

Introduction: Locating Personhood and Place in the Commodity Landscape

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In exploring subjects from historic home restoration to lifestyle migration, and to the commemorative performances of Wall Street women, these three articles suggest fresh ways of dealing conceptually and practically with the mutually implicating impact of profound structural and cultural changes felt by people and absorbed by places where they live, work, and search for meaning in a world where human actions are increasingly characterized as marketplace exchanges. The collection comprises an ethnographically rich and theoretically intricate engagement with questions of personhood, place, and the complicated, often conflicted negotiations between belonging and difference as well as the local and the global. The articles speak to the complex processes through which market forces variably insinuate and express themselves in social relations, systems of meaning, personhood, versions of history, and future possibility in both intimate and public spaces of everyday life. Through a close reading of lived experience from the concrete canyons of Wall Street to the suburbs and exurbs of America, they illuminate projects of person- and place-making that variably embrace or resist, acquiesce to or challenge the logic and practice of neoliberal capitalism while illustrating the meaning and power of culturally informed personal and collective narrative.

Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga's article takes us into the world of historic restoration by owners of early 20th century houses of the "bungalow" style in Southern California. Lawrence-Zúñiga offers compelling insights into the ways in which these homeowners devotedly speak of their houses, endowing them with a sense of agency. In their individual *cosmologies*, informed by preservationist ideology, houses become subjects rather than objects within material and moral projects of both restoration and redemption. In this way, houses become sites and sources of intimacy, attachment, and commitment. Their projects are a process of constructing individual identity as steward of the house in intimate dialogue with the building itself. We find a provocative language of salvation in the renovation projects detailed in homeowners' accounts. Their personal narratives construct restoration as a moral as well as material project and suggest a sense of the "sacredness" of their efforts to preserve place-based history.

As homeowners take up the cause of restoration, they appropriate a language of emancipatory struggle similar to community organizers of the

past. Yet, in a manner akin to the women of Fisher's Wall Street study and the lifestyle migrants of my own research, these projects effectively reproduce boundaries of social exclusion and economic advantage. The homeowners' self-conscious practice of consumption, a "commodified obsession with domesticity," at once rejects mass consumption (in a manner that resonates with leaders of the Arts & Crafts architectural movement) even as it re-inscribes forms of class-based difference and distinction. What comes through the self-reflection of preservationist homeowners is a sense of righteousness regarding their efforts that masks the power of specialized knowledge as well as their positions of socioeconomic and symbolic privilege. Historic preservationist homeowners attempt to transcend self-absorbed consumption to achieve what they see as a public good, i.e., the protection of historic homes and neighborhoods even if through largely private acts. Lawrence-Zúñiga describes a process whereby such private consumption is believed "converted" into civic virtue and thus material practice transformed into moral acts. Even while such endeavors may create practices and meaning systems that offer a semblance of fulfilling social obligation, as in cases presented in the other two articles, these actions may serve simply to further insulate and isolate those involved from larger questions of structural inequality. Together these articles explore elements of this fundamental tension in the struggles of everyday people to make individually meaningful and fulfilling lives as the authors seek to locate personhood and place in the commodity landscape.

My own article draws attention to the phenomenon of urban-to-rural lifestyle migration and the discourse of character and morality that mark the narratives of downshifting and downsized workers relocating from metropolitan, corporate worlds to small town or micropolitan places in order to "start over." Lifestyle migrants speak of their relocation as an affirmation of "true" character and a requisite act to any possibility of discovering their own moral core. It is expressed as a rejection of labor in workplaces increasingly reliant on commoditized notions of the worker where individuals are required to think of themselves as disembedded skills or qualities offered in the marketplace rather than as complete and integral persons. The reader will find a language of redemption in their discourse that resonates with personal narratives of historic house preservationists documented by Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga in her article.

Lifestyle migrants describe the processes of choice through which they attempt to symbolically, if not physically, extricate themselves from corrosive ties of the market and construct new lives "outside" the relentless pressures of capitalism and consumption. In a tension similar to that found in the other two articles, their practice of relocation is at once a form of resistance *and* acquiescence. There is personal satisfaction and even pride in lifestyle migrants' expressed rejection of the consumptive force of capitalism and incessant drive to "get ahead." At the same time, they remain largely mute when it comes to critical reflection on their individual economic capacity to choose relocation. Their stories essentially neglect the power of class opportunity that this choice reveals. It may be the very naiveté of privilege that gives form and substance to this

belief and the moral project that it informs. Lifestyle migrants offer a story of a self capable of salvation through creative reinvention, in a manner akin to the subjects of Lawrence-Zúñiga's work, who attempt a conversion of private material consumption into civic virtue. Their discourse, though, is neither a narrative of self-in-solidarity for collective resistance nor is it one of class struggle against the sure uncertainty of survival in the marketplace where human labor is a mere commodity. Rather, these narratives affirm belief in personal agency, the power of choice, and ultimately the individual ability to daringly extricate oneself from the grip of market forces.

Melissa Fisher's article exploring an organization of Wall Street women's commemorative celebrations provides an engaging accompaniment to a study of lifestyle migrants. Fisher's research concerns long-term planning associated the 25th and 50th anniversary celebrations of the Financial Women's Association (FWA) and the process of inventing and claiming a collective history for the group and its members. As she describes, the construction of the FWA origin story is a powerfully marked collective narrative of professional women's isolation, mutuality, struggle, and ultimately, success. Fisher's discussion of the FWA's selection of the Federal Hall building in New York City, the "symbolic center of the financial district," as site of the 25th anniversary celebration in 1981, speaks to the women's claims for legitimacy and of right to occupy sites of masculine power. Through Fisher's mapping of FWA's final choice for their celebration, we see how the organization deliberately set to using material cultural forms through historical architectural sites, slide shows, and memorabilia to tell their story in what they deemed the most powerful and lasting way in order to convey a deliberately self-referential message. As in the other articles, we see how individuals and groups use places and objects in the intentional construction of identity.

As the FWA origin story lays claim to the women's status as "pioneers" and their right to place and power on a historically-male Wall Street, it also lays claim to the exclusivity of privilege in the class project of an emergent elite, despite evocations of solidarity with a broader struggle for women's rights. While speakers at the 25th anniversary celebration pose challenges to gender injustice, they remain effectively silent on questions of poverty and the economic inequality that shapes the lives of many women. Twenty five years later, in March 2006, FWA's 50th anniversary celebration again provides a forum for recognizing women leaders in the financial services industry while beginning to embrace a sense of solidarity with a global struggle for women's rights. However, their struggle does not appear to be for the rights of all women or for women's solidarity in class-based struggles. The FWA celebrates their success in a gendered struggle to *belong* and to occupy elite domains of male power, but without changing those spaces or the power relations that support them. Thus, a discourse concerning their right to occupy spaces of male power is analogous to the narratives of lifestyle migrants in that neither group seeks to fundamentally transform extant social and economic arrangements.

Notes

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