telling a tale, and any of the details that might fill in the tale substantively are left to some clichéd imagination of a woman “showing a little” as though that tells us something. We have a tale that does not circulate, in a movie that raises this problem but that itself doesn’t much circulate. The large point of course is about the nonmobility, the nontravel, of this kind of Global West tale. We still don’t know: What has happened? What is next?

With a kind of alertness, then, I was pulled into the recent stage play and feature film *August: Osage County*, in which settler women’s stories and history are central. The film opens with gorgeous, clear landscape shots of the Oklahoma countryside, at times returning to open spaces, and in so doing, it frames our way into and through this tale via the genre-establishing visuals of popular Western settler cinema (space for the taking, for viewer consumption, mobility as rejuvenation). These expansive shots are juxtaposed quickly and deconstructively with the toxic domestic “inside” of the Weston home, which holds the traumatic life stories of the hardscrabble matriarch sisters of the family, women raised in Dust Bowl era poverty. For a film so star-studded, based on a play that has won much critical acclaim, the degree of audience pushback is worth thinking through. The film has been widely panned by moviegoers as unwatchable and depressing, with some critics calling the film a failure for its mishandling of the play’s comedic elements.<sup>40</sup> My own interests are in what seem to be directorial decisions to emphasize the film’s Western dimensions, and in that light, I think audience response to the film’s “unpleasantness,” shall we say, its “depressing” features, should be read symptomatically (in an Althusserian sense, for what the text represses to organize itself). Why is this kind of tough film so singularly tough when American cinema celebrates films like *Django Unchained*? What range of toughness would be acceptable in a film about settler women’s lives and histories?

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., Mick LaSalle, “August: Osage County: Great Play . . . but a Bad Movie,” *San Francisco Gate*, January 9, 2014, <http://www.sfgate.com/tv/article/August-Osage-County-Great-play-but-a-bad-5127982.php>.

The film's story unfolds around the fact that the husband of the principal matriarch, Violet (Meryl Streep), a literary man named Beverly (Sam Shepard), goes missing. His disappearance brings home to Oklahoma from elsewhere two adult daughters, with their families/partners in tow, who meet up with the one daughter/sister who stayed behind. Against the backdrop of their missing father, these three sisters replay their lives to one another and to audiences. So too do we hear the life stories of the mother/matriarch Violet and her sister, Mattie Fae (Margo Martindale), a woman who has had relations (and a child) with Violet's husband. So this is a tale across three generations of women, with a fourth generation (the great-grandmother) haunting it. The "black comedy" aspect of the theatrical play has us understand Violet, the mean-mouthed, drug-addicted matriarch, as "horrible but funny."<sup>41</sup> But the big-screen film takes Violet in more black drama directions, making us ask: Does the trouble here move us to feel for this family, as do so many classic family dramas of American theater (*Streetcar Named Desire* or *Death of a Salesman*)? And as do classic Westerns (i.e., *The Searchers*)? The answer, tellingly, is no. *August* does not move toward tragic pathos, nor can audiences feel that this kinship system should survive. There is no sympathy on the score of family or domestic settler dilemmas.

But in terms of pop Wests, Global Wests, elements of dark comedy register. What is funny? For me, what is darkly comedic is the daring telling here of a settler-colonial state in collapse. I read the film as a consideration of the end of settler domestic occupation and a study in the consequences of telling family secrets, especially the secrets of women. At the beginning and end of this tale of settler implosion, significantly, is the Cheyenne caregiver Johnna (Misty Upham). A key moment early in the film that comically rehearses "cultural contact" (indigenous presence and settler response) has to do with practices of naming. The belligerent Violet must come to grips with the fact that her husband, Beverly, has hired Johnna to care for her and for the family home. We come to learn that Beverly takes this step of providing for Violet since he plans to kill himself (and succeeds). Violet, aggressive as always and thrust into relation with Johnna, asks if she is an "Injun" and, over the course of the tale, frets obsessively about having "an Indian" in the house—what is she supposed to do about "the Indian"? At one point, in an intergenerational exchange about the politics of naming, Violet's daughter Barbara (Julia Roberts) tells her mother to call Johnna a "Native American," and Violet quips, "They aren't any more Native American than I am. . . . Let's just call the dinosaurs Native Americans while we're at it." The joke here though turns out to be on this family of women who are slowly dismantled in their relations to one another, Johnna serving as witness to what seems, by the last scene, will be their extinction. The family heads toward the fate of the dinosaurs, not killed off by a meteoric natural event, however, but by eating themselves alive. As these women—these three sisters, these two matriarch sisters, this mother Violet and her daughters, this daughter Barbara and her own teenage daughter—all unravel in their bonds with one another, passing repeatedly beyond points of return, Johnna cooks, cleans, goes calmly about her business. Comedically, she bakes great apple pie. In one scene, Johnna intercedes (with a frying pan as weapon) as one of the sister's male partners smokes pot, and heads toward having sex, with the teenage daughter of one of his partner's sisters. Johnna is the solitary sympathetic character of the tale.

In a final scene of grace, Johnna cradles the abjected head of Violet, who has chased away her daughters and now is abandoned. Johnna is not a "caregiver" here, picking up the pieces. She is not a "last chance" for Violet's survival, because Violet will not survive, and audiences

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

have no reason to care. Instead, Johnna is poised, in the film's visual economy, to inherit what is loosely suggested to have been hers to start with—an indigenous claim on legitimate land occupation. The settler tale moves to a postsettler tale in which negotiating with indigenous sovereignty is on the table. An earlier moment of the film shows us a mural of a headdress or feathered war bonnet—the image of the headdress, painted on a public wall in town, backgrounds a scene in which the mild uncle Charlie (Chris Cooper) picks up his son Little Charles (Benedict Cumberbatch) at, significantly, the local Greyhound bus station—a place of relay, of stopping off, of settler anxiety. Little Charles has overslept and missed the funeral of his uncle Beverly, and the ever-bending father consoles the even-milder son about his chronic life ineptitudes. The directorial choice to include the visual of the war bonnet, which is not provided for in the play, reminds audiences that we are in a Western. But all of these western men, like the father figure of John Grady Cole, are exhausted and in no position to answer the war bonnet's call. Nothing prevents, that is, the negotiation of or reoccupation of stolen land. Pawhuska, Oklahoma, the location of this settler tale, is the county seat and capital of the Osage Nation—audiences are asked to notice intimacies between US and tribal lands. Western cinema, like most locations in pop-cultural imagination, does not plot the US as mapped or disrupted in its contemporary territorial integrity by sovereign indigenous nations. We are not asked typically to think about the United States as itself already transnational space. But this film gestures toward the some 56.2 million acres held in trust by the United States for various Indian tribes and individuals, the approximately 326 Indian land areas in the United States administered as federal Indian reservations—and it frames the history of settler colonialism through relations between women.<sup>42</sup>

Unlike Vienna, who can't get a hearing in *Johnny Guitar*, Violet definitely gets a hearing. Through one raging scene after another of a kind of grief and anger that won't stay in place, Violet's story is on the brink of being untellable. Especially at this postfeminist moment in history, her story is too angry, crazy-angry. Once one hears the story—the cruelty and violence of Violet's mother against her daughters, the beatings of the daughters by the mother's "boyfriends," one time with a hammer to the head—her rage makes sense. Violet seems to bring to life the conviction expressed by Audre Lorde in *The Cancer Journals* that it is not until "every woman traces her weave back strand by blood self-referenced strand [that] we will begin to alter the whole pattern."<sup>43</sup> Obviously, this is not polite storytelling; this is hard-core truth telling about poverty as a form of total desperation, about selling sex and whatever else one has that someone will buy. It ruins Violet to have lived it, and ruins her daughters to hear it, but as a feminist viewer, listening, I am not ruined as much as relieved: Violet's rage, addictions, and dysfunction seem just right. What do audiences imagine lives underneath all the violence these stories tell? There is a kind of feminist analogue here to *Blood Meridian*, a testimony to the violence of "benevolent" domesticity and the settler enterprise, and we haven't even begun to hear from Johnna. The closest we've come to that tale is Leslie Marmon Silko's raging epic *Almanac of the Dead*. And nobody likes that story. What readers like and critics have canonized is Silko's debut novel, the lyrical and healing *Ceremony*.

<sup>42</sup> These numbers are reported on the website of the Department of the Interior, Indian Affairs. While no doubt these numbers are a complex source of information in a discussion of postsettler thinking, I forward them less as final demographic facts than to suggest the critical geographies of the film that interrupt settler common sense. See <http://www.bia.gov/FAQs/> (accessed May 29, 2015).

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Alaimo's discussion of "material memoir" in *Bodily Natures*, 85.

*August* leaves us with Johnna, and with the suggestion of her story and history on some cinematic threshold of tellability. We have learned from her earlier that in the pouch around her neck she carries her umbilical cord, which, for her as a Cheyenne, locates her soul so she knows where she is and will not wander. For the first time in all the work detailed here, we have a decolonial vision, a relation to place and movement that embraces logics of nonmovement in the vision of belonging in and to a place and, thus, registers possibility. It's not a lot, perhaps, but given the genocidal intentions of settler projects, it's the basic foundation of the new: there *is* a future for Indian Country. As I noted before, *August* raises the question "Now what?"

Imagining a future takes us finally to *Opal*, a girl-powered indigenous Western by the Navajo filmmaker Ramona Emerson. *Opal* is a text that was funded through crowdsourcing and is an indie short film with modest production values that needs a "viral moment" in order to travel. Were it not for my colleague in Native studies, Susan Bernardin, I doubt I would have learned about it. Her work with the film's intertextual Western referencing and interviews with the filmmaker and analysis of local contexts of production underlies the readings I do here.<sup>44</sup> *Opal* dramatizes, through its Western genre play, the legacies for indigenous people of settler-colonial relations and cultural imaginations (i.e., the effects of watching yourself obliterated over and over as popular entertainment). It takes up colonial gender orders as well and then shows us how to "think otherwise" with, but beyond, them. The local problem the film dramatizes involves a fight between boys and girls over the right to space and movement in the Navajo Nation: the boys forbid the girls from riding their bikes over certain territory, posting a sign "No Girls Allowed." This masculine directive could be taken more broadly as a statement about Global pop Wests and Westerns. The larger thematic of mobility in Westerns and settler colonialism has been raised as a feminist problem.

*Opal* opens by showing us a drawing of Charles Bronson and proclaiming "My Hero, by Opal." The film directly references Bronson in *Chato's Land*, as well as the signature elements of Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (slowed time, close-ups, water dripping, windmills). It knowingly invokes pop West visual economies of open landscape and markings of claims on the land in the form of roads, highways, signposts, the white man (Bronson) "playing Indian," and the "outsider" (Opal) who approaches territory occupied already, which hints at inevitable violence of fights over space. Inside this set of formulas that travel worldwide, we get the very unfamiliar: reservation kids on bikes, a violence-against-women narrative that does not take moral authority from threats to settler domesticity (white womanhood), and a Navajo girl who reenacts the Bronson revenge fantasy, the Native and feminist filmmaker refusing the "not allowed" mandate.

The short film takes us along the path of a classic Western plot but with Navajo youth playing the roles of settler and Indian. The boys/settlers tell the girls/Indians they cannot ride their bikes on the boys' space; it belongs exclusively to them. The girls refuse to recognize their claims to occupancy as legitimate. The boys push back, one of them, Thurman, pushing Opal to the ground and giving her a bloody nose, taunting her as "a girl" destined to get hurt. She may be bleeding, she retorts, but she isn't crying. It's a gendered standoff. Opal regroups, gathers her band of warrior/girl-powered riders. They pledge to assault the territory in question: the bike hill and jump. The sides square off for battle. The boy Thurman calls Opal out to a showdown—they will compete over the hill in question, ride fast and hard down it, and if Opal wins, the girls win access. Down

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<sup>44</sup> See Bernardin, "A Good Day to Bike."



the hill they go, Thurman falls—and now the moment of feminist truth arrives, the moment in which this tale does not resolve as classic Westerns do. Opal goes back for the fallen Thurman, who is unrepentant, refusing to concede the bargain he’s already struck. That is, like settler powers, he reneges on deals made and breaks treaties. He’s down and hurt, and for leverage, Opal kicks his injured foot. Now Thurman gives in: the girls too can use the space. But here is where the payback for Thurman and his band of boys stops. This will not be a tale that regenerates through violence. The boys will not be annihilated. A collective pacifist intervention of girls has reordered colonial modes of possession and exclusion, and if Opal takes Thurman (as she says) “down a notch” so that he plays fair, no colonial narrative is in play that makes the Other disappear.

We might say regeneration through violence works in 1954 for Vienna in *Johnny Guitar*: she ends the tale a victor, having shot her rival in self-defense, and in the final moment, she wears the black pants again and, with them, displays the prerogative of the male sovereign. But in the case of *August: Osage County*, the violence regenerated between women over four generations has destroyed them: there is no path out. The daughters, living wherever they go in the “after” of the film, will survive, but they are damaged, their future is dark, audiences don’t chase imaginatively for their stories, they are done. In the Border Trilogy (*All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, and *Cities of the Plain*), McCarthy rejects a thesis of regeneration through violence. Without it, John Grady Cole is redeemed but, at the same time, forever lost. Neither he nor Billy Parham ends up as a figure of settler or national exception.

In contrast to these tales, *Opal* holds out the possibility of a decolonized and feminist pop Western, a critical space of (Bernardin’s term) “rezterns.”<sup>45</sup> In Emerson’s hands, the Western is not rejected or exhausted. It is subject to critique, yes, but *Opal* takes us beyond critique. Bernardin sees in the end of the film a vision for collaboration between Navajo youth, a vision informed by the memory of pre-Columbian gender relations, in which men and women were not set against one another as they have been since the imposition of colonial gender orders. Such a claim is not a step back into nostalgic politics but a step toward the future (Opal’s bike is named “Next”). If *August: Osage County* and McCarthy’s trilogy see the Western as fatigued past the breaking point, *Opal* says, no, there is potential for storytelling here, but these new stories are in the hands of our children, who must be given decolonial tools.

There is much yet to do to situate *Opal* in larger contexts of recent independent indigenous cinema and of the flourishing of scholarship about visual sovereignty, the history and presence of Native people in cinema, and the linkages between this tale and histories of writing about Native American women by Native women.<sup>46</sup> All this work is important in a context of discussions of texts and knowledges that move or do not move across Global West cultural circuits. Moreover, some interpretive foregrounding, contextualization, and historicization likely will be needed to make a text like *Opal* intelligible as an instance of decolonial politics or feminist critical regional practices. It is unwise to read the text superficially or exclusively as a pop-culture phenomenon.<sup>47</sup> The filmmaker Emerson, on her Kickstarter campaign website, talks about receiving her love of Westerns from her mother’s and grandmother’s love of them. Emerson’s spectatorship, her

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>46</sup> See Joanna Hearne, *Native Recognition: Indigenous Cinema and the Western* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011); and Michelle H. Raheja, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> Hearne offers an example of locating a text in its local production logics in both “‘This Is Our Playground’” and “‘Just by Doing It.’”

“cinematic reference points,” as Bernardin calls them, emerge through intergenerational communication systems between women.<sup>48</sup> The language and politics of “intergenerational nurture” in Native American communities signal crucial sites at present of knowledge activism, revitalization efforts, and cultural production. A Global West critical project committed to decolonial knowledge and feminisms will be attentive to the deep contexts of production, distribution, and indigenous communal interest as it does its analytic work. A

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<sup>48</sup> Bernardin, “A Good Day to Bike,” 92.