NORTH AMERICAN
DIALOGUE

Research Article

Promises of Place: A Future of Comparative U.S. Ethnography

By James S. Bielo

In this essay I capitalize on a convergence in some recent U.S. ethnography to explore the cultural power of place making and the conceptual promises of "place." Reports of losing, forgetting, and otherwise being disconnected from place are legion in depictions of late modernity. Said (1979) called it a "generalized condition of homelessness" (18), Gupta and Ferguson (1992) described it as a "profound sense of a loss of territorial roots, of an erosion of the cultural distinctiveness of places" (9), and Appadurai (1996) termed it "deterritorialization" (49). The culprits of this anxiety in the United States are multiple. A postindustrial economy fuels constant mobility, creating highly flexible labor regimes and others that are not reliant on geographic locale. Expanding urbanization disrupts relationships to land, transforming farm acreage into ultraplanned exurbia. Neoliberal corporate infrastructures prize predictable familiarity over uniqueness in order to secure service industry profits. There are, as well, technological and media empires that can render the particularities of place irrelevant. We late moderns are said to struggle to maintain meaningful place attachments and places themselves struggle to be distinctive. We are increasingly uncertain of how to recover from our pandemic placeless-ness. Of course, this narrative is ideological; it contains truth and myth, history and nostalgia, is uncannily accurate for many and exaggerated for many others. Nonetheless, the threat of placeless-ness is an American social fact, very real for the discontents it generates. According to recent U.S. ethnography that addresses different cultural spheres — religion and food — this anxiety has also produced resistance. People are not simply internalizing erosion and loss; they are responding by actively cultivating senses of place.

Regarding religion, I look to my own fieldwork with American evangelicals. In the public sphere evangelicals continue to be narrowly construed. They are the Religious Right, conservative electors of Reagan, Bush, and Bush; antigay, antiabortion, antievolution campaigners; megachurch-attending, televangelism-watching, praise-singing people of faith; living in an alternative America, out-of-step with the secular mainstream. Much like placeless-ness, this portrait is equal parts ideology and sociology; truth ground with caricature.

In a series of publications (Bielo 2011a, b, c), I examined the Emerging Church: an evangelical movement of social change focused on transforming mainstream evangelicalism as much as American public culture.[1] One of my primary ethnographic findings with Emerging evangelicals was that place is a central value and resource in their visions of change. They were convinced that the earlier narrative of placeless-ness is no mere threat, but a pressing reality. Moreover, this social ill had equally undermined the nation and the Church and was partially responsible for moral and economic failure. Their main strategy for restoring a sense of place has been to start new congregations in mixed-income and

[1]This fieldwork constituted nearly 4 years of multisited ethnography, which began in Lansing, Michigan, from October 2007 through July 2008. From August 2008 through July 2011 the research was based in southwestern Ohio (primarily Cincinnati, but also in several surrounding urban and suburban locales). Data collection focused on four fieldwork activities. First, I conducted formal interviews with 90 Emerging evangelicals from 40 different church communities and 11 denominations. The sample consisted of 68 men and 22 women; 56 were doing urban ministry, 34 suburban; nearly all were middle-class whites; and all were born between 1958 and 1989 (most between 1970 and 1980). Second, I conducted systematic observations of collective religious practices: from church worship to weekly small groups, informal church gatherings, national and regional conferences, workshops, and book promotional tours. Third, I engaged in several forms of collaborative ethnography, in which the researcher attempts some remove from authority by involving consultants in the designing of fieldwork activities (e.g., pastors led me on guided tours of the urban neighborhoods they approached as "mission fields"). Lastly, I collected a variety of material culture and textual items produced, used, and circulated by the individuals and congregations I worked with.

North American Dialogue 16.1, pp. 1–11, ISSN 1556-4819. © 2013 by the American Anthropological Association. All rights reserved. DOI: 10.1111/nad.12000

disinvested urban neighborhoods. Most of my consultants chose to leave suburban congregations to start or join an urban "church plant," and in doing so they acted against the dominant grain of 20th century evangelicalism — pursuing megachurch growth in family-centric suburbia (Luhr 2009).

To cite just a few examples, my fieldwork included newly married couples with young children exchanging suburban homes with ample yards for relatively cramped urban homes (losing money and equity in the process); pastors and congregants writing and publicly accepting vows to never move away from a particular neighborhood; churches creating and maintaining urban gardens; pastors refocusing their political energies from national campaigns to neighborhood associations; organized voluntarism that ranged from after-school tutoring in a local school to leading city clean-up days; pastors and congregants working entrepreneurially to start neighborhood-focused businesses (ranging from coffee shops to auto body repair shops); individuals pledging to consume only at locally owned businesses; and a pastor with two young children who made it a point to attend every home football game of the local high school. For Emerging evangelicals, a renewed commitment to place promises the way to social intimacy, more meaningful personal relationships, higher quality of life, civic improvement, and deeper faith.

Emerging evangelicals are not the only late modern Americans looking to place to fashion a better future. This essay ensues from a repeated observation about recent work in U.S. ethnography: first, in step with developing interests in the anthropology of food, ethnographers are writing about American food systems; and second, analyses of the sustainable food movement reveal a striking veneration of place. I will concentrate my comparative remarks on a few scholars who demonstrate something of the range in this movement: Weiss (2011, 2012) writing about the surging popularity of pasture-raised pork and farm-to-fork processes; Paxson (2006, 2008, 2010) on the politics and aesthetics of artisanal cheese producers and consumers; Gross (2009) on two extreme expressions of alternative foodways; and Bubinas (2011) who explores the increasing impact of urban farmers markets.

The sustainable food movement in the United States encompasses a range of social actors and communities of practice. Full-time and part-time farmers, market vendors, "foodies" (Weiss 2012), "back-to-the-landers" and "freegans" (Gross 2009), restaurateurs, Community Supported Agriculture cooperatives, grocers, food writers, everyday shoppers, and government agencies all participate in producing, circulating, promoting, or consuming alternatives to the industrialized food system. Paxson (2006) captures this issue of diversity in describing artisanal cheesemakers in Vermont, writing that while most are "sophisticated urban transplants bringing bourgeois economic and cultural capital to farmstead production," their motivations range from "politically conscious rural revitalization" to " 'hippie' homesteaders working modestly out of their kitchens," and others who are simply "really into the cheese" (213–214).

Irrespective of demographic and ideological diversity, one theme is consistent across these studies: food sustainability advocates endow place with reverence and deem it a site of significant economic, ethical, and ecological agency. "The local" — assigned to people, land, animals, vegetables, and markets — garners a near-sacred status. Bubinas (2011) writes about the role farmers markets play in revitalizing the downtown core of two postindustrial Wisconsin cities. Each market "achieves a distinctive identity as a place" (156; emphasis added) and calls to "buy local" (166) are both an ethical imperative and a renewal strategy. Gross (2009) takes us to rural western Oregon and the marginal lifestyles of back-to-the-landers and freegans who practice "subsistence strategies that were dominant in pre-capitalist times" (58). Cultivating an attachment to place is central to their collective life: "Once they had land and began growing food, their travels were curtailed and they became more rooted in a specific place. Parallel to constructing a more independent food system, [they] commonly chose to homeschool their children. Both of these activities were considered integral parts of a holistic life, firmly

rooted in a particular place" (68). Paxson and Weiss, working respectively with artisanal cheese and pasture-raised pig networks, highlight the possibilities their consultants assign to place. Paxson (2010) writes, "By calling attention to material conditions of production, U.S. experiments with terroir offer opportunity for reterritorialization — for drawing meaningful lines of connection among people, culture, and landscape to invest rural places anew with affective significance and material relevance" (446). Weiss (2011), somewhat more critically, writes, "Why is 'local food,' among all legitimate rubrics for collective action, such an effective category? How are problems of industrialization, animal welfare, environmental degradation, or the exploitation of labor, spatial matters to which 'locality' offers an alternative? Specifying how places are constituted, and the qualities with which they are imbued, helps us grasp the force of the politics of space entailed in appeals to locality" (443).

So, why elaborate on a convergence between evangelical and agri-culinary movements? My point has nothing to do with theoretical novelty; the conceptual value of "place" is well established (Feld and Basso 1996; Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003; Rodman 1992). And I will not try to explain this convergence between evangelicals and sustainable food proponents. My aim is to secure a place for "place" in the ongoing, comparative ethnography of late modern America. This is a call to fieldwork, not in the sense of "there is nothing being done, how egregious!" but in the spirit of "good work has been done, contours are set, let us continue the momentum!" My hope is to make clear what those contours are and give some direction for carrying the momentum forward. What is clear is that a diverse set of social actors in late modern America are making place vital to their cultural existence. Place is being positioned as central to the construction of selves and communities. Emotionally felt and morally loaded meaning is being attributed to place. Place is being used as a symbol of, a resource in, and a starting point for resistance to expansive and powerful macrosystems. Place is consistently treated as a contested social space: as redeemable, as the locus of power, as something to rally around, but something endangered and under threat. In short, there are high stakes involved with place, in which political, social, personal, ecological, economic, and ethical gains are up for grabs.

Three Convergences

I see three areas of overlap in the comparison between Emerging evangelicals and sustainable food activists. Both movements are fueled by a cultural critique of close social Others, both make authenticity a paramount value, and both are driven primarily by a middle-class and upwardly mobile white demographic. After elaborating these, I outline three analytical points of departure that seem especially productive for further inquiry into the ethnography of place in late modern America.

Cultural Critique

The Emerging evangelical movement thrives on a wide-ranging cultural critique of mainstream evangelicalism (and, to a lesser extent, liberal Protestantism and Catholicism). The individuals in my fieldwork harbored deep suspicions about Christianity-as-practiced in the United States. The problems were social in nature, the ideological and institutional artifices created by their brethren: misplaced political and ethical activism, self-segregation in the vapid comforts of suburbia, and overcommitment to megachurches where relationships are less intimate and resources are used irresponsibly. I found that the Emerging inertia toward critique could not be reduced to ritualized complaint, self-flagellation, discontents, or displeasure; it was nothing less than a primary means of subject formation and ethical self-cultivation.

The ethnographic literature on food sustainability bears a close parallel. Gross' (2009) freegans and back-to-the-landers "distrust ... industrially processed foods" (66), and habitually lay a host of ills at the

feet of globalized, corporatized food producers: declines in farm employment due to food importation, negative health effects, and damaged ecosystems. Bubinas reports that consumers are attracted to farmers markets because of a desire for face-to-face relationships that have been lost in the anonymity of mass production. Weiss (2011) observes that producers and consumers of pasture-raised pigs "oppose the perils, especially ecological, of the corporate, industrial food system" (439) and seek to "combat the dire social inequities of environmental, human, and animal degradation at the hands of industrialization" (440).

For food activists and evangelicals alike, cultural critique is not just talk; it leads to action. As Emerging evangelicals relocate from suburb to city and leave megachurches to start neighborhood house churches, consumers shift their dollars from national chain grocers to farmers markets. Weiss (2011) nicely captures this link between critique and action: "Such critiques form a cornerstone of efforts of farmers, chefs and others' efforts to regenerate robust connections between farms and eaters" (442). For many of my consultants, suburbia as a place is found lacking and troubling for its implication in destructive macroprocesses. It is not enough to disaffiliate from a suburban megachurch, relocation is required. The constant reference to "industrialized foods" and "the local" implies placeless-ness and the need to restore place attachments. Restoring place is the economic alternative to urban blight (Bubinas), the ecological alternative to damaged ecosystems and animals (Weiss 2011, 2012), and the healthy alternative for bodies (Paxson 2008, Gross 2009) and for spirits, whence the promise of renewed faith in Emerging evangelical relocation.

These critiques rest on an inherent dialogue with larger systems: the conservative evangelical culture industry, agricultural-industrial complex, regimes of mass consumption, and corporate giants. This dialogic quality means that the critiques are always seeking new evidence from the same culprits. Every time there is a salmonella outbreak in industrialized ground beef, "the local" is validated. Every time a megachurch pastor is found morally wanting the value of more intense relational accountability in "local" churches is validated. This dialogue also produces a tension of managing growth. Smaller, local, and slower is unquestionably better, and the more who commit the better, but increased commitment lends to dangers of critical mass. A recurring dilemma for Emerging evangelicals was what to do when house churches reach a limit. Be uncomfortable? Start a new house church? Who leaves to help start the new and who stays? What happens if the new meeting is in a different neighborhood? Of course, supplying food for increasing demand puts pressures on farmers and vendors, and consumers must master a new shopping habitus defined by patience and higher costs.

Real Faith, Real Food

Emerging evangelicals and sustainable food advocates both cling to the value of authenticity. During 3 years of fieldwork, whenever I asked consultants to talk about their existing and desired religious lives, they repeatedly returned to one word. They spoke earnestly about wanting to have "authentic" lives, faith, community, relationships, experience, worship, tradition, and spirituality. The convergence with sustainable food advocates is not merely discursive; the logics for authenticity also mirror each other. Emerging evangelicals frequently look to the past, to previous Christianities, as models of authenticity. Gross (2009) finds the same among young freegans who frame their choice of lifestyle as "searching for authenticity in the same way that the Underground Gourmet from the 1960s [did]" (75). Emerging evangelicals reasoned authenticity through originality, such as when they insisted on writing their own vows of place commitment rather than use existing scripts. Paxson (2010) observes that artisanal cheesemakers construct a sense of the authentic through the taste–place connection of "terroir," in which distinctive qualities of place (soil, weather, and ecology) import a uniqueness in taste and "contribute to the [cuisine's] felt authenticity" (445). Emerging evangelicals distinguish the authen-

tic from its lesser alternatives through the nature of connections; among individuals, other social groups, God, scripture, prayer, and place. Weiss (2012) argues that agri-culinary interconnections, "between elements and actors, producers and consumers, terrain and technique, seasonality and sustenance" (615) are "critical to an overarching motivation and organizing principle — a leading value — of the food reform movement, namely people's desire for 'authenticity' in the foods they eat and the social processes through which this food is produced" (Weiss 2012).

The turn to authenticity is not surprising according to theorists of value in modernity. Charles Lindholm (2008) argues that authenticity has become "taken for granted as an absolute value in contemporary life" (1). Of course, Lindholm is not claiming that modernity invented an investment in authenticity, only that the modern era endowed authenticity with unprecedented importance. His book, *Culture and Authenticity*, is an ethnological survey that invites readers to question what might unite an unlikely group of phenomena: country music, national cuisines, the tango, skydiving, mountain climbing, bungee jumping, slow food, tourism, and art, to name a few (and I would add religious movements like the Emerging Church). He goes on to make a notably place-oriented argument that authenticity's rise to prominence tracks with the alienation and estrangement that accompanied urban industrialism, "[the] irreversible plunge into modernity, which can be succinctly defined as the condition of living among strangers" (3).

Place continues to figure prominently in the desire and pursuit of real faith and real food in late modern America. For one, place is treated as a vehicle of redemption and fulfillment. Emerging evangelical pastors critique megachurches for losing substantive attachments to place. Relocating to the city promises to restore a meaningful, functional emplacement, as well as the spiritual vitality that diminished along with a forgotten sense of place. The urban neighborhoods my consultants found seemed to do as much for them as they were trying to do for those neighborhoods. The same appears to be true for back-to-the landers, freegans, sustainable food consumers, and artisanal producers. Reclaiming land and place means improved health, distance from a morally and politically troubling industry, and restoring intimacy to social and exchange relationships formerly defined by anonymity. Along with renewed relationships, place anchors a variety of other connections. Bubinas (2011) unpacks the category of "freshness" (156), which uses place to unite physical health, local identity, and knowledge of food biography that functions as a form of trust. Weiss (2012) observes that "snout-to-tail" talk in local food movements capitalizes on the place-based value of farm-to-fork to achieve a sort of "anatomical authenticity" (622).

White, Middle-Class Movements

It was apparent, from the very beginning of my fieldwork with Emerging evangelicals through the very end, that this was a religious movement broad in ambition but narrow in demographic. All of my ethnographic consultants, and nearly all of the individuals I crossed paths with or who were important figures nationally, were middle-class whites. Some were arguably upper–middle class, others lifers in the solid middle-class, and others upwardly mobile from working-class or working-poor backgrounds. But they all experienced relatively stable economic lives, maintained the requisite social capital to manage potential hard times, and clearly possessed the cultural capital necessary to navigate middle-class America. Reading the work of Bubinas, Gross, Paxson, and Weiss, I see the same trend.

Observing this parallel is not simply about checking the demographic box. The race–class entanglement at work sheds needed light on matters of agency and exclusion. Consider one example of Emerging evangelical suburban-urban relocation. In early 2009 I met a young pastor, Josh, who was in the initial stages of planting a church in Cincinnati. At the time, Josh was the youth pastor in Mason, an affluent exurb 30 miles north of the city's downtown. Along with he and his wife, Josh would recruit

15 members from his Mason congregation to be "the launch team." The new church would be in the urban neighborhood of Oakley, itself a middle-class haven (the mean selling price of homes in 2009 was $200,000). Oakley is situated between a working-class black neighborhood and a downwardly mobile white neighborhood marked by an Appalachian heritage of parents who had migrated north for industrial labor and children who struggled without the guarantee of manufacturing employment. Between late 2008, when the invitations were made, and early 2010, soon after the church started, all but four launch team members had bought new homes in or near Oakley. (The two couples who had not were older, in their late 50s and early 60s, had their homes on the market and searched actively, often daily, for a new home.) Due in part to the U.S. housing crisis, several of the young married couples lost notable sums of money and equity in selling their suburban home and buying a house in the city.

My point in spelling out this example is that relocation, a process defined by concerns about place, is a form of agency enabled by the class position of Josh and the other launch team members. This kind of religious/economic action is foreclosed to downwardly mobile and destabilized working-class populations. Put simply, the relocation so vital to much of the Emerging movement is class specific. Weiss (2011) notes that there is a "well-established critique of elitism that embeds the sociality" of the sustainable food subculture (445). Bubinas recognizes that farmers markets entail decidedly class-based patterns of consumption. After all, whether shopping for one or for a family, who can regularly afford heirloom tomatoes and grass-fed beef that cost several dollars more per pound?

Weiss (2011) is most explicit about the realities of racial and class exclusion. He notes that despite frequent attempts by sustainable growers and consumers to "make local food more affordable, and provide outreach to underresourced consumers, including a growing Latino community, in the [North Carolina Piedmont] region" (439), the "historical issues of farming relating to labor, class and race in hog farming" (Weiss 2011) are habitually unaddressed. White growers and consumers have failed to connect with local African American farmers who "reject the categories of 'local' and 'cooperative,' even as their 'traditional' practices include annual hog killing and processing among small groups of neighboring family farmers ... The uneven adoption of these categories demonstrates that 'local' is not simply an existential condition of being in a place, it is a specific orientation to how space is produced" (456).

Still, alongside matters of agency and exclusion, we might also consider other outcomes of race–class–place entanglements. Bubinas emerges as the most hopeful in this regard. She sees farmers markets as having the potential to bridge class divides. As an alternative marketplace, she sees farmers markets as "re-embedded in local meanings of morality [so that] the working class becomes not just an abstraction but embodied in [individuals], with whom exchange relationships are forged. The exchange relationship itself opens up possibilities for a new class consciousness based on mutual acknowledgement and understanding" (164). Throughout my fieldwork, I felt this tension represented in the contrast of Weiss and Bubinas. On the one hand, it was obvious that new church plants like the one in Oakley would struggle mightily to ever be anything other than middle-class white congregations, despite their new proximity to racial and class Others. Yet this new proximity did mean partnerships with predominantly African American institutions (e.g., Josh and other congregants forged a relationship with a black Baptist congregation that included shared social engagement projects) and everyday work and leisure encounters unavailable in their former suburbia (cf. Elisha 2011:199–213).

Points of Departure

In each of these areas of convergence — cultural critique, valuing authenticity, and race–class entanglements — the shared primacy of place between two late modern American movements is

revealed and elaborated. While these three areas will prove useful for others whose fieldwork focuses on matters of place, they do not exhaust the possible points of departure. Later, I present three further themes that hold analytical promise: senses of place, temporality, and cultural production.

Senses of Place

Experiencing place is an elemental portion of being human. Culturally, we learn, seek and create modes of dwelling; what Feld and Basso (1996) described as "ways of fusing setting to situation, locality to life-world" (8). Or, as Basso (1996) wrote elsewhere, "Dwelling [consists] in the multiple, 'lived relationships' that people maintain with places, for it is solely by virtue of these relationships that space acquires meaning" (54). At stake is a transformation, from physical space to inhabited place, from anonymity to lived-in intimacy, from disconnection to emotionally and politically potent attachment.

The intentional cultivation of senses of place is at the heart of the earlier parallel between religion and food. Place making is hard work, and it is in tracking, describing, and explaining this work that the ethnography of late modern America has an immense opportunity. A strong focus on process and performance is crucial. How do individuals, embedded in communities of practice, make and remake their senses of place? We might prefer "strategy" over "performance," as we think through self-conscious projects of place making. We would also do well to remember that strategies come in diverse forms.

Strategies can be distinctly material. Mobility comes to mind. Acts of re-placing were integral for the Emerging evangelicals I worked with, as they sold suburban homes, packed belongings, bought urban homes, unpacked, and initiated new daily routines. For Gross' homesteaders and Paxson's cheesemakers, urban–rural mobility is equally strategic. In cases where place making involves infrastructure, there will be material strategies. The process of fashioning things — be they homes, third places, markets, or attractions — as with Bubinas's and Weiss's examples of farmers markets, shows the vital role of creating infrastructure in building senses of place. Such material strategies are useful ethnographic places to begin, as they are highly identifiable and often highly important to the overall project of place making.

Material strategies are always underwritten by ideological commitments. The mobility of Emerging evangelicals is theologically motivated, and it thrives on notions about "the city": namely city dwellers as dangerous, vulnerable, in need of help, unable to help themselves, and alienated (notions, of course, that also draw secular actors to inner cities on missions of change). For Weiss's farm-to-fork advocates, ideologies bend toward what promises a better future for farmer livelihoods, local economies, individual health, and animal rights. While more difficult to pin down than material forms of practice, such ideological strategies are equally necessary to understand.

Strategies can also be more virtual. Reed (2008) reports on bloggers in London who use blog writing to generate a renewed sense of urban place. I see no reason why blogs and similar media could not serve the same function in U.S. contexts. In fact, a sample of the Emerging evangelicals I worked with were part of the same church planting network. One benefit of membership in the network was access to "The City," a social networking site programmed specifically for churches and congregational social engagement. There is a small irony here: the same late modern force that lends to American placelessness, the engulfing nonplace of virtual reality, is also put to work in making a sense of place.

We might also speak of discursive, intersubjective, and other kinds of strategy, and each would continue to point to the ethnographic advantages of being in the thick of place-making processes. I would add that projects and strategies are rarely disconnected from structural realities. For example, the reurbanization of Emerging evangelicals cannot help but occur alongside, borrow resources from, and get mistaken for acts of gentrification. While many of my consultants were critical of class-based

divisions and consumptive practices, they also recognized that "urban redevelopment" initiatives could look eerily similar to some of their own projects and that to some degree such "downtown revitalization" enabled their return to the city. Ethnographers of the sustainable food movement observe much the same tension. Gross (2009) writes, "Freegans and back-to-the-landers generally cannot sustain themselves without the overproduction of the industrialized agrifood system ... [and] their dependence on commodity foods does remind them that they are not as independent from the capitalist system as they would like to be" (74). Similarly, Weiss (2011) writes, "It is only the compelling interest in pigs and pork (exemplified, for many, by industrial pork, and 'commodity' country hams) that allows the introduction of novel categories ('pastured,' 'artisanal,' and 'local') to be understood and appreciated" (455–456). Despite senses of self that trade on being "alternative," "counterculture," and "nonmainstream," the senses of place these movements cultivate remain tied to dominant social and economic structures.

Temporality

Temporality is a second theme that other ethnographers of place might take up. Time, like place, is an elemental human experience and, like place, is subject to cultural transformation. When anthropologists speak of "temporality," they are referring to shared assumptions about the nature of time and its passing (cf. Bialecki 2009). Guyer (2007), working in the same comparative spirit of this essay, observes that in late modern America, Fundamentalist Christian and macroeconomic movements have both adopted an "evaporation of the near future" (410) in favor of immediate and far distant futures. How might modes of temporality intersect with senses of place?

Several key categories in the food movement are fundamentally temporal. Consider "sustainability," arguably the key category. Whether directed to markets, land, food systems, or community relations, sustainability implies continuation over time. A sense of the long duree permeates the concept, so much so that it easily connotes stewardship, temporary ownership to be transferred to a subsequent generation. Sustainability may be another iteration of Guyer's immediate and far distant futures, wherein action now (buying locally raised pork, buying produce from a farmers market, and eating unpasteurized cheese) does not generate change in the near present, but it does promise a better life some time later on. Then, there is "terroir." Paxson (2010) writes that this category, pertaining to matters of region–taste entanglements, "offers a theory of how people and place, cultural tradition and landscape ecology, are mutually constituted over time" (444, emphasis added). Terroir brings nature and culture closer together than sustainability does, but both emphasize the human and ecological benefits of long-term engagement.

Attention to temporality also raises questions of how people position their places in time (this notably circles back to strategies that must be practiced). How, for example, do people historicize their places? Throughout Gross's account of back-to-the-landers, there is the distinct presence of nostalgia for a lifestyle all but destroyed in the fallen world of industrialized food. Place is a waiting time machine, the means of return to "an earlier golden age" (Gross 2009:63). Nostalgia being a valued resource amidst late modern discontents (Stewart 1988), it is unsurprising to find it in this equation, but it is not inevitable. For Paxson's (2010) cheesemakers, "this alternative agriculture embodies a sense of place and purpose whose particular form is emergent. There's nothing nostalgic here" (451). Place–time relations are not grounded in "mythical roots" (Paxson 2010) but are "worked out experimentally" (Paxson 2010) in the present. And then there is hope. For Emerging evangelicals, this is the temporal currency they traffic in as they look to redeem, and for redemption in, urban places. Akin to sustainability, the change expected is not close at hand but assured in the long run pending right action right now. Many of my consultants invoked a New Testament definition of faith to explain

their reurbanization, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1, emphasis added).

Interestingly, the Emerging evangelical and sustainable food movements both harbor anxiety about their own temporality. They worry about maintaining longevity when the odds seem stacked against them — because of so many failed predecessors working for urban change or because the competition is a multibillion dollar corporate behemoth. As new urban church plants wring hands about attracting adherents, farmers market vendors labor to make loyal customers. Despite critiques of capitalist motivation, both need profits to succeed — and they know it. Will it be predictable that other place-centered movements relive similar anxieties?

Cultural Production

The two localized projects of place making I have highlighted, and I suspect most others, are not purely local. They are enactments of nationally targeted cultural production networks. They emerge from systems of knowledge making that include intellectuals, conferences, advertising, books, programs, training, de facto public relations campaigns, media reports, and Internet hubs. The goal here is to understand how knowledge circulates among institutions and between producers and consumers.

It is no accident that Gross (2009) gestures toward organized cultural production to open her article, "journalists and scholars with a gift for popular writing like Michael Pollan, Marion Nestle, Gary Nabhan, Carlo Petrini, Barbara Kingsolver, Eric Schlosser, and Bill McKibben have laid out the dystopic elements of industrial farming and food processing and have written in defense of local foodsheds and healthier eating habits" (58). If anything, Gross is quite conservative in scaffolding the breadth of sustainability advocacy. We could easily add documentaries (e.g., Food, Inc. [Kenner 2008]), periodicals (e.g., southern agro-culinary inventions in Garden & Gun), the increasing popularity of co-ops and locally interested grocers (e.g., Whole Foods), and media empires (Food Network and its various celebrities come to mind: think Jamie Oliver). For Emerging evangelicals, local congregations are deeply embedded in nationwide institutions. Traditionally conservative and mainline denominations have launched Emerging-oriented subsections (e.g., Reformed Church of America's One Thing); there are numerous para-church organizations (e.g., Emergent Village); para-church organizations launch their own subsections (e.g., the collegiate ministry InterVarsity's Emerging Scholars Network); regularly held conferences gather people face-to-face (e.g., Off the Map); and publishers create specialized book series (e.g., Baker's Emersion series, Zondervan's Youth Specialties).

Tension reappears. Earlier, tension figured as the reluctant admission that local ideals rely on the very same structural realities that are the subject of critique. Tension here exists as movements that are dead-set on local-ness being tied to national networks, either through intentional investment or simply united by association. Theoretically, this lends to an analysis of power and two issues in particular. There is the matter of authority. In a complex field of knowledge production, who do you trust? What cultural forms — specialized language, key symbols, and narratives — do you use as clues to target your trust? Where does status come into play? What kinds of cultural capital generate status in place-centered movements? In systems of cultural production, authority works prominently in terms of who garners an audience. Being a matter of being heard, authority segues to a second issue: distribution. Hitting all the right notes goes only so far. Sooner or later cultural production becomes a matter of political economy, of having the institutional basis to circulate a specialized language, key symbols, and narratives.

Of the three themes outlined, cultural production is the least well charted. This is not about having adequate theoretical tools. It is much more about the difficulty of locating ethnographic sites and gaining access (cf. Lutz and Collins 1993). Fully integrating cultural production into a research agenda

focused on place making will require ethnographic creativity and ambition. Instead of just watching documentary films, we should search out filmmakers and observe filmic processes (Peterson 2011). Instead of just cataloguing and reading books, we should interview authors, publishing editors, and marketers. In short, we must get inside the systems of cultural production, not settle for viewing them from afar.

Coda

The theoretical, conceptual, and ethnographic value of “place” is well established in anthropology. In her 2011 Presidential address-cum-article, Setha Low (2011) reasserted this value in terms of denaturalizing regimes of power: “Theories and methodologies of space and place can uncover systems of exclusion that are hidden or naturalized and thus rendered invisible to other approaches” (391). Reading Low alongside Feld and Basso’s (1996) *Senses of Place* volume suggests that a focus on place can bridge phenomenological and political economy approaches, heightening its analytical flexibility (cf. Paxson 2010:444–445).

My impetus for this essay was that place could be a productive entryway in the comparative ethnography of late modern America. In a year-in-review essay, Dole (2012) observed the same, if only in passing: “ ‘locality’ provided anthropologists writing in 2011 a thematic space to explore placemaking in North America and, namely, the forms of pleasure and fantasies of escape (from impersonal exchange, market rationalities, and the alienations of industrialized production) that take flight in consuming the ‘local’ ” (231–232). In thinking about the convergence between my fieldwork with Emerging evangelicals and what I read about the ethnography of food sustainability, I pursued this essay with a suspicion that other researchers are finding different forms of place making and still other examples will soon be written about. After all, for some U.S. states, the stakes of asserting an attachment to place are quite high. Kentucky tourism sells a well-packaged mythology about the intimate bond between the American Spirit and America’s Spirit. The State Board of Tourism proudly announces, “Kentucky bourbon history and tradition are as long and strong as the nation itself ... Bourbon is ‘America’s Official Native Spirit,’ as declared by Congress, a leading export and a growing symbol of Kentucky craftsmanship and tradition. More than 95 percent of the world’s bourbon is distilled and aged in Kentucky bourbon country.” *Newsweek* recently profiled a movement parallel to farm-to-table, “farm-to-glass” (Schillinger 2012). Much like their foodie brethren, mixologists inclined toward vintage and specialty cocktails are growing herb gardens for the strict purpose of creating homemade bitters. Sazerac, anyone?

To conclude, I will not suggest but say: this essay is a promise. Through ethnographies of place, anthropologists of late modern America will uncover Low’s “systems of exclusion,” see Feld and Basso’s fusions of “locality to life-world” at work, and come to terms with the political, economic, and ethical possibilities that people invest in their places.

References

Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy.” In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Arjun Appadurai, ed. Pp. 27–47. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Basso, Keith H. 1996. “Wisdom Sits in Places: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape.” In *Senses of Place*. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, eds. Pp. 53–90. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.

Bialecki, Jon. 2009. “Disjuncture, Continental Philosophy’s New “Political Paul,” and the Question of Progressive Christianity in a Southern California Third Wave Church.” *American Ethnologist*, 36(1):35–48.

Bielo, James S. 2011a. “Purity, Danger, and Redemption: Notes on Urban Missional Evangelicals.” *American Ethnologist*, 38(2):267–280.

Bielo, James S. 2011b. “City of Man, City of God: The Re-Urbanization of American Evangelicals.” *City & Society*, 23(s1):2–23.
Bielo, James S. 2011c. *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity*. New York: NYU Press.
Bubinas, Kathleen. 2011. “Farmers Markets in the Post-Industrial City.” *City & Society*, 23(2):154–172.
Dole, Christopher. 2012. “Revolution, Occupation, and Love: The 2011 Year in Cultural Anthropology.” *American Anthropologist*, 114(2):227–239.
Elisha, Omri. 2011. *Moral Ambition: Mobilization and Social Outreach in Evangelical Megachurches*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Feld, Steven, and Keith H. Basso, eds. 1996. *Senses of Place*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
Feld, Steven, and Keith H. Basso. 1996. “Introduction.” In *Senses of Place*. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, eds. Pp. 3–11. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
Gross, Joan. 2009. “Capitalism and Its Discontents: Back-to-the-Lander and Freegan Foodways in Rural Oregon.” *Food and Foodways*, 17:57–79.
Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson. 1992. “Beyond ‘Culture’: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference.” *Cultural Anthropology*, 7(1):6–23.
Guyer, Jane. 2007. “Prophecy and the Near Future: Thoughts on Microeconomic, Evangelical, and Punctuated Time.” *American Ethnologist*, 34(3):409–421.
Kenner, Robert, dir. 2008. Food, Inc. 94 min. Magnolia Pictures. New York, NY.
Lindholm, Charles. 2008. *Culture and Authenticity*. London: Blackwell.
Low, Setha. 2011. “Claiming Space for an Engaged Anthropology: Spatial Inequality and Social Exclusion.” *American Anthropologist*, 113(3):389–407.
Low, Setha M., and Denise Lawrence-Zuniga, eds. 2003. *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*. London: Blackwell.
Luhr, Eileen. 2009. *Witnessing Suburbia: Conservatives and Christian Youth Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Lutz, Catherine A., and Jane L. Collins. 1993. *Reading National Geographic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Paxson, Heather. 2006. “Artisanal Cheese and Economies of Sentiment in New England.” In *Fast Food/Slow Food: The Cultural Economy of the Global Food System*. Richard Wilk, ed. Pp. 201–218. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.
Paxson, Heather. 2008. “Post-Pasteurian Cultures: The Microbiopolitics of Raw-Milk Cheese in the United States.” *Cultural Anthropology*, 23(1):15–47.
Paxson, Heather. 2010. “Locating Value in Artisan Cheese: Reverse Engineering Terroir for New-World Landscapes.” *American Anthropologist*, 112(3):444–457.
Peterson, Leighton C. 2011. “ ‘Reel Navajo’: The Linguistic Creation of Indigenous Screen Memories.” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 35(2):111–134.
Reed, Adam. 2008. “ ‘Blog This’: Surfing the Metropolis and the Method of London.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 14:391–406.
Rodman, Margaret C. 1992. “Empowering Place: Multilocality and Multivocality.” *American Anthropologist*, 94(3):640–656.
Said, Edward W. 1979. “Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims.” *Social Text*, 1:7–58.
Schillinger, Liesl. 2012. “In Vermouth Veritas: How bitters became the cocktail flavor of the moment.” *Newsweek*, June 25: p. 55.
Stewart, Kathleen. 1988. “Nostalgia — A Polemic.” *Cultural Anthropology*, 3(3):227–241.
Weiss, Brad. 2011. “Making Pigs Local: Discerning the Sensory Character of Place.” *Cultural Anthropology*, 26(3):438–461.
Weiss, Brad. 2012. “Configuring the Authentic Value of Real Food: Farm-to-Fork, Snout-to-Tail, and Local Food Movements.” *American Ethnologist*, 39(3):614–626.

James S. Bielo
Miami University
bielojs@muohio.edu