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A Scapelore Manifesto: Creative Geographical Practice in a Mythless Age

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One role of geographers is giving meaning to places and landscapes. This is in contrast to the assumption that geography is about interpretation of others' place-making and meaning-giving activities that shape the surface of the earth. A look into the constitution of meaning shows that meaning is layered onto places from a variety of sources. By doing geography, one can synthesize the plethora of produced scientific and cultural-historical information. In the case of doing what I call a Scapelore, the geographer's role is to breathe life into landscapes—not only to interpret, but to boldly give meaning, enchanting and creatively mythologizing the world's surface. To write a Scapelore one must be comfortable with factual description, but a Scapelorist must also add a poetics that is definitively his or her own. There is no pretend to objectivity in giving meaning to places and landscapes, nor a pretense that only one interpretation is available; Scapelore is firmly rooted in the postmodern. The rationale for this treatise is threefold: Scapelores (1) make visible the invisibilities in relational ontologies, (2) transform the vernacular into the spectacular, and (3) bring the local out of Romanticism, where it is trapped. There must be a place in society for nonfictional meaning makers, people who tell us what places are and why we should care about them. This opens our eyes to the world we live in, and engages us personally with our own quotidian landscapes so that when we make collective, democratic decisions, we make good ones. **Key Words: art and geography, folklore, geographical practice, landscape description, landscape interpretation, postmodern mythology, spatial practice in art.**

No place, not even a wild place, is a place until it has had that human attention that at its highest reach we call poetry. . . . Hundreds of other place-loving people, gifted or not, are doing [poetic acts] for places they were born in, or reared in, or have adopted and made their own.

—Wallace Stegner (1992, 205)

I'd like to start with a brief story of an experience I had in 2012 while conducting research at California State University's Desert Studies Center in Zzyzx, California (pronounced zye-zix), about three hours east of Los Angeles in the Mojave Desert. I was there to study the history and folklore of the region, trying to understand the landscapes I was looking at from as many different perspectives as possible. As part of this endeavor, I devoted a large amount of time imagining what the landscape is like, or what it means, to the nonhumans that live there. I read all kinds of biological field guides from the Center's library, noting especially the genres of how animals' lives are represented textually. I realized that the most captivating by far were those that took risks, took liberties with what is possible to know, and presented the lives of the animals with a poetics, an embellished factual description. Exemplary in this fashion was a book by the

English broadcaster and naturalist David Attenborough (1984), *The Living Planet*. When read next to the flat factuality of scientific taxonomies (e.g., Needham and Westfall 1954), Attenborough's enlivening prose helped me imagine what the land surrounding me might *mean* to other perspectives, other species. I realized that it didn't matter to me that this was—and would always have to be—partially an act of the imagination; meaning-making is a craft. This was the flash of inspiration, the period when I began seeing an enormous gap in landscape studies, which, stated simply, is that at the confluence of creative practice and geographical thought there is a need for showcasing the mysterious, the unseen, and indeed, the mythical that surrounds us in this mythless age. Incorporating modern-day myth into landscape interpretations means we have to look to the arts. To fabricate is to build, to create, to make; *fabbrica* is the Italian word for factory. For the most part until now, when geographers have written about art they have tended to analyze the various spatial components of practice in the art world. But in this article I urge that geographers and other scholars need to adopt practices of artistic production—of fabrication—to further their own agenda of describing landscapes.

As the title suggests, the topic of this piece resides at the intersection of land*scape* and folk*lore*. The assumption I make, also suggested in the article's subtitle, is that in attempts to understand and articulate the human relationship with the natural world that has been the obsession of the environmental humanities over the past twenty-five years, the fabrication of lore (a subset of which is myth) about the environment is both needed and absent. Describing, representing, and articulating the wondrous, imaginable, but not yet real requires a new mode, a new approach, to scholarship that is concerned with the human–land nexus. Existing creative work that helps us see the invisible in the landscape should be harnessed for its methodologies and its willingness to take risks with interpretation and representation. Entering into life after nature, and into the posthuman presents an opportunity to act creatively in the face of the unknown, an opportunity that should be taken advantage of by those at the intersection of art and geography.

Some of the seeds for Scapelore have been planted within the vast field of literature on nonrepresentational theory in cultural geography. One piece that stands out in this particular literature has been Wylie's (2010) emotionally torn encounter with subjectivity in the practice of doing creative geography. He lucidly outlines the perils of uncritically proclaiming that creativity emerges from an essential self, but cannot resolve this with the admission that the most inspiring geographical work comes from "intense literary evocation[s]" that seek to "communicate more holistic and transcendent messages about our relationship with land, with other creatures, and with our own vexed histories" (110). Hedged between direct phenomenological experience (see Wylie 2005) and the inescapable nature of a subject rooted in the contexts of place and time, Wylie sees nonrepresentational theory (NRT) as the practice that exists as a third space between these two poles.

For me this hedging is too tentative. We need a way to make places sacred. There are too many ways that the places we love are constantly being destroyed. So much so that I, and I imagine others, find ourselves afraid to invest emotionally in certain places because we know somebody will buy the land and do something ecologically undesirable with it, or use it to tacitly advance social injustices. This is where art and where Scapelore come in; we need to make places meaningful in spite of the fact that they are potentially doomed. In the act of imagining how they are sacred—and representing how they are sacred—we can perhaps stop them from becoming doomed. I believe the political ends of making landscapes care-worthy

through creatively bringing them to life outweigh the philosophical concerns associated with an anxiety-ridden subject, anxious about his or her own subjectivity.

The rationales for proposing this type of creative practice within landscape studies—that is, what Scapelore helps us achieve—are to (1) see the invisibilities of the reality proposed by relational ontologies, (2) transform the vernacular into the spectacular, and (3) bring the practice of living a local life with local myths out of Romanticism, where it is trapped. Scapelore as a concept and a practice addresses all three of these necessities—it is a way to define the motivations for, and forge a new path for, work at the intersection of art and geography. The methodology for achieving these ends is description. The geographical terrain, so to speak, in which it functions, is landscape. The Scapelore methodology rests on the art of describing visual landscape scenes, and therefore brings together disparate practices within creative spatial practice. The tone of Scapelore is one that fascinates, that makes the everyday or otherwise unnoticed become worthy of care, and part of the fabric of our lives. As the prime example of a Scapelore for this article, I highlight a digital humanities project I am conducting called *Enchanting the Desert*, a revival of an early-twentieth-century slideshow of the Grand Canyon. This article is in part written to define the approach I am taking in the re-presentation and geographically based augmentation of the forty-two photographs in the slideshow.

One of the main supporting arguments I make is that the acts of vision, interpretation, and description are (still) definitive of the category "landscape." Despite cogent and lucid critiques that have moved away from a distanced viewing of landscape toward an embodied, phenomenological approach to studying landscape (Wylie 2005; Anderson 2006), the practice of landscape interpretation—reading a landscape scene—is still incredibly important for describing a landscape's state of being and process of becoming. The ability of a reader, distanced from a scene, looking at a landscape and offering interpretation, is a valuable skill and practice, and is what I seek to radically rethink in this article. My perspective comes from a tradition of landscape studies that is rooted in the visual, and especially from the work of Cosgrove (1985, 2008). The emphasis on visual sensation in my conception of Scapelore stems from my desire to blend a particularly geographical way of interpreting landscape—one that relies on looking at a scene from a location—with the production of relational space. I want to open up new, creative methodologies for how geographers understand object relations, which are thought to be "accruals of multiple sets of relations that precede or enable particular things to exist" (Ash and Simpson 2014, 11). To use the ocular in searching for the material aspects imbued in these "sets of relations" is to wield an old geographic method in new way, one that seems to encourage creativity and myth making exactly because of the invisibility of the object relations themselves. The geographic discipline has built an entirely revolutionary concept world (i.e., the world of object relations) without having a way to see it. Therefore, what better method to begin *seeing* this world of new natures, new humans, and new machines, than one already present in the discipline's history?

The short version of what I have in mind is that spatial theory that rests on the relational qualities of objects and phenomena to build its ontology needs a language, a creative voice, to describe that relatedness. Now that spatial theorists are committed to interpreting the production of landscapes as contingent on the networking of living and nonliving objects, the poetics of describing and communicating the invisibility of these relations must look to the imagination, to creative practice. Artistic practice must meet cultural geography if relational ontology is to survive in its spatial manifestations. Seeing, then making visible landscape scenes born from a

relational ontology cannot happen without a playfulness, a liberty to enchant that celebrates the craft and subjectivity of its maker and that contributes at once to the mystification and the further understanding of the earth's surface. In doing so, a Scapelore necessarily transforms vernacular into spectacular, an alchemy that cannot take place without mixing factual description with fantastic awe.

Fortunately, now is a good time for this confluence of art and geography, as wellsprings of creative geographical practice have begun to emerge. In the opening of their call for a politicized intersection of creativity and geography, Marston and De Leeuw (2013) rightly pointed out "the somewhat regular appearance and the frequent dissolution" of moments when geographers and artists have inspired one another. There is (again) underway an artistic turn in geography, and in art a geographical turn has also been developing (Coolidge and Simons 2006; Armstrong, Hertz, and Teran 2010; Dear et al. 2011; Bauch and Scott 2012; Hawkins 2014). This article brings these two emergences together, using their confluence to introduce the particular mode of proposed creative geographical practice that I call Scapelore, an inventive mode based equally in fact, observation, and imagination. A Scapelore inspires, it fascinates, it grabs the attention of its readers or viewers, it enchants. In her work on the concept of enchantment, Bennett (2001) portrayed Deleuzian enchantment as a place "where wonders persist in a rhizomatic world without intrinsic purpose or divinity … enchantment resides in the spaces where nature and culture overlap: where becomings happen among humans, animals, and machines" (34). Factual description is, I believe, the wrong genre to encompass Bennett's postnatural "wonders." Instead, there is a developing language at the intersection of geography and the creative arts that uses description, but is open to imaginings, of describing the unseen and immeasurable. Although Scapelores run the gamut of artistic media, they share a tone that is perhaps best described as an enthralling, deep, curious, intellectually stimulating tour guide (e.g., Lingis 1998). Filmmaker Lynch (2007) wrote about how important it is for his work to bring people fully into a different world, to create a space, as it were, with its own look, feel, and internal consistency, yet one that is different from a scientific reality. "Each story," he said, "has its own world, and its own feel, and its own mood. So you try to put together all these things— these little details—to create that sense of place" (Lynch 2007, 117). Lynch is interested in creating a sense of place for his other-worldly stories, but it is precisely this sense of place that needs to be created for our everyday lives as well. I argue there is no better confluence than that of geographical landscape interpretation and creative, spatial artistic practice to achieve this enchantment of the mundane. By enchanting the mundane we can close the gap —or fill in the blank spot—that exists between the unseen connections among components of a relational landscape, and the practice of seeing those connections. This is where creative geographical practice can have the most influence.

At the Desert Studies Center, I became hooked on the idea that there is a tremendous void in the business of producing geographical knowledge in terms of fabricating myths that reside in landscapes. Within the academy, myths have traditionally been the domain of anthropologists, who examine them to "better understand the structure and functioning of social organisation among small-scale, generally pre-modern communities" (Cosgrove 1993, 281). It is paradoxical to me that we encounter and treat myth as fiction, but at the same time are perfectly comfortable believing that myths are real in other cultures, places, and times (Limburg 2005). As scholars we are often fascinated by, and are certainly comfortable

with discussing the way others value the unseen, how they call on a heritage of generational knowledge to explain natural phenomena, or how they perform ritual as a method for interacting with landscapes. And yet scholars do this while maintaining a critical objective distance, respecting but dismissing such practices as, ultimately, irrational and uninformative for their own practice as scholars. We write about others' beliefs carefully and thoughtfully, but are hesitant to adopt their logics into our own scholarly work; we lack a methodology or systematic way of thinking about how such myths might be fabricated, harnessed, and employed. Since a critical turn in the late 1970s, folklorists have come closest to addressing this paradox by cataloging present-day myths that people live with in urban, technologically, and industrially defined settings (Dorson 1978; Green 2012). In folklore and ethnography, however, there remains a critical distance between subject and object. To close this gap between analysis (reportage) and practice (creative arts) for landscape interpretation, I argue that practitioners in landscape studies, writ large, take on the role of creating a landscape of lore—a Scapelore—a new mode of communicating one's inevitable positionality within a landscape scene, while unabashedly taking creative liberties with how that landscape is depicted, represented, and transmitted to a wider audience. To put it in the parlance of current geographical thinking about landscape, I would prefer to take the "non" out of NRT and replace it with "creative" (see Thrift 2008). Instead of calling it creative-representational theory, however, I prefer the term Scapelore. The aim of Scapelore is not to banish representation from the scholar's toolkit, nor is it to feel with one's hands and smell with one's nose new pathways out of the messes made by the act of crystallizing ideas in word or image. Its aim, rather, is something of the opposite: to dive into the most horrible corners of the practice of representing, where the oppressive gaze of the privileged tacitly and consistently reproduces the very categories (e.g., poor, black, native) necessary for its survival, stare into the face of this frightening corner, and win. Defeating the damaging side effects of representation is possible in this case because the vain search for factuality is abandoned, and the not yet real, the idea, and the wished for are given the same status as fact (for more on the pursuit of objectivity, see Porter 1995).

RATIONALE

This section offers three reasons explaining why I urge the formalization of the creative geographical practice called Scapelore. These reasons can be thought of as questions that a Scapelore answers, and as advancements it makes at the confluence of artistic practice and spatial theory. A Scapelore:

- Makes visible the invisibilities in relational ontologies.
- Transforms vernacular into spectacular.
- Brings the local out of Romanticism, where it is trapped.

Then, in the section following this one, I outline the intellectual apparatus and methodology for making this all happen, focusing on the concept of *description*. But first . . .

The Invisibility of Relational Ontology

If we start with the assumption that the materiality of any visual landscape scene is made through its "heterogeneous associations" (Murdoch 1997), then the language of accounting for the breadth of associativeness must be more than scientific; it must, indeed, be artistic. The first reason for explaining how Scapelore is important comes from the wave of social and environmental theory that deals with the relatedness of living and nonliving objects to define reality. Here I evoke frequently cited theoretical antecedents such as the actor networks of Latour and the assemblage of Deleuze (see Murdoch 2006; Olwig 2013; Harman 2014). In spatial thinking, these ideas have grown in many fruitful directions because when objects in the world coconstitute one another, there is an implicit mapping of those objects that is waiting to happen. If we are philosophically convinced that objects and organisms are defined vis-à-vis the networks in which they are embroiled, then the spatial rendering, or mapping, of these networks tells us a lot about the reality in which we live. There are, in effect, innumerable new spatialities that emerge when a network is described, warranting their mapping and giving a renaissance to geographical framings. For example, a t-shirt is not just a t-shirt, but is also the soil where the cotton grew, the geologic and human processes that created that particular soil quality, the sweatshop where the cotton was spun and sewn into a t-shirt, and the life of the worker who made sure the shirt was the right size. Seeing where all these phenomena occur, and explaining why they occur there, is how I interpret the translation of "relational ontologies" into geographical theory. It is important to recognize that, as in the t-shirt example, network mappings tend to be global in nature, or at least tend to sprawl out over space, reflecting the economic structure of our world. However, the mapping of object relations has another application that is inherently more local, and that is its use in reading and interpreting landscapes, an entirely different register of geographical thinking than following objects through a global network.

When the starting point for building a relational ontology begins with an object (think again of the t-shirt example), the connections to be drawn with other people, objects, and events can really go anywhere in the world. Industrialization and commodification have wrought mappings in which the great distances between nodes are not only unsurprising, but expected (note that by and large food and other consumer goods made locally are still in the counterculture). But what happens when the starting point for building a relational ontology is not a single object, but is instead a landscape scene? Here we discover two curiosities. The first is that the aim of following the connections made with any single object becomes more spatially constrained. That is, the question becomes vested in the local: How is everything in the landscape, everything within my field of vision, related to one another? Geographically restricted as such, I am suggesting a methodology for reading and interpreting landscapes, one that uses the insights from building a spatialized relational ontology for a single object, and applying that strategy to a landscape scene instead. The process changes when we do this. It is less about following connections, or relationships, and more about the accounting of all possible objects, nodes, and phenomena into a descriptive whole. Although not unlike ecological interpretation, what I propose also incorporates other materialities—stories, ghosts, memories—that constitute the meaning of the scene as much as rocks and trees and animals (Price 2004). The second curiosity is really a statement about what I think landscapes are. The practice of reading a landscape is founded on the notion that a landscape is the territory captured by the eye from any one station point. This station point is normally elevated so that a land can be seen, thought about, and

visually represented. The embodiment of (i.e., corporeally entering into) landscapes offers valuable insights into how territorial scenes can be experienced and understood, but for now I want to bracket off those insights to focus on this particular idea of reading the connectedness among the objects and organisms in a landscape, in the territorial scene captured by the eye from a single station point. Doing so brings together the intellectual traditions of relational ontology with visual landscape interpretation, forging a new way of knowing.

This new way of knowing is accomplished by answering the question "What connections can be made visible among the objects in this landscape?" We assume there are all sorts of connections among objects, organisms, stories, geologic events, and so on, that make any particular scene meaningful, but those relationships are not all readily available to the eye. This *invisibility* is the consequence of forging together relational ontology with landscape interpretation. The invisibility of object relations in a visual practice poses a major problem; that is, landscape-as-scene—undoubtedly a crucial way of experiencing the world—is hand-cuffed when an ontology full of invisibilities is introduced and used simultaneously. The remedy, I propose, is to engage the creative arts and the imagination instead of science. This practice is what I call Scapelore. A Scapelore does not eschew ecology or any other disciplinary lens in putting together its descriptions. It builds from these knowledges, synthesizing them and augmenting them in such a way that a different mode of understanding based in myth is produced.

The ability of a reader, distanced from a scene, looking at a landscape and offering interpretation, is a valuable skill and practice, and is what I seek to radically rethink in this article. Although I, therefore, unsurprisingly find great utility in the notion that landscape is "a way of seeing," it is time to update this practice on two fronts. The first is to incorporate the lessons from relational space into how landscapes are read (Murdoch 2006). But again, what are landscape readers and interpreters supposed to do when they are using vision to interpret scenes that are composed of all sorts of invisible (but real and persistent) connections among objects and events? How can we see the hybridity of objects (Whatmore 2002), or the coconstitutive "mesh" of reality (Morton 2011)? The answer to this question, and to state the second point about how visual landscape interpretation should be updated, is that object relations can be explored, imagined, and communicated by introducing practice from the art world. In geography, recent antecedents have been termed *artistic geography* (Thompson 2008), *experimental geography* (Paglen 2008, 2012), and *creative geography* (Hawkins 2011; Marston and De Leeuw 2013). Geographers in the humanities are, I believe, ready to enchant landscapes with meaning and purpose, to show the pathways for seeing the unseen and irrational, and to consciously reject inhibitions and fears that would otherwise stop them from doing so. If the posthuman is necessarily a geographical one, coconstitutive with the landscapes that make it (Bauch 2015), then we need an imaginative force to picture and describe it.

A Scapelore is not science fiction or fantasy. Stripped down, it is historical geography, it is synthetic description of the seemingly banal, yet overwhelmingly inhabited and fantastic. But neither is Scapelore devoid of the freedom to imagine the assemblages, or "mesh" of objects and events that constitute landscapes (Morton 2011). In Ingold's (2006, 10) critique of animism, he disabused the inappropriate understanding of the term in the history of anthropology. "Animism is not an infusion of spirit into substance, or of agency into materiality, but is rather ontologically prior to their differentiation." That is to say, the culture groups to which Ingold referred do not give animate qualities to inanimate objects, but rather already live in an animated world before

distinctions are made between living and nonliving. Addressing the subject of animism from a "compositionist," or generative, creative perspective, Latour (2010) wrote in his own manifesto that with Modernism indeed "it is *in*animism that is the queer invention: an agency without agency constantly denied by [rational, scientific] practice" (482–83, italics added). Practicing Scapelore does well to borrow from these insights; it is not a practice of making up nature spirits, but rather the practice of forging ahead into the scientifically unknown, crafting metaphors and symbolisms for what might already be there. What might exist in a landscape that is a priori ontologically composed of unseen, unaccounted for, unaccountable relations?

I want Scapelorists to adopt, live in, and work with spatial theories that use emergence, connection, and hybridity as their ontological assumptions. But positioning oneself already inside a hybrid object, network ontology when looking at and interpreting a landscape requires a leap of imagination to achieve this positioning, and also to describe what one finds through observation and research. The act of transmitting what one sees is vitally important to the success of Scapelore, and is why artistic practice needs to be further developed in cultural geography. Cultural geographers need a means of communication, a language for dispersing the revolutionary insights gained by the past twenty years of scholarship that have cogently brought hybrid object into spatial frameworks (e.g., Braun 2005; Shaw, Robbins, and Jones 2010).

Transform the Vernacular into the Spectacular

By uncovering the unseen in a landscape, a Scapelore also builds toward a celebration of the vernacular. A Scapelore is about the local, the mundane, the banal, the quotidian, the unassuming. We encounter many landscapes on a daily basis, most of them visually, and most of them as a repetition of what we have seen before. Breathing life into these quotidian landscapes is one of the express purposes of conducting a Scapelore. Through the process of imagining and describing the ways in which elements of a landscape scene are put into relation with one another, an otherwise banal-seeming landscape becomes one worthy of our attention, in our field of care, and a part of our mythology about a place. Vernacular landscapes have forged the most consistent link between geography and art since 1950, providing the material for a shared appreciation. This is the trajectory that aligns Jackson's (Jackson and Zube 1970) vernacular landscapes, Ruscha's (1966) *Every Building on Sunset Strip*, Tuan's (1977) everyday lived experience, Baltz's (Salvesen 2009) gorgeous and banal Orange County exurbia, Meinig's (1979) and Groth and Bressi's (1997) ordinary landscapes, and most recently the Center for Land Use Interpretation's (Coolidge and Simons 2006) flat-fact experience machine of the humanized landscape. In each of these cases the spectacular does not tend to generate contemplative or creative interaction with landscape. It is, on the contrary, the unassuming character of banal landscapes—seen so often they are forgotten—that come under the scrutiny of careful and attentive artist-geographers. To see a vernacular landscape as a complex becoming—which I believe it must be—we need to accept that the means of understanding and representing landscapes must rest on our own abilities not to master and explain, but to move with, cocreate, and explore. To invoke the notion of a spectacle here seems appropriate given its connotation of something that is made visible to a large audience to admire. It is the sight of something that makes a phenomenon spectacular. When thought about in the context of Scapelore, to make something spectacular is indeed making it visible, admirable, and worthy of attention. A

Scapelore transforms the vernacular into the spectacular, an alchemy that cannot take place without mixing factual description with fantastic awe.

Perhaps this is because, as Lewis (1979) put it, "our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears, in tangible, visible form" (12). To explore the human condition, to creatively reflect ourselves back to ourselves, one can look at, interact with, and communicate quotidian landscapes. In his mid-1970s *Fake Estates* project, for example, artist Gordon Matta-Clark purchased slivers of New York City's surplus real estate, then combined the associated property maps with his prolific photography of the small lots. Often smaller than 100 square feet, the fifteen slivers represented for Matta-Clark the possibility (or joke) of the remnants of the American dream based in land ownership.

> Gordon was delighted by the idea of such a sale. The idea of buying property in New York City for $25 to $75 was the American dream! This was a myth that he could really get behind: America had so much land that there was enough for everyone. This was the kind of myth he liked to play with. Gordon strongly believed that we—particularly artists—needed to develop a new mythology. (Kastner, Najafi, and Richard 2005, 68)

The connection in this case between the map, the photographs, and the landscape itself is meaningful because each further explains the other. A map showing an odd, narrow piece of territory engages one's imagination and curiosity: What does it look like? What could possibly happen there? What or who is there now? A good way to answer these questions is through photographic description; the map opens up questions and imagination, and the photos answer those questions. This process works in the other direction, too. Looking at a photograph of a small urban plot, surrounded by other buildings and seemingly nondescript phenomena can make a viewer curious about what story that photograph is telling. Next to a map, one can see the comical significance of a piece of land that exists as leftover, unused territory in a city where every square foot of land is valuable. In 2003, *Cabinet* magazine commissioned a number of artists to engage the sites with built or otherwise performed practices. Responses included the construction of a tiny shop selling threads and buttons, an enclosing Tupperware structure for the (leftover) odd lots, and the addition of a row of mailboxes (Kastner, Najafi, and Richard 2005).

The Local Is Trapped In Romanticism

The third and final reason that Scapelore is needed comes from an argument I set forth in this piece—that is, the local is trapped in Romanticism. Whereas the practice of knowing a place intimately is celebrated if in an urban, cosmopolitan setting (e.g., where are the best restaurants?), it is seen as backward, provincial, or steeped in dogmatism if in a rural setting. For a cosmopolite to intentionally lead a local way of life is necessarily a Romantic endeavor; she must first ensure her worldliness before admitting the rewards of such a retreat (see Norris 1993; Thoreau [1854] 1995). I want to take the local out of Romanticism and into a placed postmodernism. Making the local a legitimate way of life, outside of irony and criticism, so that it actually matches the elite philosophy of local food consumption, for example—is something that the Scapelore helps achieve (see, e.g., Hinrichs 2003; Feagan 2007). Foucault taught us that the cultural import, and the fear of, certain sexualities become objects of attention precisely because

they are made taboo, precisely because their concealment is attempted (Foucault 1990). In a similar fashion, leading a genuinely rooted life in which meaning and tradition are attached to one's local environment—without a greater knowledge of the outside world—is taboo among the cultured and educated, so that when it is portrayed, its protagonists are Hollywood television actors giving audiences something to gawk at as entertainment.[1]

My point is that adopting as meaningful the vast, nonbucolic, corporate landscapes that continue to define the local in postmodernity can fold those otherwise banal, blighted landscapes into a socially conscious local existence. Corporate landscapes are the present and future landscapes around the world, and it is imperative that scholars make these places themselves meaningful in the process of critiquing them. It doesn't immediately matter what happens behind the doors of an office building, or in the empty lots of a quotidian scene. What matters first is that those scenes are recognized as an equal part of the fabric of life as are the walkable, constructed neighborhoods of New Urbanism, that they are mythologized—and then criticized—in the same way as iconic U.S. scenes. The politics of critique (e.g., transnational corporations promote unfair labor practices) can only happen when we first recognize the meaning, the beauty, of its architecture—of its place in local geography and in the mythology of the people who live with the corporation's terrestrial instantiations.

METHOD: A CASE FOR DESCRIPTION

Where geographical sensibilities meet artistic practice in the interpretation of relational, vernacular landscapes, there must, I believe, be a radical renaissance of landscape as a visual practice and of description as the method for conveyance. White (1980) suggested that the absence of narrative is the absence of meaning. If so, it would seem that descriptive accounts of landscape are at odds with narrative, or meaning making. But I propose that the process of meaning making include description. Particularly, I believe the art of description should be paid more attention in the space created by object relations.[2] In this mode of understanding reality, meaning does not depend on causal movement through time; it does not look to the moralism of Aristotle's plots and endings as a way to signal the successful communication of the author's or artist's intention. In landscapes produced by proximal, related sets of objects, meaning is found less in the moral of the story, so to speak, and more in the aesthetic of how a landscape is presented—how it is described. Describing the ways in which proximal objects become related with one another reflects a way of thinking about landscape that breaks from narrative. It is in this vacuum left by the removal of "the moral" where I find the opportunity to introduce the creative practice I think of as Scapelore. What *could* a certain assemblage of people, objects, and hybrids mean? It is an exciting question to answer—an exciting vacuum to fill—because there are so many possibilities. Far from a singular, oppressive interpretation, Scapelore is a mode of thinking through landscape that is available to multiple, simultaneous conclusions. The big questions being addressed here are "Where is meaning?" and "What makes something meaningful?"—questions that I believe should be answered in the plural.

In conducting a Scapelore, the proximity of objects must supersede the "logical" classification of objects. What does it mean for two or more things to be proximal? In the sense I intend, to be proximal means to reside within the same material, territorial expanse that is visible from a station point—the collection of objects, organisms, stories, memories, and

phenomena that populate a landscape and make that landscape what it is. In the associations among them emerges the meaning of the territorial scene. Assuming that things close together are meaningfully related might appear obvious, but it is important to recognize that this is not how science has traditionally classified observations of the world. The Linnaean cataloging system allows us to classify species, to chart their behavior, characteristics, and dispersal over the expanse of earth. But in so doing it tends to mask any immediate, contextual relationship that organism has with its proximal surroundings. Imagine you are looking at a landscape, trying to explain it, and you point to three oak trees, identifying them as *Quercus agrifolia*. This act is wonderful in many ways: It puts those organisms—and your relationship with them—in league with centuries of observation, experimentation, and understanding about the species *agrifolia*. Yet this act of classifying isolates each of the organisms into a silo of accumulated and recorded knowledge that over the same centuries has taken all individual *agrifolia* out of the particular places in which they actually live. When identification using a standard Linnaean classification scheme is the endpoint of reading the landscape, relatively little about the geography of the scene has been described. That is, knowing that one tree in a landscape is *Quercus agrifolia* and another is *Pseudotsuga menziesii* (a Douglas fir) conjures an intellectual history that has nothing explicitly to do with proximity. Alone, this information can appear trivial; it is only when the lives of the two particular organisms residing within the viewshed are explained as part of the same system that meaning about that landscape is made. Ecology is the science of doing this kind of explaining, the assumption made that because types of relationships are hypothetically reproducible in other places, predictions can be made about how types of organisms respond to circumstances. Sadly, ecology has been transformed into—harnessed—as the only defense against environmental degradation. The burden of proof to protect environments rests on a science that cannot possibly succeed in the long term because it cannot possibly account for the complexity and amount of relationships among living and nonliving things in a place. Hard as it tries, ecology's accounting expertise will not keep pace with the accounting of for-profit enterprise. Instead of trying to measure and account for things in a landscape scene, Scapelore looks to the art of doing regional description.[3] Scapelore takes the organization of knowledge out of logical classification schemes and into the ideographic, into the geographic. Scapelore explicitly offers relational ontologies a method and style of poetic description. It is time to describe everyday landscape scenes with the same creative ferocity as is given to the production of art.

"Synthetic regional description"—as it was called by Hartshorne (1939)—has a long lineage in geographical thought and practice, and it is from this methodology that I believe we can resurrect and reforge an art of landscape description that takes into account spatial relational ontologies, and the unseen therein. If landscape is the geographical concept of territory that is most reliant on vision, then how can we describe the unseen, or the mythical? Thrift's (2008) work on the inhabiting of landscape reminds us that "we should not believe that this interaction [among objects and life forms] is taking place in one world. Rather it takes place in a whole series of worlds which are more or less attuned to each other and which have more or less resonance in and with each other" (162; see also Lorimer 2006). The interaction of these worlds, as Thrift called them, necessarily happen in quotidian landscapes. But, important to the relationship between landscape and relational ontologies, these other worlds are often outside of vision, and so are invisible. With these "series of worlds," cultural geographers are in a position to

explore new, creative modes of description. If the modernist version of seeing and describing landscapes was based in positivism and colonialism, then the Scapelorist version of seeing and describing landscapes is based in imagination, artful expression, and politics. The need to describe these invisible worlds is immense within the practice of cultural geography, and the craft of Scapelore is my attempt to address this inadequacy. If we as spatial theorists are committed to interpreting the production of space as contingent on the continuous networking of objects within a territorial frame, then the poetics of describing that networking process must look to the imagination, to creative practice.

I liken Hartshorne's synthetic regional description to a representational barrage of narratives and epistemologies, and the subsequent art of putting them in concert—not juxtaposition—with each other (Krygier 1997).[4] To put into concert requires the intentional organization of viewpoints, knowledge, and information in a way that is easily and pleasurably consumed. Description in a Scapelore is not about random collections, but rather craft. It is a move away from merely recognizing multiplicity in the world, and toward the art of ordering that multiplicity by making the elements of a visual scene all part of the same descriptive force.

One emphasis that has emerged out of Thrift's NRT with respect to landscape studies is the way people routinely interact with landscapes in their everyday lives.

> This is because in these [NRT-based] approaches we find a landscape that involves a full range of sensory experiences: it is not only visual, but textured to the touch and resonating with smells, touch, sounds and tastes, often mundane in nature. It may be a moody landscape, dark, sharp and foreboding, or associated with memory, light, breezing and sweet, or, perhaps still, wildly atmospheric. From here it is not just a matter of understanding how we think about the landscapes that surround us, but how they in turn *force us to think*—through their contexts, prompts and familiarity (or not). (Waterton 2013, 69)

I believe there is space in Waterton's interpretation of NRT to argue that this "full range" of sensory experiences could include imaginative, myth-making ones as well. Representations are surely always incomplete; there must be something lost in trying to represent the phenomenological. I see this loss as an opportunity to fill in the missing parts of a landscape's "story" with creative fabrications that connect immediate, unconscious experience with reflective, intellectual, crafted renderings. If we are willing to admit something is there, yet nonrepresentable, then why not take advantage of this enormous opportunity to put something there that helps us make sense of the world?

My argument is that Hartshorne was prescient regarding how we imagine what has been alternatively called an assemblage by Deleuze (Dewsbury 2011), an actor network by Latour (2005), a mesh by Morton (2011), or simply an environment. Starting with a geographical territory as the primary category for organizing knowledge sounds rather simple on first blush. It is easy to understand the concept that most scientific knowledge about the environment is produced from the perspective of a disciplinary lens. Field biologists study animal and plant populations in a given region, soil scientists measure the chemistry and composition of soil in a given region, and so on. Even when disciplinary crossovers and combinations happen—which is frequently, of course—the driving motivating force behind inquiry is about some thing, some topical focus. This approach has produced a wealth of independent information about regions that exist in a variety of journals. When students and scholars produce reports about a particular region, they cobble together various sections that list the findings of each disciplinary

perspective—for example, animal population, soil types, and geology. What happens, though, when during the process of creating the information about a given region the primary organizing principle is not the disciplinary perspective but the geographical territory itself? What if priority is given to proximity rather than scientific category? "The totality of conditions in any area," as Hartshorne put it, becomes the goal of synthetic regional description. When research about a given region begins with the question "What is here?" rather than "What disciplinary question can be answered by studying here?" then a new and specifically geographical vision is encountered based in the proximal relations among objects.

The practice of this type of regional geography reminds us that on the continuum of specific to general, we have created a knowledge production machine that is mostly concerned with the specific. It is not—or is no longer, anyway—the regional geographer's task to compile and list a series of disparate studies about a given region. Rather it is her task to begin with the region as a whole. Inquiry in this mode does not run along the lines of "now it's time to study the animals … now it's time to study the soil … now it's time to study the geology." Rather it is a radical break from these logical categories and a move toward asking "What is next to each other?" as the starting point. Place as the organizing category: This does not seem so profound, especially in research that is regionally based, but we almost never actually think in terms of proximity. A synthetic regional geography starts with the assumption that things are related because of their spatial proximity. Note that this is not the way science is normally conducted. A waterfall, a tourist, hiking boots, and fish are not often the topics of a study on Niagara Falls, although any one of them might be. But with a proximal epistemology, they must be because they are what makes that place what it is in the lived experience, and what gives the Scapelorist an opportunity to imagine, create, and communicate the meaning of their relationship.

Proximal epistemology is about representing and describing place—but also augmenting it. One cannot conduct a synthetic regional geography without adding his own subjectivity to the place. I urge that this happen unabashedly and unapologetically. The straight descriptive tendencies of midcentury regional geography fell flat exactly because authors tried to remove themselves from the representation of that place (e.g., Clark 1959). But this, I believe, is precisely the power of geography. I argue that geographers should intentionally and conspicuously invest themselves into their versions of synthetic regional geographies. I can imagine multiple versions of engaging, compelling, inspiring visual and textual descriptions of a single region based on the Scapelorist's own tendencies (Matless 2010). In this sense, the geographer must operate as an artist, an interpreter, and a speaker for landscapes.

Geography has long had a methodology that deals with the associativeness, or synthesis, of subject and object. Stemming from Kant's defense of ideography—literally one's private mark or signature—regional geography developed in the German tradition, then was translated in the early twentieth century by Hartshorne. The idea here was that comparisons or generalizations between regions were not possible because each region was a unique assemblage of objects in space (Burt 2005). Regional geography as a method comes premade to examine disparate bits of the world and show their connectedness simply through their proximity. It is, in this sense, a very ecological vision. Association has had a reemergence in geography thanks to work stemming originally from science studies. The classic works in this research—Callon (1986), Latour (1996), Law (1999)—have used the idea of association to demonstrate that it is a mistake to think of objects as existing alone in the world, without connection to other objects and subjects. Each object in the world has a network of

associations that can be expressed with cartography and narrative. A place is the physical gathering of a number of these objects. The experience of being in place tends to obscure the cartographic and historical aspects of the individual objects because once in place their cartographies and narratives are supplanted by, or are brought into, a new set of associations. This new set of associations is with each other; they become subjected to a new set of myths made by the people in that place.

There are two paths at this point that we can follow to frame our observations of the world. One is to follow the spatial and historical threads of particular things, mapping out their unique geographies. This path brings objects in relation, or association with the industrial and labor processes that make their existence possible. Geographers have demonstrated that these connections are frequently global in nature, spanning a variety of political-economic systems and social organizations of labor. Conversely, the other path we can take flips this strategy on its head, asking not "What is the cartographic representation of the life of an object?" but instead "What is the meaning of a place where an object ends up?" To use the strategy of association in this way requires us to ignore the impulse of following objects around, and instead to start seeing objects as they exist in relation to what is already around them.

EXAMPLE SCAPELORE: *ENCHANTING THE DESERT*

Enchanting the Desert is a research initiative that uses an early-twentieth-century narrated, photographic slideshow of the Grand Canyon as its departure point (Bauch forthcoming). The photographer, Henry G. Peabody, was a journeyman photographer who practiced professionally for nearly sixty-five years, between 1880 and 1942, traveling much of North America (Andrews 1965). The project revives and augments Peabody's slideshow in an online, interactive format. Within the photographs themselves, geocoded information from a variety of disciplines—for example, folklore, biology, geology, and art history—are merged to "enchant" the Grand Canyon region, turning the photos from a set of disorienting (if beautiful) images into a collection of places imbued with meaning and history that can be controlled and understood by the reader (Figure 1).

The aims of the project are theoretical, technical, artistic, and pedagogical. Theoretically, the project attempts to perform what contemporary (i.e., early-twentieth-century) geographical theorists referred to as synthetic regional description (Hartshorne 1939). It is a method of practicing geography whereby multiple knowledges are brought together, connected by the place that they share. Proximity, in other words, is the primary unit of analysis rather than any single disciplinary lens, like biology or history. The second aim of *Enchanting the Desert* (the technical) emerges from the first. Earlier attempts at synthetic regional description tended to come across as deflated because they were incapable of making compelling narratives and connections among the various disciplinary lenses. With the digital resources available in the early twenty-first century, not only can the spirit, or meaning, of the place be more readily communicated to a wide audience, but the content of that meaning can change from user to user, depending on the knowledge variables he chooses to enact within the visualization console itself. Third, in its attempt to bring people to their own genius loci of the region, the project is an artistic endeavor as much as it is a work of scholarship. Although based in historical, literary, and scientific research, the interactivity of the end product has the potential to make many claims —to encompass many theses—about the defining characteristics of the Grand Canyon. Stylistic
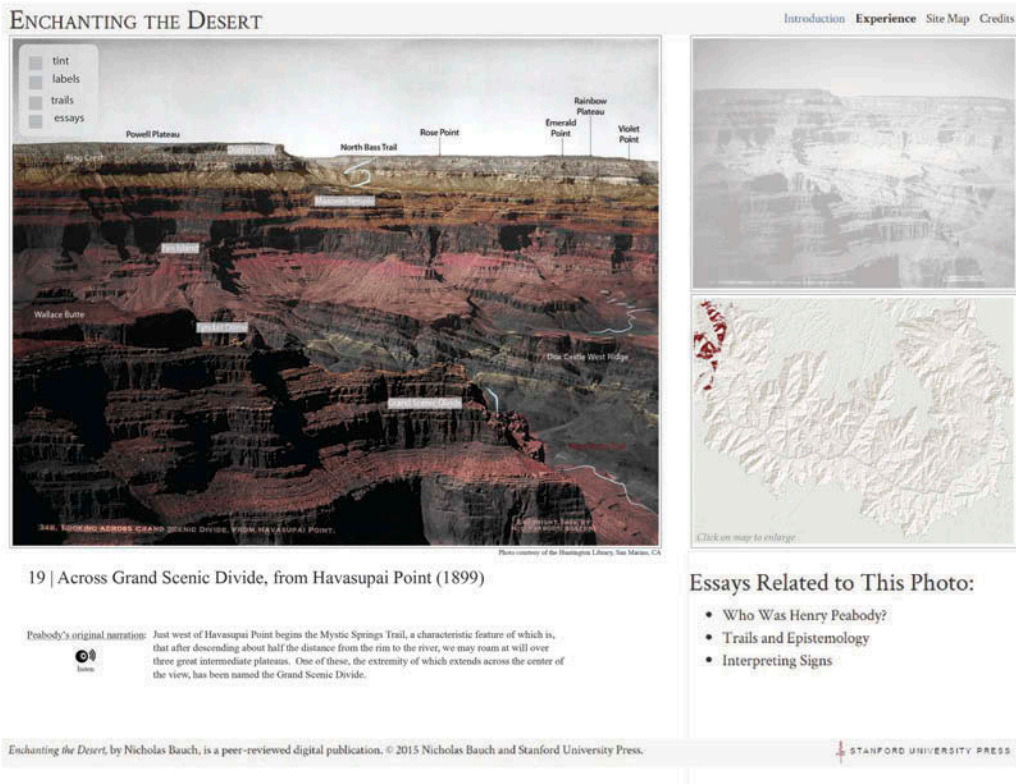
FIGURE 1   This is a wire frame of how the screen looks in *Enchanting the Desert*'s Web application module. Readers move through the images at their own pace, selecting from a variety of audio narrations and visual, georeferenced data augmentations as they go. The territory seen in each photograph is depicted on a viewshed map, affording the opportunity to read the landscape from both a pictorial and plan view simultaneously. (Color figure available online.)

liberties in the presentation of the images and data are acceptable so long as they contribute to a richer emotional and intellectual connection with the place. Finally, the project functions as a training tool for reading a landscape, and offers a new way to perform this quintessential geographical activity. Landscape interpretation is a geographical skill that can appear self-evident, but is incredibly difficult to perform well.

The exploratory nature of *Enchanting the Desert* encourages users to ask questions that lead toward deeper understanding of the region, and shows them the categories of inquiry that might be most helpful when making the Grand Canyon meaningful for themselves (Figure 2). At root here is the question "How do I move beyond an aesthetic appreciation of these images, and craft my own knowledge about the space, and the particular places therein, that the images depict?"
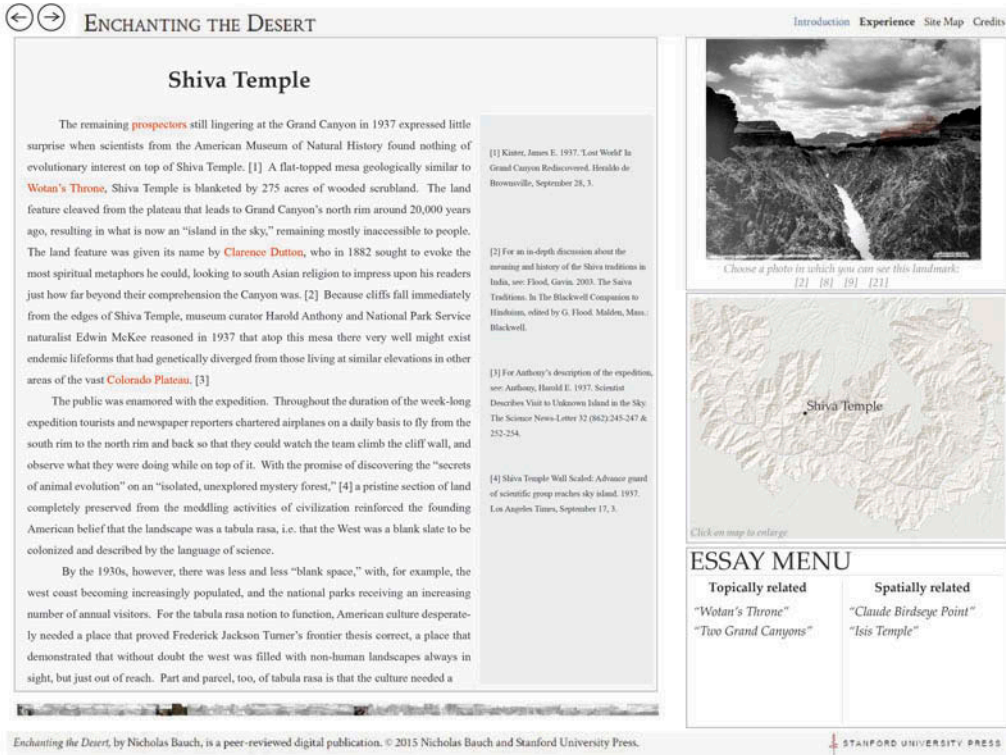
FIGURE 2   Wire frame of *Enchanting the Desert*'s Web application console. Here a reader has selected to place one of the more than sixty essays in the large section of the screen. These essays come together to form a spatial narrative of the human history of the Grand Canyon region, information that is organized by proximity within the landscape. (Color figure available online.)

Enchanting the Desert is an instance of Scapelore. It is the primary example from my own artistic-geographical practice that fulfills the aims set out in this article to identify and describe a genre of creative-spatial production. And as the Grand Canyon project has grown alongside my thoughts about what Scapelore is, this article extends the concept of Scapelore into other media and offers a theoretical foundation for what a Scapelore can accomplish and communicate.

EXAMPLE SCAPELORES

The novelty of Scapelore, I believe, is that it encourages geographers to walk the line between factual statement and creative description. Here I look to another prototype Scapelorist— filmmaker Werner Herzog and the genre of documentary film he developed. Commentators on

Herzog's work have pointed out his drive to find and present the "undiscovered." He is not pointing at what is unknown to science, but "he must track down those very phenomena that purportedly hold higher truth" (Koch 1986, 74). Ostensibly, the topic of his film *How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck* (Herzog 1976) is the skill of professional cattle auctioneers, who are able to speak at incredibly high speeds, achieving a rhythmic incomprehension. For more than thirty of the film's forty-five minutes the camera simply rests on the auctioneers at their annual competition, allowing the film's viewers to see how each one practices his profession.[5] But these thirty minutes of watching and listening to the auctioneer's calls would not be as addictive if not for the film's introduction, during which Herzog captures the surrounding landscape of rural Amish Pennsylvania. One cannot help but acquire a deep appreciation for life in this region—a glimpse of the cultural assumptions made, the quality and pace of life, the importance of cattle, the social relations, the connections to their European ancestry—even though none of this is addressed explicitly in the film. Herzog tries to get details that are "more fascinating for the audience." He rehearses interviews in his documentary films, saying "I rehearse and I shoot six times over, like in a feature film ... And sometimes I create an inner truth. I invent, but I invent in order to gain a deeper insight" (Prager 2007, 8). The lesson here—and one that is definitive of Scapelore— is to be serious about the information you are presenting about landscapes, but communicate it in a way that captures people's imagination and makes them meaningful, care-worthy. Invent to gain a deeper insight about the landscape you are describing, (inevitably) giving meaning to, and communicating to a wide audience or readership.

I also look to the work of Mike Davis as a prototype Scapelorist, and particularly his ability to capture wider themes with salient (in his case, textual) imagery. Urban geographer Gandy (1999, 380) highlights the unforgettable images of Los Angeles in his review of Davis's book *Ecology of Fear*: "golfers fleeing armies of mice, poodle-eating cougars and bears found in hot tubs." These are instances of postmodern myth making. The trick of the Scapelorist here is not to sensationalize, but to carefully create and play with these images, to capture the factual moments of life that define our relationships to the landscapes we make and live inside of. Osman (2010, 3) reflects this approach in her book *The Network*: "Rather than invent a world, I want a different means to understand this one." Osman is not inventing a fantasy, but seeing the mundane for something amazing. To see a vernacular landscape as a complex becoming—which I believe it must be—we need to accept that the means of understanding and representing landscapes must rest on our own abilities not to master and explain, but to move with, cocreate, and explore.

There are many prototype Scapelores, containing imaginative tones and ideas that inspire the further extension of those accomplishments. In the ocean of creative works serving as evidence that others have charted similar routes toward creative representations—personifications even—of landscapes, a couple that point us in the right direction would also include Heat-Moon's (1991) book *PrairyErth* and Byrne's (1986) film *True Stories*. A beautiful and clear example of how a geographer discusses ritual and myth is in Pearce's (2008) cartographic rendering of the Canadian voyageurs.

> They [voyageurs] reshaped their routes with an entire cultural landscape of their own, inscribing trees and rocks as sites of redirection, to commemorate mythic or tragic events, or to describe the place's symbolic significance to the overall route. ... Recognition of the importance of each place through symbolic ceremony was part of the formation and reaffirmation of that identity: here one

doffs one's hat and makes the sign of the cross, there a ritual drink or food is eaten, and over there a specific song is to be sung. (22)

Pearce used this information to radically redefine how cartographers might represent the experience and tone of places along the movement of the voyageurs' (or, hypothetically, anyone's) routes. Pearce offered a creative solution to the problem of representing belief, ritual, and experience geographically by color-coding sections of the map based on the moods of the voyageurs on any particular day of the trip. Through her maps, she gave meaning to the voyageurs' landscape that otherwise was not explicit. Why, though, in the first place should we consider incorporating myth making into our scholarly spatial practices? As stated, I believe that using relational thinking as the primary way of getting at spatial processes has left a blank spot within the practice of visual landscape interpretation. But another concern has emerged that in a world full of related objects, there is an abandonment of mystery and depth.

> Here [in the book *Patterned Ground*] every point, every object, is accorded an equal weight and value (for example, bees, pubs, pigs, humans, moon, or jungles, slums, buildings, archives, streets). All equally cede to the primacy of the relational and the connective. And the result, it can be argued, is a sort of ontological overflattening ... we are left with a topology without topography, a surface without relief, contour, or morphology. A spanning scene: no shadows cast, no bottomless wells, no mysterious caverns. ... A world where there is much amusement and surprise but little mystery or depth. (Rose and Wylie 2006, 476, referencing Harrison, Pile, and Thrift 2004)

To me this passage suggests that the language for capturing, for *describing* relational space is leaving out the very unseen, indeed unseeable, phenomena that comprise a relational ontology in the first place. That is, the concept of "in relation" remains as a tremendous, unopened black box in geographical theory. Sure, objects relate, but how? What exactly is being related—material, ideal, or (presumably) both? To be unfairly short to philosophers such as Harman (2009) and Meillassoux (2008)—who have made tremendous advances in the philosophy of objects—we do not yet have a shared language for how objects relate. The space between objects is vast, open (right now) to many possible directions. This is why I am so adamant about cheerfully using the imagination to describe these unknown spaces between objects. Because the relation among objects forms the becoming of landscape, the ability to articulate the relation among objects is the ability to articulate what a landscape is, what it means. I do not believe this can be achieved through the mechanism of data acquisition alone, but rather must be done through the careful crafting of one's interpretation and representation of what lies at the "mystery or depth" of the world. This crafting can absolutely not be accomplished within the bounds of present-day geographical scholarship without adopting the liberties definitive of artistic practice.

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NOTES

1. Here I especially think of the television show *Friday Night Lights* (2006–2011, NBC), the topic of which was the lives of high school football players and their families in a small, isolated Texas town.
2. Here "space" can be thought of as the oeuvre of theory that uses associativeness to build its conclusions, or it can be thought of as the material landscapes that emerge from the relatedness of objects.
3. Recent inspirational work here is found in Matless's (2014) *In the Nature of Landscape*.
4. Krygier (1997) wrote that the map is "one element within a complex of interconnected representations—part of a systematic 'representational barrage' in the published expedition reports" (p. 28).
5. In 1976, the World Livestock Auctioneer Championship was held in New Holland, Pennsylvania.

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