

Introduction

CHARLIE OLSON WATCHED as the bulldozer started its engine and slowly steered toward the cherry trees. He hugged a family friend whose face crumpled in tears. The gathered crowd held its collective breath, mouths agape, as the excavator arm extended toward the trees, jaws open. One man held his hat over his heart in a reverent gesture. The sky flashed, and a bolt of lightning startled onlookers. Undeterred, the bulldozer tore the first trees from their roots. Many in the crowd blinked back tears at the “loud cracking of the aged cherry wood.”¹ The bulldozer made quick work. By the end of the day, sixteen acres of 100-year-old cherry trees were gone. Charlie’s sister, Yvonne Jacobson, lamented, “it took about 100 years of cultivation to get them all in place, but it takes them less than two minutes to pull out one of those trees.”² In the orchard’s place? Three hundred apartments and a sixty-thousand-square-foot shopping center.³ The dramatic destruction of the Olsons’ orchard was a high-profile moment in the transformation of the Santa Clara Valley, a stark example of urban and suburban development of agricultural land in America.

Charlie Olson shakes his head as he remembers that day: “It was the crime of the century: paving over the best soil in the world.”⁴ Olson is one of the last orchardists still working in the Santa Clara Valley—tending a piece of the orchard his grandparents bought in 1901: ten acres of apricot trees and three acres of cherry trees on the heritage orchard in Sunnyvale. His office is covered in family photos, birthday cards, news clippings, State Fair ribbons, and dozens of plaques for civic awards. Sunnyvale’s housing developments and strip malls surround the Olsons’ shrinking acreage. “The orchard, once part of a living sea of trees carpeting the valley floor, is now a miniscule oasis in the midst of concrete, condos and freeways.”⁵ Charlie Olson still tends his

acres. “I don’t really know why I’m the last one here. . . . It’s just that farming is special to me, and I love my job.”⁶

The Olsons have grown fruit for more than a century, witnessing the rise and fall of the fruit industry in the Santa Clara Valley, once known as the Valley of Heart’s Delight. The phrase “Valley of Heart’s Delight” was likely coined in 1905 when the *San José Mercury Herald* held a competition to find an appropriate name to market the valley’s fruit.⁷ Also known as the “Garden of the World,” the Santa Clara Valley, about fifty miles south of San Francisco, was the premier fruit-producing region in the United States from 1860 to 1960. It was the largest orchard the world had ever seen, with eight million fruit trees blooming each spring.⁸ Although the decline of the fruit industry in this area began shortly after World War II, the bulldozing of the Olsons’ orchard in 1999 signaled the end of an era in a region the world now knows as Silicon Valley.

THE VALLEY OF HEART’S DELIGHT

In 1856, Louis and Pierre Pellier brought cuttings of the *petit d’Agen* prune from their native France to farmers in the Santa Clara Valley, and in doing so launched an industry. Fruit grows exceptionally well in the Santa Clara Valley. Its temperate climate, protective foothills, and ten feet of alluvial soil create premium growing conditions for outstanding fruit. When news of the prune’s success spread, would-be orchardists came to the Santa Clara Valley in droves. Many of these were gold-seekers who found mixed success in the Sierra Nevada mountains and turned to cities and agricultural land as their next prospect.⁹ The pastoral land offered money to be made in agriculture and cattle and thus began an era of growth and development in the valley unparalleled anywhere in the country.¹⁰

By 1920, seventy years after Louis Pellier brought the prune to California, Santa Clara County grew one-third of the prunes in the world.¹¹ The growth was exponential. Three hundred acres of prunes in 1870 grew to ninety thousand in 1900. Apricots, cherries, peaches, pears, and almonds also grew in abundance. Between 1880 and 1890, the number of fruit trees in the valley doubled to 4.5 million.¹² Canneries proliferated: San José Fruit Packing Company opened in 1873, Golden Gate Canning in 1875, J.M. Dawson Packing Company in 1879, and California Packing Company in 1885.¹³ These canneries employed more than one thousand workers during

the 1887 season, producing one million dollars of canned goods and four million pounds of dried fruit.¹⁴ After the valley produced a record twenty-two million pounds of prunes in 1892, the California Board of Horticulture declared Santa Clara County the preeminent horticultural county of the State.¹⁵ In 1893, the San José Fruit Packing plant was the largest cannery in the world.¹⁶ At this time, the Santa Clara Valley produced 90 percent of California's fruits and vegetables.¹⁷

To understand the importance of Santa Clara Valley's fruit production for the rest of the country, consider the story of the rains of 1918 when the federal government called in the Army to help save the prune crop. The first week of September 1918 was dry and sunny as usual. The valley was covered in acres of fruit trays: millions of purple prunes lay on eight-foot wooden trays drying in the sun. During the weeks after the prune harvest, rain "was dreaded, never even mentioned."¹⁸ All farmers had contingency plans: "If it rained or even looked like rain, all of the fruit would be stacked in piles of about twenty-five trays high, empty trays placed on top to try to keep the rain from getting to the drying fruit."¹⁹ On Wednesday afternoon, September 11, it began to rain almost without warning; nearly half an inch of rain fell that night. The rain continued: on Thursday, 4.32 inches of rain fell, on Friday, 1.43 more inches.²⁰ The *Mercury Herald* reported that by 5 p.m. on Friday, 6.5 inches of rain had fallen in San José—more than three times the precipitation ever recorded in an entire September.²¹

As the storm passed over the valley, all contingency plans were useless. On Friday, the *Mercury* reported "damage to tomatoes, prunes and peaches, hay and grain so enormous that ranchers and canners refuse to even try to estimate the loss." One woeful grower estimated "fully one-half the prune crop is ruined."²² A subsequent heavy fog held moisture in the air, preventing the prunes from drying.²³ The California Prune and Apricot Growers surveyed the damage and found much of the fruit on trays and on the ground had started rotting. "Trays were floating in water, and no effort could save those that had rotted. The whole valley smelled like fermented prunes."²⁴

A large portion of the prune crop was destined for soldiers mobilized for World War I. The Food Service Administration proclaimed it to be the "patriotic duty" of every prune grower to save as much fruit as possible, and came to the valley to tour the losses.²⁵ The *San José Mercury* urged growers to "Save Fruit for Our Boys!" advising growers to turn their prunes to avoid decay or mold, which would render them "unfit" for soldiers.²⁶ The War Work Council dispatched one thousand soldiers from Camp Fremont,

a military base in Palo Alto, to help save the crop. Volunteers from across the county helped soldiers pick prunes from the ground, carry out trays in the morning and back in at night, and turn the prunes on the trays.²⁷ Despite the community's valiant efforts, on Tuesday the *Mercury* reported, "Prune loss is near total."²⁸ The 1918 crop was estimated to be seventy million pounds, already only 65 percent of a normal crop. According to the *San José Mercury Herald*, it devastated every family in the valley.²⁹ This episode demonstrates the precarious nature of an agricultural economy susceptible to weather events, particularly for a community devoted to a single crop. That the federal government would deploy soldiers to help save the prunes also reveals the national importance of the agricultural production of the Santa Clara Valley.

The valley would recover, and continue to be known for its fruit. At the valley's productive peak in the 1920s, 7,000 farms grew 130,000 acres of orchards.³⁰ That is nearly ten million trees: including 7,652,000 prune trees, 665,000 apricot trees, 482,000 peaches and 380,000 cherry trees, producing 250 million pounds of fruit per year.³¹ By 1922, of 867,200 land acres in Santa Clara County, 743,822 acres had nearly 24,000 farms.³² That statistic is staggering: 86 percent of the land in the valley was agriculture. Santa Clara Valley and California were humming toward a billion-dollar annual agricultural production.³³

The stock market crash of 1929 and subsequent economic woes almost immediately affected the Santa Clara Valley fruit industry. In 1929, growers were paid 10 cents a pound; by 1930, they received 5 cents. Between 1929 and 1932, annual farm income in the United States plummeted from twelve billion dollars to less than five billion dollars.³⁴ Santa Clara Valley growers faced particular challenges due to what would later become known as the Great Depression. Prices dropped as consumers cut out specialty fruit like prunes, apricots, and pears.³⁵ Associations like Cal-Pak and the Prune and Apricot Growers fought to maintain price stability and to protect growers and packers. Beleaguered growers suffered, while canners fared a bit better because they could diversify.³⁶ The Depression would have long-lasting effects on labor in fruit growing and packing in the Santa Clara Valley.³⁷ Mechanization of agriculture and increasing integration and incorporation of food processing systems amplified the pressure on workers. While the valley's productivity remained strong, the Great Depression profoundly affected farmers in the Santa Clara Valley. It "changed the nature of the local economy and consequently of the landscape itself."³⁸ Toward the end of the

1930s, growers were uprooting fruit trees. More than 4,500 acres of prunes were leveled by 1941.³⁹

World War II was a “catalyzing event.”⁴⁰ The valley’s transition from agricultural productivity can be “directly traced to wartime electronic research.”⁴¹ World War II opened up industrial opportunities as defense-related industries moved in, laying the framework for post-war development of Silicon Valley.⁴² World War II also introduced the Santa Clara Valley to thousands of military and civilian personnel stationed in the Pacific Theater.⁴³ Soldiers remembered the temperate weather, expansive open space, and beautiful fruit trees as they passed through the valley on their way to the Pacific front.⁴⁴ “For the first time, the quiet, peaceful agricultural valley was exposed to intense public view.”⁴⁵

World War II sparked an industrial rush aided by government officials and developers eager for business. Fruit trees were torn up and canneries shuttered, replaced by houses, roads, and office parks—the infrastructure to support the burgeoning electronics and computing industry. Between 1945 and 1964, 17,000 agricultural acres were bulldozed per year, 340,000 acres of farmland gone in twenty years.⁴⁶ Acres devoted to fruit in Santa Clara County dropped by more than 90 percent between 1960 and 1992, from 64,453 acres to 5,325.⁴⁷ The latter half of the twentieth century saw the decline of the fruit capital in a swiftly changing economy instigated by the rapid growth of the computer era.

The story of the Santa Clara Valley is an American story of the development of agricultural lands and transformation of rural regions. The United States has been consistently urbanizing since the 1920s. American farms declined from nearly seven million parcels in the 1930s to about two million in 2000.⁴⁸ Technological developments in “manufacturing, agriculture, mining, fishing, and forestry accelerated migration from rural to urban areas.”⁴⁹ The urbanization continues: between 1992 and 2012, the United States converted more than thirty million acres of agricultural land to other uses.⁵⁰ However, rural regions continue to be of critical importance to “the country’s economic and social well-being” by preserving essential natural resources that provide the rest of the country with “food, energy, water, forests, recreation, national character, and quality of life.”⁵¹

The history of the Santa Clara Valley brings the impact of rural change into stark relief because of the wholesale transformation of a region completely dedicated to fruit to one entirely devoted to computers. The advent of computing sparked an industrial rush and subsequent housing boom that priced out the orchards and canneries. The Santa Clara Valley story is

particularly significant because of the ecological and agricultural value of the land that was developed for housing and office parks. The urbanization of the Santa Clara Valley “cannot be neatly explained by the old clichés of suburban sprawl. . . . The valley floor was not empty, low-priced land before the developers arrived; it was one of the most productive agricultural regions in the nation, filled with highly profitable orchards and small businesses where the trees’ fruit was processed.”⁵² As new industries moved in, the land that was once valued for its ecological character and agricultural productivity was now valued simply as a space to build, with no connection or commitment to the particular local environment.

The decline of the fruit industry in the Santa Clara Valley is just one example of the global economic restructuring that affected the agricultural industry across America.⁵³ The story of the Valley of Heart’s Delight is the story of the decline of American agriculture on a grand scale. The acres of trees and the volume of exported fruit of extraordinary quality demonstrate the significance of the Santa Clara Valley’s agricultural economy to the nation and the world. However, the statistics and accolades for the valley’s productivity do not adequately convey the significance of the valley as a place. To understand the history of the Santa Clara Valley, it is important to consider a sense of place in the valley: what it was like to live and work in the fruit capital of the world.

PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

This is a history of place: a rhetorical and environmental history of the Santa Clara Valley. I explore an environmental sense of place in this elapsed agricultural community and consider the implications of Santa Clara Valley’s wholesale transition from a regional economy devoted to fruit to one focused on technology. Applying a multifaceted theoretical framework for studying place, I examine rhetorical expressions of place in multiple genres of discourse to articulate a sense of place in the Valley of Heart’s Delight. In doing so, I hope to offer insight into how place-based connections in agricultural regions change in response to urbanization and other environmental exigencies.

In this rhetorical history of place, I approach “historical narratives as rhetorical discourses, instances of purposeful communication, written in narrative form and loaded with interpretation.”⁵⁴ I examine the evolution

of the Valley of Heart's Delight into Silicon Valley, drawing from historical artifacts of that time as well as the personal experiences of people who lived the Santa Clara Valley's agricultural history. The interplay of public history and personal narratives reveals a relationship between individuals, the community, and the environment. This review of a broad array of historical discourse reveals a complex history of the Valley of Heart's Delight: a powerful narrative of changing environment that invites us to reflect on the meaning of place in Silicon Valley.

The purpose of this study is to understand how a sense of place emerges and changes in an evolving agricultural community. This research reveals three substantive changes in the community's sense of place in the rise and fall of the fruit industry in the Santa Clara Valley. First with the rise of fruit cultivation, an aesthetic sense of place emerged that promoted caretaking and stewardship of the environment. The valley's environmental aesthetic emphasized the link between the valley's ecological health and its abundance. The sense of place in the valley relied on a profound emotional attachment to the land to cultivate a strong ethical commitment to preserve the valley's beauty and bounty. Second, agricultural work engendered a dynamic, material sense of place. The daily and seasonal practices of fruit work in the valley fostered a sense of place through embodied practices that cultivated an intense connection with the land. As agricultural practices mechanized, technology separated workers from the environment, and changed the communal nature of agricultural work, emphasizing economic interests rather than community vitality. Third, exponential population and industrial growth after World War II disrupted the aesthetic and agricultural sense of place. As political and economic leaders promoted urban development at the expense of fruit cultivation, land became valued as space to build rather than for its extraordinarily fertile soil. This shift disrupted place-based meaning, as the valley became "undifferentiated" and "abstract" space without values or meaning attributed to place.⁵⁵ The development of orchards into housing tracts and office parks signaled a shift away from consideration of the valley's environmental characteristics and the vital role of the orchards in community health and economic independence.

THE SEASON

Fruit defined the economy and also the community and identity of Santa Clara Valley. Yvonne Jacobson explains the integration of fruit work with

the rhythm and cycle of life as “work punctuated by family gatherings and by friends coming and going, the children being bathed on Saturday night, the Sunday dinner after church, the community meetings, the occasional picnics, the coming of the gasoline motor and the automobile, the trips to San José for supplies, the crops coming in and being sold, the money being put aside for the future, the births and christenings, deaths and funerals.”⁵⁶ Fruit work influenced the daily practices of living in the valley, fostering a sense of community as residents worked together, participating in the yearly rituals of the Season.

Summertime was simply called “the Season” because from May to September, nearly everyone in the valley was working on the harvest or the pack or supporting the fruit industry in some way.⁵⁷ The canneries were the valley’s biggest employers.⁵⁸ During the Season, canneries operated around the clock, typically employing three shifts of workers.⁵⁹ The sights, sounds, and smells were visceral reminders of the importance of the harvest and pack to the economic vitality of the valley and its residents. At the start of the Season, canneries blew steam whistles, calling thousands of valley fruit workers to the packing plants. “You’d hear one long blast on the whistle and everybody would then head for canneries. When the season ended there’d be another long blast and everybody would go home and wait for summer.”⁶⁰ Robin Chapman, whose family harvested apricots each summer from trees on their property, remembers hearing the noon whistle as a child, knowing that it was lunchtime at the canneries.⁶¹ During packing season, the smell of cooked fruit infused the valley. Deborah Olson remembers the dense smell of cooked fruit near Libby’s Cannery in Sunnyvale: “The smell would permeate the air. It’s very distinct and it’s running twenty-four hours a day.”⁶² At times the smell of stewed tomatoes was so strong “it was like driving through someone’s kitchen.”⁶³ The rhythm of the Season influenced the visceral sense of place—the smells and sounds of fruit production were identifying markers of place that fostered a strong connection to the land and community.

During the Season, life in the Santa Clara Valley coalesced around the harvest and the pack. The fruit bloomed in waves: first cherries, then apricots, then prunes; fruit harvesting drove the valley’s “rhythm of life.”⁶⁴ Apricots were packed in July, peaches and pears in August, prunes in September, and tomatoes in September and October.⁶⁵ For a generation of cannery workers, the cannery defined their summer. Frances Sanchez, a long-time F. G. Wool cannery employee remembered: “Summertime in the cannery, it’s a fact of life, a part of you.”⁶⁶ The prune harvest started in mid-August, and usually

took a month, but sometimes went into October.⁶⁷ “Prune season would encroach on the beginning of school in those days,” California State Senator David Cortese remembers.⁶⁸ School didn’t start until the prunes were picked.

Weaving together community and the land itself, entire families worked in the canneries and the orchards. For fruit families, farming “was a way of life in which the smallest child participated.”⁶⁹ Summers were spent in the orchards. Vince S. Garrod, whose family had an apricot orchard in Saratoga, remembers, “The apricots started the 1st of July, sometimes the 30th of June. It always screwed up your 4th of July. It went for about 14 days. Once they were ripe it was a hustle.”⁷⁰ His daughter, Vicky Bosworth, recalls, “In our family, vacations were around the fruit season. There was a week between the end of apricots and the beginning of prunes that we could take off and go someplace.”⁷¹ Deborah Olson remembers: “Everyone went to the beach during the summer. They’d say and can’t you go? No, I can’t. I’ve got to work. I had to work every summer my whole life.”⁷² She remembers, “I was just always in the fruit stand in the summer time. . . . I worked side by side with my grandmother and sold, packed, and sorted cherries.”⁷³ Cannery families couldn’t take a vacation either. Sisters Ruth Savage and Betty Nygren (née Wool), whose grandfather founded F. G. Wool Cannery, remember their friends vacationing on the Russian River: “We were envious of them, because they were having fun as we were having fun with the cherry machine.”⁷⁴

Even for families not directly involved in the fruit industry, the Season framed the year.⁷⁵ Those who didn’t work in the orchards or the canneries worked in a business that supported the fruit industry. Jim Zetterquist, whose father worked in the canning industry for forty years, and who himself worked at several canneries including: F. G. Wool Canning Co., San José Canning, Richmond Chase, Filice and Perrelli, and Schuckl canneries, remembers: “Everybody was connected one way or another to food products, whether it was packers or canners. If you were the barber, you were cutting the plant manager’s hair. . . . My PE teacher and my sixth-grade teacher both worked with me later in the cannery during the summer [to] supplement their incomes.”⁷⁶ Restaurants, hardware stores, and banks all supported the cannery workers. Warehouses stored raw fruit until processing, and again before shipping. Trucking companies hauled fruit. Local companies such as Muirson Label and American Can Company provided materials, and Anderson Barngrover supplied machinery.⁷⁷

Fruit drove the valley’s economy. The health of the agricultural industry determined the strength of the local economy. Dollars made on the farm

and in the cannery were “recycled through the economy several times.”⁷⁸ Farmer Ray Benech remembers:

Everybody knew the price of prunes—because if the price of prunes was good, farmers made money, and if farmers made money, they paid the bank back, they paid their gas bills, they went to the hardware store and bought a new shovel, they went to the dry good store and bought a new pair of shoes—everybody benefited. If the price of prunes went down, farmers hunched in and nobody got paid—everybody was in trouble. It was a one-industry area here, and when that industry got hurt, everybody got hurt.⁷⁹

The fruit industry determined employment and income; the region’s “economic vitality” was tied to the seasonal fluctuations of fruit growing.⁸⁰ The valley was “a textbook example of a fully integrated agricultural community.”⁸¹

After World War II, the foundations of Silicon Valley began to uproot the agricultural industry. As the computer industry transformed the valley, the personal and community rituals that centered around agriculture changed. Just as the rapid planting of the orchards significantly altered the valley’s landscape in the late 1800s, the development of the valley in the second half of the twentieth century brought about sweeping change to the physical landscape of the valley as houses and office parks replaced orchards and farms. With these material changes, the industrial transition transmuted the community’s relationship to the Santa Clara Valley’s natural environment. In this stunning example of industrialization of rural land, we see a dramatic change in the region’s economy and community, and with that, a changing sense of place.

This introduction outlines the framework for this rhetorical history of place. First, I articulate a four-part theoretical framework of place as an environmental concept: highlighting material, dynamic, aesthetic, and collective senses of place. Second, I outline the methodological approach of this research: analyzing narratives of place. I explicate the method of rhetorical history and articulate the process of artifact analysis: detailing the types of artifacts I consider and outlining the specific procedures I engage in to analyze and synthesize the meaning of these artifacts into the three case study chapters. Finally, I discuss the importance of critical analysis of historical narratives: acknowledging hegemonic spaces and emphasizing marginalized voices to articulate a diverse, nuanced history of place.

HISTORY OF PLACE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To understand the transformation of the Santa Clara Valley, this book examines the history of the Valley of Heart's Delight as a *place*. In general terms, place is a location with physical or geographical parameters. For instance, we might ask "your place or mine?" when discussing plans with a friend. Place is also a state of mind or an emotion: we might hear someone describe a situation that provides comfort or relaxation as their "happy place." Place, generally, is a physical site in which we engage in activities, that has situational context, and has deep meaning. "We all were born, live and will die in towns, neighborhoods, villages or cities that have names and which are filled with memories, associations and meanings."⁸² Place provides the daily context of life, in our homes, in our cities, in parks, at work, on our commutes, on vacation, and so on.

Place is how we learn who we are, through "concrete and contingent circumstances which serve as the grounds of our existence, our experiences and lives."⁸³ Place is thus existential; it "serves as the *condition* of all existing things. . . . Place belongs to the very concept of existence."⁸⁴ Where we live provides perspective, "a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world."⁸⁵ Our relationship with place is "expressed in different dimensions of human life: emotions, biographies, imagination, stories, and personal experiences."⁸⁶ Thus, place is rhetorical: the way we "discursively invoke images or memories of a place"⁸⁷ reflects our "attitudes and aspirations."⁸⁸

This study draws upon an interdisciplinary understanding of place as "territories of meanings" cultivated by daily practices in physical settings and landscapes.⁸⁹ Three integrated and interdependent facets of place are location, locale, and sense of place. Location is the "where of a place": a particular point in space "with a specific set of coordinates and measurable distances from other locations." Locale is the physical element of place: the "material setting for social relations—the way a place looks. Locale includes the buildings, streets, parks, and other visible and tangible aspects of a place."⁹⁰ The third aspect of place underscores the way that place creates meaning: through "feelings and emotions" in what is known as a *sense of place*.⁹¹

Places are significant because we "come to know them and invest them with meanings, ideas, and sensibilities." Our sense of place and attachment to place is distinct from the location or material conditions of a place, it

includes knowledge and ideas about a place and deep, emotional symbolic connections to place.⁹² Our sense of place is an identification with a particular area that includes our understanding of location and locale, and our developing connections to the land and community. These connections foster an attachment to place that may have negative or positive connotations based on our experiences.

Sense of place evolves through personal experiences, and defines how people view, interpret and interact with their world.⁹³ Our experiences give place meaning as we develop a sense of belonging and identity shaped by our surroundings.⁹⁴ Sense of place includes both a “sense of the character or identity that belongs to certain places or locales, as well as to a sense of our own identity as shaped in relation to those places—to a sense of ‘belonging to’ those places.”⁹⁵ For example, how we describe where we live, and relate the importance of home provides an “affective connection” to our home place.⁹⁶ Whether we have an affinity for or aversion to our home place, our intimate connection fosters a strong identification with that place that influences our values, our sense of community and our sense of ourselves, and a sense of our environment.⁹⁷

Place Is Environmental

Place refers to a specific geographical place with particular environmental features. Environmental communication scholars study the way we communicate with and about the rest of the natural world and how this affects our attitudes and actions. Donal Carbaugh and Tovar Ceruli note, “Environmental communication is, inevitably, a place-based form of communication.”⁹⁸ Environmental places are not simply physical settings on which environmental issues play out, as the places themselves influence communication about environmental issues.⁹⁹ Carbaugh and Ceruli remind us that communication is an “emplaced practice” that plays “a formative, constitute role in creating our sense of place.”¹⁰⁰ Samantha Senda-Cook articulates this constitutive function of environmental rhetoric and place: “Landscapes are not only material parts of our world but also politically and rhetorically powerful spaces.”¹⁰¹ Thus, our sense of place is rhetorical: we articulate our response to the environment, convey our location-based knowledge, and frame our individual and community identity in relation to place. James G. Cantrill and Susan Senecah expound a “sense of self-in-place” that is “socially constructed upon an edifice of the environmental self that, in itself,

is a product of discourse and experience.”¹⁰² Our sense of place and environmental self is rhetorically constructed, based on how we communicate our experience in that environment.¹⁰³ Through our relationship to place, we gain perspective of the world that influences our sense of self within our community and surrounding environment.

Considering place as environmental means that “a place is not a mere patch of ground, a bare stretch of earth, a sedentary set of stones.”¹⁰⁴ Our everyday practices cultivate our sense of place. “Place-based practices profoundly influence human-nature relationships.”¹⁰⁵ Embodied practices are emplacing practices, those that define and nurture our relationship with the environment and with others. We organize our lives “within the context of environmental conditions and natural resources of that place . . . the *history* of residents’ shared experiences in and with that place.”¹⁰⁶ Places are environmental because the ecological features are resources and conditions that influence our individual and collective identity. This history of place reviews the environmental transformation of the Santa Clara Valley from fruit-growing region to technology capital.

Place Is Material

Of the integrated aspects of place: location, locale, and sense of place, location is the most immediately obvious: our physical surroundings. Geographer David Harvey outlines a materialist framework that integrates space, place, and environment into social process and practical politics.¹⁰⁷ The topography of a place—its natural features—and its built environment—humanmade structures such as buildings or bridges—are the scaffolding for our social interactions and our relationship with the rest of nature.

Material features impact the daily practice of place-making. “Everyday signifying practices are influenced by historically situated material conditions.”¹⁰⁸ Danielle Endres and Samantha Senda-Cook note, “Materiality includes physicality and social conditions, but it also includes embodied experiences in place.”¹⁰⁹ Individuals and communities develop specific “practices of place that reflect embodied relationships with local landscapes.”¹¹⁰ The way that we move through and relate to a place is material. Our lived experience is embodied and material, and thus we engage in place-making practices as a part of our everyday life.¹¹¹ Sense of place is cultivated through practice. “Places are practiced. People do things in place. What they do, in part, is responsible for the meanings that a place might have.”¹¹² Thus, “places

are embodied rhetorical performances” whose meaning is accrued over the daily actions of living.¹¹³ We come to know a place through mundane experiences that offer “a unique blend of sights, sounds, and smells, a unique harmony of natural and artificial rhythms such as times of sunrise and sunset, of work and play.”¹¹⁴

Places are environments made significant through “discursive activity, filled with symbolic and representational meanings.”¹¹⁵ We infuse our physical surroundings with meaning through emotional attachments such as hope and fear. Material features represent our aspirations—tall buildings reaching for the sky are signs of human potential, while grand mountains remind us of the scope of geologic time. Our commute into a city may affirm that we are part of a bustling society, while a walk in the woods reminds us of the rejuvenating power of nature. Place gains significance through lived experience in material conditions of the environment through embodied, cultural practices that cultivate relationships with people and the environment.

Place Is Aesthetic

Places are environments in which we experience daily life and see the world. Thus, place is aesthetic. Aesthetics, conceived broadly, is the philosophy of art: the study of perceptions of beauty and taste.¹¹⁶ Environmental aesthetics encompass a broad sense of the world at large, help us to consider the role of place in how we interpret experience, and rest on the assumption that the world’s environments offer much to appreciate.¹¹⁷ Aesthetic terms evoke an emotional reaction—we feel pleasure, optimism, or other sentimentality toward a concept represented in words or images. Environmental aesthetics necessarily involve an ethical sense of beauty: a sense that one must act to preserve the value of the environment.

Environmental aesthetics begets an environmental exceptionalism that rests on the concept of the sublime. The sublime is a particular perspective of the environment that rests on a “sentiment to the physical beauty of the landscape.”¹¹⁸ This may range from what Christine Oravec terms the “pastoralized picturesque” to a more “abstract” wilderness aesthetic.¹¹⁹ The sublime response combines “visual, narrative, personal, and moral connotations” in an emotional reaction to place.¹²⁰ The concept of the sublime is central to how we rhetorically construct nature. Sublime rhetoric employs three strategies to cultivate appeal of place, and convey exceptionalism: exaggerated features, emotional aesthetics, and self-reflexivity.

The first aspect of the sublime is the exaggeration of characteristics of a place for the purpose of representing a landscape in a certain way. Emotional reactions to sublime representations afford a distance from the object itself. “The sublime had always signified a general lack of verisimilitude [or] realism because of its distortion of the facts of the scene and its use of hyperbole for effect.”¹²¹ In exaggeration, sublime rhetoric confronts human vulnerability and fears of irrelevance by representing land as landscapes and imbuing them with rhetorical significance for human observers.

The second aspect of the sublime is the emphasis on an emotional aesthetics: written descriptions and visual representation of the natural world designed to cultivate emotional attachment to particular places. Sublime rhetoric is intended to “evoke emotional responses toward nature, to confirm aesthetic or ethical beliefs about nature, and to call attention to particular landscapes for settlement, tourism, or preservation.”¹²² Our sense of place cultivates “emotional resonance” with the natural world through personal and community activities that create place attachment—intense emotional bonding with the environment.¹²³

The third aspect of sublime rhetoric is self-reflexivity, a rhetorical positioning that leaves “the observer feeling both within a scene and also outside of it, viewing the scene (and reflexively, the self) from a higher or more distant (and morally outstanding) perspective.”¹²⁴ The sublime offers not only a perspective on the environment, but also a mirror into a speaker’s sense of self and what it means to be human. How we represent our surrounding environment is powerful, “affecting the actions, the choices and the consciousness of people, shaping our image of the world and with it, reality.”¹²⁵ Frequently deployed in nature writing and tourist propaganda, the sublime aesthetic offers a view of human aspiration and cultivates an aesthetic-based sense of place.

Place Is Dynamic

Our sense of place embraces the materiality of an environment and through everyday practices cultivates “social rootedness and landscape continuity.”¹²⁶ Our rituals of place provide constant and ongoing practice that imbues places with dynamism. “Place lies at the center of human experience as both a process and a perspective.”¹²⁷ Places are moving, growing, and improving: we see this in changes of the season or in new buildings altering a city skyline. Though we might think of places as rooted by geographical location