

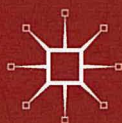
CULTURAL
SOCIOLOGY

Seeking Authenticity in Place, Culture, and the Self

The Great Urban Escape



Nicholas Osbaldiston



**SEEKING AUTHENTICITY
IN PLACE, CULTURE,
AND THE SELF**

Cultural Sociology

Series Editors: Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, David Inglis, and Philip Smith

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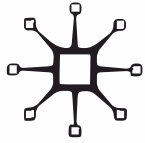
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SERIES EDITORS' FOREWORD

HUMAN LIFE IS CONDUCTED AND ORGANIZED IN BOTH SPACE and place. The former is a Cartesian environment of abstracted dimensions, vectors, and speeds. The latter is a world of meaningful locales. An innovative push in the 1980s saw new theoretical attention given to their relationship. Driven largely by critical thinking on postmodernity, this literature asserted that space and place were tied together by the forces of capital. Economic globalization, post-Fordism, and consumerism were the proximate factors that shaped place-meanings. These could be written off as shallow, malleable, and ideological. The lessons of an older cultural anthropology and humanist geography were mistakenly forgotten. These had long insisted on the power of story and symbol in shaping human encounters with landscape and cityscape alike.

Nicholas Osbaldiston systematically and decisively revives this forgotten tradition. Drawing upon structuralist theories of narrative and on Durkheimian thinking about the role of sacred and profane places, he reverses the causal arrows of critical theory. In his analysis, money follows myth. Through theoretical reconstruction and case study analyses he shows how mass amenity migration to the coast, mountains, and countryside is propelled by a search for authenticity. It responds to culturally embedded needs to flee urban profanity and to find the sacred. Urban planning is equally beholden to myth as it shapes place identities. Paradoxes and ironies emerge as reality and expectations collide. Real estate bubbles, marginalized locals, civic identity crises, and environmental degradation arise out of the mass pursuit of mythic ideals of self and place.

Illustrating how a meaning-centered sociology can inform the study of place, space, and migration, this study brings a new set of resources to cultural geography and spatial theory.

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CHAPTER 1

THE GREAT URBAN ESCAPE

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the West since the commencement of industrial modernity, the city has been a magnet for attracting population growth. Filled with promises of economic security, increased opportunities for intellectual and vocational development, and an abundant social and cultural life, the metropolis has grown immensely in the modern period. Left behind were the small villages and country towns that became, in some respects, symbols of a time forgotten when life was harsh and less comfortable. Those who still resided in villages and towns were considered “country folk,” backward, and with a limited view of the world. The city, on the contrary, was seen as progressive, technologically advanced, and cosmopolitan. Widespread migration into the city has subsequently resulted for many years in a general decline in population numbers amid some of these smaller country communities. However, in recent years, this general trend is being reversed in areas of high environmental value. Places that have historically been left untouched except through tourism have recently become the center of a great urban phenomenon: escape.

Described as amenity migration by some (Moss 2006a; Glorioso and Moss 2007; Ullman 1954), lifestyle migration (Benson and O’Reilly 2009a; Benson 2011; Hoey 2006, 2010) by others, and, in various corners, as Seachange (Burnley and Murphy 2004; Dowling 2004; Osbaldiston 2010), this movement involves a growing group of disgruntled ex-city residents who are seeking meaning in their lifestyles. The focuses of their quest are those places with pristine environments and small country town “feels.” Areas that have traditionally attracted the gaze of the passer-by in domestic and international tourism are now attracting these modern-day Thoreaus

who search for their own slices of “Walden.” Locales, for instance, along the foothills of the Cascade Range and Rocky Mountains in Canada, along the coastlines of the Pacific Northwest and Florida in the United States, across the beaches of Australia, or in the quiet countryside of England and France and surrounding European neighbors are developing into hotspots for the influx of what could be described as the “great urban escape.” What is the apparent “meaning” that these metropolitans seek for is the question that underpins this book. Geographer Moss (2006b, 8–9) suggests simply that the answer lies in two categories of amenity, “environmental,” which includes the natural beauty of both landscape and animal life, and “cultural,” which includes community spirit, small-town values, and a region’s history. Other variables here include those that also drive tourism, such as air quality, scenery, animal life, opportunities for lifestyle pursuits, and the spectacle of the “natural world.” Yet, tourist amenity, although a possible contributor, is not a dominant motivator for amenity-led migration (see, for instance, Kuentzel and Ramaswamy 2005). As Moss (2006b, 9) makes clear, the social world, including community mindedness, culture, and the “tangible manifestations” of not only the present community, but also of past peoples, is another attribute that these urban escapees seek out when they migrate from the city.

Understandably, this dramatic shift in population migration has attracted the interest of authorities across the world. Research and policy are abundant. Significant amounts of funding have gone into exploring statistical future-projected growth rates of areas of high amenity with a view to prepare small towns for the hard realities of amenity-led urban escapism. The results of these studies and projects demonstrate the importance of the phenomenon in the current social fabric of Western societies. Places once ignored in previous amenity-led shifts such as retirement migration are now drawing people in high numbers to the detriment of other areas. Once-revered destinations are now being overlooked in a quest to find towns that have yet to be spoiled by high migration and development. For instance, Garber-Yonts (2004) reports that in California, the usual high numbers of domestic migrants who arrive seeking after its famed environmental amenity has dropped in recent years. This trend, he proposes, will continue over the next decade as other less-developed regions across the United States have become more attractive for amenity-led migrants. For instance, within the greater western region, regions such as Oregon and Washington in the iconic Pacific Northwest, home to vast landscapes and the Cascade Range, are emerging as winners. These two areas in particular are set to expand considerably with a projected population increase from 1995 to 2025 of approximately 42 percent (Garber-Yonts 2004). Among current estimates, Oregon falls just behind Florida, the great retirement village of the United States, in net

interstate migration, with seven in every thousand residents emerging from elsewhere (Garber-Yonts 2004, 4).

Similar statistics are recorded in other nations across the West. In Canada, for instance, approximately 41 percent of small regional areas recorded growth, rather than loss, during the years of 1996 to 2001 (Mitchell 2005). Although some of this growth can be attributed to intrarural migration, or the movement of peoples from one country area to another, Mitchell (2008) concludes that one-third of this can be attributed to in-migration from metropolitan centers. Elsewhere in Australia, where the Bureau of Statistics has considered thoroughly the prominence of urban-rural migration, population growth has been recorded in dramatic numbers in regional areas. In 2004, for instance, and similar to the case of Canada, Australia's coastal regions grew in population size significantly within a five-year period. Of those migrating into these areas, one-third came from major capital cities such as Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane (ABS 2004). Of more interest is the suggestion that 42 percent of these new residents were families, with approximately 18 percent of couples having dependent children (ABS 2004). Furthermore, there is also strong evidence in this case study that many were not retirees, but younger than 55 years of age (see ABS 2004). Such counterurbanization trends have been occurring for sometime in Australia, as demonstrated in Hugo's (1996) studies in the late 1990s.

While these examples are small, they do beg the question of why people are seeking refuge from the city among less popular areas. It is apparent that these locales hold some extraordinary or even charismatic value that pulls people away from metropolitan centers. Yet, inherent in the revaluation of small regional places is the *devaluation* of similar attributes in the city. Important social issues such as pollution, overcrowding, materialism, distrust, and risk serve, I contend, to accentuate the mythical pull of small-town life. While we must admit there have been some structural changes, such as advances in telecommunications and Internet technologies and a widespread increase in personal wealth, that have increased the mobility of individuals (see Lash and Urry 1987; Beck 1992; Giddens 1990), it is the contention of this book that amenity-led migration is indeed a cultural phenomenon embedded in narratives that are constructed culturally and that impact greatly on the current and future dimensions of place-value. This book will examine in particular the binary coding of the city and the country that sits deep in the imagination of the amenity migrant. Life amid the natural beauty of the countryside, beaches, and mountains holds the key, for this group of escapees, to unlock the happiness and meaning that is imprisoned by the ingrained habits and stresses of the city. As noted earlier, it is not just retirees, as might traditionally be assumed, who seek after this escape. Professional journalist Dowling (2004, 8) illustrates this in her

discussion with some of Australia's "Seachangers," many of whom are middle-aged people who had "reached a point in their life . . . where they opted to put their own personal happiness ahead of more materialistic concerns such as salary, career advancement or the house in the prestigious suburb."

Indeed, there has been some suggestion through empirical work that income itself is sacrificed at the altar of self-fulfillment in not only this movement, but also in its cousin, voluntary simplicity or downshifting (Osbaldiston 2006a; Breakspear and Hamilton 2004; Schor 1998). However, amenity migrants are broadly speaking quite well resourced in comparison to those who live in small country towns and villages. To suggest otherwise underestimates the income and wealth disparity that exists between city and country populations. In fact, this unevenness (as this book will explore in detail later) is often evidence of the impact and proliferation of recent urban escapism across Western nations, especially as the movement has grown in popularity (Benson and O'Reilly 2009b). Indeed, the structural stresses that are brought to bear upon these small regional locales through population in-migration from the cities are quite apparent in statistical data matching population growth with local market housing costs. Some examples of this include iconic places such as Teton County in Wyoming, United States; the Town of Canmore in Canada's Rocky Mountains; Brighton on the United Kingdom's coastline; or the Byron Bay region in Northern New South Wales, Australia. In each instance, there has been significant growth in population, especially from urban centers. In time, these once-small economies that held relatively cheap housing markets have subsequently boomed. As an example, Teton County, which encompasses both the spectacular Rocky Mountains and the great plains of Wyoming, increased in population by 13 percent in the decade of 2000 to 2009 (Census Bureau 2010). The impact on Jackson Hole, a fairly isolated town located in the heart of Teton's national forest, is significant. For instance, overall real estate sales figures from 2006 through to 2007 jumped 20 percent to approximately \$1.5 billion indicating a growth not only in new home sales but also in house prices. However, the recent downturn in the national economy has seen this restricted in recent years as a flow-on effect of broader troubles. Yet, such figures have inflated market prices to the extent that local authorities have been required to initiate policy that deals with equity issues. In particular, having to balance the influx of relatively wealthy individuals (and developer interests) from larger city centers with the needs of earlier amenity migrants and less wealthy local residents is an important issue for this small community.

A similar situation is occurring in the historically small village-like place of Canmore in Canada's Alberta province. Here, the township's population over the age of five in 2006 was 11,340. Of these, approximately 35 percent were outsiders who had immigrated either from other parts of Canada

or from overseas locations (Statistics Canada 2006). The resulting flow-on effects upon the housing market, alongside demand for second homes and residential tourism, have been dramatic, with the average single-family home selling for approximately \$900,000 in the first quarter of 2011, well above national averages (Canmore Real Estate 2011). Such dramatic consequences for the locale have drawn a response from local authorities similar to the Town of Jackson. Here, a policy instrument has been designed to create low-cost housing for local municipal employees. In Australia, in the township of Byron Bay along the northern New South Wales coastline, a similar situation has emerged. At the last census intake, the percentage of immigrants from outside the region (or overseas) into the town was approximately 30 percent of the total Byron population (ABS 2006). Wealthy migrants and other developer interests have subsequently created a push factor, with local residents being forced out into surrounding suburbs and regions in recent years (Howden 2009). Indeed, the median house price within this iconic piece of Australiana in December 2010 was \$664,000, over 50 percent higher than in surrounding regions (Domain 2011). In 2007, the annual median house price growth was 20 percent, which has since dipped. However, the effect of the “cashed-up” migrant is evident.

Research across the phenomenon is finding similar circumstances throughout other amenity-rich areas as well. This is especially evident in relation to rapid population growth, incoming wealth, and social sustainability issues related to housing and significant shifts within micro-economies (see Moss 2006b; Gurran, Squires, and Blakely 2006; Chipeniuk 2008; Gober, McHugh and LeClerc 1993; Hall and Muller 2004; Fuguitt 1985; Hall 2006). As Moss (2006b, 17) states, the injection of wealth can indeed be a source of social turbulence. Increasing rates of second-home buying and the empty houses syndrome can also exacerbate this turbulence within smaller communities (see McIntyre, Williams, and McHugh 2006; Gurran, Squires, and Blakely 2006). Incoming migrants, who are distinct from more established amenity migrants (who had arrived earlier), are inclined, according to Moss (2006b, 17), to engage quite clearly in “conspicuous consumption,” not only in housing, but in daily practices. Thus, the escape from the city is less about lifestyle transformation and more about a new mode of status-related consumption.

As this book demonstrates later, the increase of permanent urban escapees and the fluctuation of temporary residents with second homes can create disharmony within these small and traditional communities. The reasons for this are multifarious. However, data such as those provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in a study conducted in 2004 provide some hints. The study finds that city escapees within regional locales were more likely than their neighbors to have a university education. In a strange

twist, urban escapees were conversely found to be less likely to find quality and ongoing work, with an unemployment rate of 18 percent opposed to the 8 percent rate found among the locals (ABS 2004). Reasons for this latter statistic are beyond the scope of this research. However, we can speculate that perhaps the strength of local social networks and trust plays a role here in the job market. Furthermore, the qualifications that new residents hold are less likely to be attractive to industries within regional locales. Often these places are based on blue-collar labor, a course new migrants may not have experienced. As a result, there is potential for value conflict through the disjuncture between urbanites and local communities. The former group, however, as Pahl (2005) has recently considered, has the power to alter the shape of a locale through its influence and, perhaps, cultural capital (see also Halbwachs 1991[1941]). Alongside these issues lie also the physical effects of population turnaround on landscapes, environmental conditions, biodiversity, and other sustainability concerns such as sewerage, waste water, and pollution (see Gurran, Squires, and Blakely 2006). The subsequent pressure on local municipalities to deal with these matters alongside other issues such as climate change has accelerated in recent times. Yet, despite this, authorities often act to promote their area rather than keep quiet, hoping to obtain a slice of the migration phenomenon for their own localities. As such, the very phenomenon of amenity-led migration also threatens its continued viability not only in relation to sustainability issues, but also culturally.

EXPLORING THE PHENOMENON

Throughout the chapters that follow, the unintended consequences of amenity-led migration are explored in some detail. Underpinning these issues, I contend throughout this project, is a cultural narrative that promotes amenity-led migration, but that also draws attention to the degradation in value of places that have become ruined through the movement. It is perhaps a cruel irony that those sleepy locales that serve as a place for the rejuvenation of the self are now challenged by the same profane attributes of the city that drive people to seek refuge.

The foundation of this book is based in Durkheimian logic, specifically that of contemporary figureheads such as Smith (1999) and Alexander (1998) and their “strong” approach to cultural sociology. Using this approach allows culture to take center stage in analysis. Yet, this methodological framework is not just designed to demonstrate collective values in the movement, as illustrated through qualitative comments or the “thick” data that emerge from participants themselves. It also allows us to see these cultural narratives embedded in institutional concerns that have a deeper relationship to the sacred and the profane than what is usually proposed in other theoretical

work (see Smith 2008). As I will show later in this book, the act of promoting places as authentic and the protective work that is initiated to maintain the distinction between city and country are inherently tied into those cultural binaries that provide the foundation for amenity-led migration.

From this perspective, the present work provides an analytical position that is often missed in studies of the phenomenon. As mentioned earlier, purveyors of research into amenity-led migration tend to focus on revealing those issues of sustainability, overpopulation, and environmental danger that emerge as the movement rolls on. Such debates are not only necessary, but can also provoke communities into civil and political action (Moss 2006a). However, policy discussion and examining political discourse ignore the power behind understanding the motivation to leave the city in the first instance. Perhaps this is not their cause for concern, but in many instances human behavior in amenity-led migration tends to be simplified. Not only here but also in analyses of voluntary simplicity and downshifting (see Hamilton 2004; Schor 1998), researchers often rely on well-founded principles found in social science/theory to answer the question of motivation. For instance, Moss (2006b) concludes that technological advance, mobility, and other structural transformations akin to the “new” age of *individualization* (Beck 1992; Giddens 1990; Bauman 2001a) are the bases for the inception of amenity-led migration. While such notions are important, such as the freeing up of social and economic capital to allow the phenomenon to flourish, they miss a broader fundamental feature of the movement that is intrinsically tied back to the self and importantly, the realization of the authentic self through the very act of migration. In other words, the motivation for escape is treated almost as a given through structural transformations, which denies the possibility of deeper symbolic trends among analyses. These are the issues that this book seeks to address.

Further displaced in these policy discussions are the collective imagination and valuation of places with high environmental and cultural amenity—in particular, the distinction between city and country/beach, which acts as the mediator for urban escapism. In this present work, the importance of place is a focal point. The narratives that construct the locales discussed below provide the symbolic value that either acts mundanely or degradingly on the self, or promotes a certain authenticity. Conceptually and methodologically, this project is aligned closely with Smith’s (1999) Durkheimian-inspired “Elementary Forms of Place.” I will elaborate on this further later. Importantly, this theoretical logic acts to provide that holistic approach to amenity-led migration missed in those policy discussions mentioned above, but also promotes an appropriate alternative to spatial theories such as the Urry (1992; 1995) “gaze” theorem, which proliferates in empirical and theoretical research.

In particular, Smith's (1999) logic allows room for the cultural imagination to impact upon the behavior of individuals in greater detail than what Urry's (1990) gaze theorem allows. It should be noted that within the discussions below, the notions of the latter are not entirely dismissed as irrelevant. Indeed, as will be shown, there is conceptual value in the way Macnaughten and Urry (1998) illustrate the significance of the authentic in place. However, Urry's (1992) persistence with the Foucauldian-inspired tourist gaze rhetoric denies access to broader cultural codes and narratives that are deeply embedded, as will be shown, in place value. The romantic "gaze," for instance, is founded upon the precepts and perceptions of the "upper middle classes" (Urry 1995, 44), producing a set of criteria that defines natural landscape and, importantly, how it is to be enjoyed. These theories inevitably tie nature-based activities to class boundaries where bourgeois tendencies have precedence. Yet those who negotiate with the natural world do so heterogeneously. Activities that perhaps could be considered historically as "unnatural" are enjoyed with the same underlying sentiment that guides more "natural" behaviors. For instance, consider the white-water rafter compared with the bird watcher or bush walker. In each instance, there is a connection between the individual and place that encourages different forms of "authentic" behavior according to subgroup norms, values, and themes. The subsequent cultural force of the place provokes changes in action; the difference between them is irrelevant. While Urry (1992) acknowledges that these supposed natural activities are constructed, he fails to note that there are different ways of enjoying nature that are not always met with complaint from more "dominant" discourses.

The main point of distinction between Smith's (1999) model and Urry's (1992) theorem is found in the focus of the latter upon the "eye" and visual consumption of landscape. For instance and in response to critics of the tourist gaze, Urry (1992, 185, italics added) argues the following:

What is crucially important is that the systematicity of an "attraction" derives from different kinds of gazes, both upon various markers and upon the nucleus itself. *It is these different kinds of scopic regimes, that incorporate different times and space, that produce different tourist systems.* These can be organized around both built and supposedly "natural" environments. *The eye is central to such systems. The visual might be disparaged, but its systematic power cannot be doubted.*

Intrinsic to this mode of analyzing place/space, then, is the organization of landscape around sight. Gazing upon sites, whether they are natural, built, or historical, provides the individual with "something distinctive to be gazed upon . . . set off from everyday life and experience" (Urry 1992, 173).

Yet, these notions fail quite mundanely to explain the deeper motivations for traveling to places we might consider “sacred,” such as war memorials, sites of religious and national significance, and other iconic locales (see West 2008; Osbaldiston and Petray 2011). Universal themes, such as self-authenticity, the sacred, and indeed even the profane, are lost in what is a superficial analysis of place value. Thus while Urry (1992) persists with categorizing activities in relation to how place is organized around specific “gazes”—such as solitary engagement, collective enjoyment, brief two-minute camera “moments”—he neglects the myths and narratives that attract people to the place in the first instance. As we will see in examples shown throughout this book, landscape has a much more powerful influence on the individual than simple visual consumption. Lifestyles are transformed through objective surrounds. West (2008) illustrates further that this is also evident in tourism, where experiences can leave indelible impressions on individual’s memories and cultural practices (see also Smith 1999).

The core of the Smith (1999) project relates to appreciating place by providing culture with a certain autonomy, distinct from concrete spatial practices (Urry 1995) and critical theory, which concentrates specifically on the mundane, leaving little room for understanding of places of high collective value (see Soja 1996, 2000; Harvey 1996, 2001; Zukin 1995). At the other end of the theoretical spectrum are those who critically engage with tourist places as sites of contrived or staged authenticity (MacCannell 1973; Baudrillard 1994; Ritzer 2010). In the case of Ritzer (2010) and Baudrillard (1994) especially, individuals become little more than pawns to the spectacular, seduced by the enchantment of the fantasy world presented by places such as Las Vegas. Certainly as we shall see later in chapter 2, these mammoth objects of materialistic desire can at times be viewed with an air of cynicism and disgust by those with quasi-postmaterialist tendencies. Yet within these postmodernist theories and assumptions, the consumer of landscape is treated as a dependent rather than an independent variable (Alexander and Smith 2001). Lost are the collective values and cultural wrangling that can at times serve to provoke disdain for places that evoke disgust.

While place and its associated attributes hold an important position in the theoretical and empirical reasoning of this book, it is the relationship of the locale to the individual that is more prominent. From here, we can begin to reveal more emphatically the motivations of those who escape city environs for the natural wonders of the regional world. (As mentioned earlier, this failure to adequately study motivation is one of the fundamental flaws of studies into the migratory phenomenon in general.) This book also distinguishes itself from the well-established school of thought of lifestyle migrant theorists Benson and O’Reilly (2009a; Benson 2011), who propose that the movement is based on a “reflexive habitus” (Sweetman 2003),

suggesting that amenity-led migration is “inevitable” in a late modernity, where life projects are embedded in cultural tastes. This is demonstrated for them specifically in the behavior of people post migration, which reflects choices once exhibited in the city:

Migration enables individuals to begin to establish a way of living that they feel is preferable to life before migration. In this respect, their actions demonstrate that they reflect on their particular circumstances, acting to improve their lot in life; that they make choices demonstrates that, to a degree, lifestyle migration is an individualized action. However, while they stress that they are in the process of realizing their dreams, it is evident *that these remain informed by their lives before migration*, and in this respect, are not the break from the pasts they had previously envisaged. *They bring with them skills, expectations, and aspirations from their lives before migration*. Their lifestyle choices thus remain *mediated by their habitus*, and framed by their levels of symbolic capital. In other words, their relative symbolic capital (incorporating educational, cultural and social capital) *impacts on the decision to migrate and the destinations chosen, but also the life then led in the destination* (Benson and O’Reilly 2009b, 618, *italics added*).

There is some analytical and empirical power behind these sentiments. The manner in which some “lifestyle migrants” perform their urban escape reflects previous experiences in metropolitan living. This causes some to conceive of newer participants in the phenomenon to be “fake” and detrimental to the authenticity of the locale. However, this is just one population within the entirety of the movement. Dominant features, as this project aims to reveal, include a significant break in lifestyles from those found in previous lives in the city. Attributing lifestyle migration simply to the tastes of previous lives underestimates the power of the relationship of place to the self, or rather, underestimates cultural autonomy and the power of cultural imagination to transform the self and its associated practices. Participants have been able to show in the past a transformation in attitude, values, and expectations in their new residencies, albeit through much upheaval of ideas and behaviors (see Dowling 2004; Ragusa 2010a; Osbaldiston 2006a). From this perspective, Benson and O’Reilly (2009b) fail, similar to Urry (1992), to envisage more universal themes such as the *quest for the authentic* within their analyses.

Such wider appreciation of cultural values within movements similar to amenity-led migration is certainly the focus of other works (see Lindholm and Zúquete 2010; Parkins and Craig 2006; Vannini and Williams 2009a). However, these are often broad and focus on collective ideas or the influence of global forces in producing cultural rebellion. Lindholm and Zúquete (2010), for instance, propose that new movements of contemporary

modernity respond to the homogenizing influence of globalized capitalism (see also Parkins and Craig 2006). They write,

The struggle against the evil system, despite overwhelming odds, and at the risk of isolation, mockery, or punishment, is a value in itself. . . . No compromise is possible because, for the aurora movements, American-style neoliberal-capitalist globalization represents a dark power of indignity, disenchantment, homogenization, and debasement. It is not just flawed or mistaken, it is evil (Lindholm and Zúquete 2010, 155).

The utopian dream of social movements based on such a philosophy, is as shown, a guiding principle only. Realistically, the rebellion against the hegemonic influences of global forces is unwinnable. Yet, for Lindholm and Zúquete (2010), it is the spirit of rebellion against a driving inauthentic force that is capitalism, which is highly prized. Thus, it is through collective action, or rather reaction, that members of these groups experience “authenticity, diversity, solidarity and humanity that they feel are denied to them in ordinary life,” even if their goals are unrealistic and unattainable (Lindholm and Zúquete 2010, 161). Or in Durkheimian-type logic, ritualistic encounters enable the reenchantment of life through collective processes.

Similarly, Parkins and Craig (2006; see also Honoré 2004) contend that slow movements, such as slow food, emerge as global responses to pressures from elsewhere. These “glocal” responses form through the transformation of mundane practices. This everyday is renegotiated within paradigms of “care,” “attention,” and “mindfulness,” where behaviors such as food consumption adopt more meaningful purposes (Parkins and Craig 2006, 4). Slow living has emerged through civil/political narratives that take into account complex global outlooks on issues of social, environmental, and political justice. Social action in the everyday can have “creative and ethical potential,” which the slow movement embraces through transformation in action, consumption, and production (Parkins and Craig 2006, 7). These notions are reminiscent of calls from Soper, Ryle, and Thomas (2009) to consume differently, as a form of “alternative hedonism,” in order not only to recapture activities that provide pleasure (such as cycling or walking), but also to provide an opportunity for a sustainable future.

These positions are helpful in understanding the inception of “slowness” into the vernacular of Western culture. Similar to the manner in which amenity-rich locales are protected from profane influences through policy instruments and planning controls, communities rebel against the “evil” forces of capitalism through social movements and changing mundane practices in order to recapture a sense of authenticity. However, what these culturally sensitive approaches lack is a discussion of the underlying narratives

and theoretical pathways that promote a collective valuation of authenticity and the sacred self in the first instance. In other words, what is it that people see as being “profaned” through these intrusive forces and how does that reflect in their behavior? Questions such as these are vital to any discussion of amenity-led migration. In particular, the city, like global capitalism for Lindholm and Zúquete (2010), is perceived to damage the sacred authentic self, causing the individual to seek out sacred places that provide an objective surround that promotes self-actualizing behavior. In this book, I seek to reveal the meaningful cultural codes that do not just underpin amenity-led migration, but also traverse the spectrum of authenticity-seeking behavior in late-/postmodern societies.

A QUESTION OF LABELS

Before laying down the theoretical foundation from which this analysis will be built, I wish first to clarify a rather mundane issue but one that has conceptual importance for this book, this being the name of the phenomenon in question. . What Lindholm and Zúquete (2010) make clear is that throughout contemporary Western culture, there is a continued attempt to remove what is considered profane from those attributes of high value. Freedom, authenticity, community, and collective autonomy are all objects threatened by global and other detrimental forces that plague everyday life. In slow food for instance, the reaction against the fast-food giants is intended to protect and enhance local food cultures and the authentic ethnic identities they represent. Unquestionably, a binary is at play here. Good versus evil, sacred versus profane, or authentic versus inauthentic—these distinctions are missed somewhat by other researchers. My contention is that in amenity-led migration, this binary is also clearly evident in practice. In particular, the city is becoming increasingly profane, in the Durkheimian sense of the word. It threatens the moral fabric of individual well-being to the point that a type of secular ritualistic avoidance strategy is employed to escape it. Of course, hinged on this is the sacralization of places in the country, which become an antidote to the evils of the metropolitan lifestyle.

The play between the city and country is therefore based on hot or affective symbolic communication and negotiation. In some cases, participants in the movement are inclined to discuss their migration in quasi-transcendental manners (see Locke 2006; Dowling 2004). The soul is at stake, or something like it. Yet, most are less inclined to such dramatic language. However, it is clear that the decision to migrate is often connected to deeper emotional thoughts rather than being viewed simply as a lifestyle project found in late modernity (Benson and O’Reilly 2009b). Recognizing this, Australian demographers Burnley and Murphy (2004) have labeled

amenity-led migration as *Seachange*. Derived from a successful television drama of the same name, which embraced the term from Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, Seachange denotes not simply a migration to locations outside the city, but also a deeper transformative process within the individual. The metaphorical term suggests a "fundamental change" of experience, lifestyle, and cultural/vocational pursuits that is achieved through a transition in scenery (Burnley and Murphy 2004, 3).

Within international and Australian academic and public debates, the term is misrepresented often as simply meaning a shift toward coastlines. For this reason, there has been a growth in alternative terms, specifically within Australia, that signify a push toward specific parts of the country, such as Greenchange (movement into the lush countryside), Treechange (movement into the rural/regional country areas), Hillchange (movement into the hills), and T-Change (movement into the small island state of Tasmania). However, the term "Seachange" is derived not from locations of interest, but from Shakespearean language in *The Tempest*:

Full fathom five thy father lies. Of his bones are coral made; Those are pearly that were in his eyes; Nothing of him doth fade, But doth suffer a Sea-Change, Into something rich and strange (cited in Dowling 2004, 15).

The theme here reflects a deeper and "rich" transformation that delivers the subject into something new, something "strange." As will be shown in the later empirical chapters, the places sought after in this phenomenon are those distinct from or "unfamiliar" to the city. Although there are certainly traces of a reflexive spirit in the decision making of individuals within the movement, which at times serves to divert disaster (see Moss 2006a; Ragusa 2010a, 2010b; Osbaldiston 2006a), it is the adventurous and subjective transformative power held within Seachange that provokes participation. These notions as Burnley and Murphy (2004, 3) suggest are not coast specific, but spread across the most of the movement's population. For these reasons, I contend, the label "Seachange," not simply amenity migration with its utilitarian notions or lifestyle migration, which reflects a more general movement specifically of middle-class peoples, is entirely useful both in its functional and its aesthetic capabilities for discussion here.

A STRONG CULTURAL SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO SEACHANGE: PLACE AND THE SELF

The relatively recent return of the Durkheimian school back to the agenda of sociology has sparked significant debate. In particular, the new American-led strong program of cultural sociology from Yale's Alexander and Smith

(2001) has created a steady flow of discussion and criticism (Alexander and Smith 2001, 2010; Alexander 2005a; Alexander and Reed 2009; Emirbayer 2004; McLennan 2004, 2005) alongside a more general focus on not just the French master but also on his students (see Riley, Daynes, and Isnart 2009; Riley 2010). In particular, Alexander and Smith's (2001) somewhat pointed discussion of other contributions to the sociology of culture as "weak" has sparked some response from progenitors of certain strands of the discipline (see for instance Gartman (2007) as an example in relation to Bourdieu). Furthermore, the direction and use of Durkheim's own work within the broader cultural sociological field of Alexander himself has arguably resulted in alternative explorations of the French scholar by authors such as Lemert (2006), who seems to wish to reclaim the "ghost" of Durkheim, lost to the world of cultural studies.

Such debates are important to have. Here, however, there is not nearly enough space to discuss them all. Rather, in this book I espouse an application of the strong program, in which culture is illustrated as an autonomous driving force that creates lifestyle pursuits such as Seachange through an ongoing negotiation and contestation of codes and binaries. Specifically, the cultural field here can be examined through narrative theory. Places of high amenity and the processes that inject them with high collective value are explored in this book as underpinned by texts or narratives. Such a methodological approach (namely narrative or genre theory) is for Alexander and Smith (2001) a potential step forward to distinguish Cultural Sociology from other "weaker" programs. It is worth citing them at length here:

The appeal of this theory lies partially in its affinity for a *textual understanding of social life*. The emphasis on teleology carries with it some of the interpretive power of the classical hermeneutic model. This impulse towards reading culture as a text is complemented, in such narrative work, by an interest in *developing formal models that can be applied across different comparative and historical cases*. In other words, narrative forms such as the morality play or melodrama, tragedy and comedy can be understood as "types" that carry with them particular implications for social life. The morality play, for example, does not seem to be conducive to compromise (Wagner-Pacifici 1986, 1994). Tragedy can give rise to fatalism (Jacobs 1996) and withdrawal from civic engagement, but it can also promote moral responsibility (Alexander forthcoming, Eyerman forthcoming). Comedy and romance, by contrast, generate optimism and social inclusion (Jacobs and Smith 1997, Smith 1994). Irony provides a potent tool for the critique of authority and reflexivity about dominant cultural codes, opening space for difference and cultural innovation (Jacobs and Smith 1997, Smith 1996) (Alexander and Smith 2001, 146, *italics added*).

One of the more significant applications of such a reading of culture is delivered in Smith's (2008) *Punishment and Culture*. Here, reanalysis of collective punishment, where the dominant perspective of the Foucauldian tradition has prevailed (mainly the *Discipline and Punish*-inspired tradition in criminology and the sociology of deviance) for many years, is challenged through a perspective that promotes the cultural terrain as a powerbroker in transforming ideas on retribution, justice, and crime. Not only does Smith (2008) achieve this, but he also in turn displays some of the follies that are present in "weak" appraisals of institutional punishment.

In this book, however, and as indicated earlier, the emphasis on place as a fundamental concept for investigation in *Seachange* calls for one of Smith's (1999) lesser-known works, which combines the work of literary critic Northrop Frye (1957, 1976) with the Durkheimian tradition to produce "The Elementary Forms of Place" model. As suggested in the above quote from Alexander and Smith (2001), this typology is based on reading culture as a text that can in turn be used for application across historical or comparative cases. We can see an illustration of this in Smith's (1999) own exploration of *Place de la Bastille*, which he argues has developed historically through a number of cultural paradigms, each distinct from the other. Specifically, the locale has been seen to traverse from sacred value to the profane and then to two other categories that Smith (1999) invents for his four-pronged model, the liminal and the mundane.

Despite its distinctiveness from competing paradigms (see earlier discussions in this chapter), this model has some similarities with existing place theories. In particular, the now much-maligned humanist geographies of Relph (1976), Buttimer (1993) and Tuan (1976) are comparatively similar in purpose to Smith's (1999) piece. These once-popular contributions to human geography attempt to ground cultural perceptions of place with terms such as "place-attachment," "place-rootedness," and effective "placelessness." The essential argument that binds them together is the notion that values within places can bind themselves to individuals, creating strong ties. Place can define identity, promote authenticity, and allow for strong communities. Modernity, however, creates the potential for these ties to be severed as increased mobility uproots and continual commercialization of locales rips them from the individual's sense of place. This process does much then to remove a collective feeling of community, instead leaving us to live individualized lives. To a certain extent, these ideas are well illustrated in the motivations for *Seachangers* (see Ragusa 2010a; Dowling 2004; Osbaldiston 2006b). Relph's (1976) assessment of authentic places versus placelessness is significant in light of the degrading influence the metropolis has on individuals seeking to *seachange*. However, the flaw in the logic of the humanist geographers lay within their ethically and morally charged arguments.

Unlike Smith (1999), they viewed culture homogeneously, despite their acknowledgement of subgroup deviation. In particular, their views on the destructive influence of commercialization reflect a biased value perception of what is authentic to society, rather than acknowledging that authenticity is culturally constructed. These normative assumptions and articulations are essential to those who dismiss humanist geographers in contemporary work (McIntyre, Williams, and McHugh 2006).

With this in mind though, the humanist tradition does attempt to connect culture with a deeper symbolism that is embedded in the individual psyche. Smith's (1999) "Forms of Place" model follows this notion in a value-neutral manner, unlike the humanist geographers. Using the "spirit of Goffman and Giddens" in conjunction with the Durkheimian view, Smith argues that places are "settings for interaction which are, in turn, reproduced by action itself" (1999, 14). In other words, the cultural texts or themes that surround a locale also mitigate the action or behavior of social actors. Like the myths that underpin religious ritual for Durkheim, the narratives that sustain an area are replenished or sustained through this activity:

The action/setting dialectic can be understood as mediated by overarching, place identifying cultural structures—treated in this paper as quasi-religious myths and narratives—which inform the actions of ego in contexts of both single and double contingency. That is to say interpersonal actions are attuned by the symbolic meanings attached to a locale, and, indeed that ego's actions within a place will be influenced by myths and narratives of the locale even in the absence of alter (Smith 1999, 15).

While agency is vital in the analysis of place behavior, it is crucial also to recall the cultural codes/narratives that determine the characteristics of certain spaces. However, these sustaining codes are not homogeneous across collective society nor are they fixed (Smith 1999, 16). As Smith (1999) demonstrates in his historical discussion of *Place de la Bastille*, meaning and its subsequent social action are transformed according to different paradigm shifts. At one moment in time, a place may project a sacred aura invoking pilgrimage and ritual encounter while at another it may signify disgust or absurdity. The shores of Gallipoli, for instance, were transformed from a rather mundane or even unknown setting through the horrors and subsequent stories of World War I in the mind-set of the Australian. Now, ritual pilgrimage to the site where Australian identity was concretized (see Scates, 2006) is common practice (West 2008). Similar thoughts can be applied to the site of the Flight 93 memorial in Pennsylvania (Riley 2008). Both these examples illustrate the power of myth in promoting a place in value or

contempt but also demonstrate how a concentration on the “gaze” of tourists fails to identify deeper motivations.

As mentioned earlier, Smith (1999) proposes in his typology that there are four “forms of place” that can be used as a model to interrogate place both historically and in contemporary case-study examination. Two of these follow after Durkheim’s (1995[1912]) treatment of religion, the sacred and the profane, which when used in conjunction with Frye’s (1976) “themes of ascent” and “themes of descent” presents a conceptual framework for understanding the deep division between places of high value and those of moral disdain. In particular, and of conceptual importance for the Seachange debate, is the manner in which one promotes social solidarity, relationships, and meaning whereas the other provokes individualized experiences that disconnect the individual from true identities. To thicken the typology however, Smith (1999) further adds the liminal, which is inspired by Shields’s (1992) investigation into marginal spaces. Here, places on the boundaries are represented that are neither sacred nor profane, but still appear outside the ordinary. Lastly, Smith (1999) answers criticism of Durkheim’s (1995[1912]) conceptualization¹ of the profane by introducing the concept of the mundane place. Here, sites of no significance that are the “everyday” are disentangled from the profane category, allowing the latter to be fully developed. Each of these forms has distinct properties that differ from the other and that I will introduce briefly now.

THE SACRED PLACE

In the flows of everyday places, there are some locales that provide alternative experiences from the ordinary. They inspire and provoke behavioral change, not because of some dominant power watching their movements through the aid of a CCTV, provoking panoptic-type responses, but rather through a culturally derived paradigm that causes one to alter micro bodily (our walking, gestures, speech, and breathing patterns, for instance) behavior. The themes surrounding these sacred places are for Smith (1999) likened to Frye’s (1976) conception of the “theme of ascent” located often in romances such as Christian dogma, Greek mythology, or Latin texts. Important here is the distinction between “themes of ascent” and “themes of descent” discussed by Frye when he reflects upon literature throughout history as follows:

The general theme of descent... was that of *growing confusion of identity and of restrictions on action*. There is a break in consciousness at the beginning, with analogies to falling asleep, followed by a descent to a lower world which is sometimes a world of cruelty and imprisonment... In the descent there is

a *growing isolation and immobility*: charms and spells hold one motionless; human beings are turned into subhuman creatures, and *made more mechanical in behavior*; hero or heroine are trapped in labyrinths or prisons. The narrative themes and images of ascent are much the same in reverse, and the chief conceptions are those of *escape, remembrance, or discovery of one's real identity, growing freedom, and the breaking of enchantment*. Again there are two major narrative divisions: the ascent from a lower world and the ascent to a higher world. (1976, 129, *italics added*).

The central character of such stories, as Frye (1976, 129–130) explains, is placed under so much strain in the descended world that there emerges a “revolt of the mind, a recovered detachment,” which sparks an ascendancy into a higher world. Within this transition, themes such as escape, identity, collective festivals, and mercy are all key outcomes of a “theme of ascent.” It is perhaps fitting that the play from which the term “Seachange” is derived, *The Tempest*, follows suit. The story follows the life of magician Prospero, rightful Duke of Milan, who is usurped by his brother, Antonio, and sent out to sea with his daughter, Miranda. The two land on an isolated island and learn how to survive through the assistance of Caliban, a half-human monster. Eventually, through his dark magic, Prospero raises a mighty tempest that forces a passing ship carrying Antonio ashore with King Alonso of Naples, the co-conspirator. What follows is a “theme of ascent” from the isolated and subhuman island to Prospero’s rightful place in Naples—or in other words, to his true identity. The crescendo of the play is Prospero’s eventual release from imprisonment, encapsulated when he turns to the audience and cries, “But release me from my bands, with the help of your good hands” and finally, “Let your indulgence set me free.” In other words, only through the applause of the crowd is the victim released from his bonds.

It is quite remarkable how entwined Frye’s (1976) reading of romantic literature and Durkheim’s (1995[1912]) own reading of sacred objects, places, and persons are. For Durkheim, sacred things promote not just respect and admiration, but encourage a “collective effervescence” or collective identity set aside from the profane world of individualized experience. Thus, as Hubert (1999[1905]) records, religious festivals are often opportunities for people to come together in collective reverie from the profane world. Yet the distinction between the profane and the mundane is never quite clear in the Durkheimian work, which we will explore briefly later. Despite this, the split between sacrality and profanity is evident in our social imaginations, as Smith (2008, 20–21) comments here:

These imaginative templates enable societies to make sense of the world by organizing their environments and experiences using broader, extra-contextual symbolic patterns. Such cultural systems live symbiotically with

the collective rituals that reproduce them, these being oriented around that deep gulf separating the sacred from the profane, the pure from the impure.

The duty of the cultural sociologist then is to uncover the semiotic codes that illustrate this split. Understanding how the sacred and profane operate within the concept of place is the proposed direction this book takes.

The position of Smith (1999) with regard to these theoretical paradigms is that both religious and secular narratives can establish a sacred site. Themes of patriotism, nationalism, romance, and identity underpin a variety of locales that are considered sacred across certain subgroups. Relph (1976) and others would be quick to remind us that small families may well have sacred sites that relate to their own past experiences and evoke nostalgia. However, at the larger collective level, locales of political struggle, collective upheaval, sacrifice, and at times death often attract the solemn assembling of people. Underpinning many of these is the notion of heroes who become immortalized through totem-like structures, such as Abraham Lincoln or Karl Marx (see Hubert 2009[1919]). Their stories, at times romanticized, serve to provide a place with a special aura provoking special behavior:

Nearing the sacred place a penumbra of solemnity imposes itself of human behavior, inviting, for example, the hushed tones, the straightened back, silent footsteps, slow breathing which in turn invoke physiological changes and direct memory towards the sacred and away from the mundane, liminal and profane (Smith 1999, 19).

Riley's (2008) recent discussion of the Flight 93 crash site exemplifies this further. Not only do pilgrims to this important spot in contemporary American history transform behavior in accordance to the force of the narrative of sacrifice, they also engage in a ritual "gift giving" exercise where "religious medals and icons, firefighters" and emergency workers' uniforms, other items of clothing bearing messages of sympathy and identity with the passengers and crew, and many, many American flags are pinned to a memorial fence, erected in honor of the sacrifice of those who perished (Riley 2008, 11). Here, the symbolism of such exercises reflects a deeper cultural coding that distinguishes the Flight 93 memorial as sacred.

Places such as Gallipoli, the World Trade Center memorial, Golgotha, or graveyards are perhaps obvious examples of sacred sites. Their association with or similarity to Seachange places is not so clear. However, when utilizing Frye's (1976) theoretical contribution, the sacrality of country townships is exposed. In particular, the notions of isolation, loneliness, and subhuman/mechanical worlds that the hero or heroine breaks out of through a moment where a "revolt of the mind" takes place are indicative of the romantic

journey that the Seachanger endures. This will be evident throughout the discussion chapters. Through further use of Smith's (1999) typology, we can also see how narratives that promote a place in value also cause a transformation in macro behavior. The cultural force of sacred places is essential to understanding why certain locales are chosen in Seachange in particular narratives of natural beauty alongside communal and cultural heritage (Moss 2006b). While secular worship is perhaps a strong word to be using within this phenomenon, I contend here that the force of the "themes of ascent" embedded in natural form, cultural heritage, and communities produces a transformation in the consciousness and the lifestyles of individuals. For instance, as Dowling (2004) shows (see also Osbaldiston 2006a), participants in the movement often find themselves living more slowly or more meaningfully and more purposefully, and participate in activities that they would otherwise not participate in. Migrants into regional areas often end up in community groups, participating in informal social networks or even involving themselves with activist organizations at a local level. This transformative power is precisely what Seachangers seek out. The setting here produces an action, but is, as Smith (1999) contends, strengthened by the activities of those within the sacred sites. Within the Seachange phenomenon, we can, as will be shown later, see evidence of a highly secularized sacred place sustained through quasi-religious myths and narratives.

THE PROFANE PLACE

Understanding the sacred place is complemented by the profane. Certainly in Seachange, the division between the city and country is well conceptualized in the sacred/profane dichotomy. While the threat of the liminal or mundane is also very real, it is the impact of the "profane" metropolis that causes the Seachanger to seek refuge or escape in the countryside. Once more employing Frye's (1976) theory of "descent" from romantic literature helps us to read the text of Seachange places as well as the phenomenon in general. He writes, for instance,

At the beginning of a romance there is often a sharp descent in social status, from riches to poverty, from privilege to a struggle to survive, or even slavery... the structural core is the individual loss or confusion or break in the continuity of identity, and this has analogies to falling asleep and entering a dream world (Frye 1976, 104).

The descent here is not to be taken as literal in the Seachange drama. Rather, the Seachange drama shares the attributes of identity loss, strain on personal happiness, or as Frye (1976) reminds us later, the entering of a world that

is mechanical and isolated. When using this notion to describe the profane place, Smith (1999, 19) conceptualizes it thus:

These narratives see human actions as polluting to the moral fabric of society and degrading to human spiritual values. Like sacred places, those which are profane are often founded upon narratives of violence... Profane places are more often—but not always—the locus of subsequent, equally ritualistic (to the sacred) attempts at destruction and obliteration... marked out by taboos and what Durkheim called “rituals of avoidance.”

It is the latter “rituals of avoidance” or escape that we concentrate on here in this book. However, as Smith (1999) cites, there are numerous examples of profane places that have inspired intense hatred and moral outrage, which in turn cause spontaneous moments of ritual destruction. The Berlin Wall is perhaps a telling demonstration of this.

From Smith’s (1999) perspective, we can begin to connect the impact of the profane place within the city/country dialectic in Seachange. However, as a note of theoretical interest, it is my contention that we must also deal with how the profane place appears to inspire ritual engagement, rather than avoidance. Here, we can begin to identify another pole of the sacred, the impure or “left” sacred identified by Durkheimian Hertz (1960[1909]), working within places. The sacred is divided here between two poles. One induces feelings of awe, inspiration, and collective effervescence. The alternative, the impure, produces responses of horror and dread. Both, however, are revered. The relationship of the two poles of sacrality is intimately connected in place and needs to be distinguished from the profane detailed by Smith (1999) here. In many settings, the two are present. For instance, the Flight 93 memorial presents a pure sacred aura through hero worship and patriotism as described above. However, beneath the layers of collective admiration for those who died is the deeply disturbing and somewhat horrific narrative of how they met their fate. It would be difficult to walk through the fields of that significant site without also conjuring images of how the plane crashed, slamming 40 innocent lives into the ground. Such visions no doubt invoke dread. This is also evident in Gallipoli where at times, symbolic landscapes provoke a feeling of exposure, horror, and depression (see Scates 2006; Osbaldiston and Petray 2011). However, like the impure left hand and pure right hand of primitive cultural form (Hertz 2009[1909]), the two serve to provoke a holistic sacral experience. The horrific manner in which the crew and passengers of Flight 93 died serves to strengthen their heroic status through narratives of courage.

In contrast, the profane serves only to degrade human values and produces feelings of disgust that are detrimental to the human condition. Often,

profane locales are symbols of a wider destruction. Throughout history, examples of profane places that have been laid to waste through ritualistic attempts to remove them from society include Pol Pot's home, murderers' houses, places of moral transgression such as brothels in conservative societies, and many of the Nazi death camps. In each of these areas, the symbolism reflects a wider "theme of descent" (Frye 1976). However, profane places can be less toxic than those listed, but still provoke avoidance or fleeing. If we view Seachange as a secular ritual in the worship of the individual, the city represents a profane place. It is essentially seen as detrimental to individual well-being and at times, social worth. While the metropolis is stark in contrast to those profane places listed above, the underlying coding through "themes of descent" (Frye 1976) is similar. Locating the city as the profane further enables a sacralization of the country. Or as Durkheim (1995[1912]) suggests, the profane drives the sacred and vice versa.

THE LIMINAL PLACE

The distinction between the sacred and the profane has had a pronounced influence on important cultural theorists such as Levi-Strauss and Douglas, who have in turn inspired others. Within the subject of place, however, Smith (1999) is adamant that leaving the theoretical model within this binary fails to incorporate all conditions that a place can pass through culturally. Those spaces that sit on the margins of place and that are narrated by "themes of absurdity" are an example of this. Using theoretical logic from Shields's (1992) assessment of areas such as Niagara Falls, where "deviant behavior and sexuality" are well-established themes of the area, Smith (1999, 20) contends that within the cultural treatment of place, there lies another type outside of the categories of sacred and profane. This he terms the "liminal." Such areas sustain "quasi-carnavalesque, playful or grotesque forms of behavior" that cannot be located in the previous two categories. They stand above the everyday through themes of excessive consumption and taboo breaking through festival-type atmospheres. Such events are at times historically noted as sacred, but now represent something less enchanting. Important here are the thoughts of second-generation Durkheimian Bataille (1991[1949]), who posits that within modern culture, excess energy is spent through the temporal crossing of taboos, in particular the transgression of sexual norms. In the case of the liminal place, narratives that surround the space allow for the temporary removal of everyday morals and collective norms. As one enters the place, morality, it seems, is checked in at the door, only to be regained once the person reemerges into the everyday flows of life. It is true, however, that for some groups, particularly conservative groups, liminal places espoused by this typology could well be conceived of as profane. Indeed, if

we consider examples of the liminal to be sites for cultural practices such as horse-racing tracks, casinos, brothels, or strip clubs, we can see how the place itself encourages deviant behavior outside of everyday morality attracting the protesting eye of the conservative person/group.

This is an illustration of how the reading of the sacred, profane, liminal, and mundane types are fractured across different social groups. However, it is clear that dominant perspective of areas such as Las Vegas revolve around themes of excessive expenditure of not just money, but also time. Furthermore, added pop cultural lines such as “What goes on in Vegas, stays in Vegas” suggest that behavior within the confines of the city are essentially morally unacceptable in an everyday setting. Time itself, as Hubert (1999[1905]) discusses in his exploration of sacred time, is cut out of normality by themes of entry and exit. In a similar fashion, one could argue that Saint Patrick’s Day, once considered sacred, has now become a festival of the ludic where excessive behavior is normalized, suggesting that there are indeed liminal times.

Within Seachange, the threat of the liminalization of place is great enough to warrant concern from policymakers and advisers (Gurren, Squires, and Blakely 2006). In the Queensland coastal city of the Gold Coast, for instance, the annual event known as “schoolies week” (where graduating students from high schools across Australia congregate for fun and frivolity) transforms the location into one giant party. Media presence is strong, presenting images and stories of drunken teenagers, underaged sex, and drug consumption to the general public, who every year debate the future of the event. Police have a part to play in this via a risk/danger amplification that exacerbates the ludic atmosphere. Similar incidents occur during national holidays such as Australia Day, where the sacral aura of nationalism/patriotism is shadowed by the ever-present absurdity of crude drunken behavior. Across the Spanish coastline, similar notions plague other, once quite tranquil locales such as Costa Del Sol, where migration has transformed towns and villages into a chaotic urbanity that encourages carnivalesque type attitudes and behaviors (Diaz-Orueta 2004). Once these areas sink into the liminal, even if temporarily, those “themes of ascent” (Frye 1976) that promote unity, identity, and meaning (or authenticities even) are lost to themes of absurdity and transgression. The diminishing of value in these areas, even if temporary, illustrates to us how the identity and cultural perception of place are not fixed but can shift according to different narratives. As mentioned earlier, at one moment the place may hold sacred value, yet as events occur and narratives interact with place, it transforms into a liminal setting. In the phenomenon of Seachange, the avoidance of this is crucial to its future success not only as a collective movement but also for the individuals within it.

THE MUNDANE PLACE

The sacred, the profane, and the liminal all share a common element: they are extraordinary. Like Simmel's (1997[1910]) notion of the adventure, these places appear as islands amid the oceans of the everyday. Those who step into the sacred, for instance, are confronted with those symbols that have a power to transform their own bodily and mental behavior. Similarly, the profane induces fleeing, escapism, and, at times, destruction. Yet, outside these extraordinary areas lie the constant and ordinary. For Smith (1999), these represent what he terms the "mundane," or the normal day-to-day spaces that are viewed with little collective thought or valuation. Unlike Durkheim (1995[1912]), these spaces are conceived of as separate or distinct from the profane, which actively degrades human values. The mundane represents those spaces that require "little conscious reflexivity on the part of the individual as to symbolically appropriate forms of action" (Smith 1999, 21). For this reason, the mundane par excellence for Smith (1999) is the city, where infrastructure, symbols, and signs induce an everyday procession of social activities. Zukin (2010) and others are integral here to understanding how the design of cities encourages normality through a symbolic force that disables deviance.

However, it should be noted that describing mundane places in this manner does not mean that they have little or no cultural significance. Indeed this is not Smith's (1999) argument at all. Mundane spaces may well require conscious effort to navigate through, alter behavior, and negotiate the mazes of infrastructures and diverse material cultures. This is clearly the case in shopping malls, where food courts, entertainment, shop windows, and other visual/audio consumption encourage certain types of activity. However, despite the cultural significance of these places and their influence in everyday social action, they require "less human investment than the extraordinary" (Smith 1999, 22). The distinctiveness between the war memorial and the shopping center is obvious. The former promotes a collectively established, ritualized-type behavior, whereas the latter can conceivably be seen as an everyday space, promoting little more than consumption and sociality. In the Seachange discourse analyzed in this chapter, the tension between the mundane and the sacred is also very evident. The constant nourishment of narratives that serve to sacralize Seachange locations prevents them from descending into the everyday. Without such narratives, the black hole that is the mundane drags them into nothingness, or perhaps as Relph (1976) contends, placelessness. Areas in Seachange in particular lose their distinctiveness from their metropolitan counterparts and take a step toward "themes of descent" (Frye 1976) and the eventual profane attributes that cause disturbance among Seachangers. Thus the mundane is technically defined as the default (see figure 1.1).

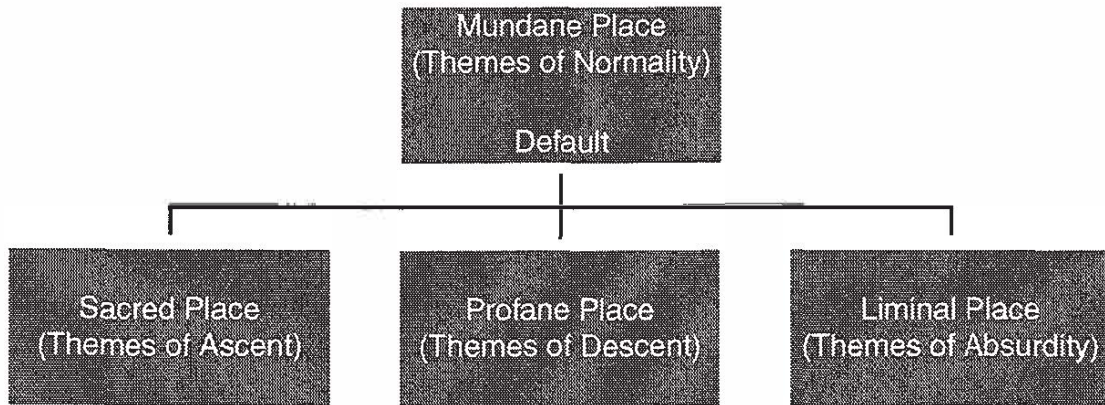


Figure 1.1 The Elementary Forms of Place (adapted from Smith 1999)

SOME NOTES ON METHOD AND THE BOOK

The contention of this book is that through the *Forms of Place* model proposed by Smith (1999) we can conceptualize the Seachange movement through a lens that promotes rather than denies cultural autonomy. The four types of place are evident throughout the experience and negotiation of place across the phenomenon, as will be illustrated later. The two most significant forms are the sacred and the profane. Throughout the book, it will become apparent that through the city/country narrative, a well-established and reinforced binary between the two resembles Smith's (1999) distinction between the sacred and the profane. The maintenance of this opposition is increasingly important for the future of Seachange. Once symbolic lines are crossed, or in other words, once the city enters the country sphere, these lines of separation are lost and the binary breaks down. From here, the once-lauded regional place descends into paths of alternative values. In some cases this includes the liminal, or in others, a removal of value completely, with areas becoming sites of the ordinary or mundane place.

Such a conceptual pathway allows, I argue, for an understanding of how places in general descend or ascend in value. In particular, as Smith (1999) makes apparent in his empirical analysis of *Place de la Bastille*, narratives that surround the place itself impact upon the place's value. Furthermore, it is apparent that a simple test of the power of a place, importantly the sacred, is illustrated when individuals choose to transgress boundaries of behavior. Responses from the general community as well as from the institutions that enable legal responses from them toward those who desecrate sacred places are often highly emotive and generally harsh. Within the Seachange drama, we could argue that a similar response is evident in community outrage over "property" graffiti that disturbs the aesthetic peace found in spectacular landscape and a township's authenticity. The sacred binary begins to loosen, and towns fall in value for those seekers of serenity.

With the theoretical model discussed, we can now move on to the heart of the book, the empirical investigation. But before doing so, it is important to make a few comments on methods. As is the case in cultural sociology, the important work is the understanding of semiotic codes and discourses that feed phenomena such as Seachange. However, as Alexander (1998, 31) contends,

[S]emiotics can never be enough. By definition it abstracts from the social world, taking organized symbolic sets as psychologically unmotivated and as socially uncaused. By contrast, for the purposes of cultural sociology, semiotic codes must be tied into both social and psychological environments and into action itself.

Thus, unlike the Goffman-inspired projects (1971) where meaning is discovered through the interaction, the themes revealed through an analysis of culture must be connected to a wider or broader social setting. Such is the gap between microsociological analysis and the direction of a strong cultural sociology (Alexander and Smith 2005, 8).

In the pages that follow, the semiotic codes of Seachange are revealed through discourses that surround selected Seachange areas such as the Town of Canmore and the Town of Golden in Canada, the Town of Jackson in Wyoming, Noosa in Queensland and Clarence Valley in New South Wales in Australia, and various coastal towns in the United Kingdom. Some of the areas used as examples are large, now-vibrant commercial centers, others still small village-type towns where population growth has caused concern for locals and Seachangers themselves. For each town mentioned, there is also an entry in the appendix that will help orient the reader to the landscape and histories of the places. Within the chapters, however, these places tell a story that adds to the Seachange drama. Whether it is action enacted through policy, marketing of Seachange through local councils, advisory columns and opinions pieces in local and statewide news sources, or narratives from the actual participants themselves, each piece of information allows us to peek in and capture the spirit of the phenomenon.

Thus, the data brought to the fore will allow for the “thick description” of the social setting called for by Geertz (1973), which is of importance to the cultural sociology paradigm. Themes that emerge are not dissimilar to those explored by other researchers such as Moss (2006b), Benson and O’Reilly (2009b), and Ragusa (2010a). These include the pull of sacred nature and landscape, community values, and cultural heritage. Yet, the book will also explore those narratives that suggest that these things are threatened by increasing numbers of urban escapees, environmental changes, and other social issues akin to the city. Explaining or exposing this is important to

understand the cultural complexity of Seachange. However, as Alexander (1998) notes above, we need to move beyond simple explanations that render data meaningless. Throughout the book then, I provide sprinklings of theoretical insight from not only Smith (1999) above, but also other key theorists such as Urry, Simmel, Pahl, Ingold, and the “other” Durkheimians. At the conclusion of the work, I explore the entire phenomenon in relation to the concept of self-authenticity, which, as explained earlier, is a wider principle founded in our contemporary culture that drives movements such as slow food and, in this case, amenity-led migration. Like Smith’s (2008) argument on the Foucauldian take on the self, my argument will propose an alternative perspective to self-authenticity embedded in Simmelian notions of self-actualization or cultivation and Durkheim’s and Mauss’s conceptualization of the soul. Most important here is the distinction in this work from that of Foucauldian-inspired Nikolas Rose (1996), where the contemporary obsession with self-help is established through years of psychological theory and advancement within institutional settings. The basic premise here is, as Simmel (1997[1912]) acknowledges in his essays on modern culture, that Seachange is hinged on a practice of engaging with the objective world for the cultivation of the subjective. What is authentic in the former significantly impacts on the authenticity of the latter. The sacred place then becomes an important player in the promotion of the self in late-/postmodern culture.